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The Pelican in the Wilderness:
Symbolism and allegory in women’s evangelical songs of the Gàidhealtachd

Anne Macleod Hill

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh

2016
Declaration

This is to certify that this thesis has been written by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

The following two papers are included in the Appendix:
Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 7. ‘An Cuan Nach Traoghadh: Metaphor and Reality in the Sea Imagery of Women’s Evangelical Songs’ (forthcoming)
Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 8. ‘Dh’fhalbh na Gillean Grìnn: Spiritual Perspectives in Women’s Songs of The Great War’. By permission of Dunedin Academic Press Ltd.

Signed:

Anne Macleod Hill
16 February 2016
Abstract

The Pelican in the Wilderness: Symbolism and allegory in women’s evangelical songs of the Gàidhealtachd

The Gaelic women’s song tradition has been studied in depth, and the post-Reformation Church and its impact on the Gàidhealtachd examined from various perspectives, yet the body of evangelical song which shows the interaction of the two is possibly the least explored area of traditional Gaelic verse and the least understood outside the immediate environment in which it was created. In their devotional songs, evangelical elegies and waulking songs, generations of women have left a record of the domestic, spiritual and cultural life of the Gàidhealtachd which would be difficult to retrieve from any other source. The present study provides access to this important literary and cultural resource by creating a research corpus of 600 poems, representing the work of 165 women from many different parts of the Gàidhealtachd, dating from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day. The historical, theological and literary background to the songs is explored, using both a range of secondary sources and the words of selected poets as they articulate and define contemporary events within the context of Reformed doctrine.

Analysis across the corpus shows songs creating an allegorical world within which every creature, person and place is imbued with spiritual significance, each acting as a mnemonic for an associated biblical paradigm. This use of scriptural and doctrinal allusion is functional rather than purely ornamental, with core metaphors expressed and made authoritative in lexicons of honorifics, epithets and poetic place names. The thesis facilitates fuller reading of spiritual song by explaining the symbolic significance of the above elements, demonstrating their role in creating contextual settings, linking songs into a network of biblical, doctrinal and poetic texts, extending and validating the poet’s message. The functioning of this referential system is further explored in detailed literary analysis of the work of a representative sample of poets, each of whom is set in her own social and historical context.
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<td><strong>AF</strong></td>
<td><em>An Fhianuis</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AM</strong></td>
<td>Angus MacLeod Archive / Ease Archive, Kershader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CD</strong></td>
<td>Màiri Anna NicIomhair, <em>Ceòl agus Deòir</em> (Stornoway: Stornoway Gazette, nd.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EGSS</strong></td>
<td>Edinburgh Gaelic Schools Society</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EUL</strong></td>
<td>Edinburgh University Library</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DSCHT</strong></td>
<td><em>Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FG</strong></td>
<td><em>An Fhianuis Ghàidhealach</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LW</strong></td>
<td><em>Life and Work: The Magazine of the Church of Scotland</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MR</strong></td>
<td><em>The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MSA</strong></td>
<td>Unpublished text from the collection of John Murdo MacDonald, now held by his daughter, Maggie Smith, Achmore, Isle of Lewis.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NLS</strong></td>
<td>National Library of Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NLS MS 14987</strong></td>
<td>Notebook containing unpublished evangelical songs by Anna NicFhearghais, Kintyre, c. 1841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SA</strong></td>
<td>Recordings from the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archive, University of Edinburgh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SG</strong></td>
<td><em>The Stornoway Gazette</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SGS</strong></td>
<td><em>Scottish Gaelic Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SGTS</strong></td>
<td>Scottish Gaelic Texts Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPGH</strong></td>
<td>Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SSPCK</strong></td>
<td>Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TGSJ</strong></td>
<td><em>Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness</em></td>
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Acknowledgements

At various stages of this study, and in many different ways, I have been fortunate in being able to draw upon the knowledge and advice of family, friends and colleagues. Each has made their own vital contribution to a work which I hope will reflect their generosity, if not their entire approval. That it remains open to many criticisms is entirely my own responsibility.

Initially, I would like to offer my most sincere thanks to my supervisors, Dr Anja Gunderloch and Professor Wilson McLeod whose help has been invaluable and without whose friendly encouragement and searching questions, this study would have been very much the poorer. I should also like to thank Professor Donald Macleod of Free Church College, Edinburgh, for his advice and encouragement, and for his critique on an early chapter, which helped avoid various errors and omissions.

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A wide-ranging study such as this could never have been completed without the generosity of those who have offered songs and background information on poets. Among these I number Murdo MacLennan, Donald MacKenzie, Annie MacKinnon, and most particularly Janet MacPhail, who in discussion of her own work, sheds light on the whole tradition of Gaelic spiritual verse. My greatest support throughout this extended period of study has been that of my immediate family and friends, who have patiently accepted my increasing disengagement from the practicalities of family life. Above all, it is to my husband, who has been unfailingly supportive and endlessly patient, that I owe the greatest debt of gratitude.
Chapter 1: Thesis Introduction

‘Nadur an duine ’na staid cheithir-fhillte’, a formative doctrinal text of Evangelical Protestantism, shows the early eighteenth-century theologian Thomas Boston theorising as to how the body consumed by fire may be reconstituted from smoke and ashes:

Agus biodh iad air an caiteadh as gus na smuirnean a ’s lugha; no biodh iad air an losghadh, agus an luaithre air a tilgeadh sna aimhnicibh, no a thilgeadh suas san aidhear, gu bhi air a sgaoileadh leis a’ ghaoith, biodh duslach mhìltean ginealach air an coimeasgadh, agus deatach nan carpa marbh air a h-iomain thuig agus uaith san aidhear […]\(^1\)

Gaelic evangelical song may be far from being moribund, but it is certainly scattered. Brought to life in the oral tradition, subject to the vagaries of transmission and to human memory, which is by its nature selective, inclined to alter and interpret, its body is fragmented, its history discontinuous. In a sense, though living, it has no body, no acknowledged corpus, nothing which constitutes a canon.

The Evangelical tradition in the Gàidhealtachd

It is important to clarify at the outset what is meant by the term ‘evangelical’ as used in this study. In its basic form, ‘evangelical’ describes songs which in whole or in part respond to the Gospel from a Protestant perspective. In sixteenth-century Scotland, the term ‘Evangelical’ was simply a synonym for Protestant.\(^2\) In this sense, there has been an unbroken Evangelical tradition in the Gàidhealtachd since 1605. From Robert Bruce, Privy Councillor and ex-moderator of the Church of Scotland banished to Inverness after offending James VI, it continued through the Covenanting period and the scholastic Calvinism of Thomas Hog of Kiltearn,


\(^2\) *DSCHT*, p. 306.
to John Balfour and the Northern Revivals of the early eighteenth century. Ordained in 1654, dispossessed in 1661, re-settled in 1691, Hog continued to serve his extensive parish, often clandestinely, and is credited with establishing the system of fellowship meetings, prayer meetings and Communion gatherings which became distinctive features of Highland Evangelicalism.

Differences between Highland and Lowland parishes, between those largely dependent on itinerant missionaries and lay preachers, and those with a settled university-educated ministry, were initially practical and logistical rather than doctrinal. They were compounded by the Church Patronage (Scotland) Act of 1712, which, despite the opposition of the General Assembly, gave wealthy landowners the right to appoint ministers of their own choosing. Patrons, predictably, tended to favour candidates whose views on society and religion agreed with their own. For those who saw lay patronage as an unacceptable interference in the spiritual independence of the church, this imposition was to lead to a deeper concern with personal religious freedom and the growth of an evangelical faction within the Established Church. The term ‘Evangelical’ became specific to this dissenting minority, and subsequently to the ‘Evangelical movement’ which lent impetus to successive Awakenings and Revivals.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the majority party were increasingly being criticised as worldly, negligent of their charges, averse to revivalism, tolerant of religious and ethical rationalism. Disparagingly known as ‘Moderates’ or ‘Na Measarraich’, they stood accused of being ‘moderate’ in all but their attachment to manse, stipend and glebe. The Church of Scotland had from its inception, held the Bible as its principle standard, with the Westminster Confession and the Catechism formally accepted in 1647 as subordinate doctrinal standards. The first significant departure from this was


4 See p. 57, below.

in 1797, when the Associate or Burgher Synod introduced a ‘preamble’ making the formula of subscription for its own ordinands less rigid.\(^6\) The Highland Evangelicals, ‘Na Soisgeulaich’, by contrast, adhered resolutely to the doctrines of the *Westminster Confession* and the *Catechism*. They had developed a form of discipleship unique to themselves, subtly adapted to the practical, cultural and linguistic demands of the Gàidhealtachd.\(^7\) As Gaelic was the language of the people, so it was the language of evangelical discourse, a fundamental element of the identity of the Highland Evangelical churches. It also, to some extent, allowed Highland churches to resist changes instigated by the Lowland leadership, further emphasising the Highland / Lowland divide.\(^8\)

Ministering to small communities widely scattered over immense parishes, Highland clergy found it impractical to adhere rigidly to the systems endorsed by the General Assembly.\(^9\) The presbyterian structure set out in the *First Book of Discipline* depended to a large extent on accessibility and the possibility of ministers, deacons and elders attending Kirk sessions and meetings of both presbytery and synod. With the Synod of Argyll, for example, governing an area stretching from the Butt of Lewis to the Isle of Arran, it was not feasible for ministers to attend meetings with the same regularity as those in Lowland parishes. This, coupled with the fact that their teaching was necessarily in Gaelic; that it depended on the oral tradition; and that the Gàidhealtachd, both linguistically and culturally made different distinctions between the natural and the supernatural, markedly increased the Lowland perception of Highland Scotland as being uncivilised, not truly Christian.\(^10\)

Despite differences of language and practice, Highland Evangelicalism shared its theology with that of Reformation Europe. Rooted in Calvin’s Geneva and Luther’s Wittenberg, it had close parallels in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of

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\(^7\) A glossary of Gaelic terms relating to the Highland Evangelical churches is given in Appendix 1.


England, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic, Gallican and Helvetic Confessions.\textsuperscript{11} Its liturgy was informed by John Carswell’s 1567 Gaelic translation of \textit{John Knox’s Liturgy}, itself an adaptation of the Anglo-Genevan \textit{Book of Common Order}. Its presbyterian ecclesiastical structure was in accordance with the Reformed Church of Scotland’s \textit{First Book of Discipline}, drawn up in 1560 and endorsed by the \textit{Second Book of Discipline} in 1578. The \textit{Scots Confession} of 1560, followed by the \textit{Westminster Confession of Faith} and \textit{Catechism} of 1647, were its subordinate standards for belief and practice. Its teaching was also strongly influenced by the writings of seventeenth-century English Puritan theologians, both before and after their translation into Gaelic.\textsuperscript{12}

The Bible was regarded as the sole revelation of God’s will, its precepts applying to every aspect of daily life. Belief in the necessity of spiritual renewal or conversion; belief in Salvation by faith in the atonement made by Christ; and acceptance of personal and communal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of others, were central to Highland Evangelical theology. Faith was not simply a matter of private devotion, but must be declared openly and be evident in every aspect of the Christian’s conduct. From studying the scriptures, to family worship and strict observance of the Sabbath, Christians had a duty to meet together and to support each other in their faith. Though the Highland Evangelical churches have at no point formed a single entity, and have between them suffered many divisions, all, to a greater or lesser extent, have maintained these ideals. It is to these values, the emphasis on public profession of faith and the desire to spread the Gospel that we owe the creation of the body of evangelical song which forms the subject of this thesis.

\textbf{Gaelic evangelical songs}

Women’s evangelical songs in Gaelic, possibly even more than men’s, belong to a tradition where the criteria of acceptance and approval are not those of printed texts.

\textsuperscript{11} Donald Macleod, ‘Gaelic Spirituality’, \textit{TGSI} 55, 2006-9, 1-34. (p. 9).
\textsuperscript{12} See pp. 58-60, below. As this study deals exclusively with Gaelic evangelical song, the term ‘Reformed’ should be understood throughout as referring specifically to the doctrines of the Church of Scotland and the Protestant churches of the Gàidhealtachd rather than Reformed theology worldwide.
That so few have been published is not an indication of how they were regarded, rather that in the oral tradition, songs have the quality of conversation, each giving way to the next. Like sermons, some are remembered, possibly over generations, but the generality are soon forgotten, simply because this is the nature of spiritual discourse. It has a duty of self-renewal, an obligation to reiterate its message. Gaelic evangelical songs belong to a world of strong religious feeling and belief in divine inspiration, where the persona of the poet was of small importance. Sharing the song was publication enough, and, if it met with approval, it would be held in communal memory as surely as a published text is held in print. The gradual replacement of the oral tradition by printing, and the continuing displacement of the Church in Gaelic communities, has left women’s evangelical song with limited means of support and has seriously reduced its chances of survival. It is possibly the least explored area of traditional Gaelic verse and possibly the least understood outside its own immediate environment. Can this important cultural resource be recovered, and if recovered, how can it be made accessible to those unfamiliar with the conceptual framework within which it was constructed? That is the question which this thesis addresses.

Even accepting that, in this context, the poet is of less importance than her song, one cannot but be struck by the fact that, even when published, so many are known only in relation to fathers or husbands. *The Monthly Record*, for example, has Bean Aonghais Choinnich (1932), Nighean Aonghais Choinnich (1935) and Bantrach Aonghais Choinnich (1945), all of Laxdale, Lewis, while ‘Seann bhoirionnach diadhaidh rathad Loch Inbheir’ (1916) and ‘Piuthar do Mhinistear na h-Eaglais Stèidhte’ (1928), do not enjoy the distinction even of a husband’s or a father’s patronymic.\(^\text{13}\)

Though there are cultural reasons for a woman being defined by her relationship to a man, does it follow that her poetry must also be so defined? Does it deserve notice only in being different, or in not being different from a man’s? Where it is freely recognised that all are equal in the sight of God, could it be that in spiritual verse, if in no other area of poetry, men and women speak with a single voice? Were this

\(^{13}\) See Appendix 6, Annotated Chronology, for these poets.
question to be asked, and I see no evidence that it has ever been asked, from what perspective could it be answered? From what body of verse would evidence be drawn to support or deny it? Discussion would need to be supported on each side by a substantial body of songs of both oral and literary composition, covering a range of genres and with a chronological spread from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day. As no such corpus has yet been collected to represent men’s songs, the corpus of women’s songs which I have assembled for this thesis must, for the moment, stand alone. In devoting this study to the collection, contextualisation and poetic analysis of women’s evangelical songs, I go some way towards providing the evidence base from which to answer such a question. In preparing the women’s case, I have to some extent also prepared the men’s answer, not in having assembled a comparable corpus (though I have gone some way towards this), but in exploring the parameters within which evangelical song, whether by men or by women, is created and interpreted.

I approach this study not as a detached observer, but as a participant in the culture which it represents, where family worship was an accepted part of daily life from my earliest childhood. Thus informed, my critical perspective is that of a sympathetic interpreter whose purpose is neither to question nor to justify the belief system implicit in the songs, simply to make their spiritual content more accessible in a largely secularised culture. This study cannot, in itself, offer definitive interpretations or judgements, merely exemplifications of how particular songs may be read when their basic structural elements are understood. The issue is not that the reader share the beliefs expressed, but that they are able to enter into the mindset of the poet and find her songs convincing as expressions of her faith. Similarly, it is important that readers are able to follow the logic of individual songs, understand what is being said in terms of how the poet perceives the world, understand how she is expressing herself, and appreciate the significance of evangelical verse in specific communities at specific times.

That this is a literary rather than a theological study should not be taken as reflecting indifference to the religious character of the material, rather a recognition that
spiritual song can be read and appreciated under the same conditions as are applied to literature in general. Though its original emphases are doctrinal and devotional, this in no way precludes the exercise of literary craftsmanship. It is, for example, entirely possible that a heightened awareness of the evangelical poets’ distinctive fusion of the literal and the figurative could suggest alternative readings of a number of secular songs, subtly altering our understanding of the Gaelic poetic tradition as a whole.

In a sense, this thesis creates a field for itself, by applying Max Müller’s famous aphorism, ‘He who knows one, knows none’, to the study of Gaelic evangelical song. There is no satisfactory term with which to designate the heterogeneous body of poems which are its subject; no fixed terminology which can confidently be applied in discussing them. To call them spiritual songs is to impose modern concepts of the secular and the spiritual on a body of poetry, much of which made no such division. Where the modern eye sees difference, the contemporary eye saw continuity, a spiritual/secular spectrum where the spiritual is never entirely divorced from the physical, and the material never independent of the spiritual. Songs may be profoundly devotional, yet still be firmly grounded in the material world, interpreting contemporary events in terms of biblical teaching, seeing the life of the body as a metonym for the life of the spirit.

This study is arranged in two parts: the first part having an introductory chapter, with chapters 2, 3 and 4 discussing the collection and organisation of source materials; the social and cultural context of the poets; and the allegorical setting of their songs. The second part focuses on individual poets, with chapters 5, 6 and 7 examining their work in the light of analysis made in the preparatory chapters. The first section of chapter 2 deals with the collection and categorisation of the corpus of women’s songs upon which this research is based. The songs are of both oral and literate composition, some entirely devotional, others broadly secular. What they have in common is that they show poets responding to evangelical teaching in a way which is both reflexive and reciprocal, taking it as applying to themselves, whatever their

circumstances. They understand Reformed doctrine in the light of their situation and their situation in the light of Reformed doctrine. Within this limitation the songs display considerable diversity in terms of function and structure, ranging from òrain luaidh to the most formal of marbhrannan.

In order to facilitate analysis of this amorphous body of song I have categorised the research corpus, defining and describing each category to create reference points around which discussion can proceed. Categorisation of texts has been according to the perceived function of the songs, rather than their position on the spiritual/secular spectrum, and is to some degree internal to the thesis, a tool for analysis rather than reflecting an accepted system. While some categories are familiar, others are defined by omissions and indeterminacies which in themselves declare distinctions not otherwise made explicit.

The second section of chapter 2 explores the historical, theological and cultural context of evangelical song and discusses the various approaches taken in analysing the corpus. The juxtaposition of disparate types of song demonstrates correspondences between them, highlighting features which, once observed, become apparent in other songs, both within and outside the research corpus. It reveals the interdependence of texts, their reliance on formulaic expressions and the influence of biblical exemplars on both secular and spiritual song. Though the songs considered here cover a chronological span of over 250 years and were composed in many different situations, the poets consistently create intimate relationships between their own world and that of their biblical predecessors. They, in effect, open up a dialogue with biblical texts, showing that what they or their communities experience has been experienced before. The Clearance landlord has his antecedent in the wealthy man ‘a’ cur tighe ri tigh, agus a’ cur achaidh ri achadh’, just as the collector of Church dues is prefigured in the Pharisee ‘a dh’itheas suas tighean bhantrach’. Though the purpose of this dialogue is doctrinal, the fact of its taking place in an oral context demands that its language be poetic, simply because this is the most effective way of committing text to memory.

15 Isaiah 5.8; Mark 22.40.
Old Testament scriptures had, in their original languages, spent many generations being passed on orally before being absorbed into the Bible. Certain books were set in rhythmic prose or verse, employing strong visual imagery, antithetic parallelism and incremental repetition to facilitate memorisation. That these techniques also served to deepen understanding of the texts, allowing for multiple interpretations and for the same set of paradigms to inform different eras and different situations, did not go unnoticed by their imitators. In a Christian context, there were certainly more who could repeat the litanies of the pre-Reformation Church than could give a reasoned exposition of their meaning, yet they served, and still serve, as an effective medium for teaching the Gospel.

The post-Reformation Church, setting itself firmly against what it regarded as meaningless repetition, demanded that each individual engage personally with the scriptures. With literacy levels universally low this could only be addressed in public readings of the Bible and memorisation of the Catechism. In the Gàidhealtachd, public Bible readings initially involved extempore translations from English or Irish into vernacular Gaelic, while early Catechisms, with their literary language, were barely comprehensible to the laity. As the Catechism and later the Psalms taught doctrine, biblical poetics were embedded in communal memory to coexist with the indigenous tradition. Structurally and conceptually, the traditions were very similar: each using a stock of conventional images, formulaic expressions and heroic epithets to amplify and validate their narrative.

The Psalms and the Catechism were progressively supplemented by songs teaching biblical history and Reformed doctrine. Secular verse was also to assimilate biblical exemplars, with Mosaic and Messianic imagery freely used in Jacobite song. When, in mid-eighteenth-century Morvern, Bean a Bharra composed her laoidhean teagaisg, she was following a well-established tradition, and like her predecessors, using a poetic vocabulary reaching back to St. Columba and, in a sense, to the

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earliest of the scriptures whose substance she attempted to convey. The great strength of Gaelic evangelical song is that it re-casts biblical teaching into familiar poetic phrases and attaches it to familiar secular tunes. By locating it in the home rather than the pulpit, it allows doctrine to be understood in ways inaccessible to reason alone. Carried in song, the paradigms referenced may come to be more binding, more completely assimilated into the collective subconscious, more authoritative than any amount of reasoned exposition could make them, overruling intellectual argument by the sheer force of familiarity.

Before engaging with the work of individual poets, their songs must be situated in their own time and place. Some address concerns which are universal, yet even they are the product of specific moments in time, particular orientations of thought, specific influences in terms of what the poet could reasonably have known. Some accepted that all that Man could know was already made known in the scriptures, rejecting the very concept of Higher Criticism as bordering on the diabolical. Others question, perceive difficulties in sequences of events, dislocations between cause and effect, applying human logic to questions not susceptible of logical explanation. Knowing that the former belongs to the eighteenth century, the latter to the twenty-first, gives one perspective. Knowing the reverse to be the case gives quite another.

The remainder of chapter 2 makes a brief survey of earlier scholarship in this and related fields, discussing how it might be applied to the subject of this thesis. Of particular interest are questions of literacy as opposed to orality; the interaction of published texts with the oral tradition; discussion of spiritual verse by a literary scholar contrasted with that of a theologian; analysis of the coded imagery of secular panegyric and discussions of the role of the poet in Gaelic society.

Chapter 3 approaches contextualisation from a variety of perspectives: historical, literary and theological. It considers individual women’s perception of themselves as poets and how they see the function of their songs within the community. Questions

17 Higher Criticism was a 19th century movement which by studying the Bible in literary/historical terms raised questions about the origins of the texts.
of composition as opposed to inspiration inevitably arise, with a general reluctance to consider spiritual songs as having been consciously composed, or to see them analysed as a literary form. The second section of the chapter presents a succession of first-hand contemporary accounts of the workings of the Church from different poets. These offer personal views on Highland churches which, as Donald Meek observes, have been perceived by ‘modern literary critics of a sceptical cast’ as being ‘a baleful and retrogressive influence’ and ‘enemies of traditional Gaelic culture’.18 My assumption throughout this study is that evangelical songs, particularly those of the oral tradition, give a fair representation of the relationship between Church and community at any specific time. While poets can be as ready to condemn as to praise, their condemnation invariably attaches to ministers or elders who fail in their duties, factions who lead secession or those who oppose it. They never reject the Church as an institution nor doubt its spiritual authority, whatever the failings of individuals within it.

The mixture of exhortation and narrative characteristic of evangelical song allows insights into vernacular theology, at the same time drawing vignettes of the social and spiritual life of the Gàidhealtachd. There are portraits of individual ministers, elders and precentors; notes from specific sermons and memories of specific services in the taigh leughaidh. There are accounts of Dùsgaidhean and Òrduighean: the hospitality received in different villages, the spiritual companionship and the teaching of the elders on Latha na Ceist. Just as these songs preserve a record of the life of the Church; the Church and its members have preserved the songs.

The first section of chapter 4 discusses the themes and motifs of evangelical song; the second explores its allegorical setting; the third examines some of its most potent metaphors. However intimately a song may relate to the poet’s personal and historical situation, its narrative, either in whole or in part, is invariably located in an allegorical world which, though entirely figurative, is totally familiar to poet and hearer. Every detail of its topography is imbued with spiritual significance. Its geography is familiar to the extent that each road, river and well serves as a point of

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18 Donald Meek, ‘Gaelic Literature of the 19th century’, <meekwrite.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/nineteenth-century-gaelic-studies.html>[accessed 12 June 2015]
reference for specific aspects of biblical history; specific points of teaching; specific emotional and spiritual conditions; each or all of which may be brought to bear upon the immediate subject of the song. By setting her song in this allegorical world, the poet draws upon the authority of the scriptures, establishes continuity with earlier poets and declares her position in relation to the community. However fragmented these scriptural references may become as they filter into secular song, they continue to affirm the shared spiritual dùthchas of all who perceive them, creating a common ground where the great issues of life are discussed.

In order to facilitate discussion in this area, the geography of this allegorical world has been explored, its topographical features listed and their spiritual significance explained. Analysis across the corpus shows it to be consistently described in formulaic expressions which are metrical in form. They serve a specific function, are repeated, are transferable between texts, and have been understood in the same way in different locations over a period of time. Their incidence is traced in the work of a sample of poets, both male and female, from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century in different areas of the Gàidhealtachd. Over time, these expressions have become formalised in set lexicons of coded spiritual expression. Each phrase is metrically complete and is coherent in its referencing of biblical paradigms. As a system it is both functional and ornamental, a didactic and poetic device capable of infinite subtlety and complexity. This coherence makes it possible, for example, to track expressions across the spiritual / secular spectrum: to identify core elements of evangelical song in devotional songs, then trace them as they undergo progressive dilution before fading into invisibility in secular songs. The fact that they are as potent in extreme dilution as at full strength serves to validate my original argument, that familiarity with the underlying tradition is essential to the understanding of any individual song.

In chapters 5, 6 and 7, the work of eight evangelical poets is subjected to literary analysis in the light of observations made in the introductory chapters. The first of the eighteenth-century poets, Bean a Bharra from Morvern, had a reputation as a

19 Appendix 4.
satirist before becoming one of the earliest published evangelical poets. Her near-contemporary, Bean Torra Dhamh of Badenoch, was, from the evidence of her surviving songs, deeply concerned with social justice and the rule of high-handed landlords. Mairearad Chaimbeul from Lochaber, the last of the eighteenth-century poets, published a collection of secular panegyrical and a later collection of evangelical songs. The mid-nineteenth-century poet, Anna NicFhearghais from Kintyre, leaves a remarkable literary legacy in the form of a manuscript containing twenty evangelical songs and a lament for a young minister. At the end of the century, Margaret Camaran of Monar in Ross-shire looks back on the deaths of three of her children in a series of *cumhachan*. The last three poets are all from the Isle of Lewis. Catriona Thangaidh gives an insight into the early days of the Evangelical movement in 1820s Lewis, its notable evangelists and her own spiritual trials and temptations. Màiri Anna NicIomhair records the life of the Free Church from the early 1940s to the mid 1970s, while Catriona an Tucsain represents the poets of the Lewis Awakening of 1949-53.

Throughout this study all quotations are given verbatim, in order to reflect the originals. This includes idiosyncratic spellings and typographical errors. Original usage has been followed in the use of accents, many texts using them inconsistently or omitting them altogether. As personal names, patronymics and place names used in attributing songs carry layers of information which once lost may be difficult to retrieve, they will be given as found, regardless of whether they mix Gaelic and English terms. This, I believe, is preferable to assigning a simple ‘Margaret Smith’, for example, to each ‘Marad’, ‘Mairearad’, ‘Mearrad’ or ‘Maighread Nic a’ Ghobhainn’, which risks subsuming the identities of four first cousins into that of their grandmother. In other contexts, place names will be given in English. Capitalisation, while not used consistently in the original texts, is used here to clearly define honorifics and epithets accorded to the Deity and to draw attention to the fact that they occur as formulaic expressions. Italics are used for technical terms relating to Gaelic poetry and terms specific to the Gaelic Evangelical churches. A glossary of these is given in Appendix 1.
Chapter 2: The Corpus

Introduction

Belonging largely to the oral tradition, women’s evangelical songs carry a record of the domestic, spiritual and cultural life of the Gàidhealtachd, which is unique to themselves. At the same time, viewed from a literary perspective, they show the assimilation of biblical poetic imagery into vernacular song, an amalgamation of poetic traditions linking the poetic culture of the Gàidhealtachd to that of wider Europe and the Middle East. A primary objective of this study is to find ways in which this unexplored resource may be made accessible: to allow the songs to be read in the spirit in which they were composed, and interpreted in terms of the ideas and events of their time; to give some sense of how individual songs were intended and how they were understood by those for whom they were a natural form of communication.

The initial task having been to assemble a corpus upon which research can be based, this introductory chapter describes that corpus and explains the criteria for inclusion. It indicates the sources from which songs are drawn and the system by which they are ordered. It considers earlier systems of classification and historical precedent for naming different types of spiritual song; then makes its own classification of the songs in the research corpus, identifying, defining and describing categories. These have been named in accordance with established Gaelic usage, or where no precedent can be found, names descriptive of function have been assigned for the purpose of this study. The second section discusses the methodology used in addressing issues of accessibility; establishing commonalities between songs; identifying the conventions governing evangelical song; and establishing the cultural context in which it functioned. The third section discusses some of the main areas of scholarship which have informed research.
2.1 The Corpus

Research is based on a corpus of songs which defy simple categorisation, in that they represent different points on a spiritual / secular continuum. Chronologically, they range from the mid-eighteenth century to the present day. All, to different degrees, show poets responding to Reformed teaching by assuming a direct correlation between what they learn from the Bible and their own day to day experience, interpreting each in terms of the other. The corpus is made up of published and unpublished texts from both public and private collections. It contains over six hundred poems, representing the work of one hundred and sixty-five women from throughout the Gàidhealtachd and from different denominations within the Reformed tradition. The absence of a corresponding body of Catholic verse reflects the fact that for much of the period Highland Catholicism was marginalised, with both education and Gaelic publishing led by the Church of Scotland. While Catholic services followed a set liturgy, the product of centuries of Church teaching; in the Highland Evangelical churches, itinerant lay-preachers and evangelical poets exercised considerable influence, as did missionaries, catechists and elders – each using extempore preaching and prayer, each conducting worship according to their own lights and in the language of their charges. These practical factors, combined with doctrinal divergence, suggest that attempting to cover both in a study such as this would do justice to neither.

The corpus provides a resource from which sub-sets of texts covering different themes and genres, different periods, different localities and songs by individual poets and groupings of poets can be identified and described. It has poems from women who were highly literate and from those with no formal education; from women recognised as spiritual poets; from poets whose works are largely secular; and from many whose one known work is represented here. As neither the poets nor their songs have been gathered together before, it cannot be assumed, without specific evidence, that any one poet would have been familiar with the work of the others. Similarly, it cannot be assumed that any individual song has, up until now, been seen in relation to the others.
Sources

In assembling the corpus I have drawn texts from published collections; Church magazines; Highland newspapers and journals; manuscript collections in Edinburgh University Library, the National Library of Scotland, the Senate Library in Free Church College, Edinburgh, the Gaelic Collection in Leabharlann nan Eilean Siar in Stornoway, the Angus MacLeod Archive at Kershader in the Isle of Lewis, and Comainn Eachdraidh throughout the Highlands and Islands, from individual poets and from private collections. Recordings are from the School of Scottish Studies Sound Archives; the sound archives of the BBC; commercial recordings and personal recordings made during the course of research. Selected texts of songs which are unpublished or difficult to access are given in Appendix 7.

In gathering the corpus, songs which are entirely anonymous and cannot confidently be attributed to a woman poet by other means have been excluded, while songs with attributions such as ‘seann bhoirionnach diadhaidh rathad Loch Inbheir’ have been included.20 In determining female authorship of individual songs it is unsafe to rely on style or content alone. There is a well-attested tradition of men’s evangelical songs being used as waulking songs, and of men composing laments for family and close friends in the voice of the bereaved wife or mother.21 Evidence within the song as to the identity of the poet may also be ambiguous as men address Christ as ‘m’ eudail’ and ‘m’ fhear pòsda’ just as women do, allowing gender distinctions to become unclear.

The spiritual / secular spectrum

The broad spread of songs included in the corpus reflects the fact that spiritual expression in vernacular Gaelic song covers a wide spectrum, shading from the wholly devotional to the quietly acquiescent, where life and death, justice and

21 See, for example, Eachann MacFhionghain, An Neamhnaid Luachmhor (Stornoway: Stornoway Religious Bookshop, 1990). Six of his marbharrann are headed ‘tha am marbharr mar gun dèanadh a bhantrach e’, or ‘mar gu ’m b’ ann le bhean’, etc. ‘An Dachaigh Bhuan’, pp. 101-5, is used as a waulking song, as is Donnochadh MacAsgaill, ‘O nach sèideadh bho Nèamh an anail’, in An Dòchas Beò (Furnace: Cruisgean, 1990), pp. 28-30. On SA 1961.10, a group of women in Harris recall using Iain Gobha’s evangelical songs as waulking songs.
injustice are seen in terms of Freasdal Dhé. Songs which are essentially secular may include formulaic spiritual verses relating to the main theme of the song. This is particularly common in laments composed during wartime or when men are lost at sea and there can be no formal burial. A variation on the text, ‘Gus am bris an là agus an teich na sgàilean’, commonly used to announce a death and to mark the gravestone is integrated into the song. Dòmhnall MacLeòid from Lower Bayble, near Stornoway, for example, who was killed in action at Ypres in May 1915, was mourned by his sister in these words. ‘Soraidh leat gus an tig a’ mhaduinn / ’s an teich na sgàilean tha mu chuairt’. Secular songs may carry a scriptural subtext, a complementary narrative encoded in biblical references which both disguise and justify the poet’s comments on issues such as war or land rights. This is clearly seen in ‘Óran le Mairiread Ghrigarach do Thuath an t-Shlis Mhin.’ Her séist carries the disclaimer, ‘‘S nach fhaodar le am aithris mo bharail air doigh’. Ostensibly recommending tolerance and restraint, she commiserates with friends and relatives who have lost tenure of family land. Then, giving an account of the Israelites’ flight from Egypt, she shows Rìgh nan Gràs causing the elements to rise up and destroy the oppressors, while for the exiles the laws of nature are suspended. The sea divides to let them pass; water springs from desert rocks; bread falls from the sky; they spend forty years in exile then reach their promised land. The inference that the intruding landlords are breaking both natural and divine law could not be clearer.

A scriptural or doctrinal subtext does not necessarily carry a political message. It can also be playful, almost to the point of irreverence. In ‘Óran do na chnuimh fhiacail’ Mairearad describes an attack of toothache in exactly the same terms as evangelical preachers describe the path of the sinner. She goes from indifference to an uneasy consciousness of discomfort. Discomfort turns to pain, pain to agony and she searches for Mac an Eildair, whom she has heard can cure her. When she eventually finds him, he lances her abscess and allows the poison to drain away, bringing her relief which she compares to Salvation. In her euphoria she warns her friends not to

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22 C. MacLeòid, ‘I-u-ra-bho, sheòl gun sheòl thu’, SG (1 June 1917); Song of Solomon, 4.6.
24 ‘Oran do na chnuimh fhiacail ’s do dh’oin Og Mac an Eildair’, in Mackintosh 1831, pp. 87-90.
delay in seeking him out, then makes the underlying evangelical message more explicit:

Sud ni bu mhor fiach dhuinn, co b’e dh’iarradh na thrath e,
Chan eil dorainn na piantan ann an Righeachd nan Grasan,
Ach tha solas a sith ann nach gabh innse gu brath dhomh,
Stigh air Geata na Firinn choindh chan intrig ar Namhaid. (v. 12)

Mairearad Ghrigarach’s song may be atypical in its playfulness, but is not at all uncommon in its mixing of secular and spiritual concerns. Even the most profoundly devotional songs draw illustrations from daily life, expounding Christian doctrine in terms of the fish drawn into the net or the lamb snatched from the fold. Anna NicFhearghais of Kintyre, for example, in ‘S cian a luidh mi gun dion’, describes her efforts to avoid commitment as being like a fish breaking away from the fisherman’s line, hiding in the seaweed to escape capture:25

’S tric a shuidhich Tu lion,
Chum air tir mo tharruing,
Ach ’s ann bhrisinn o ’n sgrioch,
’S sheasainn dion de ’n fheamainn. (v. 2)26

Where so many songs move freely between the spiritual and the secular, the poets themselves should not be seen purely as spiritual poets. Some, such as Bean a Bharra and Mairearad Chaimbeul, were known as secular poets before turning to spiritual themes. Others felt that their ability to make poems was a spiritual gift given for the express purpose of composing evangelical songs. There was also an understanding that this gift would be taken away if misused. Seònaid NicMhathain of Glendale, Skye, makes this explicit in ‘An Neamhnaid Luachmhor’, where she counters local criticism of her work by declaring herself ready to suffer martyrdom rather than keep silence:

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25 See pp. 217-43 below, for Anna NicFhearghais.
26 ‘S cion a luidh mi gun dion’, NLS MS 14987, 13.1.
O ged a chlachadh iad mi gu bàs,
Is ged a shàbhadh iad mi le sàbh,
Seinnidh mise cliù dha le m’ uile dhùrachd,
Gus an dùnar mo shùil ’sa bhàs. (v. 12)

Ma fhuair mi tàlant o ’n Rìgh is Àird’,
Chan ann a chùm a chur anns an lùr,
Ach a chur gu feum tre gach uile dheuchainn,
Gus an tog E Féin e fo mo laimh. (v. 13)²⁷

Bean Iain Domhnullaich of Uig makes it clear in ‘Mo thurus gu Mangersta’ that she too sees her poetry as a gift from God which she has a responsibility to use:

An Ti tha naomh ’na uile riaghladh,
Stiùir E mi air fuinn gun iarruidh.
Air an aobhar sin bu mhiann leam,
Gu m’ e bhiodh deante ’thoil-san. (v. 24)²⁸

Interestingly, it is in songs sharply critical of splits in the Church that these two poets pointedly absolve themselves from responsibility for their words. They make no direct claim to be speaking with divine authority, but the inference is there.

There is no firm dividing line which can be drawn between the physical and the spiritual in these songs. The spiritual focus of a marbhraon soisgeulach, for example, in no way precludes detailed description of the events leading up to a death.

Premonitions and foreknowledge; the words of farewell only understood after the event; the last meal shared and the last Psalm sung, become a valediction, sometimes clear to the one close to death, sometimes only recognised in retrospect. Hearing and

²⁸ Bean Iain Domhnullaich, ‘Mo Thurus gu Mangersta’, in Òrain le Bean Iain Domhnullaich a Breamish, Uig, Leòdhas, a tha ’n diugh An Sgìre Shlèite anns an Eilean Sgitheanach (np. nd.), pp. 11-16; Appendix 7.5.
telling news of a death and the practicalities of burial are described in detail as necessary preliminaries to setting out the grounds upon which the hope of resurrection is founded. This mixing of the physical and the spiritual makes for a very close relationship with the secular song tradition, with poets sharing tunes, choruses and verses which may be understood as being secular in one context, spiritual in another. The chorus, ‘Thèid i ’s gun tèid i leam’, for example, becomes ‘Thèid is gun tèid mi null’, changing gràdh nàdurrach to gràdh spioradail, and an actual to a spiritual journey.  

Where the Bible is considered to be the Word of God, inerrant and infallible, that Word could be called upon as validation when voicing opinions on secular concerns just as it was used as absolute proof on spiritual matters. Màiri Mhòr nan Òran, for example, is not generally thought of as a spiritual poet, but when making her complaint of unjust imprisonment, it is to the Bible that she turns for justification. In ‘Luchd na Beurla,’ she uses the poetic idiom of evangelical sermons to reproach the minister who failed to support her, reminding him that those who oppress widows and orphans will be called to account:

Neach a shàraicheas an truaghan  
’S a’ bhantrach nach gabh e truas dith,  
Thig an là an cluinn an cluas  
A’ bhinne chruaidh thèid or’ èigheach. (v. 7)  

Having been, as she points out, ‘seachd is fìchead bliadhna fo èisdeachd an duine dhiadhaidh’, she has plenty of ammunition to hand, listing instances of injustice and betrayal from the Bible: Joseph sold into slavery by his brothers; Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ; the Apostle Peter who denied Him; Balaam’s ass who was beaten mercilessly. Like the ass whose faithful service counted for nothing with her master, Màiri’s blameless reputation had failed to protect her. Just as the ass had been

granted the power of speech to complain of her undeserved punishment, Màiri found a way to make her voice heard. ‘’S e na dh’fhuiling mi de thàmailt, / A thug mo bhàrdachd beò’’. In this context, biblical precedent carries as much and more weight than that carried by legal precedent in courts of law, reflecting a perception of natural order as much as religious conviction on the part of the poet.

**Chronological ordering of corpus**

In order to assist in contextualising the work of unknown and unpublished poets against those familiar to the academic world, an Annotated Chronology of the entire corpus has been provided in Appendix 6. This gives names and patronymics, brief biographical details where known, titles of songs and details of publication where applicable. A number of poets are identified only as ‘bean’, ‘nighean’, ‘piuthar’ or ‘banntrach’ of a man who is himself only known by his patronymic. In some cases, names and surnames have been established from these details, but where this has proved impossible, poets are listed by title and patronymic.

Though the originals of most songs are undated, some mention events which allow them to be assigned to a particular period if not to a precise date. The most obvious examples are songs commenting on war, the call-up of recruits, specific battles and named military leaders. The life of the Church is similarly traceable with Disruption, Secession and Union, congregations defecting from one party to another and the establishing or closing of churches. Ministers, catechists and elders are sometimes named, which can help to place songs. Marbhrrannan for ministers can be dated by Church records, others from newspaper reports or public records. Where neither internal nor external evidence assist in dating, songs are placed by date of publication, even though this may be long after the time of composition.

**Categorisation of corpus**

Categorising songs within the corpus has created the necessity of finding suitable terminology to describe them. The difficulty is not that women’s dàin spioradail are different in kind from men’s, nor that they cover different aspects of spiritual

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understanding, feeling and expression, rather that no overview has yet been taken of daín spioradail in general, so the terms used to describe texts have not reached any degree of conformity. In his 1876 essay, ‘Litreachas nan Gàidheal’, Donald MacKinnon defined four categories of laoidhean: translated hymns; anonymous laoidhean from the oral tradition or from pamphlets; laoidhean by living authors; and ‘laoidhean is ùghdair a tha airidh air àite urramach fhaotainn a measg ar bárdachd’.32 John MacInnes took a different approach, dividing daín spioradail into three groups in order to ‘represent accurately the content and tone of the teaching which the Gaelic hymn writers imparted to the people.’33 Two of his groups were geographical, with each group having distinctive characteristics. Argyll and Perthshire included Daibhidh MacEalair and Dùghall Bochanan while the Northern Highlands had Donald Matheson of Kildonan and Bean Torra Dhamh. The third group was made up of poets influenced by the Haldane movement, including Pàdruig Grannd, Dr Iain Domhnullach and Iain Gobha.

MacKinnon categorises and discusses laoidhean in terms of their perceived literary merit, MacInnes in terms of spiritual and doctrinal content. The categorisation of the corpus assembled for this thesis prioritises function, taking no account of poetic merit or doctrinal differences. Texts are classified according to their perceived purpose, intent and context of composition. Distinct categories have been identified, described and named in accordance with established usage. Where no precedent has been found they have been assigned names descriptive of their function.

**Terminology: Definition and description of categories**

In naming categories Gaelic terminology is preferred, largely because the term ‘hymn’ in English is firmly fixed and has little overlap with the Gaelic texts under consideration. It could reasonably be used of devotional songs and of some evangelical songs, but is misleading in that English hymns rarely give personal

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33 These poets are discussed in ‘The Gaelic Religious Poets: Their teaching and Influence 1688-1800’, in MacInnes 1951, pp. 262-94.
names or comment on local events in the way that Gaelic laoidhean do, nor do they share verses and choruses with the secular song tradition. English hymns are short, static in form and are a recognised part of the liturgy, while Gaelic laoidhean are none of these. The English terms ‘elegy’ and ‘eulogy’ are also fixed and formalised and do not suggest the intimacy of a mother’s lament for her children nor the evangelical function of laments for ministers and elders.

The terms dàin spioradail and laoidhean spioradail are widely accepted in Gaelic publications as covering the whole spectrum of religious verse, with no clear distinction made between them. Laoidhean spioradail will be used here of songs which are confessional, penitential and devotional. Laoidhean teagaisg will be used of songs teaching biblical history and Reformed doctrine. The term laoidhean molaidh will denote songs whose whole function is to praise God. Laoidhean soisgeulach will be used of songs which focus on evangelism, with laoidhean dàisgaidh for songs focusing specifically on Revival. Marbhrrannan soisgeulach will be used of laments for Church leaders and professing Christians, as distinct from the cumhachan spioradail mourning children and those who were not Church members. Earailean will be used of warnings and admonitions. Órain mun Eaglaís will be used to refer to songs dealing with factionalism and schism in the Church.

Though there are inevitably many crossovers between categories, the categories themselves are distinct in function and intent. They have definable sets of motifs which, though not totally exclusive to the category, are strongly predictable in their occurrence. The motif may be a single word, ‘lòchran’, for example; a phrase ‘bha do lòchran laiste gleust’; or a complete verse. ‘O tha mi ’san dòchas / nach robh do lòchran gann / is gun d’ fhuair thu measg nan òighean / steach còmhla ri Fear na Bainnse.’34 The use and ordering of these motifs is discussed in chapter 4 and demonstrated in Appendix 5.

**Marbhrannan soisgeulach**

In his 1989 essay ‘Na Marbhrannan Soisgeulach’, Coinneach D. MacDhòmhnaill discusses marbhrann composed by leaders of the Highland Evangelical movement. He refers to ‘seòrsa ùr de mharbhrannan a’ nochdadh, am marbhrrann spioradail, a’ moladh cinn-iüil a’ chreidimh, ministearan, ceisdearan is èildearan’.

He describes marbhrannan soisgeulach as having much in common with traditional marbhrannan gaisgeil, but with distinguishing features of their own. They are long, resembling sermons in that they are divided into sections dealing successively with the life and work of their subject, his personal attributes, his teaching, his ministry, his attitude in approaching death and his enjoyment of Heaven. Familiarity with biblical texts is clearly assumed, with biblical phraseology and symbolism closely incorporated within the poetic structure of the song. The features which MacDhòmhnaill identifies as being typical of marbhrannan soisgeulach are, with the exception of their formalised division into sections, those seen in women’s marbhrann for church leaders and members. These are clearly evangelical in intent, often using the voice of the subject to continue his teaching. In the light of this similarity in function and intent, marbhrannan soisgeulach is the term which will be used for this category.

**Cumhachan spioradail**

William Matheson makes a distinction between elegies composed by clan bards, and those composed in an unofficial capacity, particularly those composed by women. He uses the term marbhrann for the former, cumha for the latter. This effectively makes a distinction between male and female, formal and informal laments, while recognising that the one may be every bit as powerful as the other. Matheson’s use of the term cumha, with the qualification spioradail, will be adopted here to mark the distinction between marbhrannan soisgeulach composed for Church leaders and

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36 MacDhòmhnaill 1989, (pp. 177-9).
professing Christians, and laments for young children or for those whose spiritual status is uncertain. Marbhranann soisgeulach and cumhachan spioradail are structured differently, used differently and have different sets of motifs. There is a shared middle ground, but the extremes are clear and distinct and there are points which never cross. Cumhachan spioradail differ from secular cumhachan in that they both hope for and fear resurrection. They differ from marbhranann soisgeulach in that they are not marking the passing of professing Christians. They hope that the subject will have made their peace with God, but cannot be confident that this is so.

**Laoidhean spioradail**

Laoidh and laoidh spioradail are very general terms for songs teaching the Gospel, expounding doctrine, expressing penitence, spiritual longing or devotion. Donald MacKinnon defines the term laoidh as follows:

> Is e ciail cumanta an fhocail laoidh, ’nar latha-ne, dàn spioradail a tha air a chumadh ri fonn, is a tha freagarrach gu bhith air a sheinn a chum cliù Dhé. 38

MacKinnon’s definition would cover most of the devotional songs within this corpus, with the exception of some late twentieth and early twenty-first century poems which are read rather than sung. MacInnes describes the form of evangelical dàin spioradail as being determined by their function. As they were never intended for congregational singing, they followed the pattern of the heroic ballad:

> The heroic ballads and the secular songs were sung or recited by one individual, while the rest listened. In the ballad and often in the song there was a story. The length did not matter. Or rather the longer the better. The spiritual songs follow this pattern. They were long. They contained narrative mingled with exhortation. 39

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38MacKinnon 1956, p. 145.
39MacInnes 1951, p. 274.
MacInnes’ description, particularly as regards narrative and exhortation, fits the
generality of evangelical songs. Long devotional songs are the particular domain of
the recognised spiritual poet, covering what the Church of Scotland’s *Leabhar
Sheirbheisean*, in its categorisation of prayers, describes as ‘moladh’, ‘aideachadh’,
‘taingealachd’ and ‘eadar-ghuidhe’.⁴⁰ Here they will be put in the broadest category,
that of *laoidhean spioradail*. *Laoidhean spioradail* make professions of faith,
acknowledge fault and express penitence. They plead for strength to resist temptation
and for spiritual renewal in the Church and for humanity at large. They carry
elements of heroic panegyric, recounting the Christian’s spiritual journey as an
example to others. In setting they range between praise of the natural world as a
manifestation of God’s power and mercy, and rejection of it as a place of physical
and spiritual exile.

**Laoidhean molaidh**

*Laoidhean molaidh* are set apart by their simplicity, in that their whole function is to
praise God. They are readily identifiable by their listing of the names and attributes
of God and of Christ.⁴¹ These appellations run to hundreds and appear in every type
of song, but in *laoidhean molaidh* can be concentrated almost to the point of
excluding any other content. The Gaelic translation of William Dyer’s *Christ’s
Famous Titles* (1665), which ran to at least five editions between 1817 and 1894, was
undoubtedly influential, in that he used honorifics as headings for his homilies and in
referencing points of doctrine.⁴² In ‘Ainmeanan Cliùiteach Chrìosda’, D. I.
MacCuis of Forres fits 126 names into 72 lines, an exercise which he repeats in
‘Cuid a dh’ainmean na h-Eaglais’.⁴³ MacCuis does little more than list his collection
of names and epithets, while Anna NicFhearghais of Kintyre, in imitation of the
embedded genealogies of biblical prose, forms them into a narrative. By repeating
her litany of names and epithets she recognises Christ as Prìonnsa and Righ, and in
declaring her loyalty, claims His protection:

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⁴¹ See Appendix 3.
⁴² Uilleam Dyer, *Ainmean Cliùiteach Chriosd: Slabhraidh Òir a’ Chreidich agus An t-slighe Chumann
do Neamh* etc. (Edinburgh: Mac-Lachuinn Stùbhhard agus an cuideachd, 1845).
⁴³ D. I. MacCuis, ‘Ainmeanan Cliùiteach Chrìosda’, *AF*, (Jan. 1913), 4; (Feb. 1913), 15;
So Prionnsa na Siochainnt’ so Iobairt na Rèit’,
So Maise na Righre’, Crann Fireanntachd Dhé,
Clach Oiseann na Lùthchuirt, chaidh dhuildeadh gun chéill,
Feuch a nis E, crûnta ann an Cuirtibh nan Speur.  

**Laoidhean teagaisg**

Some of the earliest evangelical songs are the *laoidhean teagaisg*, didactic hymns teaching Old and New Testament histories with a strong emphasis on The Fall, the Journey in the Wilderness, The Crucifixion, Resurrection and Judgement. These were of great importance in spreading religious teaching and were the preferred mode of seventeenth and early eighteenth-century poets such as Fear na Pàirse, Donnchadh nam Pìos a ndaibhidh MacEalair. Bean a Bharrá, the earliest poet represented in the research corpus, explains the link between The Fall and The Crucifixion:

Moladh do dh’Ard Riogh nam Feart,
A thug gradh gun choimeas ris;
’S rinn cumhnanta ri h-Adhamh,
Gun sabhailt pairt da shlìochd. (v. 11)

’S e Chriosd a choisinn sud dhuinn,
Le follas a ghnuis gu chneas;
An t-sleagh nimhe roi’ a thaobh,
’S fuil a’ taomadh mar thuinn chas. (v. 12)

**Laoidhean soisgeulach and laoidhean dùsgaidh**

*Laoidhean soisgeulach* tend to be immediate and experiential, a mixture of narrative, warning and encouragement, belonging more to the oral than to the literary tradition.

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44 Righ Shioin’, NLS MS 14987, 15.2; Appendix 7.1.
45 Bean a Bharrá, ‘Com am bhuil mo theang na tost’, in *Co’chruithneachadh laoidhe agus chantaicibh spioradail, le ughdairean eagsamhail*, ed. by D. Kennedy (Glasgow: D. MacCnudhein, 1786), pp. 72-5.
Many address friends and neighbours rather than the Deity. They favour rural and domestic biblical imagery with, for example, parables of reaping and harvest appealing to missionaries and elders, ‘O nach tigeadh luchd leigeil nan dlòitean’ or complaining of them as ‘luchd buain a’ leigeadh dualan thro’ meoiribh’. Donald MacKinnon uses the terms laoidhean beothachaidh and laoidhean dùsgaidh to describe English and American evangelical hymns, particularly those of Ira D. Sankey, which had been translated into Gaelic by the Rev. A. MacRae. The term laoidhean dùsgaidh will be used here, not of translated hymns, which form no part of this corpus, but of the laoidhean soisgeulach created during times of Revival or Dùsgaidhean. Laoidhean dùsgaidh typically give accounts of the poet’s own spiritual awakening or express a longing for spiritual renewal. They have a strong affinity with òrain ghaoil, an air of excitement and euphoria seeking to draw all around into the poet’s new-found happiness. Some address Christ alone, while others embrace ministers, elders and others present at the time of conversion. Donald MacLeod describes the gràdh spioradail which they express as ‘a spiritual bonding that carried no connotations of impropriety and knew no sexual boundaries’. This can be seen in Nan Eòghain of Laxay’s song recalling her own conversion:

Tha dà bhliadhna nise slàn
Bho dh’ altraim mise Fear mo Ghràidh,
Na mo chrídhe rinn E âit’
Nach dèan gu bràth rium dealchadh. (v. 1)

Tha an gràdh tha so cho naomh,
Is bho shuas a’ tarrraig sìugh
’S ma thig ni feòlmhor steach na ghaoth
Gun cuir e gaoid is boladh dheth. (v. 7)  

47 A. MacRae, Laoidhean Beannachd (Edinburgh: MacLachlan & Stewart, 1874); MacKinnon 1956, p. 148.
48 MacLeod 2006-9, 26.
The elation of conversion and düsgadh may be contrasted with spiritual emptiness or traoghadh spioradail. Jessie MacRitchie of Orinsay, who had joined the Church at the age of sixteen, was in her early twenties, confined to the Lewis Sanatorium in the last stages of tuberculosis when she composed her songs on traoghadh spioradail:

Tha mi cianail fuar is falamh
'S mi ri 'g ionndrainn Fear mo Ghràidh.
B’àbhaist dhomh bhi suidhe fo fhasgadh
B’ i a bhratach tharam an Gràdh. (v. 1)

'S truagh nach robh mi mar a bha mi
Anns na làithean bho chian,
'N uair bha rùin Dhé air mo phàillinn
'S cúir’ a ghràidh 'gam' chuimeal suas. (v. 5)^[50]

**Earailean**

The most recognisable laoidhean soisgeulach are the earailean, or warnings urging penitence and conversion. The term earail has consistently been used of such songs. The 1916 anthology Bàrdachd Leòdhais has Calum MacNeacail’s ‘Earail do dh’óighean’, ‘Earail do luchd-aideachaidh mheadh-bhlàth’, and ‘Facal earail agus misnich’, all of which issue emphatic warnings.^[51] Some earailean are introspective, as when Bean a Bharra reflects upon her own impenitence:

'S fhada a codal ort a cholann,
T-uine ruith mar ghlaine ghainimh,
Mar ealuinn ri craoibh an doire,
Tha do choire rut a leanail. (v. 1)^[52]

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^[52] Bean a Bharra, ‘’S fhada a codal ort a cholann’, in Kennedy 1786, pp. 77-80.
Others are specific to individuals, as in Mairiread Ghrigarach’s warning to her brothers as they go into battle:

Chan iompoichar san uair sin,
Nuair a bhios an uine ar fàgail,
Nuair thig leaba no h-as-shlàinte,
Agus acain a bhàis oirn nós,
Gun chomas tionndadh na ceartach.53

Most are more general in their application, as in this anonymous waulking song from Harris:

Sèist:
O nach èisdeadh tu sgeul le aire!

Chuirinn impidh ort, thu grad pilltinn,
M’ am bi thu millt’, O gabh suim dha’ d’ anam.54

Few, if any, evangelical songs are free of earailean, either explicit or implied. It is their degree of concentration, the fact that so many admonitions follow in quick succession, rather than their presence, which defines the category.

Órain mun Eaglais

Songs in this category may be loosely described as protest songs – songs rather than hymns – which deal with schism and factionalism within the Church. There is criticism of the Moderates and propaganda both for and against Disruption, Secession and Union. There is condemnation of ministers and elders who have neglected their congregations or who have led defections into other churches, and reproaches directed against fellow-members of the congregation who have allowed

53 Mairearad Ghrigarach, ‘Òran do ’n a’ Chuideachd Cheudna’, in Macintosh 1831, p. 80, v. 10.  
themselves to be led away. There is also regret for the resulting estrangement from childhood friends and the breaking of gràdh bràthreil, one of the comharraidhean held to mark the true Christian. Bean Iain Domhnallaich’s song ‘Mo thurus gu Mangersta’ describes the aftermath of a split in her congregation before making a plea for reconciliation:

B’ àbhaist dhuit bhi aoibheil càirdeil
Toirt di-bheatha dhomh mar bhràthair.
Feuch a nis bu mhòr a chràidh dhomh
A bhi eadhon là a’ d’ chuideachd. (v. 4)

Ach mu dheireadh thug mi ’n reusan:
Cha robh ann dhiot ach ‘Seceder’
Fear a cheannardan an treuda
Rinn sibh féin gu léir a sgaradh. (v. 5)

Splits in the Church made for divisions in the community, hardship for congregations left without a place of worship and denied land to build on, isolation for those left with church buildings but no congregation. Consequently, songs concerned with the politics of the Church range from enthusiastic celebration of the emergence of a new church, to anger against those who have disturbed the status quo and the misery of isolation and estrangement when families and communities are divided. Congregations which have divided and individuals who have left the Church are appealed to and reasoned with by poets whose wish is for unity, or violently rejected by poets who demand separation.

Songs commenting on the Church are undoubtedly motivated by religious feeling and seek to convey an evangelical message. They use the poetic idiom of dàin spioradail and argue doctrine, drawing their proofs and arguments from biblical sources, yet they cannot, in my view, properly be called laoidhean without blurring the meaning of the term as it is habitually used and as I wish to use it. Lacking any

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55 Appendix 2.
56 ‘Mo thurus gu Mangersta’, in Domhnallaich, nd. pp.11-16; Appendix 7.5.
precedent for a collective term for such songs, this category has been assigned the name òrain mun Eaglais, using the term òrain solely to distinguish them from laoidhean for the purpose of this thesis. The term will be used here to cover songs dealing with factionalism and schism within the churches at all levels, including Disruption, Secession, Union and their aftermath.

Conclusion

The corpus covers a broad spread of songs, deliberately so, because in this relatively unexplored field, songs will be used to explain and to contextualise each other. The time-span of over two hundred and fifty years allows for the effects of increasing literacy and the availability of Gaelic Catechisms, translated doctrinal works and the Gaelic Bible to be shown. It also allows songs to be seen in relation to the rise of Highland Evangelicalism; changing understandings of the relationship between God, Man and the natural world; contention and division in the Church; war, emigration and depopulation, all of which are reflected in the songs. Some categories, such as marbharranan soisgeulach and òrain mun Eaglais, could be said to be peculiar to the Gàidhealtachd in that they give vignettes of social and spiritual life in specific places at specific times. Laoidhean spioradail are the broadest category and consequently the best represented in the corpus. Along with laoidhean molaidh they are the closest to the hymns of the wider Reformed Church. Where they differ is in length, and in not being designed for congregational use. When Gaelic laoidhean are criticised by late nineteenth-century editors and translators such as Iain Whyte, who writes, ‘nach ainmicheadh neach iad mar laoidhean iomraideach na h-Eaglais’, it is possibly this, along with their inaccessibility in musical and linguistic terms which is being considered.57

2.2 Gaelic evangelical song: a new evaluation

The collection, categorisation and ordering of the research corpus shows it to be representative of a tradition showing a particular way of reacting to the world, rather than just a collection of individual songs. It has been analysed as such, in order that categories of song, groups of songs on specific themes and individual songs can be

57 Iain Whyte, ‘Laoidhean Iomraideach na h-Eaglais’, AF (January 1902), 832-4, 928-30 (p. 928).
seen in relation to the tradition as a whole. Though this study concentrates on spiritual songs composed by women, a broadly corresponding body of songs composed by men has been considered. These are used less for comparison than as points of reference, showing men and women addressing spiritual concerns on an equal footing, in the same forms and in the same poetic language. They may also be used as corroboratory evidence where songs discuss specific individuals and contemporary events.

In the 21st century, the familiarity with scriptural and doctrinal texts common to the 18th the 19th and a substantial part of the 20th centuries can no longer be taken for granted. Religious education in Scottish schools concentrates on moral education rather than biblical knowledge and only around 18% of the Scottish population attend church regularly. These changes, coupled with a widespread loss of familiarity with the traditional higher registers of Gaelic, leave the whole referential system of Gaelic spiritual song largely inaccessible. Similarly, in an increasingly secular age, there is little understanding of the historical interdependence of Church and community. In view of this, the functioning of the Church at different periods will be described, both from historical records and in the words of individual poets.

The problem of inaccessibility in relation to scriptural and doctrinal allusion is more complex and is a major concern of this thesis. It has been addressed by establishing that such allusion is functional rather than ornamental. Because it is functional it is ordered and therefore predictable. This is demonstrated in the structure of the Catechism and the Confession of Faith, which offer biblical texts as validation for each point of doctrine. This same system pertains in sermons and to a lesser extent in songs, where the references tend to be associative, implicit rather than explicit. It can be seen as a semantic system with a core lexis, unconsciously acquired and in common use, supported by the more specialised lexicons of metaphor and allusion used in sermons, songs and prayer. Coinneach Ros shows how this poetic lexicon was acquired and maintained:

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58 Churchgoing in the UK, Tearfund research report (p. 31), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03 04 07 tearfundchurch.pdf> [accessed 22 May 2015].
Chan e mhàin gun cuala sinn am Biobull a bhith ga leughadh, ach chuala sinn cuideachd caoban dheth an úrnuighean nam bodach. […] Chaidh air an dòigh sin piosan mòra de ’n Bhìobull domhainn an inntinnean dhaoine, cho math ris na pàirtean dheth air an d’rinn iad cuimhne bho an leughadh fhèin, no bho aoradh-tighe nan òige, no teagasg-sgoile. 59

In analysis of the corpus, common elements become clear. Songs can be separated into different groups according to their function. Patterns of motifs and allusion emerge. It is evident that there is a broad unity of intention governing the use of these motifs. Some are general to the whole corpus; some are linked to a specific category of song; some are exclusive to the highest spiritual register of their particular category. As this is the first study of its kind, discussion is supported by an appendix demonstrating the occurrence of motifs in each category of song, their spiritual significance and their use by individual poets. 60 These studies substantiate the claim of this thesis that the semantic system underlying these songs is coherent, can be seen to have undergone a process of development, and is uniform across both synchronic and diachronic spectra. The expectation in considering a large corpus in a single study was that the conventions of evangelical song would be thrown into relief. Patterns of language use would become evident, common attributes become clearer and the possibility of mistaking the conventional for the innovative be reduced. This has in fact been the case, with detailed literary analysis demonstrating continuities with older spiritual poetry; intertextuality between songs and a steady increase in the use of biblical quotation and allusion as both secular and spiritual songs defer to Reformed doctrine.

**Historical, theological and cultural context**

Any evaluation of Gaelic evangelical song, or assessment of its place in our poetic tradition, must be informed by an understanding of the theology which underpins it; the oral culture in which it is grounded; and the historical and cultural context within

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60 Appendix 5.
which it was created. Such contextualisation cannot depend on standard works on Highland history alone, though these inform some aspects of research. Throughout this study, songs are accorded their original role of offering personal and communal perspectives on contemporary events, values and beliefs. Individual songs and groups of songs can be seen to give both practical accounts and metaphysical interpretations of war, depopulation, religious dissent and the vicissitudes of everyday life. Extensive quotation from many different individuals, poets, preachers and elders is used to build up a picture of the interdependence of Church and society and the importance of the laity in Gaelic spiritual life. Where a single voice carries little weight, the corroborative evidence of so many voices must be respected.

**Analytic approaches**

To unpack the texts of these songs one needs a way of identifying the component parts; of seeing how they relate to each other; and of recognising coded or allegorical areas. It is necessary to understand why such areas are coded, the significance of the coding itself and the range of meanings attached to individual features. Evangelical spiritual discourse uses a poetic vocabulary of its own, a formalised lexicon of allusion and imagery. It has complementary lexicons of honorifics and place-names and a specialised religious terminology. These work together to add depth and force to sermons and songs. Equally, they may be used in such a way as to make information inaccessible, deliberately so, to all but the innermost circle of clergy and elders. This poetic language can be seen to have developed in conjunction with literacy, as individuals and groups immersed themselves in study first of the Psalms, then the New Testament and the Gaelic Bible. It became complex to the point of opacity, where ministers and elders spoke to each other in what was known as *dubh-chainnt*, a coded language of reference and allusion intended to exclude outsiders.\(^{61}\) The abundance of anecdotes concerning the use of *dubh-chainnt* would seem to indicate a degree of competitiveness amongst the spiritual élite as each tried to outdo the other in the obscurity of their references. Particularly vivid examples would filter down, if not into common usage, at least to be regularly quoted when

speaking of particular elders. It was a language, not of obscure words or archaisms, as when traditionalists use the biblical form ‘focal’ in place of the vernacular ‘facal’ in fixed expressions such as ‘focal Dhè’ or ‘dearbhadh an Fhocail’, but of interlocking allusions, the import of which could not be perceived without a knowledge of each component part. It depended entirely on detailed knowledge of the scriptures, the inference being that the more intricate the network of allusion, the more godly the speaker – and the more suspect the one who failed to comprehend. With biblical Gaelic and the terminology of religious discourse increasingly remote from young people’s experience, and many Highland churches unable to support a Gaelic ministry, even the simple language of biblical allusion with which present-day elders greet parishioners is becoming the preserve of the elderly.

**Biblical allegory: a system of contextualisation**

Evangelical song clearly springs from the vernacular song tradition with deep roots in the literary tradition. The Judeo-Christian tradition which both grow from is far older than either and it is not by chance that Gaelic heroic panegyric shares much of its imagery with the Bible. For a fuller understanding of the texts, biblical influence, in terms of poetic imagery, biblical phraseology and allusion must be explored from both a literary and a theological perspective. It can be seen to vary from category to category. *Laoidhean spioradail*, for example, are more literary in their use of biblical imagery while *laoidhean teagaisg* use scriptural paradigms more freely. *Laoidhean molaidh* and *marbhrrannan soisgeulach*, in common with secular *dāin mholaidh*, make liberal use of Old Testament heroic panegyric while *laoidhean soisgeulach* depend more on New Testament parables.⁶²

**Lexicons: Ainmean clìùiteach**

Analysis of the research corpus shows The Trinity described in a lexicon of names and epithets amounting to hundreds. These are listed in Appendix 3 under the categories: *An Trianaid; Ainmean clìùiteach Chrìosda; Ainmean agus buaidhean*

⁶²Appendix 5.
Dhè; and An Spiorad Naomh. They indicate many degrees of intimacy or distance, showing Reformed doctrine shaded by poetic perspective and local belief. While most are the common property of Christendom, their interest here lies in which are selected: which attributes are emphasised; how they are grouped together at different times and by different poets; how they are used either to intensify or to mitigate the force of a message. Individual patterns of use show the poet’s perception of the different Persons of the Trinity and her understanding of how each relates to herself. Though there may, as Donald Meek maintains, have been ‘no novel or distinctively Gaelic views of the person and work of Christ’, the Ainmean Cliùiteach Chrìosda of women’s evangelical songs offer, if not a unique picture, at least a consistent one.63

Unlike Rìgh nan Dùl and Am Breitheamh Mòr, Christ comes into the heart of the family. As Bràthair as Sine and Fear-pòsda, He is close to the human world, still among the fishermen on the shores of Galilee, appealed to by the penitent to catch her in His net and to draw her safely to shore. In confessing herself to be a ‘caora chaillte’, the poet silently asks An Cìobair to accept her into an treud, just as in naming An Ìobairt and Am Fear Rèiteach, she acknowledges Christ’s sacrifice and seeks reconciliation with An Athair. Addressing Him as An Tobair nach Tràigh and Rathad an Fhìrinn, she shows Him to be embodied in wells, springs and pathways, both the way and the means by which an dream a thagadh leis o shiorruidheach are led through am ãsach.64

An Spiorad Naomh comes as An Comhfhurtair, Spiorad an Íuìl and An Calman, a messenger who cannot be summoned, only sent. An Droch Spiorad, by contrast, is uncomfortably familiar, his vices the human vices of pride, deceit and enmity, his names shading from the near-human Buaradair to the diabolical Rìgh nan Uabhas. Where the Ainmean Cliùiteach are recited as laoidhean molaidh, Satan’s names and attributes are counted against him as di-moladh.65 With naming being such an important element of composition, it naturally extends to the congregation,

63 Donald Meek, ‘Jesus in Gaelic Scotland’, <meekwrite.blogspot.co.uk> [accessed 18 Jan. 2014]
64 See pp. 130-3 and Appendix 4.2 for am ãsach
65 Listing Satan’s names is uncommon as naming him risks attracting his attention. See ‘Spiorad Fuath’, in Domhnullaich, nd. pp. 19-21.
functioning both by affinity and by opposition. It binds members of the Church together as na bràithrean, linking them to their Bràthair as Sine and through Him to An Athair. They are am beagan, an dream and an iarmad dileas, terms which seem vague, but are actually totally specific, dividing the few from the many, those who choose the world from those who separate themselves from it, those who are as an taghadh from those who are not. Caught in the paradox where each must choose, but where by choosing one cannot become one of the chosen, poets show a constant anxiety as to whether they will be numbered with an treud and whether they will ever be found in comunn na naomh. For those unfamiliar with the conventions of the Evangelical churches, such terms may escape notice, but are in fact essential in establishing poetic perspective, and are listed in Appendix 1. Notable by their absence are honorifics for the Virgin Mary. In the whole research corpus, she is referred to only twice by name and twice by implication. Where she is mentioned, it is with simple human sympathy, as a woman like themselves, pitied for having been turned away from the inn or having been forced to travel in winter. This fundamental difference in perception highlights the potential difficulty of studying Catholic and Reformed texts as a unified whole, without first establishing their discrete range of functioning.

