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Culture, Crisis and Salvation on The Isle of Lewis

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Theology and Religious Studies

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Theology and Religious Studies, MRes

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Abstract

The historical resilience of communities such as those found in the Gàidhealtachd, with their long traditions of communal living and self-sufficient means of subsistence, can provide a model from which to derive alternative modes of living equipped to deal with crises. The Isle of Lewis is a small scale social formation that is at odds with the world of unchecked expansion of industry and commerce. This particular Gàidhealtachd culture places value on sustainability, peacefulness and maintaining their distinct cultural heritage. These values are sustained through communal reinforcement that partly comes from religious conviction as well as spiritual connection to the community and the environment. This thesis will investigate the role of religion in the resilience and survival of this culture through a variety of local and global crises. Field interviews with tradition bearers inform the analysis, drawing on a grounded theory approach. By considering how religion has contributed to this resistance and survival, this thesis will investigate how this unique cultural identity operates as a living religion. Consequently, asking if this cultural identity operates in a similar way to liberation theology in the ways that it helps to sustain the indigenous islander way of life.

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For the purposes of intellectual honesty, I wish to state that I am not a Gael and I am not a Christian. I was born on the mainland but I did visit family on Lewis as a child. Without these experiences, my perspective of the community might be different. Alex McDonald, Head of Performing Arts and Cultural Projects at Stornoway's cultural hub *An Lanntair*, said to me:

I would rather you were [working with Gaelic culture in a professional setting] than someone who had no connection at all...because if you have a cultural connection, a background, family whatever, you're accepted here very much so because people automatically know that if you have holidayed here with your family here and have some perception of [the culture.]¹

This sentiment exemplifies how Gaelic culture continues to require care and protection which is at the centre of this thesis' approach. This project is inspired by a passion for Gaelic culture as a valuable source of spiritual strength as well as an uncertainty about the future.

¹ Interviewed in Stornoway, 7th November 2022.

Author's Declaration

I certify that this thesis is my own work, except where indicated by referencing, in accordance with University guidelines.

Introduction

This thesis will examine the role of religious culture in the life of Gàidhealtachd indigenous islanders. The Isle of Lewis' unique historical experience has created a unique indigenous cultural heritage that is distinct from the rest of Scotland. The United Nation's working definition of indigeneity is:

‘communities, peoples and nations having continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.’²

Although there are problems with deploying this term accurately in this context,³ this thesis will use the term indigenous to denote that which belongs to Gàidhealtachd culture associated with the islander way of life as opposed to the dominant English-speaking culture of the mainland.

As a small scale decentralised social formation, the indigenous islander community has maintained a close connection to the environment to meet their subsistence needs from the land and sea through agriculture and fishing. This is less so the case in modern times because these island communities are reliant on ferry connections as the vast majority of food and goods are imported. Meaning they depend more on the larger scale social formation of the mainland where industry and commerce can expand exponentially. The indigenous islander way of life consists of a close community with shared interests in sustainability, peacefulness and maintaining their distinct cultural heritage. This cultural heritage includes the Scottish Gaelic sociolinguistic identity as well as a distinct religious identity that helps

² Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations State of the World's Indigenous Peoples https://web.archive.org/web/20100215113446/http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/SOWIP_web.pdf.

³ For example, there is debate about who counts as indigenous and what this should be based on, such as ancestry or Gaelic language proficiency (see Iain MacKinnon 'Recognizing and Reconstituting Gàidheal identity' and response from Timothy Currie Armstrong et al 'Gaelic and Identity: A Response to Iain MacKinnon.') This thesis will avoid debate about identity as this is beyond the scope but rather will discuss an indigenous culture and associated way of life.

protect their way of life. This way of life and culture has persisted through various crises⁴ and can provide valuable insight into how a culture maintains its values in the face of external pressures.

The term Gàidhealtachd refers to the parts of Scotland that speak Scottish Gaelic. Scottish Gaelic or *Gàidhlig* has ‘come to be accepted as a symbol of Scotland’s distinctiveness’ and Gaelic speakers are ‘regarded as the repository of an important national resource.’⁵ That being said, according to the 2011 census, there are only 57,000 Gaelic speakers in Scotland. The highest concentration of speakers by far is in Na h-Eileanan Siar council area (52.3% compared to the second highest concentration of 5.2% in the Highland council area).⁶ Na h-Eileanan Siar council area is comprised of the islands off the west coast of Scotland called the Outer Hebrides or the Western Isles. These islands include the Isle of Lewis which is the focus of this thesis.

⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, the term crisis denotes threats to their indigenous ways of life, for example, their ability to use fishing and agriculture as a means of subsistence as well as decline of the Gaelic language and associated cultural practices such as cèilidh dance events. These crises encompass historical events such as the Clearances (an event which ‘coincided with the decline of the decline of Gaelic culture, most notably in the fall in the numbers of Gaelic-speakers and the inexorable incursion of the English language.’ (Richards, 85)) as well as the Isle of Lewis’ economic dependence on tourism which threatens the distinct cultural characteristic of Sabbath observance. This also could be said to encompass the climate crisis.

⁵ Stuart Dunmore *Language Revitalisation in Gaelic Scotland: Linguistic Practice and Ideology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019) 7.

⁶ Languages Scotland’s Census <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/census-results/at-a-glance/languages/>.



Figure 1. Map of Scotland showing the Isle of Lewis with the Outer Hebrides/Western Isles - council area Na h-Eileanan Siar – highlighted with dark blue.

Barrybob (attribution), license details. Image has been edited to mark the Isle of Lewis.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Category_A_listed_buildings_in_the_Western_Isles#/media/File:Na_h-Eileanan_Siarcouncil.PNG

The Isle of Lewis is 683 square miles and as of 2011, its population was 21,031.⁷ Since the nineteenth century, crofting has been the primary way of meeting the population's subsistence needs. These crofts are nearly all located along the shoreline since reliance on agriculture was often subsidised by fishing until the invention of the steam trawler in the nineteenth century. Local fisheries including a thriving herring industry in Stornoway have since diminished considerably.⁸ The last census shows that twice as many people identify as Christian on Lewis compared to Glasgow.⁹ This is predominantly a United Reformed Church

⁷ Britannica, Editors of Encyclopaedia. 'Lewis and Harris' *Encyclopedia Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/place/Lewis-island-Outer-Hebrides-Scotland> (2018).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Scotland's Census 2011 <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/>

which is an institutional religion where practises such as prescribed liturgy filter down from universities and bishoprics. However, religion can also be performed in more informal, community and familial settings as a less institutionally rigorous form of practice that might be better termed “spirituality”. This form is common to the Gàidhealtachd such that the divide between religion and spirituality can be problematic to define. Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk outline the development of understandings of religious culture as split conveniently into a two-tier system. Religion practiced in more informal, community settings has sometimes been described as “vernacular religion” but this relies on a two-tier system that has been associated with problematic binaries such as high versus low culture, folk versus elite culture or even - Christianity and superstition. This scheme can be useful for understanding debates within the field of religious studies but it burdens the term “vernacular religion” with the negative connotations of being uncivilised or primitive.¹⁰ In the context of the community on Lewis, the lines between vernacular and institutional are particularly blurred partly due to the geographical distance of centralised institutions. It could be argued that this has better allowed indigenous islanders to maintain a distinct cultural identity which encompasses a Gàidhealtachd way of practising Christianity that should be protected as part of their indigenous way of life, for example, their distinct commitment to Sabbath observance.

It may be reasonably assumed that many atheistic outsiders to the culture of the Isle of Lewis could consider their religious belief and practices to be superstitious and in opposition to rational thinking. Certainly, it is trivially the case that claims such as ‘Jesus is my saviour’ are not empirically verifiable. However, we could just as easily show that whether a person holds this to be true or not can influence how they behave. In other words, religious belief and ethical assumptions should be recognised as profoundly political since, empirical verifiability aside, beliefs translate into modes of behaviour and ways of interacting with the world. For this reason, Gil Anidjar has claimed that religion is performative since when it ‘is used or invoked it enables understanding, provides orientation, allocates meaning; it gathers, defines, sustains and even dictates dispositions, practices and modes of behaviour.’¹¹

Therefore, this thesis will show how religion and spirituality are performed and how this performance impacts a community’s behaviour. This will show that cultural heritage

¹⁰ Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk ‘Introduction: Vernacular Religion, Generic Expressions and the Dynamics of Belief’ in Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk (eds) *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief* (Oxon. Routledge, 2014) 11.

¹¹ Gil Anidjar ‘The idea of an anthropology of Christianity’ *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 11.3 (2009) 368.

plays an important role in preserving cultural values and helps maintain a particular way of life. Many of these cultural values come from how the indigenous islander performs Christianity. Their religion has an influence on how people interact with each other and their environment. In this way, it can be compared to liberation theology since its influence assists the community in preserving the indigenous islander way of life. This allows them to continue to resist impact from external forces and survive through significant crises. The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland catechism states that salvation is achieved through Christ's redemption and by having faith in Him and practicing the will of God.¹² However, the concept of salvation has wider meaning that liberation theology can be useful for unpacking, such as how it can be understood by someone without faith. It provides an example of how religious claims continue to have influence on the public sphere.

Liberation theology is primarily associated with Gustavo Gutiérrez and a merging of Marxism with Christianity which focused on the liberation of workers in Peru. Gutiérrez's writing on liberation theology prominently features the concept of salvation. He points out that as Christian consciousness developed 'the idea of universal salvation and the possibility of reaching it [and how] the whole problem of salvation made a qualitative leap and began to be perceived differently.'¹³ Gutiérrez describes this qualitative leap as a way of thinking about universal salvation widening to include the possibility that one could open themselves up to God, 'Christians and non-Christians alike – all people', without being aware they were doing so. Gutiérrez says when someone 'turn[s] away from the building up of this world, do[es] not open themselves to others, and culpably withdraw[s] into themselves'—they are rejecting union with God.¹⁴ In other words, we are saved through building solidarity with all others. This way of thinking about salvation can be understood by everyone as it 'is not something otherworldly, in regard to which the present life is merely a test. Salvation—the communion of human beings with God and among themselves—is something which embraces all human reality, transforms it...'¹⁵ Lilian Calles Barger argues:

that liberation theology marked the end of the modern attempt to maintain the perilous and unproductive myth of a separation between the secular and the religious. By challenging the sacred/secular divide of modernity,

¹² Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 'The Shorter Catechism' <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/important-documents/the-shorter-catechism-1648/> (2024).

¹³ Gustavo Gutiérrez *A Theology of Liberation: History Politics and Salvation* transl. by Sister Caridad Ina and John Eagleson (New York: Orbis Books, 1973) 84.

¹⁴ Ibid 85.

¹⁵ Ibid.

liberationists reshaped the terms of engagement and opened the floodgates for a full-throttled entry of religious claims into the political sphere.¹⁶

In a similar way to how religion is considered no longer appropriate for the public sphere, the Gàidhealtachd indigenous islander way of life can be thought of as obsolete and that it should change to accommodate tourism and modernisation. On the other hand, this thesis contends that the incredible durability of this way of life can provide valuable insights into ways to live in and against the various crises of modernity such as accelerating climate change, escalating culture wars and widening income inequality.

Methodology and Research Methods

This thesis is built upon qualitative research. Qualitative research was chosen because the aim of the thesis was to explore views and experiences of people on the Isle of Lewis. While quantitative approaches such as a questionnaire survey would have lent itself to exploring the generalisability or extent of views held, a qualitative approach was deemed more appropriate to seeking a more nuanced understanding of phenomena that were yet to be explored.¹⁷

I have adopted a grounded theory approach, which has allowed me to explore key themes using comparative analysis. In their seminal text on grounded theory, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss analysed how theory can be discovered from qualitative data that is ‘systemically obtained and analysed in social research’ for the purpose of providing ‘relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications.’¹⁸ This methodology develops theory from the analysis of the empirical data that was gathered from these conversations. As such, grounded theory is the most suitable for creating accurate explanations and interpretations of the participants own beliefs and experiences for the purposes most relevant to the indigenous islander. The adaptability of indigenous island culture depends on care and privacy so this methodology will arrive at a theory most suitable for the concerns of the indigenous islander. This is because it is generated by stating positions and counter positions through examples rather than verifying proposed theories that could be problematic.¹⁹ This is more suitable than trying to prove a theory such as: their culture can save us from a crisis like climate change. Asking such a broad question as “what

¹⁶ Lilian Calles Barger. *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology* (New York, Oxford Academic, 2018) 6.

¹⁷ David Silverman *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2024) 16.

¹⁸ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) 1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

parts of your culture do you think are important to preserve?” – would naturally only prompt questions which would lead to me talking about why this research was important to me personally. My answer would often reflect my worries about the future and whether religion or spirituality had a role in the community’s ability to adapt to political and environmental upheavals. This thesis will analyse what this role might be. One of these themes is privacy because indigenous islander people, while they are very hospitable and welcoming, they are also private about their beliefs. My connection to the community became part of this conversation and prompted lines of discussion, for example about “who counts” as an insider to Gàidhealtachd culture and how best it should be protected.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of conducting face-to-face interviews with Gàidhealtachd tradition bearers who were selected because they occupy different social positions in the culture and would therefore allow access to a variation of views. ‘Theoretical sampling’ is an important component of a grounded theory approach since it allows the researcher to target views that may have specific implications and add nuance to analysis and interpretation.²⁰

There was originally a total of seven participants. Six of these consented to have their names included.

1. Gordon Macleod is minister at Stornoway High Church which is part of the United Free Church. The congregation has roots in the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church. The Church holds services in English and Gaelic.
2. Gordon was interviewed along with his son Scott C. Park. Scott is a professional musician who has played shows in *An Lanntair*, at the *HebCelt Festival* as well as on the mainland in places such as Glasgow and London. Scott used to be but is no longer part of the Church. However he still enjoys discussing religious and spiritual matters with his father and others.
3. Father Ross Crichton was born on Lewis and brought up Protestant. He converted to Catholicism from Protestantism and considers himself to have ‘a foot in both camps’ because he has both Catholic and Protestant family. He studied to be a Catholic priest in Rome before his first parish appointment in Paris. He has since occupied various parishes in the Outer Hebrides.

²⁰ Ibid 45-46.

4. Calum MacPhee is an officer in the merchant navy in the position of Marine Assure Manager. He was 29 at the time of the interview, was born and brought up on Lewis where he has consistently attended church but has recently moved to Glasgow for work. He intends to attend the St Columba Gaelic Church in Glasgow to maintain his culture.
5. Alex MacDonald is Head of Performing Arts and Cultural Projects at Stornoway's cultural hub *An Lanntair*. She is a native Gaelic speaker with great knowledge of traditional Scottish and Gaelic music and culture.
6. Calum Fraser, at the time of interviewing, was 29 years old and studying Language and Culture at the University of the Highlands and Islands while working at *An Lanntair* helping to organise community events. He is a musician and is a member of Scott C. Park's indie rock band *One Big Fuse* as well as Gaelic language punk band *Balach* [boy]. He returned to the Isle of Lewis after living in Glasgow for a few years in his early 20s and hopes to develop a career in Gaelic culture and media.

Semi-structured interviews allowed these tradition bearers to describe what their culture meant to them in their own words, allowing them to raise issues and experiences of importance to them, which I had not thought to ask about.

In their own different ways they participated in Gàidhealtachd culture by attending Gaelic services at local Churches or other cultural events but also defined and sustained it through living in a way that embodied Gàidhealtachd values. Through this way of living and participation in culture, the definition of Gàidhealtachd culture will continue to evolve. These participants shared how their culture is lived and articulated, simultaneously demonstrating how religion and spirituality continue to have an important place.

The topic guide for interviews was based on three broad questions so the participants could express what was of value to them. These questions often led to open discussion and sharing of anecdotes which provided insight into the culture of the Gàidhealtachd. It was then possible to pick out key themes that would guide and bring context to this analysis.

Data collection and analysis was guided by four research questions:

1. Are there any Scottish/Gaelic folksongs, sea songs, hymns or prayers that you would like to share?
2. In what way do the meaning of these relate to your life or community?
3. Do you think it is important to preserve these traditions? If so, why? If not – why not?

4. Can you tell me a little bit about how these songs/stories/prayers were handed down to you?

Overview

This thesis is split into three chapters. The first chapter will provide relevant historical background for the remaining two chapters. It will firstly examine the process of the Christianisation of the Isle of Lewis from the relevant literature with a specific focus on indigenous islanders before providing an overview of the Reformation's arrival on the Isle of Lewis. It will outline the subsequent schisms that affected the religious faith of the indigenous islanders which led to the Free Church of Scotland being the predominant denomination. It will then proceed with a description of how these historical events related to the Highland Clearances since the indigenous islanders' experience became inseparable from their distinct religious faith. The chapter will conclude with a critique of the Romanticisation of the Gàidhealtachd, particularly the construction of an alternately positive or negative image of the culture by external observers, and will outline how this process affects the culture itself.

In the second chapter, key themes in the religious identity of the Isle of Lewis Gàidhealtachd culture will be explored. Firstly, the reasons for the continued practice of Sabbath observance will be examined in both religious and pragmatic terms. The manner which community and environment play a central role in Gàidhealtachd religious culture will then be considered. This examination of material culture will be followed by an analysis of the experiential dimension of Gàidhealtachd religion. Lastly this section will explore how religion is a private matter on the Isle of Lewis with particular attention paid to both its significance for the Gàidhealtachd and the sensitivities and difficulties that this raises regarding research on the culture.

The third chapter will focus on the spiritual dimensions of Gàidhealtachd culture, as distinct from the strictly religious, which tradition bearers nevertheless hold to be equally important to religious culture in terms of the composition of the Gàidhealtachd cultural identity. The first section will discuss customs and witchcraft. Examining these two themes together shows how some ritual customs come to be demonised and others legitimised in the context of changing attitudes to "paganism." This will allow an examination of how ritual customs can still survive without institutional support. This connects to the following section on traditional music which highlights how the *cèilidh* survived despite "cultural dismemberment" and the growing popularity of music with "Celtic" roots today. The following section on secularisation will critique the idea that it will only be possible to

construct a just society in a world without religion. This will lead to an examination of the connection between material well-being and salvation as understood within a Christian framework.

