



Image of the day

Cross of sacrifice at Beaumont-Hamel



Call to Methodist people to roll up a sleeve and get vaccinated

The President and the Lay Leader of the Methodist Church in Ireland have written to members encouraging them to take the Covid-19 vaccine, to support a generous sharing of vaccines throughout the world.

Rev Thomas R McKnight and Mrs Hazel A Loney state -

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected every country in the world. Very few countries have been able to limit its impact, and for most, Covid-19 continues to be a very serious threat.

However, the rapid development of several safe and effective vaccines is good news. We give thanks to God for this precious gift. As with many precious gifts, we want to

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ensure that vaccines are used effectively and shared generously.

With this in mind, we want to raise several important issues with our Methodist people, and with all who will listen.

Firstly, we want to encourage people to take the vaccine whenever it is offered to them. It is safe and effective. There are very few people who will, on medical grounds, be advised not to have the vaccine. We can see no moral or ethical grounds on which Methodist people should refuse the vaccine. Indeed, it is essential that there is as high an uptake as possible, in order to maximise the effectiveness of the vaccination programme at national level.

Secondly, we recognize that many countries in the developing world do not have the resources to roll out mass vaccination on the same scale, or at the same pace, as we do. As Christians we have a responsibility to care for our neighbour – the one next door and the one at the other end of the planet. Accordingly, we must support a generous sharing of vaccines throughout the world. Some may argue this from a self-interest point of view – ‘no one is safe until all are safe’. There may be truth in that, but as Christians our greater motivation is love and justice.

In this regard there are a number of issues we should consider and engage with, prayerfully, practically and politically.

Cost: Wealthy countries and pharmaceutical companies should ensure that poorer regions do not miss out on vaccines simply because of finance.

Education: We recognize that for cultural and other reasons there may be a great reluctance to avail of vaccinations in some places (and not just in the developing world).

The WHO, national governments, and indeed all of us, have a responsibility to promote responsible and accurate messages about vaccine safety and effectiveness.

Recognizing other threats: Whilst Covid-19 is the dominant issue at present, we call attention to the fact that over the next few years it is likely that in the developing world more people will die from malaria, malnutrition, and a host of other largely preventable causes than from Covid-19. In dealing fairly with COVID-19 vaccines, we should not neglect these wider and longstanding issues of global injustice.

In conclusion, we call on our Methodist people to roll up one sleeve and get vaccinated. Then, roll up both sleeves to work and pray for greater justice in the task of overcoming Covid-19 throughout the world, of which the Lord has made us all His stewards.

Vatican may fire employees who refuse vaccine

The Vatican is taking Pope Francis's pro-vaccine stance very seriously, decreeing that any employee who refuses to get a Covid-19 vaccine without a valid medical reason risks being fired.

A February 8 decree signed by the governor of the Vatican city-state says that employees who opt out of vaccination



without a proven medical reason could be subject to sanctions up to and including “the interruption of the relationship of employment”.

The directive cited the need to protect Vatican employees in the workplace, as well as guidelines issued by Francis's advisory Covid-19 commission, which said individuals had a moral responsibility to get vaccinated “given that refusing a vaccine can constitute a risk for others”.

The decree sparked heated debate on Thursday, since its provisions go well beyond the generally voluntary nature of Covid-19 vaccinations in Italy and much of the rest of the world. The Vatican is an absolute monarchy in the heart of Rome that operates independently of Italian law and Italian labour protections.

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Some Catholics and other believers have expressed faith-based concerns about vaccines because some of the products available were indirectly connected to research that used aborted foetal cells.

The Vatican's doctrine office has judged it morally acceptable for Catholics to receive Covid-19 vaccines, including those that relied on research using cells derived from aborted fetuses.

Vaccines are not mandatory in Italy, where Europe's coronavirus outbreak erupted this time last year and which has the highest pandemic death toll of any European country except Britain.

Some doctors and nurses who have expressed anti-vaccine sentiments or scepticism about the virus have been threatened with professional sanctions.

The Italian government's bioethics committee said in November that while it could not rule out the need to require vaccines for members of highly exposed groups, such as medical personnel, any move to mandate Covid-19 jabs must be “discussed within their professional associations and be revoked as soon as there is no longer a significant risk for the collective”.

The Vatican, which has around 5,000 employees, is on its way to becoming perhaps the first country to complete its adult vaccination campaign. Francis himself has received both of the required doses, and the Vatican has expanded its vaccine offerings to also cover homeless people.