Lexicons: Topography

The third chapter locates evangelical song in its historical and cultural setting, the fourth explores its allegorical setting. This non-corporeal world has, over generations, become as clearly mapped as the Holy Land itself. It is remarkably consistent in its geography and in the spiritual significance attached to each topographical feature. Its imagined landscape provides both a conceptual setting and a store of metaphor used by preacher and poet alike. Analysis of the corpus as a whole allows this allegorical world to be described. Its links to biblical history have been established in order to determine the spiritual significance of each place-name. In order to facilitate discussion in this area, the existence of this allegorical world has

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been demonstrated by listing its place-names and topographical features as they appear in the corpus. The spiritual significance of each is shown in Appendix 4.3, followed by examples of their use by different women in Appendix 4.4, and by men in Appendix 4.5.

**Lexicons: Comharraidhean Gràis**

The justification for considering this large body of texts as a homogeneous whole is based upon an assumption of the stability and continuity of the beliefs which they represent. There is an underlying stability of Christian belief and a limited and stable body of doctrinal works which mould that belief. Evidence for continuity of belief amongst the laity is offered in analysis of discussions of the *comharraidhean Gràis*, the attributes of the ‘true believer’. In order to establish the degree to which the *comharraidhean* were agreed upon over time and in different areas, reports of *Latha na Ceist* services in Gaelic congregations throughout the Gàidhealtachd between the 1870s and late 1890s were analysed. These have been collated and are listed in Appendix 2, with each elder’s statement appended, both as evidence of conformity of belief, and near-verbatim repetition of their actual phrasing in women’s songs. A strong degree of correlation was observed between the *comharraidhean* given by the 19th century elders and those described by Donald MacLeod as belonging to the Gaelic churches of the 21st century.\(^67\)

Their importance, in the context of the present research, is that the *comharraidhean* define a set of expectations which the believer expects, and is expected, to meet. Though speaking on *Latha na Ceist* is a privilege reserved to the most respected of the elders, women may set out their understanding of the *comharraidhean* in song, or take a single *comharradh* as their theme. Failing to recognise this fact could seriously compromise understanding of the song. It could, for example, lead to confusion between *gràdh spioradail* and *gràdh nàdurrach*, or leave the impression that *fèin-cheasnachadh* was unique to a particular poet, whereas it is all but obligatory for professing Christians.

\(^67\) MacLeod 2006-9, 24-6.
Working with a large corpus

There is precedent for working with a large corpus in a study such as this, and suggestions as to a methodology which may be applied, in Paul Zumthor’s essay ‘Style and expressive register in medieval poetry’.68 Taking a corpus of around seven hundred examples of grand chant courtois, he finds that an underlying stability in the poetic tradition allows the examination of this large number of texts as a uniform entity. He focuses solely on the texts in order to identify which elements may be taken as being representative of the corpus. He identifies three structural elements: the lexicon; phonetic and syntactic links in the language; and minimal thematic constituents or motifs. It is in the relationships between these three layers of information that the referential sense within which these songs were constructed and understood once depended.69 Applying his system of analysis to several songs, Zumthor was able to identify structural similarities; a unity of intention; common rhetorical figures; a common stock of imagery; figures which recurred in single songs and those which recurred throughout the corpus.

It became evident not only that rhetorical figures and motifs were meaningful in themselves, but that patterns of occurrence, order and frequency of recurrence, were also significant. There was no doubt that the songs had meaning beyond their face value, and that their message had been clear to composer and hearer alike as long as the tradition was maintained. The poetic register of these songs was in itself a connotative language, but its meaning had become progressively more obscure with the passing of time and the loss of the tradition which upheld it. Just as with Gaelic evangelical song, stylistic differences between songs were small and the voice of the poet was subsumed in the voice of the poem itself.70

If a similar methodology is applied to the present corpus, the collection of six hundred songs becomes manageable. Evangelical song has distinctive lexicons of

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69 Zumthor 1971, p. 265.
70 Zumthor 1971, p. 274.
honorifics, place-names, and set poetic phrases. It has a set religious terminology. It has thematic constituents or motifs which are in fact biblical paradigms, each having a pre-existent network of connotations, each anticipating a specific response. These features are linked metrically: by assonance, and by the sharing of tunes and choruses, each evoking affective connotations of their own. They are also linked by the patterns of synonymous, antithetic and synthetic parallelism characteristic both of biblical poetry, and Gaelic song of the oral tradition. These poetic devices are deployed selectively so that meaning, syntax, form and stress reinforce each other, advancing or completing the thought being put forward.

Each of these elements can be interpreted in relation to the song’s historical and literary background. With the earliest texts in the corpus dating to the mid-eighteenth century, even for anonymous songs, context can, to some extent, be deduced. We have historical and social background for the whole Evangelical movement; for individual districts and congregations; for the Church leaders commented upon; and in some cases for the poets themselves. Where there are several songs on a particular subject, each contextualises the other. There may be recordings of the poet herself or her contemporaries. These have been studied wherever possible and are invaluable, in that they show the poet’s own linking of words and music, and local or individual styles of ornamentation being used to intensify or modify what is seen in written text.

**Biblical phraseology and allusion in secular song**

In Gaelic, as in other literatures, biblical phraseology and allusion has passed into the vocabulary of secular song, worn down by familiarity to the point where it is used with the barest consciousness of the original meaning. This could be a function of the spread of literacy, or an indication of religious conservatism, as described in James Moffat’s study, *The Bible in Scots Literature*. It is important to recognise the risk of over-interpretation, but also to realise that, even in secular songs, a poet may use biblical allusion to reference a whole situational background immediately apparent to her contemporaries, but obscure to present-day hearers. As discussed above, evangelical song tends to follow certain patterns of motif and allusion. If these

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appear in a secular song as an extra layer of corroboratory evidence, they must be assumed to be intentional. If they appear to be contradictory or transgressive, it could be that the poet is delivering a subversive message. On the other hand, she may quite simply be unaware of or indifferent to the original meaning. Again, establishing what is usual and how a particular type of song functions normally, is the best defence against misinterpretation.

**Individual poets**

Having established the broad conventions of evangelical song and described its functioning in Gaelic society, eight poets representing both mainland and island parishes at different historical periods have been chosen for closer study. They are of different ages and different social status, with varying degrees of education. There are single women, widows and married women with children. One was known as a satirist, another for her secular panegyric. One is remembered as a counsellor and guide, another as a prophetess and visionary. All were known as evangelical poets, though not necessarily published within their own lifetime. A primary consideration in selection, has been to choose women who have several surviving songs, in order to gain insights into the range and diversity of their work. Together, they cover each of the categories identified in the research corpus. Each is set in her historical context, and her songs explored from both a literary and a theological perspective so that this poetic legacy may be better understood.\(^\text{72}\)

**2.3 Scholarship in the field**

This thesis presents a new corpus from a field which has received little academic attention and in consequence has no substantial accumulation of scholarship to draw upon. There is, however, a considerable body of scholarship on different aspects of the Gaelic poetic tradition: composition, transmission and survival; interactions between the oral and the literary traditions; the role of the Church in publishing; and the importance of Gaelic song as a repository of Highland history. Each contributes

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\(^{72}\) The female poets discussed in the thesis may be cross-referenced in the Annotated Chronology in Appendix 6. Male poets appear only in the Bibliography.
towards establishing the historical, literary and social context of the songs, allowing them to be seen as integral to, rather than intruding upon, the poetic culture of the Gàidhealtachd.

Though the corpus contains songs by women known to have had no formal education and by others who were highly literate, their songs are not necessarily clearly distinguishable one from the other. James Ross explores the interface between literary and oral traditions, using the terms ‘literary’ and ‘sub-literary’ to distinguish between Classical bardic and later Gaelic poetry. He describes bardic poetry as having complex metrical structure; formalised systems of imagery; sensitivity to the musical qualities of language; and as demanding absolute precision in composition, retention and delivery, quite independent of the written word. The same qualities of formalised imagery, musicality and sensitivity to language, albeit more loosely ordered, can be seen in the work of later vernacular poets such as Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, Iain Lom and Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir, with no reference to the poet’s literacy or lack of it. What Ross classifies as ‘sub-literary’ poetry links stanzas by assonance rather than by regular stress or alliteration. Its relationship to the literary tradition is seen in its formulaic elements of composition. Its use of emphatic antithesis, duplication of images, and incremental repetition allows the poet to analyse her subject aspect by aspect, creating poems as potent as any in the formal literary tradition. The same may be said of women’s evangelical songs. The fact that semantic parallelism, near synonymous re-statement and the systematised deployment of archetypal images are also characteristic of biblical poetry, allows evangelical song a second line of literary descent.

Dàin spioradail’s facility in deploying both formal and colloquial registers of Gaelic, formalised poetic imagery and biblical metaphor show that neither the Gaelic nor the biblical literary tradition were closed to non-literate poets. John MacInnes’ studies of the Gaelic oral tradition show that, even where oral poetry is the norm, influence

from written texts is common. In his work on the development of literacy and the spread of printed texts in the Gàidhealtachd, Donald Meek examines the interface between orality and print, showing that the influence of printed texts could spread well beyond their actual readership. The implication of titles such as Leabhar-ceist na mathair do’n leanabh òg of 1752 is that there was already a potential readership amongst Highland women. The foreword, ‘Focall do Chloinn Oig’, indicating that children were the intended readers, shows a clear expectation that they would read to their parents, and a direct route by which biblical texts would reach into the oral tradition.

As Colm Ó Baoill points out, poems survive in the oral tradition not because they express the poet’s emotions, but because they put into words feelings which are common to others in the community. A poem is expected to have some function, commenting on some event or offering a moral lesson. Ronald Black describes poems as being part of a chain of cause and effect, with the ultimate test of a poem being whether it brought about its intended effect. Thomas McKean, in examining the role of the poet in twentieth-century Gaelic society, shows songs responding to personal or community need, transient when dealing with topical events, more lasting when the poet’s concerns are universal. He shows that the heightened register and formulaic language of song allows the poet to deliver a strong message and share intense emotion in a way unacceptable in ordinary speech. While McKean’s study does not focus on spiritual song, methods of composition and transmission are comparable, as are the criteria by which songs are judged. There are also significant similarities between secular and spiritual poets in terms of their role in the

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78 John Willison, Leabhar-ceist na Mathair do’n Leanabh Òg (Glasgow: John Orr, 1752).
82 McKean 2007, p. 133.
community. McKean, in identifying and describing qualities which are fundamental to secular song, provides a basis for considering these same attributes in spiritual song.

**Literary criticism**

In his introduction to the anthology *Caran an t-Saoghail*, Donald Meek shows himself very much aware of the nineteenth century having been seen as a low point in Gaelic verse, arguing that this is largely due to the influence of ‘literary critics whose yardsticks are calibrated by the intellectual standards of the twentieth century’. 83 His aim in providing detailed textual notes in *Caran an t-Saoghail* is clearly stated:

The editor’s principal aim has been to expound the historical, social and literary background of the material, and to address, in some small way, the profound loss of contextual awareness which is now affecting people’s knowledge of nineteenth-century verse.84

Meek’s own research on spiritual verse of the period shows the main genres of secular poetry undergoing changes of emphasis and perspective as they are adopted into evangelical song.85 Late nineteenth-century critics were eager to show Gaelic poetry as measuring up to Greek and Latin models of epic poetry.86 By these standards, the bulk of nineteenth-century poetry was dismissed as being inadequate or debased, while women’s songs of the oral tradition fell outwith the range of scholarly debate. As the world of Gaelic scholarship is small, the body of critically edited texts available is correspondingly small and no real overview has been possible. William Gillies suggests ways of producing a better critique of Gaelic literature, both as a whole and of its diverse parts.87 A corpus representative of the

84 Meek 2003, p. xl.
85 Meek 2003, p. xxxv.
86 Meek 2003, p. xiii.
totality of Gaelic literature available would be gathered. It would contain sub-sets of texts covering individual poets; groups of poets; different localities; different periods; different genres and themes. Social, historical and cultural context would be established. Diction and rhetoric, poetic coding, metre and music, intertextuality, transmission and reception would be considered. This would give a more balanced view of the whole and a more detailed understanding of its component parts; a deeper understanding of the poetic tradition as it is and was; rather than a partial view of what is believed to have been.

In 1876, in his series of papers ‘Litreachas nan Gàidheal’, Donald MacKinnon, in possibly the first attempt to examine Gaelic literature as a whole, gives priority to laoidhean, seeing ‘saoghal nan spiorad’ as being fundamental to any body of literature.\(^{88}\) He begins by stating that he has no intention of judging the laoidhean on doctrine, that his whole intention is to assess them as poetry and their composers as poets. His analysis was based on a very different corpus from that considered here, in that with the exception of an extract from Aithbhreac inghean Coireadail’s fifteenth-century lament for MacNéill Dhùn Suibhne, ‘A phaidrin do dhúisg mo dhéar’, his poetry was entirely of male authorship.\(^{89}\) MacKinnon, however, was not unaware of contemporary women’s dàin spioradail, contrasting the spontaneous oral composition of a widow with the formal poetry of the theologian. This reveals his perception that their songs would be thematically and structurally different, the non-literate woman making a devotional song using biblical phraseology, while the educated man would compose heroic marbhhrannan following classical models:

A meagd ùghdar nan dàn so [...] gheibhean a’ bhantrach do nach aithne a Biobull a leughadh, ’na bothan falamh, a’ taomadh a mach a gearan ann an rann, a’ tilgeadh a h-uallaich Air-san a gheall a bhith ’na Athair d’ a dilleachdain, is a’ briseadh a mach le buaidh-chaidream an sealladh tonnan buaireasach Iordain a’ bhàis.\(^{90}\)

\(^{88}\) MacKinnon 1956, p. 143.
\(^{89}\) MacKinnon 1956, p. 184.
\(^{90}\) MacKinnon 1956, p. 142.
Fifty years later this passage was quoted by Professor Domhnall MacGill’Eathain of Free Church College, Edinburgh, in an address to An Comunn Gàidhealach. By this time perspectives had to some extent changed, and he named Bean Torra Dhamh and Mrs Cameron of Rannoch as ranking with Pàdruig Grannd, just below Dùghall Bochanan and Iain Gobha, whom he described as ‘an cheud triùir de bhàird na Gàidhealtachd’. In closing, he indicates that regardless of its poetic merit, spiritual song enjoys little respect with those whom he is addressing.

MacKinnon, while acknowledging Daibhidh MacEalair, Dr Iain Domhnullach, Dùghall Bochanan and Iain Gobha as poets, criticises them for their tunes: ‘nach do chleachd iad fuinn a bha cumanta a measg an t-sluaigh’; for their didacticism, ‘gu bheil iad mar a dh’thaodas sinn a ràdh, an còmhnaidh a’ searmonachadh ’nan dàin’; and for their teaching, ‘agus gu bheil na faireachdainnean agus na beachdan a tha iad a’ toirt f’ ar comhair do-thuigsinn do mhòran’. Pàdruig Grannd is noted as having the highest reputation allied to the least ability, while Seumas MacGriogair is criticised as having little inspiration of his own and borrowing what he has from Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir.

John MacInnes devotes a chapter of The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland, 1688-1800 to the Gaelic religious poets. Unlike MacKinnon, MacInnes’ interest is in doctrine. He traces the influence of individual preachers and discusses the role of spiritual song in non-literate communities, showing it as essential to the spiritual life of those who had no access to formal education. There is nothing in MacInnes’ writing of the veiled contempt for women’s songs seen in MacKinnon, and it is clear that he perceives oral transmission as being the most natural and effective medium for spreading religious teaching. He makes no distinction between men’s songs and women’s in discussing their modes of expression or the doctrine expressed. Though his primary interest is in their doctrinal content, he engages with poetic structure and use of poetic imagery almost as a matter of course, as it is this

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92 MacGill’Eathain 1927, p. 111.
94 MacInnes 1951, pp. 262-4.
which ensures their viability and their usefulness in the work for which they are intended.

Criticism of poetry by a literary scholar, a theologian and a poet may be expected to show very different perspectives. In discussing secular poetry, Sorley MacLean measures expressivity, emotional power and the impact on the hearer.⁹⁵ He considers how songs work on thought and memory and what they say of the heart and mind of the poet. William Gillies sums up MacLean’s critical criteria: ‘MacLean is quick to detect and praise what is poignant, spontaneous, direct and personal’.⁹⁶ Though MacLean’s concern is not specifically with spiritual song, least of all with evangelical song, his criteria apply as much to spiritual as to secular song.⁹⁷ MacLean acknowledges the extempore sermons and prayers of Calvinist ministers and Men as an important influence on modern Gaelic poets.⁹⁸ John MacInnes was later to trace the influence of evangelical sermons in terms of breadth of vocabulary, eloquence and structure in MacLean’s own poetry.⁹⁹ MacLean emphasises the link between words and music, showing that meaning is not carried in the bare words but in the emphasis laid upon them.¹⁰⁰ Gillies elaborates on this, showing that patterns of line-repetition and alternation of text lines with vocables allow the hearer to decode the allusive language of the song, extending its meaning by attaching it to other songs in the tradition.¹⁰¹ Mòrag NicLeòid explores the linking of words and music in Gaelic song in more detail, showing that both tunes and style of singing affect meaning, allowing change of emphasis from tune to tune and from singer to singer.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Mac Gill-eain 1985, p. 117.
Donald Meek’s paper ‘The Literature of Religious Revival’ examines written accounts of the Disruption and various Revivals from both internal and external perspectives. Gaelic perspectives on Disruption, Secession and Union may be judged from örain mun Eaglais, while laoidhean dissgaidh give first-hand accounts of Highland Revivals. From the evidence of the research corpus, these can be seen to be significantly different in tone and fact from accounts in newspapers of the English-speaking world. While newspaper accounts of religious movements in the Gàidhealtachd may be criticised as being limited, if not biased, accounts offered in laoidhean dissgaidh may be seen as being overly subjective. They are presented, neither in the measured rhetoric of newspaper editorials nor the exaggerations of popular journalism, but in a poetic language based on allegory and allusion. Every phrase, every word even, is part of an elaborate referencing system, clear, lucid, totally logical to insiders, unintelligible to those on the outside.

Until John MacInnes published his seminal research on the codes underlying Gaelic panegyric poetry of both oral and literary traditions, the meaning of many poems remained obscure. Under MacInnes’ scrutiny a complex system began to reveal itself. The moral and aesthetic values of Gaelic society were seen to be designated and described in relation to the natural world. What was of practical value in one was of moral value in the other. Virtue was measured, and the many qualities which made up the ideal man or woman were set out in order. Once this systematic coding was identified and its component parts explained, the understanding of Gaelic poetry acquired an entirely new dimension. It was evident from MacInnes’ research that he had discovered an underlying principle and some of the codes in which it was expressed. His initial study described the ‘panegyric code’ and its application in traditional panegyric verse. Though MacInnes’ research corpus was very different from that which is considered here, it is clear that secular and spiritual panegyric

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share biblical models. It is equally clear that dàin spioradail have discrete codes of their own, used both to conceal and reveal.

**The Reformed perspective**

It must be borne in mind that for the earlier poets, literal belief in the Bible was the orthodoxy of their time, not in opposition to it as with present-day fundamentalism. Just as the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church have their ‘Mysteries’, the Reformed Church has points of doctrine which defy logical explanation. Even so, its basic tenets of foreordination and an invincible providence underpin the poets’ perception of the physical and spiritual world and it is in the light of these that they deal with the great questions of life, death and the hereafter. The Scottish Reformed Churches are, to their varying degrees, committed to the Westminster Confession, and the works of eighteenth and nineteenth-century theologians are still central to their teaching. Donald MacLeod notes that though there is virtually no Gaelic theological prose, there is ‘a rich store of Gaelic theological poetry […] much of it superbly didactic’. This poetry preserves a unique record of the theology which marked Highland evangelicalism, not only in the voice of the theologian, but at many different levels. In order to understand currents of belief and the perspective of individual poets, and as a precaution against introducing anachronisms, research will be informed as far as possible by contemporary doctrinal works and by the songs of the most renowned evangelical poets of the Gàidhealtachd.

**Conclusion**

This study is not radically different from earlier work, except in that it examines a different group of texts. Its scope is necessarily wide, as no single song can be fully understood without some understanding of the rest. None of these songs exist in isolation. They draw on an older and wider poetic tradition; on an older tradition of religious poetry; on the Bible and other doctrinal texts; and, possibly most importantly in this context, on each other. Earlier scholars may not have examined

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105 MacLeod 2006-9, p. 12.
this particular body of work, but their methods and findings can be applied as readily to these songs as to any others. Zumthor shows that a large corpus can be perceived as layers of information, once its component parts and the linking systems between them have been identified. From these the ‘normal’ functioning of the tradition can be established and a foundation laid for closer study.

The Rev. John MacInnes understands the whole significance of spiritual songs to be in their teaching. He shows the influence of different evangelists appearing in songs and demonstrates that the poetic and musical qualities of a song ensure its spread, survival and usefulness in conveying its teaching. Dr John MacInnes’ analysis of the coded imagery of traditional panegyric suggests the possibility of comparable interactions between the literal and the figurative in other genres of Gaelic verse. Donald Meek shows that no poetry can be fully appreciated without an understanding of the social, economic and religious background against which it was created. Sorley MacLean engages both heart and intellect, highlighting the dangers of using the criteria of the written word when judging poetry and song. Whether words are in themselves musical or whether the music creates the words is less important than the fact that they are inseparable. Thomas McKean shows the functioning of song in society and the role of the poet in small communities. William Gillies makes a case for the above factors to be considered together in order to reach a deeper understanding of our literary heritage. These writers, and many others, have laid the foundations upon which this study rests.
Chapter 3: Historical, literary and social context

Introduction

The post-Reformation Church demanded an intellectual engagement with the scriptures which itself demanded literacy. This chapter examines the influence of Gaelic religious publications in the Gàidhealtachd and the interface between orality and literacy as the Church adopted techniques from the oral tradition to extend its teaching to non-literate communities. The second part of the chapter considers the interdependence of Church and community; showing the social and spiritual life of the Gàidhealtachd as depicted in evangelical song. One of my objectives in making this study has been to re-populate, as it were, the deserted villages of the Gàidhealtachd, allowing individual voices to bring to life aspects of our history which are now largely overlooked or entirely forgotten. The poets quoted give an idea of the spiritual authority they once held; some absolving themselves of responsibility by claiming divine authority for their words, others speaking out when discretion demanded silence, speaking for those who could not speak for themselves or saying what no one else dared to say. The third part of the chapter illustrates poets’ acceptance of the role of a messenger whose words were not their own, even though this may bring them into conflict with their neighbours. It shows the various ways in which songs were shared and kept in common ownership. Even though a fraction of what was confided to song ever reached publication, this remnant gives an idea of the vitality of the tradition, the variety of subjects addressed and the energy with which debate was pursued.

3.1 Texts and publications

Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh

The first book to be published in Gaelic was John Carswell’s 1567 Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh, a translation of John Knox’s Book of Common Order (1556). As a former Catholic priest who had become Bishop of the Isles, Carswell brought an
eclectic mix of literary influences to the foundational text of the Reformed Church in Gaelic Scotland.\textsuperscript{106} His intention was that the devotional heritage of the pre-Reformation Church would be carried forward, while stimulating the intellectual involvement with the scriptures which Reformed doctrine demanded of both clergy and congregation. Writing in Classical Gaelic in order to encourage acceptance amongst the learned classes, Carswell built in patterns of alliteration to facilitate recitation, enabling ministers to reach out to non-literate communities.\textsuperscript{107} He was careful to use simple language to explain doctrine, but where English has a single word, his translation uses paired synonyms or a complete phrase. ‘Help’, for example, becomes ‘cobhar agus cuideachadh’, while ‘dreadful’ becomes ‘is mó dh’adhbhur eagla agas uamhan’. These patterns of duplication and assonance reinforce their message while creating a flowing rhythmic prose which is both memorable and impressive: ‘mar Dhia láin do thrócaire dona daoinibh peachtacha do-ní aithreachus agas aithrighe’\textsuperscript{108}

The Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith

The Catechism teaches doctrine in the form of a dialogue between teacher and pupil where the teacher’s questions are simple, the pupil’s answers complex. In suggesting that the pupil is expanding upon the question, effectively teaching the teacher, it gives a practical demonstration of the Reformed ethos that each individual must engage with the scriptures personally rather than be a passive recipient of clerical teaching. The Foirceadal or Catechism included in Carswell’s Foirm na n-Urrnuideadh was easily memorised, but not readily understood by the general population.\textsuperscript{109} Calvin’s Catechism, Adimchiol an Cheidimh Comhaghalluidhedar, published in 1631, was little better. The Westminster Confession of Faith, including both the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism appeared as Leabhar Aideachaidh a’ Cheidimh in 1727, and was more accessible. It was revised in 1804

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\textsuperscript{109} Meek 2002, p. 89.
and again in 1838. By this time both its language and orthography were that of the Gaelic Bible, and its dialogues along with their 'proofs from the scripture' had become part of the oral culture of the Gàidhealtachd. This emphasis on providing Gaelic Catechisms and the *Westminster Confession* rather than a Gaelic Bible was not an indication that doctrinal works were considered to be more important, more a reflection of the fact that the publishing policy of the General Assembly was partly driven by their perception of Gaelic as a language which was to be ‘worn out’ for the Highlander’s own good.\(^\text{110}\) Their assumption was that the need for a Gaelic Bible would only be temporary and would be quickly overcome by education.

**The Psalms**

In translating Knox’s *Book of Common Order*, Carswell had not attempted to translate the *Genevan Psalter*, an integral part of the book. The Synod of Argyll’s publication of *An Ceud Chaogad do Shalmaibh Dhaibhidh* in 1659 and *Sailm Dhàibhidh* in 1694 completed the work. Recognising that lack of literacy in Gaelic rendered these works largely inaccessible, the Synod had in 1660 required parish schools to teach pupils to read the ‘Irish’ Psalms and Catechism, with parish ministers assisting if necessary.\(^\text{111}\) This should have ensured a wide readership for the first impression of over 2000 copies of *Sailm Dhàibhidh*, which was gifted to Highland parishes by King William II and III in 1696, though most in fact remained in Argyll.\(^\text{112}\) Over the next thirty years repeated requests were made by SSPCK teachers for copies of *Sailm Dhàibhidh* for use in schools. Parents were eager that their children learn to read Gaelic, but the SSPCK remained adamant that Gaelic not be taught in its schools.\(^\text{113}\)

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\(^\text{110}\) MacInnes 1951, p. 60.
\(^\text{112}\) Findlay 2003, pp. 222-3, NAS CH2/557/3, 761, 14.8.1696; 770, 2.6.1697; 805, 26.10.1698.
\(^\text{113}\) Findlay 2003, p. 201, quoting teachers’ and parents’ requests from National Archives of Scotland, GD 95/2/2 f. 259, 13.1.1719; + f. 342, 15.1.1720.
Sailm Dhàibhidh quickly became what MacInnes describes as ‘the chief devotional manual of Highland Evangelicalism’.\(^{114}\) Their metrical renderings of Old Testament history were re-interpreted in *laoidhean teagaisg*, creating a route by which biblical paradigms came to permeate even secular songs. This is evident in Jacobite identification with the Israelites in exile; with Clearance seen as expulsion from Eden; emigration becoming a journey to the Promised Land.\(^{115}\) With the daily recitation of the Catechism and singing of Psalms by all ages, generation after generation across the whole population, Gaelic acquired a new lexicon of biblical idiom and religious terminology. At the same time a distinctive style of Gaelic was emerging in formal preaching and religious writing.\(^{116}\) Grounded in the Classical Gaelic of *Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh* and the scholarly Gaelic of the Bible, it drew into itself the vivid vernacular idiom of the lay preachers, the erudite Gaelic of non-native theologians and borrowings from imported doctrinal works.

As eighteenth-century secular poets became increasingly fascinated by the works of Nature, evangelical poets such as Dùghall Bochanan and Bean a Bharra followed the Psalmist’s vision of the universe as a manifestation of God’s power.\(^{117}\) The pastoral and topographical imagery of the Psalms would have been familiar enough in the Gàidhealtachd, its own moorland and mountains lending a terrifying reality to ‘am fàsach siorruidh buan’ or ‘an làthaich dhomhain gun àit an seasainn ann’ (Ps. 69.2). The proof of God’s presence was all around. ‘Bheir sneachd mar olainn, sgaoileadh e an liath-reodh mar an luath [...] is anns an fhuaichd a rinneadh leis, cò dh’fheudas seasamh ann?’ (Ps. 147.16-17). What, though, was to be made of the ‘lebhìàtan âghoir mhòr’ whose head would be broken, or the ‘dhràgona ro-uamhasach’ (Ps. 74.13-14) who would praise God from the depths of the sea? Descriptions of strange lands, strange creatures and a God who fed the ravens, whose voice was in hailstones and who rode on the wind, ‘a ghuth a mach le cloich-shneachd chruidh [...] ag itealaich air bharraibh sgiath na gaoith’, fed the imagination of an intellectually

\(^{114}\) MacInnes 1951, p. 66.


\(^{116}\) Meek 2002, p. 91.

\(^{117}\) John MacInnes, ‘Gaelic Spiritual Verse’, *TGSI*, 46 (1969-70), 308-52 (pp. 313-4).
inquiring population (Ps. 147.9; Ps. 18.10-14). This rich seam of poetic imagery, which was to be worked and re-worked in over two centuries of evangelical verse, cannot be ignored in the secular tradition, even in the ‘boglaich craosaich’ and the ‘smùidrich fairge a theine garbhlaich’, which so concerned Sorley MacLean.\textsuperscript{118}

**The New Testament and The Bible**

With practical literacy confined to ministers, schoolmasters, and an educated élite, Kirk’s 1690 edition of the Irish Bible and the New Testament never came into common use. A single Bible, however, might have a wide influence, being sent around the parish on weekdays to be read in different families and returned to the Church on Sundays where it was read to the assembled congregation.\textsuperscript{119} The unfamiliar language of the English Bible and the Classical Gaelic of Kirk’s edition were both brought into the various Highland dialects by local ministers as they read from the pulpit.\textsuperscript{120} Extempore translations were also made at house meetings and for family worship, where perhaps just one member of the family could read. Many parishes had a ‘common reader’, who would read and translate to the congregation before the minister entered the pulpit.\textsuperscript{121} These local ‘oral Bibles’ became fixed in communal memory and in some parishes, even in the Gaelic Church of Edinburgh, the tradition of public reading with extempore translation was maintained until the Disruption of 1843. When the complete Gaelic Bible was published in 1801, many found the General Assembly’s translation disappointing, far preferring to have it in the familiar Gaelic of their own elders.\textsuperscript{122}


\textsuperscript{119} Findlay 2003, p. 155.

\textsuperscript{120} MacInnes 1951, p. 64.

\textsuperscript{121} MacInnes 1951, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{122} Meek 2002, p. 96.
The learned ministry: Thomas Hog of Kiltearn (1628-92)

Thomas Hog of Kiltearn, friend and advisor to William of Orange, could be said to have been the definitive influence on Highland evangelicalism.\(^{123}\) Ordained to Kiltearn in 1654 and faced with ministering to a sparse population scattered over a wide and inaccessible parish, he made important innovations in the organisation of the Church of Scotland in the Highlands. He is credited with the emergence of the lay preachers who came to be known as ‘the Men’ and with instituting the distinctive form of the Highland Òrduighean.\(^{124}\) He also introduced fellowship meetings at which practical and experiential matters could be discussed freely amongst Church members. In the Catholic Highlands, where the Established Church had at best a precarious hold, it was with an army of itinerant lay preachers, students, probationers and catechists that the Counter-Reformation was resisted. It was the political necessity of bringing the Highlands into sympathy with the Protestant establishment which prompted the Government to fund the Royal Bounty Committee, providing the Gàidhealtachd with itinerating schools, teachers, and a new generation of ministers.

The learned ministry: James Fraser of Alness (1726-69)

By the mid-eighteenth century Highland sermons were showing a remarkable degree of theological sophistication. A sermon by James Fraser of Alness, which came to be known as *An t-Searmon Mhòr*, provoked the comment from Principal Cunningham of New College, Edinburgh, that the sermon was ‘eminently good, but what astonished him most was where a congregation could be got which would intelligently follow and appreciate it.’\(^{125}\) Apparently there was no difficulty in finding such congregations, nor a readership for his theological works. Fraser’s *Treatise on Sanctification* was published posthumously in 1774, while *An t-Searmon Mhòr*, which ran to fifty-two pages, was included in his *Sermons on Sacramental*.

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\(^{124}\) Andsell 1998, p.123.

Occasions, published in 1785 and again in 1834. The lasting influence of such preaching may be gathered from Donald Sage’s account of having read from Fraser’s Treatise on Sanctification to an elderly parishioner, Hugh Ross. Ross had become ‘excited and uneasy’, interrupting Sage to ask what book he was reading, as he recognised the substance of it as having been delivered as sermons and lectures by Fraser seventy years earlier to the Alness congregation. Ross claimed that the points made were ‘as fresh in my memory as when I heard them from his lips’. This would seem to indicate that Fraser’s exegesis was not beyond the comprehension of non-literate members of his congregation, nor was it entirely dependent on printed texts for survival. Apart from ordinary services and lectures, Fraser held prayer meetings for ‘different classes of men and women’ throughout the week, and monthly meetings similar to Latha na Ceist where men and women met separately to discuss doctrine:

Pious females who were not allowed to speak in other meetings, came […] with a great variety and wealth of difficult questions in what might be called casuistic divinity.

This system of holding separate meetings for women was not uncommon in the Gàidhealtachd, forming part of the intellectual background against which the mid-eighteenth century evangelical poets Bean a Bharra, Bean Torra Dhamh and Mairearad Chaimbeul were composing.

**Puritan Tracts**

Organisations such as the Edinburgh Religious Tract Society, founded in 1793, circulated Puritan tracts, both Gaelic and English, in their hundreds of

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127 Fraser 1898, p. xx; Alexander Stewart, Memoirs of the late Rev. Alexander Stewart, One of the Ministers of Canongate, Edinburgh (Edinburgh: William Oliphant, 1822). On pp. 238-9, Stewart describes how in Dingwall in 1805 he was running a fortnightly ‘private lecture for the benefit of some of his female parishioners […] of that rank that I could not always have access to them at their own houses nor examine them at a public diet of catechising’.
thousands. With titles such as Galar Bàsmhor agus Cungaidh-leighis, these little booklets typically dealt with dramatic conversions or the twin evils of drinking and swearing. Though widely circulated, it is not obvious that they influenced Gaelic spiritual song to any great extent. They lacked the vivid pictorial quality and the poetic imagery of biblical texts and had a pious sentimentality not seen in Gaelic spiritual song. Similar in doctrine, they were different in attitude, deferential to those in authority in a way which Gaelic song is not. ‘Deference’ was clearly a requirement, as is evident in this extract from ‘Hints on the Composition of Religious Tracts’:

Animadversions on the political institutions of the country, should be avoided; and all reflections which may tend to bring persons in authority, and the higher orders, into disrepute with the lower orders, should be guarded against. No reflection should be made on living characters, especially ministers of religion […] all fulsome or adulatory eulogiums on the living should be avoided.

This model would effectively rule out the whole tradition of panegyric and the strong political voice of much Gaelic evangelical song. While Puritan tracts rebuke schoolboys and drunkards, Gaelic evangelical poets castigate governments, landlords, theologians and academics alike.

**Translated doctrinal works**

Highland ministers shared the learning common to all Church of Scotland ministers, but with no tradition of theological prose in Gaelic, doctrine was read either in English or in translation. Translated doctrinal works appeared from the 1750s on,

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129 John Reid, Bibliotheca Scoto-Celtica (Glasgow: John Reid & Co., 1832), pp. 149-52.
131 MacLeod 2006-9, pp. 11-12.
some running to many editions. Amongst the most popular were Richard Baxter’s *Gairm an Dé Mhòir*, 1750; Joseph Alleine’s *Earail Dhurachadh do Pheacaich Neo-iompaichte*, 1781; Alleine’s *Leabhar-Pocaid an Naoimh*, 1823; Thomas Boston’s *Nadur an Duine, ’na Staid Cheithir-Fillte*, 1811; and John Flavel’s *Companach do Luchd-Broin*, 1828. The influence of Puritan texts had been felt in the Gàidhealtachd long before they had been translated into Gaelic, notably in the *laoidhean* of Dùghall Bochanan.\(^{132}\) He openly declared his debt to John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* of 1666, which had greatly encouraged him and inspired his own spiritual autobiography.\(^{133}\)

Bunyan’s *Cuairt an Oilthirich; no Turus a’ Chriosduidh* of 1812 was altogether different in kind, coming far closer to the Gaelic world of the traditional storyteller with its account of Chriosduidh’s allegorical journey from Gleann-an-Léir-sgrios to Am Baile Nèamhaidh. It was read from the pulpit, in the cèilidh-house and in the home and ran to many editions. Bunyan’s characters were as real to his readers as the men and women of the Bible, and are often met with in evangelical songs. Their discussions and arguments are mirrored in Iain Gobha’s ‘Còmhradh eadar Soisgeulach agus Cuibheasach’ and his ‘Còmhradh eadar Chriosduidh agus Ainealoch’, where an Evangelical and a Moderate debate their opposing beliefs.\(^{134}\)

The St Kilda poet, Raonaig Nic Criomain, adopts both personification and narrative, meeting ‘As-creidimh’ and ‘Buareadh’ on the road and reassuring herself, ‘fluair Beag-chreidimh cho såbhailt thairis air amhuinn a bhàis’.\(^{135}\) Iain Mac a’ Ghobhainn shows the world preferring ‘Spiorad an Uabhair’ to ‘Spiorad a’ Charthannais’, while Bean Iain Domhnullaich shows the conflict between ‘Spiorad Gràidh’ and ‘Spiorad Fuath’.\(^{136}\)

\(^{132}\) Donald Meek, ‘The influence of Bunyan texts on religious expression and experience in the Scottish Highlands and Islands’. pp. 6-7. [http://meekwrite.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03](http://meekwrite.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03) [accessed March 2013].


Sermons: Evangelists and the oral tradition

The Gaelic evangelical churches have traditionally had deep reservations about the written sermon, favouring ‘inspired’ extempore preaching. Ministeir pàipeir was a term of severe disapproval for a minister seen to have written out his sermon in advance, so relatively few Gaelic sermons appear in print. A notable exception was the publication of the sermons of the Rev. Archibald Cook (1788-1865). These had been taken down verbatim by a member of his congregation, Duncan MacIver, using a form of shorthand modified to suit Gaelic. ‘Searmoinean Eirdsidh’, as they came to be known, were published as a collection in 1907, going through different editions and translations, becoming essential reading in many Highland households with extracts regularly appearing in Church magazines.

Though few are published, the principal points of sermons and their most arresting imagery are remembered in nòtaichean, memorised by members of the congregation, to be told and retold, sometimes for generations. Many nòtaichean showed preachers paraphrasing biblical stories, relocating them in local villages and peopling them with local characters, with some taking on a life of their own to appear in spiritual songs on an equal footing with the original. Preachers used the strengths of the poetic and storytelling traditions to make their teaching memorable. Christ himself was characterised both as poet and storyteller, and in creating parables of their own, preachers and poets saw themselves as following biblical precedent. This was in no way perceived as breaking the biblical prohibition on adding to or taking away from the ‘fàidheadaireachd’ contained in the Bible, more as a way of showing each individual that it applied to them.

Bunyan’s way of personifying attitudes and arguments was to become a stock ingredient of Gaelic sermons, notably those of Rob Fionnlasdan, minister of Knock

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138 Archibald Cook, Sermons (Gaelic and English) by the late Rev. Cook, Daviot ed. by J. R. MacKay (Inverness: 1907).
140. ‘Dealbh agus Samhla’, AF (July 1928), 55.
141 Revelation 22.18-19.
and of Lochs, and his successor MacRath Mór of Carloway, later of Lochs.¹⁴²

Both Fionnlasdan and MacRath would introduce personifications of moral attributes, projecting them back into biblical settings or sending them around the local villages, arguing the points of the sermon with them as though they were there in person. In one sermon, MacRath Mór shows God personified as Cearta, Naomhachd, Gliocas Dhé and Gràdh Dhé, debating with Himself as to how mankind can be saved:

Agus sheas mar an ceudna Naomhachd suas, a’ reusanach gu dian, dùrachdach, cionas a bhiodh gloine a nàduir air a cumail suas, gun sal, gun smal, na ’m biodh fàbhar air a shineadh d’ an leithid de chreutairean neo-airidh. An sin thainig Gliocas Dhé air adhart, agus thuirt e, ‘O mo Cheartas agus mo Naomhachd, tha mi a’ làn chòrdadh ribh anns a h-uide ni a tha sibh a’ labhairt gu firinneach’.¹⁴³

MacRath Mór’s use of paired synonyms and alliteration; ‘dian / dùrachdach’; ‘gun sal / gun smal’; ‘dh’ainmich agus chomharraich’; ‘freagarrach agus foghainteach’; is exactly that of Carswell’s Foirm na n-Urrnuidheadh of three centuries earlier; and is used for exactly the same purpose – to spread biblical teaching in non-literate communities. His success may be judged from the survival of so many nòtaichean of his sermons.¹⁴⁴ Rob Fionnlasdan and MacRath Mór were friends and contemporaries of the poet Catriona Thangaidh, discussed in chapter 7, and all were renowned for their vividly imaginative poetic discourse, whether in sermons or song. With literacy in Gaelic always the exception rather than the rule, it was in sermons and song that Highland communities heard, memorised and re-told the Gospel, and through the power of their poetry that evangelists such as Domhnall Mathanach, Dùghall

¹⁴² Meek, 2013, p. 5; Rob Fionnlasdan (1793-1861) was minister of Lochs from 1831-56. MacRath Mór (1794-1876) was minister of Lochs from 1857-66.
¹⁴³ Neacal MacNeacail, An t-Urramach Iain Mac Rath (Mac Rath Mór) a bha ann an Leòdhais. Beagan Iomraidh m’ a Bheatha agus Criomagan de Theagasg (Inverness: George Young, 1894), pp. 34-5.

### 3.2 Education

Evangelical preaching, with its paraphrasing of biblical histories and its vivid personification of virtues and vices, encouraged an interest in reading which the Highland education system could do little to satisfy. In the 1696 Act for the Settling of Schools, the Scottish Parliament had ordered that a school and a schoolmaster be provided in every parish.\footnote{MacInnes 1951, p. 225.} Acts of Assembly, however, carried little weight in the Highlands, and with many of the landed gentry actively hostile to the idea of general education, the law was widely ignored.\footnote{MacInnes 1951, p. 232.} Even where heritors met their legal obligation, this was totally insufficient. It would, for example, leave parishes such as Ardnamurchan, with a population of 5,000, scattered over a wide geographical area, served by a single school. Some families grouped together to employ a tutor for their children while others attended ‘Adventure Schools’.\footnote{MacInnes 1951, pp. 255-6.} These operated seasonally, varying according to the quality of the teacher. Some taught basic reading and writing, while others aspired to the standard of the Grammar schools, preparing boys for university entrance with Classics and mathematics taught by ex-parochial school teachers or struggling university students.

#### The SSPCK

The Society in Scotland for Promoting Christian Knowledge was formed in 1709 in order to ‘send the Scriptures to the Highlanders and teach them to read them’.\footnote{MacInnes 1951, pp. 238-9.} Despite its policy of teaching only in English, it grew rapidly, with an SSPCK report of 1748 showing it to be supporting 134 schools throughout the Highlands and
Islands. This report shows a significant imbalance between the numbers of boys and girls, with girls at best making up a third and more usually a bare quarter of the school roll. A report from 1764 notes:

Wherever there is access to a school, the Boys are carefully put to it; but the Parents consider Learning of any kind as of little Moment to the Girls, on which Account, great Numbers of them never go to any School. 

Though the Society was itself militantly anti-Romanist, requiring all its teachers to sign a ‘formula against Popery’, its schools accepted both Protestant and Catholic, in the belief that a knowledge of the scriptures would naturally lead to the abandonment of Catholicism. Similar reasoning prevailed in the schoolroom, where Gaelic was strictly forbidden, in the belief that a knowledge of English would naturally lead pupils away from their native Gaelic. The impracticality of having an absolute ban on the only language which pupils could understand was perhaps a factor in the Society’s sponsoring the publication of Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s *Nuadh Fhocoloir Gaoidineig & Beurla* in 1741. In 1752 the Society published *Leabhar-cеist na mathair do’n leanabh óg*. A second edition with Gaelic and English in parallel columns appeared in 1758, but it was not until the publication of the New Testament in 1767 that the SSPCK ban on teaching in Gaelic was rescinded.

In SSPCK schools all pupils were catechised twice a week in English. At home, the Parish Catechist, often also the SSPCK schoolmaster, catechised both children and adults in Gaelic. In areas at some distance from a church, the schoolmaster conducted public worship on Sundays, making his own extempore translations from the Bible and treading a fine line between ‘explaining the Scriptures’, which was required of him, and ‘preaching’, which was forbidden under pain of dismissal. Notable among these SSPCK teachers was the poet and lexicographer, Alasdair mac Mhaighstir

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150 List of Schools Maintained by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge 1748.
152 MacInnes 1951, p. 242.
Alasdair, initially Episcopalian, briefly Presbyterian, finally Catholic. The poets Dùghall Bochanan and Lachlan MacLachlan were both SSPCK teachers, Dr. Iain Domhnullach an SSPCK missionary, and Iain Gobha an SSPCK Catechist. This interdependence of the poetic, educational and spiritual culture of the Gàidhealtachd is too obvious to be ignored, with the SSPCK, intentionally or otherwise, providing a basic living for these Gaelic scholars and poets at a time when few other options were available to them.

**Gaelic Schools Societies**

The early nineteenth century saw the founding of charitable School Societies in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Inverness. The first of these, the Edinburgh Gaelic Schools Society (EGSS) was set up in 1811 for the express purpose of teaching Highlanders to read the Bible in Gaelic. It ran circulating schools catering for all ages, using the Gaelic Bible as the main means of instruction. A series of letters to the Committee show that the Sgoilean Chrìosd, as they became known, were welcomed by all denominations. In 1813 the Episcopalians in Scatwell, Ross-shire were ‘readily receiving instruction’. The Rev Dr Norman MacDonald, Roman Catholic Clergyman in the Parish of Ardnamurchan, in a letter of 22 April 1813, commended the EGSS teacher Mr M’Ewan, whom he hoped would ‘teach all the youth of the country to read the Gaelic Scriptures, which I hope for very much’. Catholic parents were evidently happy to have their children taught from the Gaelic Bible, but not from Protestant doctrinal works. In Catholic Ireland, and very possibly in Catholic Scotland, as it was historically served by Irish priests, there appears to have been an ingrained belief that what was written in Irish must necessarily be true.

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155 The EGSS was founded in 1811 and had 85 schools by 1826. The Glasgow Gaelic School Society, founded in 1812 had 48 schools by 1824. The Inverness School Society, founded in 1818 had 65 schools by 1824. The General Assembly set up its schools in 1825 and by 1865 had 200 schools, 29 of them in the Hebrides. Andsell 1998, pp. 103-4.


157 Henry Joseph Monck Mason, A Brief Sketch of Various Attempts Which have Been Made to Diffuse a Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures Through the Medium of the Irish Language (Dublin: Graisberry & Campbell, 1818), p. 120. MacDonald is quoted in Monck Mason, pp. 119-25 which gives accounts of the Catholic areas of Ardnamurchan, Canna, Eigg, Glenug and Moidart welcoming EGSS schools.
Nicholas Williams attributes the enthusiastic reception of Bedell’s Bible in 1686 partly to the fact that no other Irish publications were available, and partly to an instinctive trust in the language itself:

Sa dara háit is dócha nár chreid cuid acu go bhféadfadh Biobla Bhedell a bheith eiriciúil, mar is i nGaeilge a bhí sé.\(^\text{158}\)

The peasant is assiduously instructed to consider the Protestant Bible to be an heretical book, but nothing will persuade him that heresy can be uttered in his native tongue, and he imagines that Satan is dumb in it, an opinion that has been industriously encouraged.\(^\text{159}\)

This trust, if it extended to Catholic Scotland, could not extend to the Catechism and the doctrinal works used as textbooks in SSPCK schools, which from a Catholic perspective were clearly heretical, even in translation.

**The Outer Isles**

The Rev. John Lane Buchanan, Missionary Minister to the Isles from the Church of Scotland, worked for the SSPCK in Harris and the Southern Isles from 1782-90, and gives a front-line account of parochial schools, charity schools and the plight of missionaries neglected by the charities responsible for employing them.\(^\text{160}\) Local tacksmen and ministers regularly appropriated funds sent by the General Assembly and the Royal Bounty Commission. Money intended for funding a Grammar school in Stornoway had been taken by the Parish minister to employ an assistant for himself. The SSPCK schoolmasters in South Uist and Barra had both been reduced to starvation, unable either to support their families or pay their passage back to the

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\(^{158}\) Williams 1986, p. 133.


mainland. In Harris a pretence of schooling was kept up, with two itinerant ‘Questers’ teaching the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed and the Catechism. The Questers were no more literate than their pupils; one ‘a blind beggar of four-score years and upwards’, the other ‘a decrepit changeling endowed with a tenacious memory’. Alexander Buchan, the St Kilda Catechist, by contrast, had an extensive library of theological works. His influence was such that when Dr Iain Domhnallach visited St Kilda in 1822, he found a ‘traditional and theoretical knowledge of the scriptures’ surviving in the oral tradition, even though St Kilda had been without missionary or catechist from the time of Buchan’s death in 1730.

Angus MacLeod, setting up the first EGSS school in Bayble, about six miles east of Stornoway, in December 1811, sent in a report revealing the people’s hunger for education:

The people gather every day in the week to hear the word of God. I believe that I had above three hundred of them last Sabbath. […] They are so anxious to learn that they would sit up day and night if their work would allow them. The house they made is large […] and after all it will not contain above two thirds of the people that gather to it. The rest of them will be lying on the roof of the house all the time of the reading.

Ten months later MacLeod was teaching from both Old and New Testaments, seldom having fewer than fifty pupils at a time. He accepted pupils of all ages, teaching from seven in the morning until ten at night, sometimes until midnight. After fifteen months he was required to open a school in Gress, north of Stornoway, leaving the most advanced of his Bayble pupils to teach the rest.

In 1818, over in Uig on the west side of Lewis, there were just two Bibles, one in the Church, one in the manse. Fifteen-year-old Calum MacRitchie, who was later to

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161 Buchanan 1793, pp. 242-3.
162 Buchanan 1793, p. 241.
163 MacInnes 1951, pp. 209-10; Appendix 8, ‘An Cuan nach Traoghadh’.
165 Ibid. Appendix to Report 11, p. 34.
become a leading light in the Evangelical movement, was able to borrow copies of the New Testament, Ailleine’s *Earail Dhurachdadh* and Baxter’s *Gairm an Dé Mhòir*. When he acquired a Gaelic Bible in 1821, news of it spread throughout the district and neighbours would gather to hear it read. His minister, the Rev. Hugh Munro, responded by threatening to evict MacRitchie’s father and locking the manse doors against the son, claiming that he was insane. In 1823, aged just twenty, MacRitchie opened a school at Aline in South Lochs, teaching far into the night, with children, parents and grandparents attending his school all together. The same enthusiasm for education in both young and old, was seen all over the island. By this time women and girls were making up half the intake of EGSS schools in the Islands. In some mainland schools they outnumbered boys, possibly because boys were attending the fee-paying SSPCK or parochial schools which offered a wider syllabus.

These were the early days of the Evangelical movement in Lewis and Harris. Beginning with *Bliadhna an Fhaomaidh*, the great Revival of 1822, it spread from Barvas to Uig, Lochs and Stornoway and down to Harris. Fuelled by the preaching of Alexander MacLeod; the preaching and poetry of Dr Iain Domhnullach; and in part by the young teachers of the *Sgoilean Chrìosd*, it engendered a new breed of poets and evangelists: MacRath Mór, Rob Fionnlasdan, Ceistear Mór nan Loch, Iain Gobha, his sisters Eibhric and Màiri Morison and Catriona Thangaidh, a generation hugely influential in setting the patterns of evangelical song.

In spite of the provision of Parish schools, SSPCK schools and the *Sgoilean Chrìosd*, universal literacy remained beyond reach. The geography of the Gàidhealtachd meant that provision of schools and churches would always be problematic. Education could only reach as far as children could travel to school, as far as their

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166 MacAulay 1980, p. 170; See p. 260-1, below.
167 See MacAulay 1980, p. 105 for Munro, who, hearing that a school of whales had entered the bay, had famously driven parishioners from the pews. ‘Mach a so sibh; Tha na mucan air a thighean a steach do ’n bhágh. ’S iomadh là gheibh sibh searmoin, ach chan ann tric a gheibh sibh na mucan’.
labour could be spared, as far as books could be provided, afforded and read. The Established Church was limited in its provision of ministers, catechists, and missionaries, just as the Catholic Church had been in its provision of priests. Missionary Societies distributed Bibles and tracts and by 1844 the EGSS calculated that it had taught 90,000 people in the Gàidhealtachd to read in Gaelic. In Lewis, this debt to the Sgoilean Chriosd was acknowledged at every Communion for over fifty years, with special collections for the Society. MacRath Mór, in taking up the collection, once reminded the congregation:

Cho fad ’sa bhitheas muir a’ bualadh ri lic, agus bainne geal aig bò dhubh,
cha bu chòir do mhuinntir Leòdhais na sgoiltean Gàidhlig dhi-
chuimhneachadh.  

3.3 Church and community

Historically the Church of Scotland was powerful in that it held land and could assign tenancies. It held endowments and could exercise patronage. It could exact levies in kind and in labour. It administered the Poor Law; distributed or withheld charity; endowed schools; employed teachers; set syllabuses and published textbooks. It employed missionaries, catechists and probationers, assigning parishes or blocking appointments. It exercised social control by public censure; granted or withheld Baptism and Marriage, and allowed or refused burial in consecrated ground. Post-Disruption Free Churches exercised a lesser degree of influence. In Highland and Island communities, the minister would have had a better education than the generality of his parishioners. He would be assigned a glebe, however small, and would receive a stipend along with support in labour and in kind. The distinction in material terms would be small by city standards, but immense in rural areas where subsistence farming was the norm.

The Church histories quoted so far have been written from the perspective of Church leaders. What is yet to be heard is Church history from the perspective of the laity as recorded in evangelical song. There is the blind man in Greenock Poor House who

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171 MacAulay 1980, p. 126.
accuses the Church of violating God’s Law by separating him from his wife; the
widow who cannot pay Church dues; the unjustly imprisoned mother, accusing her
minister of desertion; the women who refuse to accept that the Establishment has the
right to determine who will preach God’s Word. These poets, and many others, speak
out in their songs, building up multi-dimensional representations of the Church
community in different areas at different times. They reveal personal
understandings of Christian teaching; differences of emphasis; differences of
perspective. They show a confident independence of thought, yet nothing of the
modern concept of equality, with biblical paradigms and real life united in
confirming that inequality is Man’s natural state.

Evangelical songs are, by their nature, composed by those who, however critical,
have a commitment to the Church and are conscious of a duty to maintain its
integrity and uphold its good name. While the Church exercised the right of public
censure from the pulpit, it was itself subject to censure. Church officers and ministers
could be held to account in songs, reminding them that they were answerable to God
for any failing in their pastoral or spiritual duty. For those whose only power was
that of poetry, setting out their complaint in song was, in itself, a form of
recompense. Some examples follow, showing individual poets who could not remain
silent in the face of injustice, divisions in the Church, decline in public morality, or
who simply felt themselves neglected by the eldership.

**Gilleasbuig Mac-Mhaoilein, Eilean Arainn**

One complainant, whose case is a matter of public record, was Gilleasbuig Mac-
Mhaoilein from Lochranza in Arran, born c.1800. He had been blind from birth,
but had supported himself as a small trader for thirty years, before falling into
destitution. He describes having applied to the Parochial Board for relief, eventually
going to the Glasgow Poor’s House where his family were ‘kindly received and

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172 See McColl 2006, pp.147-53 for discussion of the evangelical poet as spokesman for the
community in relation to land agitation.
173 Gilleasbuig Mac-Mhaoilein, ‘Foirneart Luichd-Riaghlaidh’ and ‘Dleasnas Luichd-Riaghlaidh’, in
Dearbhadh a’ Chridhe: Laidhean Spioradail le Gilleasbuig Mac-Mhaoilein, An Lochraonasa, Eilein
provided for’. He was pursued by the local Board Inspector, committed to Greenock Poor House, and his wife and three children sent back to Arran. Coughing blood from injuries sustained in a fall and close to starvation, he composed a series of spiritual songs detailing his situation. Though blind, Mac-Mhaoilein ‘knew the Bible better than many who can read it’ and used both biblical arguments and passages from *Foirm na n-Urrmuidheadh* to condemn the parish officials who had separated him from his wife, fostered his children with strangers, denied them support and refused them schooling. He framed his rebuke in the words of the Church of Scotland’s own marriage service, ‘An ni sin a cheangail Iehobhah r’a cheile / Na rachadh a sgaoileadh le daoine’:

Cha’n urrainn mi innseadh na fhuair mi do chruadail,  
’S na dh’fluilling mi uatha ’s an uair ud,  
Mo phaisdean mhi-ghnath’chadh le eucoir bha graineil  
Gun sgoil iad ’s iad ga ’n cumail bho ’mathair. (v. 22)\(^{174}\)

Se aobhar a’ bhroin gu ’m bheil agam r’a innseadh  
Is sin ann an duthaich Chriosdaidh,  
Gun d’ rinn fear-teagaisg ’s luchd-riaghlaidh na d’ faoid iad  
Gu briste an lagh sin ’s mo theaghlach-sa sgaoileadh. (v. 5)\(^{175}\)

Mac-Mhaoilein’s case came to the attention of the Board of Supervision in Edinburgh, then to the Committee of the Home Department in London. He was reunited with wife and children, given an allowance, and in 1853 published his songs ‘to prevent the recurrence of such atrocities in the Parish of Kilmorry and in other parishes throughout the Highlands’.\(^{176}\)

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\(^{174}\) ‘Foirneart Luch-Riaghlaidh’, in Mac-Mhaoilein 1853, pp. 4-6.

\(^{175}\) ‘Dleasnas Luchd-Riaghlaidh’, in Mac-Mhaoilein 1853, pp. 7-9.

\(^{176}\) Mac-Mhaoilein 1853, p. iii.
Mearraid Nice-Leain, Pòll lù

Some cases were beyond redress long before they were published, and how Mearraid Nice-Leain’s complaint was received while she was able to sing it herself, is not known. MacCoinich’s introduction notes her song as having been composed ‘aig âm anns an robb taobh a tuath do Shiorrachd Rois gann do lòn làitheil’.

It was composed ‘air do ’n bhean so air a buaireadh ann bhi smuaineachadh nach robb gradh aig neach sam bith dhi do bhrigh ’s nach b’ urrainn i compaireachadh riu dheth maoin’. She describes her humiliation at having nothing to give to the needy who came to her door or to the elder collecting Church dues. Inability to contribute to the Sustentation Fund was a keenly felt humiliation. In Edinburgh in 1843, a gentlewoman collecting for the Fund reported that though many households could only give a halfpenny, ‘the persons who gave this mite would have been grieved if I had passed them over’.

Mgr. Moireasdan, minister of Uig, had to report in 1882 that though his parishioners were eager to contribute, ‘gu robh cuid de na dh’fhuirich nach robh a’ làimhseachadh airgid bho cheann gu ceann de’ n bhliadhna’.

Mearraid Nice-Leain lived in Poolewe and, having had no access to schooling, could neither read nor write. She found no one able to write her songs down for her until 1861, when she was herself ‘air leabaidh a bàis’ and could remember only her marbhhrann for Mr Finlayson, Minister of Helmsdale and a few verses of this song. It shows her clinging to her belief in Fear Ard an Lighich in spite of the Church, which, in place of ‘aran laigheil’, had offered only ‘taois na Phaireisich’ and ‘fileantachd am beit’:

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180 Matthew 16.11-12; ‘taois na Phaireisich’ refers to false teaching and to clerics ‘ag itheadh suas tighean bhantrach, agus air sgàth deagh choslais a’ dèanamh urnuighean fada’, Matthew 23.14.
Cha ghradhaich am fear beartach mi
Cha ’n aithne dha có mi,
Cha ghradhaich am fear bochd mi
Le phoca ’g iarraidh bidh,
Cha ghradhaich am fear crosda mi,
Nach dh’fhàg na h-osanan sgìth
‘S cha ghradhaich am fear diadhaidh mi,
Ma bhios e ’g iarraidh brib. (v. 1)

‘Sud an Eaglais Shaor’

The Disruption of 1843 was fuelled by a sizeable body of writing from both supporters and detractors, largely in English and generally offering a Lowland perspective.\(^{181}\) In the Gàidhealtachd it was driven by lay preaching and by evangelical songs demanding freedom of worship, challenging the Establishment and condemning the Moderates. A poet now known only as ‘Piuthar do Mhinistear na h-Eaglais Stèidhte nach do dhealaich ann an 1843’ may have preserved her own anonymity, but her exuberant sèist ‘Sud an Eaglais Shaor leis an do dh’aom na seòid’ was to appear in a succession of songs commenting on divisions in the Church.\(^{182}\)

While many Church of Scotland ministers were turning their backs on Church, manse and stipend, subjecting wives, children, elderly parents and even domestic servants to homelessness and insecurity in the name of religious freedom, the poet’s brother seems to have stayed put. She cannot contain her indignation, condemning him and his kind as worldly, interested only in the trappings of their position:

Sèist:

Sud an Eaglais Shaor leis an do dh’aom na seòid.

‘S duilich leam mar tha thu,
‘S gur tu mo bhràthair,


\(^{182}\)Piuthar do Mhinisteir na h-Eaglais Stèidhte nach do dhealaich ann an 1843, ‘Sud an Eaglais Shaor leis an do dh’aom na seòid’, MR (Dec. 1928), 302; Appendix 7.23.
Thu bhith shìol Chanàain,
'S an àireamh ro mhòr. (v. 9)

Na Modarats shaoghalt',
Tha iad mear da rireadh,
Cha’n iarr iad gu strìth
Ach mans’ is glib is cleòc. (v. 12)

The turn of the century brought another division in the Church and Iseabal NicLeòid uses the same sèist in her ‘Moladh na h-Eaglais Shaoir’, praising the Lewis Free Church ministers who had refused the Union of 1900, assuring them that, though they lose home and stipend, the people will support them:

Sèist:
Sud an Eaglais Shaor, leis an d’ aom na seòid.

Bha reisemain bhoidheach
Air an cùl ga ’n còmhnadh
Muinntir Eilean Leòdhais
'S b’ iad féin na seoid. (v. 6)

O chòmhlan bhoidheach
Cha bhi dith bhi-beò orra
’S ann tha an taic ’san dòchas
Anns an stòr tha shuas. (v. 7)\(^{183}\)

Sìne Mhàrtainn of Scalpay adapts the sèist to fit a waulking song, as in 1929 she urges the people of Scalpaigh to leave the United Free Church and re-join the Free Church:

Sèist:
Gur i an Eaglais Shaor leis an d’ aom na seòid.

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\(^{183}\) Iseabal NicLeod, ‘Moladh na h-Eaglais Shaoir’, *MR* (May 1904), p. 276; Appendix 7.10.
Thigibh oigrind ghaolaich, na fanadh fò an Aonadh
Gabhaidh ri Fear Saoraidh, gheibh sibh saorsa mhór. (v. 1)

Bithibh ’s an Tigh Leughaidh, gradhaichibh a chèile,
Gheibh ar n-ùruigh éisdeachd, ’s cha bhith rèult fo sgleò. (v. 3)

Change of any sort, action or failure to act, was commented on in song, and the Free Church was as open to criticism as the Moderates had been. In ‘Luchd na Beurla’, Màiri Mhòr nan Òran aired her grievance against the minister who had failed to support her when she was imprisoned in 1872. A few years later, in ‘Tha caochladh cur air clò na cùbaid’, she accuses other ministers of failing to live up to their calling:

Is cuid dhiubh ’n Eaglais Shaoir na h-Alba
’S duilich leamsa dol ga sheanchas
Dh’ìth an fheòil ’s a dh’òl an eanraich
’S thug iad oilbheum ’s sgannal oirr’. (v. 5)

Though she was an adherent of the Free Church in Inverness rather than a member she felt strongly enough to criticise departures from traditional teaching:

Is iomadh fear le foghlum dùbailt,
’S müsg an aineolais mu shùilean,
Thòisich air a’ Chreud a’ spùilleadh
Bhon là a chuinnheadh fallain i. (v. 2)

Innovations in theological scholarship which seemed to question the absolute veracity of the Bible were greeted with great distrust. An opposition was perceived between ‘fios agus gliocais’, with the preaching of the charismatic evangelist

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preferred over that of the university man. In 1891 Raghnaíl NicLeòid of Bragar made a marbhrann for Donnchadh MacBeatha, a much-loved minister in Ness. It records the Free Church Assembly having refused to accept him as a divinity student because he had not passed the entry examination. The Presbytery of Lewis had eventually agreed to license him to preach in response to a petition from the district of Cross, Ness, where he served as a missionary. ¹⁸⁷

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Bha iad ag radh nach robh agad foghlum
'S nach dèanadh tu feum do ’n t-sluagh
Ghabh muinntir Nis thu mar a bha thu
Leis a’ ghràs a tha o shuas.¹⁸⁸
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**Màiri Morison, Beàrnaraigh na Hearadh**

The difference between a minister and one of the laymen known as the ‘Men’ could be as little as this ‘licence to preach’. Though many Men lacked the formal education required for ordination, all had risen to this status because of their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures, their eloquence in preaching and prayer and a quality of spirituality which commanded respect. None, however, was above criticism, not even that most charismatic of evangelical poets, Iain Gobha, who found himself the subject of complaint in a song composed by his own sister.¹⁸⁹ Màiri Morison seems to have felt neglected, with her brother and the local Men holding meetings all over the island, yet not in Bernera. She sends out a rebuke in the form of a waulking song, summoning them all by name, to come and gather the souls that are waiting like wheat to be harvested:

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Sèist:
O nach tìgeadh eadh, b’ fheàrr gu ’n tìgeadh eadh,
Is truagh nach tìgeadh eadh, tìonal nan dloghan.
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Tha sinn ann am Beàrnarai mar lòchran bho Shàdoim
Ag éisdeachd ar câinidh o phàirt-fhear luchd eòlais. (v. 2)

Tha ’n t-àite-sa duai’nidh, cha taghail daoin’ uaisl’ e
A bheath’ aca co truagh ris an t-sluagh a bha ’n Sòdom. (v. 3)

Us Iain an gobha a’ fàs umainn coma
Is ann dhà nach bu chomain a chomunn uainn fhògradh. (v. 4)

Eibhric Morison, Tairbeart na Hearadh

Màiri Morison could use gentle satire to persuade Iain Gobha and the Men to come
to Bernera, but when local fishermen made a song mocking her brother Calum
Morison and his fellow elder Eoghan MacDughall after an encounter with a whale, it
brought the wrath of Eibhric Morison about their heads.190 The whale, she points out,
was under God’s command and would have brought Calum and Eoghan to land just
as it had delivered Jonah unharmed. As for the fishermen, she warns them that if she
were to answer them in kind, ‘Gu ’m biodh cuimhn’ ac’ air mo chomraidh / Fhad ’s
a bhiodh duine beò san linn’ (v. 4). Fortunately for them, she exercises restraint:

Nam bu ministeir sa chléir mi
’S a bhi ’toirt tàire dha mo chléireach,
Bheirinn leantuinn air ur leinidh
Sibh ga m’ éisdeachd, ri ur druim. (v. 7)

As poets from a long-established poetic family and sisters of the eminent evangelist,
Màiri and Eibhric would have been expected to comment on community affairs.
Satire though, had to be exercised with discretion. The poet Murchadh a’ Cheisdèir,
whose father Ceisdèar Mór nan Loch was one of the Men mentioned in Màiri’s song,
was reluctant to use it:

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Is i aoir gineal as gràinnde de theaghlach na bàrdachd. Cha bhith i uair sam bith a’ falbh le aodann glan, agus chan ’eil ann n’ as lugha air na h-uile neach fhaicinn ri tighinn gu a dhorus a thagradh càirdeis no dh’iarruidh aoidheachd air an aoir. 191

When Eibhric turns her attention to local ‘misgeirean’, she tempers her diatribe with eminently practical reasons why they should moderate their drinking. It should, in her view, be sufficient warning that Satan was known to frequent inns, while the Virgin Mary had, in her time of need, been turned away:

Nach maireg nach gabhadh gràin’ dhibh
Mar àiteachan còmhnuidh
’S cho minic ’s a bhios Sàtan
A tàladh mor-shluaigh annt
Chaidh aithris dhuinn ma ’n d’ thanig
An Slànaighhear glòrmhor
Nach faigheadh Moire a mhàthair
Leis àite san taigh òsda. (v. 14)

Eibhric fully expects to be criticised in her turn, but maintains her right to speak out so long as she can back up what she says from the Bible:

Cha ghabhainn uait mar mhi-chliù
Le spid no le tâir
Ni thachradh ceart na mì-cheart
Ged dh’innseinn an dàn e
Cho fad sa bhiodh na fhirinn
An ni rinn mi ráitinn
Cho ceart ’s a bhiodh e sgrìobhte

An clàr-innse na f-àinteann. (v. 16)\textsuperscript{192}

From Màiri’s single surviving song and the six songs by Eibhric, it would seem that the Morison sisters used song to exercise care and discipline within the family of the Church, while Iain Gobha was preoccupied with evangelism. Eibhric warns against drunkenness and scolds irreverent fishermen. She makes a marbhann soisgeulach for Màiri, who died in childbirth.\textsuperscript{193} She makes a lullaby for Iain Gobha’s granddaughter, Màiri Bell, urging her to live up to his example. She marks Iain’s recovery from an illness with a complimentary song, to which he contributes an uncomplimentary verse, asking ‘Co ’n òinseach rinn an t-amhran?’ (v. 7) What is clear in all these songs is that the sisters felt themselves to be on equal terms with the Men of their time, though their sphere of influence was different.