1. Historical Background

There is little evidence of the culture of the indigenous community in Lewis before the Reformation in 1560 but the Gàidhealtachd has long been known for its resilient religious traditions. James V, writing in 1532, provides a clue to how strongly the community valued their traditions. He says that people of the Western Isles were:

tenacious of old custom, traditional manners and rites: they cannot tolerate the introduction of anything which menaces ancestral practice, and if any man, above all a religious [man], fails in a matter of accepted custom, they consider it an imperfection or it fills them with aversion and contempt.²¹

This indicates that a faith of strong character, which may have at one time been distinct from institutional Christianity, endured after Monasticism. This indicates that the culture was defined and sustained through beliefs and cultural expressions which the indigenous community deemed sacred and therefore repeated. These aspects endure because they have popular acceptance. They become part of the Gàidhealtachd identity because they are seen as sacred and worth preserving in the view of the indigenous community.

1.1. Christianisation

It is possible that Christianity arrived at a time where the community already had a rich culture that was unique to the locality of the Isle of Lewis. Thomas O'Loughlin asserts that when Christianity arrived in Scotland it entered into an already rich culture and as a result 'the processes of Christianisation were slow and lacked the clear demarcations of later investigators systematically trained in doctrine.'²² This means that it is hard to assess whether or not certain traditions were preexisting or subsequent to Christianity, not just because there is little evidence about indigenous islander culture from this time in history but also because these demarcations of Christian and pre-Christian would not be meaningful

²¹ James V. *Letters of James V* Robert Hannay and Denys Hay (eds) (Edinburgh, 1954) 209; quoted in Iain G. MacDonald 'The Church in Gaelic Scotland before the Reformation' in Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin and Robert Armstrong (eds) *Christianities and the Early Modern Celtic World* (Palgrave MacMillan: Hampshire, 2014) 27.

²² Thomas O'Loughlin 'Theology in Scotland before Scholasticism', in David Fergusson, and Mark W. Elliott (eds), *The History of Scottish Theology, Volume I: Celtic Origins to Reformed Orthodoxy*, History of Scottish Theology (Oxford, 2019; online edition, Oxford Academic, 24 Oct. 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198759331.003.0002>, accessed 8 June 2023).

to the indigenous community. Some traditional accounts hold missionary expeditions associated with St. Ninian as responsible for the eventual conversion of the Picts but it is not possible to point to one historical event as the definitive conversion of the Outer Hebrides to Christianity since it appears to be a slow process. The dissemination of Christian values and practices had to contend with an already robust set of local cultural and spiritual norms which ‘involved reimagining that culture (and its past) as well as Christianity being reimagined within that culture by that culture.’²³

This indicates that religion was an important part of life for indigenous islanders outside of Gaelic-centric monasticism. As such, it is reasonable to assume that, both before and after the advent of monasticism, religious culture was also shaped by the interests, customs and beliefs of indigenous islanders especially those in areas like the Isle of Lewis that were relatively hard to reach from mainland areas of centralised power. Vernacular religion was likely to be rich and shaped by long lines of traditions based on the beliefs and customs of the local community before monasticism and the arrival of organised religion from urban areas of centralised power. Therefore, it is important to outline the sociopolitical formations which Christian traditions became integrated with as accurately as possible even despite the glaring lack of evidence pertaining to the specific practices and beliefs of pre-Christian culture.

Since religious culture in the islands before Christianity could be said to have been a matter of local custom, the history of the Gàidhealtachd has a different trajectory from the rest of Scotland. It is important to note that the boundaries of the Gàidhealtachd as well as the borders of Scotland have changed over time. The Outer Hebrides were part of the Kingdom of the Isles which was under Norse rule between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that the arrival of the Norse had an influence on the culture of those living in the now Outer Hebrides despite the lack of concrete evidence. When the Vikings invaded, the area that is now modern day Scotland was home to different cultural identities including the “*Picti*” and the “*Scoti*” but these names are of Latin origin and are undoubtedly not self-designations.²⁴ The same can be said for the term Celtic which is derived from the Greek “*Keltoi*”. Celtic can only be meaningfully understood as a linguistic group and is thought to evolve from the Indo-European influx that crossed

²³ Thomas O’Loughlin ‘Theology in Scotland before Scholasticism’, in David Fergusson, and Mark W. Elliott (eds), *The History of Scottish Theology, Volume I: Celtic Origins to Reformed Orthodoxy*, History of Scottish Theology (Oxford, 2019; online edition, Oxford Academic, 24 Oct. 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198759331.003.0002>, accessed 8 June 2023).

²⁴ John Marsden. *Somerled and the Emergence of Gaelic Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000) 4.

Europe possibly even before the first millennium BCE.²⁵ It is not possible to attribute a homogenous religious culture to all peoples who have been identified as Celtic such as the Gàidhealtachd community. Donald E. Meek points out the term ‘Celtic Christianity’ is ‘neatly alliterative and attractive’ shorthand that ‘can give the impression that there is consistency and, indeed, uniformity in the ways in which the Christian faith was represented in all the ‘Celtic’ areas of the British Isles.’²⁶ It is more likely that every locality where Celtic peoples resided, including the Gàidhealtachd, had its own culture and religious traditions and, over an extended period, Christianity grew to be a central aspect of those traditions. Over time a gradual process of Christian integration imposed itself on the community sometimes supplanting its local customs and practices and sometimes fusing with them. Nevertheless, the process was slow enough that even at this time, the indigenous islanders are unlikely to have considered their culture in anything like the same terms by which we understand “religion” today. Rather than following a strict institutional or regulated procedure of religious observance where monasticism had greater influence, the indigenous islanders in the Gàidhealtachd adhered to “folk” practices which integrated religion and culture as part of a unified whole, infusing their language, their family structure and even their means of subsistence. For them, religion was not a separate domain of life, to be observed in a Church, but rather the very fabric of their everyday lives.

Therefore however the Christian, Norse and vernacular cultures collided, it can be theorised that it was not always through the extreme violence associated with Viking raids and land capture. There is no evidence that the culture is shaped by a genocide of the indigenous population and in fact, a cultural fusion that took at least one generation is more likely to have been the case.²⁷ Additionally, Norse place name elements in Gaelic place names are at their highest concentration on the Isle of Lewis, material evidence that indicates how this seemingly distinct cultural identity was incorporated into local areas.²⁸ One possible implication of this evidence is that the unique cultural practices of the Norse seafarers were incorporated into the local cultural practices of Gàidhealtachd indigenous islanders when the Isle of Lewis became part of the Kingdom of the Isles.

The fact that the Outer Hebrides were difficult to reach throughout this early period strengthens the theory that religious culture was a matter of local custom. The relative geographical inaccessibility of the island meant that if a given authority had any desire to

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Donald E. Meek *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Millfield: The Handsel Press, 2000) 6.

²⁷ John Marsden. *Somerled and the Emergence of Gaelic Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000) 10.

²⁸ Ibid.

control their everyday religious practices it would be very difficult. This was true of Norse rule since the origin of Norse power was such a distant land that it was beyond the range of their direct control despite being informally under Norse possession²⁹ for more than 200 years.³⁰ This would also be true of Scottish rule to a considerable but lessening degree as history developed. Overall, the evidence suggests that the cultural identity of this sea kingdom was a:

rapid fusion of blood and tradition to produce a people known to the Irish annalists as the *Gall-Gaedheil* and it is extremely difficult to distinguish in detail the Celtic and Norse contributions to the subsequent Hebridean way of life.³¹

This fusion is often partially attributed to Somhairle who is thought to have brought these cultures together through marital alliance and military conquest. Somhairle himself cannot be recognised as either a Norseman or a Gael but someone who reflects this fusion which ‘binds the deeper cultural roots’ of modern Gàidhealtachd.³²

As alluded to before, this fusion of culture was not limited to language and religion but also included a ‘whole spectrum of skills and technologies, beliefs and symbols, perspectives and horizons.’³³ The history of Gàidhealtachd religious identity can be most accurately described as a process of fusion between Norse culture and local culture. During this period the Gàidhealtachd was suffused with Norse influence through a gradual incorporation of these skills and technologies, as well as religious beliefs and symbols. It is generally accepted that a strong passion for tradition was important for this Hebridean way of life but it is not possible to conclude that when this fusion happened, some practices were considered Gaelic practices and others were considered Norse. The Gàidhealtachd saw no difference and did not think of certain religious practices as associated with certain cultural identities; as far as they were concerned it was all Gàidhealtachd culture. Customs were instead defined by a pragmatism wherein traditions were not considered important to preserve for any political reasons such as preserving a Gaelic identity but more likely because they served some purpose which was valued by and meaningful for the community.

²⁹ The Norse were seafaring but apart from Somhairle whose rule has no clear origin, Norse rule over the Outer Hebrides came from the Scandinavian Islands.

³⁰ John Marsden. *Somerled and the Emergence of Gaelic Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000) 21.

³¹ W.D. Lamont. *The History of Islay* (Dundee. rep. 1970) 15, quoted in John Marsden. *Somerled and the Emergence of Gaelic Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000) 21

³² John Marsden. *Somerled and the Emergence of Gaelic Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000) 142-143.

³³ *Ibid.*

Whatever identity can be attributed to the fishing and farming community of the Isle of Lewis and the Outer Hebrides in general, the way that religious thought shaped Scottish society at this time was ‘presented less by text and more through architecture, images, ritual practices and liturgical forms.’³⁴ Until the arrival of monasticism, demotic Gaelic was an oral language but was also one of the oldest demotic languages to be written down. Therefore, religious traditions and beliefs would be passed down in community contexts such as family and community gatherings but also through blessings said in everyday life, such as blessings said before tasks associated with fishing and farming. Donald Meek’s book *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* examines how close modern reimaginings of Celtic Christianity are to the truth in terms of Christian life and experiences before modernity. One of the most important sources we have for these oral traditions is Alexander Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica*. This collection was compiled through fieldwork where he recorded prayers and incantations that were customary in the nineteenth century Highlands and Islands. Many of them indicate that they were used to serve a specific purpose like for an ailment or to provide a blessing before an everyday activity. For example, the collection includes blessings for tasks that fishers and crofters performed including marking lambs and fishing itself which was blessed with *Beannachd lisaich* (the Fishing Blessing):

Tilgidh mi mo dhubhan sios, (I will cast down my hook)

‘S an caid iasg a bheir mi nios, (The first fish which I bring up)

An ainm Chrìosda, Rìgh nan Sìan, (In the name of Christ, King of the elements)

Gheobh an deoir e mar a mhiann. (The poor shall have his wish)³⁵

Meek asserts that their non-literacy:

could not be equated with ignorance. Education existed in the community beyond the classroom, and was not dependent on pen and ink. The charms and incantations which [Carmichael] had discovered in the Hebrides had been passed down, as he himself states, ‘not through the lettered few, but through the unlettered many – through crofters and cottars, the herdsmen and shepherds of the Highlands and Islands.’³⁶

³⁴ David Ferguson and Mark W. Elliott, 'Scottish Theology: Contexts and Traditions', in David Fergusson, and Mark W. Elliott (eds), *The History of Scottish Theology, Volume I: Celtic Origins to Reformed Orthodoxy*, History of Scottish Theology (Oxford, 2019; online edition, Oxford Academic, 24 Oct. 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198759331.003.0001>, accessed 9 June 2023).

³⁵ Alexander Carmichael *Carmina Gadelica: Hymns and Incantations with Illustrative Notes on Words, Rites, and Customs, Dying and Obsolete* (1900; reissued London: Forgotten Books, 2016) 323.

³⁶ Alexander Carmichael, et al. (eds) *Carmina Gadelica*, 6 volumes (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd et al., 1900-71), quoted in Donald E. Meek *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Millfield: The Handsel Press, 2000) 63.

Carmichael describes the collection as a blending of pagan and Christian religions and considers this to be the reason for their great appeal. Many of the texts have a strong connection to the environment and frequently refer to fishing and the handling of fire and water which is a feature often associated with pagan religions. These “pagan” aspects cannot be said to be originating from Norse or Celtic neighbours or an indigenous imagining. Further, it is hard to distinguish these features from the Christian features. The passage above mentions Christ but gives him the title of King of elements which imbeds Christ into the environment in a manner more commonly associated with paganism. This encourages those who recite the blessing to see the divine in nature which may have given them spiritual strength to confront the elements, which of course they did daily, given the relatively unforgiving environment of the Outer Hebrides and the difficulties of crofting and fishing. While this blessing is undeniably Christian, it is this embodiment in the ecological which gives the blessings in the collection their ‘pagan’ quality. This may well be a crucial factor in their durability through many historical changes and crises since they appeal to those outside the Christian faith that find utility in their spiritual quality. Further examination of the spiritual, which is to say non-Christian, elements of the culture will be explored in the second chapter but it is nevertheless important to acknowledge here that even within the Christianity of the Gàidhealtachd a strong pagan influence remains.

It could be said that maintaining this ecological quality in their religious traditions is both the motivation for and reason why the Gàidhealtachd community has maintained a religious identity stronger and more distinct than the culture of the rest of Scotland. This fusion and an awareness of this fusion is likely to have helped Christianity to disseminate amongst indigenous islanders and also to embody religious traditions in everyday life allowing them to have a relevance to the struggles of everyday life. This relevance would mean that keeping traditions alive would be of value and interest to indigenous islanders. This further suggests that indigenous islanders had great influence in shaping what is now considered to be Celtic Christianity. Accordingly this ecological quality is of import when assessing how and why these traditions survived through political changes.

1.2. Reformation(s)

When the Reformation reached the Gàidhealtachd in 1560, it disseminated in a different way than on the mainland. Therefore, the religious identity of insular areas like the Isle of Lewis is distinguishable from the mainland and there are also distinctions between the religious identities on different islands. The people of Lewis now predominantly attend the Protestant Church of Scotland Churches whereas Uist is predominantly Catholic, although both

populations have a significantly higher amount of the population that identify as religious compared to the population on the mainland. Their geographical inaccessibility is another important factor in producing these cultural differences from the mainland. The insular nature of these island locations and landscapes meant that implementing religious reform was more difficult than it was in more centralised areas. The Isle of Lewis was a large rural area with inaccessible parishes and no burghs or trade guilds which on the mainland had provided the reformers with initial enthusiasm and endorsement.³⁷ There was also a lack of Gaelic speaking reformers and those without Gaelic were reluctant to visit areas where the language was still dominant, a situation exacerbated by negative attitudes to the language at this time.³⁸ This would have meant that the dissemination of Protestantism amongst the lay community on the Isle of Lewis was a slower process than on the mainland.

The first book printed in Gaelic was Bishop John Carswell's translation of John Knox's *Book of Common Prayer* in 1567 and unlike Catholic liturgy which was performed in Latin, one central pledge of Protestant reformers was to preach and teach in the vernacular.³⁹ Along with this aspect of reform, they also appealed to local tradition for legitimacy with the crofters from their first encounters with these people. Any changes to religious culture imposed on the indigenous islanders would be more popular if it was congruent with their ancestral traditions. As noted by James V when he said that the Hebrideans were hostile to that which 'menace[d] ancestral practice' and if indigenous islanders considered an aspect of culture, maybe an aspect brought in by a religious leader from outside of the locality, to be imperfection 'it fill[ed] them with aversion and contempt.'⁴⁰ Protestantism could arguably have a closer relationship to what is now understood as Celtic Christianity since the flourishing of the idea of a Celtic Church was due to 'the belief that a pure and uncorrupted faith preceded the rise of Rome.'⁴¹ For example, when Bishop John Carswell translated John Knox's *Book of Common Order* into Gaelic, he incorporated a traditional fisherman's prayer which 'may have allowed the spirit of Celtic Christianity to survive among the people of 'Mid-Argyll' and Lorne, down to [the nineteenth

³⁷ Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin 'Introduction: Religious Acculturation and Affiliation in Early Modern Gaelic Scotland, Gaelic Ireland, Wales and Cornwall' in Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin and Robert Armstrong (eds) *Christianities and the Early Modern Celtic World* (Palgrave MacMillan: Hampshire, 2014) 4.

³⁸ Andrew T. N. Muirhead *Reformation, Dissent and Diversity: The Story of Scotland's Churches, 1560-1960* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) 190.

³⁹ Muirhead *Reformation, Dissent and Diversity* 191.

⁴⁰ James V. *Letters of James V* Robert Hannay and Denys Hay (eds) (Edinburgh, 1954) 209; quoted in Iain G. MacDonald 'The Church in Gaelic Scotland before the Reformation' in Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin and Robert Armstrong (eds) *Christianities and the Early Modern Celtic World* (Palgrave MacMillan: Hampshire, 2014) 27.

⁴¹ Donald E. Meek *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Millfield: The Handsel Press, 2000) 110.

century.]⁴² These appeals are likely to have contributed to the acceptance of Protestantism on the Isle of Lewis but the process of establishing an institutional religious culture comprising of liturgy filtered down from universities and bishoprics was slow. This centralised Protestant Church was slow to replace the priests, conventual clergy and even lay preachers who had been religious leaders during these previous years. Many people on Lewis did not receive any professionally performed sacraments for around forty years prior to Rev. Farquhar Macrae's visit in 1611 where he declared that the population 'had lapsed into heathenism.'⁴³ However, his understanding of heathenism would be coloured by systematic training in doctrine. His application of the term to indigenous islanders on Lewis is incongruent with evidence such as the *Carmina Gadelica* which shows that faith permeated the everyday tasks of the lay community and was a central feature of their culture.

When the Isle of Lewis was under the aegis of the MacKenzie kindred in the seventeenth century, the clan chief, Kenneth MacKenzie brought Rev. Macrae to preach in both Gaelic and English. This was likely due to it being possible to gain favour by appointing clergymen that would be popular amongst the lay community such as those who spoke Gaelic. This is the case when Rev. Farquhar was appointed by Kenneth MacKenzie, Lord of Kintail in the Highlands. This appointment may have contributed to the acquiescence of the Lewis community to his rule since the people believed 'that a lord who brought a Gaelic clergyman must indeed be a Christian and was to be welcomed, or at least accepted.'⁴⁴ This acceptance was often based on whether an appointee was seen as able to conform to ancestral practice including the Gaelic language, rather than any concern about political affiliation. This shows that indigenous islanders may question the religious authority of the Church since preservation of tradition was of concern to all members of the community.

Further to the arrival of the Reformation, Christian life on the Isle of Lewis was shaped by a schism called the Disruption of 1843 within the Church of Scotland resulting in the Established Free Church of Scotland. The period leading up to this change is associated with spiritual revivalism in the Hebrides that came from the evangelical movement. Public meetings brought together speakers from Presbyterian, Congregationalist and even Episcopal Churches allowing them to see that what united them was more important than what divided them which in turn gave rise to non-denominational missions to the poorest

⁴² Arthur Geddes *The Isle of Lewis and Harris: A Study in British Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1955) 221.

