

28th July 2023

Beyond

“Directing attention and love to a reality beyond ...”

Simone Weil, *Draft for a Statement of Human Obligation* (1943)

I like worshipping in churches with stained glass windows. For one thing, they are often quite beautiful. For another, they're great to look at and get lost in if the sermon happens to be somewhat boring or over-long ...

The rose-window in the chancel of the church in the centre of Fort William is quite stunning. To be honest, the sermon on the day I worshipped there was neither too long nor too dull, so the stained-glass didn't get my full attention till a piece of reflective music was played *after* the sermon. The window, in vibrant blues, reds, yellows and greens, is a depiction of the Last Supper. Bread and grapes sit in the centre of the window. Round them, making the circle of the rose, are the twelve disciples, each with their own chalice, with Christ at the top, breaking bread. I was told some time ago that the faces of the disciples, and of Christ himself, are based on local men. Who they are, no one knows. But the music and the rose window, the colours and the faces, *and* the connection to local people, took me beyond the worship and the church's surroundings to the world around me.

“Directing attention and love to a reality beyond”? It was certainly that! And is this not the very purpose of worship? Adoration and praise, words and stillness, reflection and prayer, aren't surely just for now, and only for here, and confined to those who are present in this place. Their purpose must be to direct our “attention and love to a reality beyond”: to the town which the men in the window had inhabited; the joys and sorrows of their families; the poor and the wealthy; those who had succeeded and those who struggled; those who, in their own day, would have worshiped in this place, and those who would walk by the church's door.

The walls of the church had gone! *This* was my true worship. I had been taken to “a reality beyond”, and I thanked God for that. What I do with that reality is now my challenge. Where my attention and love are directed is my task to discern. But at least I know that worship hadn't trapped me in a building, beautiful though it was, but had taken me through the stained-glass to the reality *outside* that really mattered.

A prayer for today

Lord, take me beyond worship to the needs of the world, and there to serve you. Amen