The Rev. Norman C. MacFarlane, author of The Men of the Lews (1924), points out in his essay ‘A Woman of Lewis’, that the term ‘Men’ relates not to gender but to the fact of being a layperson, and that the Church also had its notable women.\textsuperscript{194} In discussing ‘Sheila of Lochs’, he says that though some women were of ‘vastly greater spiritual weight […] fit to be Prophetesses and Judges in Israel’, Sheila was by far the most popular and felt herself fully equal to ministers and elders. ‘With all her spiritual virtues she had a gift of satire that was as sharp as a reaper’. She had great respect for ministers, but when not accorded equal respect, as on one occasion when she was served in the manse kitchen rather than at table with the assembled ministers, she satirised them collectively and severally in a long and loud Grace, which they could not help but overhear and which none dared interrupt. Sheila is described as being ‘a simple childlike soul who dwelt on the confines of sanity’. This ‘simplicity’ was a quality shared by several notable Highland Christians, both male and female, who were nonetheless regarded as having great spiritual insight, uncanny powers of perception and the gift of prophecy. Some, such as ‘Tormod Sona’ of Shader, attained almost to the status of saints, with nòtaichean of his teaching and his

\textsuperscript{192} Eibhric Morison, ‘Rannan do ’n Mhisg’, in Henderson 1893/2, pp. 298-8. This is one of only two references to the Virgin Mary in the whole research corpus.
\textsuperscript{194} Norman C. MacFarlane, ‘A Woman of Lewis’, SG (19 Sept.1919).
prayers, his expository parables and examples of his mysterious *dubh-chainnt* still repeated and wondered over.\(^{195}\)

### 3.4 The social and spiritual life of the Gàidhealtachd

Where the Book of the Dean of Lismore gives a picture of the social and spiritual life of pre-Reformation Perthshire, evangelical songs do the same for the post-Reformation Gàidhealtachd. They show the Church as an institution with its own hierarchies and systems of governance, sitting apart, yet holding a duty of educating, disciplining and caring for those under its charge. They also present it as the sum of its people, its ministers and elders, members and adherents, and the community within which it maintains a stabilising presence. They reveal it exercising its authority repressively or officiously with a view to preserving its own status. They also show that, in the end, respect and affection predominate and that it retains its position by general, if not individual, consent. Evangelical song shows this interdependence of Church and society, where the people accept the governance of the Church – to a degree – and where Church members offer instruction and admonition, in the full understanding that it will be heeded – but only to a degree. Advice is offered and accepted in much the same way as a mother’s advice is accepted, but not necessarily acted upon.

**Asceticism and secular culture**

The account of the oppressive rule of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism offered in *Carmina Gadelica*, the burning of musical instruments, and the prohibition of secular song, dancing and traditional tales, is challenged by Donald MacLeod, who describes the richness of the musical culture of Ness during his parents’ youth in the 1920s.\(^{196}\)

There were pipes, fiddles, melodeons, Jew’s harps and pianos, even in the homes of Church members. Music and singing were very much a part of everyday life, with their local ‘danns an rathaid’ regularly held on the bridge in Swainbost. The idea of

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converts customarily burning their bagpipes and breaking their fiddles was, in MacLeod’s view, ‘pure myth’, based on isolated cases being taken as typical. He argues that, in the recounting of heroic tales, fact progressively replaced fiction:

Oral tradition survives only so long as it serves its community, creating the mythical or living history which gives it pride and its sense of identity. Men who had fought at El Alamein didn’t need legends of Culloden; and villages which could boast of war heroes didn’t need myths about the Fingalians. Oral tradition can no more be static than can history itself.197

The ‘bothain’ and the ‘taighean-cèilidh’ continued well into the last quarter of the 20th century. Some were given over to drinking, some to singing, others to reminiscing, while some homes became ‘taighean-cèilidh’ for those whose interest was in discussing theology, dissecting sermons, exchanging nòtaichean and singing evangelical songs.198 A great deal of the spiritual life of the community centred, and still centres, upon these informal cuideachdan or cruinneachaidhean and it is here that the unwritten discipline of Church membership is both learned and maintained. MacLeod acknowledges that renunciation of the world, in the sense of not going to public houses, concerts and dances, is expected of professing Christians, but points out that this is in no way confined to Highland Evangelicalism. He describes this self-discipline as ‘a form of Protestant monasticism: not an asceticism of the cloister, but an asceticism of daily life, practised within the secular community’, arguing that Reformed belief in the priesthood of all believers is as valid a position as Catholicism’s acceptance of a spiritual élite who are respected rather than ridiculed for withdrawing from the world. 199

Ministers and elders

Coming from many different voices over a considerable period of time, spiritual songs build up a picture of how the Highland Reformed Churches actually

197 MacLeod 2006, pp. 185-6; See also Andsell 1998, pp.127-34.
198 MacLeod 2006, pp. 210-11.
199 MacLeod 2006-9, p. 16; MacLeod 2006, pp. 207-8.
functioned at any particular moment in history. They show how members related to each other in real life, in both strength and weakness. They show the Moderate minister who never turned the hungry from his door; the ‘fir faire air na ballachan’, elders who watch night and day over the weak in body or in spirit; the Precentor who can no longer sing; the elder who cannot read. They show the anxious search for *comharraidhean*, the eager discussion of *nòtaichean*; the friendly rivalry of the *sgoil fhonn* and the great gatherings of *Dùsgaidhean* and *Órduighean*.

The Church was traditionally paternalistic in structure, its ministers, elders, catechists and precentors given the respect and affection due to a father, unless and until such deference became untenable. Ministers occupied the highest position in the Church family and are remembered in many affectionate *marbhrannan soisgeulach*. As with heroic *marbhrannan*, these depict the ideal as opposed to the actual man, a Calvinist hagiography describing their subject’s strength, his gentleness, his power in prayer, his prophetic vision. Catechists and missionaries stood a little lower in the hierarchy. They may have been students, or probationers waiting for a parish, but were equally likely to be crofters or fisherman, elevated to the standing of Men, not by university degrees, but by spiritual conviction and the power of their preaching and prayer.

Elders were possibly the closest to the congregation, visiting the sick and the elderly, sharing the duty of public prayer at the *Taigh leughaidh*, leading the *Taigh fhaire* services in homes where a death had occurred, setting out the *comharraidhean* on *Latha na Cèist*. Mairead NicDhòmhnaill of North Tolsta describes the place which her uncle Aonghas MacAoidh filled in the village:

> B’ e aon e d’ ar luchd faire bha air a’ bhalla dh’oidhch’ is là<br>Cha b’ ann a mhàin nar baile, ach a mach air feadh gach àit’,<br>Is bu aon e de ar luchd ùrnuigh, bhiodh cho dùrachdail airson chàich<br>A mhuinntir bha ri bròn agus air an leòn sann leis a bhàs. (v. 4)\(^{200}\)

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The female counterparts of the elders were the *mathraichean an Israeil*, or *cailleachan diadhaidh*, often elderly single women or widows. They are fondly remembered as spiritual mentors, their homes depicted as ‘Bethel’, places of refuge for those in distress and ‘taighean-cèilidh’ where young people would gather for discussion and to sing evangelical songs. Some were poets; some were reputed to share *rùn diamhar an Tighearna*; all were respected for their wisdom and understanding and their gift for teaching the young.

**The precentor**

Though all elders could be called on to act as precentor as required, the position of Precentor was a formal appointment. It involved leading the singing at Sabbath services, prayer meetings and gatherings of all kinds; from the intimacy of the *Taigh fhaire*, to gatherings of thousands at the open-air *Òrduighean*, or communal Psalm singing on the dockside as ferries or emigrant ships left harbour. Despite vehement attacks on ‘am fasan mi-nadurra agus graineil sin, cainntearachd na sreath’ from commentators such as Henry Whyte, the Precentor held a highly-respected position in Highland congregations.201 Whyte mocks precentors as ‘Para nan-salm agus Domhnull-an-achaidh’, objecting that precenting wastes time, breaks the continuity of the tune and destroys the meaning of the words. In his attempts to make Gaelic Psalmody more like English hymnody, he apparently overlooks the vernacular song tradition where lines are regularly repeated and half-lines separated by a *sèist*, without loss of continuity or meaning. Coinneach Ros points out that the Gaelic style of singing is structurally meaningful and is in accord with the Jewish tradition of Psalmody where voice answers voice:

> Ann an rannaigheachd nan Salm, tha tri ceathramh a’ freagairt ceathraimh, no faodaidh leth-rann a bhith freagairt an leth eile, no eadhon a’ chuid mu dheireadh de ‘n t-Salm a bhith na fhreagradh do ’n chuid eile; bha mar sin co-labhairt air a cleachdadh mar mhodh-taisbeanaidh is aoraidh san teampull. Agus fhathasd, anns an t-seinn Ghàidhlig, chi sinn am modh dà-ghuthach ud

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201 Eanraig Mac-Ille-Bhain, ‘Ceòl nan Eaglaisean Gàidhealach’, *The Highlander* (13 April 1878).
David Paton ascribes the survival of this distinctive style of singing to its having become, like the Gaelic language itself, a symbol of Gaelic cultural identity, a way ‘to hear a community to assert its own continued vitality […] an audible emblem of their members’ adherence to the faith of their ancestors’. 203

**An sgoil fhonn**

It was the Precentor’s responsibility to run the *sgoil fhonn* teaching Psalm tunes and precenting. 204 In the 1920s, according to an article in the *Stornoway Gazette*, ‘in rural Lewis, few functions, if any, attain the universal popularity of the annual winter season tutoring class for Gaelic Psalms’. 205 The *sgoil fhonn* run by the Free Presbyterian Church in Breasclete taught all ages and represented ‘all the various types in the community, religious, denominational and otherwise’. Màiri Anna NicIomhair of Vatisker describes the work of her brother Domhnall na Criomaig, a well-known Lewis precentor of the 1960s:

_Fhuair thu tiodhlac o ’n àirde ’s tre ghràs rinn thu feum dheth
Air seachduin agus Sàbaid, gu ’m b’ àillidh bhi ’g éisdeachd
Mar sheinneadh tu gu sòlumte déidh óran nan naoimh ud.
O b’ iongantach do cheòl is a sheòrsa cha chluinn mi. (v. 11)_

_Theagaisgeadh tu ’n òige le eòlas ’s le cùram
Gu seinn cliù lehobha gu deònach ga stiùireadh._

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202 Ros 1972, pp. 54-5.
204 SA1968.186 Norman MacKillop describes how he learned Psalm tunes in sol-fa in a Psalmody class run by Norman Morrison, minister of Berneray, Harris. (MacKillop began precenting in 1928).
205 ‘Sgoil Fhonn at Breasclete’, *SG* (7 Feb.1924).
Over a hundred would attend Domhnall na Criomaig’s sgoil fhonn each week. It was held in Back Free Church, which has two aisles, so the people from Vatisker, Domhnall’s own village, sat to his right, those from Back, as locals, sat in the middle, those from Coll were to his left, with the children of all the villages sitting at the front. There was great rivalry between the villages. Domhnall would turn his back so as not to be distracted and call out ‘Nach tog sibh fonn’ to the people from Vatisker, listen attentively, then call, ‘Nise, a’ Bhac’, listen again, call out, ‘Nise Coll’, then ‘Nise a’ chlann’. At the end of the class he would bring out the blackboard with the Psalms and tunes for the following week and sing them through himself. In each village, people would gather in small groups to practise the next week’s Psalms. He taught precenting to both men and women, always emphasising that this was not a performance but a service to the congregation; that the precentor should always avoid drawing attention to himself and should ‘hide behind the words’. ‘Na bi gar sealltainn fhèin – falaich air cùl na facail’. Conveying the full poignancy of the words was of paramount importance, and the mark of a good precentor was, and still is, one who is able to draw the words from the congregation without their even thinking of looking at their Psalmodies.

**Òrdughean**

The high points in the spiritual life of the Church and in the social life of Highland communities were the Òrdughean, the Communion meetings which were held twice a year in each parish. The Rev. Tormod Domhnallach of Foyers remembers these gatherings in late nineteenth-century Skye:

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206 Máiri Anna NicIomhair, Marbhrrann do Dhomhnull Maclomhair (Stornoway: SG, nd.); Appendix 7.13.
207 This account is from Janet MacPhail, recorded at North Bragar, May 2013.
208 Murdo MacLennan, Precentor of Gravir Free Church, personal communication, Marvig, October 2013.
Anns an là ud choisicheadh daoine gu h-èasgaidh, toilichte, tri fichhead mile, ceithir fichhead, agus suas ri ceud mile gu Comanachadh. Bha iad a’ dol ’gan cois as an Eilean Sgitheanach gu àiteachan cho fada as Inbhir-pheofharain agus Inbhir Nis [...] Fad làithean na sàcramaid, cha bu shealladh annasach e idir ann an gu leòir de sgireachdan a bhith a’ faicinn eadar deich mile is còig mile deug de shluagh cruinn ann an gleann faszgach, no air leathad grianach cnuie. 209

Many maintained that they had more spiritual benefit from the informal discussions on the way to and from the Òrduighean than from the services themselves. 210 People would travel in groups, sometimes in company with elders who would hold services wherever they found a night’s shelter on the road, drawing in local farmworkers or fishermen on the way. 211 Alastair Phillips describes Communion seasons in the Free Church manse at Fearn, Ross-shire where his uncle, the Rev. George MacKay was minister from 1910-1944. 212 Amongst the Men who were the mainstay of the Caithness Communions were some who would spend the entire summer tramping from Òrduighean to Òrduighean. They would speak on Latha na Ceist, and were welcomed for the blessings they left on those who gave them food and shelter.

The main services of the Òrduighean would be supplemented by house-meetings and prayer meetings. These would be followed by family worship, which would itself be followed by personal meditation and prayer. Resources were stretched to the limit in feeding and accommodating such numbers, yet the rules of propriety still applied.

Iain Aonghas MacLeòid recalled Òrduighean in Tarbert, Harris, in the 1930s, where the byre would be filled with as many visitors as it could hold; single men sleeping side by side along one wall, single women along the other, with a row of married couples between them to preserve the reputations of all. 213

209 Tormod Dòmhnallach, MacAidh Thiridhe (np. nd), pp. 3-4.
210 MacLeod 2006-9, pp. 1-34 (p. 17).
211 Campbell 2011, p. 203.
213 Iain Aonghas MacLeòid, personal communication, recorded Largs, 2011.
**Nòtaichean**

With such large numbers gathered together, there was constant theological debate, discussion of spiritual matters and exchange of *nòtaichean*, points of interest remembered from the sermons of notable preachers. When Sorley MacLean states that it was common in the 1920s to hear ministers and elders quoting from memory points made in sermons and prayers up to a hundred years earlier, it is these *nòtaichean* which he refers to.\(^{214}\) Donald Meek sees parallels between Gaelic sermons and traditional forms of storytelling, and is of the view that anecdotes concerning catechists, elders and ministers, their sermons and their *nòtaichean* have become a narrative cycle in themselves.\(^{215}\) David Paton sees these anecdotes as encompassing both local history and spiritual guidance, in that they encapsulated a virtue or illustrated a particular understanding of providence.\(^{216}\) Extra-biblical imagery in evangelical songs can in some cases be traced back to *nòtaichean* from a specific sermon. In present-day Gaelic congregations, *nòtaichean*, both new and old, are still a matter of eager interest to those unable to attend a particular sermon.

**Comharraidhean Gràis**

The Friday of the *Òrduiighean* was, and in Island congregations still is, *Latha na Ceist*, with a service where the most respected of the elders discuss a specific biblical text. Each elder in turn sets out what he understands to be the *comharraidhean Gràis*, the Marks of Grace which distinguish the true believer from the hypocrite.\(^{217}\) The term itself carries connotations of the earmarks by which the shepherd knows his own sheep, and of the landmarks by which the steersman makes his way into harbour.\(^{218}\) This links them to evangelical song’s many depictions of Christ as Ciobair na Treud and Am Fear Stiùirdh. There is general agreement over which are true *comharraidhean*, as elders of long standing explain the *fein-cheasnachadh*, *fior aithreachas* and *gràdh bràithreil* which mark the true Christian. The listing of *comharraidhean* builds up a set of expectations, a template against which spiritual

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217 Appendix 2.
218 MacLeod 2006-9, p. 23.
experience may be measured. Though only men speak on Latha na Ceist, and it is their listing of comharraidhean which survive in Church publications, women contribute to the debate by listing the comharraidhean in their songs, often in near-verbatim quotation of elders of an earlier generation.\textsuperscript{219}

\textbf{Órduighean as a focus for song}

Órduighean seem to have been a focus for spiritual songs of all types.\textsuperscript{220} Some look forward to meeting friends and relatives, listing the ministers and Men who would be there. There were laoidhean soisgeulach encouraging adherents to become members, and laoidhean spioradail expressing penitence and devotion in preparation for going forward for the Sacrament itself. For the journey home, there were songs full of sadness at having to separate from the community of believers to go back to everyday life. There were songs looking back on past Órduighean, and songs from those who had been left behind, too elderly or too ill to make the journey to the great fèill. Margaret MacIver of North Tolsta describes Órduighean Ghrabhair, showing the fellowship and warm hospitality she enjoyed there to be as important to her as the services themselves:

O gur mise tha cianail, a’ cur cùl ri sgcir’ na Pàirc,
An déidh bhi aig an t-Sàcramaid cómhla ri Do shluagh;
A’ conaltradh ’s ag ùrnuigh, is seinn gu h-àrd Do chliù,
Toirt moladh do an t-Slànaighair airson a ghràdh dha m’ thaobh. (v.1)\textsuperscript{221}

It was not only Church members who looked forward to the Church gatherings. Tormod Domhnallach records that when word went out that the famous evangelist MacAidh Thiridhe was to preach, young and old would turn out to hear him:

\textsuperscript{219} Appendix 7.8.
\textsuperscript{220} See, MacLeod 1962, pp. 9-11. This describes how Murchadh a’ Cheisdeir would sing his laoidhean at meetings then hand out printed copies. His typical print-run would be 1,200 leaflets, which he distributed free of charge, both in person and by post. Other ministers had supplies printed for their own meetings, giving him free copies as their contribution to his work.
\textsuperscript{221} Margaret MacIver, ‘Ordughean Ghrubhair’, in Beatha Ùr (Stornoway: Bethesda, nd.), p. 8.
Chunnaic mi fhìn daoine nach sealladh air eaglais bho ’n dárna ceann de ’n bhliadhna thun a’ chinn eile, a’ dol g’ a éiseachd, agus, rud a b’ iongantaiche buileach, dh’fhàgadh iad obair an fhoghair, eadhon air làithean de thide math nach robh tighinn ach ainneamh, agus fhrithealadh iad gach coinneamh gu cunbhalach. 222

Those who were away from home at the time of the Òrduighean missed the animated debate and the opportunity to see friends and relatives. Màiri NicEalair’s song ‘Air Latha Òrduigh Dhuneideann’, seemingly composed in a French sea port, is very different in tone from most evangelical songs, using biblical references with a flippancy which is hard to reconcile with the earnestness of the village poets:

_Sèist:_

Air faillirin, illirin, uillirin ò,
Air faillirin, illirin, uillirin ò,
Air faillirin, illirin, uillirin ò,
Mo rùn air a’ chomunn ’s mo thogradh ’bhi leò!

Ged tha mi ’s an Fhraing ’g éiseachd srannraich na gaoith’,
’S e baile Dhunéideann ’n diugh m’ éibhneas ’us m’ ùigh,
’Us cluig bu bhinn òrain ri ceòlraidh do m’ chridh,
’Toirt cuiridh gu cuirm ann an cùirtean an Rìgh. (v. 1)

A nigheanan Shioin co geal ’us cho dearg
Ged ’s dubh mi seach sibhse na gabhaidh rium fearg;
Bidh mise thar chuintean ga m’ bhualadh le grian,
’Us sibhse gu mùirneach le bùthaibh ga ’r dion. (v. 5) 223

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222 Domhnallach, nd. p. 1.
Her comparison of the Edinburgh ladies’ pink and white complexions to her own, which has been exposed to sea and sun, would, in the highly charged symbolism of evangelical verse, trespass upon the Song of Solomon’s depiction of Christ, ‘Tha fear mo ghràidh-sa geal agus dearg’, as would her paraphrasing of the verses:

Dubh tha mi ach sgiamhach, O a nighean Ierusalem, mar bhùthaibh
Chédair, mar chùirteinibh riomhach Sholaimh. Na biodh umhail agaibh ged tha mi dorcha, a chionn gu ‘n amhairc a’ ghrian orm, bha mic mo mhàthair am feirg rium.²²⁴

Màiri NicEalair’s ‘cùirtean an Rìgh’ alludes to the ‘cùirteinibh riomhach Sholaimh’, where Solomon, the earthly king, represents Christ, the heavenly King. The anticipated ‘feirg’ of her friends links to the ‘feirg’ of ‘mic mo mhàthair’. The ‘bùthaibh Chédair’ of Heaven become the ‘bùthaibh g’ar dìon’ which protect her friends complexions, also alluding to the ‘bùthaibh’ or tents used by preachers under whose teaching they are presumed to shelter. Màiri NicEalair’s sèist, though seemingly out of place in a body of songs which use sèistean for emphasis of their spiritual message, actually follows a precedent attaching this specific sèist to songs concerning Òrduighean where the singer is not present. It is one of the very few examples of the use of vocables in evangelical song.²²⁵

Mearraid Nice-Leain used this same sèist in ‘Òran do Mgr. Finlayson, Ministeir an t-Soisgeul’, who had died on his way to the Òrduighean at Lochbroom. It appears in an earlier song by Anna NicCoinnich of Balone, who had composed it when unable

²²⁴ Song of Solomon 5.10; 1.5-6.
²²⁵ In the research corpus of over six hundred evangelical songs, this is the only sèist made up of vocables. It appears only in these three songs, each of which relates to Òrduighean where the singer is not present. In all other cases, where evangelical songs use tunes associated with secular songs whose sèistean are made up of vocables, eg. ‘Fil Ò Rò’, the vocables do not transfer but are replaced by a line or lines of meaningful text. ‘Òran an Aonaidh’ by Murchadh a’ Cheisdeir has the tune ‘Air faillirin, illirin, uillirin o’, but gives no indication of having a sèist. His song was inspired by seeing the hardship suffered by congregations holding open-air Òrduighean in bad weather after the Union of 1900 left United Free Church congregations without church buildings – so the link to Òrduighean is maintained.
to attend the Òrdui ghéan in Strathmore, Lochbroom. Only one verse remains of Anna NicCoinnich’s song ‘Ealaidh Ghaoil’, and that survives solely because title, verse, tune and sèist were borrowed and published as a love song by Ewan MacLachlan, who describes having heard it sung by his students at Aberdeen. His version of Anna NicCoinnich’s song appears in the Elizabeth Ross Manuscript of 1812, so song, tune and sèist date, at the latest, to that period:

Sèist:

Air faillirin, illirin, uillirin ò,
Air faillirin, illirin, uillirin ò,
Air faillirin, illirin, uillirin ò,
Gur bóidheach an comunn
‘Th’ aig coinneamh ’n t-Srath-mhòir.

Gur gile mo leannan
Na ’n eal’ air an t-shnàmh’
Na cobhar na tuinne
’S e tilleadh bho ’n tràigh;
Na ’m blàth-bhainne buaile
’S a chuach leis fo bhàrr
Na sneachd nan gleann dosrach
’Ga fhroiseadh mu ’n blàr.

Anna NicCoinnich’s song, though her imagery of sea-foam, creamy milk and snow showers is entirely Highland and domestic, follows the pattern of evangelical love songs based on the Song of Solomon. They address Christ as Fear mo Ghràidh, using imagery of exotic spices and fruits such as pomegranates, of which their composers can have had little experience. What is often overlooked, and what Anna notices and

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imitates, is that the Fear Gràidh of Song of Solomon himself uses homely imagery of washed fleeces, flocks of sheep, the roundness of a cup, white doves and chalk to describe the bride whom He searches for.\textsuperscript{227} Songs in the oral tradition are essentially transitory, yet even though Anna NicCoinnich’s song was forgotten, these three elements, tune, theme and sèist remained stubbornly attached to each other for the best part of a century.

**Bean a’ Chlachair, Ceirsiadar, lost songs and poetic families**

In collecting the research corpus there have been other instances of lost songs, women known as spiritual poets, none of whose songs survive and accounts of specific songs which no one can remember. One of these, Bean a’ Chlachair’s *cumha spioradail* for her three sons lost in the Great War, is noted in two separate places in the Angus MacLeod Archive:

Mrs Mary MacDonald (née MacLeod) was an accomplished Bardess with many compositions to her name and we hope that these will be noted and preserved before they are lost to posterity. We would like to quote from the Gospel song she composed after she lost her three sons in the armed forces.\textsuperscript{228}

In each case, space has been left for the texts ‘when they come to light’, which they apparently never did. Her *cumha spioradail* is clearly remembered by both Murdo MacLennan, Marvig and Murdo MacLeod, Garyvard, elders of Gravir Free Church, but what they remember is the fact of its existence rather than its substance.\textsuperscript{229} Màiri NicLeòid was a niece of Murchadh MacLeòid, Ceisdear Mór nan Loch, also of 4 Kershader, a well-known evangelical poet of the early nineteenth century, whose *laoidhean* were never written down. One of his sons, Murchadh a’ Cheisdeir, now best known for his song ‘Eilean an Fhraoich’, broke with local tradition in publishing his *laoidhean*. Another son, Iain a’ Cheisdeir, left a *marbhrrann soisgeulach* on

\textsuperscript{227} Song of Solomon 2.1, 4. 2, 6. 6, 7. 2.

\textsuperscript{228} There is an entry on Mary MacLeod, Mrs Mary MacDonald, 2/4 Kershader, in Kershader Croft Genealogy (Kershader: Comunn Eachdraidh na Pairc, 2007), p. 7; AM, Series E, File 2, Genealogical Records of the Townships of Pairc, Shildinish, Habost, Kershader etc. pp. 53-5.

\textsuperscript{229} Personal communication, June 2013.
MacRath Mór and ‘Ionndrainn’, a tribute to the Rev. Dòmhnall Moireach of Knock when he was translated to Tarbert Free Church in Easter Ross. Iain’s other songs seem not to have survived, but from the evidence of his brother Murchadh’s ‘Marbhrrann air Iain MacLeòid, 1868’, were well-known in the oral tradition:

Dh’fhàg thu cainnt as do dhéidh,
A theid a ghleidheadh air chuimhne;
’S ma gheibh an sluagh i ri ’leughadh
Bheirear spéis anns gach linn di:
Deagh bhriathran do bheòil,
Air an cur an òrdugh an rainn;
Is fhad ’s a bhios Gàidhlig an Leòdhas,
Bidh do chuid-s’ òran ’g an seinn. 230

Their sister’s son, Iain a’ Ghreasaiche, made a marbhrrann soisgeulach for Murchadh a’ Cheisdeir:

Bha e treibhdhireach, gun fhoill,
E simplidh, grinn, gun mhòr-chuis
Mar chrann-ubhall am measg chàich,
’S a ghnuis fo bhlàth an còmhnuidh. 231

Their first cousin, Captain Kenneth Kennedy MacLeod, also of 2/4 Kershader, my own grandfather, left a single evangelical song, ‘Amhran togail Eaglais an Acha-Mhòr’, composed around 1928 appealing for building materials and practical help for the building of the Free Presbyterian Church in Achmore:

Sèist:
Leagaibh an eaglais, togaibh i freagaireach,
Leagaibh an eaglais, togaibh i freagaireach,
Deanaibh i eireachdail, cosmuil ri pulluin.

230 MacLeod 1962, p. 5; pp. 67-9 (64-5).
231 MacLeod 1962, p. 20.
As for Mary MacLeod, just one of her spiritual songs survives. It is printed out in capital letters by an unknown hand and is titled ‘Òran Bean a’ Chlachar do Niall Mòr’. Its theme is gràdh spioradail:

Na faicinn fhéin ri tighinn thu
Gum bithinn air mo dhòigh
Gu faighinn ann am fagus dhuit
Gum fhios do dhuine beò
Gum biodh Gràs an Tighearana
Ri riaghladh oirnn cho mór
’S gum biodh na clachan cuimhne againn
Dha ‘r daingeachadh ’san ròd. (v. 1)233

Ceisdear Mór nan Loch and his descendants were said to have inherited their poetic talent from his mother, Máiread nighean Alasdair Thormoid’s family, but of the songs of these three known generations of evangelical poets from one croft, just these and the sixteen published by Murchadh a’ Cheisdeir survive.234 The others exist only as memories, with neither words nor music.

3.5 Composition, transmission and survival

Poets often speak of their songs as ‘just coming to them’ and, in the context of spiritual song, the suggestion that songs are ‘composed’ may be understood as

233 ‘Òran Bean a’ Chlachar do Niall Mòr’, AM File 6 no. 89.
234 MacLeod 1962, p. 20.
implying artifice, or manipulation of what is seen as being of divine inspiration.\textsuperscript{235} Domhnull na Criomaig’s advice to aspiring precentors ‘Na bi gar sealltainn fhèin – falaich air cùl na facail’ could apply equally to evangelical poets as it is the message, not the poet, which is of importance.\textsuperscript{236} Spiritual song is understood as being as much a channel for communication with the divine as are preaching and prayer, and the ideal which values spontaneity over contrivance is the same as that which values extempore prayer over a set liturgy and demands that sermons, no matter their complexity, not be seen to be read. Spontaneity, however, in no way precludes preparation, in either minister or poet, as biblical study is seen as the source of all inspiration. It is also an absolute prerequisite in practical terms as it is in this that the referential systems of prayer, sermons and spiritual song are learned and archived.

Just as no believer would countenance literary analysis of extempore prayer, there is a reluctance to analyse spiritual song for fear of causing irreparable damage, a fear of reducing it to its component parts in such a way that its essence is irretrievably lost and it can never be heard in the same way again. In making her song, the poet assumes a common context of belief and expectation and a common understanding of the codes of spiritual discourse. She sets up chains of association relating word to word and phrase to phrase in traditional patterns of repetition and opposition, taking lines or phrases from secular songs while simultaneously creating links to biblical paradigms which are themselves invariably linked in complex sequences. Any single element of a song may be given greater or lesser emphasis by assonance, by metre, by subtexts referencing other texts, all of which systems are assumed to be equally familiar. To those for whom spiritual song reflects both their world-view and the language of everyday life, the assumption that they are consciously deploying well-documented poetic devices is as offensive as it would be to suggest the same of their ordinary conversation.

Close analysis of songs sometimes suggests dislocations which, once seen, appear to require explanation, yet may be nothing more than a reflection of the fact that many perceive no border between physical and spiritual worlds, the one permeating every

\textsuperscript{235} Personal communication from Janet MacPhail, North Bragar, 2013-5.

\textsuperscript{236} See \textit{An sgoil fhonn}, pp. 84-5, above.
aspect of the other. Gormal NicIomhair, for example, in her *marbhrann soisgeulach* for her husband Iain a’ Phunch, lost in the sinking of the *HMS Main* in October 1917, takes her *sèist* from a love song evocative of long winter nights watching and waiting for a lover who will never return, ‘Siud mar chuir mi ’n geamhradh tharam’:

>'S ann an toiseach mìos October,
Fluair mi an naidheachd a leòn mi,
'S tu ri thighinn air förladh
Ach cha robh e òrdaicht’ dhut tighinn dhachaigh.
O mar chuir mi ’n geamhradh seachad
Ès do dhèidh an dèidh na bh’ eadrainn. (v. 1)^{237}

Her song tells us that she and Iain were newly married when war broke out and of her grief at losing one who was both best friend and husband. The concept of foreordination, however, is implicit from the start: ‘cha robh e òrdaicht’ dhut tighinn dhachaidh’. He was neither permitted by the naval authorities to come home on leave, nor was it ordained by providence that he come home at all. As she tells of her sleepless nights, the standard motifs of *marbhrannan soisgeulach*, the ‘lòchran’, the ‘òighean’and the ‘àithntean’ make their appearance, showing the foundation for her certainty that his spirit is not in Sruth na Maoile where his body lies, but has been taken to Cuan A ghaol:

>'S ann tha thu snàmh an cuan A ghaol-san,
Am measg nan naomh anns na Flaitheas. (v. 14)

Though she feels that the love they shared should be able to draw him back even from ‘uchd Abrahaim’, she has no choice but to drink the bitter cup which has been poured for her:

Gormal’s song creates parallels between the fact of war and the concept of divine providence; the possibility, and the impossibility of calling her husband back from Heaven. Her use of biblical references creates a reality beyond actual experience, where events can be seen to be ordered rather than random. At the same time, resisting the order that she herself is setting out, lines such as ‘’S gun tugann thu à uchd Abrahaim / Leis na bha de gràdh eadrainn’, being so far from received doctrine, create a new order. They strongly suggest spontaneous composition, as careful deliberation would almost certainly have avoided this defiance of divine edict. Songs which are ‘sent’, however, absolve the poet of all responsibility, the onus being on the hearer to understand the spirit of the song and avoid close scrutiny of apparent disparities between doctrine and belief.

The ‘gift of poetry’

Despite reticence in claiming responsibility for composition, poets and poetic families are acknowledged as such, with the ‘gift of poetry’ being passed on through the generations. When their gift is that of spiritual poetry, it is assumed to carry a heightened sensibility, perceptiveness, an understanding of the spiritual needs of others, whether in conversation or in a spiritual communication which takes no account of distance. The poet may, like Catriona Thangaidh, be credited with abilities quite beyond the ordinary and be believed to have powers of malediction equal to her intuition.238 She may, like Catriona Dhòmhnallach, reproach herself for failing to perceive what her more ‘spiritual’ husband had already foreseen and warned her of:

Fad nam maduinn labhair sinn air fiosraichean a cheil’,
Air deileagadh an Tighearna bho ghabh E ruinn an Criosd’;

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The ‘gift of poetry’ may be associated with some great change in the life of the individual, as with Màiri Mhòr, who found her poetic voice when unjustly imprisoned. In a religious context, it is often associated with conversion, as in accounts of the Lewis Awakening of 1949-52. The concept of this gift being given at a specific time leads to the inference of its being given for a specific purpose, placing a responsibility on the recipient to use it for that purpose. In effect, it gives a licence to speak to those who may otherwise stay silent and, to an extent, validates what they say, simply by the fact of their having received the gift. Bean Iain Domhnallaich, when criticising a division in the Church, does not hesitate to claim that her song is a message which she has been required to deliver:

Maduinn Dùbhgláchd ’s mi neo-ionnsaicht,
Thàinig teachdaireachd a m’ ionnsuidh,
A thuirt rium bhi ealamh suimeil
Chum na rainn so chur ’nan altaibh. (v. 1)

This allows her to be outspoken yet distance herself from what is said, the critical voice being that of the song itself, rather than the poet. In a second song on the same subject, she claims that the gift of poetry came to her in spite of herself, and that she is obliged to use it:

Seinnidh mi mo dhàin air teudan
A thug Easan dhomh mar fheudal,
’S ma rinn mi dhol dochair ceum annt’
Ni E féin sin réidh dhomh fhathast. (v. 2)

239 Catriona Dhòmhnallach, Marbh-Rann do an t-Urramach Iain Domhnallach, Sgire na Paire, Leòdhas a chaOchail 10.11.69, Leaflet published by Aonghas MacLeòid, AM, File 6, No. 93.
240 See pp. 20-1 above.
242 Duan air Sgir Uig an Leòdhas’, in Domhnallaich nd. 1-7; Appendix 7.5
243 Mo thuras gu Mangersta’, in Domhnallaich nd. 11-16; Appendix 7.5
As though to emphasise her role as emissary rather than instigator, the poet may begin with a conventional appeal for help in finding words. ‘Nan cuideachadh leòbha mi / Gu òran a chur cruinn’. She may open with the equally conventional ‘an cuala tu gun d’ thàinig naidheachd’ indicating that she is the bearer of news, or with an expression such as ‘S ann leam is goirt an sgeul’ when her news is of a death within the community. The mid-eighteenth-century poet Bean a Bharra claims to be incapable of expressing herself, ‘S mo theang ain-colach, gun chail / Dh’aithris do chach pairt do d’ ghniomh’, justifying her request for help by citing the precedent of Balaam’s ass, who had been granted the power of speech in order to complain of injustice:

Cuidich mise Riogh na Greine,
O ’n san duit is leir mo chas;
A dh’huasgal le beul na h-Asail truagh,
’N tra’ buaileadh i leis an fhaidh.245

Her near-contemporary Bean Torra Dhamh makes no such excuse, seizing upon a well-worn couplet from the secular tradition to frame her denunciation of the world of oppressive landowners, greedy bankers and effete aristocracy. ‘S mile marbhaisg ort a shaoghail / ’S carach, baoghalach do chleachdadh.’246 The early twentieth-century Lewis poet, Eilidh NicComaraid is more reserved, announcing herself by giving time, place and situation to support her unspoken claim of having been entrusted with a message:

’S a mhaduinn Di-luain
dol suas do ’n choinneamh
Gur mise bha fuar,
bha ’n sluagh cho tana.247

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245 Kennedy 1786, pp. 82-3. Numbers 22.28.
247 Eilidh NicComaraid, ‘Nach dùisgeadh ar sluagh a’ bhuaileadh a’ chadal’, MR (September 1940), 231.
These few words tell us that her song relates to a poorly attended Órduiighear. This is in itself a reproach to the community and a demand that she as a poet speak out, while her ending, ‘fàgaidh mi agaibh an t-òran’, indicates an expectation that others will think over what she has said.

**Private grief and public mourning**

Some songs are clearly public, spreading news or commenting on current events. Others may become public property in ways which the poet never intended. Eibhric Morison’s ‘Marbhrann do Mhàiri Morison’, for example, remained within the family, sung just once to Màiri’s daughter Catrìona who in turn taught it to her sister Mòr. It was not until thirty-eight years after Eibhric’s death, by which time Catrìona had also died, that Mòr taught it to George Henderson, who published it in Dàin Iain Ghobha:

Fhuaras am Marbhrann seo bho nighean Mhairi, Mòr Nic Ascaill, eadhon, Mrs Robertson am Bearnarai na h-Earadh. Cha do ghabh Eibhric, piuthar Iain Ghobha, an t-òran seo a dhuine riamh ach aon uair do Catrìona nach maireann, piuthar do Mhòr nic Ascaill.⁴⁴⁸

Màiri had died in childbirth and Eibhric’s *marbhrann soisgeulach* for her is warm and intimate, full of regret at not being with her when she died or there to prepare her for burial, pity at the sight of her small children, sorrow at the thought of the last Psalm that she joined in singing. Henderson records that this was Psalm 49, 14-15, ‘Mar chaoraich dol san uaigh tha iad / ’nam biadh do ’n bhàs gun iochd’. There is a stark contrast between the severity of the Psalm and the tenderness of Eibhric’s *marbhrann* – the one facing the reality of death – the other looking beyond it: ‘’S an uair a chriochnaich an t-seinn leat / Bha na h-ainglean ga t-fhaire’ (v. 20). It is not possible to say to what extent such very personal *marbhrannan soisgeulach* were made, or were kept within families.

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During the Great War, private grief found its most public expression, with *marbhrainn* and *cumhachan* regularly sharing column space in local newspapers with casualty lists and portraits of young servicemen. With war accepted as a visitation of providence, it was a rare poet who did not include spiritual verses in her song. At the same time, these wartime songs give the clearest possible demonstration of the merging of secular and spiritual in terms of content, structure and the sharing of tunes and choruses. Songs evocative of unrequited love, *cianalas* and spiritual exile, such as ‘Tha mi tinn, tinn, tinn’ or ‘Tha mi duilich, duilich, duilich’ became standard forms for wartime laments, the first couplet setting the emotional register, the second focusing on the specific message.249 In Berneray, Harris, the evangelical poet Eachainn MacFhionghain uses ‘Tha mi duilich, duilich, duilich’ to express his fear of being banished from God’s presence:

    Tha mi duilich, duilich, duilich,
   Tha mi duilich dol tron fhàsach;
    Tha mi duilich ’s trom fo smuaintean
  An tèid m’ fhuadachadh bho làthair.250

Peigi NicLeòid of Cromore takes the same *sèist* as a *cumha spioradail* for her son, lost in action in Cairo. For her, the ‘fàsach’ which she travels is both the biblical wilderness of spiritual exile and the ‘fàsach’ of the desert around Cairo where her son lies buried.251 In other *cumhachan* of the Great War, the introductory ‘Tha mi duilich, duilich, duilich’ is followed by lines such as ‘Tha mi duilich bho latha a dh’fhàg thu’; by the more specific, ‘Tha mi duilich airson mo bhràthar’, or by the totally specific ‘Tha sinn duilich, duilich duilich / Tha sinn duilich O a Theàrlaich’ in which the poet affects anonymity while the whole village knows of her undeclared

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249 Appendix 9, ‘Dh’fhalbh na gillean grinn’.
250 ‘Cait an taisbean mi?’ in MacFhionghain 1990, pp. 77-80.
love for Teàrlach MacLeòid. Between the wars this same sèist appears in songs similar to marbhrannan soisgeulach, lamenting not the death of a minister, but his translation to a new charge. Mairead NicLeòid uses it as the Rev. R. MacLeod leaves Garrabost for Dunoon:

Tha sinn duilich, duilich, duilich,
Tha sinn duilich mar a tha sinn,
Tha sinn duilich, türeach, cianoil,
Gun duin’ air sgial a lionas t-àite.  

Bean Aonghais Choinnich adapts it to suit her song ‘Mu Mhaighstir Camshron’ as he leaves his congregation ‘mar threud gun bhuachaill’:

Tha mise duilich, duilich,
Tha mi tuiream mar tha càch,
’S Maighstir Camshron beannaicht
Dol dha aisig bhuain thar sàl.

Just as in marbhrannan soisgeulach, both Mairead NicLeòid and Bean Aonghais Choinnich prepare the congregation for an interregnum by summarising the essentials of their ministers’ teaching in song. Reluctant as congregations may be to put their feelings into words, the love and loss implicit in tune and chorus allow these to be inferred and understood among themselves.

Transmission and survival

Songs become known within the community by word of mouth from the poet herself, or when she passes a song on for others to sing. As with nòtaichean of sermons, they

may be committed to memory, or copied out and kept by other members of the congregation. *Marbhrrannan soisgeulach*, being both commemorative and didactic, are frequently printed for local circulation. Booklets of songs by a single poet are published privately from time to time to be sold in Church bookshops. Songs have been recorded for archives, recorded commercially or recorded privately to be sold for Church charities. Such publications and recordings are often accompanied by a brief preface explaining that the songs were never intended for publication, but that the poet has been constrained by friends to make them available to a wider audience. Though *The Stornoway Gazette*, the Stornoway Religious Bookshop and Lewis Recordings became the publishers of choice for many evangelical poets during the latter part of the 20th century (as is reflected in the research corpus), publishing is now more dispersed, as individuals and Comainn Eachdraidh take advantage of modern computer technology to publish independently.

During the course of research, copies of unpublished songs written out and kept by someone other than the author have been found, both in archives and in private collections. Notable among these are two notebooks from the collection of John Murdo MacDonald, John Murdo Eachainn of Laxay, Isle of Lewis, now held by his daughter, Maggie Smith of Achmore. Containing twenty-one and twenty-four songs respectively, these are personal anthologies of *laoidhean soisgeulach* copied from a variety of sources, published and unpublished, some known to have been unpublished until 2010, and others as yet unidentified. One collection contains two English Gospel songs, the other three. All other songs are in Gaelic, with those which have been identified coming from local poets such as Murchadh a’ Cheisdair, Cairistiona Mhoireasdan, Mairead Nic a’ Ghobhainn, Jessie MacRitchie and Nan Eòghain. Just four songs are common to both collections. One notebook came from Woolworths and is written in pencil and Biro; the other uses a fountain pen, changing to Biro half-way through the second last song. One has the poem ‘The Weaver’ on the back page, with ‘Benjamin Malachi Franklin 1882-1965’ written beside it in different ink and a different hand. With no provenance other than this, schoolgirl handwriting and an address in Portnaguran, Point, these notebooks can only be taken as evidence that personal favourites were copied out, that local Lewis
poets were preferred by these two anthologists, and that songs composed in Laxay were known in Point long before publication. How many such collections were made and how many survive is, of course, impossible to determine.

**Publication**

The six hundred texts retrieved for this research offer a set of markers showing the breadth of the tradition at different times. Bean a Bharra, the earliest clearly identifiable woman to have had evangelical songs published, had six *laoidhean teagaisg* included in Kennedy’s 1786 anthology. Mairearad Chaimbeul had a collection of *dàin molaidh* published in 1785 and a collection of *laoidhean soisgeulach* published in 1810. These are largely *earailean* and are of startling severity, particularly when contrasted with her earlier *dàin molaidh*. Bean Torra Dhamh is noted for her *laoidhean spioradail* with their undercurrent of political protest, but had only a single song published during her lifetime. Anna NicFhearghais published a *marbhrann soisgeulach* and a *laoidh* in 1855, leaving a remarkable legacy of unpublished *laoidhean* in manuscript. Mrs Cameron of Rannoch, Màiri Nic Dhòmhnaill and Anna NicEalair had songs included in hymnbooks and anthologies. Mairearad Ghriogarach and Màiri Mhòr nan Òran have spiritual songs in secular collections, while Màiri and Eibhric Morison had evangelical songs included in their brother Iain Gobha’s collection, though this did not appear until long after their death. Margaret Camaran, in 1916, at the age of ninety-two, had a collection of *cumhachan spioradail* published. Catriona Thangaidh’s *laoidhean spioradail* and *marbhrannan soisgeulach*, though taken down by her editor ‘as a beul fèin’, were not published until 1917, forty-six years after her death. Twentieth-century poets such as Bean Iain Domhnullaich, Màiri Anna NicIomhair, Catriona Caimbeul and others have published single songs and small collections at intervals, while Catriona NicDhòmhnaill has recently collected her

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255 Kennedy 1786, pp. 78-106.
257 MacRae 1935.
258 Eibhric Morison and Màiri Morison are published in Henderson 1893/2.
earlier works into a volume of 128 laoidhean, making her the most-published of all the evangelical poets.\textsuperscript{259}

\textbf{Laoidheadairean}

Nineteenth-century editors such as Iain Whyte, Principal Dewar of Aberdeen and the Rev. Archibald Kelly M’Callum of Glasgow made no secret of preferring English to Gaelic hymns, embarking on massive works of translation in order to bring the musical and poetic sensibilities of the Gàidhealtachd closer to those of their English contemporaries. \textit{Laoidhean agus Dàin Spioradail}, edited by Whyte and depending heavily on his own, M’Callum’s and Dewar’s translations, has just fourteen extracts from Gaelic laoidhean, two of which are by women, along with almost four hundred translated hymns.\textsuperscript{260} Whyte notes that Highlanders use ‘the hymns of Bochanan and others in private devotion and praise’, but claims to offer ‘fresh, more varied and more practicable materials’.\textsuperscript{261} Comunn Soisgeulach Gàidhealach Ghlascho’s \textit{Leabhar Laoidh} of 1899, has ninety-four translated hymns and six extracts from songs by Pàdruig Grannd, the only native poet represented.\textsuperscript{262}

The Church of Scotland’s \textit{An Laoidheadair} of 1935 shows a different aesthetic, with seventy-eight Gaelic laoidhean, five by women, and forty-two translated hymns.\textsuperscript{263} Though represented, Bean Torra Dhàmh’s ‘Beatha nan Gràs’ is reduced from 60 lines to 32. Bean a’ Bharra’s ‘Com am bhuil mo theang na tost’ is cut from 72 lines to 16 and her ‘M’ athchuing ort a Righ an Aigh’ from 52 lines to 12, while Mrs Cameron’s ‘Am Meangan’ goes from 80 lines to 32. This allows them to fit into Church of Scotland services, but considerably alters the substance of the originals.

\textsuperscript{259} Catriona NicDhòmhnaill, \textit{A’ Chreathall, an Crann ’s an Crùn} (Staffin: Cranagan Books, 2010).

\textsuperscript{260} Gilleasbug K. Mac-Caluim, \textit{Laoidhean agus Dàin Spioradail}, ed. by Iain Whyte (Glasgow: Archibald Sinclair, 1894).

\textsuperscript{261} Mac-Caluim 1894, p. vii.

\textsuperscript{262} Duncan MacColl, ed. \textit{Leabhar Laoidh air a chur r’ a chèile agus air a chur a mach le Comunn Soisgeulach Gàidhealach Ghlascho} (Glasgow: Archibald Sinclair, 1899).

\textsuperscript{263} Calum MacLeod and Robert M’Leod, eds. \textit{An Laoidheadair} (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Committee on Publications, 1935), pp. 106-7; p. 19; 14-5.
Conclusion

Neither the Church of Scotland’s enthusiasm for English hymns in translation nor the Faith Mission Hymnbooks with their American Gospel songs did anything to weaken the rooted objection of the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian Church to the use of laoidhean in formal Church services. If anything, they reinforced it. The anonymous ‘Rannan do Chléir na h-Eaglaise Saoir ann an Inbhir-nis: Mu sheinn nan laoidhean úr ann an Aoradh Follaiseach An Tighearn’, which appeared in The Highlander in 1881, shows the vehemence with which the Free Church resisted the encroachment of instrumental music and translated hymns:

Nach iad tha làdurna is tréun,
A’ tabhairt stigh gu seirbhéis Dhé,
Obair shnaidht’ an làmhan féin
A riarachadh an âilgheis. (v. 5)\(^\text{264}\)

Free Church and Free Presbyterian adherence to Psalms undoubtedly protected the indigenous tradition of dàin spioradail to some extent, in that it allowed it a separate domain, while maintaining its core lexis of biblical imagery. It was not until 2011 that the objection to using laoidhean in formal services in the Free Church was overcome, and that only to the extent of their being permitted, rather than universally accepted. Even this degree of acceptance was dependent on their being strictly scriptural:

Luther and Calvin were rightly adamant that if a preacher is content simply to explain the Bible his sermons are the word of God. The same is true of a hymn. If it is scriptural, it is the word of God; and precisely because it is poetic and lyrical it has the power to set forth that word in a way that no prose can match.\(^\text{265}\)


As has always been the case, the number of songs published is no indication of their importance, nor of the numbers created. The fact that fewer now survive shows only that those who might have passed them on have themselves passed on. When Gaelic-speaking communities begin to fail, the song tradition, both secular and spiritual, fails with them, depending not on constant creation but on a static body of recorded and published texts. Even so, in the early twenty-first century, evangelical songs, both modern and traditional, are regularly broadcast on television and radio and increasingly recognised for their cultural value, appear as privately published collections and in anthologies and local histories published by Comainn Eachdraidh.
Chapter 4: Biblical paradigms and allegorical worlds

Introduction

Dearbhadh an Fhocail, or the systematic use of biblical paradigms seen as lending scriptural authority to the poet’s words, is absolutely central to evangelical song, just as it is to preaching and prayer. Many exemplars have, over time, become so familiar as to be immediately indicative of specific themes and have consequently become attached to specific categories of song. This chapter’s examination of the functioning of these exemplars or motifs is based on analysis of a representative sample of songs from the corpus. Each category has been analysed separately: its motifs identified; their biblical or other provenance established; and examples of their use by different poets given. This makes it possible to assess to what extent motifs are shared: whether they are regular, consistent and meaningful in their occurrence; whether there is variation over time; from poet to poet; or in response to external events. As this is the first study of its kind, discussion within the chapter is supported by Appendices 5.1 to 5.6 which detail the motifs associated with different categories of song along with their related dearbhadh. Appendices 5.7 to 5.10 show their use in the work of selected poets.

The constant use of dearbhadh an Fhocail in prayer, preaching and song encouraged identification with the peoples and places of the scriptures. It created an allegorical world, as clearly mapped as the Holy Land itself, within which each topographical feature was imbued with spiritual significance, each acting as a mnemonic for its associated paradigm. This figurative map is used to indicate theme and set context to such an extent that an awareness of its main features becomes central to any interpretation of evangelical song. In exploring this allegorical world, continuity and consistency of interpretation have been assessed by making a survey of biblical place names and topographical features as they occur in the research corpus. These are listed in Appendix 4.1-2. The symbolic significance of individual place names and topographical features is explained in Appendix 4.3, while Appendix 4.4 shows this system of signification in use in the work of individual poets. In order to establish
whether there are significant differences in the allegorical setting of men’s and women’s songs, Appendix 4.5 lists place names and topographical features as used in *laoidhean* by Pàdruig Grannd and Murchadh a’ Cheisdeir and in *marbhranan soisgeulach* by Eachann MacFhionghain.

The interaction between themes and motifs, topography and honorifics is also significant. There is, for example, a strong correlation between the names and appellations accorded to Christ and topographical features such as wells, springs, rivers, seas and shores. The *Ainmean agus Buaidhean Dhè* and the *Ainmean Cliùiteach* used of Christ and of the Holy Spirit have been listed in Appendix 3 as have the names and epithets used of Satan. Terms distinguishing Church members from adherents and others may appear indistinct to the point of invisibility, but as they can be fundamental to establishing the perspective and focus of individual songs, those identified have been listed in Appendix 1.2. The last section of this chapter deals with the merging of physical and allegorical worlds and poets’ understanding of the natural world as Leabhar Mòr na Cruitheachd.

### 4.1 Dearbhadh an Fhocail

Bha e mion-eòlach air na Sgriobtairean, oir chan eil faireachdadh no smuain a tha e cur ann am bàrdachd nach eil e comasach air dearbhadh an Fhocail a chur orra.\(^{266}\)

There is a convention in evangelical prayer, preaching and song that every assertion made and each hope expressed must be supported by *dearbhadh an Fhocail*. Just as the preacher teaches from a specific text, supporting his exposition point by point with evidence from related texts, so the poet uses scriptural paradigms to validate every word and justify each expectation. The use of scriptural paradigms to provide precedent is by no means exclusive to spiritual song. In the poetry of the Clearances

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\(^{266}\) This was said of Calum MacNeacail by Iain N. MacLeòid, editor of the 1916 anthology, *Bàrdachd Leodhaic*, MacLeòid 1998 [1916], p. 272; Murdo MacLennan, Precentor of Gravir Free Church, makes this same assertion of himself and fellow elders in discussing public prayer and teaching. Personal communication, March 2015.
and the Land Agitation, biblical authority was regularly appealed to in supporting communities against factors and landowners. Political activists of the Highland Land Law Reform Association looked to Mosaic Law to justify redistribution of land.²⁶⁷ Ministers and evangelists cited biblical precedent both in condemning landlords and in counselling submission to the decrees of Providence.²⁶⁸ Poets speaking on behalf of their communities used the same system. In ‘Croitearan Leòdhais’, for example, Murchadh MacLeòid, in referring to ‘an duine reic an fearann’, delivers a stinging accusation of hypocrisy, as transparent to its intended targets as to all who heard his song.²⁶⁹ Similarly, Màiri Mhòr supports her arguments against Sheriff Ivory’s oppressive regime by prefacing particular points with ‘Tha do theiste fìor am fìrinn Dia’, or ‘Tha ’n Fhìrinn fhèin a’ cur an cèill’.²⁷⁰

**Themes and motifs**

Though *dearbhadh an Fhocail* may be drawn from any part of the Bible, certain texts have been used with such regularity as to have become formalised into a lexicon of easily recognisable motifs. Hypocrisy, for example, is commonly decried by referring to the Pharisees; penitence encouraged by the example of the prodigal son.²⁷¹ Motifs such as these have been used and understood in the same way; from the earliest days of the Reformed Church in Scotland until the present day, both in the Highlands and in the wider Scottish Church. *The Westminster Confession of Faith, The Larger Catechism* and *The Shorter Catechism* are the central doctrinal texts of the Reformed Church in Scotland. In each of these texts ‘the proofs from the scripture’ are attached to each point of doctrine discussed. These ‘proofs’ have appeared in successive editions from 1647 on, ensuring continuity of interpretation from generation to generation and in different denominations within the Scottish

²⁶⁷ Allan W. MacColl, *Land, Faith and the Crofting Community, Christianity and Social Criticism in the Highlands of Scotland, 1843-1893; Scottish Historical Review Scottish Monograph Series No. 14* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 162-3. There are clear parallels between the songs of the HLLRA and the *òrain mun eaglais* in terms of their use of biblical *dearbhadh*.


Reformed churches. They are used in both men’s and women’s songs, spiritual and secular alike.\(^{272}\) They are transferrable between sermon, song and prayer, linking each to the other, and all to the foundational teaching of the Church. In songs they perform several functions simultaneously: making personal declarations of faith; identifying speaker and hearer as part of the same Christian community; adding context and expanding upon the intended message. Unlike sermons and prayers, songs do not allow for additional explanation. Their message must be understood as delivered. Their motifs must link directly to the network of ideas joining traditional beliefs to sermons, doctrinal works, other songs, and most importantly, to the Bible itself.

Some motifs, such as ‘an crann fìge a mhallaich Iosa’, have their origin in a single parable.\(^{273}\) Others, such as ‘an crann-fìona’, have several possible sources and several possible meanings. As each is considered in relation to the other, a theme emerges, is developed and validated, with each step firmly grounded in biblical teaching. Just as dearbhadh an Fhocal may be drawn from any part of the Bible, so any individual motif may appear in any type of spiritual song. It is in their myriad possibilities of connection and comparison that their strength as an expository device lies. As might be expected, motifs are grouped differently according to the subject addressed, acting as markers for the several categories of spiritual song. At the same time they may be used to bring secular songs, particularly cumhachan, closer to the register of dàin spioradail, where a single motif such as ‘an t-aiseag’ declares a hope of resurrection, along with all which that implies.

**Marbhrannan soisgeulach and cumhachan spioradail**

Different categories of song and specific themes within each category show patterns of motifs which, while not exclusive to the category, are strongly predictable in their occurrence. This may be seen in the public genre of marbhrannan soisgeulach being shadowed by the more personal genre of cumhachan spioradail.\(^{274}\) Formalised

\(^{272}\) Appendix 5.

\(^{273}\) Matthew 21.19.

\(^{274}\) Appendix 5.6; 5.5.
expressions of mourning and elegy seen in *marbharrann soisgeulach* for public figures such as ministers are reflected, but not replicated, in *cumhachan spioradail* for brothers, sisters, husbands and children. Where the majority of *marbharrann soisgeulach* are composed for elderly men meeting a natural death, *cumhachan spioradail* tend to be for children or those suffering an untimely end. In *marbharrann soisgeulach* the poet has no doubt that the deceased is assured of Salvation. The fear for those lamented in *cumhachan spioradail* is that they are not. The *marbharrann soisgeulach* regards death as the culmination of a journey. The *cumha spioradail*, by contrast, searches for an explanation, concluding that only ‘Freasdal Dhè’ could demand this early separation. With the death of young children, there is sometimes an acceptance of God having ‘còir as fheàrr’, the right to take back what He has given as and when He chooses. *Cumhachan spioradail* tend to speak more directly than *marbharrann soisgeulach*, avoiding euphemisms such as ‘am pàilliun crè’ or ‘an taigh talmhaidh’ when speaking of the body, locating the subject in the physical rather than the spiritual world.²⁷⁵

There are, however, many commonalities between them. Both *marbharrann soisgeulach* and *cumhachan spioradail* record the sudden visit of ‘teachdaire a’ bhàis’. Both discuss practicalities: *marbharrann soisgeulach* in terms of the formalities of burial, *cumhachan spioradail* often preoccupied with the fact that there can be no burial as the body has not been recovered. All understand that they must cross ‘Abhainn a’ bhàis’, and that not everyone can be certain of a safe passage. Leagsaidh NicGhilleathan of Grenitote is confident that her sister Ciorstag, who died in 1952, had a smooth crossing, ‘gun d’ fhuair thu d’ aiseg null gu séimh / thar Iòrdain is i tràigthe’, while in Calbost in 1947, a young sailor’s mother can only hope and pray: ‘O, na faighinn gealladh / an d’ thug an Athair dhuit A Lâmh’.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Appendix 5.7-10 show examples of these motifs in use.
**Aiseirigh**

‘Aiseirigh’, or resurrection, appears in two distinct ways: as a matter for celebration, where the subject is seen as having a secure expectation of Heaven, or as an earnest hope that reconciliation had been sought before the moment of death. *Marbhrannan soisgeulach* illustrate this in a succession of motifs from the Book of Revelation. The redeemed are depicted as discarding the ‘corp thruaillidh’ of mortality to put on the ‘trusgan bainse’ of immortality and be united with Fear na Bainse ‘ann am pòsadh nach sgaoil’. *Cumhachan spioradail* show no such confidence. One young woman tries to console herself and her parents, ‘Ach nam biodh tu ann an Criosda / bhiodh sinn riaraichte leis an âmhghar’. Many confine themselves to the simple hope contained in the verse ‘Gus a m bris an là agus an teich na sgàilean’ often seen in wartime songs, or as in this mother’s expectation for herself and her infant daughter:

> Nuair theicheas gach sgàil’
> ‘S a bhriseas an là le mòr shoillse,
> Bidh leanabh ’s a mhàthair
> A’ tàmh an Comunn nan Naomh.²⁷⁸

**Marbhrannan soisgeulach**

While the subject of the *cumha spioradail* lives in an unmistakably physical world, fishing a real sea or dying on a specific battlefield, the subject of the *marbhrann soisgeulach* inhabits both the physical world and a non-corporeal world of metaphor and allegory. The former meets his death in the course of his everyday life. For the latter, this world is a metonym for the next, and life is in itself a journey in search of God. His death is announced as ‘chriochnaich e a thuras anns an fhàsach seo’. He is depicted as ‘fear-fàire air na ballachan’, ‘gaisgeach armaichte’, and ‘ciobair na

²⁷⁷ Nic a’Ghobhainn 2009, p. 74.
treud’, guarding and protecting the community.\textsuperscript{279} He spends his days ‘a’ cur siol anns a’ ghàrradh’, labouring to plant and nurture the seed of the Gospel. He is shown ‘a’ saothair ’san fhion-lios’, bringing the fruits of his own study to the congregation, and as the ‘geug torrach’, bearing a good harvest for his Master. He may be depicted as ‘fear-stiùiridh’ or ‘sgiobair treun’, guiding souls over ‘fàsach na fairge’. He is almost invariably the ‘teachdaire dileas’ whose preaching and prayer inspire and comfort others. Each name and each setting carries its own dearbhadh, each referencing a biblical paradigm, and in shadowing the titles and attributes accorded to Christ, show him to be a faithful disciple.

\textit{Earailean}

Though \textit{earailean}, when concentrated in a single song, are considered here as a separate category, they appear in all types of evangelical song. \textit{Marbhrrannan sosgeulach} repeat warnings which the subject has delivered in his role as ‘teachdaire dileas’. \textit{Cumhachan spioradail} hope that the subject has heeded earlier warnings and that others will understand the uncertainty of life. The paradigm of the ‘mac stròghail neo-aitreach’ often appears, with its patient and forgiving father holding out the hope of reconciliation. The example of the ‘deich òighean’ is almost universal, contrasting the fate of those who keep their ‘lòchrain laiste’ ready for the coming of Fear na Bainmse, and those ‘air an do dhruidhe an doras / o nach d’ fhuaras ola na lamba’.\textsuperscript{280}

The motifs of \textit{earailean} draw strongly on time and the seasons, on sleep, shadows and darkness, on night falling with no certainty of the next day dawning ‘oir chan eil a-màireach air a ghealtainn’.\textsuperscript{281} The world itself is ‘caochlaideach, carach, mealhta’. Time runs away like water or sand; blossoms fall; grass is cut down. Death appears as the biblical ‘gaduiche ’s an oidhche’ or the ‘teachdaire a’ bhàis’ of indeterminate origin. The ‘teachdaire’ visits ministers and the unconverted alike. For some he is the ‘Teachdaire o Nèamh’; for others he is attended by An Nàmhaid, watching for an

\textsuperscript{279} Appendix 5.6-9. 
\textsuperscript{280} Appendix 5.5. 
\textsuperscript{281} Appendix 5.3.
opportunity to seize the unwary soul. Nan Êòghain’s song ‘Teich le d’ anam’ warns anyone who will listen:

O anam, dùisg an àrda,
’S an oidhche a’ tarraing dlùth,
’S an Nàmhaid dèanamh gàire riut,
’S cuir sgàilean air do shùil. (v. 2)²⁸²

Many of the ‘sluagh gun chùram’ will never waken, and for them, as Mairearad Chaimbeul makes clear, their fate is decided from the moment of their death:

Tha ’m bàs a teachd mar ghadaiche,
Gu ’n choiseamachd thabhairt dhuinn;
Bu chóir dhuinn bhith air ar freiceadan,
’S bhi ullamh air a chionn.
G ’e be staid am fàgar sinn,
’N ’ar chàrmar sinn ’san ùir;
’Sann mar sin a dh’eireas sinn,
’N ’ar dh’ éighear sinn gu cùirt. (v. 4)²⁸³

Laoidhean spioradail

The relationship between laoidhean spioradail and laoidhean soisgeulach is not unlike that between marbhrannan soisgeulach and cumhachan spioradail, where a formal category is shadowed by one which is more personal. Laoidhean spioradail make up the largest category in the research corpus, both in terms of the number of texts and the range of concerns addressed. Along with marbhrannan soisgeulach, they occupy the highest literary register of spiritual song, and, though both cover many degrees of formality, no other genre approaches their highest register. Laoidhean teagaisg and laoidhean molaidh may be seen as sub-sets of this category, the former distinguished by function, the latter by its concentration of a specific type

of motif, the ainmean cliùiteach. Both belong to the earlier period of laoidhean spioradail and have been largely superseded.284

**Laoidhean spioradail: Honorifics, epithets, topography**

As the oldest, broadest and most published category, the earliest songs pre-dating both general literacy and Gaelic translations of the scriptures, laoidhean spioradail hold the core lexicon of motifs upon which other songs depend. The early laoidhean teagaisg, along with the Catechism and the Psalms, built up a vocabulary of motifs. Laoidhean molaidh added to this, their listing of names and epithets providing a multiplicity of representations of the three persons of the Trinity.285 Just as in traditional panegyric, these establish dùthchas and genealogy and are used to define the attributes of the leader. Christ’s human and His divine descent are both traced. As Mac an Duine, He is Mac Dhàibhidh and Flùr o Iesse. As Mac Dhè, He is Siol Iehòbha and Prionnsa Cùirt nan Speur. His heroism is established as Gaisgeach Mòr nam Buaidh. His protection of His followers is expressed in names such as Am Buachaill and An Lighiche. He is also husband, friend and confidant, addressed as ‘mo Charaid’, ‘m’ Fhear-pòsda’ or simply as ‘m’ Annsachd’.

Laoidhean spioradail also set out the topography of the spiritual world. It is here that the archetypal turas an fhàsaich is mapped out. Some of its roads and pathways are directly traceable to the Psalms or the Book of Proverbs, both of which were available in Gaelic long before the Bible itself. Though paths such as Slighe na Slàinte and Rathad nan Aingidh are symbolic, they become ‘real’ by having this biblical dearbhadh. Similarly, symbolic wells such as Tobar Òcshlainte and Tobar na Beatha relate to real wells in real places such as Elim, Marah and Shiloh. These marked the Israelites’ flight from captivity to the Promised Land, providing paradigms for the Christian’s journey to Salvation. Christ is seen to be embodied in the land itself. As Rathad an Fhìrinn, He is the path which must be followed; as

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284 *Laoidhean teagaisg* became less relevant with the publication of the Gaelic Bible and the general improvement in literacy during the 19th century. *Laoidhean molaidh* were at their height in the mid 19th century, but seem simply to have fallen out of fashion.