⁴³ Brand Report, 1902, xii; from Alexander McRae, *History of the Clan Macrae*, Dingwall, 1899, 57; quoted in Arthur Geddes *The Isle of Lewis and Harris: A Study in British Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1955) 194.

⁴⁴ Arthur Geddes *The Isle of Lewis and Harris: A Study in British Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1955) 194.

areas of Scotland including rural Lewis.⁴⁵ For example, Presbyterian minister Thomas Chalmers, who later became an important minister for the Free Church, was convener of the Church Extension Committee of the Church of Scotland. He placed importance on reaching those disadvantaged by poverty and lack of education during a time of great population growth.⁴⁶ This may have had popular appeal in the Gàidhealtachd since communities such as those on the Isle of Lewis have a history of close kinship ties and the sharing of resources.⁴⁷ Although we have little evidence of the extent and nature of popular devotion and adherence, it is possible to deduce that the poorest in the community shared religious spaces with those of high social rank especially in rural parishes and the absence of official clergy meant that lay preachers from different backgrounds were embraced and ‘what was true of the upper grades of both Church and laity applied to their lower counterparts.’⁴⁸ Under this new paradigm, all members of the community witnessed this new style of evangelical preaching in Gaelic for the first time. This theology was based in the Calvinist idea that a Godly life that would be rewarded in heaven is defined by hard work, frugality and devotion to God. Whilst these notions would not be alien to crofters and fishers the Calvinist vision of universal education for the illiterate, which Calvinists considered to be essential for living Godly life (combined with other novel “improvements”) would nevertheless lead to political upheaval.⁴⁹

Nonetheless, there was great enthusiasm for this spiritual revival amongst crofters and 1822 became known as *Bliadhna an fhaomaidh* or the Year of the Swooning in reference to the congregation’s reaction to evangelical mission.⁵⁰ While the 1843 schism started in Edinburgh, the movement’s evangelical theology was popular in the Highlands and Islands and a number of sources suggest that from the Lewis population of 17,000 only 450-500 remained with the Church of Scotland and most of them in the most urbanised area of Stornoway.⁵¹ In response to this popularity, in 1845, a number of Gaelic students of Divinity were licensed without having completed the full theological course in a rush to fill vacant Churches and preaching stations.⁵²

⁴⁵ Muirhead *Reformation, Dissent and Diversity* 117.

⁴⁶ Alex J. MacDonald ‘What is the Free Church of Scotland’ *Scottish Affairs* 32.3 (2023) 290–308, 294.

⁴⁷ Alastair McIntosh. *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power* (London: Aurum Press Ltd, 2001) 12-13.

⁴⁸ Martin MacGregor ‘Church and Culture in the late Medieval Highlands’ in James Kirk (ed) *The Church in the Highlands* (Inverness: Scottish Church Society, 1998) 5-6.

⁴⁹ Jenny Wormald *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland 1470-1625*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018) 207.

⁵⁰ Murdo Macaulay *Aspects of Religious History of Lewis: Up to the Disruption of 1843* (Inverness: John G. Eccles Printers Ltd, 1980) 91.

⁵¹ Douglas Ansdell *The People of the Great Faith: The Highland Church 1690-1900* (Stornoway: Acair Limited, 1998) 63.

⁵² *Ibid* 73.

The motivation for these Evangelicals who wanted to break away from the Established Church was the pursuit of spiritual independence. This spiritual independence concerned the ways in which civil powers on the mainland made decisions about religious life. Many had a problem with the system of patronage where landowners or the crown had the right to select ministers for empty parishes.⁵³ In 1843 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had an Evangelical majority and passed the Veto Act allowing the male heads of families in congregations to refuse a minister suggested by patronage.⁵⁴ To the Court of Session this was infringing on the property rights of the patron but evangelicals saw this as interference by the civil courts in matters that should be up to the local parishes.⁵⁵ This non-hierarchical and rather democratic approach to interpreting the gospel is congruent with the Free Church's particular theology where they consider Christ to be the only true head of the Church. As the statistics show, this evangelical movement was particularly popular on the Isle of Lewis and this began a trend of religious culture tending 'to deal with internals rather than externals, by placing an increasingly great emphasis on personal experience of faith.'⁵⁶ According to Free Church minister, Alex J. MacDonald, the Free Church is 'best summed up in the words of Jesus in John, 3:16 – 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'.⁵⁷ Meaning that salvation was not dependent so much on performing sacraments at Church but rather required a focus on belief in Christ's works. When the Free Church was established, it took with it the most evangelically zealous and channelled the movement into an era that was less concerned about debates around theological doctrine and more focused on personal faith and Christian action.⁵⁸ Many historians describe the Disruption as more of a class conflict than an ecclesiastical dispute with the Free Church supported by 'the small tenantry while on the other side was the established Church, factors and proprietors.'⁵⁹ Therefore, this process of change in the religious character of the Isle of Lewis appears to be at least somewhat shaped by the spiritual struggles of the indigenous islanders through the Clearances.

⁵³ Ansdell *The People of the Great Faith* 58-60.

⁵⁴ *Ibid* 60.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* 60-61.

⁵⁶ Donald E. Meek *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Millfield: The Handsel Press, 2000) 219.

⁵⁷ Alex J. MacDonald 'What is the Free Church of Scotland' *Scottish Affairs* 32.3 (2023) 294.

⁵⁸ Andrew Michael Jones *The Revival of Evangelicalism: Mission and Piety in the Victorian Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022) 37.

⁵⁹ Ansdell *The People of the Great Faith* 82.

1.3. The Clearances

The Revival and the Disruption happened at the time of arguably the biggest crisis and social upheaval that the Gàidhealtachd community experienced. In what is referred to in Gaelic as *Àm nam Fuadaichean*, the indigenous islanders were, often forcibly, evicted to make way for large scale sheep farming. Over a period of nearly 100 years from c. 1750 to 1860, indigenous islanders who tenanted the land were displaced so that landlords could improve the profitmaking capabilities of the land. According to Eric Richards:

The best-known form of action was the resistance to the choice of ministers of the Church forced through by the landlord against their own preference. Induction riots had been common since the beginning of the previous century, and recurred throughout these years, ultimately exploding into the Disruption in the Highlands, when a comprehensive challenge to authority of the landlords caused an almost total withdrawal of the people from the Established Church.⁶⁰

Further to the purpose of resistance, the evangelical nature of the social movement provided spiritual comfort to the community in those times of crisis. Lay preachers, known as *Na Daoine*⁶¹ gained wide acceptance and condemned the ministers of the established Church as ‘worldly men who ‘fed themselves and not the flocks.’⁶² Despite being from lay backgrounds, they adopted a stern theology which had a huge influence on how the community observed their own faith. For instance, many stopped taking communion because of a feeling of ‘unworthiness.’⁶³

Ancestral religious practice, in terms of devotion and adherence to community and shared worship, had been maintained and reshaped by indigenous islanders as much as by the lettered elite. This means that religious culture had developed in a way that is non-hierarchical and is shaped by the spiritual comfort it provides people that rely on the land and sea for their subsistence. According to George Robb:

The Christianity which finally triumphed in the Highlands drew heavily on popular culture. Evangelicalism helped Highlanders formulate a new cultural identity which nonetheless incorporated much that was traditional.

⁶⁰ Eric Richards *Debating the Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012) 69.

⁶¹ Sometimes translated as “the Men” but “the Folk” or “the People” may be more accurate.

⁶² George Robb ‘Popular Religion and the Christianization of the Scottish Highlands in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’ *The Journal of Religious History* 16.1. (1990) 18-34, 32.

⁶³ Andrew T. N. Muirhead *Reformation, Dissent and Diversity: The Story of Scotland’s Churches, 1560-1960* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) 194.

[...] The Christianity which finally triumphed in the Highlands drew heavily on popular culture. Evangelicalism helped Highlanders formulate a new cultural identity which nonetheless incorporated much that was traditional.⁶⁴

It can be stated that the Clearances uniquely impacted the religious identity of the Isle of Lewis. These experiences shaped the character of faith and showed how religion can be a source of resistance despite strict views on social issues.

1.4. Romanticism

Attempts to reconstruct religious or spiritual aspects of the past must place importance on the social circumstances of those that practised them. As was highlighted in the previous chapter, the Gàidhealtachd preserved its cultural heritage through historical changes orally since for much of its history these rural communities were non-literate. Therefore, their history was not recorded in their own words but rather what was attributed to them by outsiders much as the name “Celts”. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware that any descriptions of the Gàidhealtachd may be perceived through a romanticised lens which can distort the understanding of their way of life.

Meek reflects on how people in the Gàidhealtachd are often viewed as ‘the other’ in opposition to modernity and urban culture. For example, the Gàidhealtachd way of life is generally portrayed as stereotypically simpler and more peaceful than more urbanised areas on the mainland. What Meek terms “native spiritualities” are now generally viewed by mainstream culture as a culture defined by ‘qualities which we are meant to admire and seek for ourselves.’⁶⁵ However the idea of “native spiritualities” is linked to the concept of indigeneity and a history of colonial and imperial violence. As has been seen, the Gàidhealtachd indigenous peoples have experienced displacement and language loss through English dominant education.

This concept of a romanticised lens and its distortions can be compared to the theories of Edward Said in his famous study *Orientalism* in which he examines how “the West” instituted Orientalism as an academic discipline which constructed a romanticised view of the “Orient” – a view which, moreover, facilitated the ideological justification for the domination and subjugation of the “Orient”. He argued that the “Orient” was an idea with no corresponding reality that was created by “the West” and that there are – or were –

⁶⁴ George Robb ‘Popular Religion and the Christianization of the Scottish Highlands in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’ *The Journal of Religious History* 16.1. (1990) 18-34, 34.

⁶⁵ Donald E. Meek *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Millfield: The Handsel Press, 2000) 32.

cultures located in the East but ‘their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West.’⁶⁶ Significantly, Said extrapolates his critique to suggest that generally, ideas, cultures and histories cannot be properly understood without considering the power dynamics or structures that shape them and the way they are perceived.⁶⁷ It is my contention here that similar dynamics can be observed in the romanticisation of the Gàidhealtachd by the modern and secular mainland of Scotland.

While the Gàidhealtachd might be perceived positively in opposition to problems of modernity like a disconnect from nature, there is also a history of the “Celts” being defined in opposition to modern life or civilisation in the sense that they are uncivilised, barbarians or savages. So while the Isle of Lewis way of life is commonly admired for its stereotyped connection to nature and peacefulness, this same stereotype necessitates an opposition to “civilisation” which is connected to a history of division in Scotland. Scotland is generally perceived to be divided between the Gaelic “Highlands” and the English speaking or Scots “Lowlands.” This is despite the fact of the Gaelic language was spoken by about half of the population until as late as the sixteenth century and the lack of a border delineating this divide.⁶⁸ Since the late 1300s if not before, there is evidence of Lowlands commentators describing the Gàidhealtachd in strongly negative interpretations portraying people as backwards, violent and uncivilised and demonising their religious behaviours. The Reformation intensified this binary as ‘new ideologies of kingship and government gave new impetus to the imposition of ‘civility’ on the Gàidhealtachd.’⁶⁹ Also, the Isle of Lewis remains a stronghold of the language, despite the Protestant majority. Therefore, the Isle of Lewis straddled the sectarian divide in Scotland between Catholic and Protestant which consists of the Irish or Celts on one side and the nominally British, English and Scots speakers on the other side. To accurately portray the Gàidhealtachd it is necessary to pay attention to these power structures although the full history of this divide is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, negative perceptions of both Gaelic speakers and those who live in rural areas still persist. MacDonald talks about how she still comes across negative perceptions of the Gaels:

I think people don’t know the history of Scotland. If folk were to study how it was deliberately stamped out, they might have a different view. Somebody said to me recently: why did they want to stamp out the Gaels?

⁶⁶ Edward Said *Orientalism* (1978; reis., New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014) 6.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Wilson McLeod *Gaelic in Scotland: Policies, Movements, Ideologies* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020) 10.

⁶⁹ Ibid 11.

Weren't they all awful sort of cave dwellers? [I said] That's because of your perception - you've actually been fed the crap of that time. When the king [King VI] was painting Highland people as these terrible, barbarians that all had to be slaughtered and he slaughtered a lot and he took a lot down to London and hung them...you know people need to know that aspect of it it's like... its awful complex...

This reflects how the Gaelic language's associated political identity is often seen in opposition to the British kingship.

Meek warns against attempting to correct these biases when we reconstruct the Gàidhealtachd spirituality since 'it could be claimed that, far from righting the wrong, it continues the same process of suppression, by imposing another level of obfuscation and Anglocentric misinterpretation on what remains of the supposed 'Celts'.⁷⁰ Despite the forces arrayed against Gaelic, there is still interest in the language and new language learners. This interest in the language is sometimes accompanied by an interest in the indigenous way of life and associated "native" spiritualities. These spiritualities provide insight into adapting to challenges such as climate change. This insight will only be valuable if Gàidhealtachd tradition bearers are at the forefront of its articulation.

This is why it is necessary for the words and values of indigenous cultural heritage organisations and tradition-bearers to be central to research and accounts for the current trend in qualitative social research to 'observe and capture the flow of vernacular discourse and reflect on it.'⁷¹ This thesis attempts to foreground these speakers but there nevertheless remains much more research to be done to observe and capture the flow of Gàidhealtachd discourse. In order to avoid the romanticisation of Gàidhealtachd spirituality and culture, it is necessary to examine how it is defined. It is necessary to avoid compartmentalising customs in theoretical terms that do not reflect the discourse of the people whose culture is the object of study. In the nineteenth century, the human sciences developed new disciplines, such as anthropology and orientalism, whose focus lay outside of what was considered "enlightened" or "rational." In the past ethnology and folklore research recorded what was considered to be obsolete traditions from rural areas that still held on to expressions of belief that predated Protestant Christianity. Bowman and Valk say that in the past:

ethnologists and folklorists studied the rural people of their own countries
as carriers of obsolete traditions, and early scholars of religious studies

⁷⁰ Donald E. Meek *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Millfield: The Handsel Press, 2000) 32.

⁷¹ Bowman and Valk 'Introduction: Vernacular Religion, Generic Expressions and the Dynamics of Belief' 10.

looked for primitive forms of religion among ‘uncivilized’ peoples and in historical sources, as expressions of belief that antedated the contemporary Protestant Christianity conceived to be the highest stage of religious development.⁷²

Carmichael highlighted how Christianity lived alongside “pagan” customs. Many tradition bearers in the Gàidhealtachd are also English speakers meaning the binary between Gàidhealtachd and the mainland of Scotland is not an absolute. This emphasises that binaries are often unhelpful for understanding the fluidity of culture.

⁷² Ibid.

2. Religion in the Gàidhealtachd

Diverging historical events have led the Isle of Lewis to have a distinct culture from the mainland. For instance, their culture has a more prominent Protestant Christian element compared to the mainland of Scotland. The Free Church of Scotland is the most prominent religious denomination on the Isle of Lewis and the majority of Churches adhere to an evangelical theology. This theology is accompanied by a distinct faith identity that is embodied in particular religious practices. However, these practices do vary between different denominations with a lot of the Presbyterian Churches including the Free Church adopting a stricter Calvinism without any religious icons as well as different beliefs about what kind of music is appropriate in Church. While which Church an individual attends will usually be based on familial tradition and the majority of Churches are Presbyterian Free Churches, the variation in religious practice gives people some freedom. Despite the relatively small size of the island, this freedom means they can decide which style of worship and worship space they find sacred.

2.1. Sabbath Observance

The most noticeable difference between the Isle of Lewis and the mainland is the continued observance of the Sabbath. On Sundays, the Isle of Lewis observes a day of rest where nearly all commercial activity ceases and a quality of peace and quiet can be experienced.⁷³ The idea of keeping the Sabbath holy is a feature of some denominations of Christianity and takes a central role as one of the Ten Commandments:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.⁷⁴

For people of religious faith, the Sabbath is a gift from God so it is necessary to show gratitude for this through worship and attending Church. Gordon Macleod says:

There's the two aspects of it. One is...we're given a day of rest for our benefit but what we do with that day of rest is also important and obviously

⁷³ Explore Scotland <https://www.isle-of-lewis.com/information/sundays/> (2021) [accessed November 2023].

⁷⁴ Exodus 20:8-11 New King James Version.

within faith culture part of that is to give back, to worship. [The Sabbath] gives us time to do that.⁷⁵

This sentiment is also expressed by Father Ross Crichton who says:

The Sabbath, for [Catholics], we have what we call the Sunday obligation so you must attend Mass. There's no option not to. After that it's considered a family day so you're expected to take leisure activities, to relax in the presence of your family. You shouldn't be doing work it is a day set apart. On Lewis it's stricter.⁷⁶

This could be interpreted by people without faith as an imposition on their freedom and a reflection of how the community might be too strict in enforcing religious practices on the whole community. Aspects of the requirements of the Sabbath can be experienced in a way that is not of value to the community and this communal reinforcement can also apply to Church attendance. Since the congregation of every Church will be relatively small, it is easy to notice the absence of a particular attendee which can lead to members of the community attending out of a sense of obligation rather than faith which can interfere with the original purpose of the Sabbath as a day of rest. For example, Macleod says that:

when religious culture comes in and says you've got to do it this way, you've got to do it that way. You've got to go to Church both ends of a Sunday.

Sometimes, people feel obligated to go to Church for services in the morning and the evening. Macleod says:

So basically it builds up and builds up and becomes something it was never intended to be. It was never intended to take away life, it was never intended to stop kids swinging on a swing on a Sunday when they chain the swings up.

This shows that that the Gàidhealtachd community on Lewis has been quite strict in their communal reinforcement of the Sabbath with leisure activities for children being policed to the point of generating some resentment. On Lewis it used to be the case that even public parks were closed on Sundays meaning that children's leisure activities were seen as inappropriate until recently as Park remembers:

⁷⁵ Interviewed in Stornoway, 5th November 2022.

