

ARAMAIC BIBLE COMPANION
IN TRIBUTE TO DERICK BINGHAM



"The Rock" where Derrick & I shared in CSSM

THE MAN HE WAS
AND THE MASTER HE SERVED

A FRIEND OF MY YOUTH

Foreword

It was in one of Ireland's exquisite towns at the foot of the Mourne in Ireland's County Down that the Bingham family and the Coffeys made their homes. His father was a widely travelled evangelist with the Christian Brethren and his mother kept a most hospitable home and nearby Derick, Desmond and I would despoil the time.

Derick attended Down High School and proceeded to Queens University where he earned the university prize for Oratory. He was an accomplished pianist and compelling preacher and for years he pastured a Fellowship of believers hard by the University.

My experience of Derick comes from the early years. These were fun times-walking by the Shimna river, playing marbles in the gutter on the way from school, building carts from pram wheels and sharing in the sports staged to mark the Queen's coronation even before the New Donard Park sports facility existed. We began our education in the same school-St. Johns primary and the evangelical tradition-Derick in his small corner with the local assembly and I in mine with the Presbyterians but Jesus meant so much to us the rest fell easily into place. Derick came into my life significantly at three points to which I shall refer in the story.

Derick often spoke at Merrion Hall in Dublin and there is a wonderful little episode in the life of John Guinness that he penned as a tract. An outline of this moving story will be included and thus I would hope to perpetuate the memory of an outstanding Christian man and pay tribute to his power as a recontour and his desire to spread the gospel and find men for God.

Bob Coffey
Aramaic Bible Companion

1, Schooldays

The hard frost and deep snow of winter 1947 would be the most memorable weather feature of our schooldays. I was living on the north side of the Shimna and Derick on the south side in those days. The snow

even in the seaside town we loved stood up to two feet above our heads when we moved along the lanes choreographed by council workers in the thoroughfares. We were prisoners for weeks and weeks but hurrah school was abandoned!

When we got back to the grind I was a new boy straight from Donard View School where we had frequent lessons in the playground from very capable bare fist fighters. Derick had just come of age to enter the world of education under “Cluck” McClure. I was one year advanced by age and mother had taught me copperplate so I became one of Miss McClure’s favourites and that was an advantage not to be despised for “Cluck” lifted boys who did not do her bidding by the ears.

Every morning the up and over divider between us and classes 4-6 was lifted and we were led in daily devotions. Miss Paisley played the piano and Derick and I sang cheerily

“All things bright and beautiful all creatures great and small
All things wise and wonderful the Lord God made them all”.

Religion was “in” big time on the curriculum in those days-God was known widely and feared truly. On “All saints day” and during every Christian festival we were marched along by the strand where “the mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea” to the Rock Church where Rev. Andrews gave us a suitable short talk before we marched back again. On the winter I described and every other, we would be deputed to carry the iron mesh crates of milk left by Patterson’s dairy. The milk would be warmed by the fire and we each would have a 1/3rd pint bottle to drink.

Summer time was so very different. In junior school we were content with rounders and tig-in-a circle where you chased the person who touched you around the outside of a long circle circumscribed by the wall between the senior playground and headmaster McComish’s garden. We used to buy bombs-with-caps which would produce a considerable exploding noise when dropped. Chestnuts were in abundance from Earl Annesley’s big tree and the game of conkers was our autumn pastime. It is surprising that we developed any interest in books at all. We of course had readers-lots of them- with lovely pictures which made us want to turn the page at least.

When at length it was time to move up into classes 4-6 I would part with Derick but gain the consolation his brother Desmond as a friend. Des and

I got on like a house on fire. He was a loveable cheat forever glancing furtively at my answers. “Pasty-face Paisley” as our delightful Christian teacher was known, caught Desmond who had repeated his trick of underarm talking preparatory to copying red-handed. He and I were called up-and sent to Mr. Garston (who had been recently de-mobbed and hurriedly retrained –and withal was proper poor at his trade) for “slaps”. Garston excelled at “slaps” and when you got two each –one a little off target on the wrist-you felt the sting for some time. Des and I were not altogether cured of talking in class but we ceased from sin for a season.

