

29th January 2022

Pillars

**“He may be one of its [the Church’s] buttresses,
but certainly not one of its pillars,
for he is never found within it.”**

Anonymous, of John Scott, Lord Eldon,
from ‘Public and Private Life of Eldon’ by H Twiss

I don’t know what anyone had against the First Earl of Eldon that caused such a comment to be made, and I don’t know enough of Lord Eldon and his relationship with the Church to determine whether it’s justified or not. But I *do* know that the metaphor of “the pillar” is a familiar one in Church circles and would be readily understood by Twiss’s readers.

In Scotland we talk about a “Pillar of the Kirk”, someone who is solid and dependable, without whom, it seems, the Church couldn’t function. The ancient Greeks would often use pillars in human form, such as in temple buildings in the Acropolis. One modern architect has described the pillar as “monumental of our own stance in the landscape.” So to be described as a “Pillar of the Kirk” seems an appropriate metaphor.

One of the churches in Islay is Kilarrow [pronounced kill-a-roo] parish church in Bowmore. It’s an iconic building at the top of Bowmore’s Main Street, and it’s known as “The Round Church”, because ... well ... it’s round. Being round, its roof is supported by a massive central pillar, the kind of thing you see in a circular marquee, holding everything together, the source of the church’s stability. Familiar with the metaphor of “Pillars of the Kirk”, I remarked to a local worthy how impressive and important this pillar was. He smiled at me and said, “Aye well. But there’s a problem. If you find you’re sittin’ behind it, you cannae see a thing, an’ you cannae move it oot o’ the way either.”

Pillars matter for strength and support. I’m sure a local worthy knew this was the case in the church too. But he also identified a problem: pillars can be in the wrong place if you want to see things differently; they can be static and immovable when purpose, style and character need developing. “Pillar of the Kirk”? Yes, a good metaphor, but only if that solid pillar in the middle of a church isn’t *always* getting in the way.

A prayer for today

Lord, make me strong and supportive when I need to me, flexible and accommodating when I should be, and give me the wisdom to know the difference. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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