285 Appendix 2.
Carraig Bhuan, the rock which gives shelter; and as An Tobar nach Tràigh, the well which never runs dry.\textsuperscript{286}

**Laoidhean spioradail: Sin**

The themes of *laoidhean spioradail* include rejection of the world, avoidance of ‘oibre na feòla’ and the cultivation of ‘toradh an Spioraid’, with body and spirit locked in conflict as a consequence of ‘truailleachd tha dualach do ‘n fheòil’.\textsuperscript{287}

Bean Torra Dhamh has her own solitary struggle:

\begin{quote}
Mo chrìdhe do lùbtadh, 
Ruith dlùth a chum daorsa, 
Tha ‘n seann duine cho làidir, 
’S nach tàir mi dheth aomadh. (v. 5)\textsuperscript{288}
\end{quote}

Each poet has her ‘peacadh leannan’, which she tries to overcome. For Mairearad Chaimbeul her faults are ‘sgreataidh lionmhóir, mar ghaineamh na tràighe na mar dhadum na grèine’.\textsuperscript{289} Each is no sooner suppressed than it rises up again. Anna NicFhearghais weeps over her shortcomings while in Church, but admits ‘nuair dh’fhàgagainn do chùirt, philleadh sugradh peacach’.\textsuperscript{290}

Sin is also equated with disease: the province of Lighich nam Buaidh. He is described by Anna NicFhearghais as ‘an tobar ghlanas ciont agus creachdan leònte. Catrina NicDhòmhnaill explains that His blood has healing properties. ‘Is cungaidh lân buaidh / ’s chan eil eucail no galair / chan eil tinneas no truaigh / nach dèan i a leigheas’, but recognises that this healing was bought at a price. ‘An Lighich beir dhuit i / phàigh Esan i gu daor’.\textsuperscript{291} This links the concepts of sin as disease and sin as debt; the ‘fiachan’ or ‘éiric’ incurred by Adam which Christ as Ìobairt na Rèite pays

\textsuperscript{286} Appendix 3; Appendix 4.3. 
\textsuperscript{287} See Galatians 5.19-23 for ‘oibre na feòla’ and ‘toradh an Spioraid’, I Corinthians 15.42-50 for ‘truailleachd nàduir’. 
\textsuperscript{288} ‘Truailleachd Nàdur’, in MacRae 1935, pp. 51-6; Westminster Confession, 13.2. 
\textsuperscript{289} ‘S e sud ghabh mi beachd air’, Chaimbeul 1810, Laoide 32.9. 
\textsuperscript{290} B’ fheàrr leam là ann do chuirt’, NLS MS 14987, 12.6. 
with His own life. Màiri Anna NicIomhair explains why this is necessary: ‘Cha
dèanadh rèite ach fuil Mac Dhè / Mar éiric bha ro-phriseil’. Having paid this debt,
Christ as the ‘Fear-tagraidh gu buan anns a chùirt’ intercedes on behalf of Adam’s
descendants.292

Laoidhean spioradail: Penitence, confession, doubt

Laoidhean spioradail are confessional, penitential, often introspective as the poet
examines her conscience or addresses her own soul. Bean Torra Dhamh speaks to her
soul as though to an unruly child, telling her that she was born into slavery, that her
own corrupt nature is the burden which she must carry, and that as a consequence,
she must expect death: ‘’S e do thuilleachd a thaobh nàdur / Aobhar d’ ànraidh mar
mo bheachd-sa’.293 She explains carefully what she must do: ‘Seall a nise ciod a ni
thu, […] Thig le irioslachd a ’s dòchas / Dh’iarraidh cómhnadh o ’n Aon Bheartach’. She
assures her soul that, though she may think her fate unjust, the course of her life
had been foreordained and must be accepted:

Ged bhiodh Freasdal dhuit air uairibh
Tuille ’s cruaidh réir do bheachd-sa,
Tuig gur gliocas thug mu ’n cuairt e
’S gheibh thu beannachd as am pailteas. (v. 6)

As Bean a Bharra examines her conscience, conviction of sin strikes like a surgeon’s
lancet or as an arrow to her heart. ‘’S Tu thilig na saighde diamhair, Thig le hiosap ’s
bidh mi slan’.294 The arrow which pierces the heart, however, is not necessarily in the
healing hand of An Leigh, it may be one of the ‘saighdean teinnteach Shàtain’, which
inflict a deadly wound. For Nan Èòghain, doubt and despair lodge in her heart like
Satan’s arrows. ‘’S mi seòladh troimh na doimhneachdan / le saighdean na mo
chridhe’:

293 ‘Beatha nan Gràs’, in MacRae 1935, p. 57.
Self-doubt is an arrow which Satan plants in even the purest heart and it is this which Catriona NicDhòmhnaill warns her soul against. ‘Na dh’èirich buaireas fo shaighdean Shàtain / Teich fo dhion far am bi thu sàbhailt’. Mrs Camashron of Rannoch explains that God is Man’s sole defence, present in every trouble.

Anns gach trioblad agus deuchainn,
Bidh e dhoibh ’ga fhoillseach féin,
Bidh e maille riu ann an sè dhuibh,
’Us anns an t-seachdamh cha dean e ’n tréig. (v. 5)²⁹⁷

Her dearbhadh reflects the words of Job’s comforter, carrying the unspoken rebuke that it is not Man’s place to question Freasdal Dhè:

Oir crathaidh e, agus ceanglaidh e suas; lotaidh e agus leighsidh a làmhan.
Ann an sè teanntachdaibh saoraidh e thu, agus anns an t-seachdamh cha tig ole an gar dhuit.²⁹⁸

The troubled soul seeking shelter ‘fo sgàil Do sgèith’ appears in many different forms, with the ‘sgiath’ as shield, shelter or protective wing, each a metonym for the protection they seek. For Anna NicFhearghais it is a rock sheltering a tender plant: ‘Fo dhubhar sgèith ’n Fhir-Shaoraidh fein / Tha fàs nan geug an còmhnuidh’.²⁹⁹ It is a place of safety: ‘Bhiodh fasgadh domh a ’s tearnadh / Fo dhubhar sgàil Do sgèith’. It is a canopy shading the ‘leaba do ’n ghràdh gun ghò’ where the soul meets with

²⁹⁵ Nan Eòghain, ‘Buardadh’, MSA.
²⁹⁸ Job 5.19.
²⁹⁹ Fo dhubhar sgèith ’n Fhir-Shaoraidh fein’, NLS MS 14987, 6.
Christ. Màiri Anna NicIomhair uses it in its most homely form, just as Christ himself had once used it, as the wings of a mother hen sheltering her chicks:

Mar sgaoileas cearc a sgiathan blàth,
Os cionn a h-ail gu deònach,
’S e cainnt a bhéil gu ’m b’ aill leis féin,
Le sgàil a sgéith ar còmhdach. 301

Laoidhean spioradail: The Song of Solomon

Both laoidhean spioradail and laoidhean soisgeulach express spiritual love in motifs drawn from the Song of Solomon. They describe an abstract, universal love in a succession of images of trees, fruits, open fields, walled gardens, locked doors and dark city streets. Birds and animals have no fear of man, with the natural, the spiritual and the human world all in accord. There are impossible unions and loves which can never be consummated, the Lily and the dove, the Rose of Sharon and the roe deer. There is a conflation of familial relationships of brother to sister to mother to lover and spouse. The lover pursues the beloved yet is always inaccessible. He draws her towards him yet always eludes her. She searches the streets for him yet will not admit him when he waits at her door. These òrain ghaoil spioradail express a love which is absolute and unconditional, without self-consciousness or inhibition, the devout Christian’s love for Christ and the idealised gràdh bràithreil of Christian fellowship.

In the mid-eighteenth century Bean Torra Dhamh describes Christ as her suitor:

‘’S e an Ròs E o Shàron / ’S am Flùr E o Iesse […] ’S e mo Charaid ’s m’ Fhear-pòsd e, / ’S e mo Bhràthair as sine’. 302 A century later Anna NicFhearghais meets Him unexpectedly. ‘Do gràdh chuir stad air mo cheum […] Mar chir na meala Do phog / ’n uair tha ’n t-anam an toir a d’ dheigh.’ 303 Anna NicEalair names her lover only as ‘a ghaoil’ and ‘a rùin’, meeting him ‘ann an gàrradh nan ubhal’ and taking

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300 NLS MS 14987, 18.9, 7.6.
302 MacRae, 1935, pp. 67-70.
303 NLS MS 14987, 7.4, 7.5.
him to her mother’s house. She leaves no doubt that it is the lover who pursues her: ‘‘S ann bha thu an rùn mo ghlacadh / ’S ann a thug thu dhomh do ghaol’. She is overwhelmed by a love as sweet as wine: ‘Is milse leam Do ghaol na ’m fion […] ’S nuair a thug dhomh do ghràdh, ’S ann a dh’fhàilnich mo pearsa.’ A hundred years later, at the height of the Lewis Awakening, Màiread Nic a’ Ghobhainn is roused from her sleep, ‘Chuir E a theachdair le cabhaig gam shealg’. Just as in the Song of Solomon, she searches the streets for her lover:

Sèist:
'Faca sibh a Lilidh tha mise ri lorg?

Bha mis’ air na sràidean
a’ faighneachd do m’ chàirdean,
Faca sibh mo ghràdh
’s gu faigh mi air sealbh? (v. 3)

Na ’s milse na mil dhomh,
Tha briathran a bhilean,
’S mo chrídhe ri sileadh,
Gu labhair E m’ ainm. (v. 4)\(^{305}\)

Catriona Chaimbeul confesses that she is weak with love. ‘‘S e bhith tinn le Do ghràdh-sa dh’fhàg mi ’n dràsda gun fheum […] Tha Do bheul mills’ ionmhuinn / ’S mar shùil chalaman Do shùil’. Catriona NicDhômhaill attempts to hide, but Christ seeks her out, calling her to Him as ‘Mo chalaman tha fàlach an sgoltadh na creag’:

Na fuirich air d’ aineol, ’s na deòir air do ghruaidh,
’S Mi sireadh do thàladh le cridhe làn truais.

\(^{306}\) ‘Tinn le Do Ghràdh’, in MacLeod, nd., pp. 14-5.
Is mise d' fhear-pòst ’s tha mo ghràdh dhut toirt bàrr
Air gràdh athar neo màthar, piuthe air brath’r’.

In the Song of Solomon, the woman is perfect and unblemished. ‘Tha thu uile àillidh, a bhean mo ghaoil, agus smàl chan eil annad’. In each of these songs, she is flawed. Bean Torra Dhamh was called back, ‘bho shlig’ dhòruinn ’n lèir-sgrìosaídh’. Anna NicFhearghais admits, ‘Do ghràdh chuir stad air mo cheum / ’ruith gu doimhneachd na lèir-sgrìos mhòr’. Anna NicEalair was ‘ann am bothan bochd a’ bhròin’. Màiread Nic a’ Ghobhain was ‘ann an dùthaich gun faszadh’ when she was warned ‘crioslaich do chasan a bhaile na feirg’. Catriona NicDhòmhnaill was ‘san fhàsach air seachran san oídche dhubh dhorch’ when she was found and promised ‘ni mi d’ fhalach ri m’ bhoilleach ’s bidh thu tèaraint’ nam ghaoil’. All of these songs hold out the promise of a pure all-embracing love, the Lily for the dove, the Rose of Sharon for the roe deer, the innocent love that binds mother, sister and brother. Each gives an allegorical description of conversion in terms of Salvation by Grace, the concept that God’s love cannot be deserved, but is freely given.

Laoidhean soisgeulach

Laoidhean soisgeulach are distinct from laoidhean spioradail in that they are concerned almost exclusively with the evangelical function of the Church. They tend to be more transient, tied to particular times, places and events. They celebrate specific Òrduighean, naming officiating ministers and elders, noting who was there and who was absent. They include laoidhean dùsgaidh, inspired by specific dùsgaidhean, particularly those of the mid-twentieth century. They may be earailean, warning of the need for revival; they may focus on ‘miann dùsgaidh’ or

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308 Song of Solomon 4.7.
309 Mair NicEalair’s ‘bothan bochd a’ bhròin’ is possibly figurative rather than literal, referring to the state of being ‘fo chàram’ which precedes conversion. The phrase appears in Paraphrase 14. 4 of Ecclesiastes 7. 2-6, which advises that wisdom is to be found in sorrow rather than laughter. ‘An duine crìonna thèid gu tric gu bothan bochd a’ bhròin’.
310 Appendix 7.17.
312 The Westminster Confession, 18.4 offers Song of Solomon 5.2-6 as a dearbhadh of ‘The Assurance of Grace and Salvation’.
313 Appendix 5.2.
'traoghadh spioradail' or may celebrate conversion in songs closely resembling òrain ghaoil. Those which deal with conversion or 'traoghadh spioradail' could, in terms of content, belong to the wider more anonymous category of laoidhean spioradail, but are included with laoidhean soisgeulach because of their attachment to time and place and to named persons.

Laoidhean soisgeulach have a strong element of cianalas. Young Christians, full of the joy of their new-found faith, long to be with those who share it. Church members, particularly those set aside by age or infirmity, miss the spiritual companionship of Òrduiughean. They re-live their own conversion, looking back on past Dùsgaidhean and past preachers, hoping that a new generation will rise up to replace them, hoping that family and friends will be brought into the fold. There are motifs of empty churches and barren fields. 'An eaglais a’ dol fàs'; 'Ar liosan ri fàs le deanntag'; ‘dris tha muchadh a ghàrradh’. These are the nettles growing around deserted houses; the rushes of uncultivated crofts; the ‘droighionn agus cluairean’ which faced Adam and Eve as they were expelled from Eden – visible markers of the distance between their present state and the spiritual union with Christ which they long for. They are both ‘suaicheantas na mallachd / a ghairm Dia air an fhearann’, and the ‘crùn de thoradh an duslaich / do Chruithear na Cruinne’ with which Christ was mocked.314

As in the biblical turus an fhàsaich, aridity, barrenness and desolation are contrasted with dewfall and rain which bring spiritual growth and revival: ‘O gun sileadh an driùchd oirnn, ’s na frasan a dh’ùracha dh fonn’.315

Where laoidhean spioradail have vineyards and great forest trees, laoidhean soisgeulach keep to the more familiar harvest fields. Itinerant evangelists depicted as ‘luchd tional na dlòth’ are appealed to, ‘nan dianadh sibh cabhag ’s na h-aicheadhgan geala’. Their teaching is seen as reaping a harvest, ‘a’ tional na sguaban’, yet they are never seen to handle a sickle. Each motif links a visual image to a biblical text. The mention of ‘sguaban eòrna’, for example, calls up associations with parables of sowing, reaping, gathering the grain into the barn and burning the chaff. Linked with

‘luchd-tionail’, the focus narrows to laoidhean dùsghaidh; linked with ‘am moll’, it becomes an earail. Each additional motif narrows the field of focus until the precise message becomes clear. Evangelists, however, were not the only reapers and when ‘an corran’ appears, it takes all categories forward to Là a Bhreitheanais:

’N uair a bhios sinn abuich,
Thèid an corran chuir an sàs;
Bheir Thu ’n cruinneachd do ’n taigh tasgaidh,
’S thèid am moll a chuir ’na smàl. (v. 11)\(^{316}\)

\(\textit{Órain mun Eaglais}\)

The relationship between òrain mun Eaglais and the other categories of evangelical song is not unlike that between aoir and dàin mholaidh. Their themes and motifs are similar, but opposition of time, aspect, affirmation and negation are used to transform each motif into its opposite.\(^{317}\) Praise becomes blame, affection becomes enmity, respect becomes contempt. Minister and congregation are still depicted as shepherd and flock, but the ‘buachail math nan caorach’ has become the ‘buachail gun spèis’. Where he was shown ‘ag altrumas na treud’, he is now one of ‘na ciobairean nach gabh suim dheth ’n cuid chaorach a chumail cruinn’. Congregations where there was ‘gràdh gun fuath do gach anam’ desert their minister and are scattered, ‘a’ leantainn gach buachaill gun spèis / chuir sgapadh ’s an treud cho mòr’.

The ‘teachdaire dileas’ who was respected for his learning is scorned as ‘fear le foghlum dubailt / s’ mòsg an aineolais mu shùilean’. This transformation reflects the reality of divided communities and divisions in the Church, with poets expressing their approval or disapproval by arranging motifs in opposing pairs, positive and negative, past and present.

The system of patronage had left Moderate ministers open to accusations of preferring their ‘òighreachd shaoghalta’ to ‘òighreachd Nèamh’. Mearraid Nice-Leain, a widow struggling to pay Church dues, compares her minister to the Pharisees, infamous both for their hypocrisy and for ‘ag itheadh suas tighean

\(^{316}\) ‘Tha saoghal fàs na ’s famh leam’, in MacRitchie, nd. pp. 18-21; Revelation 14.14-20.

\(^{317}\) Appendix 5.4.
bhantrach’; ‘Cha b’e taois na Phaireisich / bu mhath leam air mo bheul’. The ‘taois’ which she has no taste for is doctrine based on learned hypothesis rather than the scriptures. She is determined not to be led astray by ‘fileantachd am beul’. University-educated ministers introducing theological argument which appeared to question the authority of the Bible were derided for their ‘fòghlum dùbailte’ and labelled ‘ministearan gun Ghràs’. When disputes reached the point of actual division, opposing factions vilified each other as ‘luchd-aidichidh gun Ghràs’, each convinced that the other was being led astray by ‘fianais brèige’ if not by actual ‘buill do shianagog Shàtain’.

Church disputes cast a long shadow and for some there was no way back. Bean Iain Domhnullaich reflects sadly on a secession which has left her childhood congregation very much depleted. Where her old minister preached with biblical authority, protecting his flock from temptation, she sees new preachers who are, as she believes, leading them astray. Her dearbhadh carries both an accusation of hypocrisy and the charge that, like the Pharisees, they value their own reasoning above biblical teaching:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Ni aodhairean daoine 'bhuaireadh} \\
&\text{Le 'n cuid theagaisgean gun bhuannachd} \\
&\text{Teumadh bhràithrean 's daoine suairce,} \\
&\text{'S iomadh truaighe bheir seachad. (v. 36)} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Air bhith dhaibh a slùgadh chàmhull,} \\
&\text{Measaidh iad mar ni ro shàbhailt,} \\
&\text{Sioladh meanmhchuileag an fhàsaich} \\
&\text{Ni a rinn gu tràth an dalladh. (v. 37)} \text{321}
\end{align*}
\]

Her song shows mingled shame and regret, contrasting the present ‘cùl-châineadh’, ‘tàire’ and ‘nàimhdeas’ between the factions with the gràdh bràithreil which the

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318 Matthew 23.14; ‘Cha ghràdhaich am fear beartach mi’, in MacCoinich 1871; Appendix 7.16.
319 Matthew 16.6.
320 Revelation 3.9. Henderson 1893/1, p. 129, v. 5
321 ‘Duan air Sgìr’ Uig an Leòdhas’, in, Domhnullaich nd., pp. 7-25; Appendix 7.5.
congregation had shared. The Church which was full is now empty, and though she cannot approve of friends leaving the Church of Scotland she cannot forget them:

Dh’amhairc mi mu ’n cuairt ’s gach àite,
Ach am faicinn-sa na bràithrean,
’S peatraithchean bha sairce cràbhach,
Togail ’ait fo bhlàth ’san tall ud. (v. 13)

Ach ro thearc bha iad ri àireamh,
’S ged a bha gach ni mar bha e
’S e leòn mi mo phiuthar ghràdhach
’S mi faicinn a h-àite falamh. (v. 14)322

Bean Iain ’ic Iomhair, who supports the Union of 1900, is mortified at the turn events are taking as congregations divide again:

Sèist:
Och is och, gur mi tha tûrsach,
Faicinn obair mo luchd-dùthcha,
Fuadach theachdairéan à cùbaid,
’S a’ cur cùl ri’ air beag aobhar. (v. 1) 323

She complains that people are taking sides with no real understanding of the points under dispute:

Chluinn mi fuaim air feadh gach sgire,
Iad ’n am barail féin cho fireant’;
Gabhail eagail roimh an Aonadh,
’S chan urrainn iad innse an t-aobhar. (v. 11)

322 Romans 8.35-9.
On the opposing side, Sìne Mhartainn takes the setting up of the Free Church in Scalpay in 1929 as a sign that the Flood is over, and that the new minister is coming like Noah’s dove returning to the ark with an olive leaf:

An cuida sibh gun tainig naidheachd,
Columan Noah fhathast beò,
Gheibh sibh coinneil a bhios laiste,
’S bidh mansa agaibh air dóigh’. (v. 3) 324

Those leaving the Union are depicted as returning, like the prodigal son to a forgiving Father:

Tha na Mhic Strùidheil a’ tighinn dhachaidh,
Gu Taigh an Athair ’s iad fo leòn,
Thèid a chulaidh uimp’ bhios maisteach,
Fàinne beannaicht’ air am meòir. (v. 12)

Conclusion

The linking of themes, motifs and dearbhadh is complex. This study can only act as an introduction to the concept and the broadest of guides as to its operation. What can be clearly established is that the significance of a song depends upon its motifs and their associated dearbhadh being ‘read’ and understood both individually and in combination. The motifs act at two fundamentally different levels; firstly in evoking connotations which the hearer locates within a web of texts, sermons and songs which give context and significance, and secondly as system for validating each statement made. Providing biblical paradigms and ‘proof” for each point of doctrine had been of great concern to theologians in the early years of the post-Reformation Church. Similarly, Disruption, Secession, Union and other divisions were, and are, discussed in terms of scriptural ‘proofs’ presented by the opposing parties. This concept, which historically permeated every level of rhetoric, both secular and

spiritual, is maintained to the present day in the sermons and songs of the Scottish Reformed Churches.

Where songs are predictable in terms of theme, as with marbhranann soisgeulach, their motifs and dearbhadhean are also predictable, both in type and in order of occurrence. Cumhachan spioradail are less predictable in content as they cover a wider range of eventualities, from the death of an infant to the loss of the entire crew of a fishing boat. Their motifs, however, are just as predictable as those of marbhranann soisgeulach, though fewer and less complex. Laoidhean spioradail, as the largest category, generate the largest body of motifs and the most complex interactions of motif, dearbhadh, place names and honorifics. Laoidhean soisgeulach shadow the laoidhean spioradail and are shadowed in their turn by earailean.

The relationship of the motifs of òrain mun Eaglais to those of other categories is that of aoir to dàin mholaidh. Each motif is presented in its negative aspect, not in praise of the negative, but as a reproach to those who have brought this change about. Particularly pointed use is made of the antithetic parallelism of scriptural texts, arranging motifs in opposing pairs, positive and negative, past and present. This juxtaposition of a disparaged present with an idealised past is used to express opposition at every level. Equally, it may be used in reverse, contrasting a past negative with a present positive.

Though generalisations may be made, each song must be considered as a unique grouping of motifs, dearbhaidhean, place names, honorifics and epithets set in the context of time, situation, the sensibilities of the poet and of those who pass on her songs. Carefully read, they reveal perspectives on the nature of the universe, time and eternity. They show individual understandings of the scriptures and doctrinal works, expectations of the clergy, and relationships both within and between churches and between Church and State.
4.2 The allegorical setting of evangelical song

*Turus an fhàsaich*

*Turus an fhàsaich*, or the journey in the wilderness, is an all-pervading theme in both men’s and women’s spiritual verse. The depiction of Christian life as a journey is seen at many levels, from the conventional expression indicating that someone has joined the Church, ‘thòisich e a’ leantainn’, to the equally conventional ‘chrìochnaich e a thuras san fhàsaich seo’ announcing a death. This use of the figurative to discuss the non-figurative is typical of biblical poetic rhetoric, and was to become typical of evangelical prayer, preaching and song. One need go no further than Psalm 1.1 to see the conflation of ‘slighe’ as conduct and ‘slighe’ as a literal path which must be followed or avoided, as it warns that God sees both ‘slighe ghloin nam fireanach’ and ‘slighe fhìar nam peacach baoth’.

The physical world is envisaged as a wilderness in which Man lives in a state of exile; the spiritual world as a wilderness in which the soul wanders in search of God. Both have as many paths as there are virtues to be encouraged and evils to be censured. Slighe Ghlan na Fireantachd, for example, which must be followed, runs dangerously close to Slighe na Fèin-fhìreantachd, which must be avoided, while following Slighe nan Àithntean will only keep the traveller from Slighe Dhòruinn an Lèir-sgriosaidh if he is one of the elect. The journey is never free of buaireadh and fèin-cheasnachadh, when paths which had seemed clear suddenly disappear or turn back on themselves, forcing the wanderer to drink again and again from Uisge Mharah or struggle in Sloc Domhain a’ Pheacaidh, the same pit of despair from which he had just escaped. Marah, with its ‘uisge searbh’, is a potent symbol of grief and adversity and a well to which the evangelical poets constantly return.325 Elim, Marah and Tobar Taigh Dhàibhidh kept their biblical names, but most wells were named by qualities associated with Christ or with the scriptures, in the sense of being unfathomable sources of wisdom. There were ‘tobraichean beò’, ‘tobar an t-sòlais’, ‘an tobar nach tròig’ and ‘an tobar fhallain nach fàilnich’ where the pilgrim

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325 Exodus 15.23, 27; Appendix 4.
could find refreshment on his journey. There were wells symbolic of purification and forgiveness: ‘tobar a’ ghlanaidh’, ‘tobar na Slàinte’ and ‘tobar na fala’. Christ himself is depicted as An Tobar nach Tràigh, Tobar nam Beannachd and Tobar na Beatha, as essential to the soul as water is to the body.

**Turus a’ Chriosduidh**

Bunyan’s *Cuairt an Oilthirich no Turus a’ Chriosduidh* of 1678 had been influential in the Gàidhealtachd long before the Gaelic translation appeared in 1812. The account of Criosdaidh’s journey from Baile an Lèir-sgrios to Baile an Dia Mhòir was read in the schoolroom, in the cèilidh-house and from the pulpit. It found a place in every home and ran to many editions. Some were lavishly illustrated, others left the reader to visualise its carefully charted roads and paths: ‘B’ e ainm an dà rathaid a bha sin Cunnart agus Leir-sgrios’; ‘B’ e ainm na callaide seo Slàinte’; ‘’S e ainm a’ bhruthaich Èiginn no Deacair’. Bunyan had the biblical Tir Emmanueil, Sliabh Shinai and Sliabh Shioin along with features of his own invention such as Slighe na Lèir-sgrios, An t-Slighe Fhuachaidh and the terrible Sloc na Mi-mhisneach. The importance attached to these names as a means of teaching doctrine is reflected not only in their being absorbed into sermons and songs, but in some editions listing and referencing them as an appendix to the main text.

**Am fásach**

The metaphorical *fásach* has its origins in the Wilderness of Sin, lying between the Red Sea through which the Israelites escaped from Egypt, and the River Jordan which separated them from the Promised Land. Neither sea nor river was passable.

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without divine intervention.\textsuperscript{328} The biblical wilderness was both a real world of human trial and a sacred world where God spoke to the prophets and where Christ was tempted by Satan. \textit{Am fàsach}, emblematic of physical and spiritual exile, became the archetypal setting for evangelical preaching and poetry. ‘Turas an fhàsach’, the soul’s journey towards Salvation, created a vision of reality where \textit{am fàsach} was set against Tir a’ Gheallaidh, and exile set against inheritance of An Rìoghachd, with the passage across Iordan a’ Bhàis marking the transition between them.

The \textit{fàsach} of evangelical song, Fàsach nan Drisean, Fàsach nan Deòir and Am Fàsach Fuar told of trial, sorrow and exile. It could be any place which the Gospel did not reach, from the heart of the sinner to parishes deprived of ‘inspired’ preaching: ‘Le luchd teagasg gun ghrasan […] Buill do shionagog Shàtain lan neoghlain’. Iain Gobha describes such a place. ‘Gun dealt a ghràis tigh’nn a nuas air / ’S e mar fhàsach ro fhuaraidh / Gun ghrrian a’ bhlàthais a’ cur snuaidh air’.\textsuperscript{329} In this spiritual wilderness, ministers charged with leading and protecting the flock persecuted them and preyed upon them like wolves:

\begin{verbatim}
Luchd faire dall us coin bhalbha, 
Madraidh alluidh an anmoich, 
Tha cumail sluaigh ann an aimlisg, 
’S pobull Dhè ga ’n geur-leanmuinn. (v. 7)
\end{verbatim}

They offered their congregation nothing, reading out sermons which they had written or borrowed from other ministers, rather than preaching direct from God’s Word:

\begin{verbatim}
Theid an t-searman a leughadh 
’S b’ e siud seanchas gun eifeachd, 
Is ni neo-tharbhach do ’n treud e, 
’S chuis fharmaid luchd eisdeachd. (v. 14)
\end{verbatim}


Am fàsach and fàsach na fairge were spiritual worlds, where even the most devout Christians suffered doubt and temptation. Nan Eòghain of Laxay uses both settings to describe her own journey:

’S ann tha mi so san fhàsach
’S corp a’ bhàis so na mo phianadh,
’S chan fhaigh mi air do ghràdhachadh
Gu bràth mar tha mi ’g iarraidh. (v. 6)\(^{330}\)

’S mi seòladh troimh na doimhneachdan
Le saighdean na mo chridhe,
Gun mi faicinn càil ach cuibhrichean
A’ coinneachadh rium san t-slighe. (v. 3)\(^{331}\)

**Biblical topography**

Many of the paths and landmarks of *am fàsach* are directly traceable to biblical texts. Slighibh Glan na Fireantachd, Slighe na Firinn and Slighe na Beatha, for example, are from the Psalms, while a single chapter in the Book of Proverbs has Slighe nam Firean, Slighe a’ Ghliocais, Rathad nan Aingidh and Slighe Dhroch Dhaoine.\(^{332}\) Slochd an Dubh-èigein and An Slochd gun Iochdar are from the Book of Revelation, but in evangelical song they acquire associated torments: Slochd na Pèine, Priosan a’ Bhroinn, Teach a’ Bhròin, Leab’ na Dòruinn Bhuain, Ionad na Pèin ’s na Dòruinn, and Sloc Domhainn a’ Pheacaigh. Roads, tracks and pathways are also qualified with discrete sets of characteristics, with those leading to Geata nan Gràsan being
‘creagach, cas, direach, cumhang’, while those which are ‘leathan, farsaing, rèidh’, inevitably lead to Teach a’ Bhròin.

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\(^{330}\) Nan Eòghain, ‘Laoidh a’ Tuba Nighe’, on *A Chuideachd mo Ghaoil: Laoidhean air a sheinn le Cairistiona Sheadha* (Stornoway: Acair, nd.).

\(^{331}\) Nan Eòghain, ‘Buaireadh’, MSA.

\(^{332}\) Psalms 23.3; 119.30; 16.11; Proverbs 4.11-19. Appendix 4.2.
These poetic phrases were consistent in their symbolic significance, but could sometimes be grouped in such a way as to become contradictory in fact. The wilderness was a sea and a desert, a frozen wasteland and a dry parched land. It was a battlefield, a vineyard, a field of wheat, a pasture. Ministers and elders may be depicted ‘ag obair san fhion-lias’; they may be ‘a’ tional dloghan’ in the fields; or be ‘iasgairibh air daoinibh’ on the shore, or all of these together. Murchadh MacLeòid describes a fellow elder reaping souls from the waves of a stormy sea as though it were a field of wheat:

’S bhiodh tu ’ga tharruing troimh an chuan
Bha dol thighinn uaireigin gu ceann
Ach chan eil tonn a bhuail air
Nach do bhuan dha toradh trom
Chaidh e dhachaidh leis na sguaban
’S fhuair e ’n duais aig a cheann thall. (v. 11) 333

Where the symbolism of ‘an toradh trom’ is of such potency as to render any question as to whether it was on land or sea irrelevant, MacLeòid’s conflation of images would present no more difficulty than the familiar warning, ‘chuir iad a’ ghaoth, agus buainidh iad a’ chuairt-ghaoth’. 334

This allegorical topography reflected not only the interface between physical and spiritual worlds, the known and the unknown, but biblical descriptions of the Holy Land being understood in terms of Highland moorland and Hebridean seas. Those taught in the Sgoilean Chriosd, for whom the Bible was their only history textbook, their only atlas, and very possibly the entirety of their reading in both childhood and adulthood, may well bring its landmarks into their songs. Others, with every advantage of education, were still bound by it. Coinneach Ros describes how, even after university, theological college and a lifetime as a minister, the link between biblical landscapes and his childhood home in Skye is not altogether broken:

334 Hosea 8.7.
Tha làithean brèagha samhraidh ’sa Ghleann air dhòigh toinnte fhathasd am Betel, an Sinai, am Muir Ghaililidh ’s an Sliabh-nan-Crann-Ola, mar sgeul a thachair gu boillsgeanta an sud nar n-òige. Thàinig na Fàidhean, ar leam ‘a stìgh am Bràigh’ a thoirt rabhaidh le òirdhearcas cainnte ’s iomraidhean ùra do dh’ Fharasaich a’ Ghlinne a bha dùinte ’sa Teampall. 335


**Beinn Shion**

Màiri NicGhillEathain describes Eubhal Mòr in North Uist as a witness to Creation while Iain Aonghas MacLeòid tells how Ròineabhal in Harris sheltered the

335 Ros 1972, p. 108.
336 Appendix 4.3.
thousands who gathered for Òrduighean in Tarbert. Real mountains and valleys, though, were rarely named in spiritual song. Poets may praise ‘Grabhair nan gleann ’s nan cluain’ or ‘Uig nam beann ’s na stuaigh’, but their significance was only as places where Òrduighean were held. The poets’ real preoccupation was with Glìnn an Fhàsaich Fhualair, Gleann nan Deòir and the search for Slèibhteann Shioin. Only visible to the eyes of the faithful, the holy hill of Sìon was both within reach and immeasurably far away. It was longingly described as ‘Sìon na Maise’, ‘Sìon ’s aille snuadh’, ‘Beinn Shion is àille fiamh’, but most often simply as ‘Sìon Shuas’.

In biblical historical terms Sìon was Mount Sìon or Mount Hermon, while Zion was Jerusalem, the City of David and The Temple, all equally sacred. It was, at the same time, the Israelites as a people, a spiritual kingdom and a metonym for the world to come. In Christian teaching, the Nìchean Shioin of the Psalms was understood as prefiguring the Church – those who recognised Christ as Rìgh Shioin. The ‘Sìon’ of Gaelic evangelical song is an amalgam of all of these, anticipating the time when Nìchean Shioin and Rìgh Shioin will be reunited and joined in marriage on Slèibhteann Shioin. The words ‘air na slèibhteann’ came to imply Slèibhteann Shioin, and by extension, any place or time where a deep level of spiritual intensity was felt in discussion and prayer. Where there was a decline in spiritual life, Sìon would become a desert. In ‘Luchd Caoineadh Shioin’, Màiri Anna NicIomhair describes just such a situation in rural Lewis. The effects of post-war depopulation and an aging eldership are compounded by a new generation growing up with different values:

Tha comhar ’s gach àit gu bheil Sìon dol fàs ann,
Gun suim ac’ d’ a Sàbaidean naomha. (v. 4)


338 As Professor Donald MacLeod points out, with no ‘z’ in Gaelic, ‘Sìon’ is used of both, making it difficult to register the distinction in written texts. In conversation, September 2014.

The Church sits in the dust of the desert like a widow in mourning and seeing Christ unrecognised and disregarded, can go no further on her journey:

Tha ’n Eaglais tha ’n trath seo chuairt anns an fhàsach
’Na suidhe air an lâr ’s cuilidh bròin oirr’
Ri faicinn cho tàireil ’s tha Cuspair a Gràidh ann,
’S gu bheil fhianuis air àicheadh le móran. (v. 1)

In ‘Sgeul air Sgeul’, Màiri Anna names a generation of elders one by one, ‘craobhan árd’ who have been swept away leaving their villages ‘fàsail’ and ‘lom’, both literally and figuratively:

Théid sinn cuairt air feadh na sgìr’,
Aitean fàsail air gach taobh;
’S bha craobhan árd ann lân de bhrìgh
’S iad dileas air na ballachan. (v. 3) 340

In her marbhrann soisgeulach for Ruairidh MacAoidh, she takes a text from Lamentations to show the roads themselves mourning for the shepherd who would no longer lead the flock to Slèibhtean Shioin:

Ach tha ’n teaghlach fo leòn ’s tha brôn air a’ bhaile
’S tha Ròidean Shioin ri caoidh’
Tha ’n Eaglais a’ faighneachd ’n ann an corruich
A thàinig a’ bhuille g’ an claoidh. (v. 8) 341

Dr Iain Domhnullach had used the same text in his ‘Marbhrann do Mhaighstir Caldair’:

341 ‘Ruairidh Mac Aoidh’, in CD, pp. 30-2; Lamentations 1.4. Lamentations marks the fall of Jerusalem. ‘Tha ròidean Shioin ri brôn, a chionn nach eil aon neach a’ teachd a chum na h-ârd-fhèile’.
Dr Domhnullach could confidently refer to ‘Bòchim’ in seven successive verses of his marbhrainn, knowing that it would be understood as ‘the place of weeping’, marking a place and time where the Israelites had been punished for disobedience in not separating themselves from surrounding tribes.  

Inhabitants of Am Fàsach

The fàsach of evangelical song was peopled by shadowy figures – less tangible – less biblical even than the Old Testament prophets and kings or the more homely disciples of the New Testament. ‘Teachdaire a’ bhàis’ comes and goes at will. He visits young and old, rich and poor, the just and the unjust alike. His hand is cold, his face pale, not known but recognised as soon as seen. He calls with no invitation and never leaves empty-handed. ‘Am fear a ruitheas’ appears at moments of crisis, observing, recording and passing on. ‘Anail o Neàmh’ and ‘Cas a dh’imich feur gun lub na cheum gun fheall’ pass unseen, the one telling where a drowned son may be washed ashore, the other bringing news of Redemption. Sometimes these messengers are clearly the ‘Spiorad Naomha na cheum chrionta’ – sometimes less identifiable. ‘S tha cuid eile dhiubh gun dealbh, gun chruth, gun ainm gu dòchasach’. Am Mac Stròdhail, with many different names and in many different guises, leaves home, is reduced to poverty in ‘fàsach an t-saoghail’ and returns to his father’s house as a penitent. ‘Macantas’, ‘Fìrin’, ‘Fireantachd’ and other personifications of divine virtue come to relieve the traveller. Over all these, ‘Gràs Dhè’ falls ‘mar dhriuchd’ on the parched ground, sometimes in the form of spiritual teaching, sometimes as a less definable blessing which relieves the hardships of the journey.

343 Judges 2.1-5.
**An Nàmhaid**

Man’s great enemy, An Nàmhaid, stalks the desert, setting snares, digging pits, casting his net around the souls of men. He sets false *comharraidhean* to mislead the faithful and lure pilgrims from the path.\(^{345}\) As Nàmhaid nan Caora ch he prowls around the sheepfold, waiting to snatch lambs from the flock. As Am Fear Millidh he spreads discord, setting brother against brother and congregation against congregation. As An Nathair Lùbach and An Nathair Sheòlta he is insinuating and persuasive, as An Nathair Shèitich a thinly disguised Nathair a’ Bhàis. Breugan, like their father Athair nam Breug, travel on the wind and, like Am Buaradair, carry the unwary towards Criochan an Nàmhaid. The many euphemisms designed to avoid naming Satan or attracting his attention somehow only serve to make him more real. He is seen to be present in every lapse, waiting at every door. Fortunately, the names of Satan are many times outnumbered by the names of Christ, whose power is by far the greater.

**Birds and beasts**

*Am fàsach* also has its birds and beasts, both natural and supernatural. It has serpents and dragons who haunt the ruins of ancient cities, owls who are always in mourning, unicorns who are able to speak and reason with man, but unwilling to serve him.\(^{346}\) Like Job, all are outcasts, excluded from the companionship of their fellow-creatures. ‘Is bràthair mi do na dragonaibh agus is companach mi do na comhachaibh’.\(^{347}\) An Nathair and An Dràgon are well known in evangelical verse as manifestations of Satan. In Iain Gobha’s ‘A’ Bhuaidh Larach’, An Dràgon poisons the heart of the sinner:

\begin{quote}
Naimhdeil, graineil, neo-gheanmnaidh,
Ionad taimhe gach anamaint,
\end{quote}

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\(^{345}\) Appendix 3.
\(^{346}\) Job 39.10-12; 24.
\(^{347}\) Job 29.29.
Tobair nimhe ro shearbh e,
Lan do phuinnsean ro mharbhteach an Dràgoin. (v. 3)³⁴⁸

Is puinnsean nimh thu ro laidir
O ghath na nathrach, an Dràgoin,
Tharruing mallachd us bas oirnn,
Iomhaigh sgreamhail an t-Satain. (v. 3)³⁴⁹

Isaiah prophesies that the land will be turned to a wilderness and given over to unclean beasts and birds. ‘Sealbhaichidh am pelican agus a’ ghràineag i, agus gabhaiddh a’ chaileach-oidhche agus an fithich còmhnuidh inne’.³⁵⁰ In the midst of this desolation, a path will be made by which the faithful may reach Sion. ‘Agus bidh rathad mòr an sin, agus slighe, agus goirear Slighe na Naomhachd dheth’. Iain Smith, missionary and poet, reassures the traveller:

Ged a dheadh do chuaireachadh le innealan a’ Bhuairidh
Bidh cumhachd an Ard Bhuachaill ’toirt buaidh dhuit gach àm
Ged thigeadh fearg an Dràgoin gu sèideadh gaothan bàsmhor
’S tu air do chuir fo’ amhghair le Sàtan ’sa Ghleann. (v. 3)³⁵¹

Using illustrations bordering on the Gothic, he trusts that ‘Gealladh Dhé’ will protect him from lions, wolves and wild dogs, from savage tribes and cannibals, even from the lies of his ungrateful children:

‘N uair chuireas e a’ bhrìathran g’ an cuideachadh ’s iad iosal
Bidh teicheadh dol air Diabhuil ’s air eunlaith a’ bhàis,
‘N uair a thug e órdugh do armaitean nan lòcuist
Bha gooth an ear gu leòr dhoidh gan doirteadh gu sàl. (v. 7)³⁵²

The wilderness has ‘madaidh agus drèun Orr’ and ‘eunlaith a’ bhàis’. It has ‘luchd nan goibean cnamaha ro chàileal air d’ heeòil’ [sic.] and ‘canabals fo amhghair

³⁵⁰ Isaiah 34.11; 35.8.
³⁵¹ ‘Seasmhachd A Gheallaidh do ’n Eaglais’, in Smith nd., pp. 7-12.
³⁵² Smith, v. 7; Exodus 10.13. (Thug gooth an ear a steach na locuist).
airson do bheatha thairsinn’. It has its cormorants and ravens, the eagle who never
dies, except of hunger, and the archetypal ‘pelican an fhàsaich’, emblematic of
loneliness and sorrow. It also has small defenceless birds, sparrows and larks whose
natural home is the sky, but who are bound to the earth: ‘Aon là mar eun le cloich ri
’sgiath / ’S là eile ag éirigh suas’. Murchadh MacLeòid of Liurbost gives a vivid
description of his own turus an fhàsaich, deserted by both God and man:

Tha ’n Dia bith-bhuan ’s a shluagh air m’ fhàgail,
Mar eun gun sgiathan fo shian an fhàsaich. (v. 1)

He describes how Man is caught up in the war between God and Satan, hunted
through the wilderness by An Nàmhaid. He tries to understand why Man’s great
enemy had been able to reach into the Garden of Eden, and sees that the Fall of Man
had been ordained before the world began. For him, the wilderness is cold and
frozen. He is forced to drink from the bitter cup, but he finds ‘an t-sligh’ rinn Dia do
’n Chriosduidh’ and discovers that there is a way through. He reasons that even Satan
is bound by God’s will, and cannot pursue him forever:

Tha ’n saoghal truagh so le fluachd ’s le reòtachd,
Tha deochan cruaidh aig do shluagh ri òl ann,
Cum mi ag iarraidh fo sgiath do thròcair,
’S thèid orra crioch ged tha An Diabhull seòlta. (v. 10)

Janet MacPhail of Bragar tells of Iain Fhibhig, an elderly man from Shawbost who
had been ill for many years. He sees all his old friends being ‘taken home’ before
him, while he lingers in great pain and distress. He has reached the end of his
journey, but is left standing at the harbour, waiting for a ferry which always leaves
without him:

353 ‘Seasmhachd A Gheallaidh do ’n Eaglais’, in Smith nd., pp. 7-12, vv. 6; 7; 11.
355 ‘Cath a’ Chreidimh’, in MacLeòid, Liurbost nd., pp. 3-4.
Though he says he has no words to describe his feeling of isolation and abandonment, the simple mention of ‘pelican an fhàsach’ calls up vivid images of terminal illness, days fading away like smoke, parched skin, flesh like withered grass, bones burning with pain. The cup of tears, the bread that is like ashes in his mouth, the loss of strength and the sentence of death are all evoked by this one phrase. In ‘Marbhrann do Mhaighstir Caldair’, Dr Domhnullach combines the imagery of ‘pelican ’s an fhàsach’ with that of ‘craoibh ann am fàsach’. Where father and sons had once stood together like trees, lending each other strength, one now stands alone stripped of leaves and branches:

Tha fear do ’n àl a tha air fhàgail
Mar am pelican ’s an fhàsach;
’S cha ’n es’ bu lugha aobhar chràidh,
’N tra thugadh ’bhràithair caomh uaith:
Tha e mar chraoibh bhiodh ann am fàsach
O ’n d’ fhalbh gach duill’ is geug a dh’fhàs oirr’,
Is e ri tuireadh goirt a ghnàth,
Gu ’n d’ fhàgadh e ’n a aonar. (v.107)

357 Psalm 102. 2nd version.
That same biblical image of utter loneliness appears in a secular marbhrann by a young woman from Alvie, Badenoch. It was composed for her intended husband, Donald MacGregor, who had drowned in the Spey the night before their wedding:

Mar phelican ’s an fhàsach mi,
Mar chailleach-oidhch’ nan gleann,
Mar bharr an fhraoich ’n a theine,
Tha mo chridhe air a chràidh. (v. 5) 359

Indigenous belief

Biblical allegory transfers effortlessly from teaching doctrine to supporting indigenous belief. Where the Bible is ‘inerrant and infallible’ its slightest pronouncement may be used to support an argument, regardless of its original context. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes warns against maligning those more powerful than oneself for fear of being overheard: ‘Giùlainidh eun an adhair an guth, agus innsidh an ni air am bheil sgìathan a’ chùis’. 360 Ceit NicDhòmhnaill, of Tarbert, composing in the early 1990s, takes his words literally as validation of Gaelic beliefs attributing powers of prescience to birds. In an introduction to her poem ‘Guth nan Eun’, she quotes Ecclesiastes, putting her own interpretation on his words:

Thug Dia dhaibh eòlas agus ro-aithne a chum E air ais bho na daoine. Is ann tro theachdaireachd nan eun a fhuair mise a-mach air iomadh uair gun robh rud a’ dol a thachairt.

Bhuail eun beag glas le bhroilleach ciùin
Uinneag an taighe air an taobh chùil
Fhuair mise fios ro cheann na h-uair
Nach robh mo bhràthair tuilleadh buan. (v. 1) 361

360 Ecclesiastes 10.20.
The fact that Ceit NicDhòmhnaill’s poem appeared in The Church of Scotland’s magazine *Life and Work* lends another layer of credence to this belief, simply by virtue of its being published there. Gaelic proverbs such as ‘Tha fios fithich aige’ and ‘Innsidh na geòidh as t-fhoghar e’, whose figurative meanings are equally open to literal interpretation, sometimes take on the status of objective fact.\(^{362}\) The instability of the border between traditional belief and biblical teaching was apparent in *Life and Work* sixty years earlier as the proverb ‘Tha creideamh aig na h-eòin nach eil agadsa’ was used to introduce an anonymous poem ‘As-creideamh’, even though the poem itself was entirely biblical in its assurance that man would be provided for just as birds were:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Feuch eòin na speur a’ seinn gu binn} \\
\text{Cha chuir iad sìol ’s cha bhuaín,} \\
\text{Gidheadh tha Dia a’ freasdail dhaibh} \\
\text{Le choibhneis càirdeal buan. (v. 1)} \quad ^{363}
\end{align*}
\]

When Iseabail NicIlleathain of Balephuil, Tiree composed ‘Laoidh na smeòraich’ (recorded in 1968), it was the contrast between her own destiny and that of the bird which concerned her, the fact that the bird had no knowledge of good or evil and consequently would never face judgement:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nach sona dhuit aig àm do bhàs} \\
\text{Cha sàsuichear gu mòd thu.} \\
\text{Tuitidh tu sios air a’ lèir} \\
\text{’S gu bràth cha tig ort feòrìch;} \\
\text{Ach ’n uair a laidheas mise sios,} \\
\text{’S a dhinnichear o ’n fhòd mi,} \\
\text{Mur bi mi beò an Iosa Criosd,} \\
\text{Gun ditear a’ mhòd mi. (v. 3)} \quad ^{364}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{362}\) Iain MacIlleathainn and Maletta NicPhàil, *Seanfhacail is Seanchas: Proverbs and Folklore in Gaelic and English* (Stornoway: John MacLean, Maletta MacPhail, 2005), pp. 103, 108.

Belief in the prescience of birds, however often it appears in evangelical song, cannot be taken as mainstream Reformed doctrine. Individual songs may be neither doctrinally pure, nor intentionally transgressive and to take them as considered rationalisations of belief is unsafe. They are not, in general, composed by theologians, but by people bringing received wisdom into alignment with biblical teaching, making their own accommodations on the way. Motifs such as ‘cuibhle an fhòrtain’ and ‘gainmhein tìm’ may sit side by side with ‘rùintean Freasdail’, but do not enjoy the same orthodoxy.

**Fàsach na fairge**

Greater familiarity with the Old Testament brought fàsach na fairge, the land of Babylon, with all its connotations of exile and captivity, to join am fàsach as a metaphor for the sinful world. Poets and evangelists invoke Rìgh nan Dùl as they warn of its dangers, calling on Fear a’ Bhàta and Am Fear Stùiridh for help and guidance. The New Testament carries an extended allegory showing Christ as An Ti a’ Riaghladh air a’ Chuain. He is seen walking on the sea and calming storms, while the apostles Simon-Peter, Andrew, James and John are depicted as fishermen who become ‘iasgairibh air daoinibh’. The biblical symbolism of the sea, the fisherman and the net is explained in a parable:

A ris tha rioghachd nèimh cosmhuil ri lìon air a thilgeadh ’s an fhairge, agus a chruinnich de gach uile sheòrsa éisg. Agus air dha ’bhi lân, tharruing na h-iasgariean e chum na tràighe, agus air suidhe dhoibh, chruinnich iad na h-éisg mhaithe ann an soithichibh, ach thilg iad na droch éisg a mach. Is ann mar sin a bhitheas ann an deireadh an t-saoghail: théid na h-aingil a mach, agus dealachaidh iad na droch dhaoine á measg nam fireanan.

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365 The land of Babylon was called the Desert of the Sea, Fàsach na Fairge, see Cruden 1769, p. 421; See Appendix 8, ‘An Cuan nach Traoghadh’.


The logic of this depiction of the world as a sea is that the fish which the apostles take in their net are the souls of men. Those caught in the net and kept are the elect, those left or discarded are the damned. To what extent this understanding is any part of evangelical verse’s use of fásach na fairge for the sinful world is uncertain, but depictions of the soul drawn to shore in a net are not uncommon.

Fásach na fairge is not as clearly mapped as am fásach itself, but has definite limits and borders. It is bounded on one side by Tràighean Emanueil shuas and Cladach na Siorruidheachd, on the other by An Cladach Caillte and Tràigh a’ Bhròin. It has rocks upon which travellers may be shipwrecked, but also has Carraig na Slàinte and Carraig Bhuan nan Àl, depictions of Christ as the rock upon which the Church is built. Rathad an Teàrnaidh is to be found in the sea, just as it is on the land, but ‘tonnan garbh na fàsaich’ and ‘suthaibh a’ bhàis’ constantly threaten those who attempt to follow it and without the help of Am Fear Stiùiridh, none will reach Cala nan Neàmh.

Little was known, and much was supposed about the monstrous creatures of fásach na fairge. ‘Lebhíatan, an nathair-dhìreach agus Lebhíatan an nathair-lùbach’ and ‘an dràgon a tha ’s an fhairge’, who shared their names with Satan, lived in its depths. In the Sound of Harris, the ‘muca-mara mòra’ were familiar enough, but not entirely of this world. They were suspected of being relatives of the ‘iasg mòr’ who had pursued Jonah, acting as both jailer and prison cell before delivering him up for judgement. When local fishermen made a satirical song suggesting that Iain Gobha’s brother Calum Morison and his fellow elder Eoghan MacDhùghail had been carried off by one of these known agents of divine displeasure, Eibhric Morison reacted with considerable annoyance:

Gad bhiodh Calum agus Eoghan
Am muigh air druim na muice mòire
Gu ’m bu chomasach Iehobhah
Air bhi seòladh leò gu tir. (v. 2)

368 Leach, 1989, p. 595.
369 Isaiah 27.1.
Rinn E barrachd air Ionah
Ann an taisbeanadh a thròcair
Cha do leig e beud na chòir-san
Bha tri oidhche ’s là da broinn. (v. 3)\textsuperscript{370}

Popular perception of the sea and an acceptance of its role as messenger and executioner can be seen in John Flavel’s *New Compass for Seamen*, a collection of homilies and poems often quoted from the pulpit:

The waves of the sea are sometimes raised by God’s commission, to be executioners of His threatenings upon sinners. When Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord to Tarshish, the text saith, ‘The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea and there was a mighty tempest.’ These were God’s bailiffs, to arrest the runaway prophet.\textsuperscript{371}

Women of island and seaboard parishes must often have prayed that men be returned from the sea, and must also have been familiar with the condition of the bodies recovered. In 1889, Catriona NicRath of Harlosh, Skye, lamenting the drowning of Iain Mac a Phi and his son Seonaidh, comforts the mother that though Seonaidh’s body was not recovered, and though it may be in many small pieces, it will be returned. Even if each fragment is leaping over the sea in the bellies of fish his body will be made whole again on Là na h-Aiseirigh:

\begin{quote}
Ach mar tha ’n dàn ag innse dhuinn
Mar dh’èireas dhan an sluagh
Ged bhiodh iad nam bideagan
Gur chruiinn’chear iad ri uair;
Ged b’ ann am broinn an èisg bhiodh iad
A’ leumraich feadh a’ chuain,
\end{quote}

Far from being a product of her own imagination, this was nothing more than a simple re-statement of the Reformed concept of the indestructability of matter, as discussed by Thomas Boston in his ‘Nadur an Duine’:

Uime sin, biodh cuirp dhaoine air an càradh san ùaigh; lothadh iad an sin, agus biodh iad air an caiteadh as gus na smuirneanan a ’s lugha; no biodh iad air an losgdadh, agus an luaithre air a tilgeadh sna aimhnichibh, no a thilgeadh suas an aidhear, gu bhi air a sgaoileadh leis a’ ghaoith, biodh duslach mhiltain ginealach air an coimeasgdadh, agus deatach nan corpa marbh air a h-ioman thug agus uaith san aidhear; itheadh eòin no beathaiche fiathach na cuirp mharbh, no sluigeadh eisg na mara suas iad, air chor as gu ’n teid miora do chuirl dhuine a ta mar so air an gearradh as, gu bhi ’nam pàirt no eunlaith, do beathaichibh no do iasgaibh; […]

In daily life the sea was both benign and malevolent, one day providing food, the next taking husbands and sons as payment. It provides an immediate and obvious demonstration of the power of Rìgh nan Dùl over the elements, lending itself to dramatic illustrations of man’s weakness. Flavel quotes the Scythian philosopher Anacharsis as his authority for saying that seamen could not be counted either among the living or among the dead, being in fact a third order of being whose lives hung continually in suspense, on the borders of death and eternity. It was not only in sermons and doctrinal texts that this uneasy equilibrium between fear and dependence upon the sea was maintained. In women’s evangelical songs, as in the everyday lives of those who sang them, the sea could appear to be malignant in its own right, but they had no choice but to accept its governing power. In her cumha spioradail for the crew of a local fishing boat, Bean Iain Domhnullaich

373 Boston 1894, pp. 379-80.
374 Flavel 1801, pp. vi-vii.
acknowledges that the sea answers only to God, and in taking boat and crew, had acted at His command:

Cha b’ e aineolas air sàl
No bàt thug uath an cli,
Ach gun cual’ iad guth ’nan dàil,
A dh’aithn dhaibh tighinn gu crich,
Dol as cha ’n eil aig aon bho ’n àithn’,
A rinn o ’n àird dhuinn inns’,
Gu siubhail sinn do ’n uaigh tre ’n bhàs,
’S a chuan no ’g àiteach tir. (v. 6)\textsuperscript{375}

\textit{Abhainn Iordain}

After \textit{am fàsach}, the River Jordan is possibly the most powerfully symbolic geographical feature in the Bible, a liminal zone where the boundaries between the natural world and the world of the spirit are constantly crossed. In biblical historical terms, every aspect of the river Jordan is sacred. It is fed by streams from Mount Sion, where Moses took down the Ten Commandments. It runs through the Sea of Galilee, where Christ calmed the storm, fed the five thousand and worked miracles. Its waters were parted to allow the Israelites to cross into the Land of Canaan. Christ was baptised in Jordan. It was there that the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove and there that God acknowledged Christ as His Son.

In the figurative rhetoric of evangelical prayer, preaching and song, Jordan has all of these sacred associations, but is above all, the place where life and death meet. The association of Jordan with death is rooted in Bunyan’s depiction in \textit{Turus a’ Chriosduidh} of ‘na h-eilthirich a’ dol thar Abhuinn a’ Bhàis’ and ‘an aiseag suas chum Glòir’.\textsuperscript{376} The introduction to Dr Domhnullach’s \textit{marbhrann} for his father,

\textsuperscript{375} ‘Cumha’, Domhnullaich nd., pp. 21-5.
‘An Criosduidh air a Thurus gu Iordan’ speaks of Jordan as ‘an amhuinn a bha eadar an fhásach agus tir a’ gheallaidh, a’ ciallachadh le sin am bàs’. While this is undoubtedly its geographical location, as it were, in the symbolic language of evangelical verse, and the representation of death is its main function, it also carries the biblical associations of healing and purification. It was in Jordan that Namaan was cured from leprosy, reinforcing the powerful symbolism of sin as disease. ‘An luibhre’ and ‘an galar’, like sin, left sufferers as outcasts from their own people, indelibly marked, untouchable, incurable except by the healing hand of Fear Àrd an Lighiche. In evangelical song, Jordan’s waters run between life and death. In Reformed doctrine, at the point where life ends, there is no further possibility of Redemption, so crossing Jordan also divides eternal life in ‘cuan ghràidh nach traoghadh’ from eternal death in ‘cuan feirge nach traoghadh’.

4.3 Allegory and the elements

The soul as a boat

One of the oldest and most persistent allegories of Gaelic spiritual song is that of the soul as a boat being carried over the sea of life. Meg Bateman traces this metaphorical boat in Classical Gaelic verse from 1200 to 1600. Seathrún Céitinn describes it in his Trí Bior-ghaoithe an Bhàis of 1625. In 1926, An Fhianuis Ghàidhealach strongly recommends Céitinn’s book, printing a full-page extract which it titled ‘Facail Earail mun Bhàs’. It glosses twelve Irish words, assuring Gaelic readers that they will have no difficulty with the language: ‘Is e ‘Trí Bior-ghaoithe an Bhàis’ as ainm do ’n leabhar, agus tha iomadh deagh earal ann, mar a dh’haodas tu chreidsinn o na h-earranan so’:

Biodh a fhios agat, a dhuine, ó tharla gach guais i’ d’ chionn, amhail adubhramar thuas, nach fuláir dhuit luingseóireacht chliste do dhéanamh agus

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377 Domhnullach, 1885, pp. 120-42, (p. 119).
378 II Kings 5.14.
Making its way from Catholic Ireland to the Scottish Gàidhealtachd, weathering the Reformation to appear in seventeenth-century *laoidhean teagaisg*, the metaphor of the soul sailing towards the harbour of Heaven eventually reaches Evangelicalism and Bean a Bharra’s mid-eighteenth-century penitential:

Mar long gun seol mi ann an cuan,
Doinnean mhòr ri bord a’ strith;
Fhir a dh’huasglas air gach cas,
Glachd an acair, sabhail mi. (v. 11)

Reiteach cala do ’m anam fein,
Cuir trusgan nam breug so dhim;
O! ’S tu cheannaich mi o ’m bhas!
A measg do chloinne aireamh mi. (v. 12)\(^381\)

This frail vessel may, however, be set on the opposite course. Anna NicFhearghais’ description of her soul as a boat crewed by obduracy and self-indulgence heading for the shores of Hell as her conscience sleeps could have belonged as easily to Céitinn’s Ireland as to mid-nineteenth-century Kintyre:

Mile sonas a ’s faith do ’n cheud mhadainn a tha thu m’ choir,
Leis an t-saighead bha geur ’chum mo tharruing fuidh ’dochleas
B’ fhad’ a chaidil mi m’ thriall ’s m’ anam mianna gu bas fo sheol
Mo long le sgioba gun ghras, stuireadh thairis gu traigh a’ bhroin. (7. 1)\(^382\)

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\(^{381}\) ‘Gloir do ’n leigh d’ an leir mo lotaibh’, Kennedy 1786, 4.12; Appendix 7.3.

\(^{382}\) ‘Mile sonas a ’s faith’, NLSMS 14987, 7.1.
The ‘saighead bha geur’ which stops her is not one of the ‘saighean diamhair’ with which An Leighe lances Bean a Bharra’s festering wound, nor the arrow of doubt with which Satan pierses Nan Eòghain’s heart, but a sudden consciousness of Christ’s love and the realisation that she has been chosen in spite of her faults.

‘Do ghradh chuir stad air mo cheum / ‘ruith gu doimhneachd na leir-sgrios mhor’. 383 The metaphorical boat appears again in an earail, warning those who are still sleeping and have not heard the call, that they are drifting off course, and must inevitably be overwhelmed by the waves of death:

Thus’ ’tha fhathast gun chùram,
’S tha cadal na h-uine gun stà;
’S cian do chadal gun dûsgadh, Feuch an guth nach gabh diultadh a’ d’ dhàil:
Tha do long ’call a cùrsa,
’S i dol fo’ ann an suthaibh a’ bhàis;
Ach trid chreidimh a ’s ûmhlaich
Theid e tearunt gu dûthaich chanàin. (14. 5) 384

In a third song Anna appeals directly to Christ as An t-Iasgair, asking that He spread his net and draw herself and her companions to shore, or that as Fear Stiùiridh He take the helm and steer them to a land where they will be beyond doubt and temptation:

Sgaoil-sa d’ eangach ’nar sgriob, Agus socruich a’ d’ lion ar ceum;
’S dean ar tarruing gu tir, An taobh thall de gach ni ’ni breug:
’S tu fear dheanamh na sìth, Bheir thu dòchas d’ an ti nach geill, Ghlac thu ’n stiuir ann do dhòrn, Bheir thairis fo sheol do threud. (20.10) 385

383 ‘Mile sonas a ‘s faith’, NLSMS 14987, 7.4.
384 ‘B ’e mo mhiann air do Mhòráchd’, NLSMS 14987, 14.5.
With the publication of *Turus a’ Chriosduidh*, the allegory of the boat on a stormy sea was joined by that of the *aiseag*. The crossing of Jordan as the passing between life and death became the focus of songs of every degree of formality, from Dr Domhnullach’s *marhrann* for his father to *órain luaidh shoisgeulach*. An anonymous poet from the Bays of Harris sings of An Spiorad Naomha, whose step is so light as to leave no footprint on the Plains of Moab. He has freed her from captivity, brought her out of Sodom, and it is by His guidance that she will cross Jordan. She is fully confident that she will not be refused, knowing that payment for the ferry was made long ago in the ‘rèite’ made by Christ:

*Seist:*

Mo ghràdh air an Spiorad Naomha.

Mo ghràdh air an Spiorad Naomha
Rinn ar saoradh o gach dórainn. (v. 1)

‘N Spiorad Naomha ’s E bha uasal,
Thug E ’n sluagh a mach á Sodom. (v. 2)

Spiorad Naomha nan ceum crìont’
Air achannan brèagha Mhóaib. (v. 3)

‘S math nach e òr neo airgead,
Thèid a dhearbhadh abhainn Iordain. (v. 4)\(^{387}\)

Another poet, now known only as ‘Cailleach à Tharansay’, trusts that she will be taken across, claiming her right to an inheritance in Heaven by declaring her faith while on earth:

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\(^{385}\) ‘Moch ’sa mhaduinn ’n uair ’dhuìsg’, NLSMS 14987, 20.10.
\(^{386}\) ‘An Criosduidh air a thurus gu Iordan’, in Domhnullach 1885, pp. 120-42, v. 3.
The song, however, dates to the time of the Great War, and her hope of the next world is tempered by fears for this one. Friends and family are in danger and servicemen are being killed in such numbers that they will never be known or counted until the Last Trump is sounded:

Na nàimhdean ag iarraidh còir oirre
Sgeul brònach ri h-aithris. (v. 7)

'S tha mi duilich ma mo chàirdean
A mharbhadh am blàr ’s an teine. (v. 10)

'S cuid dhiubh air nach d’ hluair sinn cunntas
Sgeul thursach ri h-aithris. (v. 11)

Cuid eile dhiubh anns a’ Ghearmailt
Aig a’ Chealgair air an glasadh. (v. 12)

'S ceudan dhiubh nach tog an cunntais
Gus an seinn an trump air ’n anam. (v. 13)

The *Catechism’s* teaching that ‘dearbhbheachd air Gràs’, having been found, may weaken or be lost altogether is reflected in songs where, never confident of its position, the soul must wait and hope, uncertain when or how the *aiseag* will leave or

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where its journey will end. Mairi NicIomhair goes forward, full of apprehension. Her faith, however, is stronger than her fear. Knowing that many have gone before and that many will follow, she faces the waves and trusts herself to God’s mercy:

Ach bi toradh a ghràidh
Gu bràth ri fhaighinn
Cho fad ’s a thèid tràigheadh
Bi muir-làn ga leantainn
’S tha tonnan a’ chuin ud
Cho buain ’s cho maireann
’S gun cúmaidh na maraiche scòladh. (v. 8)

Catriona NicDhòmhnaill looks longingly at those who have escaped Rìgh nan Uabhas and crossed safely to the city of Rìgh nan Dùl:

An abhainn chuir orr’ uabhas
Nis sàbhailt’ air an cùl,
Fhuair iad aiseag fàbharach,
Rìgh nan Uabhas cha d’ fhuair dlùth.
An fhairge nis nan coinneamh
Tha mar chriostal soilleir ciùin,
I cuartachadh na cathrach,
Aite-còmhnaidh Rìgh nan Dùl. (v. 6)

Màiri M. NicGhillEathain describes the plight of those deceived by An Nàmhaid. Filled with pride and self-importance, refusing to accept advice or instruction, they now face crossing Jordan alone:

389 See MacLeod, 2006-9, p. 25, where he comments, ‘it is part of the Calvinist paradox that the elect cannot be self-assured’; Catechism, Question 81.
Though ‘mi-rùn na fairg’ is held in check by ‘rùn Dhè’, Màiri NicGhillEathain’s sea has all the malice of that depicted by Flavel as the elements combine to subdue the pride of the soul which denies its Creator. In Anna Gobha’s *cumha spioradail* for her brother and a crew of five local men lost between Berneray and Lochmaddy while lifting creels, she speaks of them as though they had literally set their course and sailed for the next world. They had known neither the time nor the direction, but had been guided over the waves to be gathered in unharmed, not like fish to the net, but by the Shepherd who knows His own and takes them into the fold:

Och gur e sinne air ar cràdh,
Na shàrachaidhean ’s na h-atharrachaidhean,
Dh’fhalbh Di Mairt a thogail chliabh,
‘S cha d’ fhuaireadh sgeul càit’ an deach iad. (v. 1)

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Ach an Tì a riaghladh shuas
An t-saoghal a-nuas chan atharraichear,
A stiùireadh àrd air bhàrr na toinn
A dh’ionnsaidh fonn nach faicear sibh. (v. 2)

Chruinnich E a chuid Fhèin
’S chan eilear beud ri dhèanar dhuibh,
Chruinnich E dhachaidh an còmhlan
A dh’ionnsaigh ’n crò gun dealachadh. (v. 4)\footnote{Anna Gobha, ‘O gur sinne a th’ air ar cràdh’, SA1977.099 A9.}

Her understanding is that when God extends His protection to men at sea, it may be to bring them home to their families, or it may be to take them home to Himself. That they should be gathered to the fold, a land-based image, rather than in the net, says something of the dread of losing men at sea and never recovering their bodies for burial.