One day a real Queen came to our neck of the woods-not Queen Elizabeth-but another lady from Tonga who was visiting the town prior to the Coronation Event in London. Queen Salotte stepped out of her black limousine. We all cheered and she waved and parceled her not insignificant self back into the car. We might have been forgiven for thinking she had come to see Edie Whiteside’s “sweetie shop” on the corner-but no-it was for a glorious view of the Mournes or maybe to see Percy French’s memorial fountain –who knows? She came to the Emerald Isle –the only black person we had ever seen to date and a Christian to boot who modeled the faith unashamedly to her people.

Now in those far distant days Des and I had state of the art carts. Where I lived at Curragherd Cottage was over a mile uphill of the Bingham home on the Bryansford Road. We would haul our carts or “trolleys” as we preferred to call them to the top of a 3/4mile downhill run. We had brakes of a sort and good guide-ropes. Our vehicles were cobbled together from parts bought from a “nic-nac” man who lived on the Shimna Road. Des got four elite pneumatic wheels from the guy –it was who you know that counted in that connection and Des who lived just a stone’s throw away kept his company and got the best stuff. As close pals we were parted because like Timothy on account of my stomach and frequent infirmities (1Timothy5.23) I suffered undiagnosed for 2 years with grumbling appendix sickness.

2 Victor McManus and all that

There existed in our town of around 2000 homes a band of men whose hearts the Lord had touched. These good men and their womenfolk united under the aegis of The Christian Workers Union. There was Johnny Johnston-a solicitor, Harry Wilson-a plumber, Andrew Brown-a civil

servant, Walter Lowrie- Ulster Transport Authority's Chief Inspector and George Newell-an official of Shell; all these good men and true brought "solid rock" testimony and solidarity to Christianity in Newcastle. They supported Promenade Evangelism in summer, the CSSM outreach for children and staged several missions with Evangelist and Gospel Singer Victor McManus whose family owned a chain of N.I. shoe shops.

Victor came from a different background from Derick's dad. He preached the same good news but had lived the high life. His story was riveting. He would tell of gambling in Monte Carlo and one morning when he sobered up in his hotel he was told he had won a real live elephant as a prize in the casino. God brought him to faith and after cursory training he joined Ben Peake's *Movement for World Evangelisation*. One evening in early autumn of 1955-65 years ago my father took me along to one of Victor's meetings. Victor sang to the playing of Victor Jack-he was opera quality-a mini Paul Robeson-and stirred the heart. His message was on Mark 3.27-28 "I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sin but whosoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven" How would you react to that as a boy just entering your teens? I was terrified-was I able to be forgiven? When the appeal was given my hand shot up and I am not one for knee jerk reactions. There was a toilsome tug-of-war going on in my soul and that night the Lord pulled me mightily His way. I was all but home even though I only knew by heart the 107 answers of the shorter catechism and a few scripture passages that "Holy Joe" Hanlon my Sunday school teacher and a Colporteur had taught me. Soon one of the "good men and true" Andrew Brown no less met me on a narrow path where I had dismounted and gave me the tract "God's Way of Salvation" by Alex Marshall with no less than 36 Questions anyone seeking Jesus might want answers to-they were all there for one to read. Needless to say when Andrew asked me had I read the booklet I could say with total certainty I had done more-I had given my heart to the Lord -become a Christian. He was thrilled. Thank God for Andrew Brown who stood at the bottom of my bed as I recovered from an op for burst appendix just over a year earlier & looked on me with deep compassion in his eyes-which I was later to understand-the holy winsome desire of a soul-winner. Ever since I am a student of the human eye; it tells more than the tongue.