⁷⁶ Interviewed remotely, 26th October 2022.

still in the late 90s, swings were being changed up with padlocks...⁷⁷

However, it seems that this religious observance has found some balance with everyday life such as the necessary work of feeding animals and other essential tasks that cannot be postponed till Monday such as healthcare. Macleod tells a story of how religious repression can be challenged by indigenous islanders who have priorities that clergy might not factor in when moralising on the importance of Sabbath observance:

It was the minister who [was going] from his Church service on a Sunday walking along and seeing a lady out in the croft feeding her horse and he laid into her because she was out feeding, doing this work on the Sabbath and she let him, sort of really criticise her for it and then she said ‘so where are you going minister? Are you going home for your Sunday dinner?’ ...and he was! So has she not got a right to feed her horse?

This highlights the importance of input from indigenous islanders when shaping religious culture. Their Sabbath observance is maintained through communal reinforcement and therefore there is a consensus that this is of benefit to the community either for religious reasons or otherwise. This might not be as easy to maintain in more densely populated, urban areas so it could be argued that the insularity of the Isle of Lewis has allowed them to maintain this cultural distinction. Macleod tells a story of encountering tourists who were disappointed to find that everything was closed on a Sunday and at first were angry their holiday could not go as they planned. He was at:

the holiday park, many years ago, someone turned up and they were really, really annoyed that things were shut on a Sunday. They couldn’t go anywhere on a Sunday and that there was no public transport. This was a tourist and they were really kind of very critical of it. Let them have their say, sorry that’s just the way it is up here, that’s the culture we live in and a week later, they came back and they said ‘actually you’ve got it right’ because they obviously come from a really busy [life] right, holiday, gotta make the most of the seven days here, they wanted to cram as much as they can into it...and they were forced to cram...[peace] into it.

In faster paced, more secular social formations, enforced rest provokes a negative reaction and on holiday it was not a priority for this family. However, despite an initial negative attitude, tourists are able to see the value in a way of life that prioritises peacefulness. This

⁷⁷ Interviewed in Stornoway, 5th November 2022.

is an aspect of religious culture that outsiders can find to be too strict but Park points out that rest is of importance to the secular constituents of the community as well and feels:

really strongly about that [...] that Sabbath is extremely important and I really value the way it's observed up here and although, for no religious reason, purely like a well-being reason. Like I think that a lot of, like the campaign for a four day work week and stuff like that. I feel like [...] let's establish a day of rest every week first then we will get there, I guess. I feel like that whole movement is fully a response to that 24/7 way of doing it. [Sabbath observance is] a really revolutionary concept these days. It's anti-capitalist and it's quite rebellious, really, to have a Sabbath. But it's interesting that the USA which is the stronghold of modern evangelical Christianity is also the original place where that kind of 24/7 work culture originates but both of those things serve the patriarchy more than they serve ordinary people because the Church is the place if you want to have a power structure that elevates you above everybody else and gives you tax free status and in that country's case, get private jets and all that and also in the same breath, there's this culture of hustling that again subjects the poor to having to work and not getting a Sabbath and gives the already rich more wealth.

While this practice is of religious origin even members of the community without religious faith see it as integral part of life on the Isle of Lewis that provides time off for all people which in other areas of the world are working as often as they can or even more.

In recent years, there has been a small increase in commercial activity, possibly due to demand from the growing tourism industry, with one commercial flight and one ferry service as well as *An Lanntair* opening one Sunday a month as a compromise with the religious community. It is likely that tourism and other commercial activity will be economically valuable but the community also attributes value to the peacefulness of the Sabbath for other reasons apart from faith. For example, it allows time and space for rest and the sharing of culture. When families are able to share this time the older generations are able to share traditions, values and stories with younger generations about, for instance, the insecurity of their lives, what has sustained them through their difficulties and how past generations have expressed their religiosity. Father Ross grew up with strict Sabbath observance and is a great supporter of the tradition. Before he came to work in parishes in the Outer Hebrides, his first parish was in an area of Paris that had a large Jewish population

and he remembers discussing the Sabbath with a local Rabbi who described it as a ‘social equaliser’ because everyone including the poor get the day off. Father Ross expands on the importance of this:

When people come to Lewis, it annoys me when the incomers come in and they want life in the Hebrides but they want all the facilities open on a Sunday. You say, well part of life in the Hebrides is having Sunday off. It’s alright for the middle classes to say well we want our leisure activities but somebody who can’t afford to take a day off will be the one who’s providing those activities. [...] Well what attracted you to the islands? You want the peace and quiet? [...] It annoys me when incomers say we want the peace and quiet but we want everything as it was when we were in London or Kent or wherever we came from. Well, no, don’t come in and impose that on people [...] In a very middle class or affluent society, well yes, you can afford to take a day off if you’ve got a good wage but it’s the single mother who has to work on a Sunday because the opportunity is there and then she’s deprived of family time. Families that are poorer off are deprived of family time [...] I’m a supporter of that principle. It’s a very big part of [Lewis’s] identity...and if you go there accept it, don’t change it. Don’t try and have a hybrid approach - that affects the identity of island.

2.2. Community and Environment

This communal reinforcement of Sabbath observance is also strengthened by effective community connection. As well as being a stronghold for the Gaelic language, the Isle of Lewis has a long history of communal living and the sharing of the environment’s resources as well as worship spaces. The community’s insularity maintains a close connection to its environment in order to be self-sufficient in times of crisis. Preserving and revitalising aspects of these cultural characteristics contributes to the overall resilience of these traditions. A shared culture including a shared language and faith helps a community stay closely connected. Alastair McIntosh describes how time and place was shared when he was growing up on Lewis in the 1960s:

Nobody ever knocked on doors in those days and many doors had no locks fitted. You went in and out of other people’s houses; they were an extension of your own. If you were hungry, you would be fed; if you were

cold, you would be warmed by the peat fire; if you were naughty, you would be ticked off, because the village was like an extended family.⁷⁸

Additionally, in those days, houses were built communally but governmental regulations now prevent this and therefore, ‘the old custom of making communal effort in order to make light work has greatly declined.’⁷⁹ However, there are aspects of this culture that still survive and Father Ross describes how this aspect of Gàidhealtachd culture is of value to the community:

There’s a refuge for us when we go back to our homes and speak Gaelic and when we have our prayers in Church in Gaelic, where there’s meetings, poetry recited, songs are sung in Gaelic that...it reminds us that we have roots that go way back to the time of Columba...this gives us a sense of rootedness...that’s what’s really important in modern society...that’s what lacking I think and that’s why people just latch on to the economic thing, your material success and wealth and that’s not the measure of human life...there has to be more to identity than that.

The community’s awareness of the finitude of resources may be linked to why they hold on to traditions that set these insular communities apart from more urban areas where many people experience a disconnect from the environment that sustains them. Extreme weather conditions continue to disrupt travel to and from the mainland by both ferry and plane. According to Duncan, we are no longer connected to ‘the environment that sustains us and this has led to a devaluation of its function as an integral part of our lives. We live in cities and do not want to inhabit any other environment where we are deprived of our home comforts and technological stimuli.’⁸⁰ It could be argued that this is less true of insular locations like the Outer Hebrides since extreme weather conditions can cut the community off from supply chains coming from the mainland as well as technological supports like the internet. This means that insecurity remains a feature of their life which they must always be prepared for with older generations remembering what it was like for mainland supply chains not to reach the islands for extended periods of time. Father Ross describes what this is like and how it can be a shock to those from urban areas:

⁷⁸ Alastair McIntosh *Soul and Soil: The People Versus Corporate Power* (London: Aurum Press Ltd, 2001) 12.

⁷⁹ Ibid 13.

⁸⁰ Graham Duncan ‘Celtic Spirituality and Contemporary Environmental Issues.’ *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 71.3 (2015) 1.

The ferry didn't come for four days so there was no water in the shops, so this is what I mean by life being precarious and because people expect a high standard of living now... you know in a city if its stormy, you can still get to work, the buses will run.... Here the electricity goes off as it did one time for three days, nothing works – nothing- so I have a stove, I was cooking on top of the stove in the front room, myself and the cat moved to the front room because the house was freezing – you can't take a shower, you can't put the kettle on, you can't do anything like that and people say I wouldn't like that....when friends from the city come here, like other priests who are amazing at the fact there's no street lives....and one friend asked me 'is there an Italian restaurant?' ...and I laughed and he said how do you survive without an Italian restaurant?

This demonstrates a keen awareness of and sensitivity to the precarity of resource supplies. McIntosh describes the prevailing attitude during his own upbringing as assuming that 'anything produced off the island was a luxury' and this same attitude, though less persistent, still maintains today.⁸¹

Given this awareness of resource scarcity, it could be said that the indigenous islander's Calvinist frugality is a matter of necessity rather than what some might view as superstition or strictness. If climate change worsens other localities might have to adapt to the reality that anything not produced locally will be harder to get. Gerten and Bergman examine the role religion plays in facing challenges that come from climate change. They look into possible cultural techniques that could assist communities in the transition to a society equipped to address 'the tremendous challenge of *mitigating* dangerous climate change (however defined) or – if mitigation is not successful - *adapting* to unavoidable changes.'⁸² These unavoidable changes might concern food insecurity and society may have to adapt to working with resources available only in local areas, adapting to growing transport disruptions due to extreme weather conditions like flooding or technological failures such as transport infrastructure breakdown and less secure internet access. As well as dealing with the impact of extreme weather conditions, the Isle of Lewis pauses commercial activity on a Sunday so individuals will generally only use the resources already available to them. It could be argued that this provokes more efficient management of resources and a stronger awareness of levels of consumption. Park sees value in religious

⁸¹ Alastair McIntosh *Soul and Soil* 40.

⁸² Dieter Gerten and Sigurd Bergmann 'Introduction' in Dieter Gerten and Sigurd Bergmann (eds) *Religion and Climate Change: Suffering, Values and Lifestyles* (London: Bloomsbury. 2012) 3.

practices for drawing attention to issues like overconsumption and “hustle culture”. For example, how fasting draws attention to how humans interact with their environment:

I was talking to someone recently about Lent. She’s from an Orthodox Christian background and we were having a conversation about Lent and about how in the Orthodox Church there are several Lents throughout the year and there’s little fasts all dotted everywhere and there’s like vegan periods as well. We were talking about how that is such a great way of like ethical consumption [and to] look after the world a lot more to have those fasting times and stuff like that. So yeah, the Sabbath is, if you pitched it, if you reframed it [because] the idea of the Sabbath, it’s the Christian day. It’s these sorts of connotations that it might be off putting to people but those same secularists might also be proposing a 4 day work week. It’s the same thing. We are saying stop for a bit please.

The culture of the Isle of Lewis might provide insight into dealing with the impact of climate change such as how to adapt to these changes while preserving community well-being. Cultural techniques can be found in their history of self-sufficiency, communal living and sharing of resources with an awareness of their finitude. In their religious practices there are strategies to cope with social crises throughout history that can prove useful for dealing with future challenges. This shared time provides them with more awareness of how society can go through challenges and how a community can cope. They can learn techniques for making do with the resources that are available on the island. Developing an awareness of insecurity helps with preparation for future insecurity, not just in terms of a resilient attitude but also through promoting the value of practical skills that are not always deemed useful or profitable such as sewing to mend clothes, breadmaking and peat cutting.

Despite fewer tasks being performed communally, there are many community organisations that look after the shared interests of the community such as grazing committees which manage the shared areas where animals belonging to different individuals graze. When there is a shared interest in a matter concerning their livelihood, this can foster community connection since it is necessary for the sake of organisation that benefits everyone. Father Ross describes his experience in the role of treasurer for his township’s grazing committee:

And here grazings committees each community well it’s a township, especially crofting townships they have grazings committees and my previous parish was a crofting parish and I used to work on the grazings

committee as treasurer and that means communities coming together about a particular issue... you would see your neighbours, you would exchange news with them but this was a forum where we were trying to look after the land together, look after the grazings together and make sure that we all cooperated so our township would flourish. So we had fences up in the right places, we had good relationships with neighbouring townships – you wouldn't have that in a city, you've got neighbourhood watch but I'm not quite sure how that functions and do they actually meet up? They just stick a notice in their window saying neighbourhood watch and peek out their curtain every so often so here we do live in a smaller community where we do know each other, we do have to get on, we do have to cooperate on certain things when there's fall outs, they're serious because unless they're sorted, they can last for generations but then once we have to fight a cause, we do have to make representation to local authority.

This shows that a close community connection that focuses on cooperation and communication can allow a community to flourish in challenging situations. Further fieldwork focusing on these kinds of committees might provide insight into cultural techniques for coping in times of crisis.

Sociological methods provide a means for analysing what techniques could be valuable to preserve, not just as a part of Gàidhealtachd culture but because of their inherent pragmatic value in times of crisis. Obviously sewing and breadmaking are not unique to Gàidhealtachd culture but insularity and resource insecurity accentuate their usefulness. David Beel and Claire Wallace explore the value of cultural heritage for rural Scottish communities like the Isle of Lewis. They argue that this 'value is generated through cultural and social activity which is then circulated through the community in order to maintain a historical sense of place.'⁸³ This can be through the 'gathering' which is a term for the range of processes that go into the construction of community archives but also in familial settings such as passing down traditions through generations. These traditions may include practical skills such as managing resources, cooking and mending clothes. Beel and Wallace use the example of a recipe book based on methods for managing limited resources as an artefact that provides cultural value to the community.⁸⁴ For the artefact to be of use the author would have to have a close connection with the area, good knowledge of the resources available

⁸³ David Beel and Claire Wallace 'Getting together: social capital, cultural capital and the value of cultural heritage in a digital age' *Social & Cultural Geography* 21.5 (2020) 703.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

and maybe about cooking for families that had been passed down to her through the generations. While the recipe book might not sell for a high amount, it is valuable because it keeps a record of how people in the community have maintained their connection to their home. Having access to this resource, allows the community to maintain their cultural heritage and live in a way that is connected to that culture instead of through alternative means like earning a wage from a global retail company like Tesco or going to a university on the mainland to pursue a career.

Cultural skills and technologies related to the Isle of Lewis' way of meeting their subsistence needs through crofting and fishing are closely tied to other parts of their cultural heritage. When crofting and fishing were the main way of meeting subsistence, Gaelic would have been the only language that the community needed to organise themselves efficiently. Therefore as this way of life declines so does the language. Calum Fraser describes how crofting is a way of sustainably managing the land and a way of keeping Gaelic flourishing:

I think crofting is such a good model for sustainability as well. Like if everyone just has that [way of meeting their own needs] I think with this sort of decline in crofting, you see a decline in community and decline in Gaelic. It's all tied together because once it got to a certain stage with Gaelic, I guess, it's just like people accept that ok, English is the global language so we need to learn that if we want to do things on a big scale and Gaelic was just kind of left in the strongholds. The crofting communities around the Church where people speak it but now you're seeing a decline of crofting and a decline in the fank⁸⁵ which is where you would hear Gaelic all the time. It's all tied together.⁸⁶

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the value of community for a lot of people because suddenly it was necessary to spend a lot of time in isolation. This has allowed for the success of *Grinneabhat* which is a local business with a café and exhibition space.⁸⁷ The business organises many events including cèilidhs and Gaelic language classes and places importance on local produce, Gaelic language, local history and heritage. Calum Fraser says:

Grinneabhat has been an unbelievable success story. Since they opened, which was around Covid time, they have been so busy, flat out all the time

⁸⁵ An enclosure where the community's sheep were taken to be clipped of their wool. This is a good example of a task that still makes sense to perform communally.

⁸⁶ Interviewed 7th November 2022.

⁸⁷ *Grinneabhat* <https://www.grinneabhat.com/> (2020).

and it's like 90% with people from their own community just supporting them and going all the time and they are putting on events for them and turning up and stuff like that and it just so happens. It's just the way it's turned out. It's been really good for the community and Gaelic to have a place to come and speak Gaelic so yeah that's a really incredible place and any kind of... maybe it was perfect timing with Covid because people were stuck in their communities and I think it made people realise the value of that, having a place close to home and not traveling all the time... and kind of shopping local and stuff like that... because a lot of the shops closing down and stuff.. so that's just been amazing.

This success has depended on engagement from the community and their participation is a performance of their cultural heritage which helps that heritage to persevere despite such severe crises. These crises highlight the importance of this shared cultural heritage and how it can provide support in times of insecurity. Aspects of this cultural heritage might be useful for the transition to a society that is able to survive 'the tremendous challenge of mitigating the danger of climate change [or in] adapting to unavoidable changes.'⁸⁸ The close connection of the community to each other and to the environment has pragmatic value that should be explored in further research. This is also one particular aspect of the culture that can be compared to liberation theology in the sense that it values opening up to each other in order to build up the world.

2.3. Transcendence

As well as having a distinct material culture, religion in the Gàidhealtachd also has an experiential dimension. The Protestant faith which exists on the Isle of Lewis is often experienced as a connection or awareness of the divine or sacred. Sean McLeod describes how belief was a central factor in Reformation theology which:

appealed to sincerely held religious belief to distinguish themselves from what they perceived as empty (and pagan-influenced) ritual that dominated Catholicism – rituals that, Protestants alleged, were performed without sincerity.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Dieter Gerten and Sigurd Bergmann 'Introduction' in Dieter Gerten and Sigurd Bergmann (eds) *Religion and Climate Change: Suffering, Values and Lifestyles* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) 3.

⁸⁹ Sean McLeod 'Religions are Belief Systems' in Brad Stoddard and Craig Martin (eds) *Stereotyping Religion: Critiquing Clichés* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) 13.

This sincerity can be likened to an experiential dimension of faith which is felt by a person of faith and perceived to be given by God. Martin Luther, the seminal theologian of the Protestant Reformation was concerned about precisely this experiential dimension of faith and believed that having an inner experience of faith was necessary for salvation.⁹⁰ This is now called the Doctrine of Justification by Faith and is a central characteristic of Protestant theology.

The experience of a Gaelic Church service compared to an English Church service might be different in a way that is important to a Gaelic speaker of faith. Calum MacPhee says that Gaelic services on Lewis are well attended despite many people also speaking English. MacPhee describes his experience of Church as enriched by the presence of the Holy Spirit:

There is a really good spirit... a kind of feeling but it's not feelings – feelings come and go – but you are aware that Spirit is present, the Holy Spirit, the third person in the godhead – that totally fills you up, it gives you a completely enriched experience... it's more of a sense.⁹¹

MacPhee says that his inner experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit is more than ephemeral emotion but more like an awareness or a sense that God, in the form of third person in the Trinity, is felt to be present. It is apparent that this experiential dimension of the divine is very important to the evangelical Christianity on Lewis. The Free Church associates the Holy Spirit with the presence of divine inspiration, for example, it is through the Holy Spirit that scripture was revealed through ‘the divine Author behind the human authors.’⁹²

What MacPhee is describing here is often called ‘the transcendent’ in religious studies. In the field of theology and religious studies, various definitions of transcendence are found and will vary depending on how the concept is applied and in what context. In general, we can think of transcendence as referring to the experience of something beyond the immanent. This could also be applied to a sense of solidarity with a community of shared values. However, when people talk about their religion, they often talk about their relationship with ‘the sacred’ or ‘the divine’ which refers to an object or substance ‘that is fundamentally different from or stands outside of the ordinary world.’⁹³ This does not simply

⁹⁰ Simeon Zahl *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 19.