\textbf{Leabhar Mòr na Cruitheachd}

In the pre-scientific world of the medieval theologian, the material world was seen as a book written by the hand of God, from which the ignorant understand nothing and from which the wise, in reading nature, read the thoughts of God.\footnote{Émile Mâle, \textit{The Gothic Image}, trans. Dora Nussey (London: Collins, 1961, [1\textsuperscript{st} edn. 1910]), p. 29.} In the context of evangelical \textit{dàin spioradail}, the whole of Creation is imbued with God’s power and may be looked to for instruction or feared as an instrument of rebuke. Sun, moon and stars reflect the glory of Àrd Rìgh na Flathais. Storms, snow, hail and wind are messengers for Rìgh nan Dùl, coming and going on command. Though originally given dominion over every living thing, the relationship between Man and the natural world had been tainted by The Fall, when Adam was cursed and nature became hostile. ‘Tha ’n talamh mallaichte air do shon: ann an doilgeas ithidh tu dheth uile làithean do bheatha.’\footnote{Genesis 1.26-30; 3.17.} Human nature itself became corrupt; ‘indisposed, disabled
and made opposite to all good and wholly inclined to all evil’. The concept of the ‘noble savage’ had no place in evangelicalism, with ‘truaileachd a thaobh nàdur’ impossible to escape and even the most devout engaged in a constant struggle with ‘the natural man’:

Tha truaileachd naduir ga ’r mealladh
Le iomadh car agus fiaradh,
Ar cridhe cealgach neo-fhalluin,
Lan aimhleis ain-iochd us diorrais. (v. 4)³⁹⁷

Creation, however, was still seen as reflecting its Creator. Flavel explains the perceived relationship between God and the natural world:

The whole Creation is God’s voice; it is God’s excellent hand-writing. The heavens, the earth, the waters, are the three great leaves of the book of God, and all the creatures are so many lines in those leaves.³⁹⁸

Alasdair MacDhiarmaid, in his essay on the spiritual aspects of Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir’s poetry, shows that this world-view was held even in 1913, maintaining that nature was both catechism and schoolbook to the non-literate poet:

Bha leabhar mòr na cruitheachd fosgailte da, agus fhuair e an leabhar so lom-làn do theagasc agus do fhiosrachadh. […] Bha leabhar an Fhreasdail aige, a’ teagasc dha gu bheil Dia ann, agus gur e tha riaghladh an t-saoghail.³⁹⁹

Gaelic honorifics such as Rìgh nan Dùl and Righ an Domhain express an underlying belief that the elements act at His command. This understanding makes metaphors drawn from the elemental power of the wind and the sea particularly potent. The

³⁹⁶ Westminster Confession, 6.4.
³⁹⁸ Flavel 1801, p. xviii.
more closely they reflect everyday reality, the more compelling their force. Dùghall Bochanan, for example, uses a limpet, the lowest possible form of life, fit for food only in times of famine, to show Man’s insignificance. He compares the sinner in Hell to a limpet on a rock, endlessly washed by the waves of God’s implacable anger:

Mar spårneig fuaighte ris an sgeir,
Tha iad air creagaibh goileach teann:
'Us dibh-fhearg Dhè a’ sèideadh chuain
Na thonnaibh buaireis thar an ceann. (381-4)\textsuperscript{400}

Mairearad Chaimbeul shows the elements both sharing and delighting in Man’s suffering, with the howling of the North wind in the hilltops echoing the cries of souls in torment:

Tha iomachar bhochd thruagh air
Daonan gun tâmh,
Caoidh nach d’ fhàn e bunailteach, gun ghluaisad,
Ann an seirbhis na ’n gràs.
E ga’ losgadh ’s ga’ lèire,
'S e ’g èughach le cràdh
'S e sgreadail is cruaidh
Na gaoth-tuath nam beann ard. (16. 4)\textsuperscript{401}

The wind may mock the cries of lost souls, but the natural world also reflects Gràs Dhè and holds out the possibility of redemption:

Tha dearsadh na Trianaid
'Deanamh solus air Neàmh,
Cò is urrainn ga ’innseadh,
Mile mhilltìbh da mhiorbhuillean treun,

\textsuperscript{400} ‘Latha Bhréitheanais’, in Meek 2015, pp. 138-79 (p. 169)
\textsuperscript{401} ‘Dhia chruthaich ’sa dheilbh sinn’, in Chaimbeul, 1810, 18.6.
Tha air muir a ’s air monadh
’S feadh a’ chruinne gu léir;
’S gach neach a ni iarraidh
As leth Chriosd chaidh fo ’n phéin;
Gheibh e fasgadh fuidh sgiathaibh
Agus siochadh dha féin. (16. 6)

When island poets look to Leabhar Mòr na Cruitheachd, they look out on sea and sky, winds, waves and storms. Some see the beauty of cotton-grass, marram and heather while others see only the nettles and rushes of abandoned villages and the thorns and thistles emblematic of expulsion from Eden. Rather than their native rowan, birch and pine, the eyes of faith see only the biblical palm tree, the olive, the fig and the vine. Eilidh NicComaraid, in ‘Nan dùisgeadh ar sluagh a buaidh a’ chadail’, sees neighbouring villages sunk in lethargy, their fields overrun with nettles, while a pomegranate, symbolic of resurrection and the hope of eternal life, lies disregarded at their feet:

Bha Rudh na h-Aird gu Ard Circ Phabuil
An Cnoc ri dol bàs le clo do chadal. (v. 3)

Ar liosan ri fàs le deanntag dhathach,
Pomagranad air fhalach ’sa choinneach. (v. 7)\footnote{Eilidh NicComaraid, ‘Nan dùisgeadh ar sluagh a buaidh a’ chadail’, MR (September 1940), 231; In Judaism the pomegranate is symbolic of righteousness. In Christianity it appears in Church architecture, sculpture, embroideries and paintings, symbolising resurrection and the promise of eternal life.}

On the mainland, Mrs Camashron of Rannoch has the Black Wood of Rannoch and the ancient gnarled trees of the Caledonian Forest to inspire her. Interpreting the biblical symbolism of the tree in terms of her native woodlands, she shows the earth flourishing under the rule of the Righteous King. Her laoidh molaidh ‘Am Meangan Cliùiteach’ is an exuberant panegyric of Christ triumphant. He is the tree growing from the royal house of David, spreading its sheltering branches from sea to sea,
deeply rooted in the earth but reaching above and beyond the heavens. The metaphor of the branch is drawn directly from Old Testament prophecies of the coming of Christ. ‘Agus thig geug a mach o bhonn Iesse, agus fásaidh faillean suas as a fhreumhan’: 403

O bhonn Iese bhrist a mach
Am Faillein gasda ûr,
Fior chrann uaine, taghta, luachmhor,
'S airidh e airt chiù;
Meangan uasal, torrach, buadhar,
'S e gach uair fo dhriùchd,
A gheugan dosrach sinne suas,
'S iad tarruing uaithe sùgh. (v. 1)

Crann ro thaitneach sgaoil ro fharsuinn
Mach o chuan gu cuan,
'S ann fo sàile gheibheal fiasgadh,
Taitneach do luchd-cuairt.
Tha àirde ruigeachd chum nan nèamh
'S thar nèamh nan nèamh a bhuidhech,
Tha mhaise 's àillseachd a toirt bàrr
Air gach crann dh’fhàs a suas. (v. 6) 404

Christ, embodied as ‘Am Meangan’, is praised in terms familiar from traditional Gaelic panegyric of the chief, beginning with His royal ancestry, ‘an crann a ’s riomhach o ’n stoc as rioghalf, tha ‘s an fhreith a’ fàs’. His personal beauty and noble attributes are described using patterns of assonance and strings of alliterative adjectives very much in the style of Donnchadh Bàn’s poems in praise of nature: 405

403 Isaiah 11.1; 11.10; Zechariah 6.12.
404 Mrs Camashron an Rannoch, ‘Am Meangan Cliuiteach’, in Laoidhean Spioradail le Domhnull Camashron, A bha na mhaighstir-sgoil Gàidhlig an Eilean Uibhist, Maille ri beagan laoighnean le ughdaran eile, (Glasgow: Donald Cameron, 1891), pp. 37-45; Appendix 7.20.
Mrs Camashron describes Christ’s role as provider for the people and His power over other kings in terms of the fertility of the land with its meadows, woodland birds sheltering amongst the branches of laden fruit trees and honey fresh from the honeycomb. In his essay, ‘Images of the King’s Peace and Bounty in Bardic Poetry’, Damian McManus shows trees bowing under the weight of their fruit as ‘the most common and enduring image by far’ in depictions of the rule of the righteous king.\footnote{See Damian McManus, ‘The Smallest Man in Ireland can Reach the Tops of the Trees’: Images of the King’s Peace and Bounty in Bardic Poetry’, in CSANA Yearbook 5: (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), pp. 61-117, (pp.103-8).}

In one poem, ‘Airne Fíngein’, an Otherworld woman describes a perpetually fruiting tree which had lain concealed in Ireland from the time of the Flood, said to have grown from a seed of the tree in Paradise. ‘Mugna a ainm in chraind sin’, for sisi, ‘mac in chraind a parrdus’.\footnote{McManus 2006, pp. 105-9 (pp. 107-8).} Whether or not Mrs Camashron was familiar with Gaelic or Irish bardic panegyric; or with medieval Bestiaries depicting souls as birds sheltering in the Tree of Life, or the religious art of wider Europe; Revelation 22.2 provides a clear point of contact between them.\footnote{Mâle 1961, p. 46.}

There, Craobh na Beatha, the perpetually fruiting tree which grew in Eden now grows in Paradise and is symbolic of Christ: ‘Craobh na Beatha a’ giùlan dà thoradh dheug, agus a’ toirt a toradh uaipe gach uile mhios; agus bha duilleach na craoibhe chum leighis nan cinneach’:

\begin{quote}
Meangan cliùiteach ’s e air lübach
Le úr-mheas chum an lâir,
Toirt toraidh trom gach âm ’s a’ bhliadh’n’
’S gu siorraind a’ toirt fàis,
\end{quote}
Tha e brioghar ’s mòr a mhilleachd
Do gach linn is àl,
‘S gach eun tha glan am measg na coill’
Gheibh iad fo ’n chraoibh so sgàil. (v. 5)

His protection is offered to all peoples through all generations, with the ‘stoirm mean’ and ‘doinnionn àrd’ in the eighth verse not gathered together to threaten the sinner, but to show that Christ stands immovable, above the elements and neither threatens nor is threatened:

Crann ro luachmhìor nach gabhs gluasad,
‘S nach luaig an doinnionn àrd;
Cha dean stoirm a fhreumhan fhuasgladh,
‘S cha chaill e shnuaadh no bhlàth.
E suidhichte air sléibhtean Israel
Le làimh an Ti a ’s àird;
‘S cha téid am feasd a ghearradh sios,
No chaoidh a spion’ às àit’. (v. 8)

The elements themselves, however, are far from benign. In the deserted village of Tangaidh on the exposed west coast of Lewis, Catriona Thangaidh dreads the powers of evil made manifest in storms and gales. ‘Nuair shéideas na gaothan / Mu thimchioll an t-saoghall g’a sgrios’. 409 In North Uist, Màiri NicGhillEathain sees torrents of rain, storms, lightning and all the forces of nature try their strength against Beinn Eubhal. Eubhal, however, was set in place at Creation, witnessed The Crucifixion, and stands immovable until the time appointed for its destruction:

Cha tàinig múthadh no caochladh ’nad chòir-sa
‘S a dh’ainneoin bùirein nan gaothan
Cha dèan thu crùbahdh no caoineadh
‘S cha chuir am Faoilleach no ’n Dùdhlaichd gu bròn thu. 410

In Liurbost, on the more sheltered east coast of Lewis, Catriona Urchadan sees the hand of the Creator in the myriad stars of the Milky Way set against the blackness of the night. In Kintyre, Anna NicFhearghais sees nature lift its voice in praise: ‘Dhuit seinneadh gach doire, gach coille ’us crann / Gach cuan agus mach-thir, gach gluc agus gleann’, yet even in this pastoral Eden, does not lose sight of the malevolence embodied in seas and storms, nor of the authority which governs them:

\[
\text{Tha gealach ’us reultan ’toirt sgeul air do chliu}
\]
\[
’S tu shuidhch san speur iad ’thoirt leirsinn do ’n dubhr’;
\]
\[
\text{Tha machrain ’us sleibhteann leat eindicth gu h-ur,}
\]
\[
\text{Le truidean de ’n fheur a ’s ort gheuraich e ’duil:}
\]
\[
\text{Tha aitireachd chuantaibh le borb thonnaibh mor,}
\]
\[
A’ clisgeadh roi’ d’ fhocal ’s gu h-callamh leat stold;}
\]
\[
\text{Tha geilt air an doinnion ro ach’dan do bheoil;}
\]
\[
’S tu chuartas gu h-obann, a ghaoith ann a d’ dhorn. (9. 3)
\]

**Conclusion**

The use of biblical metaphor and allegory in Gaelic evangelical song marks many levels of community identity. It binds church communities together, showing them as distinct from other churches and from the secular world. An understanding of its complexities also marks degrees of distinction within the churches, with adherents inhabiting a different poetic world from the *luchd-aideachaide*, who in their turn inhabit a lower stratum than the elite band who encode their conversation in *dubh-chainnt*. There are different hierarchies of symbolism, from the universally understood *turus an fhásaich* to more esoteric references intended to conceal rather than reveal. Inheriting a legacy of symbolism from the early Christian Church, the poetic language of evangelical song has been informally codified, passed down from generation to generation to be subjected to literal, moral or mystical interpretation according to the mood of the times.

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412 ‘Thoir neart dhomh ’s gu ’m b’ urrainn le h-urram mi luadh’, NLSMS 14987, 9.3-4.
Chapter 5: Bean a Bharra, Bean Torra Dhamh and Mairearad Chaimbeul

Where earlier chapters have explored the historical, literary and cultural context of women’s evangelical song, quoting a variety of poets, some anonymous, others barely known outside their own localities, the following three chapters bring a smaller number of poets into sharper focus. Each poet is set as far as possible within her own historical context with brief biographical details followed by detailed literary analysis of a sample of her songs. As discussed earlier, the evangelical poet constantly validates her message by associating it with texts of greater authority, the Bible, the Catechism, a sermon or another song. Interpretation depends upon recognising these associations and reading them in relation to the personal and cultural context of her song. Retracing such connections, many of which border on the subliminal, carries the risk of error and omission. It can, however, offer insights into the complexity of apparently simple songs and allow us to explore their richly imaginative worlds in greater depth.

5.1 Bean a Bharra, Anna Campbell

Our earliest record of Anna Campbell as a poet is not in her spiritual verse, but as the ‘Ostag mhì-nàrach an Òbain’ who in 1745 had provoked Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair with an anti-Jacobite song. With nothing of the original extant, the substance of her song survives only in Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s response. Seemingly, she had mocked the Camerons and MacDonalds for supporting a Prince of doubtful legitimacy and insulted the Gentle Locheil, a man renowned for his gallantry and magnanimity. In ‘An litir gun chèir oirr’, Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair addresses her as ‘Nighean Donnchaidh Duibh Nòtair’, while in ‘An Àirce’ she is the ‘Ostag mhì-nàrach an Òbain’. These ostensibly disparate ranks were not as far apart as they would later seem. The General Assembly’s expulsion of dispossessed Episcopalian incumbents from their parishes, in progress since 1693, and the post-1715 forfeiture of over fifty Highland estates had left many families in financial straits. Small tenants turned to distilling in order to pay ever-increasing rents, while numerous

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impoverished gentlemen of good family and education set up as innkeepers.  

Donald MacKinnon, in discussing Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s unpublished poems, also places Anna Campbell as an innkeeper in Oban:

Miss Campbell, it appears, wrote to the poet, who replied in filthy quatrains which the editor of the Glasgow edition of 1839 got hold of somehow and printed.[…] Miss Campbell at this time kept an inn in Oban, known as Tigh Clach a’ Gheòidh. […] She afterwards married, and lived for a time at Barr in Morvern, and subsequently in Craignish, where she died, about the age of seventy.  

Iain Thornber mentions Tigh Clach a Gheòdha in the same connection:

It had been tenanted by Duncan Campbell, whose wife Anna composed some robust anti-Jacobite verse, and who later lived for a time at Barr, in Morvern. 

Even had Anna’s anti-Jacobite song spread no further than her immediate neighbourhood, Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair may well have heard it for himself. His journal, as recorded in The Lyon in Mourning, shows him in Oban with Prince Charles Edward, Colonel O’ Sullivan, Ned Burke and Captain Allan MacDonald just three days after the defeat at Culloden:

19th April 1746: Upon Saturday’s morning, being the 19th, he came to Oban in Kinlochmors, a corner of ClanRanald’s estate, and for their further security contented themselves that night for their lodgement with a small sheall house near a wood.  

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414 MacInnes 1951, pp. 52-3.  
416 Norman MacLeod, Morvern: A Highland Parish, ed. by Iain Thornber (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2002 [1867]), p. 204, note 86.  
That a Hanoverian innkeeper could openly mock his fallen clansmen as ‘prasgan nan Garbh-chrioch’, while he, as a Highland gentleman and a captain in the Jacobite army could command no shelter for the Stewart Prince, was a humiliation not soon forgotten. 418

Though there is no certainty as to the dates of Anna Campbell’s birth, marriage or death, her father’s name appears regularly in the Sheriff Court Books of Argyll between 1707-19 as Duncan Campbell, Notary Public, Lorne, and Duncan Campbell, Notary, Blaircrine. 419 In 1713, a transaction concerning cattle mentions his son Donald Campbell, presumably Anna’s brother, and another later that year shows Duncan Campbell, Notary Public in Lorne, taking a share of a five-year lease on the tacks of Blarcrine and Kenacraig. According to Kennedy, Donnacha Dubh Nòtair and his partner Mr Campbell of Rudle handled virtually the whole of the conveyancing business of Argyll. 420 By 1754 Anna was evidently married, with her husband Duncan Campbell taking over the 4,224 acre tack of Barr, where he later built a house reflecting his status as one of a new generation of tacksmen, ‘colonising agents of Campbell control and polity’. 421 Anna Campbell was now Bean a Bharra, mistress of Barr House, one of a group of Morvern tacksmen’s houses exemplifying the spirit of late eighteenth-century ‘Improvement’ in Scotland.

Having been an active propagandist for the Presbyterian Hanoverian faction, with the Jacobite threat averted she turned her attention to the Evangelical movement. Duncan Kennedy saw her evangelical songs as an admission of defeat, an indication that Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair’s attack had ‘silenced her poetical muse for ever’. 422 An alternative interpretation could be that her anti-Jacobite songs were part and parcel of the Presbyterian objection to a Catholic monarchy, while evangelical songs allowed

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420 Kennedy, 1836, p. 64; Gaskell, 1996, p. 5.

421 Daniel Maudlin, ‘Tradition and change in the Age of Improvement: A study of Argyll tacksmen’s houses in Morvern’, Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, Scotland 133 (2003), 359-74 (pp. 359, 365)

422 Kennedy 1836, p. 64.
her a new role as teacher and religious reformer. The change in her circumstances and in her poetry did not go unnoticed by Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, who in one song accuses her of enriching herself by plundering Jacobite property, in another mocks her for usurping the role of the minister:

Ach ’s truagh a nis an duais a th’ agaibh,
’N déis ’ur laigse rùsgadh;
Ach na fluair sibh phlundruinn mhaslaich,
Bheir plàigh, creach, is sgiùrs’ oirbh.423

A bhana-mhinisteir ascaoin
A fluair blas air an t-searbhaig,
’S i mhiosguin an texta
’N do shocraich do shearmoid.424

Her Evangelical sympathies can be inferred from this account of her hospitality towards an itinerant evangelist, Mr Robert Harrison, a Wesleyan missionary from Nottingham:

On one occasion he arrived late one night at Barr on the shores of Loch Teacuis. Mrs Campbell, the tacksman’s wife with whom he was to lodge, ventured to say to him, ‘I am sorry I am not better prepared for entertaining you Mr Harrison. I did not expect you today’. The pious man only answered, ‘Beware my dear friend, lest death find you thus unprepared’.425

Mid-eighteenth-century Evangelicalism was an exciting and innovative movement with waves of enthusiasm sweeping down from the Easter Ross Revival of 1730-9 and northwards from the Kilsyth and Cambuslang Revivals of 1739 and 1742.426 English preachers such as John Wesley and George Whitfield were immensely

423 MacKinnon 1907-9, p. 228.
424 MacKinnon 1907-9, p. 124.
425 MacLeod 2002, p. 231.
426 MacInnes 1951, pp. 156-7.
influential in the Lowlands. In the Highlands, John Balfour of Nigg, James Fraser of Alness and a growing body of itinerant evangelists were preaching to gatherings of thousands, with nòtaichean of their sermons spreading in the oral tradition and a corresponding upsurge in dàin spioradail.\footnote{See Fraser of Alness, pp. 57-8, above.} The practice throughout the Highlands was for neighbouring families to walk to Church together, engaging in discussion of a specific text as they went. There were recognised places where they would sit and rest, join in prayer and sing spiritual songs. On the return journey each would be expected to contribute a ‘note’ from the sermon, which would lead to further discussion.\footnote{MacInnes 1951, pp. 126-7.} Morvern had two churches, Cill Choluimchille and Ferinish, with a well-established track between Barr and Ferinish, a distance of around four miles, and a track of close to twelve miles between Barr and Cill Choluimchille.

‘Geillibh do lagh an Ard-Righ’

Bean a Bharra’s song, ‘Geillibh do lagh an Ard-Righ’, could be visualised as one of these companionable journeys.\footnote{Kennedy 1836, pp. 65-8. Appendix 7.3.} It has nòtaichean from the sermon, a devotional passage, then a listing of the comharraidhean. She combines these elements in the form of a laoidh teagaisg, making them accessible to those unable to attend services, or those who, unlike herself, cannot read the English Bible. Her song is simple, direct, almost conversational. Though informal in tone, it is carefully structured in terms of doctrine, detailing successive Covenants between God and Man. The fact that her ‘sermon’ is followed by a discussion of the comharraidhean suggests the possibility that this song is her response to a particular Òrduighean, echoing the voices of the elders ‘speaking to the question’ on Latha na Ceist:

\begin{verbatim}
Geillibh do lagh an Ard-riagh,
Do reir iomhaidh rinn na sloigh;
Ge do pheacaich Adhamh sa gharradh,
Cha do threi e riamh ’n t-al og. (v. 1)
\end{verbatim}
Adam’s breaking of the First Covenant and the expulsion from Eden is familiar territory and is given a single line. Her true concern is with the regaining of man’s lost inheritance. The Covenant made with Abraham, by which his descendants would inherit an earthly kingdom, and the Covenant made with David, whereby the continuation of his royal line was assured, are used to show that God is faithful to His promise. With the Synod of Argyll’s Sailm Dhaibhidd having been in local circulation since 1694, her companions could have been expected to recognise her line, ‘Cha do threig E riamh ’n t-al og’, as a reflex of Psalm 89, 30-4, ‘Ma se a gun tréig a chlann mo lagh […] mo choimhcheangal cha bhrisear leam / no ’n cúmhnant rinn mi ris’. Her song implies what the Psalm makes explicit; that before regaining his inheritance, man must suffer the devastation of both countryside and farmland. His royal house will fall, his armies flee in battle, his land be overrun by an invading army. He will be preyed upon by strangers and become an object of contempt to his neighbours. The fact that this was exactly the situation in which post-Culloden Morvern found itself made her message all the more pointed:

Am fearran a gheall e do dh’Abraham,
Cha d’ fhailnich e shliochd na dheidh;
Thug e do dhuthaich Chanaan iad,
Ge b’ fhad an dail b’ fhior an sgeul. (v. 2)

Despite rebellion and disaffection Abraham’s descendants had been given the land which was promised. Bean a Bharra, however, seems anxious to reassure her companions, ‘Ge b’ fhad an dail b’ fhior an sgeul’, as though to them, in this time of agrarian reform, promises of land were easily made but rarely kept:

‘N tra’ chaidh Clann Israel sios do’ n Eipht,
Bha iad fo phein ann ’s fo chis;
Thug Righ nan Colbh roi ’n Mhuir Ruadh iad,
Ach dh’fhàg Righ Pharaoh ’sa shluagh shios. (v. 3)

The Israelites’ escape from Egypt with its account of the Ten Plagues, Aaron’s contests with Pharaoh’s magicians and the dividing of the Red Sea was familiar from
the Psalms and often re-told in sermons and *dàin spioradail*. Here, Bean a Bharra follows the style of the itinerant evangelists, eliciting her companions’ sympathy for Moses, as though he were well known to them, one of the *bodaich* whose stories no one believed:

Chuala sibh Maois an duine coir  
A bha ’n comhrag cruelh ’s an Eipht;  
Mar theachdair thainig o Dhia,  
’S nior chreid iad riamh smid da sgeul. (v. 4)

’S iomad plaigh dh’fhuing am por ud,  
’S iad a ruigh le dochas breig;  
Cha roibh ’m Maois leo ach fear chleas,  
Beagan bu treis’ na iad fein. (v. 5)

To the Egyptians, Moses was just another magician. They had no idea whose power they were testing as they set up their contests. Exodus explains the Plagues of Egypt as *comharraidhean* which were to be of such diversity and such severity that accounts of them would be passed down to all succeeding generations.\(^{430}\) The ultimate *comharradh* was to be made on the Israelites’ doors with the blood of a newly sacrificed lamb, the ‘*uan gun ghaoid’*. Seeing this mark, Am Millteir would pass over their houses and their firstborn would be spared.\(^{431}\) In Judaism, the story of the Ten Plagues of Egypt is recounted annually at the Feast of the Passover. For Christians, it is told and retold in sermons and *dàin spioradail* because the sacrifice of the Passover lamb is seen as foreshadowing the sacrifice of Christ, the ‘*Uan gun Chiont’*, whose death bought Redemption:

Thainig aingeal o’ch o Dhia or’r’,  
’S mharbh e ’n ciadh ghin fad na h-Eiphte;  
’S a mhadain bu chruaidh an gabhadh,  
‘O! Leigibh as clann Israel’. (v. 6)

\(^{430}\) Exodus 10.1-2 ; Exodus 12.5.  
\(^{431}\) Exodus 12.23.
Bean a Bharra interposes a passage of direct speech to move her narrative forward, with the cry of the Egyptians, ‘O! Leigibh as clann Israel’ marking the end of the captivity and the beginning of the journey in the wilderness. The biblical wilderness is both an actual and a liminal place, where man meets with God, or with Satan. The Red Sea guards its border with Egypt, the River Jordan its border with Canaan, but both must yield to the power invested in the Slat Dhé given to Moses:

Do ghluais Maois leis a chlainn,
Gan tabhairt a broinn na h-Eipht’;
Thug e gu cos na Muir Ruaigh iad,
’S dh’fhosgail Dia suas na clar rè dhoibh. (v. 7)

Ghluais Righ Pharoah, ’s b’aithreach dho,
An deidh sloigh clainn Israel;
Thainig le stoilbh trid a’ chuain ud,
’S dhuin a muir mor suas a beul air. (v. 8)

The Red Sea, its innate malevolence temporarily subdued, allows the Israelites to pass, then rises up to seize the pursuing Egyptians in its jaws. Bread falls like dew and water springs from desert rocks. The tributaries of Jordan hold back their waters and the Israelites pass dryshod into the promised land:

Bhuail e ’n t-slat ’sna creagan cruaidhe,
’S bhruchd an t-uiisge fuar anios;
’S ur a thog e fein an t-al ud,
Gar ’n do chreid a dha chlar sgriobht’. (v. 10)

An cumhnanta rinn e ri Abraham,
Bha a lamhsan leis an treud;
Thiormaich e ropa sruth Ihordan,
’S thug e steach iad da ’n coir fein. (v. 11)

432 Exodus 4. 2-9, 20. Am Fàsach, pp. 130-2, above.
433 Joshua 3. 16-17.
Though Moses was never to cross Jordan, the Covenant with Abraham remained inviolable. Sun and moon stood side by side for six hours while the Israelites annihilated the armies of the five Amorite kings of the mountain tribes. ‘Agus stad a’ ghrian, agus sheas a’ ghealach, gus an do dhìol an sluagh iad féin air an naimhdean’:

Dh’eirich na fineachan fiathaich,
Bu dian ann an cath, nan ceud;
Sheas a’ ghrian leis suas sea uaire,
Gus ’n do bhuadhaich leis gu leir. (v. 12)

Each stage of this journey was to become iconic in the allegorical setting of dàin spioradail, but here, when for most the Old Testament was only known in extempore translation and held in oral memory or sung in the Psalms, the imperative is to teach biblical history. The crossing of Jordan has yet to carry the significance which it was to acquire when redefined in Turus a’ Chriosduidh. The Ainmean Cliùiteach, however, are already being used to offer context, contrasting the temporal power of Pharaoh with the eternal power of God. Rìgh Pharaoh may hold the Israelites in captivity, but God is Àrd-Rìgh and Rìgh nan Colbh, the King of Sceptres by whose authority the Slatan Dhè given to Aaron and Moses raise plagues, control nature and defeat ‘druidhean na h-Eiphit’. Depicted as Dia Treun ann Cath san Comhrag, He wins a decisive victory over the ‘fineachan fiathaich’ who rise up against His chosen people – just as the Jacobite ‘prasgan nan Garbh-chrioch’ had been brought under government control. At the same time He is a loving father. He guides his children, feeds them, provides them with water, protects them from marauding tribes. He even stops the sun in its tracks for them. In the end, irritated by their disobedience, He decides to leave them to themselves for a time:

Pobull ceannairceach, cruaidh, dana,
Ag sior bhriseadh aith’nte Dhe;

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434 Joshua 10.6-13.
Ghabh Dia fearg ag mead an cleas riu,
’S leig e greis iad leo’ a fein. (v. 14)

Bean a Bharra also leaves the Israelites to one side and moves forward to the New Covenant, by which Christ undertook to redeem man’s debt with His own blood. She finds the story ‘ain-deoin chruaidh ri leubha’, suggesting the possibility that she now has a copy of *An Tiomnadh Nuadh*, which was published in 1767, and is for the first time feeling the full emotive power of the Gospels in her own language:

Bha sinn mar chaoirich gun bhuachaill,
Gun neach a ghabhadh truas dhinn ann;
Ach Dia treun ann cath san comhrag,
Chuir e Mhac le deoin n’ ar ceann. (v. 15)

B’ e sin an deoin chruaidh ri leubha,
Mac De bhith ga chur ri crann;
An Gaisgeach Sona rinn ar ceannach,
Air a bhas thug buaidh d’ an ain-deoin. (v. 16)

As she speaks of Christ her perspective changes from ‘iad’ to ‘sinn’, as though suddenly understanding that this Covenant concerns herself and her neighbours. It is a turning point on her journey, a brief vision of Redemption. The ‘reiteach’ has been made, the ‘eiric’ paid. If she and her companions can follow this guiding light, they will reach Aros Dè and regain the inheritance lost by Adam:

Dhil e ar ’n ainmheach le eiric,
’S ann duinn’ a b’ eibhinn bhi da choir;
Leanadh sibhse an t-iul ghlan sholuis,
’S reachadh na choinneadh le solas. (v. 17)

’S iomadach ait leis ga reiteach,
Le sith dhuinne an Aros De;
Far am fuigh sinn cuirm a nasgaidh,
’S nach gabh sinn ocras na dheidh. (v. 18)

The *comharraidhean* set by the elders on *Latha na Ceist* mark out the spiritual path which she must take. Following their example she proposes a text, going to the Book of Proverbs for the archetypal opposition of the ‘amadan’ and the ‘duine ciallach’:

‘Tha slighe an amadain ceart ’n a shuilibh féin; ach tha esan a dh’èisdeas ri comhairle glic’.

Ach triallaidh ’n t-amadan na shlighe,
A reir miann a chrìdhe fein;
Gus an druidear suas san uaigh e,
’S nach d’ thug air Dia luadh ri re. (v. 19)

As t-fhearann no deansa bosd,
’S as do stor, no dhosan geill;
Oir lead an roinne ’s caoile ad cheann,
Cha’n fhuasgail iad thall am feasd. (v. 20)

The ‘amadan’, who sees himself as sole arbiter of his own conduct is contrasted with the Christian, who accepts a higher authority. Neither land nor possessions nor pride in her own intellect can stand against death. As she urges her companions, ‘Gabh mo chomhairle, ’s glac ciall’, the ‘ciall’ she speaks of is not simply wisdom as opposed to folly. It encompasses learning, doctrine, piety and above all Christ, who as The Word is the very incarnation of wisdom:

Gabh mo chomhairle, ’s gluc ciall,
’S biodh do mhiann air a chuid is fearr;
Bi tric an comhladar Dhia,
’S luighide t’ fhia’ roì’ ghleann a bhais. (v. 21)

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435 Proverbs 12.15.
436 Cruden 1769, p. 559; John, 1.1.
Bi tric a’ taghal do ’n t-searmaidh,
’S na dearmaidh cho’ ch focal De;
Feith gu foighdeach ri ordadh,
’S mo’ aide do phorsan fein. (v. 22)

Im’ich a d’ laithean gu coir,
’S no dean tair air duine bochd;
Seachain gach droch bheirt fo ’n ghrein,
An t-eagal gun eughor thu do ’n t-sloc. (v. 23)

Reflection goes hand in hand with exhortation as she searches her heart for the
comharraidhean Gràis. Those which she lists: constant communion with God in
prayer, attending services, studying the scriptures, accepting God’s will,
acknowledging one’s sin, avoiding dubious company and inappropriate
entertainments, replicate those put forward at present day Latha na Ceist services.

Her final verse moves into classical and Jacobite iconography which she, of all
people, might have been expected to avoid. The ancient Greek symbol of the Wheel
of Fortune was widely used in medieval religious art and architecture to depict the
instability of the world. ‘Cuibheall an hfortain’ was also a favourite motif of
Jacobite song. Even though Bean a Bharra’s ‘faic an roth so dol mun cuairt’ is
impeccably linked to the biblical ‘is duslach thu agus gu duslach pillidh tu’, the fact
remains that ‘the wheel of fortune’ is far from being an orthodox Reformed
concept. It comes, possibly as a parting shot from a reformed satirist, to warn
those still clinging to Episcopalian or Jacobite loyalties that Providence itself is
against them:

Faic an roth so dol mun cuairt,
Neach cha ’n eil a dol o ’n bhas;
Gach fear, ’s gach bean thainig riamh,
Thriall iad uile ’n dus o ’n d’ thainig. (v. 24)

437 Appendix 2.
439 Genesis 3.19.
Whether this song is structured around a sermon which she had heard or is entirely her own is impossible to determine. Though it almost certainly depends on the Catechism and the Westminster Confession for the teaching on the First and Second Covenants, the Covenant with Abraham is not made explicit in either.\textsuperscript{440} Her own linking of all the Covenants by way of the Psalms is coherent and shows a considerable degree of theological understanding. She appears to be addressing her own social circle and though the song may have spread to a wider audience, with so little Gaelic poetry in print there would, at that time, have been little expectation of its being published.

\textit{‘M’ Athchuinge ort a Righ an Àigh’}

In ‘M’ Athchuinge ort a Righ an Àigh’, Bean a Bharra’s conversational tone gives way to humility and she approaches Rìgh an Àigh as a penitent.\textsuperscript{441} Penitence, as it appears in evangelical \textit{dàin spioradail}, cannot be read as being linked to any specific sin, as would be expected in the Catholic tradition. It is inborn sin, the legacy of The Fall, and the promise of Salvation by Grace which preoccupy the evangelical poets. It is the consciousness that sinfulness is inextricably bound into her nature that sends Bean a Bharra to seek absolution. She does not, however, come unprepared. Even her choice of Rìgh an Àigh as a form of address expresses a certain hopefulness. She begins with panegyric, acknowledging that the hand of Rìgh an Àigh is stronger than any other. Like a court poet listing the exploits of an earthly king, she reminds Him that He had protected the Israelites in the wilderness, provided for them and divided the sea before them.\textsuperscript{442}

\begin{quote}
M’ Athchuinge ort a Righ an Àigh,  
O na ’s i do lamh is treise;  
Dh’fhuaosgail thu Maois ann san fhaslach,  
’S ann ’s gach cas gu d’ rinn thu sheasadh. (v. 1)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{440} \textit{Catechism}, questions 31–6; \textit{Westminster Confession}, Chapter 7.  
\textsuperscript{441} Kennedy 1836, pp. 80–2; Appendix 7.3.  
\textsuperscript{442} Exodus 14.16; Exodus. 16.14.
Thug thu aran as na neamhaidh,
Agus burn a aodan chreagan;
‘Sgoilt thu mhuir na rathad reidh dhoibh,
‘S rinn thu clann Israel a sheasadh. (v. 2)

She accepts that the Hand which rules the elements also inflicts punishment. Though Rìgh an Àigh sent Amalek’s army against the Israelites, He also decreed that the Israelites would prevail in battle so long as Moses kept his hands raised to Heaven:443

Bha do ghairdein treun gan conadh,
Ann ’s gach do’ruinn chuir iad seachad;
Gus na thuit iad ann an gorraich,
‘S b’ fheudar leon thoirt air am pearsainn. (v. 3)

‘N uair thogadh Maois riut a lamhan,
Bha do ghrasan aig am pailteas;
Bu leis buaidh cath agus comhraig,
‘S bha e beo air sgath do bhcraft. (v. 4)

The fifth verse goes to the heart of Reformed concepts of foreordination, original sin and the impossibility of man justifying himself by his own actions. It references the story of Job, a virtuous and upright man who had become the subject of a contest between God and Satan. God had licensed Satan to test Job’s piety, making just one provision, ‘Feuch, tha e a’ d’ làimh-sa, ach caomhain a bheatha’.444

Gach neach a sheasas ri d’ ordadh,
No ni treorachd as do neartsa;
‘S cintich nach basaich e ’n do’ ruinn,
Shoilleirich Ihob e na eachdraíd. (v. 5)

443 Exodus.17. 5-12. The motif of the raised hands was to become common in poetry of the Boer War and the Great War. See Appendix, 9, ‘Dh’Fhalbh na Gillean Grinn’.
444 Job 2.6.
When Job eventually rebels against what he sees as undeserved punishment, his friend Eliphaz asks ‘Cò e an neo-chiontach a sgriosadh, no c’ ait an do ghearradh as na h-ionracain’, arguing that there is no such thing as innocence in mankind, and no possibility of injustice in God. Job attempts to justify himself, but God’s answer is to show that His governance cannot be judged in human terms, that incapacity and lack of understanding disqualify man from questioning the divine will.

Bean a Bharra, conscious of the rebuke delivered to Job, declares that she dare not lift her eyes nor even pronounce the Ainm Naomha. Her sin is too great, her ignorance too deep, her tongue unruly and unclean. She changes her form of address from Rìgh an Àigh to the more deferential Rìgh nam Feartan, asking that He set aside her sins for the sake of His Only Son. Here she makes an unexpected though logical reversal, where her sins die because of the Son, rather than the more usual understanding of the Son dying on account of her sins. This creates a strange circularity, an interdependence of sin and death, cause and effect:

’S dana dhamh mo ruisg a thogail,
’S peacach lothar mi gun eolas,
’S dana dhamh t-ainm naomha ghluasad,
Le teangaidh bhuaireasach neo-ghlan. (v. 6)

M’ athchuing ort a Rìgh nam Feartan,
Ge do tha mo pheacaidh lionmhor;
Cuir amach iad as do lathair,
’S basaicheadh iad air sgath t-aon Mhic. (v. 7)

She puts her faith in the Gospel promise ‘iarraibh air tùs rioghachd Dhé agus fhireantachd-san, agus cuirear na nithean so uile ruibh’, asking help from the Hand that is as bountiful as the sea at high tide.

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445 Job 4.7, 17.
446 Matthew 6.33.
Cha d’ fholuich thu riamh do ghnuis,
Air neach a dh’iarr le durachd i;
Cuidich mi ge d’ tha mi ’m failinn,
’S pailte ’n lamh no aird an lionaidh. (v. 8)

Job’s companions had rebuked him for intemperate speech and Bean a Bharra too must learn to govern her tongue. Her ‘leannanan peacaidh’ must be subdued. She asks for An Spiorad to protect her from temptation, so that she may reach A’ Charraig Bhuan gu Dìlinn:

Teagaisg dhamh mo chaint a thaghadh,
’S gun deanninn roghain dhe’ t-ordadh;
Fuadaich mo leannanan peacaidh,
Chuir mi ’n chleachdainn ann tus m’ oige. (v. 9)

Soilsich mo chridhe le d’ mhaithneas,
Sgeudaich mi le brat na firinn;
Dion le d’ Spiorad mi o bhuaireadh,
’S tu mo charraig bhuan gu dilinn. (v. 10)

‘Cuan feirge’, the sea of God’s wrath references a powerful metaphor of dàin shoisgeulach, familiar from older songs and from her contemporaries Bean Torra Dhamh and Dùghall Bochanan. In other laoidhean Bean a Bharra sees herself as ‘mar long gun seol mi ann an cuan’, or depicts the sea as symbolic of Grace: ‘An fhairge ni traghadh is lionadh / Ag nochdadh miorbhuile do ghrais’. In an appeal reminiscent of the beannachdan leapa of Carmina Gadelica, she asks for protection while she sleeps, joy when she wakes, the security of knowing that she has been caught by Rìgh nam Feartan and will be drawn safely to shore. From the safety of

447 Donald E. Meek, ed. Laoidhean Spioradail Dhuighaill Bhochanain (Glasgow: SGTS, 2015), pp.169, 171; Appendix 8, ‘An Cuan nach Traoghadh’.
448 Laoidh IV. 11, p. 75; Laoidh VII. v. 7, p. 82.
His net she appeals directly to An Rìgh, asking Him not to abandon her to Hell, but to fill her heart with An Spiorad Naomh so that she dare lift her eyes to Heaven:

’S tu mo shoilse ri h-am codail,
’S ann sa chodal ’s tu mo dhidinn;
’S tu mo thoil-intinn air madainn,
A Rìgh nam Feartan glac a d’ lion mi. (v. 11)

A t-fheirg a Rìgh, na treigsa mise,
’S dean le d’ Spiorad Naomh mo lionadh;
Mo shuilean thogail ri d’ ordadh,
’S ri d’ stor nach teirig gu siorruidh. (v. 12)

She closes her penitential by committing her soul to Rìgh nam Feartan, asking that, at whatever time He may choose to call her, as her body crumbles to dust, her soul will be taken to His garden, the Eden of Adam’s lost inheritance:

’N uair a thoilicheas tu fein thu,
Leis a chreabhaig so ni crionadh;
Glachd m’ anam a steach do d’ gharradh,
Air sgath mo Shlanuighear a dhil mi. (v. 13)

**Contemporary perceptions of Bean a Bharra as a poet**

It is not known to what extent Bean a Bharra’s evangelical songs were popular in her own time, whether Kennedy obtained manuscript copies or collected them from the oral tradition. His introduction implies that he did not know her personally: ‘she seems to have been well-educated and possessed of a liberal portion of the many amiable qualities which adorn the sex and the virtues that constitute a zealous Christian’.\(^{450}\) He makes a distinction between *laoidhean* and songs, asserting that, had she continued to compose songs, she could have been considered the equal of

\(^{450}\) Kennedy 1836, pp. 64-5.
Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh of Skye and superior to Mairearad nighean Ailein in Mull (Mairghread nighean Lachlainn).\(^{451}\) His final word was that she in every way lived up to his expectations of a devout Christian gentlewoman:

\[
\text{Bha i modhail, beusach, steidheil, seamh} \\
\text{Dh'fhuathaich gach olc is fhuir i fois air Neamh.}
\]

Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, unsurprisingly, gives a different picture, scorning her for her pretensions as a poet and her conduct as a Christian:

\[
\text{Aig a thainead 's tha 'm pòr ud,} \\
\text{An dràst' ann ad dhùthaich,} \\
\text{Gu bheil mios ort an Latharn',} \\
\text{Gur tu rogha nan ùghdar,} \\
\text{Ma tha iad le soileas} \\
\text{Sior-mholadh do bhùrdain,} \\
\text{An dùthaich eile cha b' fhiach e} \\
\text{Thogail cian thar an ùrlar. (v. 8)}
\]

\[
'S nàr do bhean eaglaiseach \\
Beadachd is tunnsgail, \\
Le spiorad na beag-nàir', \\
Labhairt sgeigeal air prionnsa; \\
Do chreideamh cha teagaisg \\
Dhuit cead thoirt do d’ sgiùrsa, \\
Droch cainnt chur an eagar, \\
Le t’ fheigil a mhùchar. (v. 9)\(^{452}\)
\]

Bean a Bharra’s laoidhean were included with those of Iain Bàn Maor and Daibhidh Mac Ealair in Duncan Kennedy’s collection of 1786.\(^{453}\) This set her alongside the

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\(^{451}\) For a discussion of bardic influences on marbhrainn composed by Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh and Mairearad nighean Lachlainn, see Frater 1994, pp. 234-9.


\(^{453}\) Kennedy 1786.
foremost spiritual poets of her day and amongst the earliest Gaelic poets to be published. The 1836 edition of Kennedy’s collection, to which he had added dàin spioradail by Dùghall Bochanan, John Carswell, Bishop of Argyll and others, shows her songs being considered as part of a developing canon. Three quatrains from one and four from another of her laoidhean were included in the Church of Scotland’s An Laoidheadair of 1935. An anonymous article in An Gaidheal in 1876 compares Bean a Bharra favourably to Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh and Mairghread nighean Lachlainn:

Chan eil i càil air deireadh air Màiri Seud no air Nighean Lachuinn ann an comas bàrdachd. Ann an aon seadh, chan eil coimeas idir eadar i féin agus iadsan; tha farsuinneachd breithneachaidh do bhonn agus do thugse mhodhannail innite, nach eil idir r’ am faicinn mu ’m bàrdachdsan. Nam biodh na laoidhean a sgriobh i air fuinn a bu thatnike, bhiodh barrachd deigh orra gu coitcheann am measg nan Gaidheal.

The writer goes on to make a comparison between Bean a Bharra and Bean Torra Dhamh, Mrs Mary Clark of Badenoch:

Fhuair Mrs Clarc aite air nach eil i neo-àiridh am measg bàird dhiadhaidh an Taobh Tuath. Bha na leugh sinn d’ a cuid glè thatneach, ni b’ usa a sheinn na bàrdachd Mhrs Caimbeul Bar. Tha iad le chèile soisgeulach ’nan laoidhean, agus a’ gabhail tachd anns na h-aon fhirinnean, ach nuair a tha Mhrs Caimbeul Bar a’ seinn mu ’n fhirinn lom, tha Mhrs Clarc a’ toirt dhuinn barrachd do shugh an fhèin fhiosrachaidh Chriosduidh. Tha an dara tè a riochdachadh faireachduinn shoisgeulach na Gàidhealtachd mu Thuath, nuair a tha an tè eile a riochdachadh teagaisg luim soisgeulaich na Gàidhealtachd mu Dheas.

The implication would seem to be that Bean a Bharra’s laoidhean revealed little of herself, while Bean Torra Dhamh’s songs were more engaging on a personal level.

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454 MacLeod and M’Leod 1935, pp. 19, 111.
This is the only known comment on Bean a Bharra’s tunes and the difficulty of singing her songs. Though there is no record of the original tunes used by either poet, Bean Torra Dhamh is described as composing ‘sweet, tuneful, flowing verse’.\footnote{MacInnes 1951, p. 287; MacRae 1935, p. 23.} Ronald Black suggests that she set ‘Beachd Gràis air an t-saoghal’ to a Neil Gow tune, ‘Good night and God be with you’.\footnote{Black 2001, p. 506.} The fact that her opening couplet ‘’S mile marbhaisg ort a shaoghail / ’S carach, baoghalach, do chleachdadh’ could have belonged either to Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, as Black claims, or to any one of a number of vernacular songs, shows an easy familiarity with the secular music and song of her day.
5.2 **Bean Torra Dhamh, Mary MacPherson, Mrs Clark**

Mary MacPherson, later known as Bean Torra Dhamh, was born in Laggan in Badenoch around 1740. Her father, Ewen MacPherson, a ‘scholarly and public-spirited man […] of good standing and character’, was parish schoolmaster at Laggan, possibly having earlier been employed by the SSPCK.\(^{458}\) He had connections with the Strathmashie Macphersons, but the best provision he was able to make for his daughter was to give her a good education in both English and Gaelic. In later life her reputation as a scholar was such that Alexander MacPherson, the schoolmaster at Ralia, regularly asked her advice when faced with deficiencies in his own education.\(^{459}\)

On marriage, Mary MacPherson became Mrs Clark, but with no record of her husband’s first name it is not known whether it was to the Clarks of Ralia, Laggan or Kingussie that he belonged. He himself held the tenancy of Torr Dhamh, a small holding of impoverished land high above Glentruim, looking across to Creag Dhubh and along the Spey Valley. It seems to have been sufficient to support the family while Clark himself was living, but on his early death, it was only the help of neighbours which kept Bean Torra Dhamh from actual want. Having as a young woman suffered a severe break to her leg which left her dependent on crutches, she is unlikely to have been able to undertake much of the physical work of a hill farm. There is a suggestion that Clark was also a schoolmaster, which would have helped to make Torr Dhamh viable, but the fact of all but one of her children leaving as soon as they could provide for themselves implies that the land could not adequately support them.\(^{460}\)

Though her first evangelical songs were in English, her husband is said to have persuaded her that it would be of more benefit to those around her to compose in

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\(^{458}\) MacRae 1935, p. 7.  
\(^{459}\) John Kennedy, ed. *Three Gaelic Poems by Mrs Clark: Translated into English; and an elegy (with a short Memoir) on Kenneth MacDonald* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart, 1879), pp. 27-8.  
\(^{460}\) MacRae 1935, p. 21.
Gaelic.\textsuperscript{461} If he were in fact an SSPCK schoolmaster, his advice may have reflected the Society’s changing attitude to Gaelic. It could also have reflected the influence of another local schoolmaster, Dúghall Bochanan of Rannoch, whose \textit{Laoidhean Spioradail} was published in 1767 and whose songs and sermons she would almost certainly have heard. Her choice of Gaelic could also have been, in part, a response to the flurry of interest in Gaelic poetry following the collecting of songs for James MacPherson’s Ossian. MacPherson, himself a native of Badenoch, had in 1760 enlisted the help of Lachlan MacPherson of Strathmashie in collecting and transcribing Ossianic poems locally, and of Ewan MacPherson, schoolmaster at Badenoch, in collecting poems in South Uist and Benbecula.\textsuperscript{462}

According to Sinton, Bean Torra Dhamh was ‘a delightful companion, being possessed of a genial, happy-hearted disposition, while a sprightly wit and pungency gave zest to her conversation’\textsuperscript{463} Even in serious discussion of spiritual matters she could barely suppress her natural exuberance. John Rose gives an account of a conversation in which she describes herself: ‘I have been of a very bad and wicked disposition; therefore the Lord was obliged to break my leg, which was the first means of bringing me to think of my sinful and lost condition’.\textsuperscript{464} As a young woman she had been very fond of dancing and when, in her old age, the Parish Catechist, startled by the tapping sound of her crutches, found her dancing all alone, she explained that she was only imitating David. This was a perfectly feasible explanation, as the Rev. Hugh MacKay’s famous sermon on King David dancing before the Ark was the talk of Badenoch at the time.\textsuperscript{465}

If, as she suggests, her conversion dated literally to the time of her accident, she would have been quite a young woman. Her husband was certainly still living, as it was he who had persuaded her to compose in Gaelic rather than English. The first of

\textsuperscript{461} John Rose, \textit{Metrical Reliques of ‘The Men’ in the Highlands, or, Sacred poetry of the North; by MacKay of Mudale (anno 1700); Matheson, Sutherlandshire (1747); MacLauchlan, Abriachan (1760); Mrs Clarke, Badenoch (1880); W. MacKenzie & D. MacRae, Inverness (1830), with introduction and brief memoirs in English}, (Inverness: MacKintosh & Co., 1851), p. 102.


\textsuperscript{463} Sinton 1902, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{464} Rose 1851, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{465} MacRae 1935, p. 26.
her songs to appear in print, ‘M’ anam, imich thusa sàmhach’, was published as a pamphlet by D. MacIain in Edinburgh in 1785, possibly funded by Mrs Grant of Rothiemurchus.\textsuperscript{466} This was reprinted in John Gillies’ \textit{Sean Dàin agus Òrain Ghàidhealach} in 1786.\textsuperscript{467} By this time she was eking out a precarious living at Torr Dhamh, ‘the poorest of the poor’, widowed, virtually blind, and in company with a daughter, said to have been a ‘living sorrow’ to her.\textsuperscript{468} The daughter later came to share her mother’s faith and they lived more amicably together. Towards the end of the century, with her daughter by now married in Perth, she went to spend her last years there and died around 1815.

Bean Torra Dhamh had travelled to Inverness in 1803-4, with the intention of publishing her songs, but failing to find sponsorship was unable to meet the cost of publication. She is believed to have composed thirty \textit{laoidean}, some of which were taken down by the Rev. Stalker of Rothiemurchus.\textsuperscript{469} Neither her own nor Stalker’s manuscript survives. Rose took down two songs around 1814 from a young woman who had learned them from Bean Torra Dhamh herself. These were ‘Gearan air truaillidheadh nàduir’ and ‘Miann an anma bhi maille ri Criosd’, which he included in \textit{Metrical Reliques} in 1851.\textsuperscript{470} Both had been published by Alexander Fraser of Inverness in 1835, attributed only to ‘Bean uasal a bh’ ann am Badenoch’. ‘M’ anam imich thusa sàmhach’ was also included in MacCallum’s \textit{Laoidean agus Dàin Spioradail} in 1894. ‘Miann an Anam’ appeared in Lachlan MacBean’s \textit{Songs and Hymns of the Scottish Highlands} in 1888, along with a tune ‘noted down for this collection’.\textsuperscript{471}

Three more songs were discovered by the Rev. Thomas Sinton in the Cluny Charter Chest.\textsuperscript{472} These were all in the same handwriting, possibly her own, and were addressed to Mr Paul Kennedy of Castle Gavel, Perth. Sinton described them in a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{466} Black 2001, p. 503.
\item \textsuperscript{467} John Gillies, \textit{Sean Dàin agus Òrain Ghàidhealach} (Perth: Gillies, 1786), pp. 279-81.
\item \textsuperscript{468} MacRae 1935, p. 21.
\item \textsuperscript{469} Rose 1851, p. 102.
\item \textsuperscript{470} Rose 1851, pp. 102-8.
\item \textsuperscript{471} Lachlan MacBean, \textit{Songs and Hymns of the Scottish Highlands, with translations and music} (Edinburgh: MacLachlan & Stewart, 1888), no. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{472} The Cluny Charter Chest contained papers which had been in the possession of Cluny MacPherson, who died in 1885. Sinton 1906, p. 329.
\end{itemize}
paper given to the Gaelic Society of Inverness in April 1899, publishing them as *Laoidhean Bean Torra Dhamh* in 1902.\(^{473}\) In all, only six of her *laoidhean* survive, published in Sinton’s *Poetry of Badenoch*, 1906, and in MacRae, 1935.\(^ {474}\) A seventh, ‘Eiridh mi, agus thèid mi dh’ionnsaidh m’ athair’, which MacRae had supposed to be hers, is now thought to have been wrongly attributed, possibly having been composed by Sinton himself.\(^ {475}\) Eight of the sixteen quatrains of ‘Beatha nan Gràs’ were included in the Church of Scotland’s *An Laoidheadair* of 1935.\(^ {476}\)

Rose had found in Bean Torra Dhamh’s songs ‘much feminine tenderness, combined with a mastery of abstruse spiritual ideas manifesting a mind of no common mould’.\(^ {477}\) Of the two songs which he had found, ‘Miann an anma bhi maille ri Criosd’, which continues to be sung to the present day, is certainly both feminine and tender, addressing Christ as Caraid, Fear-pòsda and Bràthair as Sine. ‘Gearan air truaillidheach ndàuir’ has a gentle, submissive complainant and a second, stronger voice, offering reassurance that her Bràthair as Sine will feed and clothe her and help her in her struggle against ‘an seann duine’, the natural as opposed to the spiritual man. In common with many spiritual poets, it was upon conversion that she felt that she had received the ‘gift of poetry’. She describes her growing anxiety, and her random searching of the scriptures until she happened upon Isaiah 54.7-8, which seemed to speak directly to her:

> For a small moment I have forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee.\(^ {478}\)

Opening the Bible while asking oneself ‘A bheil facal sam bith on Tighearna?’ was a very common way of ordering one’s thoughts or seeking advice, in the expectation

\(^{474}\) Sinton 1906, pp. 327-50. Translations, pp. 541-57; MacRae 1935.
\(^{476}\) MacLeod and M’Leod 1935, pp. 106-7.
\(^{477}\) Rose 1851, pp. vii-ix (p. viii).
\(^{478}\) Rose 1851, p. 101.
that a phrase or a verse would bring some relief.479 Having been given her ‘facal on Tighearna’, she took it as applying as much to everyday life as to the life of the spirit, returning constantly to the concept of Divine provision, not in the sense of wealth, but of never being left to starve, never coming to the absolute end of her resources:

Gar na ghlac mi mòran stòrais
Cha do chrion mo chóir gu airceas.
An t-aran latail fhuir mi ’n còmhnuiddh,
’S math gu léoir gun stòr chur seachad;
An tì rinn taodhal mòr ’s an fhásach
Cha do thàrr e maoin a thasghaidh,
’S fearr am beagan buain le gràs
Na oighreachd ’s achanna chaich thoirt dhachaidh. (v. 3) 480

This promise of support was part of Isaiah’s depiction of God as husband and provider, a concept central to Highland Evangelical teaching. In Bean Torra Dhamh’s songs it can be seen in the loving familial relationship which she assumes with Christ, her expectation that He will stand up for her, pay her debts, put food on her table:

‘S e fear ghabhail mo leisgeul
‘S a sheasamh mo chòrach;
A phaigheas m’ uil’ fhiachan
‘S ni mo dhion bho gach dòruinn;
Am fad ’s a bhios mi air thuras
Bheir e ’n cumantas lòn dhomh;
‘S an uair a philleas mi dhachaidh,
Cha bhi aire aig a bhòrd-sa. (v. 4) 481

480 MacRae 1935, p. 62.
481 MacRae 1935, p. 68.
The life which she can be seen to be living is an allegory of her spiritual life, the thin infertile ground of Torr Dhamh a metonym for the fásach of the world. The lón and the aran làtheil which somehow appear on her table are a reminder ‘Cha bhi airc aig A bhòrd-sa’, that there will always be spiritual nourishment at the Communion table and a table prepared for her in Heaven. The côir which Christ defends and the fiachan which He pays keep her from being evicted from her scanty holding at Torr Dhamh, but have the far higher significance of the inheritance lost by Adam and the price of redemption of that debt which Christ paid in His own blood.

When An Gaidheal 1876 speaks of Bean a Bharra ‘a’ seinn mu ’n fhirinn lom’, while Bean Torra Dhamh offers ‘barrachd do shugh an fhein fhiosrachaidh Chriosduidh’, the writer, possibly unknowingly, reflects a difference not only between the Argyllshire and the Northern evangelical poets, and between the two women, but a subtle difference in the purpose of their songs. In mid-eighteenth century Morvern, the priority was to teach biblical history and basic doctrine. ‘Laoidh Mhic Ealair’, the archetypal laoidh teagaisg of this period, was simple, factual, easily memorised and sung by many who never saw a printed copy. Structurally and didactically, Bean a Bharra’s songs followed this model. Some were conversational, others personal. Some had a satirical edge and an undercurrent of political comment, others were purely doctrinal. For Bean Torra Dhamh, composing later in the century, priorities were slightly different. Confiscation of Jacobite-held estates and changes in land tenure were taking their toll. At the same time the Heritable Jurisdictions Act of 1746 had curbed the powers of the Baillies of Regality, leaving poets free to criticise their oppressive rule. ‘Beachd Gràis air an t-Saoghal’ shows her uncompromising condemnation of their abuses of power as she campaigns for social justice and a government based on God’s Law:

Chuir iad cas air reachd na firinn,
’S ghluais iad dichiollach ’s an droch-bheart,

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482 Rose describes the songs of North Highland poets such as MacKay of Mudale and Matheson of Kildonan as being characterised by ‘tender sweetness, spiritual delicacy and purity’, those of South Highland poets such as Bochanan, by ‘theological concatenation and vigour’. Rose 1851, p. vi.
483 Mackenzie 1872, p. 181.
‘Claidh nam bochd ’s ga ’n lot le miorun
Banntraich ’s dilleachdain gun choisachd
B’ uamhasach an cleachdadh tire,
Croich a’ s binn air aird gach cnocain,
Cúirt nan spleagh gun lagh, gun fhirinn,
’S tric a dhit’ an ti bha neo-chiont’. (v. 7)

‘N uair bhios gràs ann an luchd-riaghlaidh,
Bi’dh na h-iochdarain lân aiteis,
’S bi’dh gach prionnsa, ’s diùc, a’s iarla,
‘Seasamh na cóir fo sgiath a cheartais.
Cha bhi duine bochd gun phòrsan,
’S cha bhith deòiridh truagh gun taice,
’S bidh gach cealgair air am fògradh,
’S cha’n fhaigh luchd-an-fhoirneirt fاسghadh. (v. 8)\(^{484}\)

In 1767 both *An Tiomnadh Nuadh* and Dùghall Bochanan’s *Laoidhean Spioradail* had been published. Bochanan’s *laoidhean* were already well known in the oral tradition, and with the Book of Revelation now available for all to read, his terrifying depiction of Judgement in ‘Latha ’Bhreitheanais’ had its equally terrifying *dearbhadh*. Bean Torra Dhamh had a detailed knowledge of the Bible, and clearly expected the same of those who heard her songs. This allowed more complex biblical referencing than had been feasible for Bean a Bharra just a few years earlier.

**‘Beatha na Buaidhe’**

Late eighteenth-century Badenoch and Strathspey were renowned for fiddle music and dance. The local gentry, with their fashionable German organs, their balls and entertainments, and the country people dancing on the hillside to the music of the pipes or the Jew’s harp, could not have provided a clearer illustration of the life from

\(^{484}\) MacRae 1935, p. 63. Appendix 7.4.
which Bean Torra Dhamh had been cut off, or the way of life which Job had lost when God sent Satan to test his faith:

Dannsaidh an gineal. Togaidh iad an tiompan agus a’ chlarsach, agus ni iad gairdechas ri fuaim an orgain. Caithidh iad an làithean ann an saoibhreas, agus ann an tiota, thèid iad suas do ’n uaigh.\footnote{Job 21.12-3.}

Ceòl cha ’n àill leam, piob no clarsach,
Binneas gall-thromp ’s theud,
Cha bhinn le m’ chluais ’n uair ’s aird’ am fuaim,
Cha ’n imich luath mo cheum:
Air ùrlar árd cha dean mi danns’
’S cha ghluais mi eangaidh air sléibh’,
Tha cursa nàdur ’s cunntas làithean
’Teagasg ceann mo réis. (v. 1)

Her declaration that, whether in ballroom or on hillside, no matter how loud the music, she will never dance, nor so much as tap her foot, had been no more a matter of free choice than had Job’s loss of home and family. As the long painful months of convalescence passed and it became clear that she would never regain her freedom of movement, she had searched the Bible for comfort. By the time she composed this song, possibly many years later, she was a committed Christian, with a clear idea of how she had been brought from what she herself describes as a state of ‘sinful lethargy’:\footnote{Rose 1851, p. 101.}

Mo laith’ mar cheò ’s mar fhaileas neòil
Dh’fhalbh thairis m’ òige nuadh;
’S i ’n oidhch’ tha ’n tòir orm, dh’iompaich m’ organ
Chìüil gu bròn ’s gu gruaim;
Mo chrìdhe tràm nach éirich leam
Mar chlach air gruinn fo shuain,
Nach dùisg ’s nach gluais, ach tuirseach truagh,
Mar dhuine ’n cluas a bhàis. (v. 2)

Her youth and health have proved as insubstantial as mist or a passing cloud. Her realisation of this echoes that of the Psalmist, ‘mo làith mar cheò a’ teireachduinn a ghnàth’, her complaint that of Job:

Agus tha mo chlàrsach air tionndadh gu bròn, agus m’ organ gu guth na muinntir a ghuileas. 487

Her depiction of death approaching with his ‘lann sgaiteach geur’ has the force both of metaphor and experiential truth, as she herself had been close to death after her accident when she ‘did not receive the surgical skill and attention needed’. 488

’S am bàs dha n tòir sinn uile gèill,
Gur sgaiteach geur a lann,
’S lionmhòr tréun òg ’s maighdeann bheul-dhearg,
’Chuir e ’n céis le laimh;
Gach bean a ’s céile ’s leanabh
’Sheilbhich beatha riamh bho Adh’mh,
Ach Enoch ’s Eliah, chaidh an tréud ud
Uile ’n gèill do ’n bàs. (v. 3)

Both the Old Testament and Bochanan’s recently published ‘An Claigeann’ show her that death spares no one, not even young women such as herself:

’M bu mhaighdeann deas thu
Bha sgiamhach ad ghnùis,
’S deagh shuidheach’ ad shùil da rèir. (v. 8) 489

487 Psalm 102.3; Job 30.31.
488 MacRae 1935, p. 16.
The *Catechism*, however, holds out the hope that even though the righteous must die, they will not suffer death’s sting nor its curse:

Bithidh na fireanaich air an teasaírginn o ’n bhàs fèin ’s an là dheireannach; agus eadhon anns a bhàs, tha iad air an teasaírginn o a ghath, agus o a mhallachadh. 490

’S cha chúis-eagal bàs do ’n iarmad
Thig fo riaghladh Gràis,
A chum fheitheamh théid iad sgiamhach
S bàirleig sgriobht’ nan laimh,
Air beulaobh ’n Rìgh nach dhuilt doibh
Inntreachduinn le mile failt’
Bho ’n phaidh an Sagart ac’ am fiachan,
’S thug E dioladh lòn. (v. 4)

Those who present themselves before An Rìgh with their ‘bàirleig sgriobht nan laimh’, are the elect, and will not be turned away. In the Book of Revelation, the elect are recognised by their having ‘Seula Dhè air clàr an aodainn’, while in evangelical song, conversion is itself seen as the ‘seula’ or ‘barrantas’ which allows safe passage over Jordan. 491 Poets and preachers tie the titles Fàidh, Sagart and Rìgh together, in a way which depends as much on their being the subject of four consecutive questions of the *Catechism* as on any specific biblical text. 492 The *Catechism* uses these titles to show that Christ is authorised to act as Mediator between God and Man: ‘Air a làn-sgeadachadh leis gach uil’ ughdarras agus comas, a chum dreuchdan fàidh, sagairt agus Rìgh ’Eaglais fèin a chur an gniomh’. Evangelical poets use them to introduce verses on The Crucifixion, Ascension and Judgement and as *dearbhadh* that Christ will act as their friend in court.

490 *Catechism*, questions 83-84.
491 Revelation 9.4.
492 *Catechism*, questions 42-5.
In ‘Beachd Gràis air an t-saoghal’ Bean Torra Dhamh speaks of the injustices of the Baillies of Regality. Here, in ‘Beatha na Buaidhe’, she looks to the justice of Am Breitheamh. The terminology of the figurative court where she must answer for her sins is identical to that of the civil courts; ‘fo dhìteadh, fiachan, dioladh làn, an urras, mionnan ditidh’. She stands condemned for a debt which she cannot pay. An intermediary comes forward to stand surety for her. Reparation is paid in full and she has a written warrant releasing her from her debt:

’S ged dh’fhàg am peacadh sinn fo dhìteadh,
Cha bu sinne phàidh,
Ach Lamh ar n-urras, Righ na Siochaimh
Dh’iobradh air a’ chrann;
Le umhlachd ’s fulangas ro phiantail
Chrom E sios gu lár,
A ’s ghlaodh E mach, ‘Mo Dhia, Mo Dhia,
Na tréig mi chaoidh ’s na fâg’. (v. 5)

The court where she finds clemency is the counterpart of another courtroom, where Lâmh an Urras himself suffered arbitrary injustice and where Righ na Siochaimh stood condemned to death by an unjust judge and a rabble crying ‘Biodh ’fhuil oirmne, agus air ar cloinn’:493

B’ iad siol an uile thug mionnan ditidh
’N aghaidh ’n Ti a ’s Àird’
’S a gheall gu ’n gabhadh iad fhuil phriseil
Direach air an ceann. (v. 6)

Her description of nature’s revolt against this outrage: the sun refusing its light – the earth trembling in shock – rocks splitting and the dead rising from their graves, imitates that of Matthew 27. 51-3. The elements streaming with tears, ‘’S na dùilean shruth le cràdh’, is an addition of her own, fitting Highland perceptions of the

493 Matthew 27.25.
sympathetic involvement of the elements in human life. Where both Matthew and Mark give Christ’s last words as ‘Mo Dia, Mo Dhia, c’ ar son a threig thu mi?’, Bean Torra Dhamh avoids appearing to question or accuse God by presenting an appeal which is wholly human: ‘Mo Dhia, Mo Dhia, Na tréig mi chaoidh ’s na fàg’.

After her account of The Crucifixion, it becomes apparent that her song has a recapitulative structure, revealing part of a story, interposing part of another, then returning to the first. She does not simply repeat herself, but moves her narrative forward detail by detail. In her first verse she rejects music and song; in her second she is sunk in a lethargy from which nothing can arouse her; in the eighth, she wakes, takes up her harp, and sings praises to the risen Christ. In the third verse, Death comes like an armed warrior: ‘’S am bàs dha ’n tòir sinn uile gèill / Gur sgaiteach gear a lann’. In the eighth, Christ, no longer the helpless prisoner, conquers Death, disarms him, and rises to take His place at God’s right hand:

O m’ anam, dùsg le d’ chlàrsaich chiùil,
’S dean moladh’s ciù a sheinn
Do Thriath nam Feart le ghairdean deas
Thug buaidh a mach dha threud;
’S le comhraig threu thug ’arm bho ’n éug,
’S an treas là dh’éirich suas
’S A shuidh an àird air ionad àrd
Aig deas-laimh Rìgh nan Sluagh. (v. 8)

In the ninth verse she returns to the Sagart and the Rìgh of the fourth, with Christ returning as ‘Fàidh, Sagart agus Rìgh’ to act as Mediator. He is also the Ciobair Gràidh, who will not overlook the least of His flock, and the Lèigh who heals both body and soul:

’S E deannamh eadar-ghuidhe bhuan
Air son A shluaigh gu léir,

494 Matthew 27.46 ; Mark 15.34.
The figurative court of verse four and the civil court of verses five and six become the court of Heaven in verse ten. Where Christ had stood alone and undefended in Pilate’s court, every soul who ever lived now stands, equally alone, but with An t-Eadar-mheadhonair to act for them. In the seventh verse, at the moment of Christ’s death, the saints had risen from their graves to accompany Him:

‘‘S na mairbh bho ‘n uaigh do dhéirich suas / ‘Thoirt coinneamh dh’ Uan nan Gràs’.