Myanmar: Irish and Scottish Presbyterian leaders write to Foreign Secretary

Following this month's military coup in Myanmar, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce, has joined with his Scottish counterpart in urging the UK government to 'do all that it can to ensure the restoration of democracy which fully respects the November election.'

Dr Bruce made the call with the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Rt Rev Dr W Martin Fair, in a joint letter to the Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP. Both churches have worked closely with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) for many years and were keen to support their south-east Asian brothers and sisters in Christ, while drawing attention to PCM's statement on the coup d'état, which Rev Ramthanga, the Myanmar church's General Secretary, issued in advance of its General Assembly this week.

In their letter, the two church leaders said, 'Our shock at the news of the military coup on 1 February was all the sharper because of our concern for our friends in PCM and the implications of the takeover by General Min Aung Hlaing.

'Myanmar suffered 49 years of brutal military rule that ended as recently as 2011. In the past decade people have enjoyed increasing freedoms, some political progress and increased, if imperfect, economic growth. The fate of the



Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rt Rev Dr David Bruce

Rohingya people shows that not all in Myanmar are treated equally.

‘We fully endorse a statement released by the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar in condemning oppression and calling for the release from house arrest of the State Counsellor, [Aung San Suu Kyi] President [Win Myint] and other elected leaders without exception.’

Rev Uel Marrs, Secretary to PCI’s Council for Global Mission, explained that for many years it had been challenging for PCI to develop a strong relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar on the ground, which is now recognised as one of PCI’s Global Mission Partners. “Due to the political situation in Myanmar from the early 1960s, we were only able to maintain the relationship with PCM at a distance,” Mr Marrs said.

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Initial contact, with PCM began in the early 1980s and with the political and economic reforms that led to the ending of more than five decades of military dictatorship in 2011, Church's General Secretary at that time, Rev Ling Zaw, was able to attend PCI's General Assembly in Belfast in 2016.

“As a church, we have been able to work together with PCM in a range of ways, with a focus on scholarships for students in a variety of disciplines. In 2019 PCI's Mission Support Officer for Partnerships, spent 10 days in Myanmar, developing the relationship with PCM leadership and visiting projects,” Mr Marrs continued.

“With more than 30,000 members, the Church is a small denomination in a majority Buddhist country of over 50 million people. Given what has happened, I very much welcome this initiative by our Church and the Church of Scotland.”

In their joint letter, the two Moderators also said, ‘We join with PCM in urging the authorities not to cause any harm anyone in the Civil Disobedience Movement who are pursuing non-violent means of protest and pray, as our PCM brothers and sisters in Christ say in their statement, ‘that love, peace, tranquillity, human rights and dignity may rule [their] government; that there would be no oppression; and that federal democracy would be implemented successfully.’

Dr Bruce and Dr Fair concluded their letter to Mr Raab by urging the Foreign Secretary to ‘take a leading role in building an international diplomatic response, which supports the people of Myanmar and the government they have elected.’



Respected organ builder made helping others his life's mission

David McElderry, who has died after an illness, was a greatly respected organ builder and church musician whose work was highly regarded throughout Great Britain and Ireland. He was 64, Alf McCreary writes in the Belfast Telegraph.

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Dr Joe McKee, a local organist, musician and radio producer, was among those paying tribute to Mr McElderry. “David will be a great loss to the Ulster Society of Organists and Choirmasters, which he supported selflessly, not least as president for two years from 2000 onwards,” he said. “He was a gentlemanly and modest man. In a niche corner of the business world where bows and arrows are often used with almost reckless abandon, he let his workmanship and craft speak for themselves.

“He was at heart a thoroughly nice person and one whose motive in life was to help others who asked for his advice or support.”

Mr McElderry, the son of a GP, was born at Whitehouse in 1956, but instead of studying medicine like his father, he chose a career in organ building.

As a pupil at Campbell College, Belfast, his interest in the instrument was sparked by repairs being made to the organ in the school hall after water leaking from the roof damaged its pipework.

After leaving school, he became a management trainee with the Wells-Kennedy Partnership in Lisburn, one of Northern Ireland's most notable organ building companies of the past 50 years.

He rose steadily within the firm, becoming a partner in 1980. He became the managing director in 2007 after the death of Christopher Gordon Wells, his senior colleague and mentor. Mr McElderry's legacy will survive for many years. He and his company built many new organs and rebuilt numerous

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others in churches across Northern Ireland. His firm also carried out significant restorations and rebuilds at cathedrals in Newry, Armagh and Londonderry.

It also maintained the organs in Derry's Guildhall, the Mulholland Grand Organ in the Ulster Hall and the organs at Queen's and Ulster University.

