

24th August 2021

Beauty

“Everything there is simply order and beauty.”

Charles Baudelaire, Le Fleurs du Mal

The recent annual report from Bethany Christian Trust has in its opening statement these words from the prophet Isaiah:

*... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of joy instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*

How fitting this guiding principle is for a charity committed to work with homeless people, and whose report is aptly entitled “Beauty from Ashes”.

Bethany (www.bethanychristiantrust.com) is a national charity whose mission is to relieve suffering and meet the long-term needs of homeless and vulnerable people in Scotland. They have a big vision – to work together towards the aim of ending homelessness in our country. Their ethos is unashamedly Christian, their aims are high, but, most importantly, their work is practical. “One person at a time” they say, one family at a time, one community at a time, treating every person as precious.

Bethany has three strands to its work: homelessness prevention; crisis intervention; housing and support. Their report tells us of services throughout Scotland; offering mental-health first-aid; support for new tenancies; a therapeutic residential community for women; addiction recovery programmes; city-centre care-vans; new work in secondary schools; street-outreach projects; befriending to combat social isolation. The list is ever growing ... And at the heart of it are the changes in people’s lives: John, Joanna, Robert, Tony, Lee, Scott, Paul, and countless unnamed others. These are beautiful people, once confined to the ash-heap of society, but now valued as the unique individuals that they are.

It isn’t the case that “everything there is simply order and beauty”, as Baudelaire suggests, for there is much yet for Bethany and similar charities to achieve. But where there is “a crown of beauty instead of ashes” in the changing of lives, communities and attitudes, then, from a spirit of despair, we can, indeed, see a garment of praise.

A prayer for today

*“I was a stranger,” Jesus said, “and you took me in, naked, and you clothed me.”
Thank God for Bethany, and similar charities, who live out the beauty of these words.*