⁹¹ Interviewed 10th November 2022.

⁹² Jonathan Ottaway ‘The Faith Once for All Delivered: Liturgical Theology, Scripture, and the Evangelical Free Church Tradition’ *Studia Liturgica* 51.1 (2021).

⁹³ Leslie Dorrough Smith ‘Religion is about the Transcendent’ in Brad Stoddard and Craig Martin (eds) *Stereotyping Religion: Critiquing Clichés* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) 56.

mean belief in ‘free-floating things that are supposed to exist utterly separate from the stuff that concerns us in our everyday life; rather, transcendence is a way of looking on our mundane experiences and seeing them as being more than just a conglomeration of facts.’⁹⁴ It is evident that this experiential dimension cannot be analysed empirically. In this sense, when God or the Holy Spirit is posited, it is as a transcendental concept. As a transcendental concept, God necessarily entails a mystery. This is not the type of mystery that can be solved by philosophical or scientific investigation but rather the divine is the type of mystery that is beyond human capacity to understand.⁹⁵ This sentiment is reflected in MacPhee’s favourite Bible verse:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.⁹⁶

An awareness of how we cannot contain God’s essence in the confines of our language about God helps us to avoid the idolatry of assuming we have the authority or even capacity to speak of God’s essence. In this way, faith is a transcendent experience since it is an experience of something that is beyond the sum total of facts that make up our reality.⁹⁷ William James describes one of the qualities of a transcendental or mystical experience as noetic which means ‘states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect.’⁹⁸ This would mean that it is not possible to have the same knowledge of MacPhee’s inner experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit without having the same experience as he has. This is evident in how without faith, it would not be possible to trust in the Lord as the above passage advises. This awareness also allows spiritual independence since ‘acknowledging Him’ in all your paths connotes a personal relationship with the divine based on an inner experience of the person of faith. For MacLeod, this is seen as an underlying dimension. He says:

From my point of view, there’s a spiritual dimension to our lives.... if we have a spiritual sense, we have that belief...and so with that spirituality there are... It’s not all good. Because well look at the world we live in...there’s forces there that are not good and there’s spiritual forces.

⁹⁴ Robert K. Bolger and Robert C. Coburn *Religious Language, Meaning and Use: The God Who is Not There* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019) 36.

⁹⁵ Ibid 41.

⁹⁶ Proverbs 3: 5-6 New King James Version.

⁹⁷ Bolger and Coburn *Religious, Language, Meaning, and Use* 40.

⁹⁸ William James *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902; reis. London: Routledge, 2002) 295.

McIntosh explains this using a Christian framework. He says that in his experience, without an understanding of spirituality, it is not possible to fully engage in the world. This is because of an underlying spiritual reality which McIntosh understands as our interconnectedness. He says that, although we are aware of ourselves as distinct entities ‘as we enter into that wrestling-match engagement with love in the company of others,’ this ‘psycho-spiritual distance’ is lessened. Being able to see ourselves as part of a whole is ‘God-consciousness.’⁹⁹ This connects back to the previous section about maintaining a strong community connection being valuable for the purposes of doing what is best for the community as a whole. This can then be compared to the meaning of solidarity as salvation in the context of liberation theology. He says that self-realisation means ‘starting to feel ourselves as part of everything’ including how we are connected to our environment. This kind of spirituality is not pantheism which ‘would limit God to the immanent material reality of our senses and deny the possibility of transcendence.’¹⁰⁰ He instead describes it as ‘Panentheism, God is *present* in nature.’¹⁰¹

2.4. Privacy

Related to the concept of transcendence is the idea that religious belief is part of one’s interior experience that should be kept private. In Park’s own words, Lewis provides a space for their Christian faith to be ‘safe for people who like things to feel concrete and secure and sequestered.’ These transcendent aspects of religious life pose problems for research since it depends on internal experiences and while the interviewees willing to discuss their faith were forthcoming, religion is generally seen as a private matter. This was a likely factor when a prospective participant refused to take part in this research and it is incumbent upon a researcher to treat these needs with respect. It is preferable to not open themselves up to a wider conversation because, Park says that discussing aspects of faith with those without faith:

demands removal of some layers of protection that are so integral to many people’s faith especially in these kinds of areas. It’s an extremely uncomfortable thing to ask of many of the Christians that I grew up around. I think it’s that more ecumenical approach would lead to more acceptance in the long run and would probably ensure the survival of those traditions more than full secularisation but I don’t know the important

⁹⁹ Alastair McIntosh. *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power* 118.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

people...I don't know the majority of Christians as it is would be comfortable with that approach because asking questions can lead to certain aspects of someone's faith being dismantled just through pulling that thread and that's not something that many, many people that I've met up here would want to ever entertain because it's like why would I unhinge my life from this thing that keeps me...grounded and gives me a reason to live.

In this sense, faith provides the community with a bedrock of meaning and if a community shares in that meaning then it provides a sense of security. Without this security there can be an experience of discomfort. Park explains this as:

...the desire to make something as concrete as possible in your mind is actually a little bit of it... you're trying to remove the need for faith... how can you have faith if you are sure? I don't have to faith in this table because I know it's here... but there's an uncomfortableness, considering that you could be wrong about something.

People can have different experiences of faith, some of which can withstand questioning and this in itself can strengthen faith but sometimes people prefer to evade the discomfort that this can cause. MacLeod says that:

because you learn from questions, that's what you learn from. You learn from a question, sitting inside and trying to find the answer to that. But if you are just sitting there getting pummelled with 'this is what you have to believe, this is what you have to believe' ...some people are ok with that but a lot of people are not.

Park goes on to explain the difficulties of discussing his questioning of religious faith with people who have faith. He says:

I feel it when I talk about these kinds of things, I'm someone who wants to think things out and some people that I've met, just never want to ask questions because they don't feel like they need to. You know, I can't put myself in that person's shoes. My conscious experience of living is quite different, as everyone's [conscious experience] is. So I feel like [...] it's all just how things have worked for me being someone who wants to have my worldview [and] behave in a particular way. I do want to question but some people are perfectly happy with no questioning at all and I don't

want to... I never want to make them question. My mother-in-law, I've had conversations with her regarding a particular subject of contention within the Bible or something like that. She just said: yeah, I just don't feel like I want to or need to pull that thread because my faith works for me and she's not hurting anybody. But then I've had conversations with [MacLeod] where you do enjoy that intellectual questioning and wrestling with stuff... but your faith is just as strong as hers too...so it's just two ways of getting there that, like I was saying before, like if I stopped my growth at a certain point and remained resentful of Christians, I would be sitting there like what do you mean you don't want to question things... are you happy being mindless sheep just coasting through life...and it's like...yeah what's wrong with that, there's nothing wrong with that, there's nothing wrong with not asking questions if it does make you happy...but it's a tough thing to measure, your own happiness, it's a tough thing to quantify from within yourself.

While grazing committees have to work out their problems and come to a consensus, there is less needed to come to a consensus through community dialogue, the consensus around matters of faith is that they are personal matters that require no debate. However, as previously discussed, the closeness of the community also allows for communal reinforcement which can mean that expressions of faith such as attending Church and religious obligations are more strictly adhered to. This is because the community performs a kind of self-policing that can impact on that privacy. Park sees this as a side effect of wanting to protect their faith identity:

If my security as a Christian depends upon [privacy] because when you are a Christian in these kinds of environments a lot of your time is subconsciously spent [...] looking at other people and they are looking at you and there's a lot of: how's that person doing? Oh they didn't make it to that meeting? You know, there's like, it's imbued with this accusatory peeking through the blinds, kind of thing. When you are doing that, you start to regard the performance of your faith in actions: how many times can I attend Church, how can I prove to everybody that I am this person and at that point, Church does become the idol? [...] If I decide not to go to Church for two weeks, I'm going to be worrying that my faith has crumbled and that's like putting your identity and worth in this action that

you are doing, rather than identifying in a deep[er], heart level as one of God's children.

For Macleod, this is not how to be a person of faith and there are ways to develop faith:

For instance, if you had an old banger¹⁰² and it just never worked and never got you from A to B and kept breaking and all that and it was just leaking and everything and every time you went there: ach I'm in this old banger. So if that's your experience of Church, you gotta leave, you gotta find another Church or you gotta find something else that is going to get you where you wanna go. So there's a book by Steve Aisthorpe. He worked in the Far East for many years and he came back to his Church in the Scottish Highlands and he couldn't believe that so many people had left the Church. Where are these people? They were still practising Christians, they still had their faith but the Church just didn't...kind of suit them anymore... it wasn't helping them to grow in their faith, it wasn't helping them get where they wanted to go.... So they left it. And his statistics show that there are actually more Christians outside of the mainstream Church than there is within it! So you don't need Church for your faith but Church should be a vehicle....

Aisthorpe, like Meek, notes the growing interest in Celtic Christianity with an 'emphasis on the Christian faith being woven into the very fabric of life, it offers a refreshing anecdote to a fragile dualism.'¹⁰³ The dualism he is referring to is the idea that there is an opposition between the sacred and secular or worldly as Calles Barger argued against. He says that one of the most striking shared characteristics of these "Churchless Christians" is that they want to mend the rift between everyday life and religion that they have experienced. Many of them 'cite an experience of disconnect between Church and life as a main or contributing factor in their decision to remain outside of traditional congregational life.'¹⁰⁴ In Scotland, the largest denominations have experienced unprecedented decline in Church membership in recent years but 39% of those who identify as Christian do not attend Church.¹⁰⁵ Religion in the Gàidhealtachd is not defined by Church attendance but by how their values persist. This strengthens the theory that maintaining an ecological quality in their religious traditions

¹⁰² Term for a car in bad condition.

¹⁰³ Steve Aisthorpe *The Invisible Church: Learning from the Experiences of Churchless Christians* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2016) 141.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid* 142.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid* 5.

is both the motivation for and reason why the Isle of Lewis maintains a religious identity stronger and more distinct than the culture of the rest of Scotland. Religion is expressed and experienced in a variety of ways and this is protected by keeping aspects of it private but also through maintaining a close connection to a community with shared interests.

3. Spirituality in the Gàidhealtachd

The term “spirituality” connotes a multitude of cultural phenomena but context and personal beliefs affect what is considered “spirituality” and what is “religion”. When someone identifies as spiritual but not religious it is often signalling that they possess some interior state of awareness of some kind of deep interconnection with the universe but that does not depend upon membership of an institution.¹⁰⁶ This can also be the experience of some Christians such as those in Aisthorpe’s research who left the Church and is similar to the definition of spirituality that McIntosh describes using a Christian framework. Bowman and Valk report that defining these categories ‘as reified ontological entities has lost its former attraction, because the social and verbal constructedness of concepts has become common knowledge.’¹⁰⁷ Contemporary scholars no longer see themselves as an objective outsider but rather as participants in a conversation with many different voices and points of view.¹⁰⁸ There are significant aspects of Gàidhealtachd culture that do not fit into the category of religion but hold a similar level of importance in terms of cultural identity. These key aspects are central to maintaining the cultural values associated with their indigenous cultural identity.

3.1. Customs and Witchcraft

This section will examine the cultural phenomena of customs which are often described as traditions relating to rites of passage such as births, deaths and marriages. These are often events where communities come together to celebrate and rituals are performed to sacralise a union, add solemnity and gravitas to a vow or wish good luck. For example, there is the tradition of “handfasting” which is referred to as an ancient Celtic marriage tradition by the Humanist Society Scotland and involves binding the couple’s hands together with material or cord to symbolise their union.¹⁰⁹ Traditional Scottish ritual customs are recorded by folklorist Margaret Bennet who generally refrains from speculating on why certain traditions survive and prefers for the traditions-bearers to speak for themselves. Sometimes traditions can be passed down through being amalgamated into religion and religion gives them their formality and legitimacy while others are marginalised and are practised less and less. Handfasting must have continued in other contexts as it is still popular today as part of

¹⁰⁶ Andie R. Alexander ‘I’m Spiritual but Not Religious’ in Brad Stoddard and Craig Martin (eds) *Stereotyping Religion: Critiquing Clichés* (London, Bloomsbury, 2017) 98.

¹⁰⁷ Bowman and Valk ‘Introduction: Vernacular Religion, Generic Expressions and the Dynamics of Belief’ 10.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ The Humanist Society Scotland ‘Handfasting’ <https://www.humanism.scot/ceremonies-blog/handfasting/> (2023).

secular wedding ceremonies in Scotland.¹¹⁰ The practise was accepted across all Scottish communities as a legitimate declaration of lifelong partnership while “living in sin” was frowned upon;¹¹¹ until ‘in 1609 the ‘Statutes of Icolmkill [Iona] announced the abolition of handfast marriages in the Highlands, in an effort to bring all of Scotland under the control of the Scottish Parliament.’¹¹² Alastair MacIntosh has described the Statutes as “cultural dismemberment” where the lines of Gaelic tradition were severed. They stated that traveling bards were to be placed in stocks and removed from the area. Also begging and hospitality customs that maintained the bardic tradition were banned. This was followed by reforms that imposed English language education onto the families of traditional leaders leading to a decline of Gaelic language use.¹¹³ Despite an inability to trace the lines of tradition, handfasting appears to be an example of a ritual that continues to have meaning for people without that meaning necessarily filtering down from an institutional power like a church.

When it comes to customs that have meaning to the community, it can be difficult for outsiders to understand their importance. For this reason, Ruth Marshal describes religious anthropology as still largely a “you had to be there” sort of discipline that has a habit of distancing itself from religious testimonials such as Christian witness. It is not possible to “be there” in the sense of ‘a place one could be, observe, participate in, and experience for oneself and second hand the experiences of others.’¹¹⁴ What might seem superstitious to some, might be seen differently by others who have faith or believe in certain behaviours, practices and beliefs. Due to issues with privacy and context surrounding inner experiences of customs, it is not always possible to determine the reasoning behind their continuation if there even is one at all. Sometimes people continue to practise a custom out of a sense of obligation to the community or it might be a habitual repetition that may not be a conscious decision. Park says that sometimes the traditions are acknowledged as somewhat superstitious:

That ties into like the lambing¹¹⁵ now, on the Sabbath and its superstition. I think up here, the Sabbath its lovely that it’s observed because people get to have a day where they don’t feel like anyone’s gonna hound them for anything. We are putting down our tools. But there’s also, I think the whole putting your washing out on a Sunday thing is definitely like a

¹¹⁰ Margaret Bennet *Scottish Customs: From Cradle to the Grave* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2019) xxvi.

¹¹¹ Cohabitation before marriage.

¹¹² Margaret Bennet *Scottish Customs* 131.

¹¹³ McIntosh *Soul and Soil* 56.

¹¹⁴ Ruth Marshal ‘Christianity, Anthropology and Politics’ *Current Anthropology* 55.10 (2014) 348.

¹¹⁵ Lambing refers to attending to sheep giving birth.

superstition. If you asked someone, someone who was really strict on not putting their washing out on a Sunday: why are you doing this? Maybe answer number one would be because I don't want to be seen to be doing it. But then if you kept asking why, the answer would be something along the lines of effectively I'll be cursed. Maybe not those words but I think the implication is doing those kinds of activities on the Sabbath will bring a curse upon you. It feels to me that some of the Sabbath observance up here comes from the superstition culture. I was talking a wee bit earlier about how mum is superstitious. She fully acknowledges that it's daft but it is so...in her....

Often it can be an integral part of someone's identity, if for example, being superstitious is part of Park's mother's culture and a part of who she is. While it might be possible for strangers to the culture to see the value in Sabbath observance for non-religious reasons, they may not find meaning in the idea that it would displease God or that it might have negative consequences, such as less successful agricultural production which is often associated with curses. In her ethnography *Scottish Crofters*, Susan Parman discovered that stories around not keeping the Sabbath holy and other beliefs associated with the evangelical movement 'were reeling from a series of economic ills.'¹¹⁶ Although through hearing stories of misfortune and witchcraft or *Buidsneachd*, she came to categorise them as 'a form of gossip with supernatural ingredients.'¹¹⁷ Park sees these customs as part of spiritual life and allows people to find meaning even if that meaning is not "real." He says:

That kind of thinking makes the world feel like more magical and I think that can be fun, you know, to imagine that there is a reason behind a thing, to think that something bad will happen if I do or think a particular thing on a Sunday or it can be like, you know, we have very overactive minds and I think that that energy has got to go somewhere and sometimes it goes there.

Arthur Geddes describes superstition in the context of the Isle of Lewis as 'marginal to the main body of belief, worship and conduct which forms religion.'¹¹⁸ These are considered beliefs and practices through 'which hopes and fears attach themselves to things seen or done, by a multitude of false analogies and by irrational links of effects to supposed

¹¹⁶ Susan Parman *Scottish Crofters: A Historical Ethnography of a Celtic Village* (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc, 1990) 131.

¹¹⁷ Ibid 126.

¹¹⁸ Geddes *The Isle of Lewis and Harris* 199.

causes.’¹¹⁹ Despite being marginal, Geddes admits that ‘no hard-and-fast line can be drawn between folklore and religion, where religion is handed on as living word and ritual almost without the aid of writing.’¹²⁰ This further supports the theory that culture is preserved and shaped in contexts without institutional support but is carried on for various personal reasons such as finding certain customs meaningful. Margaret Bennet discusses how New Year was marked at the end of Harvest and the start of winter in the “Celtic” calendar. Some of these customs survive in the form of Halloween including dressing up. She remembers how this was a time where:

it was believed that the whole underworld was in turmoil – fairies, witches, ghosts – they could be about. And if perchance you had some experience of the previous year when somebody who died had a grudge against you, woe betide you if they came back. They had a power to do you some mischief. So people dressed up. If you were afraid of any of the above, you could dress as a ghost or ...¹²¹

This demonstrates that spiritual traditions associated with witchcraft survived alongside a strict religious culture indicating respect for these traditions amongst the wider community. From a Christian perspective it is thought that witchcraft is sinful and there is a history of witches being executed in Scotland. Alex MacDonald points out that:

if you look at the map of Scotland and look at where the witches were executed – there isn’t anything [on the Isle of Lewis] on that map and I actually wonder if it’s because witchcraft and Christianity always...Christianity’s very late coming here anyway in comparison to other places and I wonder if it’s because they kind of stand together side by side here.