One of Mr McElderry's more recent projects was creating a virtually new organ for the Portico Arts Centre in Portaferry, opened by the Prince of Wales.

He was also involved in building and caring for very small house organs for local clients and in Edinburgh, where his business built two outstanding instruments for the Church of Scotland.

Mr McElderry was a talented male alto and a long-time member of the choir at St George's Church in Belfast, which maintained a high level of organ and choir musicianship.

As a younger man, he was a member of the choir at Donegall Square Methodist Church in the city centre, which after its closure became the head office of Ulster Bank. Dr McKee said: "It was David's interest in music, either in attending choral recitals or orchestral concerts in the Ulster Hall, that informed his vision when it came to creating musical instruments of true calibre. He will be greatly missed as a person and as an individual who possessed vast practical knowledge and irreplaceable manual skills."

Mr McElderry never married, but he is survived by his sister, Norah.

Opinion - The Wonders of Europe's Wunderbear

Kevin Myers writes

The dog that didn't bark in the night is always the give-away.

There are almost no dogs barking across Europe at the calamitous failure of the European Union to protect its citizens a full year after the Pandemic arrived on its larger shores.

Worse, for a few hours, the European Union, so beloved of Dublin's chattering classes, repartitioned Ireland. That it was more in a fit of absent-mindedness by our beloved (if unelected) **EU President Ursula von der Leyen** than it was an embrace of a clear policy is irrelevant. Absent-mindedness sank the Titanic. Yet her reckless stunt didn't cause uproar in Dublin. Why? Oh, because we're good Europeans, unlike those nasty heathen Brits and Serbs.

Neither of their countries is in the EU and both are well ahead of the EU in their vaccination programmes. So just who is this woman, Ursula von der Leyen, who appears to have such a casual disregard for the health of the peoples of the EU? Ursula, as you know, is Latin for "little bear", a term which comes nowhere close to describing a woman whose political career in Germany only began late in life after she had produced a large family: less of a little than a Wunderbear.

Her political career rapidly took off and she was soon appointed as the German Minister for Defence, in which role she turned the Bundeswehr into an exquisite embodiment of political correctness. That it was quite unable to defend Germany is of course irrelevant. Bundeswehr documents now routinely refer to “servicewomen and servicemen” in that order, even though the German army is only 6.6% female, with its women mostly engaged in administrative work. At the end of her reign, a report from Hans-Peter Bartels, the armed forces parliamentary commissioner, typified the frivolousness that results when armies attempt to incorporate the PC rulebook into military structures. It complained that the German army’s personnel carriers were so small that “servicewomen” of over 1.84 metres (6 foot 3) could not fit into them. This fatuous observation was presented with the same gravity that accompanied the revelation that not a single German navy submarine or tanker was capable of going to sea. Of the army’s 176 Puma combat vehicles, only 48 (27%) were usable. Of just 44 tanks, only 26 (60%) were working. Of the Luftwaffe’s 139 Eurofighters, only around 40 (29%) could take off, which was probably just as well, because the Luftwaffe didn’t have the pilots to fly them. And those who could fly were gravely under-trained. A Eurofighter pilot needs at the very least 180 hours flight-time annually to maintain combat-readiness: Luftwaffe pilots manage only 125 hours a year (or 150 minutes a week, or half an hour per weekday) which is 70% of the very minimum. German Arctic troops are so short of winter clothing that they have to take turns wearing the army’s Woolpower thermal long-johns: the Wunderbear’s Bundeswehr underwehr-share.

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But never fear! In other areas, the Wunderbear's Bundeswehr has been a stunning success. The driver-seats in the few German army tanks that actually work have been redesigned to accommodate pregnant she-soldiers, who clearly make fearless warriors with babies in their wombs. And as Bartels proudly declared, under von der Leyen, "the Bundeswehr was extraordinarily progressive on the topic of diversity (with) a new guide on the treatment of transexual people....The Bundeswehr philosophy is that no-one has to give up their identity at the barracks gate."

Well, nearly no-one. During her time, supporters of "German self-governance" (ie, Germexit) were redesignated "right-wing extremists" and could accordingly be expelled from the Bundeswehr. Naturally, Bartel's report mentions "right-wing extremism" in the Bundeswehr ten times, "Islamic extremism" just once and "left-wing extremism" not at all. Meanwhile, both platoons of the Maltese army could probably have landed in Bavaria, advanced to the Baltic and seized Hamburg without the Bundeswehr even halting the transgender-awareness training-classes of its Special Forces. Clearly, the Wunderbear has all the credentials to lead Europe into the third decade of the 21st century.