3 Enter Derick Bingham just when I needed a friend

My tender steps as a Christian were not so easy. My education was sadly wanting by now. My peers had all passed the 11plus and I had 2 years of afternoon only education owing to my appendicitis problem and finally was out of hospital with no teaching and no prep and you guessed it-I failed. Classmates who trailed me in days when I was well had sailed through and though I taught Derick maths at school here I was with an automatic choice of technical education now my only option.

Our options took me to Newcastle Tech. and Derick to Down High. Within a year I had caught up in my studies very well. Now only T. John Parker excelled me –the boy with whom I developed a simple friendship-in those days somewhat remote for reasons I was later to understand. His dearly loved father had gone to be with Jesus at that time. Still he pursued his task-he helped his mother with the animals morning and evening on the little farm in beautiful Slievenaman and so did his sister whom I was later to marry.

There came a day when my early faith was tested by my peers. I met three of them near my home. Their opening ploy was “We hear you have gone “religious”? My furtive answer was a straight “No I haven’t!” The conversation ended and with it my heart like Peter’s felt the grief I had caused my Lord. I told myself it must never, never repeat. Looking back now, just at that time I had little support and I had not told my parents about the new favourable state of my soul. Mother wasn’t very well and father did know about my response to the McManus appeal and quietly they would have been happy but of this I was unsure because the night of the mission I rushed past the evangelist and did not stay for counseling.

It was just then that Derick Bingham came back into the picture. He invited me to give my testimony. The context was a meeting of young people he was leading at his assembly. I said “Derick, what is a testimony?” He was stunned –but he was good enough to explain it was just telling how you became a Christian –and he was wise enough not to persist for I was not yet ready or equipped to address a group or even to pray with others-for that encouragement I have to thank Muriel Bleakley(nee Hanna). It was Derick then that set me thinking of “confessing Christ” whereupon I found that assurance that in turn enabled one to speak of Christ in company.

About this time the Newcastle CE led by Bertie Coyne closed and there was a gap in youth work in the town. With Andrew Brown's son I agreed to carpet a room in the Annesley Mansion which Lindsay had secured through Mr. Watts, the leader of the Council. The building had been derelict and we wanted to use a basement room. We had it painted, carpeted and chaired, and started a weekly Boys Meeting where we had a Prayer session, a Song session and a little address. I would give quite a few of these talks having gained some experience through doing topics at the Christian Endeavour. We asked around the pals we had and eventually gathered a good quorum. One of those we invited was Derick and soon we profited from his early experience—indeed as I remember now the shoe being on the other foot of encouragement I encouraged him to give his first address in public and he did. He was well heard by the lads and he and I continued in that little circle until I left for Magee University College and he left for Queens University.

Intermediately Derick had continued in Down High and through O and A levels readily obtained QUB entrance. I had been offered a place in Down High a year late when my standards improved considerably as indeed had John Parker my friend at Tech. John went to Belfast Tech and hence pursued a highly successful engineering and business career. I opted for a grind school and got to Magee College at 17 despite an operation in the intervening time. For many years Derick walked with God and began to lead Bible Studies for example at Carryduff—inviting me once again to share in those good times—doubtless wondering in his mind and soul if I might be attracted to fellowship and ministry akin to his own.

I had been spending a lot of time working with CSSM leaders in town in the summer—giving my testimony in the open air, visiting a lovely Christian in the Downshire Hospital—a man by the name of David Crawford who had one of the first earned doctorates in the PCI ministry; he prayed with me and encouraged me to be steadfast in studies for the ministry. My aunt Lily would have me attend the Bangor Convention and understand the deeper work of God in the soul and listen as preachers like Rev.G.B.Duncan, Dr. Alan Redpath and Dr. Edwin Orr spoke on “full surrender” and soon my path in life was directed by the Holy Spirit to the ministry of the gospel first locally in Mission halls and then I put it to the test by applying to train for the ministry. This demanded at base level study