This strengthens the theory that these spiritual traditions survived on the Isle of Lewis alongside Christianity because they were of importance to the indigenous islanders or as Geddes puts it ‘founded upon self-supporting peasant life, in line with the humble working founder of Christianity.’¹²² This respect can coexist with the Christian understanding that these things can be dangerous. According to Macleod, his:

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Margaret Bennet *Buidneachd (Witchcraft) Faclan (Words) Festival*, An Lanntair, Stornoway 2022 <https://youtu.be/-l8OLFJ8gXI?si=vhKOPdLWmwufPD1b>.

¹²² Geddes *The Isle of Lewis and Harris* 199.

understanding of the Bible is that it speaks against dabbling in that. [It's] probably for our own protection that we don't dabble in that, dabbling in something we don't understand and that's quite dangerous and not good for our health so why would you play with fire like that.

MacDonald also relates this respect to a reverence for the long lines of tradition that have been discussed. She also sees the categories of religious and pagan or spiritual custom as hard to define:

It depends on what you term as being... pagan as well because people were still reciting sort of old pagan lines here till into the 1900s and then it was kind of frowned up but that's what they were and they would have come from the Norse, I am imagining, so the two things were obviously there. And of course, for things like Halloween and New Year in particular, New Year rhymes from long ago.

These cultural ideas can also be affected by periods of crisis. MacDonald cites the Iolaire disaster as causing a shift in attitudes towards these customs:

...but they became frowned upon... and after the Iolaire disaster, attitudes would have changed to these things I'm sure...it's just the natural order of things...

In January 1919, The HMS Iolaire sank as it was arriving in Stornoway harbour in extreme weather conditions at the end of the First World War and resulted in the loss of more than 200 of the young male population on the Isle of Lewis. This event had a profound effect on the community that is not possible to fully encompass here. Considering how close to home they were, after surviving the war, the profound loss must have felt absurd and meaningless. In the face of meaningless suffering, religion is often of comfort to people who are struggling while others might find their faith shaken by the injustice. The grief amongst the community was such that families never spoke about it but with community historical organisations such as *Na h-Eileanan Siar* council's Iolaire Working Group and Stornoway Historical Society, attitudes are changing and younger people are becoming more aware of the incident.¹²³

It is times of crisis like this that allow us to reflect on what is really valuable such as loved ones and the finite time we might have with them. There are practical reasons for not allowing personal disputes to go long unresolved that Father Ross pointed out. It can affect

¹²³Iain MacInnes 'The Iolaire disaster: The 'crowning sorrow of the war' *BBC Scotland* (2019) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-46522918>.

the shared interests of the community if there is a serious falling out that may go on for generations and impacts the community's ability to organise itself properly when working in close proximity. Further motivation may continue to come from the belief that if someone died before this serious falling out was resolved, they may have power over you from the afterlife that Bennett reports as associated with Halloween traditions.¹²⁴ As Park says about his mother's superstitions, they may continue to affect behaviour even if someone 'fully acknowledges that it's daft.' These superstitions seem to cultivate an awareness of death that links back to the heightened awareness of the finitude of the living environment including the people around them. If McIntosh defines spirituality as connection, then an awareness of our connected finitude is part of this. It could be argued that the indigenous islander has more of an awareness of this finitude, while those living on the mainland are more likely to behave as though resources are infinite because, for example, they can always get more milk at the shop, even on the Sabbath. In this sense, spirituality, even without belief, can play a vital role in connecting us to our environment and to our community and thereby motivate us to preserve them.

3.2. Traditional Music

The experiences and feelings of those who suffered through crises like the 1919 Iolaire disaster are remembered and evoked through Gaelic traditional music including modern iterations like 'The Iolaire' by Skipinnish. Through their lyrics they evoke a sense of tragedy and futility:

By grace of God I yet was living
And sailing west and worlds away
From the futile fields of war¹²⁵

Even without faith, relief is conveyed through the mention of the name of God which adds solemnity even in the absence of belief. Music helps honour the memory of the lives lost and may cause spiritual reflection such as the consideration of how futile death can be and how fragile life is. Those who may have lost loved ones in war or at sea or otherwise can find meaning in performances of songs like this at community events and share a space with others who find meaning in their lyrics.

Traditional music survived the partial suppression of the bardic tradition through the *taigh-cèilidh*. *Cèilidh* music is recognised globally as traditional Scottish Highland/Gaelic

¹²⁴ Margaret Bennet *Buidsneachd (Witchcraft) Faclan (Words) Festival*, An Lanntair, Stornoway 2022 <https://youtu.be/-l8OLFJ8gXI?si=vhKOPdLWmwufPD1b>.

¹²⁵ Angus Macphail and Robert Daniel Robertson. 'The Iolaire' *Skipinnish Records* 2017.

music with accompanying set dances. The word *cèilidh* means ‘visit’ so the *taigh-cèilidh* was a house that people gathered in to visit each other and play music.¹²⁶ Carmichael describes how the rhythmic quality of prayers and hymns convey the ecological similarly to how Celtic Christian prayers reflect a deep connection to nature. He says that ‘sometimes the hymn and the prayer are intoned in low tremulous unmeasured cadences like the moving and moaning, the souging and the sighing, of the ever-murmuring sea on their own wild shores.’¹²⁷ This sonic quality can be heard in traditional Gaelic songs like ‘An Ataireachd Àrd’ which means the High Surge and reflects on feelings of longing for the Gàidhealtachd homeland. Those who have experienced similar feelings may be provoked to spiritual reflection about one’s connection to the place they were born or the meaning of belonging. Consider this verse from ‘An Ataireachd Àrd’:

'S na coilltean a siar
 Chan iarrainn fuireach gu bràth
 Bha m' inntinn 's mo mhiann
 A-riamh air lagan a' bhàigh;
 Ach iadsan bha fial
 An gnìomh, an caidreabh 's an àgh
 Air sgapadh gun dìon
 Mar thriallas ealtainn roimh nàmh.¹²⁸
 In the woods of the west
 I would not want to remain forever,
 My mind and my desire/aspiration
 Were always on the little hollow by the bay,
 But those who were generous/liberal in affection,
 In their happiness/joy, in their community
 Have been scattered/spread/dispersed/dissipated defenceless,
 As a flock of birds flees before their enemy.

Originally a poem by Donald MacIver, there are now many musical versions of ‘An Ataireachd Àrd’ by contemporary Gaelic artists such as Runrig, Ishbel MacAskill and

¹²⁶ Thomas McKean. ‘Celtic Music and the Growth of the feis movement in the Scottish Highlands’ *Western Folklore* 57.4 (1998) 247.

¹²⁷ Alexander Carmichael *Carmina Gadelica* 2.

¹²⁸ Comunn Gaidhealach Leodhais ‘An ataireachd àrd’ Eilean Fraioch: Lewis Gaelic Songs and Melodies (Stornoway: Acair, 1982) 17.

Capercaillie. This reflects how traditional music has grown in popularity and while it was not popular when she was in school, MacDonald reports:

[*cèilidh* music] wasn't trendy. But *cèilidh* music is quite trendy now...look at that [*cèilidh* music event] they're doing in the Hydro, that's great. Seeing an opportunity. My child spent her whole time growing up with me doing this job and being surrounded by that kind of music and the artists without paying much attention to it...taking it for granted I suppose and then she goes to [Glasgow for university]. And [she says] oh I'm going to Niteworks. Oh are you now? Say hello to them for me! Or I'm going to see Skipinnish. And on Friday it was *cèilidh* music in town.

Traditional music has proven to be a popular way of getting younger people involved in Gàidhealtachd culture. This had led to the development of a lot of modernised or fusion music that allows the genre of Gaelic music to stay relevant and help it grow in popularity, for example, with the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow continuing to prominently feature *cèilidh* events alongside Scottish and world folk music. MacDonald asserts that making it “trendy” for young people is of great importance:

So there's more kind of really crossover stuff like, as I say, Skipinnish and Tidelands and Skerryvore [who] do a lot to encourage a young audience which is great but it has to be trendy, it's gotta be trendy. It wasn't trendy when I was growing up...it wouldn't have been trendy when you were either....

While there might be disagreement about how much to prioritise catering to a wider, global or anglicised audience it seems that survival in any iteration is more important than “purity” of tradition.¹²⁹ MacDonald elucidates this point:

Look at Peat and Diesel - its pidgin Gaelic but it's making Gaelic quite cool for young kids because they love their music so all these kids will go to a Peat and Deisel thing sung in half English, half Gaelic. That can only be a good thing. Whether you like Peat and Deisel or not, on a quality level. I've heard lots of people talking about that. It doesn't matter in that sense, when an audience is coming in, when you've got school children coming in and it's making Gaelic cool.

¹²⁹ Investigation into what purity of culture means in this context requires further investigation.

Considering generations of Gaelic speakers were educated in English resulting in the gradual weakening of the language, it is important to see the value in its survival through in artistic reinterpretations. *An Lanntair* provides great opportunities for more traditional experiences such as *cèilidhs* as a community event for different generations. The *HebCelt* festival attracts global visitors with its promotion of cultural heritage including Gaelic and traditional music. MacDonald reports on the popularity of a traditional *cèilidh* instead of a club night:

When we had *cèilidhs* during the HebCelt as opposed to doing club nights. Visitors love it. The place is jumping when there's a *cèilidh* on. We've got a family *cèilidh* coming up at the start of December so we'll be doing more family *cèilidhs* to try and encourage the younger folk in. Keeps you fit as well! You've gotta be fit, you have to be fit to *cèilidh*. It's a great way of keeping fit. I think it's really good that more young people are interested in Gaelic itself and the language itself.

Involvement in events like this may play a vital role in more interest in Gaelic language revitalisation. All aspects of Gàidhealtachd culture are connected in that community events, language learning and other opportunities have all been increasing exponentially. MacDonald says that:

There's more opportunity full stop and people are always saying there's nothing. If you speak to each generation before, you find out what nothing was, you know, I think we are very entitled now in our society and don't stop and think about what we've got – the opportunities and resources that we have. I was talking about this the other day in here, we were offering art classes. I said I wish I had that when we were younger. I wish I had the opportunity to learn how to fuse glass or whatever it was because there was nothing like that. Same with the programme of music. People forget I think because *An Lanntair* has been here since 1985, we will be 40 years old in 2025. Because we have been here so long, folk forget that before we came along there was no opera, no theatre or cinema or even somebody regularly putting on traditional bands and I don't mean local bands but bringing the likes of Tidelands or Skipinnish. Now they take it for granted.

Just as the Gàidhealtachd maintained its distinct culture through the participation of indigenous islanders, MacDonald asserts that it is necessary for the whole community to participate and help mould the culture for fear of its loss:

Actually, it's not arrived it's a thing that's we're privileged to have. I keep shouting at folk 'use it or lose it!' because of the economic climate but it is the case [that] there is a lot of more opportunity. You have Duolingo if you want to learn a language, you've got Learn Gaelic on the TV. You've got a TV channel come on! When I was growing up, we had a [Gaelic language] programme but I didn't give much notice to it because I just didn't, I was a kid. It would be on at one at night, Gaelic programs would be tucked away on the telly, you know. Now you have Eòrpa, current affairs in Gaelic and [even] gardening.

There are also opportunities in urban areas such as the BBC for development of Gàidhealtachd culture including musical opportunities. This is useful to young people looking for a career like Calum Fraser but he prefers to explore opportunities on Lewis:

I think up here, from my own perspective because of Gaelic, so I've ended up getting roped into TV shows and gigs and session musician-ing and stuff like that on BBC Alba because of that connection and that wouldn't have happened if I was staying down in Glasgow and then when I was staying down in Glasgow, I could get gigs every other weekend. But I've found more meaningful creative opportunities up here.

The difference in the nature of the opportunities could be tied to the distinct cultural identity of the Gàidhealtachd on the Isle of Lewis. MacDonald discussed an experience of Glasgow being different from the Isle of Lewis for a music event that her daughter attended:

My daughter was saying to me, she was at Lord of the Rings live [event] on Friday night which was an orchestra playing. She called it "nerdy music." So Star Wars and all that kind of stuff and group of them went and I says that sound good. She says yeah, I really enjoyed it but it's Glasgow. What happens where[ever] you go to an orchestra anywhere. She said there was heckling there and giving it "go on yourself!" That's Glasgow culture. That's what my daughter said why is it in Glasgow [that they are like this?] I said this is part of who they are. They can't go anywhere including to a [orchestra event]. She said you put a concert on like that in *An Lanntair*, everyone knows what to do. It's a classical concert, it's quiet, you be respectful. She said I don't think the conductor knew what to do because he was getting heckled and when they went off, she said obviously they were going to do an encore because the orchestra stayed where they

were and the conductor went off. She said that group of people started stamping their feet and shouting “one more tune!”.

This respectful silence during the performance reflects the discreet and conscientious nature of the Gàidhealtachd culture of the Isle of Lewis which shows respect for tradition and cultural convention, in contrast to the more boisterous environment of large urban areas like Glasgow. As a musician, Fraser found that people are less attentive to performers in Glasgow and this is part of why he chooses to develop his career in Lewis:

...well we can play open mic nights or any pub or just organize it myself and get 50 quid and no one really cares what you are up to, you're just making some noise over there. But Gaelic is something that I care about so I want to try and get opportunities and get my foot in that door and be working in that sphere of Gaelic TV and Gaelic music and the Gaelic band that I'm in is new to me as well so it's kind of what I'm pushing for just now.

Music being performed in informal community settings seems to be central to how this distinct culture has maintained itself. Fraser reports that his main motivation is spreading enjoyment of the culture rather than any career orientated reasons. He says the meaning he finds in it is:

Nothing really other than just have fun and if people happen to listen to it and enjoy it then that's good. There's not like any kind of pressure on us to achieve anything. It would be nice if people heard it and enjoyed it. Not so much so that they would love our stuff but so that... as part of the process of normalising [Gaelic]. Community events – it's nice just putting on the event seeing people turn up and have a good time.

The success of these events depends on the community and everyone in the community gets to enjoy their success. People find enjoyment and meaning in bands with roots in the Gàidhealtachd without necessarily thinking about how their participation is keeping a cultural identity alive. This cultural identity is created through communal reinforcement in the same way that Sabbath observance is maintained; people see value and find meaning in participating in these events when they see these bands perform. That communal reinforcement brings the community together since they share in the meaning and likewise, the solemnity in the meaning is reinforced when others apply that meaning to their own lives and create further conversations between cultural participants. This can be said of many aspects of culture since it involves a kind of democratic involvement shaped by community

participation. In this way, music and culture help people open up to each other and build solidarity which according to Gutiérrez, leads to salvation.

3.3. Secularisation

Steve Bruce compares religious decline to Gaelic language use decline in the sense that they both require social support wherein the language must be used and religious culture must be participated in. In other words, ‘we need others who share our beliefs in order to sustain our convictions.’¹³⁰ He asserts that religion has core functions which are placating God, mediating between humankind and God, ensuring salvation and having access to spiritual power.

As Macleod and Aisthorpe point out, with the rise in Churchless Christians, these core functions do not necessarily entail Church attendance. Conversely, attending Church does not mean that attendees find meaning in these core functions. Bruce terms Church services for rites of passage such as births, deaths and marriages as “peripheral functions” which, along with Christianity, have a slower rate of decline on the Isle of Lewis. He credits the continued popularity of Church services for weddings and funerals rather than regular worship services to their ability to provide a solemnity and gravitas to the occasion.¹³¹ Finding meaning in the way a traditional Church service may mean that they are open to exploring their faith, as Macleod considers:

Where does the journey of faith start? Why do they want to get married in the Church in the first place? Is there something there? You can’t say where someone is on that journey so you can’t make any assumptions. So, I think if they wanted to get married in the Church, recognising that it is a Christian ceremony, and there is a commitment under God in what they are doing. I don’t make any judgements on that, I leave that with them and if they want to do that, I’ll honour that.

While individuals might not see faith as part of their everyday life, it could be that at a special time in their life, they feel that connecting with this part of their tradition adds to the occasion in a way that they find meaningful. This creates what Park described as cultural faith:

You might have someone who’s not a Church member and hasn’t picked up a Bible ever since their childhood but still wants that Church wedding

¹³⁰ Steve Bruce ‘God, Gaelic and Needlepoint: Religion and Social Accomplishment’ in Detlef Pollack and Daniel V.A. Olson (eds) *The Role of Religion in Modern Societies* (Routledge: New York, 2008) 52.

¹³¹ Ibid 53.

because they want God's blessing on their marriage but it's like, that gentle kind of cultural faith rather than an active [faith] but that's kind of beautiful in its own way.

Rather than being focused on belief, this cultural faith creates an orthopraxis that shows that the community values tradition and further reinforces the argument that the categories of religion and secular spirituality are not always relevant. Liberation theology posits the idea that it is possible to be in union with God without releasing because it is possible to act as Christ would without faith. They love their neighbour as they love themselves because they have their own reasons to believe this is moral. This means that salvation, of indigenous islander culture, depends on the community continuing to place value on the traditions for their own reasons. Macleod and Park discussed how divisions like this can hinder productive community conversations. When Park left the Church, he was worried he would have to have awkward conversations with members of his community and perceived that Christians might hold resentment towards him. However, Park says:

I can't think of any time that I've actually had a hostile conversation with somebody in person about a faith based issue and I've talked to some really militant people in person and even when they're laying it on thick. It's like when you're in that space [of questioning your faith], you're looking at them and you're not, I don't know how you can... I don't think I could enter into a prolonged sparring match with someone that was telling me about their faith because when you see they are really convicted by it then what do you gain by...

Macleod asks: 'fighting that?' Then Park says: 'yeah, what do you gain by fighting it. Unless you just like a fight.' Macleod compares this to a conversation he had with a member of the community he met during Christian street outreach:¹³²

I used to do street outreach on a Saturday night round the town when I was part of Martins Memorial [Church]. I remember having a conversation with one guy who was, you know, he wasn't absolutely drunk as a skunk but he was well on. But he knew the Quran inside and out and he was arguing against Christianity in favour of the Quran so I spent probably about an hour or an hour and a half defending Christian faith. It's almost like a jousting match and I was just like 'what just happened there?' And

¹³² Outreach is when a Church makes efforts to reach out to people who do not belong to the Church.