Now the dead gather from wherever they lie and stand to be judged before Him:

Grad-éirigh suas na bheil ’s a’ chuan,
'S a chill, ’s an uaigh, ’s na sléibht’,
A dh’ionnsuidh ’mhòid, ’s bidh coinneamh domhail,
'Thig an còir an t-sléibh. (v. 10)

When Am Breitheamh speaks, he speaks first to ‘na h-oighibh glic’, the wise virgins who had watched and waited faithfully for His coming. It becomes clear that just as Christ is Sagart, Fàidh and Rìgh, He is also both Eadar-mheadhonair and Am Breitheamh. He calls the faithful to take their place in His Father’s kingdom. Turning to ‘na h-oighibh gòrach’, the foolish virgins caught unawares by His return, He pronounces a terrible judgement:

Ach dha na h-oighibh a bha gòrach,
Bheir E ’n t-òrdugh truagh:
‘A chloinn na mallachd nach d’ iarr m’ eòlas,
Bidh bhur còmhnuidh bhuan
’S an lochan loisgeach mar ri deamhnaibh,
Caoidh ’s a’ bròn ’s a gruaim,
Dùghall Bochanan, like many biblical scholars before him, was obsessed with the Book of Revelation and the prospect of Judgement. Bean Torra Dhamh’s vision of hell equals anything in Bochanan, and for anyone in landlocked Badenoch not familiar with ‘cladach agus sgeir’, she gives the alliterative ‘shore’ and ‘shoal’ so that no detail of its terrors will escape them. This is the Cuan Feirge, the Sea of Wrath, with its perpetual fire in which the damned must spend eternity. In the face of such a prospect she cannot keep silent, addressing her hearers directly to add her own warning to those of scripture and *Catechism*:

’S e àithne bheirinn do gach beò,
Géur-aire thoirt do m’ dhuan,
Tha chûis so eagalach ri leogh
Is sgreamhaidh dhomh ’s a fuaim. (v. 13)

Their best hope is that God had not intended that man should be destroyed, that His intention was to preserve them. The most compelling evidence she can offer is from the *Catechism*, with which they have all been familiar from childhood:

’S iad oibre freasdail Dé, gu bheil e gu ro naomh, ro ghlic agus gu ro chumhachdach, a’ coimhead agus a’ riaghladh nan uile chreutairean ’g an stiùireadh uile, agus an uile ghniomhara chum a ghloire féin.\textsuperscript{495}

Tha ruintean freasdail deas an còmhnuidh
‘Thoirt dhuit eòlas nuadh,
Na’m b’ aill leat freagairt le do dheòin,
’S gach lethrom fhògradh bhuat;
Cur cùl ri easontas ’s ro prós,
’S le seirc a’ s tròcair gluais,

\textsuperscript{495} *Catechism*, question 18.
Freasdal Dhè has provided the scriptures to teach the distinction between ‘oibre na feòla’ and ‘toradh an Spioraid’.\textsuperscript{496} They must respect this instruction: reject pride and contentiousness, be honourable, charitable and merciful in their dealings with others. They must cultivate grace, love, wisdom and prudence: consider their conduct hour by hour and day by day, not be drawn in by the expectation of reward. Recognising that she might appear to be supporting the concept of justification by works, rather than the Reformed teaching that justification can be by faith alone, she takes the image of ‘feet running towards death’ from Romans. Here Paul is himself quoting a text similar to the verses from Job which Bean a Bharra had used to show the disparity between the pretended righteousness of man and the absolute righteousness of God:

Mar tha e sgiobhta, cha ’n eil ionracan ann, cha’n eil fiù a h-aon. [...] Tha an casan luath a dhòrtadh fala. Tha léir-sgrios agus truaighe ’n an slighean.\textsuperscript{497}

Le treud an t-seachrain na deònaich
’S na gabh déidh nan duais,
Chum bàis tha ’n casan luath gu leòir,
’S chan fhaic iad glòir an Uain. (v. 15)

Mar dh’àicheadh iad a theistnas òg,
’S a reachd gach lò gun d’ thruaill,
Air gràdh a theach cha ’n fhaigh iad còir,
’S cha bhlais am beòil dhe’ chuilm;
Bidh chòmhnuidh ac’ an teach a bhròin
’S bidh ’n leab’ an dòruinn bhuan,
’S air cràidh an acain cha ’n eil beò
Na bheir bun sgeòil a nuas. (v. 16)

\textsuperscript{496} Galatians 5.19-26.
\textsuperscript{497} Romans 3.10-15; Proverbs 1.16.
Her final verse breaks many of the conventions of evangelical song. Despite its recapitulative structure, her song neither returns to the theme of the first verse with its music and dance, nor does it re-visit images from earlier verses. It closes neither with praise of God’s glory, a final plea for mercy nor a last hope of redemption. Even Bochanan’s ‘Là Bhreitheanais’ holds out one last hope to the sinner, but Bean Torra Dhamh is so uncompromisingly condemnatory, that, having seen her exuberance, wit and humanity, we are left in some doubt as to whether this is in fact her last word, or whether something has been lost in transmission.
5.3 Mairearad Chaimbeul, Marairead Cham’ron

The Register of the Parish Church of Glenorchy and Inishail shows that on the 8th of May 1771 Peggy Campbell, daughter of Peter Campbell, tacksman of Clashgour in Glenorchy, married Angus MacIntyre from Lochaber.\(^{498}\) In 1785, Òrain Nuadh Ghàidhealach le Marairead Cham’ron shows her reappearing as a published poet.\(^{499}\) In the intervening years she had borne five children, been widowed, and married a Mr Cameron at Fort William, with whom she had a son. On this second marriage she was ‘much reduced in circumstances’.\(^{500}\) Her second husband was a military man and her ‘reduced circumstances’ were shared by many. After Culloden, the Gentle Locheil had gone into exile. The Cameron lands were annexed by the Crown, houses burned to the ground, stock and crops destroyed. Men had little option but to enlist or go abroad. The Old Statistical Account notes that seven hundred and fifty men from Kilmalie and Kilmanivai, the parish in which Fort William is situated, had served in the Seven Years’ War of 1754-63. It states that ‘landowners farming their estates compel them to seek bread in foreign climes’, and that many had gone to the Low Countries in search of employment.\(^{501}\) By 1782-3, hardship had become general in the area. The Commissioners of the Annexed Estates eventually reacted to the food shortages and sent a cargo of oats and pease and one of potatoes. The Duke of Gordon also sent a cargo of pease meal and one of potatoes to relieve the parish.\(^{502}\)

In 1785, Marairead’s Òrain Nuadh Ghàidhealach was launched on the wave of optimism which swept the Highlands on the restoration of the the Annexed Estates. With songs such as ‘Moladh do na Fineachaibh Gaidhealach a fhuair an Oighreachdan ann Bliadhna 1784’, it could hardly fail to attract support. She welcomes the Cameron gentry home, telling Teàrlach Camshon Loch-Iall that his clan have been like ‘mar chaorich gu ’n Chiopair’ in his absence.\(^{503}\) In all her songs

\(^{498}\) 08/05/1771 Mcintyre, Angus [O.P.R. Marriages 512/00 0010 0102 Glenorchy and Inishail] [accessed 26 September 2013]
\(^{499}\) Marairead Cham’ron, Òrain Nuadh Ghàidhealach le Marairead Cham’ron: Ris am bheil coimh-cheangailte, Co-chruinneacha do shean oranaibh eile ans a chan’uinn cheudna (Edinburgh: D. MacPhatraic, 1785).
\(^{500}\) Reid 1832, pp. 68-9.
\(^{501}\) OSA, Kilmalie, p. 427.
\(^{502}\) OSA, Kilmalie, p. 447.
\(^{503}\) Cham’ron 1785, p. 7.
Marairead comes across as a warm sociable companion, entering into the amusements of society in a garrison town. Twenty years later, her financial position was as insecure as ever, but in 1805 *Orain Nuadh Ghaidhealach* was re-published, which according to Reid, ‘relieved her embarrassments a little and enabled her to live more comfortable at Callander in Monteith’. 504

Five years later, in 1810, a collection of 34 songs appeared, *Laoidhean Spioradail air an cnuasachadh le Mairearad Chaimbeul*. Nigel MacNeill identifies the author as Margaret Campbell, daughter of Peter Campbell of Clashgour, married a second time to a Cameron in Fort William, claiming that this was ‘a volume which seems to have escaped Reid’s notice’. 505 If Marairead Cham’ron and Mairearad Chaimbeul are in fact one and the same, her second collection could hardly be more different from her first. She has changed her publisher, changed her name and moved from secular to spiritual song. The first two changes could be for purely practical reasons. With nine out of the twenty songs in *Oran Nuadh Ghàidhealach* having been addressed to Cameron chieftains and military leaders, publishing under her married name, Marairead Cham’ron, was the sensible option. For *Laoidhean Spioradail*, however, her maiden name Campbell would be the pragmatic choice, associating her with the Presbyterian Campbells, rather than the Camerons, who were at heart still Jacobite and Episcopalian. There is ample precedent for poets abandoning secular song and devoting themselves to spiritual song in response to conversion. What is more problematic, or at least more unusual, is that in this case there is a complete change of poetic voice, to the extent that it is barely possible to recognise the voice of the one in the other. Where Marairead Cham’ron’s songs were light-hearted, Mairearad Chaimbeul’s are of an uncompromising severity, harsh to the point of brutality, relishing the suffering of the damned as Marairead had once delighted in their society.

Knowing that Bean a Bharra composed secular satire we are not surprised to see a satirical edge in her *laoidhean*. In the case of Bean Torra Dhamh, her youthful love of music and dance shows in her determined abandoning of both, and her delight at the prospect of singing and playing musical instruments in heaven. In Mairearad

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504 Reid 1832, p. 69.
Chaimbeul’s case, it is not only that her laoidhean show nothing of her earlier life, but that her secular songs show so little of the ordinary religious sensibility of her time. In ‘Cumhadh airson Clemi Dho’nulach, bean Innis-Eòghain’, for example, she calmly observes that all must die and consigns Clemi to the care of Rìgh nan Dùl. On hearing that Donnacha Mac-Neachduin’s cattle had stampeded and charged headlong into the sea, she made no reference to the Gadarene swine, an opportunity which neither Bean a Bharra nor Bean Torra Dhamh would have missed. Also noticeable by its absence is the imagery of the Israelites in exile which one would expect in songs congratulating Jacobite gentry on the restoration of their estates.

A poet practised in secular panegyric might be expected to compose laoidhean molaidh or marbhrannan soisgeulach, but the author of Laoidhean Spioradail does neither. The secular collection names tunes and gives choruses for most songs, while the spiritual collection gives no indication of either.

Laoidhean Spioradail air an cnuasachadh le Mairearad Chaimbeul gives no further information as to the identity of the author, but begins with a brief ‘advertisement’:

It was once the intention of the Author of the following Gaelic Compositions to have got several of them translated into English, in order to gratify the wishes of such subscribers to her performance as do not understand the original. That intention however has since been departed from, in consequence of the suggestion of some friends, who, notwithstanding their partiality for the Author, did not judge it expedient to hazard a literal version of effusions which, at one period, were never designed for publication.

From this we see that the book was published by subscription and that some subscribers had no Gaelic. This places her either on the borders of the Gàidhealtachd, or in a community such as a garrison town where English speakers were mixing with Gaelic speakers and attending Gaelic evangelical meetings. Whether or not the spiritual poet Mairearad Chaimbeul was also the secular poet Marairead Cham’ron,

506 Cam’ron 1785, p. 24.
507 Cam’ron 1785, pp. 32-4.
508 For Mosaic imagery in Jacobite song see, Mackenzie 2001, p. 47.
to have a collection of thirty-four Gaelic songs by a single female author of this period is in itself remarkable. It allows her songs to be considered both individually and as they relate to her other work.

“S beag mo chion air an t-saoghal’

In the first quatrain of “’S beag mo chion air an t-saoghal’, Mairearad makes a formal profession of faith, rejecting the temporal world to place her hope in an eternal Kingdom: 509

’S beag mo chion air an t-saoghal
’S beag mo ghaol a bhith ann
Tha mo chion air an Rioghachd
Air nach dilinn thig ceann. (2. 1)

Taking the words of the Psalmist who longs to exchange ‘pàilliun aingidheachd’ for the peace and safety of Aros Dé, she asks for nothing better than to stand at the gates as a doorkeeper:

B’ fheàrr gu ‘m bithinn am’ dhorsair
Ann an taice ri d’ chùirt,
Ri taobh do gheataichean priseil,
Bho’ bheil sìth tighinn dhuinn. (2. 2)

’S fearr là a’ d’ chùirt na mile là;
B’ fhearr leam bhi dorsaireachd
An Aros Dé, na m’ chòmhnuidh fòs
Am pàilliun aingidheachd. (Psalm. 84.10)

As doorkeeper, she sees the redeemed leave sorrow and pain behind them, meet with Christ and share the fruit of Craobh na Beatha which now grows in Paradise:

509 Chaimbeul 1810, pp. 5-9. As Mairearad Chaimbeul’s collection appears in only one edition, these references indicate the number of the song, followed by the number of the verse; Appendix 7.12.
Craobh na Beatha had been set in the garden of Eden as a pledge of immortality, on condition of Man’s obedience to the prohibition against eating the fruit of ‘Craobh eòlais a’ mhaith agus an uilc’ which stood beside it. This second tree was the token of a Covenant which sealed spiritual, temporal and eternal death on Man if he were disobedient. Though Adam and Eve broke the First Covenant, Christ was himself ‘Craobh na Beatha’, the Second Covenant, a second pledge of eternal life to those who accepted Him:

Tha gach trioblaid ’s gach àdhmhar
Air am fàgail fo ’r cùl,
A ’s iad a faicinn ar Slàn ’ear
Ana Phàrras an iùil;
A ’s craobh na beatha fo bhlàth ann,
A ’s meas a fàs orra dlùth:
’Sè fàth m’ eibhneis gu bràth,
’N fhiuthair tha ri bhi’ d’ chuirt. (2. 3)

Determined not to make the same mistake as Eve, Mairearad warns her companions that they must remember that the world is deceitful, always be on their guard, always seek protection against Nàmhaid nan Lùb who will distract them with his promises of time, in the hope that they delay their decision for too long and fall into his hands:

Bu chòir dhuinn bhith deònach
Air bhith daonnan eòlach mu ’d rùn;
O ’n nach eil anns an t-saoghal
Ach nith caochlaideach dhuinn;
Mu ’r cum thu féin geard oirnn

510 Revelation 22.2.
Bho’ nàmhaid n ’an lùb,
’Se gealltainn dhuinn dàlach
’Se ghnàthcha nach fhìù. (2. 4)

Time is not within Satan’s power to give, nor is it promised to Man, who may at any moment be called to account. Phrases such as ‘thigibh gun dàil is am bàs a’ tighinn’ and ‘na dèan tuilleadh dàil’ are amongst the most common motifs of dàin shoisgeulach, while the expression ‘chan eil a-màireach air a ghealttainn’ remains commonplace in casual conversation in present-day Stornoway:511

’Scha ’n ’eil gealladh air dàil
Aig aon neach fui ’n ghrèin;
Tha ar nàmhaid ga ’r dalladh
A ’s mealladh nan cèud.
Mu ’r bi Spiorad nan gràsan
A’ gabhail tàmhadh na ’r crèidh,
Bithidh esan gu dàna
Gleitheadh fàrdaich dha féin. (2. 5)

Craobh na Beatha leads inevitably to An Nathair. Here he appears as Nàmhaid nan Lùb, an enemy who is both cunning and sycophantic. He is subtle and persuasive, blinding and deceiving hundreds. There is no time to spare, no middle ground, just a simple choice between Spiorad nan Gràsan and An Nàmhaid, who has both the power and the audacity to make a home for himself in the hearts and minds of creatures made in the image of God. The story of Eden and the part played by Eve is a problem which Mairrearad constantly returns to in her songs. She is drawn to the sight of ‘Craobh na Beatha fo bhlàth’ in Paradise, just as Eve was drawn to Craobh Eòlais in Eden:

’Sfhad’ o ’n thòisich an nàmhaid
Anns a Ghàradh bho’ thùs,

511 Appendix 5.3.
Historically Eve has been seen by some as being less than fully human, made not in God’s image but merely as a companion for Adam, believed by some to have no soul, by others to be uniquely responsible for the entry of sin into the world.\footnote{512} Paul, notoriously misogynistic, is emphatic as to where the fault lies:

\begin{quote}
Agus cha b’ e Adhamh a mhealladh, ach air do ’n mhnaoi a bhi air a mealladh, bha i ’s a’ chionta.\footnote{513}
\end{quote}

When in verse five Mairearad claims ‘Tha ar nàmhaid ga ’r dalladh / A ’s mealladh nan céud’, she clearly perceives herself as sharing the blame, while insisting that hundreds of others have also been deceived. All she can do is repeat Eve’s excuse ‘Mheall an nathair mi, agus dh’ith mi’.\footnote{514} As though arguing that Eve was not by nature evil she emphasises that she was Adam’s ‘bean-ghràidh’, his beloved wife. She was ‘ro-phrìseil’ (4.7), Adam’s ‘bean-rùin’ (14.2). But however dearly Adam

\footnote{512} In his essay ‘The Myth of Soulless Women’, \textit{First Things} 72 (April 1997), 13-14, Michael Nolan traces these ideas to a pamphlet published in Silesia in the mid 16\textsuperscript{th} century. This had provoked counter-pamphlets in Italy, France, Germany, Holland and England. The more firmly the concept was refuted by the Church, the more it grew. Some insisted that it had biblical authority; others claimed (erroneously) that the question of women’s humanity had been publicly debated at the Council of Macon in 585, using this to support the idea of women’s inferiority and to justify polygamy. \url{http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9704/opinion/nolan.html} [accessed 1.12.15]; For a poem depicting Eve as being responsible for the entry of sin into the world, see ‘Caoineadh Éabha’ in Seán S. Ó Conghaile, ed. and Seán Ó Riordáin, trans., \textit{Rí na nUile: Liricí Diaga a cumadh idir an 9ú agus an 12ú céad} (Dublin: Sáirséal agus Dill, 1971), p. 69. This poem reflects Tertullian’s condemnation of women, ‘Modesty in Apparel Becoming to Women, in Memory of the Introduction of Sin into the World Through a Woman’, in Tertullian, \textit{On the Apparel of Women}, (Book 1, ch. 1), trans. by S. Thelwell, \url{www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.iii.iii.i.html} [accessed 1.12.15]; For characterisations of Eve in medieval Irish texts, see Kate Louise Mathis, ‘All about Eve? Sin and Penance in \textit{Saltair na Rann\textquotedblright}, in \textit{From Vestiges to the Very Day: New Voices in Celtic Studies}, eds. Moray Watson and Lindsay Milligan (Aberdeen: AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, 2010), 1-13. \footnote{513} I Timothy 2.14. \footnote{514} Genesis 3.13.
loved his wife, he did not hesitate to blame her, and nothing can lessen her guilt. Her punishment, that she and her daughters will be subservient to men ever after and will suffer in childbirth, evident as it was in every woman’s life, stood in little need of a biblical _dearbhadh_. Everyday experience was in itself proof that matters stood just as Genesis described.

One senses behind Mairearad’s statement, ‘‘S fhad’ o ’n thòisich an nàmhaid / Anns a Ghàradh bho’ thùs’, the question which many evangelical songs ask. How did An Nathair come to be in Eden? All that she can offer by way of reply is the answer given to over-inquisitive children, that he was there ‘bho thùs’. She speaks, not with the spiritual authority of Bean a Bharra or Bean Torra Dhamh, but as a woman who has no great theological learning. Using ‘ruinn’ and ‘duinn’, putting herself beside rather than apart from her hearers, she returns to An Slàn’ear of the third verse, to explain how He had taken pity, proving His kinship with Man by coming from Heaven and paying for their freedom with His own blood. This single acknowledgement of the ‘càirdeas’ between Christ and Man is the closest Mairearad ever comes to the affectionate family relationship seen in the songs of Bean Torra Dhamh and later evangelical poets:

As na Flaithibh is àirde  
Thàinig Slàn ’ear n’ an dùl;  
Rinn iochd agus bàigh ruinn,  
’$d$ hearbh an càirdeas ud duinn;  
Le fhuil phriseil a thomadh  
Chosnadh saorsa math dhuinn;  
’Sa mheud ’sa chreideas an fhirinn,  
Gheibh iad rioghadh a ’s crùn. (2. 7)

The thought of such a sacrifice and the love which lay behind it makes her more than ever conscious of her separation from Christ, and the weight of sin that keeps her ‘‘anns an fhàsaich’’:
Seeing those around her in the same condition, she reminds them of their *Catechism* by answering its first and most basic question, ‘Ciod i crioch àraid an duine?’ She finishes her song by summarising the *Westminster Confession’s* instructions on observance of the Sabbath. They must read the scriptures, listen to the sermon, pray constantly, and always honour and respect God for sending His Son to help them:

'Sann gu seirbhais na diagh ’achd
Chaidh ar deanamh bho thùs;
Bu chòir dhuinn bhi leubhadh,
'S bhi èisdeachd le sunnt;
Bhith aig caithear na ’n gràsan,
'S bhith ghnàtha toirt cliù,
Air son a mhic gràidh,
Tha deanamh àite math dhuinn. (2. 9)

Associating her song with the *Catechism*, the *Westminster Confession* and the Psalms was an accepted way of lending it authority, just as ministers and theologians did in their sermons and writings. In Laoidh 32.2-3, she uses *Pilgrim’s Progress*’ association of Jordan with death, linking ‘Iosa nan Gràs’ with ‘Iordan a Bhàis’, coincidentally showing that the metrically complete motif ‘Iordan a’ bhàis’ had made its way into evangelical song directly from the English original, as *Turus a’ Chriosdudh* was not published until 1812. The authority acquired by quoting Bunyan could, to an extent, extend to points for which it might be difficult to provide direct biblical dearbhadh. Her repeated depiction of death ‘a’ teachd mar ghadaiche’, for example, is entirely biblical, while the ‘teachdair a’ bhàis’ who appears just as regularly is less easy to justify.\(^{515}\)

\(^{515}\) I Thessalonians 5.2.
The troubled world

Though ‘‘S beag mo chion air an t-saoghal’ is well within what is expected of evangelical song, it introduces some of the darker themes and figures which would have made Mairearad’s songs unlikely to survive in an oral context. For her, Satan is more real than Christ, death always imminent, Hell almost certain, Heaven all but unattainable. The world which she rejects is ‘daonnan mulladach truagh / chan eil ann ac h nìth diomain’ (1.4). She refuses to be associated with it: ‘Tha an saoghal mulladach truagh / Làn àdhmhair ’s gach uair’ (4.1), ‘Fàthadh mullaid leam ’n saoghal / Cha’n eil ann ach aobhar ghràin’ (5.5), ‘Is mulladach an saoghal / Gur caochlaid each a sheòl’ (6.1) Raising her eyes momentarily, she sees the natural world as a sign of God’s creative power and His ordering of the universe, (7.1):

'Nuair a sheallas mi gu h-àrd,
'S a chí mi na neòil gu luath;
Bithidh mi cuimhneachadh, a Dhè,
Gur làidir treun do bhuaidh. (7. 1)

516 Appendix 7.12. I have been unable to trace any of her songs in any context other than in Chaimbeul 1810.
'Nuair a sheallas mi air lár,
Chi mi muir a ’s talamh ann:
Tha do mhiorbhuilean gach là
Lionadh a ’s traoghadh a chuain. (7. 2)

Bean a Bharra in ‘Cuidich mise Riogh na Grèine’, sees God’s ordering of nature as an indication of His care for mankind: ‘An fhairge ni traghadh is lionadh / Ag nochdadh miorbhuíle Do Ghràis’. Mairead sees that same power – ‘Tha do mhiorbhuilean gach là / Lionadh a ’s traoghadh a chuain’ – but cannot avoid associating it with Leabhar a’ Chunntais and Priosan a’ Bhròin. In ‘Laoídh 14’, the deceitful world is joined by the personification of evil, the Enemy who blinds and deceives:

Cha’n eil ’san t-saoghal ach aobhar bhròin,
Aobhar mullaid air iomadh seòl:
Tha ar nàmhaid gu tric ga’r dalladh
’Se ga ’r mealladh air a chòir. (14. 1)

Though the depiction of Satan as a deceiver is ubiquitous in evangelical song, this characterisation of Satan as ‘ar Nàmhaid ga ’r dalladh ’s ga ’r mealladh o ’n chòir’ seems to be a particular preoccupation of Mairearad’s. In Laoídh 2, he is Nàmhaid nan Lùb, the Serpent who deceives Eve. In Laoídh 4, he is Carraich nan Lùb and Athair nam Breug, taking Mairearad back to the perplexing problem of Satan having been lying in wait for Eve from the beginning:

’S e Athair nam Bréug
Ar nàmhaid gu léir
Thug gu àdhmhar sinn féin ’s ar sinnsear,
’S fhad o ’n thòisich e féin
Ann an Gàrradh nan Seud
Far ’n robh Adhamh agus Eubh ro-phriseil. (4. 7)

517 Kennedy 1836, pp. 82-3.
In Laidh 14, she returns to the idea of the world as a place of hardship and trial, with An Nàmhaid, who, as she yet again points out, was in Eden before Adam, sent for the specific purpose of blinding us to our only means of escape:

Cha ’n ’eil ’san t-saoghal ach aobhar bhròin,
Aobhar mullaid air iomadh seòl:
Tha ar nàmhaid gu tric ga’r dalladh,
’Se ga’r mealladh air a chóir. (14. 1)

’Sann tha nàmhaid air ar cùl,
’Scha ’n è ’m fear a chi ar sùil
’S fhad o ’n thòisich é ’sa ghàrradh,
Far ’n robh Adhamh ’sa bhean-rùin. (14. 3)

She warns that An Nàmhaid is all around us, and even though we see him, we cannot recognise him. Offering supporting evidence from the New Testament, she tells us that he roams the world like a roaring lion:

Tha e daonnan a’ dol mu ’n cuairt,
Mar leòghan beuchdaich, a ’m’ measg an t-slòigh. (4. 20)

This particular depiction of Satan is part of the Apostle Peter’s letter offering advice and encouragement to new branches of the early Church:
With the Haldanes having severed connections with the Church of Scotland in 1799, the resulting growth of Congregational churches; the proliferation of Methodist and Baptist missionaries and the Evangelical movement increasingly in opposition to, rather than contained within the Established Church, Mairearad may well have been part of a new Church community. Her vivid depictions of Hell may have been seen as a necessary counterbalance to the perceived laxity of Moderatism with its acceptance of patronage and comfortably-off absentee ministers. Hers is a strangely industrial Hell, with burning sulphur and pits of brimstone, its inhabitants choking in the fumes of its great furnaces. She repeatedly gives graphic descriptions of its leaping flames, showing not a hint of pity for the ‘diobarach grannd’ who find themselves ‘“san t-slochd gun tàmh” (17.8), ‘gun diocladh air péin chruaidh’ (30.1). Bean a Bharra finds the account of The Crucifixion ‘ain-deoin chruaidh ri leubha’, and Bean Torra Dhamh hates reading of the lake of fire or imagining the cries of souls in torment, ‘Tha chúis so eagalach ri leogh / Is sgreamhaidh dhomhs’ a fuaim’. Mairearad Chaimbeul has no such qualms, delighting in the sounds of Hell, as other poets delight in the music of Heaven:519

'Sann an ifrinn gun tàmh,  
Ata 'n diobarach grannd;  
Far 'm bheil gal, agus cràdh, agus giosgail. (4. 9)

She looks on as the inhabitants of ‘rioghadh na h-àingidheachd’ are consigned to Rioghadh a’ Bhròin, listening to their despairing cries as though to music:

'S fath eagal an càs  
Bhi aig Sàtan na ’r tràil’,
'Se ga ’r tarruing le dhìchiol
Gu Priosan a’ Bhàis. (8. 6)

Gu Rioghachd a’ Bhròin
Far an sgreadail an ceòl, [sic]
An teine pronnaisg a ’s lasrach
'Siad an tachadh le ceò. (8. 7)

For those unable to imagine this Hell of fire, brimstone and suffocating smoke, its weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, she ensures that they will never again be free of it, associating the desolate cries of lost souls with the familiar sound of the North wind howling in the mountain tops:

E ga’ losgadh ’s ga’ léire,
'Se ’g èughach le cràdh,
Se screadail is cruaidhe
Na gaoth-tuath nam beann ard. (16. 4)

Amongst all this hellish imagery there are brief moments of tenderness. In Laoidh 29, after advising her companions to abandon their old nature and love each other, she tells them to bind themselves to Christ with ‘còrdaibh altrach’, the bonds between child and nurse, evocative of the bands with which Christ was swaddled as an infant:

Feumaidh tu do bhràithearan
‘Ghràdhachadh mar thu féin
'Sa bhith ceangailt ri Iosa
Le còrdaibh altrach féin. (29. 3)
These ‘còrdan altrach’ appear again in Laoidh 34.9, where she tells the story of the Nativity. This is a subject almost entirely avoided in Gaelic evangelical song, and here Mairearad describes the birth of the child with no reference to the mother:

Rugadh ann an stàbul e,
Gu ’n fritheadh bhí dha;
Chuireadh ann am prasuish e
Chum codail agus tâmh,
Cha b’ fhad a fhuair e fuireach ann
Le naimhdean gu ’n chion-fâth,
B’ iad sin na naimhdean cruaidh-chridheach
A bha gun iochd gu ’n bhàigh. (34. 2)

Bha daonan ga shìr-ruagadh-san
Air thì a chur gu bàs.
’Se Herod a bha fuilleachdach,
’S gach neach a ghabh a phàirt;
Gach mac nach robh dà bhliadh’n’
Chuir iad gu dith gun dàil,
’N dùil ri Ios ar Slànuighear
A sgarradh as gu bràth. (34. 3)

Picturing Christ pursued by ‘naimhdean cruaidh-chridheach’ turns her thoughts to her own situation, censured by her former companions for choosing to become a Christian while they remain in their ‘staid nâdarra’:

A mhuinntir anns an dorchadas,
Fuí dhùibhre sgàil a bhàis
Thug iad dhomsa mi-chliu,
O ’n thug mi dh’ Iosa gràdh:
Trìd mi-chliu a ’s deagh-chliu,

520 Appendix 7.12.
'Stu leannas mi gu bràth.
'Sgach neach atha ’n staid nàdarra,
'Siad naimhdean Iosa iad. (34. 4)

Rejecting them as they have rejected her, she takes grim enjoyment in anticipating their fate:

Sìol na’ nath’reach sgriosar iad,
'S théid an cur fo ’r cùl,
Do ’n fhùrnais, loisgich, mhìlltich,
'San slochd anns nach ’eil grunnd;
'Sann an sin a dh’fhàgar iad,
'Sam pian gach là na ’s mò. (34. 6)

Unlike ‘Sìol na nath’reach’ whom she has put behind her, she is now one of the ‘Sìol Iehobha’, her soul safely bound to Christ with ‘còrdan altrach’ which can never be loosed:

Mar bi sinn air ar ceangal ris
Le còrdan altrach naomh,
Le snàim nach fheudar fhuasgladh,
'Sè theannaich è le ghaol. (34. 9)

Though the reference to those who criticised her may simply refer to the separation from society expected of a committed Christian, it could conceivably refer to those for whom Marairead Cham’ron had once composed òrain molaidh being contemptuous of her having re-invented herself as Mairearad Chaimbeul, the evangelical poet. If there is any trace of Mairearad Chaimbeul in Marairead Cham’ron, it is in the last verse of ‘Cumhadh airson Clemi bean Innis-Eoghain’, where three of the seven deadly sins, ‘ardan, uaill and ailghios’, are linked to ‘sìol Adhamh’, the certainty of death and the sudden arrival of the ‘teachdaire treun’:
Ach com’an ghabh’maid ardan,
Na uaille na àilghios na ’r crè,
Tha gach duine shiol Adhamh,
Ro-chinnteach am bàs dhol na bheul,
Bho ’n Riogh gu ’s am baig ear,
Na ’r thig Orr’ an teachdaire trein,
A Righ nan Dùl, is nan aingeal,
Gabhsa cúram ga ’n anam fa dh’eug.\textsuperscript{521}

The preface to \textit{Laoidhean Spioradail} states that the author had intended ‘to have got several of them translated into English’ and that ‘the more striking ideas and sentiments, which are interspersed throughout the whole, have been selected, and made into English; and are arranged in the form of paraphrases’. These ‘paraphrases’ are so far different from any of Mairead’s \textit{laoidhean} as to lead to the supposition that they are different works by a different author – or that Mairearad was a complete chameleon, able to turn her hand to any style which suited her purpose, or would help relieve her persistent financial embarrassments.

When others bow beneath the taunts,
Or blush of conscious shame;
Then let me never, with foolish vaunts,
My righteous deeds proclaim.\textsuperscript{522}

\textsuperscript{521} Cham’ron 1785, pp. 21-4.
\textsuperscript{522} Chaimbeul 1810, p. 80.
Chapter 6:  Anna NicFheargais and Margaret Camaran

6.1 Anna NicFhearghais

The scant biographical information which we have regarding Anna NicFhearghais shows her to have been born in 1796 in Tayinloan, a small village on the west coast of Kintyre, near the ferry to Gigha and Cara. Her father is named as Duncan Ferguson, farmer and missionary, his dates given as 1775-1803. 523 If these dates are correct, he would have been just twenty-one when she was born, dying at the age of twenty-eight when she was barely seven years old. She married a Duncan MacMillan from the village of Clachan, eight miles north of Tayinloan, and so far as is known, spent her married life there. The Register of Marriages of Saddell and Skipness records the marriage of Duncan MacMillan of the Parish of Killean and Ann Ferguson ‘of this parish’ having taken place on 23 December 1820. 524 Both Tayinloan and Clachan are in the parish of Killean and Kilchenzie, and with Anna’s father having been evicted from his farm in Tayinloan immediately before his death, it is entirely possible that, seventeen years later, his daughter could have been resident in the neighbouring parish of Saddell and Skipness. 525

Unlike many evangelical poets, Anna allows little detail of her daily life or practical concerns to escape her in her songs. There is a hint of a family relationship with the subject of ‘Marbhraann do ’n Urramach Iain Mac-Fhearghais’, where the couplet, ‘Cò am pàrant ’rinn t-àrach / Nach dean gairdeachas tharad’, seems to show family pride and affection for a younger relative rather than just respect for a minister. At five years her junior, he could have been a cousin, but with Fasti uncertain as to his parentage, there is no firm evidence of this. The best and only guide we have to her education, or her intellectual and spiritual life, is a notebook of sixty pages in which she recorded her dàin spioradail. From this we see not just her personal and poetic perspectives, but also her knowledge of the scriptures and her command of Biblical

523 NLS MS 14987, note on flyleaf.
524 23/12/1820 Ferguson, Ann [O.P.R. Marriages 531/00 0020 0064 Saddell and Skipness].
526 NLS MS 14987.
Gaelic. We see from her flowing longhand script that she was accustomed to writing, used the standard orthography of her day, and habitually added accents after having written out her texts rather than as she went along. We see that she made small amendments and occasional crossings out, and sometimes re-wrote entire texts. We also see that she had difficulty keeping her notebook from being used by others to note down addresses, practise their signatures, test out pens, make calculations and keep accounts.

MacInnes, in considering the tone and substance of the doctrine expounded in *dàin spioradail*, divides the evangelical poets into three groupings, each with distinctive characteristics.\(^{527}\) There are the Southern poets of Argyll and Perthshire; the poets of the North Highlands; and those influenced by the Haldane movement. Living first in Tayinloan, then in Clachan, Kintyre, Anna NicFhearghais inevitably came under the influence of the Haldanes. James Haldane had made a tour of Kintyre in 1800 and had lost no time in appointing a local man, Archibald MacCallum, as itinerant missionary. John Campbell, founder of the Edinburgh Tract Society, who had accompanied Haldane, reported that MacCallum, initially based in Campbeltown, was met with threats when he visited the villages and was considered to be ‘a disturber of the peace and a common enemy’.\(^{528}\) The local Church of Scotland clergy were unanimous in their opposition, routinely depriving those who listened to him of Church privileges such as Baptism and Communion. Converts were threatened with eviction, being told to ‘relinquish all connection with MacCallum or leave their farms against Whit Sunday’. When he preached in Clachan, though only nine ventured to listen, he was taken before the Justice of the Peace, examined and ordered to ‘preach no more in that place’. A year later he was able to draw congregations of six or seven hundred on Sundays, and had established weekly prayer meetings. This upsurge in interest coincided with the publication of the Gaelic translation of the Bible. John Campbell’s report to the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home in 1801 describes its effect on the people of Kintyre:

\(^{527}\) MacInnes 1951, p. 276.
\(^{528}\) This information on early missionary work in Kintyre is taken from Campbell’s report on the area in Campbell 1803, pp. 361-8, (p. 361).
They have the most primitive cast of mind I ever witnessed. Perhaps this is owing to their having hardly any book in the language which they best understand but the Bible, indeed, they are so delighted with it and so much convinced of its divine origin, that all other books are read with suspicion. Their knowledge of the Bible is very remarkable, considering the short period of their acquaintance with it. 529

The spread of the Evangelical movement in Kintyre was to have a profound effect on Anna NicFhearghais’ early life, with her father Duncan Ferguson appearing as the subject of a letter dated Skipness, 23 June 1803, from Archibald MacCallum to the Society:

Eight farmers of the dear brethren were put out of their farms for hearing the Gospel and are now dispersed through the country. As they were going to live in the other end of the country, they went by sea, and one of them was drowned, by name Duncan Ferguson. He was an eminent Christian indeed. He was most clear in his views of the foundation laid in Sion and the fruits of righteousness were most clearly seen in his practice. 530

This agrees with the date given in NLS MS 14987 for Ferguson’s death. Its description of him as ‘missionary’ has been crossed out and replaced with ‘farmer’ by a later hand, possibly to make a distinction between a layman and an officially appointed missionary. MacCallum’s letter goes on to describe how the ‘dark providence’ of Ferguson’s death, far from hindering his own mission, had inspired further conversions amongst his immediate neighbours. All over Kintyre, those evicted for attending evangelical meetings formed new groups wherever they settled. It is probable that many evictions had as much to do with agrarian reform as with opposition to evangelicalism, but in popular perception, converts were seen as suffering for their faith, being sent out to spread the Gospel just as the disciples had been. This image of her father, seen as having died for his faith, along with the plight

529 Campbell 1803, p. 363.
530 Campbell 1803, p. 368.
of her mother, herself and their neighbours cast adrift in the world, must have left a deep impression on Anna’s young mind.

One consequence of the success of the itinerating SPGH evangelists was that the doctrines and institutions of the Church of Scotland came under attack, scorned as representing form rather than substance. Within the Church, the Evangelicals were growing in power and popularity as the Moderates steadily declined. Rote learning and quotation of the *Catechism* and *Westminster Confession* were spurned as congregations gained access to the literary, poetic and spiritual riches of the Bible. This did not represent divergence of doctrine, more a change of focus, an opening up of different dimensions of the scriptures, and increased possibility of individual emphasis in lay-preaching and evangelical song. It can be seen in the songs of Pàdruig Grannd, the most enduringly popular of the Haldane-influenced poets. He dealt lightly with Reformed doctrines such as foreordination, and questioned received wisdom on the possibility of redemption for infants, making the love of Christ his constant theme.  

During Anna NicFhearghais’ formative years Kintyre was in the grip of evangelical enthusiasm. Despite the opposition of presbytery, clergy and heritors, the SPGH had set up Sunday schools in towns and villages. Weekly meetings were held by laymen for ‘prayer and conference’, with similar meetings for women. The Gaelic Bible was Anna’s textbook at school and her reading at home. This is clearly evidenced in her songs. Their complexity of allusion is absolutely dependent upon close study of the Bible, with direct quotation of poetic phrases from both Old and New Testaments. Though early nineteenth-century Kintyre was flooded with Puritan tracts from the various Tract Societies, there is nothing of their sentimentality and simplistic piety in her songs. She seems always to be motivated by a warm empathy with Christ. The Rev. William MacKenzie of Tongue, a noted late-eighteenth-century northern preacher, saw this fellow-feeling with Christ as the most compelling emotion he could evoke in his sermons:

531 MacInnes 1951, pp. 291-2.
The truth which seemed above all others to impress and awaken his people, was the dying love of Christ. It was the sin of despising and rejecting that love that made them wretched. 533

Though virtually unknown, twenty-one of Anna’s songs have by some chance survived in her manuscript. Whatever care she took in composing them, they have received little consideration since. The pages of her notebook are stained and ragged; some scribbled over with signatures and addresses, the rules of multiplication carefully copied out, and schoolboy calculations of wages to be paid to reapers employed at 1/4d per day. Paper was evidently at a premium in her household, with songs started in a clear, well-spaced longhand becoming more and more cramped, or, in some cases, couplets compressed into single lines which never quite fit her page.

Now held as NLS MS 14987, Anna’s notebook has undergone conservation at different points in its history. All but one of its laoidhean appear to be in the same hand, the exception being No. 13, the third of the four versions of ‘Rìgh Shioin’. Unlike her other songs, this version has a title, ‘Laoidhean Spioradail, dhoibhsan a chreideas tha e luachmhor’, numbered verses, and ‘A Crioch’ at the end. All her songs appear to be fair copies, indicating that this is just a sample of her work. In some cases small alterations are made, as for example in No 2.9 where she changes ‘Cha chraidh le leon na fireanaich’ to read ‘Cha chraidh le ’dheoin na fireanaich’. With ‘leon’ and ‘dheoin’ so similar in sound, yet so different in meaning, this looks very like an error in transcription from an oral source. This raises the question of whether it was Anna herself who was writing, or indeed whether all the songs were her own. The laoidhean are numbered consecutively, 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc. down to the 21st. There are occasional disjunctions, as in No.19, where a blank page and an individual verse have been interposed between the second and third lines of verse ten, but this is clearly just an accident of conservation. ‘Marbhrann do ’n Urramach Iain Mac-Fhearghais’ takes pride of place, dating the notebook itself to some point after October 1841, the date of his death. 534

533 Campbell 1803, p. 367.
534 NLS dates the manuscript as c. 1841.
Marbh-Rann do ’n Urramach Iain Mac-Fhearghais, Ministeir Chilninbhir agus Mheileird ’an Earraghael is Anna’s only known published work. It is printed as a six-sheet pamphlet, with a ‘Laoïdh’, closely printed in smaller type filling up the back pages. This ‘Laoïdh’ is written out in her notebook as two separate songs, the third and the sixth, with seven and eleven verses respectively. There is also a verse of her marbharrann, verse twenty out of twenty-five, which is omitted from the published version. Though Iain Mac Fhearghais died in 1841, the pamphlet is dated 1855. It was published and sold by a Dùghall Mac Fhearghais, suggesting the possibility that the marbharrann was published retrospectively, or even re-published, by a member of the family. What is not known is how Anna came to be familiar with Mac-Fhearghais’ preaching. He could have spent time as an itinerant missionary in Kintyre while waiting for a charge of his own, though the couplet in her marbharrann, ‘Fhuair thu urram nam bràithrean / Anns gach àit’ rinn thu ’thathaich’, could equally well represent pastoral visiting within his own parish.

At the time of his death Mac-Fhearghais was assistant minister of Kilninver and Kilmelfort. He was forty, unmarried and sharing the manse with Archibald Ferguson, a man of eighty-five, possibly his father, and a Barbara Ferguson, also aged forty. Fasti shows him to have attended Glasgow University, been schoolmaster of Kilninver in 1821, licensed by the Presbytery of Lorne in 1831, ordained in Perth in 1835, taking up his post in Kilninver in 1838. The only publication listed was his ‘Account of the Parish’ for the New Statistical Account, 1834-45, with no record of his brief ministry other than in Anna’s marbharrann. The fact of poet, publisher, subject and household all being Fergusons is certainly suggestive of a family connection.

Marbh-Rann do ’n Urramach Iain Mac-Fhearghais, though only briefly touched upon here, is possibly the most vividly pictorial and warmly affectionate marbharrann

535 Anna NicFhearghais, Marbh-Rann do ’n Urramach Iain Mac-Fhearghais, Ministeir Chilninbhir agus Mheileird ’an Earraghael: le Anna Nic-Fhearghais ’an Sgireachd a’ Chlachain ’an Ceannaire (Dùghall Mac Fhearghais, 1855); Appendix 7.1.
536 NLS MS14987, 1.11.
537 Census, 06/06/1841, Ferguson, John [Census 1841524/00 005/00 001] Parish of Kilmelfort
539 <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1834-45/Argyle/Kilinver%20and%20Kilmelfort/7%2F61/>
in the corpus, with Anna’s tender depiction of the young minister lying in his grave, her pride in the warrior who fell in battle – the bright star that went down too early:

Anns an doilleireachd ùdlaidh
Las gu h-ùror do sholus,
Bu reult thu ’shoillsich lân àilleachd
Is fior gu ’r tràth chaidh thu fodha;
Is buan an cadal a dh’ aom ort
’San tigh chaol tha gun solus;
’S fhada t-oichdhe gun saothair,
Do lamh, a ghaoil, cha dean togail, (v. 3)\textsuperscript{540}

Anna presents the archetypical \textit{marbhrrannan soisgeulach} – a succession of biblical paradigms showing the virtues expected of a spiritual leader. He is the faithful teacher; the shepherd who feeds his sheep; the ploughman who tills the field, plants the seed, waters it, watches it grow; the worker in the vineyard who labours for his master. He is the tree under which they shelter; the rock which stands firm though beaten by waves; the warrior who defies the powerful yet feeds the hungry. In every aspect of his life he lives up both to the heroic and the Christian ideal – a reflection of the Master whom he serves – an exemplar to the congregation he cared for.

\textit{‘B’ fheárr gu b’ urrainn mi ’n Fhirinn’}

Unlike the mid-eighteenth-century evangelical poets, when Anna NicFhearghais embarks on her \textit{laoidh teagaisg} she has no need to teach biblical history or Reformed doctrine. Her companions are as able to read the Bible as she is. In fact, they have probably read it together since their schooldays. She does not ask that they value her song for itself, only that it help them interpret what they read:

\begin{Verbatim}
B’ fhearr gu b’ urrainn mi ’n fhirinn,
’S brigh o ’n bhiobull a tharruing;
\end{Verbatim}

\textsuperscript{540} See Appendix 7.1 for the text and Appendix 5.7 for analysis of its motifs.
Chum gu cuirinn an cèill i,
Do na càirdean tha mar rium:
Dh’fheuch an cuirinn an òrdugh
Laoidh bhoidheach ’chur m’ fhadal;
Sud a bheireadh dhomh sòlas,
Seach aon phorsan air thalamh. (v. 1)\textsuperscript{541}

It is a convention of both secular and spiritual song to begin with a polite denial of any ability as a poet, but here one feels Anna’s genuine frustration at being unable to adequately express herself. If she could distill the ‘brìgh’ and ‘fìrinn’ of the Bible, the absolute essence of its truth and virtue into a ‘laoidh bhoidheach’ she could help her companions to grasp its significance. Her manuscript gives no indication of tunes, but small amendments show her altering the flow of her verse to add emphasis. In this first verse she changes ‘Seach porsan air thalamh’ to read ‘Seach aon phorsan air thalamh’. She makes a similar alteration in verse eight, changing ‘Mac Dé air a cheusadh’ to read ‘Aon Mhac Dé air a cheusadh’:

\begin{quote}
B’ e mo mhiann a ‘s mo dhùrachd,
A bhith ’sgrùdadh an fhacail;
Chum gu caithinn le cùram,
Pàirt de ’n uin’ th’ anns an amharc;
Seal mu ’n gearrar as m’ àit mi,
’S nach bi m’ àireamh air fhàgail;
Tùs a ghliocais bhi sgàthach,
Mu ’n tig am bàs ann ar caramh. (v. 2)
\end{quote}

No evangelical poet would neglect to warn that life is fleeting, any more than her companions could fail to recognise the phrase ‘tùs a’ ghliocais’ as a reflex of ‘S e tùs a’ ghliocais eagal Dé’, the text so often hung on classroom walls, copied out as a punishment and painstakingly embroidered on samplers.\textsuperscript{542}

\textsuperscript{541} Appendix 7.1.
\textsuperscript{542} Psalm 111.10. (The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom)
From the ‘beginning of wisdom’ she goes to the beginning of time and Man’s fall from immortality when, having failed to respect God’s Law, Adam learned to fear it. The bare mention of the ‘geatacha dùinte’ signals the substance of her message; that the gates closed and sealed as Adam was expelled from Eden are a warning of the ‘dorus dùinte’ sealing the unwary and indifferent out of Heaven. Unlike Mairearad Chaimbeul, she does not dwell on who was to blame, nor does she attempt to terrify her companions into submission. She has already gone as far as she will go in that direction by warning them that time is short, that both she and they must consider their position ‘mu ’n tig am bàs ann ar caramh’. Her purpose is not to apportion blame, but to show them a way forward. The First Adam, who had been expelled from Eden, was in the context of her song, only of importance as an antecedent of the Second Adam, who would open the way to the Promised Land:

'S ann bu chòir dhuinn bhi 'sleuchdadh,
Do ’n Ti a réitich am bealach;
'S e a thocraich an ceum dhuinn,
'S rinn e teithleach de ’n charraig:
'S geall geatacha dùinte,
'Chuir Àdhamh g’ ar ciuradh ’sa 'bhealach;
Dh’fhosgail slighe d’ ar stiuradh,
Dh’ionnsuich důthaich a gheallaidh. (v. 3)

This perspective is entirely different from that of Mairearad Chaimbeul, who had attempted to justify Eve and searched for an explanation as to why Satan had been in Eden. Anna asks for no more than the Bible offers. She addresses herself directly to Christ, to show Him that she at least has read and understood what He has suffered for her sake. All she asks of her friends is that they listen and learn as she puts herself in the position of a witness, answering the questions put by the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem:
Co tha so a teachd o Edom, le culaidh dhaithte o Bhosrah? […]
C’ ar son a tha t’ éideadh dearg, agus do chulaidh mar neach a’ saltaitr an amar-fhiona? 543

This is amongst the Bible’s most terrifying depictions of Christ, shown with His garments red with the blood of those who had rejected Him whom He had been trampling like grapes in a wine press:

'S tu ’n Ti ’shaltair a’ d’ aonar,
An t-amar fion le buaidh chaithream;
'S dh’òl thu deasgain na cuaiache,
'Bha ro uamhann r’ a ghabhail:
Fuil a chrathaidh mu ’n cuairt ort,
'Toirt an nuadh dhreach o’ d’ earridh;
Sud an là a bha cruaidh ort,
Dh’òl thu cuach feirge t-Athar. (v. 4)

The man in ‘éideadh dearg’ in Isaiah’s prophecy is understood as prefiguring Christ. Rather than trampling those who denied Him, He was to take their place and was himself to be trampled in the winepress of the wrath of God. It was He who was to drink the cup of wrath to the bitter dregs. The wine which stained His garments was His own blood, and the droplets scattered around Him were the blood with which He paid Man’s debt to God. Wine symbolising blood and blood symbolising wine are seen in the cup of wine which He gave to the disciples at the last supper, charging them to drink it in remembrance of Him. The ‘cuach feirge’ which He must drain, even to ‘deasgan na cuaiache’, is also the ‘cupan searbh’ symbolising acceptance of God’s will, showing that the path He was to take was ordained before Creation itself. Anna does not dwell on the fury and vengeance of this Old Testament figure, but on the fact that he was alone, ‘S tu ’n Ti ’shaltair a’ d’ aonar’:

543 Isaiah, 63.1-2.
Shaltair mi an t-am ar a’ m’ aonar, agus de na sloigh cha robh aon neach maille rium. [...] Agus dh’amhairc mi, agus cha robh fear-cuideachaidh ann; agus b’ iognadh leam nach robh fear-taice ann.\(^{544}\)

She joins the prophecy to the first stage of its fulfilment, showing Christ being hurried towards His death by a crowd chanting ‘Ceus e, Ceus e’ and ‘Fàilte dhuit, a Rìgh nan Iudhach.’\(^{545}\)

Sud an làtha dubh brònach
Dh’iath a mhòr chuideachd umad;
’S iad ‘ga d’ ghabhail mar òran,
‘Deanamh dhiot fearas-cuideachd:
Ge d’ b’ urrainn do mhòrachd,
Na slòigh ’shiabhach mar dhuslach;
Bha d’ fhad-fholangas deonach.
Thoirt dhoibh còmhnaidh a ’s furtachd. (v. 5)

Different elements of His nature are personified and set in opposition to each other, to show that power is not incompatible with gentleness. His ‘mòrachd’ could have swept away the baying crowd like dust, but His ‘fad-fholangas’ was willing to protect them. This technique was familiar, both from Turus a’ Chrìosduidh, with its personification of human vices and virtues, and from evangelical sermons, particularly those of missionaries and Men without university education. The image of Christ deserted by his disciples appears again in the sixth verse – ‘Aon fhear cuididh cha d’ fhuair thu / Sheall mu ’n cuairt a ’s cha ’n fhaca’ – which paraphrases Isaiah’s ‘Agus dh’amhairc mi, agus cha robh fear-cuideachaidh ann’. Sun and moon avert their faces, unwilling to take any part in this revolt against the natural order:\(^{546}\)

\(^{544}\) Isaiah 63.3, 5.
\(^{545}\) Mark 15.14, 18
\(^{546}\) Luke, 24.45.
Dhiult a’ ghrian anns na speuran,
’S chuir i ’n céill le nach b’ ait e;
Chaidh a’ ghealach fo ’sgéith-se,
Cha robh ’n sgeul ud le taitneach:
Aon fhear cuididh cha d’ fhuair thu,
Sheall mu ’n cuairt a ’s cha’n fhaca;
’S ge d’ a ghearradh o ’n t-sluagh thu,
Làn bhuadhaich an cath leat. (v. 6)

Having become mortal, Christ suffered fear, pain and death. Death, however, had only been given power over Man because of sin, and could not hold the Son of Man, who was without sin:

Thug thu buaidh ’s rinn thu dioladh,
’S dh’ioc thu ’n iobairt bha taitneach;
Fhuair thu ceartas lán riaraicht,
Do ’n dream nach fiaradh do reachdan:
Iadsan ’ni dhiot bùn dòchaís,
Bi’dh thu ’t-òran ro thaitneach,
Chaidh t-fhuil luachmhór a dhòrtadh
Air son deòir do luchd aidhmheal. (v. 7)

In the sixth and seventh verses, the richness of her biblical imagery exposes an uncharacteristic poverty of expression in Anna’s own language. At the moment of Christ’s death, the Sun had refused its light because ‘nach b’ ait e’. The Moon had veiled itself because it did not find The Crucifixion ‘taitneach’. The fact of Christ’s sacrifice was ‘taitneach’, and the song of those who acknowledged Him was ‘ro-thaitneach’. The effect of this less than emotive language is to throw the enormity of what she describes into even sharper relief. Like Bean a Bharra and Bean Torra Dhamh, Anna finds it painful to read the account of The Crucifixion. Though she cannot bear to think of Christ’s suffering, she knows that for Man it was ‘là an deadh sgeula’, the only way in which his debt to God could be paid:
As her song progresses, she brings the person of Christ into sharper focus. He first appears as the indistinct ‘Tì a réiteach am bealach’, then as the barely recognisable ‘An Ti ’shaltair a d’ aonar’. As she tries to enlist the sympathy of her companions, she depicts Him as Caomh Mhac Dhé and Aon Mhac Dhé. In the ninth verse she emphasises His humanity. He lies in the grave as any other man might lie, but unlike man, His sleep will not be long. Having subjected himself to mortality and death in order to fulfil the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets and kings, He rises as Fàidh and Rìgh to become the Mediator between God and Man:

Ge d’ a luidh thu sios striochta,
'N leabaidh iosail mar dhuine;
Cha robh 'n cadal ud siorruith,
Dh’èirich 'nios a 's cha d’ fhuirich:
Làn choilion thu 'n sgriobhadh
'Bha fàidhean 's righre 'toirt umad;
'S fhuir thu uachdranach shiorruith,
'N uair a dhirich gu d’ thulaich. (v. 9)

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547 Catechism, questions 42-5.
Casting aside mortality like a blanket, Christ rises from the grave as though from a bed. All around him the dead awaken and follow Him to the City where they will stand as witnesses that theirs is not an earthly king, but Leomhann Treubh Judah:

Bu tu leomhann treubh Judah,  
'S moch a dhùisg as do chadal;  
Bhris thu cuibhreach na h-ùrach,  
'S thug thu dúlan do d’ leabaidh:  
Bha na mairbh air an dùsgadh,  
'S air an stiùireadh do ’n bhaile;  
Chum gu faicte le daoine  
Nach rìgh saoghalt’ a bh’ aca. (v. 10)

Leomhann Treubh Judah and An Ti teachd o Edom are one and the same, as Anna makes explicit in another song:

So an Ti teachd o Edom, dearg eideicht mu ’n cuairt,  
So an leomhann tha treubhach, dh’fhosgail seulacha cruaidh.\(^{548}\)

Isaiah’s prophecy, which she has been explaining, reaches the final stage of its fulfilment in the Book of Revelation, with John describing how he had stood and wept when no one could be found in Heaven or earth able to open the seals on the Book which held the names of the redeemed:

Agus thubhairt aon de na seanairean rium, Na guil; feuch, bhuadhaich an Leòmhan a tha de Threubh Judah Freumh Dhàibhidh air an leabhar hhosgladh agus a sheachd seulachan fluasgladh.\(^{549}\)

He is the one whom the prophets had been unable to represent, whom no pen could adequately describe:

\(^{548}\) ‘Rìgh Shioinn’, NLS MS1497, 8.6. Appendix 7.1.  
^{549}\) Revelation 5.4-5; Revelation 17.14.
Having said that no pen could describe Him, Anna tries whether it can be done in song. She follows the traditional form of praise poetry by listing Christ’s biblical appellations, each of which carries symbolic significance, each representing a parable, a prophecy or a promise. Having established that He is more than human, she shows His sympathy for humanity. He is the Tobar Làn Ioclaint which heals and cleanses and the Fuaran Fior-ghlan whose water was given to the woman from Samaria as a sign that the Salvation which Israel refused would be offered to the Gentiles.\textsuperscript{550} For His people He is ‘tearmunn, dicein, dion and cul-taic’, both the protection they seek and the protector to whom they appeal:

\begin{quote}
Tha thu ’d’ thobar làn ioclaint,
Fuaran fior-ghlan ’cur thairis;
Iadsan dh’òlas da-rìreadh;
Cha bhi iot’ dhoibh ’nan caithris:
Ni thu tearmunn a ’s dicein
Ni thu dion a ’s cul-taic dhoibh;
Cò dh’fheudas an diteadh,
’S buaichaill’ Isra’l a fair’ orr. (v. 12) \textsuperscript{sic}
\end{quote}

‘Buachaill’ Isra’l’, the last in this sequence of mutually reinforcing images, does not, as one might expect, introduce the allegory of the Israelites as a flock, but of Israel as a vine.\textsuperscript{551} The familiarity of the metaphor is its great strength, in that the mention of Buachaill’ Isra’l is in itself sufficient to evoke the image of the vine from Egypt, the tree which spread from the forest to the sea, and the appeal to Aodhair Israel who lived amongst the Cherubim to turn His face towards them, so that its light would guide them to safety. The strength and fertility of the vine from Egypt is in turn

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item John 4.9.
\item Psalm 80.2.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
evocative of Am Meangan, the Branch rooted in the House of David, which can never be destroyed, even if cut down.\textsuperscript{552}

\begin{verbatim}
Ge d’ tha thu a’ d’ lùchchuirt,
Tha thu ’d’ ial’ do luchd turais;
Is Crann ola ’sa chûirt thu,
Tha ’mhil chirr ’uait a’ sruthadh:
Geuga torach ’thig dluth dhuit,
Crann nach fiu ni thu mhilleadh;
Iadsan uile nach lúb dhuit,
Ann a’ d’ chuirtibh cha’n imich. (v. 13)
\end{verbatim}

Christ is the ‘Crann ola ’sa chuirt’, symbolic of the Church, and the fruitful vine on to which believers are grafted to draw nourishment from its roots. Honey, symbolic of wisdom and generosity flows from His tongue as from date palms or as resin from cedars.\textsuperscript{553} The ‘geuga torach’, those who accept Christ, and the ‘crann nach fiu’, those who reject Him, will in their turn be either accepted or rejected. ‘Gach uile chraobh nach giùlan toradh maith, gearrar sios i, agus tilgear ’s an teine i’.\textsuperscript{554} Though the inference is clear, Anna commits herself no further than to say that the ‘crann nach fiu’ will be destroyed and will not enter the City. In her fourteenth verse she again gently avoids the darker aspects of the passage which she references, just as she had in her fourth verse. The image which she evokes is, nonetheless, that of the ‘fìon-amar mòr feirge Dhè’:

\begin{verbatim}
A ’s feumail mosgladh luathreach,
Coran buan cha dean caitheadh;
Tha ar càirdean neo-fluathach,
An dèigh am buain leis a cheana:
Fad a’ cadal ’sna h-uaighibh,
Gabhail suain o gach ainneart,
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{552} Zecharia 3.8, 6.12; See ‘Am Meangan’ in Appendix 7.20.
\textsuperscript{553} See Cruden 1769, p. 237, for the symbolism of honey and dates as offerings to the Temple.
\textsuperscript{554} Matthew 7.19.
The ‘amar-fhiona’ in Isaiah reappears in Revelation 14.14, where John sees ‘Mac an Duine, aig an robh crùn òir air a cheann, agus corran geur ’n a làimh’. Anna has made an interesting alteration to her text, with ‘An Crun’ firmly crossed out and replaced with ‘coran’. This is a simple enough amendment if ‘coran’ were to be taken as ‘coron’, a coronet in place of a crown. Seen in conjunction with the passage she is referencing, where Mac an Duine has both a ‘crun’ and a ‘coran’ where an angel cries out to Him, ‘Sàth a steach do chorran agus buain’, it becomes more complex. She appears to have changed the crown which never tarnishes to the sickle which never wears out. The vineyard of the world has been declared ready for harvest and the souls of men are reaped with a sickle and thrown into the winepress:

Sàth a steach do chorran geur, agus cnuasaich bagaidean fìonain na talmhainn, oir tha a fìon-dhearcan lân abuich. Agus shàth an t-aingeal a chorran ’s an talamh, agus cnuasaich e fìonain na talmhainn, agus thilig e i ann am fìon-amar mòr feirge Dhè. Agus shaltraidh am fìon-amar an taobh a muigh de ’n bhaile, agus thàinig fuil a mach as an fhìon-amar, gu sréin nan each, fad mile is sè ceud stàid. 555

The Righteous, among whom she counts some of her friends, have already been cut down by this ‘coran’ and others must face it in their turn: ‘Tha ar càirdean neo-fluathach / An dèigh am buain leis a cheana’. Where all are familiar with the scriptures, the absence of an image is as potent as its presence. With both ‘buain’ and ‘coran’ in the fourteenth verse and ‘An Ti ’shaltairt a d’ aonar / an t-amar-fion le buaidh chaithream’ in the fourth verse, the link to Revelation’s ‘fìon-amar’ flowing with blood is unavoidable. Prophecy, fulfilment and the consequences of indifference follow in sequence showing Anna and her companions the way forward:

Dh’fhagadh sud oirnn fiachaicht’,
Bhi ’sior iarraidh an rathaid;
Dh’ionnsuidh baile na dìdein,
’Bheir sàr dhion d’ a luchd tathaich:
’S ge d’ robh coganna lionmhor,
Èighear sìth ri luchd caithris;
’S buailidh freiceadan Israel,
Sios gach righ ni orr’ ainneart. (v. 15)

The Fall has left them complicit in Christ’s death. Old Testament Law, however,
allowed those who had unintentionally caused the death of another to take shelter in
a ‘city of refuge’.556 So long as they stayed within the city, they would be safe from
reprisals. Christ was himself the ‘Baile nan dìdein’ in whom they must take refuge,
and now that they have become aware of their indebtedness, they must search Him
out. The ‘freiceadan Israel’ had been set on the walls of Jerusalem to defend the city,
with orders to watch night and day until they would one day hear the cry, ‘Feuch, tha
do Shlànuiuhhear a’ teachd!’557 It was they who had put the question which her song
answers, ‘Co so a tha teachd o Edom?’

Anna, with typical gentleness, delivers her considered advice, and at this point we
see the symmetrical structure of her song. Her account of the prophecy and
fulfilment of Christ’s mission of redemption is contained between three verses of
introduction, in which she appears as friend and advisor, and her last two verses,
where she repeats her advice more emphatically:

Còmhairl’ bheirinn le dùrachd,
Do cheann iùla nan dalla,
Teachd fo cheangal a’ chumhnaint,
’M feadh tha dùil ris a’ ghealladh:
Mu ’n tèid an dorus a dhùnadh,
’S nach bi ùin’ ann ni ’s faide;

556 Numbers, 35.11.
557 Isaiah 62.6, 11.
This time her warning is extended beyond her immediate circle to ‘ceann iùla nan dall’. In the context of the Gospels, ‘cinn-iùil dhall nan dall’ were the Pharisees, spiritual leaders who followed the letter rather than the spirit of the Law, placing greater reliance on their own traditions than on the Law itself in short, from an Evangelical perspective, the Moderate clergy of the Church of Scotland.\textsuperscript{558} The warning hinted at in the ‘geatacha dùinte’ in verse three is now made explicit. There is a real possibility that they will hesitate for too long, that the door will be shut and that they will be turned away.\textsuperscript{559} The grave, the ‘tigh gun úrnigh gun aidhmheil’, allows no possibility of penitence or prayer, nor, as Hezekiah points out when pleading for his life, does it allow the possibility of praising God: ‘Gu deimhin cha dean an uaigh luaidh ort; cha toir am bàs cliù dhuit’.\textsuperscript{560}

\textbf{‘Cia miseach èibhinn bha Adhamh air èideadh’}

When Anna ventures into the Garden of Eden, it is with a degree of indignation, to demand of Adam whether what she has read of him is true. Could it really be that he, who was as perfect in strength and beauty as the sunlight on the first day of Creation, and who had enjoyed the daily companionship of Rìgh nan Rìghre, could have become so despicable? How could he, who was made in the image of God, have defiled that image, preferring the dunghill and the clay he was made from to the spirit which made him? She reproaches him as one might an erring husband, telling him to look at himself, see where his behaviour has got him, evicted from his home with nothing more than he stands up in:

\begin{quote}
Cia miseach èibhinn bha Adhamh air èideadh,
Mar shoilse grèine, ’na cheud trà nóin;
Ach dh’fhàs e truailidh le meas a buairidh,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{558} Matthew 15.14.  
\textsuperscript{559} Matthew 25.10-11.  
\textsuperscript{560} Isaiah 38.18; Psalm 6.5.
Sa chomunn uasal dh’fhàs fuar le dheoin:
A chaidreamh dileas ri Rìgh nan rìghre,
Grad chaidh air di-chuimhn’ a dhiobhail treoir:
A ’s dh’fhàs e diblidh ’sa ghàraidh fhiona,
’Sa mhiannaibh ciocrach an Ti air lòn. (v. 1)\textsuperscript{561}

O mianna tràilleil thu ’bhi ’gan àrach,
’N e sud a’ b’abhais mu ’n d’ ghrà’ i thu ’bhreug;
’N i sud an fhirinn tha umad sgriobhta,
O ’n d’ rinn thu dimeas air iomhaidh Dhé:
Ge d’ fheum thu ’ghlòir-san air gràin de ’n òtrach
Le d’ mhianna neo-ghlan ’toirt lòn do ’n ch Reidh;
Feuch ’nis thu ruisgte fo lagh an sguirsidh,
A ’s èideadh úr ort de d’ chùmadh fein. (v. 2)

Adam, whom she appears to address, and those whom she is actually addressing,
invariably share the same fate. By his actions they too have been expelled from Eden
and have lost the trust and companionship of their Creator. No longer clothed in
innocence and immortality, they are in clothes of their own making, bodies of clay
which must return to clay. She does not pause to consider that,
before tasting the
fruit, Adam had no concept of fear, sin or death and that evil had not as yet entered
the world. She continues to accuse him, making an example of him to her
companions so that they fully understand the state of sin into which they have been born:

Fuair èideadh truaillidh an ionad suaimhneis,
O ’n chraobh neo-bhuadhach sann fhuaras sgeul;
An ubhall bhàsmhor, mar mhil fo d’ chàrain,
A bhrùith do shàil, ’sa thug bàs a’ d’ dhèigh;
’S i ’nathair lùbach a dhall do shùilean,
’S a dh’fhàg thu ruisgte gun tür no cèill:

\textsuperscript{561} ‘Cia miseach éibhinn bha Adhamh’, NLS MS 14987. 19; Appendix 7.1.
The Nathair Lùbach which so haunted Mairearad Chaimbeul’s imagination appears in Anna’s Eden, blinding Adam by offering him the ‘ubhall bhàsmhor’ from the ‘craobh neo-bhualadh’, stripping him of his God-given beauty and intellect, filling him with fear and dread. He might crush the serpent’s head, but it will wound his heel and every step he takes will lead him towards death:\textsuperscript{562}

Anna reproaches Adam again with his lost beauty, demanding that he account to her for becoming such an object of contempt. How had he allowed An Nathair Shèitich to strip him of his senses, destroy his honour, tarnish his crown, leaving him depraved and corrupt, living in fear of the judgement which he had brought upon himself? Adam is far beyond her help or instruction, but by this point her companions have understood that his fate is a paradigm of their own. They too are apt to give in to temptation, break promises, fail to live up to their principles in ways which only they know. The judgement which Adam fears also pursues them. For them, though, there is hope. Though Adam had torn away every semblance of divinity from himself, mankind was not altogether lost. The original remained, not in Man, but in God himself. Though the Covenant between God and Man had been broken, Christ had offered Himself as Mac a’ Chùmhnaint to restore Man to his

\textsuperscript{562} Genesis 3.15.
original state. Anna carries the metaphor of Adam wounded by sin on to the next verse, to the healing of the wound by ‘Leigh a dhunas gach creach thà ciurrte’:

Ge d’ reub thu d’ iomhaigh, cha tròigh an ioc-shlaint’,
Thig iobairt shiorruith bheir dion san fheoil;
Thig leigh a dhunas gach creach ’tha ciurrte,
’S a ghlanas d’ ùrnuigh, tre ’n tuiseir oir;
So Mac a chùmhnaint a dh’eideas ùr thu,
A ’s meas cha ruisg thu, ’s cha spuill do ghlòir;
A ’s lochran iuil e, do ’n dream nach diult e,
Do ’n dall bheir sùilean, a ’s lùgh do ’n leont’. (v. 5)

As in many evangelical songs, the narrative is supported, if not actually created, by listing the names and attributes of Christ. In this verse He appears as the opposite of all that Adam has become and the one who can restore him to his state of purity and immortality. He is An Iobairt Shìorruith, Leigh a dhùnas gach creach, Mac a’ Chùmhnaint and An Lòchran Iùil. The ‘tuiseir òir’ shows that He is also present as An Sagart who mediates between God and Man. The First Covenant has been broken, but Mac a’ Chùmhnaint will, by sacrificing himself, become the Leigh who heals Adam’s wound. The message is clearly one of forgiveness for Adam’s children, not because they have deserved it, but because God is by nature merciful. Christ is also Rosg na h-ùr-mhaidne, the first source of light and enlightenment and Ceann Iùil Luchd Bròin, who shows a way forward through sorrow. The Old Testament had prophesied that Israel would be restored to its earthly inheritance by a king from the House of David. The New Testament understands the prophecy to relate to Christ who, in Anna’s song, appears as Rìgh Shìoin, Slat Rioghall Judah and ‘An Sìol neo-bàsmhor o theaghlach Dhà’bhidh’ to restore Man to the immortality lost by Adam. He will crush Satan and deliver the penitent from the ‘gathan bàsmhor’ of death:

So rosg na h-ùr-mhaidne, shoillseas dùdlachd,
Slat rioghall Judah, ’s ceann iuil luchd bròin,
So guth nam fàidhean; toirm Beinn Shinai,
Rìgh Shioin ’ghràdhaich sliochd Adamh gun threoir:
So an siol neo bhàsmhor o theaghlach Dhà’ bhidh,
A thaghas àireamh bheir gràdh dha ’s glòir;
’S a phronnas Sàtan le ’ghathan bàsmhor,
Sa ’n aithridh ghràidh, thug o ’n bhàs a chóir. (v. 6)

Anna turns from accusing Adam to admonishing those around her, intent on making
them understand that they are implicated in his offence. They must look to
themselves and see how their own minds are contaminated by original sin, as though
with effluent from some great midden:

Ach feuch cia neoghlan, ’s tha ’n inntinn fhèòlmhor,
A dh’easbhuidh eolais air glòir an triagh;
A ’s làthaich fhuar i, o ’n duisg gach uabhar,
Sruth-chlais gach truailleachd, ’s e ’dual ’sa miann. (v. 7)

Realising that condemnation alone is useless, she checks herself. Still she cannot
keep silent ‘mar neach gun dòchas’, when she herself has found hope.563

Cha ’n fhann mi stòlta, mar neach gun dòchas,
Ach iarrainn sealladh a ’s còmhnadh uait,
Cha dun mo reusan o labhairt cèille,
Mu ’n Ti ’chaidh cheusadh an èiric sluaigh. (v. 8)

Not to speak of Christ’s sacrifice would be to hold it in contempt. She must pass on
what she has heard as there is no knowing when those unresponsive to the Gospel
may be reached, when the withered plant may revive. Though its leaves are worm-
eaten and shrivelled, there is no knowing when the ‘driùchd’ of the Gospel will cause
it to spring into growth, blossom and bear fruit:

563 I Thessalonians, 4.13.
She persuades her friends that they were not to be like the fig tree which, once cursed, died for ever.\textsuperscript{564} Though they had been condemned, the curse had been lifted. Parched and withered as they were, they could be brought to life by the pure water of An Tobar Beò. A spark of faith may be kindled even at the brink of the grave and however weak, they could still hope to regain immortality:

\begin{quote}
Cha ’n e ’n crann fìge a mhallaich Iosa,
Searg san tim sin a dhiobhail buaidh;
Ach is geug i dhirich fo lagh an ditidh,
’S thug fuil na h-iobairt dhì dion san ruaig. (v. 10)
\end{quote}

Anna’s depiction of the reward of the faithful is taken from Psalm 92, where the righteous flourish like trees, growing and spreading, bearing fruit even into old age:

\begin{quote}
Bidh piseach air an fhìrean chòir
Mar phailm-chrann ûrar glas,
Mar sheudar àrd air Lebanon
A’ fàs gu direach bras.\textsuperscript{565}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Cha d’ fhàilluich d’ fhirinn, ’s cha cheil thu d’ iomhaigh,
Air neach gu siorruith nach ioc dhuit fuath;
Mar sheudar direach bi fàs an fhìrean,
Fo bhrataich Ios*, o ’n ’s e ’n Ti thug buaidh. (v. 11)
\end{quote}

Anna brings a great variety of images of trees, plants and growth to support her message. Beginning with the ‘gàradh fhìona’ of Eden, the ‘craobh neo-bhuadhach’

\textsuperscript{564} Matthew, 21.20.  
\textsuperscript{565} Psalm 92.12.
and the ‘ubhall bhàsmhor’, she shows Adam in his full beauty amongst ‘geug a ghàraidh’ where he alone grew into an object of contempt, ‘dh’fhàs thu mar thàir an slogh’. He fell from grace like ‘duilleach crionta’ from a dying tree. His descendants were withered branches – ‘crionaich chruidh’ and ‘crionaich neo-ghlan’ – their leaves worm-eaten and shriveled – ‘tha mosgain iogain ’sa dhuileach crionta’.