for a degree. I was greatly helped by “Dickie” Burrowes who was that precocious all-rounder that makes learning a dream and can crack any problem you present. The time was short-just over three years-and with the wonderful help of my late God-fearing parents who gave their utmost to see me through this most demanding phase of “catch up” in education. Once settled in “Magee” I met terrific peers-“Willie Steele’s Elect” 10 other budding theologs who retrained the focus of one’s life and I was junior to them all. The story of Magee and Union Seminary is quite a tale but it cannot be allowed to swallow this story narrative. Summer time was spent “making a packet” conducting buses and based in Bognor Regis for 10 weeks. Since there were no grants for theological degree support it was by summer earnings and scholarships and a little top up from dad that one was able to cope with the financing of these years. This training led to an assistantship with Rev. Martin Smyth in Alexandra Church Belfast and onwards to pastorates in Tyrone and Antrim. After participating as a key player in the great PCI debate on Articles Declaratory of the Westminster Confession of Faith but for reasons of doctrine I ceded from the church of my fathers in 1975. The story swings back at this point to where the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea.

4 Re-enter Derick Bingham like the good Samaritan

It isn’t all that easy to shake off many deep relationships in early life. It is hard for a young wife to be cast like oneself upon the Lord. The Presbyterian Church remains- as Dr Cooke (commemorated by the “Black Man” statue in front of RBAI in Belfast) said “grounded upon the unmovable rock of holy scripture” and as such retains my profound admiration. However like the Anglican Kirk it holds to the position in baptism that both churches agreed in the 17th century by the casting vote of the chair of their mutual bodies. I was on the cusp of asking the PCI to reconsider this but was denied debate by the business committee and the then Clerk Dr Weir. The latter was a good man who promised my motion would be heard (which undertaking was either ill-advised or he resiled from it and when I resigned he pleaded with me that I should ask my local church to accept the provision of believer’s baptism. My answer was that I had subscribed the Westminster Confession and as he well knew could not teach counter to the church’s covenant theology. My very dear mother Mary Jane Annett-of evangelical Huguenot extraction- passed to glory and at that time before my sister Sylvia

and I were in a position to dispose of the property. Mina and I with our boys with no little sorrow of heart said our “good-byes” to Randalstown where we had seen great blessing with developments both spiritual in terms of Mission and conversions of old and young (including that of our 4 year old son John) and in terms of the building of a well appointed new church hall.

Not only was this a time of change and uncertainty-it was a time of sparse financial means.

Derick Bingham by now was ministering widely in Northern Ireland and Scotland and indeed would be invited to Keswick. Nevertheless he never quite pulled up his roots from Newcastle. He cared to seek me out at this time of uncertainty. I had by now been baptized with my wife at Newcastle Baptist Church which was then led by the inimitable Pastor Irvine.

Passing through lonely places of the soul one meets kind and considerate people who know you well and know what you have faced and play their part quietly in lifting your spirits. There is a sort of modern David and Jonathan identification that may not be an everyday experience but when at critical moments its “ministry of presence” is shown it is unforgettable. Two men who knew me well made it their business to seek me out and propose help. One was Rev. Harold McConnell –a most industrious fellow student from Seminary days and the other was the aforementioned friend from youth. Derick spent time with us and ere he left passed to me an envelope the contents of which were a gift from the local assembly. My dear mother in her later days resorted there for spiritual help and I recognize the twin kindnesses that fellowship of believers rendered mother and me. Like the Good Samaritan Derick said he would do more. Isn’t that the mark of genuine care? Mercifully, I then obtained Social support and continued local job-seeking and preaching –any remuneration received I religiously reported to the Department. Through the introduction of David Hoyle –a conference speaker from Bradford, who spoke for Pastor Irvine that year alongside Pastor Mullen I received news that Canning Road Evangelical Chapel Southport in Lancashire sought a Pastor and after two visits that Fellowship decided to call me over to help as their Pastor and in reaching the local community. We parted with