I spoke to somebody the next day and in fact, it was the minister at the time and explained what happened...

This was an unusual occurrence in the community since religion is usually considered a private matter. Therefore the minister was able to advise him:

You don't need to get into that, just tell him your testimony, just tell him about your faith.... not trying to defend the Church...not trying to defend Christian doctrine or belief.

This highlights how it is possible to separate talking about faith on a personal level and debating doctrine and politics. Discussion of broader issues can pertain to faith but there is often no reason to argue with someone's personal conviction. Appeals to faith when arguing are only meaningful to those with faith but this does not mean that there is an incongruence when discussing one's values. Park was worried that his lapse in faith would be met with the kind of hostility that Macleod was met with during outreach but he found that:

It was all me, it was all internal. It was all just extrusions of little fears that I had. Nothing that I could point to and say this happened. I guess that does happen to some people, like people I have spoken to that harbour a lot more resentment than I do, having left the Church but that's coz certain things happened to them that didn't happen to me that relate to people's cruelty rather than something that was like a function of the organisation.

It could be argued that experiences of cruelty that come from religious motivation is not the fault of religious culture itself but certain interpretations of that culture. Park values 'cultivating a kind-hearted spirit' and recognises this cultivation can also be done outside of the Church. He says:

I think that some of the loveliest, most gracious and wonderful people who you find in the Church, I think that there's definitely something that's happening that is catalysing their compassion with a lot of the teachings of Jesus that emphasise a lot of [compassion/kindness] but I think that also someone who has cultivated a kind-hearted spirit so that's how you have the coexistence of really nasty people who just happened to get involved in the Church because it's a good way to abuse power if you want to and then there's people who are kind hearted and gracious and I don't think its necessarily because of the faith that makes them one way or the other.

It could be disputed that someone without Christian faith cannot understand what Park means by “spirit” and there is no reason for him to continue to use religious terminology now he is not part of the religious community. When Park says “spirit” he might not mean he feels the presence of God in the same way as Calum MacPhee does. However, he used to attend Church regularly. He is also still part of religious community in the sense that the Isle of Lewis has a distinct religious culture and he has people close to him who are religious. Therefore, the term “spirit” will have connotations and meaning that he has picked up from years of engaging with that culture and with others. The term “spirit” is still meaningful and will be meaningful to others in the Gàidhealtachd.

While it is not exactly possible for an outsider to fully comprehend what Park means when he uses this term “spirit”, kind heartedness is a matter of connection to others so it ties back into MacKinnon’s definition of spirituality. Even if they no longer identify as Christian, those who belong to the Gàidhealtachd cultural identity may still understand their spirituality in a somewhat Christian framework. Just as Skipinnish’s lyrics ‘By grace of God’ can be understood on some level by those who do not believe in God. In this sense Christianity is part of the Gàidhealtachd cultural identity in the way it still influences understanding.

This shared understanding allows the community to sustain its convictions. Maintenance of these convictions often requires policing that outsiders might find cruel or harsh. For example, the conviction that anything not produced locally is a luxury may seem punitive to other cultures. This seemingly punitive aspect in religious culture is sometimes affiliated to the suspicion that Church members of those who identify as Christians only evoke sin to be vindictive or even abusive, for example, with reproductive and an LGBTQI+ issues. However Christianity has always been a significant part of the Gàidhealtachd cultural identity. Even without Christianity, Gàidhealtachd cultural identity places value on community, peace and kindness. These values are evidenced in orthopraxis like the continued observance of the Sabbath even for those without Christian faith. Ways of life that might seem obsolete to some, such as having a day of rest on a Sunday, should receive consideration since this culture has experienced loss to the point of near eradication and survived many crises. Father Ross argues that present problems are partially caused by too much focus on personal material wealth instead of these cultural values:

That’s what lacking I think and that’s why people just latch on to the economic thing, your material success and wealth and that’s not the measure of human life. There has to be more to identity than that and part of that is the rediscovering of cultural identity but then of course, you’re

going into the territory of...there's a big upsurge against patriarchy and white colonialism and all the rest of it, and we shouldn't take pride in our identity because it's actually something rubbish... I disagree with that entirely, every culture has its positives and its negatives and I will openly admit the negative of our culture – Gaelic, Scottish, British, whatever it happens to be but I'm not going to reject my culture because to do so is spiritual suicide.

Some atheists and agnostics may consider religion to have a negative impact on society and associate it with a form of patriarchal authoritarianism. It can be and has been argued that religion prevents us from creating a just and rational world and that religious ideas should therefore be abolished or weakened to the point of holding no sway in the political domain. This is because those without faith view theological claims as irrational since the authority of the Bible relies on faith rather than a procedure of verifiability. As a result, theological claims do not generally belong in domains of scientific reasoning and modern secular forms of ethics.¹³³

The Free Church of Scotland, for instance, has received attention because Church member, Kate Forbes was a candidate in the 2023 SNP Leadership campaign. During her candidacy, the Free Church was accused of being racist, homophobic and against reproductive rights. Alex J. MacDonald defends this by saying that that the Free Church is not homophobic in the sense that it fears or hates queer people because the commandment to love our neighbour as we love ourselves takes precedent. That being said he also asserts that the Free Church believes in the authority of the Bible which includes the condemnation of homosexuality as a sin. He compares this sin to “heterosexual sins” of greed, drunkenness and slander and expresses concern that the current push for banning conversion therapy might impinge on their right to condemn homosexuality as a sin when preaching or offering pastoral support.¹³⁴ However, research shows that conversion therapy has negative health affects including an 88% increase in the odds of attempting suicide.¹³⁵ This does not seem surprising since equating sexual identity with a sin like greed which those without faith can understand to be a negative trait, is likely to induce shame if internalised. Accordingly, it can reasonably be argued that Christianity places supreme value on loving one's neighbours;

¹³³ Matt Sheedy 'Religions are Inherently Violent' in Brad Stoddard and Craig Martin (eds) *Stereotyping Religion: Critiquing Clichés* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) 29.

¹³⁴ Alex J. MacDonald 'What is the Free Church of Scotland' *Scottish Affairs* 32.3 (2023) 290–308, 304.

¹³⁵ Government Equalities Office UK (2021) *Conversion therapy: an evidence assessment and qualitative study* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conversion-therapy-an-evidence-assessment-and-qualitative-study/conversion-therapy-an-evidence-assessment-and-qualitative-study#what-are-the-outcomes-of-conversion-therapy-1>

this evidence should outweigh other religious claims that pertain to policy despite a threat to Christian norms. Furthermore, the Bible condemns the wearing of mixed fabrics in multiple passages so there are other times where the authority of the Bible has yielded to “secular” reasoning since wearing certain clothing is not communally reinforced as a sin within the Free Church.¹³⁶ There may have been a time where reasons for using mixed fabrics such as clothing people more efficiently outweighed any religious reasons, suggesting a certain material impetus for change in the enforcement of doctrine which confirms its inherent malleability.

It could be argued that the idea that homosexuality is a sin is not communally reinforced either since Stornoway has held a LGBTQI+ Pride March since 2018 and the Na h-Eileanan Siar area has the lowest reported statistics for hate crime in the whole of Scotland.¹³⁷ As Macleod says regarding issues regarding Biblical authority “yeah I know it says don’t do this but what about loving your neighbour.” Loving your neighbour takes precedence even if the Bible can be interpreted to contradict that command. If a cultural identity relies on a Christian framework, this does not necessarily mean that their values are incongruent with progressive values as expressed in practice such as gender equality and sexual liberation.

Bruce argues that as society increases its prosperity, there will be increased demand for personal liberty that will lead to the erosion of traditions.¹³⁸ However, this theory does not consider how liberation theology utilises faith-based justifications to argue for the rights of the poor and oppressed. This is evident in the way that *Na Daoine* used faith-based arguments to argue against the civil powers that asserted their authority over the community and disrupted the indigenous islander way of life. Moreover, the indigenous islander way of life included fishing as a main source of survival and in the fishing communities of Scotland before industrialisation, gender norms differed in that the women ‘lacked the demeanour and accoutrements of Victorian femininity.’¹³⁹ It could be argued that the social formation of the fishers constituted a form of gender equality since the women had as much if not more responsibility than the men. This was because there was as much work to do on the shore as

¹³⁶ Leviticus 19.19 and Deuteronomy 22:11 New King James Version. This was also pointed out by fellow SNP MP John Nicholson <https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/23402670.snp-mp-calls-kate-forbes-sex-obsessed-religious-fundamentalist/>.

¹³⁷ Scottish Government *Developing Information on Hate Crime Recorded by the Police in Scotland* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/developing-information-hate-crime-recorded-police-scotland/> (2019).

¹³⁸ Steve Bruce ‘God, Gaelic and Needlepoint: Religion and Social Accomplishment’ in Detlef Pollack and Daniel V.A. Olson (eds) *The Role of Religion in Modern Societies* (Routledge: New York, 2008) 49.

¹³⁹ Jane Nadel-Klein *Fishing For Heritage: Modernity and Loss along the Scottish Coast* (Oxford: Berg, 2003) 59.

there was in the boats and the women had to be strong since it was their job to carry the men above their heads from the boats so they avoided the water ‘lest they never leave it again.’¹⁴⁰ While clearly practical for reasons such as preventing their feet getting wet, this also has superstitious element and there were other superstitions around women and fishing, such as it being bad luck for them to step barefoot over the nets.¹⁴¹ Ultimately progress is not a straight line and secularisation does not necessarily mean that a community has improved. While life before industrialisation would have been difficult with many people living in poverty, values that ensured subsistence have also been eroded by modernisation, creating a dependence on modern ways of living that actually increase the vulnerability of the community to emergent crises like cataclysmic climate change.

3.4. Well-being and Salvation

Salvation is the idea that human beings are in some unfavourable condition that demands overcoming. For many Christians in Gàidhealtachd Lewis with a Calvinist understanding, Salvation can only be achieved through divine intervention. Although this is often conceived of as being rewarded in heaven, some people believe in what Ninian Smart describes as “living liberation.”¹⁴² He asserts that this is partly because ‘some religions hold out hopes of a renewed blessed state that is community-orientated and located on this earth.’¹⁴³ It can be claimed that Calvinists do not believe in working hard purely for reward in heaven but also because of material demands for survival in this world. For this reason, those who believe in heaven do not necessarily give up on solving society’s problems especially if their belief includes McIntosh’s understanding of spirituality as the interconnectedness of all things. In this view the salvation of everyone and everything is inherently interdependent.

Regarding approaching crises that threaten this possible salvation, McIntosh says there is a paradox of privilege in that ‘we are materially richer than ever before and yet we suffer from a spiritual poverty that is hard to pin down.’¹⁴⁴ A definition of spirituality or spiritual well-being that Macleod and Park agree on is “living a purpose-driven life”. Spirituality is often concerned with working towards “living liberation” even if an individual does not believe that it is achievable. They discussed this using the somewhat Christian term of feeling or being “lost.” Park shared how he deals with this:

¹⁴⁰ Ibid 84.

¹⁴¹ Jane Nadel-Klein *Fishing For Heritage* 55.

¹⁴² Ninian Smart ‘Soteriology’ in Lindsay Jones (ed) *Encyclopedia of Religion, Volume 12* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005) 8526.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ McIntosh *Soul and Soil* 3.

I feel like that's something that I have had to develop since sort of moving away from belief in the Abrahamic God is to trust in... the everything... the *is-ness* of everything...to trust that I'm like held by it all rather than as a scared little mouse in the middle of a living room filled with people stamping their feet...you know, like assuming that things are... I guess... you can view the world as a big scary thing that is out to get you or something that is kind of caressing you and holding you there and I guess that's something that... faith in God gets people to... I kind of, you know, have gotten closer to that point myself since moving away from all of that so I guess that's an example of a secular...railway to that destination as well as a Christian way.

The analogy of being a scared little mouse conveys a powerlessness over one's life and an inability to find meaning or purpose. Macleod's faith impacts what he considers to be a purpose-driven life:

There's a book I forget the name of it that describes life and what you do in life and where you are at in life as....it makes a comparison of a sweet spot like in golf... when you hit the sweet spot Its purpose-driven life. And so when you've found your purpose, you've found your identity, you've found your place.... Everything is just right... [Scott] said the word harmony... there's no one spot on the place of the golf club that that's where the ball should be hit and that's where it's going to go the further and the most accurate.... finding that sweet spot in life is... I guess what we are all trying to do.

For Macleod this sweet spot can be discovered through faith in God and how Jesus advised them to live out that faith in God:

That's about that kind of when Jesus kind of breaks down the Ten Commandments to love God and love your neighbour...and everything else comes from that... and that's where your sweet spot is... so I, from a faith perspective I don't think we can find that sweet spot without God, without faith... because there's a sense of why am I here...sense of purpose, a sense of meaning, a sense of value that exists within...or should exist within your faith... you are a child of God.

Park quotes Ecclesiastes when he describes how he arrived at the way he finds meaning in the present moment:

Coming at it from more of an absurdist point of view, where I feel like, if you probe and probe and probe.... ok if I say that everything is pointless, ultimately.... well everything is pointless and everything is the most meaningful it could ever be.... Everything just is and you can take it one way or the other.... all is vanity¹⁴⁵ is not a necessarily a negative statement it's just....

Macleod interjects: 'Get out of yourself?' And Park responds:

It's get out of yourself!! I really want to reread Ecclesiastes. It's kind of like a Zen Buddhist text in a way... and like that Zen Buddhist thing about doing the dishes.... Are you angry about doing the dishes? Or are you happy? No there's just doing the dishes... and I heard...there's a lot of Jesus' teachings that deal with being in the present moment.... Like a lot of talk about the presence of God... and I look back on all that now and if only I understood that as.... God being found in the present moment rather than being this lofty kind of alternate dimension...

Macleod agrees with this understanding and responds 'You are living it. You can have it. That's the sweet spot.' Scott: 'You are already ok. You don't need to keep trying you are already ok and I guess that's Grace, isn't it?'

This conversation illuminates the spirituality that might still be present in atheistic or agnostic members of the Gàidhealtachd communities. From both points of view, spiritual well-being depends on whether a person can answer why am I here in a way that they find meaningful. Whether that meaning is spiritual or religious, that meaning is more easily found with social support and through communing with others who share our beliefs and as Bruce says, 'sustain our convictions.' Alastair McIntosh describes how the Isle of Lewis has a history of communal living where up until the recent introduction of certain government regulations, houses were built as a community:

Nobody even knocked on doors in those days, and many houses had no locks fitted. You went in and out of other people's houses as if they were extensions of your own. If you were hungry, you would be fed; if you were cold, you would be warmed by the peat fire; if you were naughty, you would be ticked off, because the village was like an extended family.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Ecclesiastes 1:2–3 New King James Version.

¹⁴⁶ MacIntosh *Soul and Soil* 12.

As Father Ross mentioned there are still vestiges of this way of life in community organisations such as grazing committees who decide democratically how the land should be worked. While there are still aspects of this culture practised today, many young people are struggling to find their place in the community. Further to this, climate change threatens that we may never reach “lived liberation.” This simpler way of life is under threat as McIntosh says the community has ‘one foot in an apparently dying indigenous world, and the other hard down on the accelerator of progress.’¹⁴⁷ The downside of this progress is losing ways of life that have the potential to prepare us for crises that could necessitate a new way of life based on the adoption of practices comparable to those that have sustained life on Lewis successfully for so long. Fraser says:

I think minority cultures have generally been brushed to the side and are dying all the time and a lot of them are much, much older cultures than the main ones today and are much more connected to the land and have much more knowledge of the land and that kind of thing.

While there may be more opportunity if one leaves the island at the moment, looking at the bigger picture requires considering the many crises facing that society as a whole. MacPhee explains how school encouraged him and his classmates to pursue their career through academic study, which often meant leaving their community for urban areas:

From my experience, school wanted to channel us all into [university] and [they said] it was the best thing ever and [university] is part of the journey but you have to look at the big picture. You look at boys who left school at 16 and went to drive diggers. I got a guy in to do my back garden and he worked for a day and two hours the next day and he made £90 driving a digger. If you are happy with the life here and thus, when I look around the tradesmen and that generally, I think it is related to a lack of ambition because it is just a fact of life that there isn’t a lot happening here. So it’s a lack of ambition, loving the comforts of home, appreciating family and there’s so many people who leave the Islands to go to [university] or college or whatever to do their plumbing or whatever and they come back ten years later because they just need to be here. That is very interesting. That is very interesting. There is such a draw back to the Islands, it’s fascinating.

¹⁴⁷ McIntosh *Soul and Soil* 3.

It could be argued that it is this “lack of ambition” is what is at odds with the larger scale world of unchecked expansion of industry and commerce. This indicates that people on Lewis find greater meaning in preserving a community that values peace, simplicity and close connection. It could be argued that this character is as vital to the cultural identity of the Gàidhealtachd as the Gaelic language. MacDonald explains how the language is just one aspect of their cultural identity:

There are many people here that I can think of that, certainly working in here, who is that very person who came here 30 years ago and made their life here and very much has integrated themselves and are very active in the community, got into the culture...out cutting peat, cutting their own peats out so don't get me wrong there are people like that but unfortunately, they are not the majority. The majority come on holiday and see a lovely view and go “oh this is fabulous; I'm going to get a cheap house” well a cheap house relatively if you are moving up from down south. Then they start asking “why don't we have a Marks and Spencers?” If you want a Marks and Spencers, stay where you are...that is not just here...that is across every island...every island I go to tell me the same thing...people need to do their research before they come to an island.

There is some debate about who “counts” as a Gael in which it is contested if Gaelic identity should be based upon ancestry or language ability or otherwise which is not possible to fully lay out here. Iain MacKinnon theorises that the most workable identity maker would be an inclusive definition based on whether one resided in Gàidhealtachd Scotland.¹⁴⁸ The exact border would be difficult to define because it would be difficult to determine a way which areas would count as having a high enough level of Gaelic language use. However, it is necessary to find a workable definition so the rights and shared interests of the community can be best protected by wider society as an indigenous and minority cultural heritage. Part of their cultural heritage is the way they connect with their environment, for instance through crofting or cutting peat for fire. Therefore, these practices should be considered more than a “stereotypical core” of Gael identity because they are part of an indigenous way of life that should be protected.¹⁴⁹ MacDonald describes what integration means to her in terms of this preservation:

¹⁴⁸ Iain MacKinnon ‘Recognizing and Reconstituting Gàidheal identity’ *Scottish Affairs* 30.2 (2021) 215.

