

17th December 2024

History

“They maintained the dignity of history.”

Henry St John, Lord Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History*

The chunkiest books in my bookcase are volumes X, XI and XII of the *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* – or *The Fasti*, as it's known. This is *The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation*. The original volumes covered all ministers of the Established Church of Scotland (before the union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland in 1929). Volumes I-VII were published on a regional basis (by Synod), while later volumes cover the whole of the Church of Scotland.

I cherish volumes X, XI and XII, because, among the plethora of information they contain, they tell the story of my own ministry – licensing, ordination, probationary ministry, two parishes and a translation to hospice chaplaincy. They are my history, or at least a record of a significant part of my life and work. My wife's father's ministry is detailed there too, as are the careers of many friends and colleagues. In “the dignity of history”, the details in *The Fasti* really matter and always will.

The Chicago-based *Ecumenical Institute*, whose methodologies were formative for me in my early ministry, had three questions which underpinned much of their thinking: Who are you? *I am unique*. Where do you come from? *I am a child of the universe*. What do you do? *I bend history*. That final part has always been important to me. I hope I might have bent history a little, influenced a life here and there, made a small difference. The entries in *The Fasti* are basic facts, but they are also a pointer to so much more that will never be written down.

But *The Fasti* is a metaphor for even more. How many people have I met over the years who think their life is worth nothing, who feel they have no mark to leave behind? Much of my “bending history” has been gently to encourage folk to see that they can bend history too, to believe the world can be irrevocably changed because they're here.

My volumes of the *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* will be with me through Advent beyond. If I am blessed to have more “bending of history” to do, I hope I can still be an encouragement to those who have no *Fasti* to record even the basic facts of their lives.

A prayer for today

Lord, if my life is unique, help me to believe I make a difference by being here. Amen

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