our home neath the Mournes as lightly laden as Micawber, carrying all our earthly goods and packing ourselves in a small fiat car. But what I must add is that another gentleman who had dipped out of the priesthood on account of his affection for the girl of his dreams interviewed me and offered the assistance of his department to pay all my removal costs across the Irish Sea to Southport. As you can gather there were no removal costs beyond what we could cram with ourselves our clothes and two boys into our little car. Nevertheless I will remember the kind gesture and earnest sympathy of this fine Catholic civil servant while I live. Thus began 14 years –so fulfilling-so blessed-in that part of England noted in the Domesday Book as “The ring of the moss with such soporific climate that if people in England knew it thence they would resort there in flocks”. The story of those years-of cockle Mary and of John Frith wheeled home in her barrow by a loving mum; of two Mormon teachers coming to the Lord, of Cicely Gorse’s conversion and gift of half her estate to God, of hundreds counseled in the Way to Life tent coming home to God-only heaven will declare the end of that beginning.

5 An evening in Pernelli’s tea-room

Before I come re-tell the story of John and Jane Guinness that Derick penned with his own mix of literary flourish and spiritual sensitivity let me take you to an evening when my friend who has been received in glory some few years ago asked me to speak from the standpoint of one’s understanding of the Greek New Testament on the subject of “The impossibility of bringing back to repentance those who have tasted of the heavenly gift”(Hebrews 6.4-6). The idea was that we would jointly field questions on the subject.

The first thing I should observe is that Derick was a natural draw. On that Sunday Evening he had most of the Christian Brethren youth constituency of that part of Co.Down gathered in one place. Derick was an accomplished musician besides being a gifted speaker. He could play with every flourish as a master of the ivories and spin round and deal effectively with this most obtruse of texts. God purposed him as a “mighty cutting instrument” in His harvest. He was a major player in setting up the annual “Northfield” convention modeled on its American equivalent and noted for outstanding bible teaching.

Going back to the evening in Pernelli's I am tempted to recall the simpler days I spent in the seafront café of that gracious Italian and his old mother eating my lunch of egg and chips and bread with a cup of tea whilst Derick would have gone home for lunch from St Johns. Now we were sharing in the strong meat of scripture. Derick had the benefit of Darby's commentaries and I had a Greek New Testament with background training in the young scholars "ginger group" established by Dr Gooding-a brethren scholar and the premier Greek lecturer at QUB. Withal we wrestled with the text and jointly hoped that we landed safely on the carpet of "the perseverance of the saints" whatever glosses we put with conviction or otherwise on the English wording.

Truth to tell we were probably barking up the wrong tree for the Aramaic of the passage has far greater perspicuity. It reads: **'But those who have at one time gone down to baptism and tasted the gift from heaven and received the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the power of the age to come *who again would sin from the outset* – and(for them) to be renewed to repentance *from the outset* they would crucify and *disparage* the Son of God *again.*'** The writer thus rejects "second baptism" and consents to the apostate state coupled with gross worldliness and immorality as *cause major* and warns the Hebrew churches to recognize early antinomian lifestyle. He goes on to refer to thorns and thistles and thus to demonstrate that such persons however well they heard the good seed of the word have turned to prioritise and prefer the deceitfulness of wealth and the cares of this world and replace the top priority of the faith of Christ in their lives. The problem with the text is the word "enlightened" which is a mistranslation of "baptized" and this is compounded by a double use of D'RISH "from the outset" in Aramaic. *What is being said is You can't re-baptise a person who is living in sin and wants to be an apostate in moral and spiritual things but have technical acceptance for even if you did he would from the outset again turn to his vomit.* No Greek text can deliver the answer that the original Aramaic yields.