Christ, by contrast, was the Siol Neo-bhàsmhor o Theaghlach Dhàibhidh. Those who received the ‘driuchd’ of the Gospel would blossom and bear fruit, with ‘blatha cùbhruidh’ and ‘geuga lùbta le ùbhla buaidh’. She goes to Exodus for the ‘searbh luibh’, the bitter herbs which the Israelites ate at the first Passover, then to the Gospels for the fig tree which bore no fruit, the ‘crann fige a mhallaich Iosa’. The fig tree once cursed, withered and died, unlike the ‘geug’ which would be made straight, which though condemned, would survive and go on to grow ‘mar sheudar direach’, the ‘seudar àrd air Lebanon’ of the Psalms.

This studied use of biblical plant imagery is characteristic of Anna NicFhearghais’ songs, as is her similarly precise use of the names and appellations of Christ. As in the Bible itself, the two are intimately related, with honorifics such as Freumh Thaitneach Thigh Dhàibhidh and A’ Chraobh Thorach used to show Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the New. Though clearly delighting in the visual aspects of this imagery, she never uses it indiscriminately or in ways inappropriate to her evangelical message.

Having begun by questioning whether what she had read about Adam could be true, ‘N i sud an fhirinn tha umad sgriobhta?’ by the end of her song Anna is in no doubt that it is. She has traced her story from the ‘ubhall bhàsmhor’, which brought about Adam’s fall, to the ‘geuga lùbta ’s le ùbhla buaidh’ growing in Tìr Emanuel. She has seen Christ made manifest in many different forms under many different titles, seen how these relate to the great scheme of Redemption, and has no hesitation in declaring that His word will reward all who respect and value it:

Bi d’ fhocal buadhach, do ’n dream ’chur luach air,
A ’s carraig fhuasglaidh thu ’n uair ar feum;

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The ‘focal’ which rewards those who value it is, in Anna’s first line, the scriptures, in subsequent lines, Christ. This is the most important message which she can give, that the Bible will show the way to Christ and that He will lead them through death to life. Abandoning her imagery of trees and growth, she turns to the allegory of the journey in the wilderness. As A’ Charraig Fhuasglaidh, Christ will provide shelter, just as the Bible will provide refuge and comfort. As An Tobar Fior-uisg’ He is a source of healing, as the Bible is a source of wisdom:

'San dream le 'n deoin e, bheir thu fo d’ sheol iad,
Thar sruthaibh Jordain, gu cómhnard rèidh;
Gu fearann àghmhnor, a ’n tir Emanuel,
A ’s nathair bhàis, cha bhi ’n phàras Dé. (v. 12)

Whether by coincidence or by design, her depiction of An Tobar as being ‘gun ghrund ‘no iochdar’ is uncomfortably close to both Bean Torra Dhamh’s and Dùghall Bochanan’s depictions of ‘an lochan loisgeach’. The ‘luchd dire an t-sléibh’ who are taken ‘thar sruthaibh Jordain’ are certainly a reflex of the pilgrims in Bunyan’s *Turas a’ Chriosduidh*, while the fact of their being ‘fo sheòl’ takes her to the *aiseag* and into older Christian imagery of the soul as a boat. The final couplet, where the traveller reaches Tir Emanuel, and where An Nathair Bhàis is not to be found in Pàras Dé, is, however, firmly biblical, dependent on nothing which cannot be found in Am Focal, which she so emphatically recommends.

If continuity of script were the only consideration, this would be the last verse of this song. NLS MS 14987, however, has a single verse, apparently written by a different hand, on a scrap of ruled rather than plain paper. During conservation it has been inserted along with a blank sheet, between the second and third lines of the tenth

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566 John 1.1, 14. (*Ann an toiseach bha am Facal, agus bha am Facal maille ri Dia, agus b’ e am Facal Dia*: John explains that Am Facal is Christ, *rinneadh am Facal ’n a fheòil agus ghabh e còmhnuidh ’n ar measg-ne*).
verse. Verse twelve, with its ending ‘A ’s nathair bhàis, cha bhi ’n phàras Dé’, takes Anna to Revelation’s description of Paradise and, logically, to the end of her song. This extra verse could have been added as an afterthought by Anna herself or by another poet. Disconcertingly, it uses capitalisation differently, omits all accents, and has ‘luch-diridh stuic’ while her twelfth verse has the metrically identical ‘luchd dire ’n t-slèibhe’:

Tha cumhnant grasmhor, ni ’s naisgte ’s cha ’n fhailich,
Tha ’n lagh air ardach, ’s chaill Bas a lugh,
Tha ceartas riaruichte, ’s phaigh na fiachan,
’S na geatan iaruinna ’nis fial bha duinte;
Tha samhlaidhean ’s iobartan a choidhch air di-chuimhn’
Tre ’n t-sagairt shiorruidh, ni ’s diol gach cuis,
’S faidh ’s righ e, ’cheanhsuich rioghachdan,
’S fo bhratac dion, gheibh luch-diridh stuic.

It is clearly a concluding verse, whether of this or another song. It shows the Covenant to be sealed, justice to be satisfied and the debt paid. The gates which were closed have been opened. Everything which was hidden has become plain. Christ has taken His place as Fàidh, Sagart an Rìgh and the pilgrims are under the protection of His banner. It is possible that having perceived her song as being poetically complete, she, or another, later saw it as being doctrinally incomplete and added a verse.
6.2 Margaret Camaran, Monar

Where Anna NicFheargais’ laoidhean, though unpublished, reach out to those around her, Margaret Camaran’s songs, even when published, seem to be sung in solitude, the voice of a mother mourning her children, setting their lives and deaths in the context of her own faith. As a committed Christian, she reconciles herself to God’s will, but as a mother, she cannot let them go. Five of the six songs in her collection, M’ Annsachd agus Rannan Eile, published in 1916, are laments for her children. The exception, ‘M’ Annsachd’, is a laoidh spioradail much closer to Anna NicFheargais’ laoidhean, similar both in structure and in its use of biblical imagery, expressing devotion unconstrained by her family concerns.

An introduction written by her son, the Rev. A. D. Cameron of the Free Church Manse at Creich, Sutherland, shows Margaret to have been born in 1824 to Ann MacDonald and Donald MacRae in Maolbhuie, Lochalsh. She attended school during the winter months, taking a keen interest in reading both English and Gaelic. She was married at eighteen to a John Cameron, who was more than twenty years her senior, moving to Strathmore in the parish of Urray. A year later while attending the Òrduiighean at Urray, she bought a copy of the Westminster Confession, bound together with the Longer Catechism and the Shorter Catechism. With this book and a copy of the Bible, she taught first her husband, and later their children to read. On an income of twenty-six pounds a year and grazing for three cows, with no school within thirty miles, they made great efforts to educate their family of seven sons and two daughters. The two eldest went to their grandparents in Fort Augustus, then on to Inverness. A girl was taken on occasionally to give the younger children an elementary education, some spending winters at school in Beauly, others in Lochalsh. The family later moved to Torrangorm on the Belladrum estate at Kiltarlity. Three of the children died in early adulthood, Donald at twenty-three and Angus at twenty-four, while Ann, the eldest, died from measles, contracted while nursing a younger brother. John Cameron died in 1893 at the age of ninety-three and

Mrs Camaran, M’Annsachd agus Rannan Eile le Mrs Camaran a bha uair-éigin am Monar (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1916).
Margaret died in 1918 aged ninety-four. Both are buried in Kilmorack, where an inscription on her stone describes her as ‘an eminent saint and poetess’.\textsuperscript{568}

Cameron could not say when his mother began to compose \textit{dàin spioradail}, supposing it to be at the time of her children’s deaths. Her published songs, however, appear to be retrospective rather than contemporary, looking back on the loss of all three children rather than expressing the first sharp pain of bereavement. There are indications within the texts themselves that they were composed in later life. Her \textit{laoidh spioradail}, ‘M’ Annsachd’, has ‘Tha mi ’nis air fàs aosmhòr / ’S neul an aoig air mo mhala’. Her lament for her daughter, ‘Caoidh a ceud-ghin’, has ‘Ach tha mi nis air fàs aosmhòr / ’S tha saoghal ’na sgleò dhomh’, and ‘Ged a shiùbhlainn am chadal’, both of which are repeated in ‘Gillean nach till’.\textsuperscript{569} There is considerable textual overlap between these last two songs. ‘Caoidh a ceud-ghin’ is printed as nine verses of eight lines, ‘Gillean nach till’ as thirty-three quatrains. The first verse of ‘Caoidh a ceud-ghin’ deals with the death of her daughter, and is unique to this song, while the other eight verses have been split into quatrains, rearranged and set amongst the verses of ‘Gillean nach till’. There are small differences between two of the shared lines, with ‘Ach tha Iosa mo charaid’ becoming ‘Cha’n iosa l mo Charaid’, and ‘’S c’uim am bi mi fo chùram’ becoming ‘Carson a bhithinn fo chùram’, but the meaning is essentially unchanged.

Though Cameron believed that in 1916 at the age of ninety-two his mother would have found the ‘mental strain’ of composing too great, she took a keen interest in the progress of the Great War, spending her days knitting hose for servicemen.\textsuperscript{570} Hugh Barron implies that in ‘Gillean nach till’ Mrs Camaran had included servicemen in her \textit{cumha spioradail} for her own children.\textsuperscript{571} Nothing of this is made explicit in her text, but it could explain her use of verses from the earlier song, given that the situation she faced in losing her own sons was now being faced by many others:

\begin{itemize}
\item Barron 2011, p. 275.
\item Cameron 1916, pp. 32-7.
\item Cameron 1916, p. 9.
\item Barron 2011, p. 275.
\end{itemize}
O, cha till na gillean
Gu fásach nan drisean,
'S cha b' fheàrr gu ’n tilleadh
Ged tha mise fo bhròn leo. (6.1)

‘Cuimhneachan’

‘Cuimhneachan’ is one of Margaret’s five cumhachan spioradail for her children.\(^{572}\) It is primarily for her daughter Ann, who died after contracting measles. The later verses appear to include Donald and Angus, both of whom died in their early twenties. As the eldest of the family, a daughter amongst so many sons, Ann seems to have been her mother’s main help and companion. She is remembered in ‘Caoidh a’ cheud-ghin’ and ‘Nighean nam beus’, here in ‘Cuimhneachan’ and also in ‘Gillean nach till’.

Though printed as continuous verse, metrically this song is in three-line strophic metre, with the first lines of five of its eleven verses echoing the last line of the preceding verse. Despite being irregular, this device is far from being random, sometimes used to emphasise the extent of Margaret’s loss, sometimes to add strength to her determination to accept it. Verses three and four, for example, which describe her daughter have ‘‘S nach d’ thug tè eile bàrr oirr’ an gnìomh’ and ‘Cha d’ thug tè eile am bàrr’. Verses five and six, where she tries to reconcile herself to Ann’s death, have ‘‘S mise dh’iarradh bhi còrduidh r’ a rian’, followed by ‘‘S mise dh’iarradh bhi géileadh’. Printing the poem as continuous verse may have been an editorial decision, bringing it closer to the form expected of a marbhrann soisgeulach. Though it carries a strong evangelical message, Margaret herself makes no pretence that it is other than a simple cumha spioradail, her children having been too young to have made their mark as Church members. She begins in the traditional manner, by explaining her situation, and that it is during a long sleepless night that these thoughts have come to her:

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\(^{572}\) Appendix 7.18.
Ged is socrach mo leabaidh,
'S ann tha 'n oidhche leam fada,
Cha d’ fhuair mi raoir cadal gun strìth. (v. 1)

'S mi ri cuimhneachdainn creuchdach,
Air an t-sràc thug an t-eug dhomh,
Mar chuir e mo cheud-ghin ‘na chill. (v. 2)

The memory which torments her is of the blow of the sickle, the stroke which death gave her as it cut down her daughter. The personification of death, with his ‘lann gheur’ or his ‘corran’, is as common in Gaelic evangelical verse as in the religious painting and funerary sculpture of wider Europe. Though it is the daughter who lies in the grave, it is the mother who is wounded by their separation. This is the first set of paired lines, with ‘mar a chuir e’ and ‘mar a thug e’ intensifying the sense of death as an intruder who comes and goes at will, disposing of people as he chooses:

Mar a thug e gu bràth bhuam
An tè bha feumail dha càirdean
'S nach d' thug tè eile bàrr oirr' an gnìomh. (v. 3)

Cha d’ thug tè eile am bàrr
Ann an ceutaidh ’san nàire
Mo chreach léire mar tha mi dha dith! (v. 4)

This intruder has taken a daughter who was the mainstay of the family, active, industrious, graceful and modest. The second set of pairings, ‘’S nach d’ thug tè eile bàrr oirr’ and ‘Cha d’ thug tè eile am bàrr’, emphasises these qualities, leading up to the mother’s cry, ‘Mo chreach léire mar tha mi dha dith!’ Bitter as the loss of her daughter must have been at the time, and much as Margaret must have felt the need of her with such a large family to care for, it is in her old age that the full extent of her loss becomes apparent. In ‘Caoidh a cheud-ghin’ we see that Ann died from measles, leaving her mother with no one to comfort her in her declining years.
Disease, like death, comes as a reaper, with the daughter as the handful of corn cut at a single slash of the reaping hook and the mother in her turn helpless in the grip of death:

B’ e sud griùrach mo sgéile,
Rinn am beum a bha crâiteach,
Bhuin i bhuam mo cheud-ghin
’S mi gun t’ ëile ’na h-àite
Ghabhas truas ri mo lag-chuis.
Ged b’ ann an glacaibh a’ bhàis e
Cha’n eil të air an talamh
A ni m’ fhàire le gràdh ann. (2. 1)

In ‘Cuimhneachan’, Margaret’s cry of distress ‘Mo chreach léire’ brings her suddenly to a sense of what she is saying, whose providence she is railing against. Whoever or whatever death may be, he cannot go beyond the orders he has been given. If it has been directed that her daughter die, she must bring herself to accept it:

Ach cha deach e thar òrdugh,
’N Ti tha rioghladh gu còmhnard;
’S mise dh’iarradh bhi còrduidh r’ a rian. (v. 5)

’S mise dh’iarradh bhi ’géileadh
Dha thoil anns gach ceum dhi,
Bho ’n chunnaic e m’ fheum air mo chlaoidh. (v. 6)

Bho ’n chunnaic e mo ghòraich,
Thaobh nan iodhalan feòlmhoir,
Théid seachad mar cheò air an t-sliabh. (v. 7)

The paired lines ‘‘S mise dh’iarradh bhi còrduidh’ and ‘‘S mise dh’iarradh bhi ’géileadh’, show that the effort she must make is beyond her own strength. Another
pairing, ‘Bho ’n chunnaic e m’ fheum’, and ‘Bho ’n chunnaic e mo ghòraich’, shows her perception of God’s care for her. Seeing how she pines for her children, He shows her the futility of earthly attachments which pass like mist on the hillsides. Breaking the link between the verses, she pauses to reflect, deciding that there is nothing more important than following An Aon Fhear, however hard that may be:

Cha’n eil cuspair r’ a fhaotainn,
An taobh so dhe an Aon Fhear,
Leanas mise anns a’ chaonnaig bhios dìan. (v. 8)

She realises that she had failed to take into account the fact that even had her children survived, she herself must inevitably die and would have no choice but to leave them behind:

Ged bhiodh iad am làthair,
Na chunnaic mi ’n tràth sin,
’S ann a dh’fheumainns’ am fàgail is triall. (v. 9)

’S ann a dh’fheumainns’ am fàgail,
Am dhéidh anns an fhàsach,
Far bheil ribeanan Shàtain ’s a lion. (v. 10)

The thought of leaving them alone in the world, exposed to the temptations of Satan with his nets and snares is enough to make her see that this was the better way. She should not mourn, but be glad that some of them have gone on ahead. She is fully confident that they will be taken into Heaven and spared the pains of Hell as they had all acknowledged Christ since their childhood:

’S c’ uim a bheil mi cho brònach,
Thaobh na dh’imich air tòs bhuan,
Ma shealbhaich iad glòir aig a’ chrioch. (v. 11)
Tha mo dhòchas ’na thròcair,
Bho ’n ghabh iad aithne ’nan oig’ air,
Nach do chuir e gu bròn iad no pian. (v. 12)

The injunction, ‘Cuimhnich a nis do Chruith-fhear ann an làithean t’ òige, mu ’n tig na droch làithean’, was clearly central to Margaret’s teaching of her children.  It is the fact that they have learned, understood and followed that advice which comforts her, allowing her to see their deaths as sparing them the pain which they cause her.

‘Samhradh mo Chràidh’

‘C’ar son nach eil na fireanaich air an teasairginn o ’n bhàs?’ is a question which Margaret must have put to herself and to her children for as many years as she used the *Catechism* as schoolbook and reader.  In ‘Samhradh mo chràidh’ she takes the familiar answer, ‘S ann o ghràdh Dhé a tha sin, a chum an saoradh gu h-iomlan, o pheacadh, agus o thruaighe i’, and explains it a little further. As in ‘Cuimhneachan’ she begins with time and place, the summer when she lost her son:

B ’e sud samhradh mo chràidh,
Bhuin e bhuam-sa mo ghràidh,
’S e na laigh fo ’n fhad gu ’n éirigh.
Far an cadail e ’n suain,
Gu là as-éirigh an t-sluaigh
Anns an éirich e suas le aoibhneas. (v. 1)

*Cumhachan spioradail* are distinct from secular *cumhachan* in that they invariably hold out the hope of resurrection. In some, this hope is largely in the mind of the poet, with little to justify it in the subject’s life. In this case, though her son was in his early twenties, too young to have been made the subject of a *marbhhrann soisgeulach*, he was fully deserving of his mother’s *cumha spioradail*:

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573 Ecclesiastes, 12.1.
574 *Catechism*, question 85.
575 Appendix 7.18. This song is also in strophic metre, this time printed as six-line stanzas.
She holds confidently to the *Catechism*’s promise of resurrection for those such as her son. He will not suffer, or even lie in the grave, but will go directly to Heaven:

“N oighreachd bheannaichte naomh / Far nach gearainear chaoidh / Gu bheil gainn’ ann air aon ni feumail’. The ‘aon ni feumail’, a phrase often heard in evangelical discourse, is part of Christ’s defence of Muire, the sister who neglected her housework to listen to His teaching – ‘Ach tha aon ni feumail, agus rinn Muire roghainn de ’n chuid mhaith sin, nach toirear uaipe’.576 Everything depends on having made this choice. She can go no further in her song, with its expectation of a new life for her son, without remembering how this became possible, how Christ seeing Man being driven headlong to destruction by the curse laid on Adam had intervened on their behalf:

Mar bha sinn gun dìon,
’S am malachd gu dian,
’Gar iomain a sios gu léir-sgrios,
Thàinig Crìosd le deòin,
Bho rioghachd na glòir,
Dheanamh dorus na tròcair réidh dhuinn. (v. 5)

Her song is, in a sense, a practical account of what she expects to happen. Where Anna NicFhearghais uses honorifics to tell her story, addressing Christ as Dìon and Dorus na Tròcair, Margaret simply says that we were ‘gun dìon’ until Christ came and opened ‘dorus na tròcair’. We see from ‘Cuimhneachan’ that both sons had been

committed Christians from an early age – ‘Bho ’n ghabh iad aithne ’nan oig’ iad / 
Nach do chuir e gu bròn iad no pian’ – so she is confident that this son is among
‘An dream a chaidil an Ios / Gheibh failteachadh fial’. Though none can escape
death, his spirit will be freed from the ‘tigh creadha’ of mortality and taken to ‘an
dùthaich as feàrr, eadhon dùthaich nèamhaidh’:\n\n’S na chaidleas fo sgàil,
An latha am bàis,
Bidh ac’ dachaidh na ’s feàrr na chré so. (v. 7)

The long hours of watching and waiting eventually come to an end. Her son’s frail
diseased body is no longer racked with coughing. Freed from weariness and pain he
is beyond the fear of death:

Bidh ’n corp euslainteach tinn,
Bha mi fàire leam fhéin,
Mar bu mhaith leam gun sgìos gun eucail;
Gun chasad gun chràdh
Gun eagal roimh ’n bhàs
Ach mar aingeal am Pàras nèimhe. (v. 8)

’S ged tha mis’ air mo leòin,
’Ga d’ chumha le deòir
Gur aoibhneas ro mhór dhomh sgeul ud,
Ged chaill mi ’n t-oganach ùr
A bha taitneach do ’n t-sùil,
Agus measarra, cliûtach, beusach. (v. 9)

Though she weeps over him, her comfort is that he has been set free. He had been a
personable young man, intelligent, perceptive, well-respected, and whatever the
nature of his final illness, it had not been able to destroy that beauty of mind and

577 Hebrews 11.16.
spirit. His greatest achievement in life had been to find the faith which prepared him for death. Where marbhrannan and cumhachan, both secular and spiritual, almost invariably remember the grief of the family, Margaret makes no mention of the father or the brothers and sisters. It is as though she is the only one left in mourning, which she may well be, supposing this to be a song of old age and widowhood. Though three of her children have gone ahead, she cannot follow. She must first go through the pain and sorrow which has been decreed for her and wait patiently for her appointed time. Then, and only then, can she go to her rest:

Feitheam-sa le rian
T-àm a shuidhich mo Thriath,
’San tèid mis’ bho gach pian is eucail,
Tha aige ’na rùn
Mu ’n cadail ’san ùir,
An taice ri rùn mo chéile. (v. 12)

As a mother of nine she had enjoyed the reward of the righteous, living her life as the fruitful tree which spread and flourish: ‘A bheir ’na aimsir toradh trom / gun duilleach chall no blàth’. 578 Her children had been a credit to her, following hers and their father’s example, decent, well-respected, committed to their faith. Now all this has been taken away. As she lives out her appointed years, she makes no complaint, nor does she question why she has lost favour as she sadly observes that she has become a withered tree:

Mi mar chrionag gun bhlàth,
Nach toir Earrach no Màigh,
Chaoidh tuilleadh gu ailt na h-òige,
Mi mar chrionag gun fheum,
Chaill a duilleach gu léir
’S nach eil sùgh an geug no mheoir dhi. (v. 13)

578 Psalm 1.3.
She uses the image of the ‘crionag gun bhlàth’, not in the sense of the worthless vine which bears no fruit and will be cast into the fire, as Anna NicFhearghais does, but as feeling herself stripped of her leaves, having no strength or purpose. This is the reverse aspect of the Psalm’s imagery of those who enjoy God’s blessing being like a tree that grows and prospers. Her leaves are withered and fallen, her branches bear no blossom, her sons do not live to father children of their own. Margaret’s ‘crionag gun bhlàth’ uses the same biblical image of leaves and blossoms as blessings which may be stripped away, as the ‘craobh gun duilleag’ of Peigi MacDonald of Cromore’s *cumha spioradail* for her own young son:

   Is coltach mi ri craobh gun duilleag
   Air a cur an oisean gàraidh,
   ’S math an taic a tha ri ’m ghualainn
   Am Fear a roinn a’ chuain ’s nach tràigh e. 579

Margaret’s desolation is physical rather than spiritual. Whatever her actual age, grief has turned her into an old woman who, having lost her daughter and now a second son, feels herself closer to death. Spring will not restore her to what she was. Autumn is near, the corn is almost ripe and the reaper with his ‘corran’ is closing in upon her:

   M’ fhoghar teannadh gu dian,
   ’San tèid an corran fo ’n dias,
   ’S am fàgar mi ’n dion na foideal,
   Far an cadail mi ’n suain
   Gu là as-eirigh an t-sluaigh,
   Anns an gairmeurs suas gu mòd iad. (v. 14)

579 Peggy MacDonald, ‘Amhran Peigi Eachainn’, *Sgire a’ Bhradain: Bàrdachd bho Cheann a’ Loch, Eilean Leòdhas* (Stornoway: Comunn Eachdraidh Cheann a’ Loch, 2010), p. 79. It is not clear whether Peigi MacDonald’s son was lost during the Boer War or The Great War. In either case, these songs could be of roughly similar date. See also Iain Ruadh Stiùbhart’s ‘Clann Chatain an t-Sroil’ (1746), where ‘Mar chraobh gun duilleach fo leòn / Gun mheur, gun mheangan, gun mhèoirean gèige’, is used as a malediction, Black 2001, p. 172.
She should have no fear of death, but others have every reason to fear it and she has a duty to warn them. The first question of the *Catechism* teaches ‘Is crioich àraid an duine Dia a ghlorachadh agus a lán-mhealtuinng gu siorruidh’, and this is what she looks forward to. Equally, it tells what will happen to ‘na h-aingidh’ and the consequences of being put ‘air làimh chli Christd’:

Gu bhith ’ga mhealtuinng gu bràth,
’S cha tig faileas no sgàil
Eadar iad-s’ ’sa làthaireachd glòirmhor,
Mar bhios na h-aingidh gu lèir,
Air am fuadach bhuath fhéin,
Gu ionad na pein ’s na dòruinn. (v. 16)

Sios do phriosan a bhròin,
Far am bi tuireadh gu leòir,
’S a chogais ro bheò ’gad ròsdadh,
Airson an dimeas air gràdh,
Ann an latha na slàinte,
’S nach do ghabh iad ri fàbhar Iehobhah. (v. 17)

If they do nothing else, these last two verses show her to be as capable of composing *earailan* as she is of making *cumhachan spioradail*, making it more than ever apparent that the *cumhachan* published as *M’ Annsachd* represent only one aspect of her work. The difference between Anna NicFhearghais’ *laoidhean* and Margaret Cameron’s *cumhachan spioradail* is a difference of function, not of doctrine, nor of poetic ability. ‘M’ Annsachd’ shows Margaret to be as familiar with biblical history and imagery as Anna. She is just as capable of tracing prophecy to fulfilment and bringing it to bear on her own concerns. When she introduces the figure in ‘culaidh dhaithe o Bhosrah’, it is not to express horror at his bloodstained clothing, nor to pity his isolation, but to ask him to bless her children:580

580 ‘M’ Annsachd’ v. 9; NLS MS 14987, 13.4; ‘Co so a tha teachd o Edom le culaidh dhaithe o Bhosrah?’ Isaiah, 63.1.
O! Gu ’n creid iad da-rireadh,
Gur e so e bho Bhosrah,
Le chulaidh sgiamhach cho daith’,
Riaraich ceartas Iehobha;
O! Gu ’n dean thu a d’ thròcair
M’ oighribh-sa a bheannachadh,
Gu bhi beò chum do ghlòire,
’S gu meal iad sólas nam flaithes. (1. 9)

Margaret’s cumhachan spioradail are not evangelical in the sense of spreading the Gospel, only in the sense of reaffirming her own faith. They appear to be retrospective, composed and sung in solitude, focusing on biblical and catechistical proofs of resurrection. There is the occasional exhortation to the unconverted, but more as a reflex of having taught the Catechism for so long than in any expectation of being heard. Where traditional panegyric verse praises heroic death in battle, and nineteenth-century religious tracts offer numerous accounts of pious children on their deathbeds being a lesson to their parents, Margaret’s songs manage to avoid both extremes. They use a narrow range of imagery, rarely going beyond the reaper and the vine, barely referencing the lexicon of honorifics which Anna NicFhearghais uses with such exuberance. They are as indifferent to the natural world as Anna is taken up with it, as restrained as she is lavish in their use of pictorial imagery. To what extent these differences are a function of their different ages; of the seventy years between Anna’s writing in NLS MS 14987 and the publication of Margaret’s M’ Annsachd; or of two personalities with two poetic personas, can only be guessed at. To compare them is not to compare like with like, just to show something of the range which the evangelical poets cover and how they address different areas of spiritual life differently.

Anna NicFhearghais’ notebook contains songs of different types – earailean – laoidhean spioradail – and a marbhrann soisgeulach with no introduction of any sort, leaving her work to speak for itself. In the case of Margaret Cameron, the question of editorial bias as regards selection and presentation of her songs cannot be
avoided. *M’ Annsachd* was published by her son, a Free Church minister, whose eight-page introduction depicts her as the archetypal grieving mother of Puritan tracts; suffering, pious, deeply concerned for the souls of her children. He describes her songs as having the ‘melancholy moan so characteristic of all Gaelic poetry […], not the musings of a dejected faith but rather of the broken spirit’. The songs represent these aspects of her work, because they have been selected to do just that. Whether this was her own, her son’s, or a publisher’s choice is of less importance than realising that at some point a choice was made.

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Chapter 7: Catrìona Thangaidh, Màiri Anna NicIomhair and Catrìona an Tucsain

7.1 Catrìona Thangaidh, Barbhas

Catrìona Thangaidh lived at the heart of the maelstrom of Evangelical Revival which swept Lewis and Harris in the early years of the nineteenth century. She was amongst its earliest converts, revered for her spiritual insight and respected for her ability to engage in theological debate with the foremost evangelists of her day. At the same time she is remembered for her gentleness and her engagement with young children. ‘N. N.’ describes how, as a sixteen-year-old, he was amongst a party walking back from Òrduighean Charlabhaigh with her, and how honoured he felt when she accepted his invitation to spend a night at his parents’ house on the way:

‘Us chuir sud aoibhneas ’us moit mhòr orm. Agus bha oidhche shona againn leatha, i ’seinn marbhrainn a rinn i air diadhairean, le guth cho binn ’s nach cuala sinn a shamhuil. Dh’fhalbh mi treis air an t-slighe leatha, ’us cha robh fiù leanaibh bhig ’choinnich rithe nach canadh i, ‘An cuala sibh mu Iosa, iarraibh eòlas air Iosa ’us bithidh ag ùrnuigh ris gach latha ’us oidheche’. 582

Alasdair MacRath, in his preface to Laoidhean agus Òrain le Catrìona Thangaidh, describes her as follows:

Fhuair Catrìona àit urramach measg luchd-aideachaidh ann an Leòdhus. Bha i àrd, eireachdail ’n a pearsa, le aghaidh a’ giúlan maise spioradail. Bha i aoibhneach, deas a bhi faicinn taobh soilleir gach freasadail agus lân gràidh agus seirc.[…] Bha i beo-inntinneach, cridheil, agus cha do mheas i e ’na pheacadh a bhi ri fa-la-dhà air uairean. 583

Renowned for her irrepressible wit as much as for her profound faith, anecdotes about her were held in oral memory for many years before being recorded in various Church histories to become part of the accepted history of Island evangelicalism. It was not until forty-six years after her death that a collection of six of her songs, *Laoidhean agus Òrain le Catrìona Thangaidh*, was published.\(^{584}\) These had been taken down ‘as a beul fhèin’ by the Rev. Alasdair MacRath of Kintail and Tongue, who also wrote the introduction. Apart from these six songs, just a single verse survives. This lists local evangelists: ‘four of the high spiritual nobility of Lews’, Callum MacCallum, the Seer of Siabost, her lifelong friend Iain MacAoidh and Iain MacIomhair, who had the reputation of being able to ‘manage Satan’ when he was too much for other men:

\[
\text{Iain Smith a Bragar} \\
\text{A Bharvais Iain MacAoidh,} \\
\text{MacIomhair ’s Callum Sheabost,} \\
\text{Bu tearc an leithid ann.}^{585}
\]

Catriona NicAoidh, Catriona Bhàn Bharbhais or Catriona Thangaidh, as she is known in Lewis, was from Tangaidh, a small village on Fearann Eaglais Bharbhais where her father was the minister’s shepherd. The minister, the Rev. William MacRae, though a Moderate, was held in high regard throughout the island for giving real practical support in terms of food, provisions and medicines to those in distress, or legal advice and representation for those in difficulties with the Lewis Estate.\(^{586}\) He was an intelligent and cultured man with a keen interest in education, actively encouraging the EGSS to establish schools in Ness, Galson, Shader and Arnol. Though openly supporting the Galson schoolmaster Iain MacLeòid when he took up his post in 1820, he later reported him to the Society for preaching rather than teaching and MacLeòid was dismissed. The people of Dell and Galson were so

\(^{584}\)MacRath 1917.  
\(^{585}\)Norman C. MacFarlane, The Men of Lewis (Stornoway: SG, 1924), p. 46.  
incensed at this that they kept ‘Iain MacLeòid Ghabhsuinn’ on in defiance of the Society, paying his salary themselves.587

The great Evangelical Revival of 1822, long remembered as Bliadhna an Fhaomaidh, was said to have started in Tangaidh, with a young girl finding a page of scripture which she took home to read to her mother. Another account has it in Barvas with a schoolgirl reading an account of The Crucifixion, first to her mother, then to assembled neighbours.588 The story affected them so deeply that word spread from village to village. Overcome by emotion, some fell into hypnotic states; some had visions; others discovered powers of divination. Among those who became committed Christians at the time was Iain MacAoidh, and through him Catriona Thangaidh. The ceangal anama between them was to be a lifelong support, which neither his marriage nor his emigration to Quebec could weaken.589

Both the Rev. William MacRae of Barvas and the Rev. Alexander Simson of Lochs wrote to the estate factor expressing fears for the sanity of some of their parishioners, who were being stirred up by itinerant evangelists.590 MacRae complained specifically of Iain MacLeòid, Galson and Neil Murray, Ness, both of whom were EGSS teachers, who, having been dismissed from their posts, continued to teach and preach. Paradoxically, literacy was to be the most effective counterbalance to the excesses which marked the early days of Revival, at the same time forming the foundation of a distinctive and enduring evangelicalism.

In neighbouring Uig, the Rev. Hugh Munro, ‘a mild ecclesiastic who kept a respectable distance from the conscience and daily life of his parishioners’, had by the time of his death in 1823, been incapacitated for some years.591 His successor Alexander MacLeod, the first Evangelical minister in Lewis, found that few were familiar with the Bible and that there was no real understanding of Reformed

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587MacAulay 1985, p. 143.
590MacAulay 1985, pp. 144-5.
591MacAulay 1985, p. 108; See pp. 67-8, above.
doctrine. Suspending the Òrduighean and refusing to baptise infants whose parents were unable to repeat the Catechism, he instituted an intensive programme of education, appealing to the EGSS for funding, establishing midweek meetings, lectures and prayer meetings all over the parish.\textsuperscript{592} Within months he had a new body of catechists and teachers, among them Iain Fionnlasdan, Calum MacRitchie, Aonghas MacIomhair and MacRath Mór, all of whom were to become ordained ministers and leading lights in the Evangelical movement.\textsuperscript{593} By the summer of 1824, Uig had become a centre of Evangelical preaching, with people spending their Saturdays travelling as much as forty miles, from Ness, Back and Knock to reach the Uig ferry in time to be in Uig for the Sunday services.\textsuperscript{594}

Though Catrìona Thangaidh’s date of birth is unknown, it is reasonable to assume from what is known of her contemporaries and from MacRath’s preface to her Laoidhean agus Òrain that at the time of the Bliadhna an Fhaomaidh Revival she was, at most, in her early twenties:

\begin{quotation}
Thàinig Catrìona fo chúram anama ’na h-òige, agus bha i gu mòr air a toirt do leughadh a’ Bhìobuill air chor agus gu robh mòran deth aic air a cuimhne, agus bha e furasd dhi a bhi cantuinn a’ chaibideil aig dleasdnas teaghlaich ’nuair nach bitheadh solus ’san taigh airson a leughadh.\textsuperscript{595}
\end{quotation}

Those such as Iain MacAoidh, Iain MacLeòid, Aonghas MacIomhair, MacRath Mór and Catrìona Thangaidh, who had shared the experience of Revival, formed deep and lasting friendships. Where spiritual authority was of more consequence than ordination or the simple fact of being male, certain women were accepted by these ministers and missionaries as being able to discern run diomhair an Tighearna and

\textsuperscript{593} Norman C. MacFarlane, Apostles of the North (Stornoway: SG, nd.), pp. 90-1; See pp. 67-8, above.
\textsuperscript{594} MacAulay 1985, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{595} MacRath 1917, p. 5
having biblical learning equal to their own.\textsuperscript{596} The sheer volume of anecdote surrounding Catriona Thangaidh, her friend Fionnaghal Bheag of Barvas, Mòr Bheag an t-Soisgeil of Ness, Mairead Mhòr an t-Soisgeil of Tolsta, Ceit Mhòr in Lochcarron, Bean a’ Chreideimh Mhòir in Sutherland, Christina NicDhòmhnuill ‘Bànrigh Shoadh’ and many others bears witness to the respect amounting to awe, in which such women were held.\textsuperscript{597} There is an account of one of Catriona’s exchanges with the Rev. Rob Fionnlasdan of Lochs:

Aig Ordugh nan Loch dh’fhàiltich Mr. Fionnlastan i ag ràdh, ‘’N i so òinnseach mhòr Bharbhais?’ Thuirt ise, ‘’S i tha so; an e so amadan mòr nan Loch?’ Ghearan cuid rithe as deigh dol dhachaidh air son a cainnt ris a mhinisteir. Cha do ghleidh i cuimhne iu cimhne a r ainnt.\textsuperscript{598}

Persuaded that she had gone too far, she walked twenty miles to offer her excuses, to be met with Fionnlasdan’s answer:

Nach eil cuimhne agadsa gu ’n tuirt mise riut-sa ’an toiseach òinnseach mhòr Bharbhais mas tuirt thusa riumsa amadan mòr nan Loch, ’us nach do phàighh sinn a chéile?’

The same account has her being rebuked by her spiritual mentor, Iain MacAoidh, for singing too loudly:

Bha i còmhla ri fìor charaid Iain MacAoidh, ag éisdeachd. Thuirt e rithe, ‘Ciod a thàinig ort, thug thu barrachd air an seinn a nochd air an dà fhear-seinn againn, Aonghas Maclomhair a ’s Calum MacRitsie?’

\textsuperscript{596} Campbell 1953, pp. 120-6; Tormod Sona: Gleanings of Early Days of Gospel Power in Lewis (Stornoway: Bethesda, 2006), p. 26; \textit{Rùn dìomhair an Tighearna} (Ps. 25.14) was the power of prescience attributed to certain devout Christians.

\textsuperscript{597} See MacLeod 1995, pp. 28-34 for \textit{Rùn dìomhair an Tighearna} associated with Catriona Thangaidh, Fionnaghal Bheag, Barvas and Beataidh NicAoidh, Dornoch; Alexander MacRae, \textit{Margaret MacDiarmid (Bean a’ Chreidimh Mhoir) or Mrs MacKay of Sheiggira and of Melness} (Glasgow: Alexander MacLaren & Sons, 1943).

\textsuperscript{598} \textit{MR} (April 1915), 15.
'O Iain chaoimh', ars ise, ‘bha ’mhil ’tighinn a nuas cho pailt as na flaitheanas 'us nach b’ urrainn mi mo ghuth a chumail na b’ isle’.

This was the more remarkable in that MacIomhair and MacRitchie were two of the most powerful precentors on the island, famous for having kept singing at Dr Domhnallach’s sermon at Òrduighean Ùige in 1827 when seven thousand broke down and wept. 600 Catriona herself is said to have had an outstandingly beautiful voice and a distinctive way of ‘dovetailing’ her singing with that of the precentor. 600

At the Disruption of 1843, William MacRae, feeling bound by his ordination promise to stay in the Established Church, sent his family to join the Free Church, leaving himself with no congregation. 601 On the death of Catriona’s father, he had allowed her to stay on in the shepherd’s bothy which had been their home, though Barvas had by this point been cleared. On MacRae’s own death in 1856, the incoming minister honoured MacRae’s promise, but did nothing to curb An Ciobair Mòr, the new factor. He, having put his three horses to graze in Catriona’s potato patch, forbade her to plant it. Finding her pulling up shaws from the previous year’s crop to keep herself from starvation, he struck her to the ground, to be met with a curse, the range and complexity of which varies in the telling. In one version she simply asks that he be removed: 602

Agus ghoirtich e i cho dona ’s gun robh i air a h-èigneachach gu guidhe ris an Tighearna an duine cruaidh-chridheach a thoirt air falbh.

Her friend Fionnaghal Bheag remonstrated with her and was answered:

Ge tà, cha b’ e do cheann-sa a dh’fheuch e mun talamh. Bheir an Tighearna air falbh e, agus giulainidh na tri eich ghlasa a-mach às an àite e.

599 MacAulay 1985, p. 178.
600 Murdoch Campbell, Gleanings of Highland Harvest (Glasgow: N. Adshead & Son, 1957 [1953]), pp. 31, 45.
601 MacFarlane nd., p. 92.
602 Campbell 1953, pp. 28-9.
This duly happened. An Ciobair Mòr died suddenly and was taken to the graveyard by his three grey horses. Another version has Catriona extending her fury to the manse: ‘Nach biodh duine teaghlach a chaoidh air a bhreith anns a’ mhansa ann a’ Bharbhais’, a curse whose potency no one doubted – and no woman had dared to test by remaining in the manse as the time of their confinement approached – even in 1963 when it was recorded by John MacInnes.\(^{603}\)

‘\textit{Marbhrann do ’n Urr. Uilleam MacRath}’

Though criticised as a Moderate, MacRae was not of the kind pilloried for neglect of their congregation, rather the Moderate who concerned himself with social welfare and education as much as with evangelism.\(^{604}\) Adhering firmly to the Church of Scotland in the face of his congregation’s defection to the Free Church, he was not, so far as can be established, against the principles of the Evangelical wing of the Church, only against the fact of the Church dividing itself against itself. Regardless of their being on different sides of this divide, Catriona never lost her respect for him, defending him against his detractors, and composing an affectionate \textit{marbhrann} for him on his death in 1856.\(^{605}\)

Though Catriona is indisputably an evangelical poet and MacRae indisputably a minister, her \textit{marbhrann} for him does not follow the established form of \textit{marbhrannan soisgeulach}. What she has done is to make a \textit{marbhrann} accepting him on his own terms; praising what he was and what he actually did, biography rather than hagiography. What is omitted is as interesting as what is included. There is no mention of his preaching, no mention of public prayer nor the usual reference to blessings flowing through him to his congregation. There is no mention even of his expectation of Salvation – a startling omission in any \textit{marbhrann} by an evangelical poet, let alone one for a respected minister. Where \textit{marbhrannan soisgeulach} typically use symbolic representations of their subject’s ministry, depicting him as ‘ciobair gràidh’, ‘teachdaire glan’, ‘fear-stiùiridh’ and ‘lòchran iùil’, these are all

\(^{603}\) SA 1963.022 A5.  
\(^{605}\) Appendix 7.7.
absent. What is seen is that he fed the poor, comforted those in distress, settled disputes and would be missed by many. ‘Cha’n e ’m baile so mhàin / Ach gach ceàrn’ de ’n dùthaich’ (v. 6). Where MacRae was a practical Christian, Catriona makes a similarly practical marbhrainn. The most immediate necessity for the wife and children of a minister who dies in post is that of quitting the manse, and this is what she first addresses:

Gur sinne tha cianail,
O ’n thriall iad o ’n bhaile!
Cha’n urrainn mi innseadh,
Mar tha m’ inntinn le fadachd
Ag ionndrain nan càirdean
Ge b’e àite gu ’n deach iad.
’S e an turus an dràsda
Dh’fhàg cràiteach is lag mi. (v. 1)

Having been parish minister for over forty years and having reared his ten children there, MacRae and his family were very much part of the Barvas community. Catriona’s marbhrainn for her friend and protector is vividly evocative of time and place, even of the weather; the burial ground by the shore; sand drifting through the marram grass and over the machair; spindrift blowing in from the sea; the frail grey-haired widow, her falling tears flowing over her breast; the narrow coffin laid in the sandy soil of Cladh Bharbhais; in everyone’s mind an unspoken apprehension of what will happen to Barvas with its protector gone:

A nis tha a chéile
I fèin ann an laigse;
Cha’n eil e ’n a iognadh
A ciabhag a ghlasadh;
Tha sileadh a sùilean
A’ drùghadh ’g a broilleach;
O ’n chàireadh ’s an uaigh e,
Di-luain air an fheasgar. (v. 4)

’N a laidhe ’s an t-siaban,
Gu h-iosal ’s a mhachair;
Ann an cist a’ chinn-chaoil,
Tha ’m fear shaoradh na bailtean
Ach a nis o ’n a dh’halbh e,
Tha Barbhas an airce,
Gu ’n tig cumhachd o ’n àirde,
Bheir gràs agus neart dhuinn. (v. 5)

Showing MacRae as ‘fear shaoradh na bailtean’ and Barbhas as being ‘an airce’ and ‘gun cheann-iúil ann’ without him was an accurate reflection of his ministry. In the years between 1841-1851, Barbhas had lost 24% of all households and Uig had lost 50%. 606 Small tenants were regularly cleared from village to village, losing their own means of subsistence and increasing the hardship of those they landed among:

B’ e sud am fear-dùthcha,
’Nuair dhùisgeadh a’ chòmhstri!
A ghnàth air an cúlaibh,
Cur chúisean an òrdugh. (v. 7)

MacRae had never limited his assistance to those within his parish boundaries and there were families all over the island who had reason to be grateful to him:

’Nuair a bhiodh an cruas orr’
Bhiodh sluagh tigh’nn d’ a ionnsuidh;
Tha mòran de dh’uisleann,
’S de thrughain ’g a ionndrain. (v. 8)

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At a time when it was Church of Scotland policy to evict those attending evangelical
meetings, MacRae had allowed Catrìona to stay on in her bothy on Fearann Eaglais
Bharbhais. On the death of her father, this act of kindness was all that stood between
her and destitution:

Ged bha mis’ gun mhàthair
Gu ’n bhràthair ’n taobh shuas dhomh,
Nach fhaca sibh ’n gràdh ud,
Thug bàrr air na h-uaislean? (v. 9)

It was an acute consciousness of this, coupled with a genuine respect for MacRae,
which led her to defend him to those who scorned him:

Ma tha thu ri faighneachd,
Dé ’n t-aobhar mu bheil mi;
Ma nì mi dhuit innseadh,
Nach fhaod thu mo chreidsinn?
Bha farsuingeachd mhòr ann,
Gu seòladh neach eile;
Nach cual’ thu bhi ’g innseadh
B’ e ’m Biobull a roghainn? (v. 10)

It seems that those around her, having thrown in their lot with the Free Church, could
barely credit a Church of Scotland minister even with reading the Bible. Catriona
assures them that MacRae spent many hours in study and prayer. She reminds them
how he visited the sick, read to them, prayed with them and that he had always taken
the scriptures as his guide. Unlike his critics, he had no fear of bullying officials or
the civil law, extending his protection to those who fell foul of it:

Cha b’ ann coltach ri c’ach a
Bha àbhaist an duin’ ud;
Cha chuireadh e diù ann
An diombadh luchd-lagha;
'S ann a bhiodh e 'n còmhnuidh
A' còmhnadh gach duine
Ri bochdan 's ri feumaich,
'N an éigin 's 'n an trioblaid. (v. 12)

Her marbharrann is clearly framed in defiance of local opinion, to the extent that she is met with derision for even attempting to defend the reputation of a Moderate. Her sense of justice is, however, stronger than her fear of ridicule. She faces her critics, defying them to contradict her, reminding them yet again of how he had fed the poor and comforted those in distress:

Ma tha thus’ an dràsda,
Deanamh gàir’ agus fanoid;
An gabh thu ort innseadh
Nach e ’n fhirinn th’ agam?
'S iomadh bochd is diol-déirc,
Thàinig feuma gu dtòirm
Le ’m poc is le ’m balgain,
'S cha’n fhalbhadh iad falamh. (v. 14)

It is a matter of record that MacRae had stood up in court to defend parishioners, appealed for EGSS schools to be founded, followed their progress and shown generosity and kindness to the poor. He had also had EGSS teachers dismissed, refused Church privileges to evangelicals and removed a whole village from Church membership when they opposed him. It is small wonder then that Catriona’s marbharrann not so much invites admiration of his virtues, as defies those around her to forget them. In her last verse, she rests her case as it seems no one can come forward to contradict her. All that is left is for them to go and convince others.

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607 MacAulay 1985, p. 143. MacRae’s conflicting loyalties are evident in his response when asked why he did not silence MacLeod: ‘Would that every person in Barvas, Shader and Galson went to hear John MacLeod. I would feign go myself’.
Co-dhùnadh an t-seanchais,
‘N duin’ ionmhuiin bha ‘m Barbhas
Cho fad is bu leur dhuinn,
B’ e fhèin an duin’ ainmeil!
Innis thus d’ a chàirdean,
Cho àluinn ’s a dh’fhálbh e
Ag iarraidh a’ Bhiobuill
Is inntinn cho anmuinn. (v. 16)

‘Marbhrann air Aonghas Maclomhair’

Some ministers were Moderate only by comparison with their more Evangelical
neighbours, or with the itinerant evangelists, catechists and schoolmasters who
started by serving at the furthest corners of their extensive parishes and ended by
taking them over entirely. MacRae was just such a minister, Aonghas Maclomhair
just such a schoolmaster, catechist and missionary.

Born in Reef, Uig in 1799, Maclomhair had little education, teaching himself to read
from an Irish Psalmody which his father had come across in Harris.608 In 1820 he
became a schoolmaster in Uig. This was followed by three years in Canada, a return
to Uig where he attempted to prepare for university entrance, then a post as
schoolmaster in Ardnamurchan. He returned to Lewis, to be taken on as
schoolmaster and missionary in Back. He was posted to Bernera where he spent
eighteen years before returning to Back, eventually moving to Maryburgh where he
died in 1856. He had campaigned vigorously for secession, holding public meetings
all over the island in the months leading up to the Disruption.609 His commitment to
evangelicalism kept him in conflict with the Gaelic Schools Society and local
ministers, but ensured him a devoted following wherever he went. When Catriona
praises Maclomhair, she has no fear of contradiction for he was universally admired

608 MacAulay 1985, pp. 198-9; ‘Angus MacIver: A Lewis Catechist’, on
as representing all that the Moderates were not. Where MacRae concerned himself with bodies and minds, MacIomhair thinks only of the soul:

Dh’fhálbh oirnn air a’ bhliadhna-s’
An teachdair bha ciatach is glan;
Thugadh dhachaidh gu slàint’ e
Le cumhachd na h-Airde ‘s mòr mais;
Cha b’ airidh an t-áite-s’,
Gu ’n gabhadh e tâmh ann car greis,
’Nuair chunccas so iomchuidh,
’S ann rinneadh an imrich an clis. (v. 1)⁶¹₀

MacIomhair’s tenuous attachment to the world was not only on account of his deeply held convictions, but also that with acute asthma, he had suffered many reminders that death might come at any moment. His wife and seven children could not help but be conscious of his precarious hold on life and Catriona speaks for the whole community in offering sympathy:

Och! ’s truagh leinn a chêile,
Ged bu leath’ Dun-éideann ’s na th’ ann,
I muladach deurach,
’s i ’g a ionndrainn féin, is a clann
B’ e teachdair a bhàis e,
’s i faicinn gach là gu ’m b’ e ’n t-àm’
Biodh i nis ri ùrnuigh,
Gu ’n tig cumhachd dhùisgeas na th’ ann. (v. 3)

The certainty that a time had been appointed for his death and that ‘teachdair a’ bhàis’ would come unexpectedly fits exactly with evangelical teaching on foreordination, adding urgency to the widow’s prayer that the work of Revival

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⁶¹₀ Appendix 7.7.
continue. MacIomhair himself had been constantly in prayer, constantly pleading that those around him would be freed from the power of sin:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Nuair bhiodh e ag úrnuigh,} \\
\text{Bhiodh sileadh o shùilean gu pailt;} \\
\text{Bhiodh e tagradh ’n còmhnuidh,} \\
\text{A chumhachd a doirteadh a mach,} \\
\text{Air na peacaich bu thruagh,} \\
\text{Chum ’s gu faigheadh iad fuasgladh as. (v. 2)}
\end{align*}
\]

He had often wept over them; now they must shed tears for themselves and reflect that not all of them will be among the elect:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tha sinne gu tùrsach} \\
\text{A’ sileadh ar sùilean d’ a réir;} \\
\text{Cha’n urrainn sinn àìcheadh} \\
\text{Nach eil sinn ’g an àireamh gu léir. (v. 5)}
\end{align*}
\]

Conversion offered no protection against self-doubt, and the Catechism offered little comfort:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Do bhrìgh nach ann do cheart nàdur a’ chreidimh, dearbh-bheachd air gràs} \\
\text{agus slàinte, feudaidh fior-chreidmhich feitheamh fada, mu ’n ruig iad air,} \\
\text{agus an déigh dhoibh ruigheadh air, feudaidh e bhi air a lagachadh aca, agus} \\
\text{stad bhi dol air.} \text{611}
\end{align*}
\]

In her songs Catriona constantly agonises over whether she has ‘dearbh-bheachd air gràs’, one moment totally confident that she has, the next moment equally sure that she has not. Despite her own lack of assurance, she has complete faith in MacIomhair, consoling his widow and children that he is safe:

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\footnote{611 Catechism, question 81.}
Sinn a’ smuaintinn a chlainn,
’S a’ faicinn a bhantraich fo ghruaim;
Ach thugadh gu glòir e,
’S tha e mealtuinn sòlas bith-bhuan. (v. 4)

The assertion ‘Ach thugadh gu glòir e / ’S tha e mealtuinn sòlas bith-bhuan’ with which Catriona comforts Maclomhair’s wife and family, is repeated in the fifth verse as ‘Ach thugadh gu glòir iad / ’S tha iad mealtuinn sòlas gach ré’, confirming that others they have known are also in Heaven. She repeats her claim ‘Ach thugadh gu glòir iad’ six times in all, assuring her companions that ordinary people like themselves can and do escape Satan and reach Heaven. *Marbhrrannan soisgeulach* typically follow panegyric with exhortation. This may be scriptural, or may be prefaced with a phrase such as ‘b’ ãbhaist dha ri innse’, indicating that the poet does not presume to preach, merely to repeat the deceased’s own words. Catriona does something rather different, taking MacIomhair’s own life and the lives of other local catechists and teachers as her text:

Ma tha thu ri faighneachd
C’ arson a tha m’ aobhar a nis;
Ma nì mi dhuit innseadh,
’S ni duilich dhuit cinnteach a chreids’.
Chunnaic sinn na bràithrean
Gach aon diubh lăn gràidh agus seirc;
Ach thugadh gu glòir iad,
’S cha bhi Nàmhaid ’n tòir orr’ am feasd. (v. 6)

This may cause some surprise, and her companions may find hard to credit, but the evidence of MacIomhair and others of the Revival generation is before their eyes. Men whom they themselves have seen, known and spoken with are now in Heaven:

Cha bhi Nàmhaid ’n côr orr’,
A’ tagradh orr’ côr anns an tir;
Tri nàimhdean is mòr iad,
An Nàmhaid, whose offers of worldly advancement they had refused, has no more power over them.\(^{612}\) They had been pursued through the wilderness by three great enemies: the world, the flesh and the Devil, but have escaped them. The increasingly frail Aonghas MacIomhair had been allowed strength for the work he had been set to do and no more. He and his fellow Christian Iain Màrtainn, who makes an appearance in verse nine, had been given the gifts of love, wisdom and integrity and none could deny that they were without pride or deceit, that the lamp of their faith had always burned brightly, always ready for the coming of Fear na Bainnse. She cannot speak of these men without her thoughts turning to Iain MacAoidh, with whom she shared a lifelong ceangal-anama:

```
Bheil thu gal Iain ic Aoidh,
Nach fhaic thu a chaoidh fad do ré?
Cha’n iognadh a bhrònag,
Ged dubhadh do ghruaidhean ’n a dhéidh;
’S e so tha mi ’g ràitinn,
Thug esan am bàrr Orr’ gu lèir;
Ach tre chumh’chd na slàinte,
Tha mi fhathast ’sna gáirdeanan treun. (v. 12)
```

She would not have been alone in being reminded of MacAoidh and *Bliadhna an Fhaomaidh* as she sings of MacIomhair and Màrtainn. Though she asks herself, as though in some surprise, ‘a bheil thu gal Iain ic Aoidh?’ nothing could be more natural. The fact that it was through MacAoidh that she had found faith and been kept secure in it was so well known, and their love for each other so well understood,

\(^{612}\) In Luke 4.1-14, Satan tempts Christ, offering Him power over all the kingdoms of the world.
that explanations were hardly necessary. Catriona was among those credited with having rùn diomhair an Tighearna, and was later to announce MacAoidh’s death in Quebec long before news arrived by other means:

Bha ceangal gràidh eadar Iain [MacAoidh] agus Catriona Thangaidh a bha sònraichte, agus fhad ’s a bha e beò ann an Canada bha iad a’ sgriobhadh gu chèile. Glè fhasg air àm a bhàis, sgriobh e litir thuice anns an robh e ag ràdh, ‘Mus ruig an litir seo, bidh mise ann an Glòir, agus cha bhith thusa fada às mo dhèidh.’ Bha e mar chleachdadh aig Catriona a bhith ag ùrnuigh airson Iain, agus air madainn àraidh thuirt i ri cuidegin mar seo. ‘Chan eil feum aig fear mo ghràidh-sa air ùrnuigh an diugh ann’.613

Catriona returns to Aonghas MacIomhair, reminding those around her that they have seen for themselves what he was. They may weep over losing their much-loved Catechist and missionary, but he has gone along with the others and, unlike themselves, is now beyond Satan’s reach:

Nach faca sibh fhéin e,
Gu ’m bu duin’ e bha treun an neart?
Ach thugadh gu glòir e,
'S cha bhi Nàmhaid m 'a choir am feasd. (v. 13)

O! anam neo-bhàsmhor,
Bi cuimhneach gach là air a chuairt;
Cha’n eil là air a ráitinn,
Chan eil mionaid, no tràth, no uair;
Biodh do shùil air an t-slàint’,
A cheannaich ’s phàigh fuil an Uain;
Bi caithris ’s ag ùrnuigh,
'M fad ’s a bhios tu ’n taobh so de ’n uaigh. (v. 14)

Her last verse delivers an emphatic warning, both to herself and everyone within hearing, that ‘time is not promised’: ‘Cha’n eil là air a ràitinn / Chan eil mionaid, no tràth, no uair’. They may be committed Christians, but they must always watch and pray, for even the best-loved disciples on the night that Christ was betrayed had failed Him by falling asleep.\(^{614}\)

‘Laoidh – O Righ air a’ chathair’

For Catriona, mind, body and spirit are locked in conflict. In ‘Ionndrain is earail’, her mind is in turmoil, restless as the winter sea at flood tide, wild, uncontrollable as the stormy sky.\(^{615}\) She can find no rest and no light to guide her. The stars are darkened, the pale light of the winter morning shut out by drifting snow:

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ is mis’ tha gu cianail,} \\
’S \text{ mi ruith leis na smuaintean diomhain;} \\
\text{Tha na glinn ud a cheart cho fiadhaich,} \\
\text{Ri muir a’ gheamhraidh ’s e toirt gu lionadh. (2. 1)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ cha’n urrainn mi bhi sàmhach} \\
\text{Cha’n eil m’ inntinn a’ leigeadh tàmh dhomh;} \\
\text{Tha na neòil so cho dorch an dràsda} \\
\text{Ri maduinn gheimhradh is cathadh-làir oirr’. (2. 2)}
\end{align*}
\]

In ‘Òran air droch chridhe’, the darkness within her own heart is like the darkest days of winter, suffocating, oppressive, extinguishing the light of faith, taking her ever closer to eternal darkness and the destruction of her soul:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tha mo chridh’ air mo mhùchadh} \\
\text{Le dùmhlaichd a’ gheamhraidh,} \\
\text{Cha’n urrainn mi éirigh,} \\
\text{Tha leir-sgrios cho teann orm. (3. 1)}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{614}\) Matthew 26.38–45.  
\(^{615}\) Appendix 7.7.
In her laoidh, ‘O Righ air a’ Chathair’, the ‘Anam neo-bhàsmhor’ whom she had warned ‘caithris ’s ag ùrnuigh’ has sunk back into a fatal lethargy. She warns, pleads, cajoles, and reminds her of the danger she is in, finally coming to understand that her soul also suffers in being bound to a body which will bring about her death. Like Bean Torra Dhamh, she speaks to her soul as though to a child: ‘O anam bi cuimhneach / Gu feum thu bhi ’g iompachadh tràth’. Though a committed Christian from her youth, this gentle reminder reveals a deep-seated fear that ‘iobairt na rèite’ had not been made for her:

Bi cuimhneachadh tric air
Gu feum thu bhi glic ann an gràdh,
Dh’fheuch am faigh thu ’n éiric,
An iobairt na réite fluair càch. (v. 2)

She addresses her soul affectionately, as someone smaller and weaker than herself, warning that she must always question what she hears for fear of being led into error. She explains that it is because they are bound together that she wants to help her escape Satan, who had even presumed to try his strength against Christ:

Thoir toighe a bhròinein
Gu feum thu a ghnàth bhi cur cheisd,
Ma ’s aom thu le gòraich
Le cuideachd gun dòchas ach beag;
’S o ’n tha thu mo nàbachd
Bu mhaith leam gu ’n tàradh tu as.
O chuilibheairtean Shàtain,
A dh’fheuch ris a’ ghàirdean bu treis. (v. 3)

In Catriona’s songs Satan is omnipresent, his malice made manifest in storms, wind and snow. He haunts her imagination, present in every dark corner of her mind, every vain thought, every flippant word. Out on Mòinteach Bharbhais she senses

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616 Appendix 7.7.
An Nathair in the roots of the heather and in the bed of every stream. Each time she treads him down he divides and replicates himself, infesting every hillside, mocking and tormenting her with his many sharp tongues:

Ach ’s lionmhor nathair tha anns a’ ghleann
Am bun an fhraich is an sruth na h-aibhne,
Tha iad air sgaoileadh air feadh nam beanntan
Tha gobhan mòr orr’ ’s is leòr na th’ ann diubh. (2. 12)

As she warns her soul against ‘cuilbhearthean Shàtain’, she realises that she herself is in imminent danger. Her one desire is for union with Christ, but Satan constantly comes between her and her promised Bridegroom. Mind and body cannot be trusted to resist temptation and Satan is devious and ingratiating, a rejected suitor who may yet win her hand and seize her inheritance by taking her unawares or simply by wearing down her resistance:

Tha mo chòirean briste,
Cha’n urrainn mo mhisneach bhi slàn;
Ma tha ’m fear tha ’n tòir orm,
An dòchas gu faigh e mo làmh;
Bheir Ùghdar na Sìochaint
Dha m’ anam-sa sith agus fois,
M’ am faigh esan còir orm
’S gur ionnan a dhòigh is am bàs. (v. 4)

She longs to be united with Ùghdar na Sìochaint, for mind, body and spirit to be in accord, but Satan will not give up his pursuit of her and if he should gain possession, her inheritance will be death. The Bible has warned her that Nàmhaid nan Caorach is always at hand, always ready to lure the unwary from the fold. She turns again to her uncomprehending soul to explain how persistent Satan is and how many he has already deceived:
O anam mar tha thu,
'S nach aithne dhuit âmghar do chall;
Gun sòlas 'n a fhàrdoich,
Is cuilbeairtean Shàtain cho teann.
Cha’n urrainn mi àireamh,
A’ mheud ’s a tha sàitht’ air an ceann;
Am bothan gun solus,
'S e obair gun toradh a th’ ann. (v. 6)

Her soul is still content to live in spiritual darkness, ‘gun sòlas ’n a fhàrdoich’, not understanding that if she does not resist Satan, this will become the ‘bothan gun solus’ of the grave. Catrìona urges her to wake up and flee for her life, demanding to know when she will repent of the sins which self-indulgence has lead her into.

If Catriona was often literally ‘gun sòlas ’n a fhàrdoich’ to read her Bible by when her father was living, she was more vulnerable by far, alone in a shepherd’s bothy in an abandoned village on the windswept Mòinteach Bharbhais. She may have been an honoured guest of Sir James Matheson in Stornoway Castle, but here she was at the mercy of An Cìobair Mòr, the bullying factor who did not hesitate to strike her.618

It is no wonder that she should live in fear of ‘Nàmhaid nan caorach’, who prowled the sheepfold and the ‘fear tha ’n tòir orm’ who would not take no for an answer. Nor is it surprising that, in her poverty, she should feel the howling gales of the exposed West Side to have more than ordinary malice, seemingly intent on scouring every living being from the face of the earth, or that she perceived the souls of the righteous to rise above the storm to a peace she could never attain:

O anam nach dùisg thu,
Bho aobhar do thòirs’ agus teich;
C’uin ghuileas do shùilean,
Ma ’n ghniomh bha do rùn a’ cur ris?

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618 MacRath 1917, p. 6.
Seeing her soul sleeping again, Catriona sadly admits defeat. Every day she tries to crush Satan underfoot, but cannot escape the realisation that it is in fact he that crushes her. She at last perceives that it is mind and body that are to blame, and that her soul is the one to be pitied, as it is she who will suffer death:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tha m’ anam gu cràiteach,} \\
\text{’S a’ faighinn a’ bhàis ann am chom;} \\
\text{Cha’n fhaod mi bhi sàmhach,} \\
\text{’S gun òla na slàinte ‘n am fhonn;} \\
\text{Mo pheacanna gràineil,} \\
\text{’G am leagadh gach là fo am bonn;} \\
\text{Co dh’ionnsuidh a théid mi} \\
\text{Ma bhios deàlradh Dhé air thoirt uam? (v. 10)}
\end{align*}
\]

Seventy-six years after Catriona’s death, Iain MacLeòid records her lasting legacy, acknowledging her as an influential evangelist in her own right. ‘Bha i féin ’na meadhon beothachaidh anns an àite ’s am biodh i ri fuireach’. 619 MacRath shows that, in her last hours at least, Catriona reached the assurance which had so often eluded her, and that the fire which had sometimes burned so low, was still capable of sending out sparks:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Cha robh i ullamh a bhi cur an teagamh a côr ann an Criosd agus nuair a thubhairt neach ’g a dearbhadh, ‘Ciod e mur faigh thu gu neamh as déigh na h-uile ni?’ ars ise, “Ged nach biodh ann ach dithis bithidh mise aon diubh: agus mur bi mise ann, ’s ann aig an Tighearn a bhitheas an call, oir tha mise ag earbsadh ri fhocal féin a mhàin”. 620}
\end{align*}
\]

620 MacRath 1917, p. 8.
Though separated by nearly a century, the physical and spiritual worlds of Catriona Thangaidh and Màiri Anna NicIomhair were not vastly different. Despite divisions in the Free Church, there had been no great theological change. War, emigration and de-population had all left their mark, but in rural Lewis, the rhythms of crofting life were much the same. As evangelical poets, Catriona and Màiri Anna were similar in many ways. Seeing the importance of recording the spiritual lives of those around them as an example for others, each has left a legacy of marbhrainnan soisgeulach.

Both were seen as mathraichean an Israeil, gifted with rùn diomhair an Tighearna and the power of poetry. What mattered most to each of them, however, was not what the outside world saw, but their own inner spiritual life, what they experienced as an uaigneas, in the secrecy of their own hearts. Their laoidhean show faith and optimism, but also that they suffer periods of fèin-cheasnachadh. In her ‘Laoidh’ Catriona feels herself being drawn into a forced marriage with Satan. In ‘Imcheist’ Màiri Anna tries her utmost to divorce him:

Nach duilich nach fhaigh mi litir-dhealaich thoirt dha-san
'S gum bithinn-sa glan is gun smàl 'nam mo nàdur. (8. 3)

Despite the many similarities in their songs, in temperament they could hardly have been more different. Where Catriona was outgoing and would hold court, discussing doctrine with the foremost evangelical teachers and activists of her day, Màiri Anna was quiet and retiring, offering kindly support in conversation and song to those whose faith was in its infancy. There was also a marked difference in their circumstances. Where Catriona suffered the insecurities of poverty and isolation out on the cleared land of Tangaidh, Màiri Anna enjoyed the relative prosperity of sharing the family croft in the heart of the village, with a loving brother to support and provide for her.

