

24th January 2021

Sufficiency

**“An elegant sufficiency, content,
Retirement, rural quiet, friendship, books.”**

James Thomson, The Seasons 'Spring' (1746)

After ten months of the Coronavirus pandemic, an interesting question to post on Facebook might be: “What’s your ‘elegant sufficiency’ at the present time?” What sustains you, makes sense for you, gives you meaning and purpose right now? Answers on a postcard, please ... or on Facebook!

I’ll try later to answer my own question and list what is ‘an elegant sufficiency’ is for me, but I’ll keep that to myself for now. However, I was struck again by the word “sufficiency” when I read the words of the 18th century Scottish poet, James Thomson, quoted above, and then continued to reflect on the hymn, “How Great Thou Art”, as I’ve done in recent days.

Carl Boberg’s poem, on which “How Great Thou Art” is based, was written in Swedish and originally had nine verses. The free translation into English by Stuart K Hine which we sing today only has four verses and a refrain. Hine’s version of one of Boberg’s other stanzas reads like this:

*When burdens press, and seem beyond endurance,
Bowed down with grief, to Him I lift my face;
And then in love He brings me sweet assurance:
“My child! For thee sufficient is My grace.”*

Why not sing these words now to the tune you know so well. Sing it out loudly, with conviction and meaning! For here is faith beyond lists or decisions. Here is true sufficiency. Here is faith, not in the human attributes that make Thomson content in his retirement – friendships, rural quiet and books – but in grace beyond definition. Here, “when burdens press”, is faith in God – for Boberg, all the sufficiency he needed.

So as I start listing my own ‘elegant sufficiency’, what sustains *me* when I’m “bowed down”, friendships, rural quiet and books will all be included. But at the top of the list is the one that I understand the least and value the most – the God who gives me a “sweet assurance” and says again, “For thee, sufficient is My grace.”

A prayer for today

*Then shall I bow in humble adoration,
And there proclaim, “My God, how great Thou art!”*

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