¹⁴⁹ Timothy Currie Armstrong, Wilson McLeod, Robert Dunbar, Stuart Dunmore, Bernadette O'Rourke, and Michelle Macleod ‘Gaelic and Identity: A Response to Iain MacKinnon’ *Scottish Affairs* 31:1 (2022), 79.

Anyone can learn a language but if you don't have a cultural background that concerns Gaels more. You can speak Gaelic fluently but can you cut a peat? Do you know what the lifestyle is? If I was going to, say, Brittany, would I go there and say I'm not speaking your language, you need to speak mine... that kind of thing... No, I wouldn't do that and think that's because we have our own language and culture. In fact, people who move in here from other countries are a lot more likely to understand and adapt to the culture here because they already have a strong culture, you have Syrian people, Afghan people, Polish people...they seem to just understand it.... Because they already speak another language so.... Because quite a lot of these Eastern Europeans go to Church mostly Catholic but they do go to Church so they understand that we are a religious community and that's fine we come from one too... So, I think people who move in from other countries actually integrate better...

In this sense, the preservation of the unique cultural identity of the Gàidhealtachd, especially in comparison to modernity, can be considered a form of salvation for the community. For example, through communal reinforcement the community continues to observe the Sabbath despite the advantages of commercial and tourist activity on a Sunday. In this way culture can reproduce practices, both religious and secular that will maintain a historical sense of place and a corresponding identity.¹⁵⁰ If this cultural identity is allowed to thrive, it can make a vital contribution to our “lived liberation” or at least assist with finding solutions and ways of coping with approaching challenges.

Conclusion: Shared Values and Indigeneity

The historical resilience of communities like the Gàidhealtachd, with their long traditions of communal living and subsistence, can provide a model from which to derive alternative modes of living equipped to deal with crises. It can be stated that the Gaels have an indigenous identity that is at odds with other larger scale social formations that continue to expand despite climate change and other crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, worsening income equality and intensifying culture wars. The constituents of this identity can be difficult to define because Gaelic language use has been affected by the imposition of English language education and many Gaels were displaced from the Gàidhealtachd. An inclusive definition would be unfavourable because it ‘would mean that claiming Gael

¹⁵⁰ David Beel and Claire Wallace ‘Getting together’ 698.

identity would effectively be a matter of unpredictable individual choice.’¹⁵¹ However, the UN’s definition of indigeneity can be applied to the Gàidhealtachd islander in the sense that it aims to preserve, develop and transmit the way of life in accordance with its own cultural patterns.¹⁵² This definition of indigenous allows for the Gàidhealtachd culture to be included despite the lack of a clear border. It could be argued that this is because Gaels are also Scots and some identify as British. For this reason, it could be said that identity in this region can only be understood in terms of a spectrum and some people are Gaels because they speak the language and others because they have engaged in the community. It could be stated that the Gaels are those who uphold the traditions and interests of the Gàidhealtachd. Some of these traditions are perceived as belonging to Scotland as a whole such as ‘Highland dress’ like tartan kilts and some belong under the umbrella of “Celtic” such as handfasting. MacDonald tells a story about a tradition that her daughter found repulsive in Glasgow:

They eat steak pie at New Year. They ought to be ashamed of themselves [because] they put sausages in steak pie. I remember how shocked she was when she discovered. She was at someone’s house. She said, ‘they’re having steak pie.’ I said, ‘I suppose its tradition down there, its venison here but hey ho’...and she phoned me and said, she was so shocked...’there’s sausages in their steak pie, it’s disgusting! They don’t even know what a steak pie is. Its vile. They don’t understand the concept of having a local butcher the way we do.

The location of the Isle of Lewis could explain some of these traits of Gàidhealtachd culture that have been discussed such as the peacefulness but there is also a distinction in their cultural patterns and social institutions. Gàidhealtachd communities have collectively come together to form organisations to buy land on South Uist, Eriskay and parts of Benbecula. The aims of these community buyouts are described by the community-owned company, *Stòras Uibhist* as ‘developing and supporting the natural, social and economic assets of the Islands to foster a vibrant and sustainable economy; reverse population decline; protect local crofting practices; and generate employment opportunities for future generations.’¹⁵³

Through community ownership, it is possible to protect this way of life and organise social formations in a way that benefits and protects both members of the community and

¹⁵¹ Armstrong et al ‘Gaelic and Identity: A Response to Iain MacKinnon’ 79.

¹⁵² Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations *State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples* https://web.archive.org/web/20100215113446/http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/SOWIP_web.pdf (2009).

¹⁵³ *Stòras Uibhist* <https://storasuibhist.com/> (2018).

the environment through sustainable practices. In prioritising sustainability, community-owned land is likely to be better prepared for crises. Maintaining this culture has not always been possible and in 1930 the last 36 inhabitants left St Kilda due to their way of life no longer being sustainable. This fragility highlights the importance of community organisation as Father Ross says:

There are groups here because we are more fragile here, we have to fight our corner for things, if you don't speak up the community lives on a bit of a knife edge, we saw what happened in Kilda. It was because life was no longer sustainable, you think after 10,000 years of living there, you think in the modern age, life is no longer sustainable? That's amazing.

This reflects Alastair McIntosh's sentiments regarding his involvement in land reform. He says at the launch of the Land Trust for Eigg, the community was asked if they were:

really to be fobbed off with the suggestion that lifestyles based on industrial intoxication, nuclear umbrellas, agricultural soil degradation, land expropriation from the powerless and unjust trade relations with the Third World are somehow "viable"?¹⁵⁴

The community of Eigg decided that these aspects of society were not viable and chose sustainable alternatives. Climate change and other crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, worsening income equality and intensifying culture wars demand that we ask this question and imagine alternatives. This requires community organisation but in recent decades, the principles of community and social welfare have been devalued and replaced with 'individualised notions of resilience, wellness and self-improvement.'¹⁵⁵ These societal values were evidently inefficient during the pandemic and highlighted how our society has failed to care for the vulnerable.¹⁵⁶

Progress is not always linear and what might be progress for some might not necessarily be progress for others. Secularism argues that it will only be possible to create a just and rational world without religion but much of the Gàidhealtachd still includes Sabbath observance in their view of a just and rational world.¹⁵⁷ As Father Ross said this practise is a social equaliser, so while the religious community might value hard work, they also value

¹⁵⁴ Alastair McIntosh *Riders on the Storm: The Climate Crisis and the Survival of Being* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2020) 187.

¹⁵⁵ Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg and Lynne Segal *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* (London: Verso Books, 2020) 2.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Matt Sheedy 'Religions are Inherently Violent' 29.

rest. The Sabbath is a time of rest for people of all backgrounds so this practice asserts that no one is less deserving of this time. This can be compared with attitudes to social inequality in the rest of the UK. Frances Ryan's social commentary on the UK's ideological social exclusion of those in poverty can be examined and compared to the culture of the Isle of Lewis with its social equalising practice of Sabbath keeping. Frances Ryan cites YouGov surveys of the rest of the UK which show that only 39% thought that everyone, including those on minimum wage or benefits, deserve to pursue a nonactive hobby and only 27% believe those on any income should have the chance to go out socialising.¹⁵⁸ More related to religious practices, YouGov also asked the people of the UK if they thought that seasonal celebrations, such as Christmas, should be attainable for all and only 60% agreed.¹⁵⁹ This is unfortunately understandable since those who claim benefits are stigmatised throughout the British mass media as part of a long-running pro-austerity propaganda campaign and as Ryan says:

In a country where it's now normalised for a home, access to basic utilities and regular meals to be out of reach for many, it's easy to become convinced that hobbies and entertainment are unreasonable requests. Before you know it, celebrating Christmas will be a privilege saved for those in the higher tax bands.

This normalisation comes from politicians who, even in the midst of a 'cost of living' crisis, respond to growing poverty and hardship with only one solution; that people must work harder and if they are not productive enough, they will be punished with deprivation of pleasure and rest.¹⁶⁰ Just like Sabbath observance is no longer practised on the mainland, there is also a decline in people's ability to take time off for holidays like Christmas because there is consumer demand for businesses to be open. Rather than being a time of consumerism and celebration, for the Free Church, Christmas is a time to reflect on Christ's sacrifice and Rev. Iver Martin encourages reflection:

It was into this dangerous, suffering and volatile world that Jesus came, not as a distant bystander but as a real human participant, knowing firsthand the kind of inconvenience, hardship, poverty, and sadness that was common to others around him. Jesus is unique, not simply because of

¹⁵⁸ Frances Ryan 'Britons have become so mean that many of us think poor people don't deserve leisure time' *The Guardian* (UK) 8th August 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/aug/08/britain-poor-people-leisure-victorian-workhouse>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

his miraculous power but because he personally identified with hurting people.¹⁶¹

Evidently, contrary to many popular misconceptions, these Christian practises can encourage progressive values such as addressing income equality and supporting the vulnerable. This class-based stigma is less likely to exist in a community that takes pride in its ability to make sure no one goes without through communal sharing of resources as part of their cultural heritage. Unfortunately, modernity, meaning among other things a reliance on consumerism and tourism has hindered this ability and diminished this aspect of their heritage. Revitalisation of this aspect would be difficult to measure but other aspects are experiencing a revitalisation including the Gaelic language as well as land reform through community trusts. Alastair McIntosh reports that with ‘over 400 such land trusts now in place, more than half a million acres – nearly 3 percent of the nation’s land – has come under the democratically accountable control of its own residents.’¹⁶² In this way the Gàidhealtachd is in more solidarity than the rest of Scotland. These new forms of democracy have the ability to revitalise the assets of the Gàidhealtachd community. More research should be done on the connections between religious and spiritual ideology and community led movements for developing and supporting community assets with a focus on sustainability, protecting crofting practises and the natural environment as well as generating opportunities for future generations. This should encompass land reform movements, language revitalisation initiatives, historic societies and other grassroots movements to create opportunities for the Gàidhealtachd. There is also much to explore regarding the religious or spiritual reasons for creating art and music that has roots in Gàidhealtachd culture. Through these community-led initiatives the community of the Gàidhealtachd can sustain and develop its resilience and provide an exemplar of how society might want to live if it is to survive the crises to come.

¹⁶¹ Rev. Iver Martin ‘Who Says Christmas Should be Happy?’ *Free Church of Scotland* <https://freeChurch.org/who-says-christmas-should-be-happy/>.

¹⁶² Alastair McIntosh *Riders on the Storm* 187.

Appendices

Participant Information FAQ: Plain Language Statement	
Study title and Researcher Details	
Title	Culture, Crisis and Salvation in Stornoway
Researcher	Eilidh Harris (e.harris.2@research.gla.ac.uk)
Supervisor	Ophira Gamliel (ophira.gamliel@glasgow.ac.uk)
Course:	Research Masters, Theology and Religious Studies
Department	Theology and Religious Studies School of Critical Studies University of Glasgow Glasgow G12 8QL
Invitation	
<p>You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.</p>	
What is the purpose of the study?	
<p>The purpose of my dissertation is to help preserve religious culture, such as hymns, prayers and songs – as well as their importance to the community in times of major changes. You are free to discuss anything that you feel is important to preserve. I am particularly interested in stories about times of crisis and how music can bring strength in times of hardship. I have a small amount of Gaelic and I'm very interested in learning more.</p>	
Why have I been chosen?	
<p>I am particularly interested in speaking to those who have lived from the sea – or their family have in the past. I approach you because you are a member of a community whose resilience to the currently ongoing crises of heat waves and floods, food and energy security, and economic challenges is crucial for our national strength. As a musician and artist myself, I wish to better understand how our culture supports our communities and our people at the face of challenges and hardships.</p>	
Do I have to take part?	
<p>You do not need to take part unless you would like to.</p>	
What will happen to me if I take part?	
<p>You are being invited to take part in an audio-recorded interview about how religious culture and traditions continue to play an important role in Stornoway life. The interview will not last more than 1 hour.</p>	

<p>You will not be asked about anything upsetting or sensitive. You are free to discuss anything relating to your cultural heritage. You will be allowed to take breaks or end the interview whenever you need to and without giving reason.</p>	
<p>Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?</p>	
<p>Because of the nature of the study please note that confidentiality may not be possible.</p> <p>If you change your mind about taking part, you may withdraw your participation without giving reason at any point until the dissertation is submitted (December 2022) by emailing e.harris.2@research.gla.ac.uk. This does not apply to those who have been interviewed anonymously. However, you will not be able to withdraw content once the dissertation has been submitted (December 2022). You can also let me know if you still want to take part, but don't want us to include a particular part of your interview.</p> <p>Please note that assurances of confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.</p>	
<p>What will happen to the project data and the results of the research study?</p>	
<p>The interviews will be used as evidence for a dissertation to be submitted and assessed for my degree. The dissertation (and edited versions of the recordings) will be available to the public. You will be credited by name.</p>	
<p>Who has reviewed the study?</p>	
<p>Materials relating to the study have been reviewed and approved by members of the College of Arts Research Ethics panel.</p>	
<p>Application reference number: 100210153</p>	<p>Date of approval letter:</p>
<p>How can I access information relating to me or complain if I suspect information has been misused/ used for purposes other than I agreed to?</p>	
<p>You can contact the researcher or their supervisor in the first instance if you have any concerns. If you are not comfortable doing this, or if you have tried but don't get a response or if the person in question appears to have left the University, you can contact the College of Arts Ethics Officer (email: arts-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk).</p> <p>Where there appear to have been problems, you can – and indeed may be advised to – submit an 'access request' or an objection to the use of data. As part of the University's obligations under UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR),</p>	

participants retain the rights to access and objection with regard to the use of non-anonymised data for research purposes.

1. Access requests and objections can be submitted via the UofG online proforma accessible at: <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/dpfoioffice/gdpr/gdprrequests/#>.
2. Access requests and objection are formal procedures not because we mean to intimidate participants into not raising issues, but rather because the University is legally required to respond and address concerns. The system provides a clear point of contact, appropriate support and a clear set of responsibilities.
3. Anyone who submits a request will need to provide proof of their identity. Again, this is not to deter inquiries, but rather reflects the University's duty to guard against fraudulent approaches that might result in data breaches.
4. You also have the right to lodge a complaint against the University regarding data protection issues with the Information Commissioner's Office (<https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>).

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT FORM

I understand that **Eilidh Harris** is collecting data in the form of **audio-recorded interviews** for use in an academic research project at the University of Glasgow.

I have read the information sheet outlining the project and its methods and had the opportunity to ask any questions arising from that.

I consent to participate in the interviews on the following terms:

1. I can leave any question unanswered.
2. The interview can be paused or stopped at any point.

I agree to the processing of data for this project on the following terms:

1. Use and storage of research data in the University of Glasgow reflects the institution's educational/ research mission and its legal responsibilities in relation to both information security and scrutiny of researcher conduct.
 - a. As part of this, under UK legislation (UK General Data Protection Regulation [UK GDPR]), I understand and accept that the **lawful basis** for the processing of personal data is that the project constitutes a **public task**, and that any processing of special category data is 'necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research'.
 - b. I understand that I have the right to **access** data relating to me or that I have provided and to **object** where I have reason to believe it has been misused or used for purposes other than those stated.
 - c. Project materials in both physical and electronic form will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage (locked physical storage; appropriately encrypted, password-protected devices and University user accounts) at all times.
2. It is likely interviews will be transcribed and the recordings and transcriptions will be available to the public when the project is completed (e.g. given to local cultural heritage organisations for archiving).
3. NAMED PARTICIPATION:
 - a. If I choose to take part as a named participant, all names and other material likely to identify other individuals will be redacted/ removed.
 - b. I may withdraw from the project at any time up until its completion date without being obliged to give a reason. In that event all record of my remarks of will be destroyed immediately.
4. PSEUDONYM USE
 - a. I can choose to be referred to by a pseudonym of my choosing. All names and material likely to identify other individuals will be redacted/ removed.
 - b. I may withdraw from the project at any time up until its completion date without being obliged to give a reason. In that event all record of my remarks of will be destroyed immediately.
5. ANONYMOUS PARTICIPATION:

- a. If I choose to take part as an anonymous participant, my name and all identifying information will be redacted/ removed. All other names and other material likely to identify individuals will be redacted/ removed. This process will be completed by 1 November 2022. After this, the data will be deemed to have been anonymised.
 - b. I understand that once the data collected is anonymised, in accordance with UK legislation (General Data Protection Regulation [UK GDPR]), it may be used for the purposes of the project without further reference back to me. However, I understand that I may request access or raise an objection if I have legitimate grounds for concern that I remain directly identifiable from it or that it has been used for purposes other than those stated.
6. Project materials will be retained in secure storage by the University for ten years for archival purposes (longer if the material is consulted during that time). Consent forms will also be retained for the purposes of record.
 7. The dissertation will be available in the public domain via the University Library website. Project materials may be used in future research and be cited and discussed in future publications, both print and online.

TICK AS APPROPRIATE:

- I agree to take part in the above study on the condition I remain anonymous.

OR

- I agree to take part in the above study on the condition my name is replaced with a pseudonym of my choosing.

OR

- I agree to take part in the above study and wish to be cited by name. I understand that I will be allowed to see and approve use of my comments in pre-publication drafts of any outputs.

ALL PARTICIPANTS:

- I agree to the terms for data processing as outlined above.
- I confirm I have been given information on how to exercise my rights of access and objection.

Name of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Researcher's name and email:	Eilidh Harris (e.harris.2@research.gla.ac.uk)
Course organiser's name and email:	Ophira Gamliel (ophira.gamliel@glasgow.ac.uk) Sarah Nicholson (sarah.nicholson@glasgow.ac.uk)
Department address:	Theology and Religious Studies School of Critical Studies University of Glasgow Glasgow G12 8QL

Four Lead Questions for an Unstructured Interview

- Are there any Scottish/Gaelic folksongs, sea songs, hymns or prayers that you would like to share?
- In what way do the meaning of these relate to your life or community?
- Do you think it is important to preserve these traditions? If so, why? If not – why not?
- Can you tell me a little bit about how these songs/stories/prayers were handed down to you?

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