Màiri Anna was born in 1894 and lived with her maternal grandparents, Norman and Isabella Graham, her parents Murdo and Anne MacIver and her four siblings, Peggy,
Donald, Isabella and Alexander, on the croft at 1 Vatisker. Her father was a fisherman, as were her younger brother Donald and her cousins Angus and Alexander Graham. On the death of their parents, Domhnall took over tenancy of the croft and he and Màiri Anna, neither of whom married, were to spend the rest of their lives there. They were from a ‘poetic family’ and Domhnall na Criomaig, as her brother was known, was famously musical, serving from 1937 to 1963 as Precentor of Back Free Church. He also ran the local sgoil fhonn and composed Psalm tunes, the best known of which is ‘Vatisker’. Màiri Anna herself was mild and self-effacing, never putting herself forward, the archetypal màthair an Israeil, loved and respected for her own deep faith and her gentle support of young believers. Their home was central to the spiritual and social life of the whole district. Janet MacPhail, a present-day evangelical poet for whom Màiri Anna was a spiritual mentor, gives an account of its importance to herself and her contemporaries:

"Nuair a bha mise a' fàs suas ann an Sgire a' Bhaic ann an Leòdhas b' iomadh ni a dh'ionnsaich mi ann an dachaigh far an robh Domhnall MacIomhair agus a phiuthar a' fuireach. Bhiodh sgoil fhonn aige agus bha muinntir na sgire air fad a’ dol an seo agus abair gu robh a’ chùis a’ còrdadh rinn. B’ e duine ceòlmhor, socair a bh’ ann agus b’ ann dha a bh’ aithne a bhith a’ teagasg. Cha robh cáil ann ach misneachd fad na h-ùine. Cha robh cronachadh na nàdar ann."³²²

Màiri Anna herself describes the warm companionship of the home which she and her brother shared in Marbharrann do Dhomhnull Maclomhair:

"Bha ’n dachaidh againn blàth ’s biodh ar fàrdach mar Bhetel, ’Nuair thionaileadh na càirdean air gràs bhiodh do sgeula, 
’’S e do shluagh-sa mo shluagh-sa’, ’s iomadh uair rinn thu innse, 
’S cha bhiodh cuimhne air uair a meagsluagh a bha aonaichte. (v. 13)³²³"

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³²¹ Personal communication from Janet MacPhail, Bragar, 2012.
³²² MR (April 2005), 20; Janet MacPhail’s Gaelic evangelical poetry is largely unpublished, though extracts regularly appear anonymously in the Gaelic pages of MR, which she edits.
³²³ Màiri Anna NicIomhair, Marbharrann do Dhomhnull Maclomhair (Stornoway: SG, nd); Appendix 7.13.
As a girl Janet MacPhail would spend many hours in conversation with Màiri Anna, listening to her singing and learning her songs. Màiri Anna herself had just such a mentor in Peigi Màiri, one of an earlier generation of mathraichean an Israel, remembered as having been in her old age in 1940. Màiri Anna’s unpublished ‘Marbhrran do Pheigi Màiri’ shows the continuity of this tradition of single women becoming spiritual mothers to the whole village. That it initially addresses the house itself is a poignant reminder of how each welcoming door and the light of each window is valued in a fragile community:

Ceud soraidh, ceud soraidh, leis an dorus tha duint’
Dh’fhalbh lochran as a’ bhaile bha laiste na curs’,
Bha na solus bho h-oige toirt seoladh ’s iuill,
’S bho chail sinn a comhnadh tha sinn bronach fo thuirs’. (v. 1)

Bho fhuair mi ort eolas ann an toiseach mo reis
B’ thaitneach thu dhomhsha ’s b’ mhor dhuit mo speis,
Na d’ chomunn bha solas toirt comhnadh am fheum;
Cha d’ rinn thu tarcuis air m’ oige, bha sinn coirdte ’nar gne. (v. 3)

O! ’s cianail an drasda tha ’n ait dh’ na chloinn
Ann an tigh ‘Peigi Mairi’ a b’ abhaist bhith cruinn;
Bha fasgadh ’s blaths ann, bha cairdeas, bha dion,
’S bha oigridh nan ghras faighinn ait fo do sgeith. (v. 7)

A collection of six songs titled Cuimhnichean air An t-Urramach Murchadh MacRath a bha ann an Ceann-Loch (Leòdhas) agus air Murchadh Mairtainn a Sgire a’ Bhaic was published in 1968. A second collection, Ceòl agus Deòir, has twelve songs dating from the early 1940s to the late 1950s. The preface indicates that these songs represented just part of Màiri Anna’s poetic output:

624 Personal communication from Donald MacKenzie, Edinburgh, March 2015.
625 Màiri A. NicIomhair, Cuimhnichean air An t-Urramach Murchadh MacRath a bha ann an Ceann-Loch (Leòdhas) agus air Murchadh Mairtainn a Sgire a’ Bhaic (Stornoway: SG, 1968).
626 CD.
Dh'fhaodadh móran eile a bhi air an cur 'nan cos, ach tha cosguis an cur an clò agus an t-saothair a dh’heumar a ghabhail riù mu ’n teid iad ann a’ bacadh sin aig an àm so.627

At least two more marbhhrannan soisgeulach, Marbhrann do Dhomhnull Maclomhair and Marbh-Rann do Raonaid Moireasdan a Sgire Bhac, have been published as pamphlets.628 ‘Marbhrann do Pheigi Màiri’ remains unpublished while extracts from two otherwise unpublished songs, ‘Sliabh an Tighearna’ and ‘Meòrachadh air Òrdaighean Bharbhais’ have appeared in The Monthly Record.629

‘Cogadh Hitler’

One great difference between the lives of Catriona Thangaidh and Màiri Anna NicIomhair is that Màiri Anna lived through the Boer War, the Great War and the Second World War. She would have been in primary school during the Boer War; twenty at the outbreak of the Great War; twenty-four when the Iolaire was lost. Her younger brother Domhnull was on active service with the Royal Naval Reserve, and though he survived, she could not but be aware of the friends and neighbours who did not, and of the devastation which war left in its wake. The concept of war as a punishment, of one country being used against another as an instrument of God’s wrath was preached from every pulpit, expounded in evangelical song and deeply ingrained in the communal consciousness of those for whom their involvement in such a catastrophic war could have no other explanation.

The post-war years, which should have seen island communities returning to normality and new families coming up, in fact saw land raids, massive emigration and de-population. Villages changed almost beyond recognition, with young people who had spent time in the forces or working away rejecting the old way of life and

627 CD, p. 5.
628 Màiri Anna NicIomhair, Marbhrann do Dhomhnull Maclomhair (Stornoway: SG, nd); Marbh-Rann do Raonaid Moireasdan a Sgire Bhac le Màiri Anna NicIomhair, this is a two-sheet leaflet with no indication of publisher or date.
setting their sights on city values and pastimes. In 1934 change of an altogether different kind began to be noticed, first in Carloway, spreading outwards to Bernera, Barvas, Garynahine, Kinloch and Cross until the whole of the West Side was again in the grip of Revival. Churches were full. Young people flocked to weekday meetings, hiring buses to travel from village to village, holding impromptu services at the roadside, at the peats, at the fank. Wherever people met there was eager discussion of where they would gather that evening, what they had heard and where the next meeting would be. Revival flared up again in Garyvard in 1938, spreading to Gravir and Lemreway and the villages of Pairc, until in 1939-40 another generation went to war.

The young people who had made Màiri Anna and Domhnull’s house their spiritual home were now dispersed, boys to the Merchant Navy or to the armed forces, girls into war work in the cities where they would face dangers of a different order altogether than anything faced by their mothers. Màiri Anna would have grown up with the mothers’ laments of the Boer War and the Great War, but when she turns to war, it is not to lament any individual, but a whole generation.

For any Free Church woman of her generation, however great the respect she was held in as a spiritual mentor, her teaching could never be seen to amount to public preaching. It would always be in an informal setting, preferably presented through a voice other than her own. In the Reformed tradition, teaching is always backed up with biblical dearbhadh, always drawing upon an authority greater than that of the speaker. This is doubly important where the speaker is a woman. Putting her message into song is one way of distancing herself from the role of preacher. Framing that song in the voice of one who was himself allowed only to write what he saw, one through whom prophecy was conveyed, rather than one who spoke in his own right, is to put an additional series of defences between poet and hearer. This then is what Màiri Anna does in drawing her sèist from Habakkuk:

Sêist:
Och gur mise tha sgíth
Ri faicinn mar thachair do ’n tir,
’S gu faod an ti ruitheas a leughadh
Gur e smachdachadh Dhè th’ air an t-saoghal.631

She has no need to make herself clearer than this. The line ‘’S gu faod an ti ruitheas a leughadh’ relates solely and directly to the story of the prophet Habakkuk who, tired of seeing the Law broken with impunity, had complained to God, ‘C’ar son a tha thu nochdadh dhomh a'ingidheachd, agus a’ toirt orm sealltuinn air doilghios?’632 Màiri Anna sees parallels between Habakkuk’s situation and her own. All around her the values which she had grown up with are being treated with contempt. She has seen increased prosperity, but also pride and ingratitude. There are cars on the roads and villages seem to be awash with money, but there is no regard for the Sabbath:

Bha ’n tir air a lionadh le airgiod,
Gun crìoch air a h-ionmhas no stòr;
Bha ’n tir air a lionadh le carbaid
Le àrdan is farmad is pròis,
Bha Sàbaidean naomh air an dearmad
Le faoineasan cealgach is ceòl;
’S a bhrosnaich sinn uile gu fearg E
’S tha smachdachadh searbh air tighinn oirnn. (v. 2)

Unlike Habakkuk, she has already seen ample evidence of the direct link between apostasy and divine retribution:

Oir aitheantan naomh cha do ghléidh sinn
Agus thréigeadh an lagh leis a’ chlainn
’S thàinig sgiûrsaidhean goirt agus eiginn
Mar a bhagair E féin gu teann. (v. 3)

632 Habakkuk 1.3.
God answers Habakkuk’s complaint by announcing an imminent invasion. He will raise up an enemy which will punish violence with violence. This enemy will be ‘uabhasach agus eagalach’, their horses ‘na ’s luaithe na liopaird, na ’s buirbe na madaidh-alluidh an amnoich’. They will fly like eagles searching for their prey and come like the east wind, destroying all before them. With each repetition of her séist the picture of this invading army becomes more firmly fixed in the minds of those whom she addresses, a visual and intellectual backdrop against which the narrative of her song is played out.

Habakkuk accepts that this punishment is deserved, but questions how God can look upon such evil: ‘Tha do shùilean na ’s gloine na gu ’n seall thu air olc, agus cha’n fhaod thu amhare air aingidheachd’. He finds no answer to this, and has to accept that human notions of justice are not commensurate with divine purpose. Having lived through both the Boer War and the Great War, Màiri Anna understands this and has seen how the innocent suffer along with the guilty. She also has no doubt that war is outwith human control, that military leaders, however powerful, are ruled by providence and that ‘slat an smachdachaidh’ is in the hand of God alone:

O, ged tha Ghearmailt ri beucadh  
Agus Hitler breun air air ceann,  
Tha ’n t-slat ann an làimh Fear na ’s treuna,  
Do ’n feum sinn bhi gèilleadh gach âm. (v. 3)

Habakkuk had stood as a watchman on a high tower, watching and waiting to see what would be revealed to him. He had been instructed, ‘Sgriobh an fhaistneachd agus dean soilleir i air clàraibh, air chor as gu faod esan ruith a leughas i’. Though he would not understand the nature of the prophecy nor see its fulfilment, it was only by his diligence in recording it that the righteous would survive, ‘ach mairidh am firean beò le a chreidimh’. This is the task which Màiri Anna takes upon herself, different only in that she does not merely record, but explains the significance of

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633 Habakkuk 1.6-13  
634 Habakkuk 2.2-4.
what she sees. She rationalises, apportions blame, links cause and effect so that ‘na fireanan’ would understand and survive. She looks back to the inter-war years, when the horrors of the Great War were beginning to fade, reminding those around her of how they had been able to work outside, ‘Gun eagal no fiamh oirnn bho naimhdean / Gun iomradh air puinnsean no bomb’. This is in sharp contrast to their present situation:

Ach a nis ’s ann tha ’n tir so fo leònadh,
Agus nàmhaid an tòir air ar sluagh,
Nàmhaid le innleachdan seòlta
Gun iomradh air tràcail no truas.
Lion iad gach dùthach le forneart,
’S rinn daoine ’nan fògaraich thruagh.
Tha mòran de fhuil air a dòrtadh,
’S tha glaodhaich nan leòint air dol suas. (v. 5)

During the Great War, remote as they were from direct enemy action, poets such as Raonig NicFhearghuis of Taransay and Mrs Ceanadaidh of Orinsay had shown concern for the people of Europe, the destruction of cities, the widows and orphans and the plight of refugees fleeing occupying armies. McArthur Màiri Anna is equally concerned with the ‘fògaraich thruagh’ and the mounting casualties in civilian populations:

Tha cridheachan dhaoine gan tràigsinn
A’ feitheamh na sgeula gach àm,
Eagal roimh naigheachd na h-èiginn,
’S tha mòran de theaghlaichean ann.
Nach truagh mar dh’èirich d’ ar n-òigridh
Nuair a dh’halbh iad a chòmhnad na Fraing?

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She sees families longing for news yet dreading what they may hear. She thinks of the young men who went off to France, of whom nothing more was, nor ever would be heard. Like the prophet Habakkuk on his watchtower, Màiri Anna is able to look out over the whole world and see the destruction brought about by war. She sees invading armies like an angry sea, sweeping all before them, killing and maiming indiscriminately, respecting neither the living nor the dead:

Gifted, as it were, with prophetic powers of vision, she can mark out where each individual soldier lies on the battlefield. She sees suffering that families can never imagine. She sees each mother who is unable to bury her son; every son who lies unburied; each father and every fatherless child; each and every widow; the cold emptiness of every home without husband and father; every brother who will never again feel his brother’s arm on his shoulder; and the many many men who will never return:

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Co ’s urrainn an diugh dèanamh sgeul air
No innse mu ’n lèir-sgríos ’s an call? (v. 7)

Och thàinig an nàmhaid le toirm
Mar bhriseadh na fairge mòir
Ri lotadh ’s a’ milleadh ’sa marbhadh
Le innleachdan arm de gach seòrs’;
’Brùchdadh a-steach leis an armachd
Gun diù ac’ de mharbh no de bheò.
O nach e ’m peacadh tha searbh
Rinn daoine cho garg ris na leoghainn. (v. 8)

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News of storms at sea, of men adrift on the waves and of men terribly injured comes from the great oceans. She sees Royal Navy and Merchant Navy ships lying on the bed of the sea, their crews still below decks, sunk in the sleep of death. In the depths of the sea she sees evacuee ships, and children whom their parents had thought would be safe in some far-flung corner of the world. She hears the cries of their mothers, the single voice of a generation mourning the Massacre of the Innocents.\textsuperscript{636}

\begin{align*}
\text{Tha iomadh taigh maiseach 'na fhàsach,} \\
\text{Tha iomadh fàrdach tha lom} \\
\text{Tha 'chlann air an sgapadh 's gach cearnaidh} \\
\text{'N dùil gum bi sàbhailteachd ann.} \\
\text{Mo thruagh gu bheil leanabanan gràdhach} \\
\text{Air an cuir leis an nàmhid do 'n doimhn'} \\
\text{O chualas guth caoidh ann an Ramah} \\
\text{Rachel a’ caoineadh a cloinn. (v. 12)}
\end{align*}

She sees cities where people live in fear of the sound of aircraft overhead, praying that God would spread His sheltering wing over them.

\begin{align*}
\text{Ar bailtean bha suaimhneach is greadhnnach} \\
\text{An diugh thà làn èiginn is call.}
\end{align*}

\textsuperscript{636} Matthew 2.16-18.
Chan urrainn dhaibh laighe no ëirigh
Gun rànail nan iteal mu ’n ceann. (v. 13)

Like Habakkuk, Màiri Anna diligently records all that she sees, so that those who read will understand that this is their punishment for apostasy. As the destruction comes closer to home she seizes upon the promise, ‘mairidh am firean beò le a chreidimh’ and summons up the courage to present her catalogue of suffering, asking that God remember their weakness, accept their contrition and take them back under His protection:

Ach, O nach till Thu gu luath rinn
’S nach crom Thu do chluais ri ar leòn.
Ged is corruich a thoill sinn
Chionn gu bheil aingidheachd mòr.
Ach chuimhnich Thu roimhe ’na do thrugas
Nach robh anns an t-sluagh ach feòil,
’S na ’m pilleadh Tu rithist le fuasgladh
Sin bheireadh do shluagh dhuit glòir. (v. 15)

Bu tric a phill e’ chorruich uath’
’s nior dhùisg e’ fhearg gu léir
Oir annta chuimhnich e nach robh
ach feòil théd ar mar bhlath. (Ps. 78. 38-9)

Alone amongst her songs, the message of ‘Cogadh Hitler’ is entirely Old Testament, the law of ‘anam air son anama; sùil air son sùla; fiacail air son fiacla’. In her marbhrrannan soisgeulach and laoidhean it is determinedly New.

‘Marbh-Rann air an Urramach Alasdair MacLeòid, Ministear a’ Bhac’

Of Màiri Anna’s twenty-three surviving songs, eight are marbhrrannan soisgeulach. Two of these, ‘Marbhrrann do Pheigi Màiri’ and ‘Marbh-Rann do Raonaild

Moireasdan’, are for *mathraichean an Israel*. Songs such as ‘Sgeul air Sgeul’, ‘Déidh air Sluagh Dhé’, ‘Déigh air Dúthaich a ’s Fhèàrr’, ‘Luchd Caoineadh Sion’ and ‘Làithean bho Chian’ could be seen as collective *marbhrannan*, lamenting a whole generation of elders and a lost way of life.638 By contrast, ‘Meòrachadh air Òrdaighean Bharbhais’ and ‘Sliabh an Tighearna’ celebrate the happier times of Òrduiighean and Church gatherings. Màiri Anna’s great preoccupation was with the life of the Church, and like Catriona Thangaidh, she held up the lives of her contemporaries as examples of Christian discipleship. The subject of ‘Marbh-Rann air an Urramach Alasdair MacLeòid’ is the Rev. Alexander MacLeod (1894-1954) from Broker, Portnaguran.639 He served with the Seaforth Highlanders during the Great War, then studied at Edinburgh University and Free Church College. He spent ten years in Ness and eight years at St Columba’s, Glasgow, before taking up his post in Back in 1947. His ministry in Back was to be relatively short, and this *marbhrann* may be assumed to date to 1954, the year of his death.

*Marbhrannan soisgeulach* are in themselves exemplars of evangelical doctrine, densely packed with biblical references. Màiri Anna is an outstanding exponent of this form of composition, typically creating a conceptual setting for her songs by using one primary text as a *sèist*, allowing her message to be validated by the voice which this allows her to adopt. Just as she had taken on the voice of the prophet Habakkuk in her *sèist* for ‘Cogadh Hitler’, in her *sèist* for ‘Marbhrann air an Urramach Alasdair MacLeòid’ she takes on the voice of Isaiah:

**Sèist:**

O ’s tròm tha an t-eallach ’s chan fhaigh sinn air inns’
Cho falamh ’s tha ’n t-aite a b’ abhaist bhith liont,
Tha ’n teachdaire beannaicht’ bha ac’ ’na cheann-iùil,
Aig Muinntir a’ Bhac air a thasgadh ’san ùir.’640

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638 Appendix 7.13.
639 Biographical information from [http://www.backfreechurch.co.uk/about/backhistory.jspmacleod](http://www.backfreechurch.co.uk/about/backhistory.jspmacleod)
Accessed 20 March 2015.
640 Appendix 7.13.
The aural and visual image which she fixes in the minds of those whom she addresses is one of desolation. Isaiah had foretold the destruction of the civilised world in a litany of prophecies: ‘Trom eallach Bhabiloin; Trom eallach Mhoaib; Trom eallach Dhamascuis; Trom eallach fásaich na fairge; Trom eallach glinn an taisbeanaidh;’ describing how great leaders would fall and their people be scattered. Each repetition resonates with those before and after it, in Isaiah’s case showing that this devastation will be universal, in Màiri Anna’s emphasising the extent of their own loss. Isaiah, however, also prophesies the coming of The Servant, who suffers and dies but is restored to life and honour. Behind the picture of desolation presented in her séist, the hope of new life shines through, and MacLeòid’s life and death emerge as a paradigm of the faithful servant attaining recognition and reward.

Màiri Anna’s marbhraim is made up of parallel strands: the narrative of their minister’s life; his preaching; contextualisation of his life and death in terms of evangelical doctrine. These do not appear in sequence, nor as separate sections, as in many formal marbhrainn, but are threaded together throughout the song. Similarly, the standard motifs of marbhrainn soisgeulach are not shown in the usual progression, but appear and reappear throughout the song. Of these strands, the narrative of his life is the shortest, beginning with the announcement of his death:

’s Se aobhar ar leònaidh Macleòid a thoirt bhuainn,
Ar teachdaire dileas air a shineadh ’san uaigh. (v. 5)

It had only been seven years since they had asked for his hand. He had accepted them, ‘married’ the congregation and been well satisfied with them. Now they are widowed, their pulpit sitting silent in her ‘culaidh bròin’:

Tha nise seachd bliadhna bho na dh’iarr sinn do làmh
’S bha thusa làn riaraicht suidhe sios anns an àite

641 Isaiah, 13.1; 15.1; 17.1; 19.1; 21.1; 21.11; 22.1; 23.1.
642 Isaiah 52.13; 53.1-12. ‘The Servant’ is a prefiguration of Christ.
MacLeòid was a married man, a father whose children had not yet made the 'roghainn de 'n aon ni nach diobair gu bràth’, that is, they had not as yet joined the Church:

Do chéile tha sàraicht’ air a cràdh ’s air a claidh,
Do theaghlach air fhàgail an dràsd ’ga do chaidh.
Gu robh an Tighearna ’na thròcair ri deònach dhaibh gràs,
Dheanadh roghainn de 'n aon ni nach diobair gu bràth. (v. 10)

There is a brief glimpse of a personable young man, 'Bha thu dìreach ’na do pearsa ’s tu snasail ’n a do dhoigh / Is d’ aodann gun phreasadh le maire na h-òig’; an indication that he suffered some underlying problem with his health, ‘Chaidh crioich air do thinneas, do thrioblaid ’s do péin / Tha ’n aonaranachd seachad ’s an an-shocair gheur’; then a description of his funeral procession:

Gu cianail Di-luain thainig sluagh bho gach àrd,
Bha ciadan air cheudan ri lionadh na sràid,
An ceuman bha stòlda agus bròn air an gnùis
Ri giulain Mhicleòid chum a chomhnuidh ’san úir. (v. 25)

In her sèist, Màiri Anna very specifically addresses those outwith the parish, asking for their sympathy and understanding. There is a consciousness that as a parish without a minister, Sgìre a’ Bhac will be looked upon differently. It loses rank and status and is open to the introduction of unorthodox teaching by visiting ministers who will try to make a place for themselves there:

Tha ’n teachdaire beannaicht’ bha ac’ ’na cheann-iùil
Aig muinntr a’ Bhac air a thasgadh ’san úir. (sèist)

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643 Job 29.18, (Ann am nead gheibh mi bás, agus mar a’ ghaineamh ni mi mo làithean lionmhor).
She considers carefully what lesson they must draw from MacLeòid’s life and ministry. This is not a teachdaireachd which is open to all, couched as it is in the language of biblical symbolism and allegory:

’S e a dh’iarr E ‘bithibh sàmhach’ fo làmh tha cho trôm
Agus tuigsinn nas fhearr nach ’eil àite so dhuinn
Gun éisd sinn an t-slat a tha a’ labhairt cho geur
’S gun tig sinn fo smachd gu bhi tabhairt dha spéis. (v. 1)

Where every event is understood as being governed by divine providence, the congregation’s response to the loss of a relatively young minister must be that ‘an t-slat a tha a’ labhairt cho geur’ represents divine authority and is intended for their instruction. The ‘làmh throm’, the command ‘Bibh sàmhach is tuigibh gur mi Dia’ and the reminder that their place is to listen and obey, indicate that a teachdaireachd is to be delivered, not from Màiri Anna herself, but from a higher authority.644 The first lesson, contrasting the brevity of human life with the permanence of the Word, is given in words from Isaiah: ‘Tha am feur a’ seargadh, am blàth a’ crionadh; ach sheasaidh facal ar Dé-ne gu siorruidh’.645

O seargaidh am feur agus crionaidh am blàth,
’S tha sin dhuinn mar shearmoin air a dhearbhadh an dràsd’
Culaidh bròin air ar cubaid ’s gun lùths aig an t-sluagh
’S Tus a mhàin tha gun chaochladh, ’na d’ fhirinn bith-bhuan. (v. 2)

The image of the withered grass and the fallen flower is joined by that of the lily gathered from the field, and of lives which dwindle away hour by hour like shadows and are at best only on loan:

Ach chan ’eil ni anns an t-saoghal nach fhaodor a ghuais’d
Agus claonaidh ar làithean mar sgàile gach uair. (v. 8)

644 Psalm 46.10.
645 Isaiah 40.8.
She constructs her *teachdaireachd* in a sequence of opposing images. Withered grass is set against eternal truth; ‘làithean mar sgàile’ set against the ‘aitreabh tha shuas bhios buan gu bràth’. Christ has the transient beauty of Lili nan Gleann and the permanence of A’ Charraig. His faithful servant MacLeòid is plucked like a lily, taken like a stone from a wall:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Tha 'n Tighearna ri tional nan lili 'san àits'} \\
'S a’ briseadh na callaid, O 's farsaing a’ bhearn. \\
'S air muinntir mo ghaoil chuirinn impidh an drasd' \\
Iad seasamh gu dileas 'n aghaidh inleachd an nàmh. (v. 3)
\end{align*}
\]

Christ is ‘Clach-chinn na h-oisinn’, the cornerstone of the Church: MacLeòid just a single stone, but his death leaves a breach in the wall.646 John MacLean of Back gives a workmanlike explanation of this symbolism, not strictly biblical, but plain enough to the elders assembled for *Latha na Ceist* at Comunnachaidh an Sgìre Chrois in autumn 1878: ‘Tha sibh-se mar chlachaibh beò air bhur cur a mach le fùdar agus teine o ghairbheal an t-saoghail gu bhi air bhur togail air a charraig so’.647 Màiri Anna’s fear is that when the wall is breached An Nàmhaid will find his way in. She appeals to Spiorad na Naomhachd to help them stand firm and to listen for the voice of An t-Ard Bhuachaill. Rather than the expected reprimand, they are given a promise, ‘Bheir Mise dhuibh suaimhneas le bhur n-uallach 's bhur cràdh’, that He will help them bear the ‘eallach’ which has been imposed upon them and which her sèist complains of. She excuses her request by explaining ‘’Nuair bhrisear an gàradh, leanaidh nàmhaid an tòir’, that with their wall broken down An Nàmhaid is hunting them. The depiction of MacLeòid as the faithful servant begins to appear as Màiri Anna, in asking for support, is careful to acknowledge the help they have already been given:

\[
\begin{align*}
O 's goirid bha an t-iasad 's na bliadhnaibh ro luath \\
'S mar theachdaire Chriosd bha thu dian 'na do chuairt
\end{align*}
\]

646 Psalm 118.22 (A' chlach a dhiùlt na clachairean, clach-chinn na h-oisinn i).
647 Seoras Beuton, *Laithean Ceisde ann an Leodhas mu 'n a' Bliadhna 1880* (Stornoway: SG, nd.), p. 24. See also I Peter 2.5.
Agus thug thu do threis is do neart do do Righ
'S an uair a chriochnaich thu 'n obair chaidh thu chadal an sìth. (v. 9)

He has spent the last of his strength in the service of his master and shown himself to be a ‘teachdaire beannaichte’; ‘teachdaire dileas’; ‘teachdaire Chriosd’; ‘teachdaire dheadh-sgeul’ (sèist, vv. 5, 9, 13). In his preaching he has offered advice and warnings, ‘a’ toirt rabhadh do pheacaich a bhi teicheadh gu dian’ (v. 12), but has also given support and comfort:

'S iomadh anam bha sireadh fhuair misneachd is lùths
'S iomadh neach a bha brònach fhuair còmhnadh is iùil.
Do chùbaid tha falamh 'n diugh a’ labhart ri sluagh
'S iomadh comhairle fallain, ’s iomadh earal a fhuair. (v. 14)

He had tried his utmost to bring young people into the Church and felt the bitterness of failure:

Chum tarruing na h-òige bha thu an còmhnuidh ri strì
Gu an glacadh le seòltachd ’s le dòighean bha caomh
Is bu tric bhiodh tu brònach is do dheòir a’ ruith sios
O nach robh iad gu deònach toirt umhlachd do Chriosd. (v. 17)

Even in practical matters such as maintaining the Church buildings, he had worked beyond his strength:

Le dìchioll mar a b’àbhaisd chuir thu an t-àite so air dòigh
Le saothair fad do làithean gus an do dh’fhàilnich do threòir. (v. 19)

Màiri Anna looks back on Church gatherings, the welcoming light, the young people’s voices and how their singing had comforted their minister after the many disappointments he suffered in trying to bring them to an understanding of Christ.648

648 Electricity came to Back in 1949 and electric lighting was installed in the Church under MacLeòid’s supervision. Personal communication from Donald Mackenzie, Edinburgh, April 2015.
An uair a bhiodh sinn cruinn air an oidhch’ an tigh Dhé
Na soluis cho soilleach is an t-seinn a’ dol réidh
’S tu ’g éisdachd a’ chiuil aig an òigridh gach taobh
Bha seinn dhuit ’na shòlas ’s ’na chòmhnadh do d’ chrìdh. (v. 20)

Seeing and sharing the gràdh bràithreil of his congregation marked the pinnacle of
his achievement as a minister, but his pleasure in their company was to be as nothing
to that which awaited him as he left the temporal world to join ‘an comunn nach
sgaoil’. Màiri Anna devotes the next fourteen verses to the reward of the faithful
servant, where the New Testament promises are fulfilled. Every moment of his
conscientious service had been noted, every tear counted, and he is to be relieved of
his burden and receive his reward:

Bu lèir Dha do thraisg, agus thaisg E do dheòir
Do shaothrachadh pailt is do thogradh bho t’ òig
’S e E féin a ni aireamh ged an drasd tha e dùint
Na dhealaras gu soilleach ann an aoibhneas do chrùin. (v. 28)

From her seventh verse on, Màiri Anna speaks to MacLeòid directly. There is no
assumption that he will reply, just a tacit understanding that he hears her affectionate
words. The fact that marbhrrannan shoisgeulach frequently address the dead cannot
be seen as reflecting Reformed doctrine, which is adamant that there is no such
possibility. Indigenous belief and received doctrine, however, seem to exist in
parallel worlds, the one not troubling the other where such matters as visions
and precognition are concerned, and certainly not regarding affectionate addresses to the
departed as being in any way incongruous. Effie MacLean of Knockaird also speaks
to MacLeòid directly, almost as though meeting him in the street:

A Mhaighstir Alasdair ‘ic Leòid, nach brònach a tha mi
O chuala mi nach eil thu beò, ’s gun deach thu a Thir na Saors’. 649

649 Effie MacLean, ‘Tribute to the late Rev. A. MacLeod, Back’, on Gaelic Spiritual Hymns IV, sung
For MacLeòid, the war between body and spirit is over and he is beyond the reach of An Nàmhaid. For Back, concern over the broken hedge and the breach in the wall intensifies. Their guiding light is gone; their elders sink under the burden imposed upon them; the wall begins to fall and An Nàmhaid returns to the attack:

’S sinne th’ air fhàgail an dràsda tha truagh,
Measg stoirm agus gâbhaidh ann am fàsach tha fuar,
Na soluis ’gar fàgail ’s an garadh ’dol sios,
Luchd-eallaich ri fàilneach is an namhaid ri stri. (v. 33)

Màiri Anna does what she can to encourage the faltering congregation, reminding them of the promise they had been given: ‘Ach gheall E bhi dileas le firinn bhios buan’. They must have faith and keep on with their journey. If they accept the guidance of An t-Aodhair, He will lead them through the valley:

’S nach tog sinn ar sùilean as ùr chum nam beann
Gu stiùireadh an t-Aodhair a threud anns a’ ghleann
’Na shagartachd shiorruidh nach criochnaich am bàs
Tha faisgadh is dion ann a dh’iarras fo sgàil. (v. 35)

This is Aodhair Israel of Psalm 80 whom the Israelites had called upon to return to them and guide them when they found their hedge broken down and their vineyard invaded:

A callaid c’ uim a bhriseadh leat!
Ionnus gu bheil gach neach
Théid seachad air an rathad mhòr
’ga spionadh leò fa seach. (Ps. 80.12)
Alasdair MacLeòid died on September 24th 1954, just three weeks after the last meeting of the Lewis Awakening of 1949-53. The Awakening had largely centred upon Church of Scotland congregations on the West Side and a campaign led by a mainland Faith Mission minister, Duncan Campbell. Though members of all denominations attended their meetings, the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian Church distanced themselves from Faith Mission doctrine and forms of worship, leaving discord between and within congregations. As a Free Church minister, MacLeòid would almost certainly have felt the effects of this, with young parishioners eager for the excitement of all-night meetings with new company, new songs and more relaxed doctrine. Though Màiri Anna makes nothing explicit, the vineyard open to passers by, the trampled vine with its burned and broken branches and the plea to the flock to return to Aodhair Israel may well have reflected the situation which Back Free Church felt itself to be in.

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650 Murdo M. MacAulay, *Free Church Ministers in Lewis (Presbytery) 1843-1993* (SG, nd.), p. 3; Peckham and Peckham 2004, p. 72. This shows the last meeting to have been held by Campbell in Lemreway on 1 September 1954.
7.3  Catriona an Tucsain, Catriona Caimbel, Siadar a’ Chladaich

Catriona Caimbel, or Catriona an Tucsain, one of the most enduringly popular of the poets of the Lewis Awakening, is from a crofting family in Shader. In December 1949, while she was in training as a nurse in Stornoway, a patient informed her that Revival had broken out in Barvas, and that her brother John Murdo, newly returned from serving with the RAF in Iraq, was one of the converts. According to her own account, she became quite indignant, saying, ‘Wait till I get home; I will soon reverse that!’ She went home at the first opportunity, and was met in the doorway by John Murdo, wanting her opinion on a verse from a laoidh soisgeulach which he had just composed. He was apparently the first of the new converts to begin composing laoidhean. That same night she accompanied him to a meeting, ‘trying hard to look composed and uninterested, determined not to give in’, and was herself converted. John Murdo had also been a reluctant convert, torn between keeping his promise to play the accordion for Christmas and New Year parties and risking conversion by attending an evangelical meeting. Another brother, who had been a piper with the Royal Scots, found himself faced with the same dilemma. He and a fellow piper had stopped off at a meeting on their way to play at a concert in Carloway, been converted, and found it impossible to continue.

There are various accounts of the 1949-53 Lewis Awakening. Some credit the Church of Scotland while disparaging the Free Church. Some credit the Rev. Duncan Campbell and the Faith Mission alone, while others acknowledge the work of local ministers and elders. All are agreed on one point, that singing, in both English and Gaelic, played a major part in the movement. Though many of the individual testimonies included in Colin and Mary Peckham’s Sounds from Heaven relate to earlier Revivals, nearly all quote verses of Psalms or hymns which contributors associate with their own conversion. Agnes Morrison of Shader, who was fifteen at

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653 Peckham and Peckham 2004 This is written from the Faith Mission perspective. It includes twenty-four personal accounts of conversion during Revival, otherwise inaccessible; Duncan Campbell The Lewis Awakening 1949-1953 (Edinburgh: The Faith Mission, 1954) gives Campbell’s own account; MacLeod 2008, pp. 261-7 is critical of both, describing Campbell’s account as ‘exaggerated’, the Peckhams’ as ‘profoundly misleading’, in that they conflate accounts from different Revivals (p. 265).
the time, recalls how she and her friends would stand on the road singing hymns until
the early hours of the morning. They had been taught English hymns from *Songs of
Victory*, the Faith Mission Song Book, by visiting missionaries some years earlier. 654
They also had the *Leabhar Laoídh* published by Comunn Soisgeulach Gàidhealach
Ghlascho. 655 Donald MacPhail of Arnol, describing these same scenes, says that
meetings would end around 2 a.m., but that no one wanted to leave. The Shader girls,
the minister James MacKay and the whole of the congregation would then assemble
at the road junction and join in singing ‘newly composed hymns written during the
Revival’. 656 Margaret MacLeod of Barvas describes having learned hymns at the
Church of Scotland Sunday School, Psalms at the Free Church Sunday School and
English hymns at a series of evangelical meetings held at her school. 657 Mary Ann
Morrison of Uig remembers that at meetings in Crowlista and Timisgarry her mother
would be asked to sing Gaelic hymns, while the teenagers sang English hymns taught
by the Faith Mission. 658 Both Catriona and John Murdo remember their own mother
singing English hymns as she went about her work. 659

Along with this influx of English and American hymnody came a corresponding
upsurge in the composition of *dàin spioradail*. Chirsty Maggie MacLeod of Arnol
claims that five people in her village received the ‘gift of poetry’ and composed
*laoidhean* as a result of the Revival, and that her sister Margaret wrote thirty
*laoidhean*, though she had ‘no such gift’ before the Revival. 660 It was at this time that
Catriona an Tucsain began to compose *laoidhean soisgeulach*. Though influenced to
some extent by Faith Mission songs, in that they are relatively short and have a
tendency towards Sankey’s exclamation style, Catriona’s songs clearly belong to the
Gaelic rather than the English or American traditions. They use Gaelic metre and
local tunes, and are sung using traditional ornamentation. Her use of biblical
referencing is less complex than that of poets of an earlier generation, such as Màiri

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(Glasgow: R. L. Allan & Son, nd.)
655 MacColl 1899.
657 Peckham and Peckham 2004, p. 201.
658 Peckham and Peckham 2004, p. 278.
Anna NicIomhair, but follows the same pattern and uses the same lexicon of poetic phrases. A collection of seventeen of her songs *Laoidhean Ghàidhlig* was published around 1964. Some became very well known and are still regularly heard on radio and television and on commercial and charity recordings. Some have been recorded for the School of Scottish Studies Archive. Catriona herself may be heard singing ‘O mo chlann’ on the BBC Bliadhna nan Òran site.

‘Nach Mise bha Ort Fagus’

Catriona’s parents were members of the Church of Scotland, both with vivid memories of the 1939 Revival and a deep commitment to bringing their children up as Christians. In a song to her own children, Catriona acknowledges that it was this early teaching which had laid the foundations of her own faith:

’S nis mus crìonaich mi na ruinn so
Taing do m’ athair ’s do mo mhàthair,
’Son an teagaisg thug iad dhomh-sa,
Nuair a bha mi òg ’nam pàisde. (v. 8)

In ‘Nach mise bha ort fagus’ she passes on her parents’ teaching to another generation by listing and explaining the *comhairraidhean gràis*. These exemplify the spiritual life to which the committed Christian aspires, marking them out from those who merely follow the forms of religion. The *comhairraidhean* are a subject of keen interest and apprehension amongst Church members and are defined and expounded upon by the assembled elders on *Latha na Ceist*. Many, particularly young people, would never have attended a *Latha na Ceist* service, though there could be few who had not heard the *comhairraidhean* discussed informally. In her exposition of the *comhairraidhean*, Catriona uses biblical *dearbhadh* and adopts the idiom of an earlier generation of elders. As in formal *Latha na Ceist* services, she

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661 Catriona Caimbel, *Laoidhean Ghàidhlig* (Stornoway: A. MacLeod, nd.).
665 Individual elders’ exposition could be held in memory for generations as nòtaichean.
begins by announcing the text to be discussed, choosing ‘gràdh Chriosd’ as her theme. She explains that Christ’s love for Man fills the heart to overflowing. It had been there from before Creation and would be there to all eternity. Just as in secular love songs, her sèist expresses the simple wish to be near Him:

Sèist:
O nach mise bha ort fagus.

O ’s ann anns a’ ghràdh tha lionadh,
Tha e teachd bho chuislean losa;
’S e bha anns nu rùintean siorruidh
’S e ni t-siorruidheachd cho sona. (v. 1)

’S ged tha iomadh pian is craidh ann,
Bith ’gad leantainn mar a dh’àithn’ thu,
Mar is motha bhios an àmhghair
’S ann is milse bhios an toradh. (v. 2)

The first comharradh she defines is that of growth. Though the believer may suffer spiritual and mental anguish, the greater the pain, the sweeter ‘toradh an Spiorad’. One eminent elder describes faith as a growing plant: ‘Tha e mar luibh a tha fàs ni ’s mò ’s ni ’s mò’.666 Another elder explains further: ‘’S e toradh an Spiorad gràdh, aoibhneis, sith, fad-fhulangas, caomhalachd, maitheas, creidimh, macantas, stuaim’.667 Catrìona takes the first fruit of the Spirit, ‘gràdh’ as her second comharradh. Where Man is seen as being inherently flawed, faith and love are not within his nature, as John MacLean of Back explains:

Bu chois dhuinn a bhi ga ar ceasnachadh fèin, am bheil am fior chreideamh, agus am fior gràdh againn. Oir cha’n fhàs iad ann an nàdur, ni ’s mò na dh’fhàsas iad anns an Diabhul.668

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666 Appendix 2, p.26, SB93, SB42.
667 Appendix 2, p. 26, SMS; Galatians 2.22-3.
668 MacBeath nd, p. 41.
She makes the significance of ‘gràdh’ doubly clear by combining MacLean’s pronouncement with a verse frequently proposed for *Latha na Ceist* discussions:

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\text{Tha fhios againn gu ’n deachaidh sinn thairis o bhàs gu beatha, do bhrìgh gu bheil gràdh againn do na bràithrean.} \quad 669
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
'S \ cha \ do \ dh’fhàs \ e \ riamh \ air \ nàdur \\
A \ bhith \ gràdhachadh \ nam \ bràithrean; \\
'S \ comharr’ \ cinn teach \ air \ gràs \ e \\
'S \ gun \ deach \ thu \ bho \ bhàs \ gu \ beatha. \ (v. \ 3)
\end{align*}
\]

If love and faith are not within the nature of man, they can only come from Christ and are a sure mark of having been accepted into a new life of the spirit:

\[
\begin{align*}
'S \ e \ ni \ tlachdmhor \ clann \ nan \ gràs \ dhuit, \\
'S \ e \ chuireas \ tric \ gu \ caithir-gràis \ thu \\
'S \ cuiridh \ cleòc \ air \ iomadh \ fàiling, \\
\text{Chan fhaic suil gràidh ach nithean matha. (v. 5)}
\end{align*}
\]

Four more *comharraidhean* follow in quick succession. The true Christian delights in attending Church services. They constantly seek the company of fellow Christians. They pray for them, overlook their faults, see only the good in them. One elder defines the *gràdh bràithreil* which makes this possible: ‘‘S e aon chomhar a bheir mi orra, cha’n iarradh iad aon smuain nàimhéidil a bhi aca do na bràithrean’’.\(^{670}\) Another elder has, ‘Comhar eile, tha thu ga iarraidh ann an uile mheadhonan nan Gràs, tha aomadh t-inntinn do ’n ionnsuidh’.\(^{671}\) Another explains how ‘gràdh Chriosd’ drives the Christian to self-examination and prayer, almost in spite of himself. ‘Tha iad an còmhnaidh g’ am bualadh fhéin agus air an cumail aig cathair-gràis’. Contemplating the mystery of ‘gràdh Chriosd’ leaves Catriona lost for words.

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669 1 John 3.14.
670 Appendix 2, p. 26, MM.
671 Appendix 2, p. 25, SB28; MMA p. 23.
It is infinitely deep, infinitely complex: ‘‘S mar is doimhne ni thu gluasd’ ann / ’S ann is diomhair e ’nad shealladh’ (v. 6):

’S tric a chumas e gun tâmh thu
’S cha tig cadal ’n taobh a tha thu
Smuineachadh air Fear-gràdhach
A chuireadh plast dhuit air do ghalair. (v. 7)

She explains that love leaves you restless, sleepless, always thinking of the Fear Gràdhach who can heal the disease of inborn sin which keeps you apart. Calum MacLeod describes this mixture of apprehension and longing: ‘Tha i cuir na h-uile ni a thaobh ach e fèin’.672

’S dé math dhomh-sa bhith cur cainnt air,
Dh’fhàilich e air Rut ’s air Daibhidh,
Ach tha aon ni a tha cinnteach
Cha bhith e gun fhios ’nad bhroilleach. (v. 8)

David had failed to describe it in the Psalms. Ruth’s words ‘Is e do shluagh-sa mo shluagh-sa’ had expressed the dutiful love of a daughter-in-law, but this could not compare with ‘gràdh Chriosd’.673 A Stornoway elder explains ‘gràdh ceart’ by contrasting Ruth’s fidelity with Orpah’s self-interest:

Phòg Orpah a mathair-chèile, ach dhlùth-lean Rut rithe. Tha iad so eudachail aon chuid, cho beag ’sa tha an gràdh, no nach eil an gràdh ceart aca.674

Catriona gives one more comharradh, ‘Cha bhith e gun fhios ’nad bhroilleach’, the mark which is itself irrefutable evidence of all the others. Faith and love cannot be hidden and when ‘gràdh Chriosd’ is seen in every aspect of the Christian’s life,

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672 Appendix 2, p. 23, CMC.
673 Ruth 1.16. Ruth’s words are often used in declaring commitment to the Church. See Marbhrainn do Dhomhnall MacIomhair, v. 13; MacBeath nd., p. 18.
674 MacBeath nd., p. 40.
words are superfluous. Her response to this love is to fly towards it, whether to the companionship of her fellow Christians or to Cùirt nam Flaitheas:

'S nam biodh agam sgiath a chlamain,
Dheannain iteag agus dh’halbhainn
Dh’ionnsaidh innis tha leam gràdhaicht,
'S gheibhinn sasachadh do m’ anam. (v. 9)

‘Marbh-Rann do Ishbel NicLeòid, Marybank, Steòrnabhagh’

Two of Catriona’s best-known songs, ‘Marbh-Rann do Ishbel NicLeòid, Marybank Steòrnabhagh’ and ‘O mo chlann’, are closely linked, composed on the same night in January 1963.675 Ishbel NicLeòid was just fifteen years old, the daughter of Aonghas MacLeòid, ‘Ease’ as he was known. She barely had time to make a mark on the world, but left poignant reminders of her brief life in the Gaelic songs which she copied out for her father, and which are now held in the Angus MacLeod Archive at Kershader. As a close friend of the family and a mother herself, Catriona could not help putting herself in the place of Ishbel’s parents, and it is from their perspective that she composes her marbhrann:

Sud a bhuille, sud a bhuille,
Sud a bhuille a bha cruaidh,
'Nuair a chaidh mi gu do leabaidh
Bha thu aig do dhachaidh bhuan. (v. 1)

Sud tha duilich leinn a chreidsinn
Is gun againn ach thu fhéin,
Ach ged 's diomhair e ri thuigsinn
B’ e sud bh’ ann a rùinteann Dhè. (v. 2)

That a young teenager could go to bed full of life, but fail to wake in the morning was only explicable in terms of ‘rùinteann Dhè’. Catriona imagines the distress of

675 Appendix 7.8
Ishbel’s mother as she looks around her, and how she must struggle to accept the loss of their only child:

’S chan eil taobh a ni mi sealltainn
Nach eil cuimhnechain mo ghràidh,
’S chan eil seomair ni mi fhuasgladh
Anns nach fhaic mi larg do làmh. (v. 4)

’Nuair òrain teachdaireachd le cumhachd
Bha thu umhail dha ’n a bhàs,
’S nuair bu mhotha bha ar suil riut,
Chaidh do spionadh as ar làmh. (v. 6)

It was knowing that Ishbel, young as she was, was a committed Christian that was to be her mother’s consolation. Though she will never see her daughter grow up, she promises to watch over her young friends for her sake, and hope and pray that they will be reunited in Heaven:

’S nuair a chi mi do cho-aoisean
’S na bha ionmhuiinn leat a ghràidh,
Bho ’n a rinn thu fhein an taghadh,
Bheir mi suil orra gu brath. (v. 7)

‘O mo chlann tha ’n diugh air m’ aire’

According to her daughter Nan Nic a’ Ghobhainn, on the night that Catriona wrote ‘Marbh-Rann do Ishbel NicLeòid’ she watched her own four children peacefully sleeping and was inspired to write ‘O mo chlann’.\(^{676}\) Like Ishbel’s parents, she can watch over her children, see that they are safe and well, but nothing can guarantee that one or all of them will not be taken from her as suddenly as young Ishbel had been taken from her parents:

O mo chlann tha ’n diugh air m’ aire
O mo chlann tha ’n diugh air m’ inntinn;
Feuch nach fhàg sibh e ro fhada
Gun ’ur taghadh dhèanamh cinnteach. (v. 1)

Thigibh tràth a dh’ionnsuidh Chrìosda
Gabhaibh a’ chuing-san ’nur n-òige;
Mus tig cabhagach am bàs dhuibh,
Is gum bi dùinte dorus tròcair. (v. 2)

Though addressed to young children, her song has all the motifs of earailean directed at adults. There is the advice ‘nach fhàg sibh e ro fhada’ and the warning of the ‘taghadh’ which must be made and the ‘cuing’ which must be accepted. There is a warning of ‘bàs cabhagach’, that death does not necessarily allow for last-minute decisions. There is another warning, ‘dèanaibh feum de latha chothrom’, and yet another, that when the ‘dorus tròcair’ is shut, it will not be reopened. This song’s enduring popularity is an indication that Catrìona’s concern has been shared by generations of mothers. Though they do what they can to guide and teach their children, they cannot make their choices for them. Catrìona appeals to her children’s affection for her: ‘Mur a faic mi anns a’ chrò sibh / Chaidh ri ’m bheò cha bhi mi riaraichte’. She knows from her own childhood just how valuable a mother’s influence can be, and appeals for help in fulfilling her duty, ‘A bhithe togail suas na cloinne / Ann an oileanachd na Diadhachd’. Conscious that her children are too young to take in what she is saying, she leaves a message for them. It may not be until long after her own death, but one day they may listen to her words and understand:

’S nuair a ghràidh a gheibh sibh tuigse,
Mis’ bith ann, no as ’ur làthair,
Deanaibh feum de latha chothroim
’S gheibh sibh carthannas na ghràdh-san. (v. 7)

677 Appendix 5.3.
In her quiet moments Catriona an Tucsain hopes for another Revival. Màiri Anna NicIomhair longs for the next Òrduighean, while the fiery Catriona Thangaidh does her utmost to get the better of Satan who keeps her mind in turmoil: ‘Mar fhear ’s a bhean-phòsda / Bhiodh an còmhnuidh ’g a dhìteadh’. 678 Catriona an Tucsain may not engage in open conflict with Satan in quite the same way as Catriona Thangaidh, but she suffers exactly the same fears and insecurities, always wondering whether she is one of an treud. ‘S iomadh uair bi eagal orm / Nach buin mi do ’n treud’. 679 Like many poets before her, both men and women, she is captivated by the Fear Ghràidh of the Song of Solomon: ‘Tha do bheul mis ionmhuinn / ’S mar shùil chalaman do shùil / O nach tig thu g’ am ionnsuidh / ’S mi cho tinn le do ghaol’. 680 And, using a metaphor dating back to the earliest missionaries from Catholic Ireland to what was to become the Scottish Gàidhealtachd, she depicts her soul as a boat: ‘Air a’ chuain le iomadh gaoithe / Gun neach ann a ni fuasgladh orm’, and sends out the same appeal for help: ‘Bidh mi mar bhàta chaill an stiùir / Gu ’n tig Thu ruin g’ am frithealadh’. 681

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678 MacRath 1917, p. 19, v. 8.
679 Caimbel nd., ‘Cianalas’, p. 32.
Chapter 8: Thesis Conclusion

Constraints of space rather than shortage of material bring this study to a conclusion with Màiri Anna NicIomhair and Catrìona an Tucsain. As Catrìona looks back from 1963 to the heady days of Revival ten years earlier, Màiri Anna laments the emptiness of the churches and the decline in faith. Just as the seventeenth-century Irish poets had lamented the death of poetry, their laments couched in the very poetry which they declare to be dead, Màiri Anna and Catrìona long for revival in songs which, far from showing decline, show the strength and vitality of a tradition which constantly renews itself.\(^{682}\) The poetic lament over the decline of faith reaches back to the Old Testament Prophets, each generation lamenting the loss in its turn, yet somehow, both faith and poetry continue, apparently unaware of their own deaths or the obsequies being pronounced over them.

The Annotated Chronology which accompanies this study shows not a static body of songs, but a field which is still productive, as the case of three present-day poets demonstrates. In 2008 Maletta NicPhàil published twenty-five of her poems, mostly in free verse.\(^{683}\) Catrìona NicDhömhaíil, whose earliest laoidhean date back to the early 1970s, published a retrospective collection of 128 songs in 2010.\(^{684}\) Equally prolific, if less published, is Janet MacPhail, who composes in both traditional and modern verse forms, recording the life of the Church, commenting on sermons, marking the passing of friends and neighbours, offering comfort and advice just as her mentor Màiri Anna NicIomhair had done before her.

My motivation in undertaking this study has been to reach some understanding of the breadth and complexity of this largely unknown area of our literary and cultural heritage. The scope of research is necessarily wide, as it considers songs which defy simple categorisation. Some are deeply devotional, others ostensibly secular, most lie somewhere in between. Linked as they are in theme, structure and motif, it is self-

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\(^{683}\) NicPhàil 2008.

\(^{684}\) NicDhömhaíil 2010.
evident that these songs do not exist in isolation. They draw on an older tradition of religious poetry, on scriptural and doctrinal texts, on a wider poetic tradition and on each other. It is equally clear that they cannot be interpreted without reference to their social and historical context. The first chapter of this study describes the collection and categorisation of the corpus and discusses the historical, theological and cultural setting of the songs. It also points out the problems presented by loss of cultural context, in that the familiarity with biblical and doctrinal texts common to the 18th, 19th and most of the 20th centuries can no longer be assumed. As evangelical song is, by its nature, dependent on biblical models, the problem of inaccessibility in relation to scriptural and doctrinal allusion is of major concern. This has been addressed, initially by establishing that such allusion is functional, ordered, and consistent over both diachronic and synchronic spectra. Further analysis reveals a formalised lexicon of symbol and allusion, with complementary lexicons of names and epithets, topographical features, and specialised religious terminology.

Though there are direct relationships between symbol and paradigm, the whole strength of symbolic expression is that it is infinitely malleable, untroubled by contradiction, susceptible to different interpretations in the face of differing circumstances. In one song the poet may use a simple biblical exemplar to validate her words, in another she may create complex sequences of interlinked metonyms which barely touch conscious thought as they open up pathways into deeper levels of understanding. It is in their relationship to each other and to the theme and context of the song that they must be understood. Where songs are so often structured around others which have been made and re-made over generations, they can never be read in isolation, or even assumed to carry the same message every time they are sung. Their phrasing may be ambiguous, carrying multiple possibilities of interpretation, striking one to the heart while leaving another unmoved. Omissions and indeterminacies provide yet another frame of reference, where what is absent is as significant as what is expressed. This is particularly evident in marthranan and cumhachan, where the spiritual status of the subject, if not alluded to, is all too clearly understood.
While it would be simplistic to suggest that figurative expression can be systematised and ordered to the extent of compiling a dictionary, certain elements can be abstracted and listed. Among these are the honorifics accorded to Christ, to God and to the Holy Spirit; the names and epithets used of Satan; the terms used to distinguish Church members from adherents; the Marks of Grace which characterise the conduct of professing Christians; the topographical features of the allegorical world in which spiritual discourse is set. Those which are clearly definable are listed in the Appendix and can serve, in the broadest sense, as a tool to interpret certain aspects of evangelical song. They can, for example, indicate the poet’s perspective, showing where she situates herself in relation to those persons, places and spiritual states.

Each category of song has been analysed in order to determine its distinguishing themes and motifs, with extracts from songs showing different interpretations by different poets.\textsuperscript{685} The concept of time passing swiftly, for example, is depicted as a flock of birds rising from a tree; a river which runs ever faster; heartbeats hurrying towards death. The examples are taken from a representative sample of poets and are far from exhaustive, but are offered as evidence of the systematic use of biblical symbolism, demonstrating the ways in which it is assimilated into songs and internalised by different poets. While familiarity with these symbols and motifs cannot guarantee access to the meaning of evangelical songs, ignorance of them will certainly deny it.

Though it is not possible to replicate the intellectual and perceptual environment within which this poetic language functions; it is possible to identify recurrent figures, to re-attach them to their corresponding biblical paradigms, to re-connect the literal and the figurative and clarify their possible range of meanings. It is certainly possible to identify near-verbatim repetition of phrases from sermons, quotations from doctrinal works, the words of the elders on \textit{Latha na Ceist}, and to recognise biblical references, despite the subtle modification they undergo as they are adopted into songs.

\textsuperscript{685} Appendix 5.
It is also possible to recognise an underlying metonymy, where Taigh Dhé implies membership of teaghlach Dhé, the longing to be recognised as clann Dhé; where the idealised gràdh bràithreil of the congregation implies kinship with their Bràthair as Sine and recognition by An Athair. Estrangement from An Athair is expressed in paired images of dislocation and opposition. Where Àros Dhè is eternal, an taigh talmhaidh and am pailtuir crè are houses which are impermanent, bound to return to the earth from which they were made. The taigh caol gun solas and the clòsaid fhuaraidh of the grave take the mortal body ever-closer to the earth, ever-further from immortality and Àros na Naomhachd. These pairings appear in many different forms: yet even when demonstrating estrangement, they continually seek to re-establish the link between An Cìobair and an treud; to unite na h-òighean with Fear na Bainnse; and na coigrich is luchd-turais with Am Fear-iùil.

Where one element is seen, the other, or others, if not made explicit, are certainly implied. This brings an easy familiarity to both sermons and songs, where what is expected is delivered and teaching is corroborated both by dearbhadh an Fhocail and the simple associations of everyday experience. Evangelical songs may, at one level, appear to merely replicate biblical texts, showing The Fall, expulsion from Eden and the journey in the wilderness as a series of metonymic displacements, where the soul grows ever-further from God. Yet the path by which the soul went into exile, is now marked by comharraidhean which will lead it home. In following these markers, the penitent rejects the world, resists temptation, is accepted back into Taigh Dhé, and drawn in to the gràdh bràithreil of the congregation to regain their right to an oighreachd. The comharraidhean Gràis, so carefully detailed by generations of elders, are the particular contribution of the Highland churches, showing their own understanding of a doctrine barely recognisable to their present-day Lowland counterparts.

The work of re-contextualisation continues over the next two chapters, initially by considering the ways in which the Church adopted the techniques of the oral tradition to extend its teaching to non-literate communities, then by charting the spread of formal education, the development of literacy and the growth in Gaelic publishing.
It quickly becomes evident that the most complex biblical exegesis was not beyond the comprehension of non-literate congregations, nor was it necessarily dependent on written texts for survival. The preservation of the substance of James Fraser’s *Treatise on Sanctification* in the oral tradition, for example, is indicative of an intellectual curiosity and a willingness to engage with ideas far beyond the range usually associated with oral transmission.\(^{686}\)

The fact that both Dùghall Bochanan’s *laoidhean* and Dr Iain Domhnullach’s *marbhrrannan* were well known in the oral tradition, quite independent of published texts, and that Iain Gobha’s songs were recovered from oral sources in Harris long after his death, show this intellectual curiosity extending to the memorising of songs of extreme length and uncompromising severity as effectively as it memorised whole books of the Bible. Such feats of memorisation were not at all uncommon, and would suggest that, far from being indicative of a rigidly imposed external culture, they reflect intellectual hunger, and an eager engagement with new worlds of the imagination. There were unknown lands, strange birds, serpents and dragons, new heroes to arouse sympathy or detestation, new philosophies to be interpreted in the light of traditional wisdom, biblical truths to be examined in the light of experiential certainties – and vice versa. The owls, pelicans, and pomegranates of women’s evangelical songs show their fascination with a world where the material is never entirely separate from the symbolic, where there is real doubt as to the existence of pomegranates and pelicans, but absolute certainty as to their symbolic meaning.

Throughout this thesis I take it as axiomatic that songs do not merely reflect the inner life and experience of the individual poet. They all, to some extent, reflect the life of the community, both in the subjects they address and in the fact that communities choose to keep some songs alive while ignoring others. For this reason, songs, particularly those of lesser-known poets, have been used to build up multi-dimensional representations of the social and spiritual life of the Church at different periods and in different areas of the Gàidhealtachd. They reveal personal

and local differences of perspective, different understandings of doctrine, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with church officers and clergy, insights into life and society. In early nineteenth-century Durness, for example, Barbara Ni ’n Rob is outraged at being offered tea instead of whisky at her minister’s Temperance Crusade Soirée. At the same time, in Tarbert, Harris, Eibhric Morison in her ‘Rannan do ’n Mhisg’ is scathing on the subject of men who spend their money on drink, leaving wives and children in misery. 687

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters subject the songs of eight evangelical poets, ranging from the mid-eighteenth to the late twentieth century to literary analysis in the light of observations made in the preceding chapters. Though inhabiting a world of allegory and allusion, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these women also live in the real world, where the circumstances of their economic, domestic and cultural lives are significant in shaping their world-view and religious perspective. Bean a Bharra, for example, the earliest of the eighteenth-century poets, found herself satirised by Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair for usurping the role of the minister by composing laoidhean teagaisg. Whatever his view of her, in 1786 six of her laoidhean were considered worthy of inclusion in a collection featuring the foremost evangelical poets of her day. Bean Torra Dhamh, composing later in the century, is one of the few Gaelic evangelical poets known to the academic world, but in her lifetime was only able to publish two songs, and that anonymously in 1785. Mairearad Chaimbeul, by contrast, was able to make a significant contribution to the family income by publishing a secular collection in 1785, a second edition in 1805, and a spiritual collection in 1810, yet her evangelical songs are unknown in any other context.

The mid-nineteenth-century poet Anna NicFhearighais is by far the most exciting discovery of this study, with her notebook of twenty-one laoidhean lying unnoticed in the Gaelic Manuscript Collection of the National Library of Scotland. Her work alone, which will undoubtedly form the subject of future studies, sets a new

landmark on the literary map of the Gàidhealtachd. This is no disrespect to the work of Margaret Camaran, whose *cumhachan spioradail* are discussed in the same chapter, only to say that we see her through the eyes of her editor, and rather than seeing her in her prime, we see her only in her old age and in mourning, and cannot judge her work as a whole.

Catríona Thangaidh, Màiri Anna NicIomhair and Catrìona an Tucsain, all well known in Lewis, also stand as markers on this newly configured literary map. Catríona Thangaidh is remarkable for her vividly imaginative realisations of spiritual worlds, her conjuring up of stormy seas, wild moorland and the shadowy figure of Satan who stalks her every step. Màiri Anna NicIomhair is equally significant, re-populating Lewis villages with their full complement of elders, precentors and *mathraichean an Israeil*, lighting the lamps in each darkened tigh leughaidh, passing on the teaching of the now silent *seanairean*. If remembered only for ‘Cogadh Hitler’, she would stand alone as poet and visionary. Catrìona an Tucsain represents the Revival poets of 1949-53, a young convert, a young mother with a young family, whose songs were the voice of her generation and are still popular today.

The Annotated Chronology which supplements this study contains songs gathered from a multiplicity of sources: verses found in Church magazines and local newspapers, leaflets with individual songs found in Stornoway charity shops, village archives and private collections. Some were lent or given, others recorded with the proviso that they be used for research only and not published. As the names of many poets will be unfamiliar, each has been set as far as possible in her local context, allowing known poets to be seen in relation to their lesser-known contemporaries. The very existence of so many little-known Gaelic poets, and so many unknown songs, reveals a huge gap in our understanding of our own poetic culture. If filling this gap were simply a matter of collecting and publishing songs, it could, and to some extent is being addressed by local Comainn Eachdraidh. The greater problem is that the songs themselves, even those at the secular end of the spiritual / secular spectrum, become increasingly inaccessible as both their conceptual framework and their allusive language become more remote from present-day experience. In
investigating the systematic use of biblical allusion and identifying its specialised lexicons, this study goes some way towards providing an interpretive key. This research undoubtedly has implications for the Gaelic poetic tradition as a whole, offering alternative readings for songs of both oral and literary composition, whether spiritual or secular.

In bringing so many poets together, many of whom were well known in their time, this study creates a cumulative sense of their participation in spiritual life, and of their role as teachers and spiritual leaders in a Church which is largely assumed to allow women no voice and to allow no place to poetry, music or song. In using the voices of poets, elders and evangelists as authoritative sources, it also offers internal perspectives on aspects of Gaelic culture little understood outside their own particular domain. Future literary studies could examine regional or historical differences, relationships between theme and genre, changes in poetic expression as poets react to the changing world. As social documents alone, women’s evangelical songs could supplement study in other areas. They chart the impact of emigration, clearance and economic migration to the cities. They show women’s response to war, widowhood, epidemics, infant and maternal mortality, education and their hopes for themselves and their children in both the material and spiritual world.

Of the many poets whose voices this study may be said to recover, some are, by any measure, outstanding and more detailed studies will certainly allow them to take their place in the Gaelic literary canon. The works of others may never become canonical, but both as individuals and groups, they in a sense re-populate the Gàidhealtachd, allowing us to revisit lost worlds of belief, philosophies we no longer understand or hold in any great respect, allowing us to see how the poets whom we overlook, in part shape the poetic culture we hold in high regard.
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Recordings: These are also listed with their composers in the Annotated Chronology

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SA 1961/10 ‘Bídha a h-uile seòrsa aig pòsadh an Uain’.
SA 1961/10A2 ‘Théid is gun téid mi nall’, ‘rinn Cailleach à Tharansaigh sin’.
SA 1961/10 ‘Tir an àigh, tir a’ ghràidh’.
See: Coinneach MacLeòid, An Laoidheadair, p. 41.
SA 1968/125 Mo ghràdh air a’ Spiorad Naomha, ‘rinn tè a bha sa Bhàghaidh sin thall e’
Oighrig Choinnich, Scadabay/ Cairistiona Sheadha
SA 1968/121/13  ‘Oh nach èisdeadh tu sgeul le àire’, ‘by a woman who got water near the house by praying’.

SA 1965/145  ’S ann a bha na suinn a ’s a’ luing ’nuair a ghluais i / tha fadachd orm o hi. Raghnait Mhòr, Bragar c. 1900.

Laoidhean and marbharrannan

SA 1965/145  ‘S e Criosd a rinn mo shaoradh’, Raghnait Mhòr, Bragar
SA 1965/144  ‘Tha iomadh neach an Carlabhagh na làithean seo fo bhròn’. Màiri Anna NicIomhair
A version of ‘An tèid thu leis an Rìgh as maiseach’, Sìn Mhàrtainn, Scalpaigh on CD Alec John MacAulay for Bethesda
SA 1974.119  Tha an gràdh seo cho làidir, Christina Morrison Scalpay, sung by Cairistiona Mhoireasdan
SA 1969/145  ‘S e bhith tinn le do ghràdh – sa’, Catrìona an Tucsain
SSS MOD 2002.06  ’O mo chlann tha ’n diugh air m’ aire’, Catriona an Tucsain.
SA 1965/145  ‘O nach mise bha ort fagaisg’, Catrìona an Tucsain
See: ‘O nach robh na laithean fagaisg’, Bean Iain Dòmhnullaich, Skye.
SA 1968.012.21  ‘Och, Ochon a Rìgh’, Màiri NicIomhair, Back, sung by Cairistiona
SA 1974.119  Mhoireasdan; CD Annie MacKinnon; CD Pordy;
SA 1970. 011  ‘Laoidh na smeòraich’, Iseabail NicIlleathan
SA 1977. 099 A9  ‘Och gur e sinn air ar cràdh’, Anna Gobha
SA 1976. 054 A1  ‘Gur ann air tūs an Dùbhachd’, Màiri NicDhòmhnaill
SA 1953.106  ‘Thugaibh rùn do ’n Fhear Ùr’, Màiri NicDhòmhnaill
’Sibhs’ tha mach a Criosd’, Mrs Smith, Arnol; (also on bbc.co.uk/alba/orain)

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Togarach a bhith maille ri Criosd – Bean Torra Dhamh
‘Nach robh mise tha tinn’, Màiri NicIomhair, Back
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‘Bha mi a-raoir air mo ghlùinean’, Iseabail NicIlleathain

Laoidh na tuba-nighe’, ‘Na faighinn fois car tamuill’, Nan Eoghain.

‘Iongantas Gràdh Dhé’, Mrs MacIver, Back
‘Deagh-ghean lehóbbah’, Mrs MacArthur, Vancouver

Donald MacLeod, *Gaelic Spiritual Hymns II*, Lewis Recordings RCS 209, 1979
‘Faca sibh Lili?’, Margaret Smith, Arnol.

‘Gràdh Dhé’, Mrs C. Morrison, Scalpay.

‘O, ’S e Iosa Fear mo Ghràdh’, Catriona an Tucsain.
‘Tribute to the late Rev. A. MacLeod, Back,’ Effie MacLean, Knockaird.
‘Na faighinn fois car tamuill’, the late Mrs MacArthur, Laxdale.

**CD recordings**

‘Sibh’s tha mach a Criosd’, Catriona an Tucsain.

‘Ochon a Righ’, Màiri NicIomhair, Back
‘O ’S e Iosa Fear mo Ghràidh’, Catriona an Tucsain

CD Allan Gunn, for Bethesda Hospice, Stornoway, Lewis Recordings RCS CD256
‘O ’s e Iosa Fear mo Ghràidh’, Catriona an Tucsain
‘Tha m’ inntinn i snàmh a-null thar an sàil’, Màiri Anna NicIomhair,

Alex John MacAulay for Bethesda Hospice, Stornoway
‘An tèid thu leis an Righ as maiseach’, Sine Mhàrtainn, Scalpaiddh
‘Dh’halbh thu uaim am priob na sàile’, Catriona Nic Dhòmhnuill,

John Morrison, Ness, for Bethesda Hospice Stornoway
‘Nam faighinn fois car tamuill’, Nan Eoghain, (to the tune ‘Fil o ro’)
Tha ’n gràdh seo cho làidir – Cairistiona Mhoireasdan, Scalpaiddh.
O ’s e Iosa Fear mo Ghràidh – Catriona an Tucsain.