6 The story of John and Jane Guinness

Away back in 1814-15 two members of the Dublin Corporation were seriously at odds. John D'Esterre and Daniel O'Connell (after whom the famous street is named) were sworn enemies. D'Esterre with whip & pistols denounced O'Connell. An exasperated O'Connell challenged him to a duel at Bishops Court, Co Kildare amid the February snow. O'Connell shot his quarry and the wife of the latter – mother of two and only 18 year of age fled to Ecclefechen in Scotland in fear of her life. Jane was a musician and the daughter of GEORGE III'S "conductor" of the festival band which performed Handel's Messiah at Westminster Abbey. As she went out with a book and sat by a river she was startled as she heard the strains of old hymns whistled by a young ploughman who stirred her languid spirit. So, she determined dutifully to return to Dublin for her children's sake, and a few weeks later sat in the gallery of St George's (which I know well-although Victor Moran of the Findlater Church was the popular preacher of my time in the city). The text was John 3.16 and the Spirit graciously led her to a deep commitment that very day-to realize the joy of sins forgiven and find peace with God. Fourteen years later she met John Guinness who for a £45 rent leased a 50 acre site along the bank of the Liffy for 1000 year term. I myself have cycled along the wall of Guinness's modern brewery which is of course a world brand.

What is quite special about Jane is that following her conversion she consistently prayed that the Lord would continue to raise witnesses in the Guinness family for 12 succeeding generations. That was 1829. Taking a generation as 25 years we can say we are in the eighth of those twelve eras. Perhaps by No.12 our Lord will have come and united all the faithful believers of that family and indeed oneself and the warmly remembered pals of yesteryear-indeed the whole glorious church like a bride will share in the bridal feast of joy and love that will far outshine the marriage of Captain John Guinness and Jane D'Esterre. I refer to the Return of Jesus because one famous son of this distinguished family Grattan Guinness was a distinguished exponent of the truth of the Rapture and the coming again of our Lord. Today to God's glory Os Guinness heads up an institute for the defence of liberty worldwide.

7 The moral of these stories

The whistling ploughman of Ecclefechan and prayerful Jane Guinness have this in common-they loved the Lord Jesus and trusted in His mighty promises for their soul's welfare. Jane Guinness like Derick Bingham himself was a soul-sinner and not content to go to heaven alone. Like John D'Haan of *Our Daily Bread* fame she lived her life with the unceasing desire of "one more soul for Jesus.

God answers prayer in the morning

God answers prayer at noon

God answers prayer in the evening so keep your heart in tune.

This little story owes little to Aramaic but it does owe something. It was written by way of tribute and thanks to the Lord for my boyhood pal Derick Bingham. Because of His devotion to the Lord fanned by the writings of Amy Carmichael of Dohnavar (and The Ards peninsula) it is also sent into the world commending a principle Derick like the Psalmist David lived by and I have taught myself to try to emulate. This little spiritual procedure is ideal to practice during the isolation and social distancing demanded in response to Covid 19.

Why not spend time in the early morning with God in prayer and with your bible and again take up the challenge like the last of the Puritans **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** who wrote his 365 day booklet "Morning and Evening" to encourage just this.

You might like to follow David who said "Morning noon and night will I praise you". You might, like the early church, be able to adopt the "hour of Prayer" i.e. 3pm-the time our Lord died on the cross and opened the veil by shedding his own precious blood. No wonder the church met to pray in the temple at that time which became a sacramental hour of prayer and witness for the first disciples. Think about renewing your personal devotion in these unprecedented days of opportunity to look to the Lord.

One very dear saint of God I knew and loved was Maynard James (Nazarene pastor who founded several churches and led the Southport Convention as each daily ministry session morphed into surrendered lives) Maynard would say in his deep Welsh tones "I was born in the fire and I can't be content with the smoke". He would come to Canning Road Southport from time to time. I can still hear him break into prayer saying:

There is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God
A place where fears do not molest near to the heart of God
O Saviour, precious Saviour, draw me near to the heart of God!

And Maynard would add a Hallelujah

So let us end the script

with

Hallelujah to the Lamb!

Bob Coffey

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