Now it would be churlish to be critical of her initial failure to cope with a pandemic unprecedented in world history, even if her first proposal to combat the crisis was a video showing people how to wash their hands to the tune of the EU anthem: The Ode to Soap. But the excuse of inexperience lasts only so long. Just consider the two much-loathed bugbears of the Irish media, Boris Johnson and Donald Trump; it would need a highly delicate Geiger counter to detect any modesty, honesty, decency or reticence in either

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character, yet recent statistics irrefutably show that they finally managed to get the vaccine-priorities sort of right.

Whereas Europe, under the skilful guidance of our beloved and unelected Wunderbear, got them catastrophically wrong. Possibly thousands of Europeans will die this year because of the EU's appalling decision-making, and maybe scores of these will be Irish. Yet for the people of Ireland, what has been the only visible measure that von der Leyen has taken to cope with the vaccine shortage? She invoked Article Sixteen of the incomprehensible Protocol to close the Border and so prevent vaccines leaking from the Republic into the North, which is rather like Mexico closing its border with the US to prevent Elon Musk getting his hands its interplanetary secrets. And anyway, how was she going to "re-erect" the Border? By deploying a few platoons of the transgender-friendly Bundeswehr?

This is all fantasy land: but what other territory does the Republic of Ireland now occupy but the imaginary one defined by a passionate desire Not To Be British? So, aside from the British, we're the only people in Europe to eat marmalade at breakfast and mince pies at Christmas and fish and chips and Yorkshire pudding and have water-tanks in our attics (thanks to the Great Fire of London), and practise English common law before wigged judges, while Grafton Street looks just like Luton High Street, but nonetheless, we are not British.

And yes, after hundreds of years of inept government from London, I'm absolutely fine with that. But what I'm not fine with is this frothingly Anglophobic devotion to the EU. Has everyone forgotten that the troika, namely the European

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Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund, strapped us to the bonnet of a Mercedes Kompressor, slammed a plank of wood between our teeth and rode us to the tune of €34,500 for every child, woman and man in the Republic in what is otherwise known as the great bank bailout? Why? Because we had to repay the German banks every single eurocent they'd had lost in the insane casino that was the property boom of the final days of the Celtic tiger. And you really don't need a PhD in business studies to twig that when a two-room shoebox with wet rot and one resident rat (single, bi, GSOH) in Drimnagh was fetching the same as a chateau and a vineyard in Burgundy, Ireland had embarked on yet another cycle of its regular bouts of economic madness. But that didn't stop the German banks gambling in the great Ponzi scheme of the Irish property market. And nor did it stop the troika – two arms of which are owned by the EU while the third largely does its bidding – from compelling us to repay the German banks the billions they'd squandered. We did this by borrowing money from German banks to repay those very same German banks the money that they'd squan.....et cetera.

Despite this, since the Brexit vote the Irish media have been preening themselves over what good Europeans we are compared to the dastardly Brits. But why this attachment to a union that raped us and which now insists we adhere to its suicidal rules on coping with the virus? Why slavishly follow a woman who is completely fluent in just three languages and equally inept in them all? And this was even before the EU's reintroduction of land-borders in Ireland, which a previous EU-loving Irish government (Varadkar's) had already warned would restart the Troubles.

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Meanwhile, as people continue to sicken and die across the EU, in the UK the vaccination programme has roared ahead, with around 20% of the population already inoculated. Look at the figures for Ireland. About 27% of the adult population of Northern Ireland have been vaccinated, compared to 5% of the population of the Republic. Even poor battered Serbia, not in the EU, has managed to vaccinate 8% of its population, compared to the 2.5% of neighbouring Croatia, in the EU. Meanwhile, the Wunderbear's EU has spent almost €1,000,000,000,000 (yes, you read that right) merely to mitigate the economic consequences of the virus even as the evil little micro-atom pinballs its way around Europe's unprotected populations. But she probably knows the answer to our problems: a little diversity training here, a touch of transgenderism there, and maybe a few pregnancy-friendly seats for geriatric men in old people's homes will see us right. Wunderbar.

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Pointers for prayer

Almighty Father,
whose Son was revealed in majesty
before he suffered death upon the cross:
give us grace to perceive his glory,
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

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Pray for all teachers and parents involved with students or their children. We ask for stamina and creativity as they seek to educate in less than ideal circumstances.

It has been announced that on Ascension Day - 13 May 2021, Bishop Hosam Naoum will be installed as Bishop of the Diocese of Jerusalem, bearing the title Archbishop. Please pray for Bishop Naoum, his family and the Diocese.

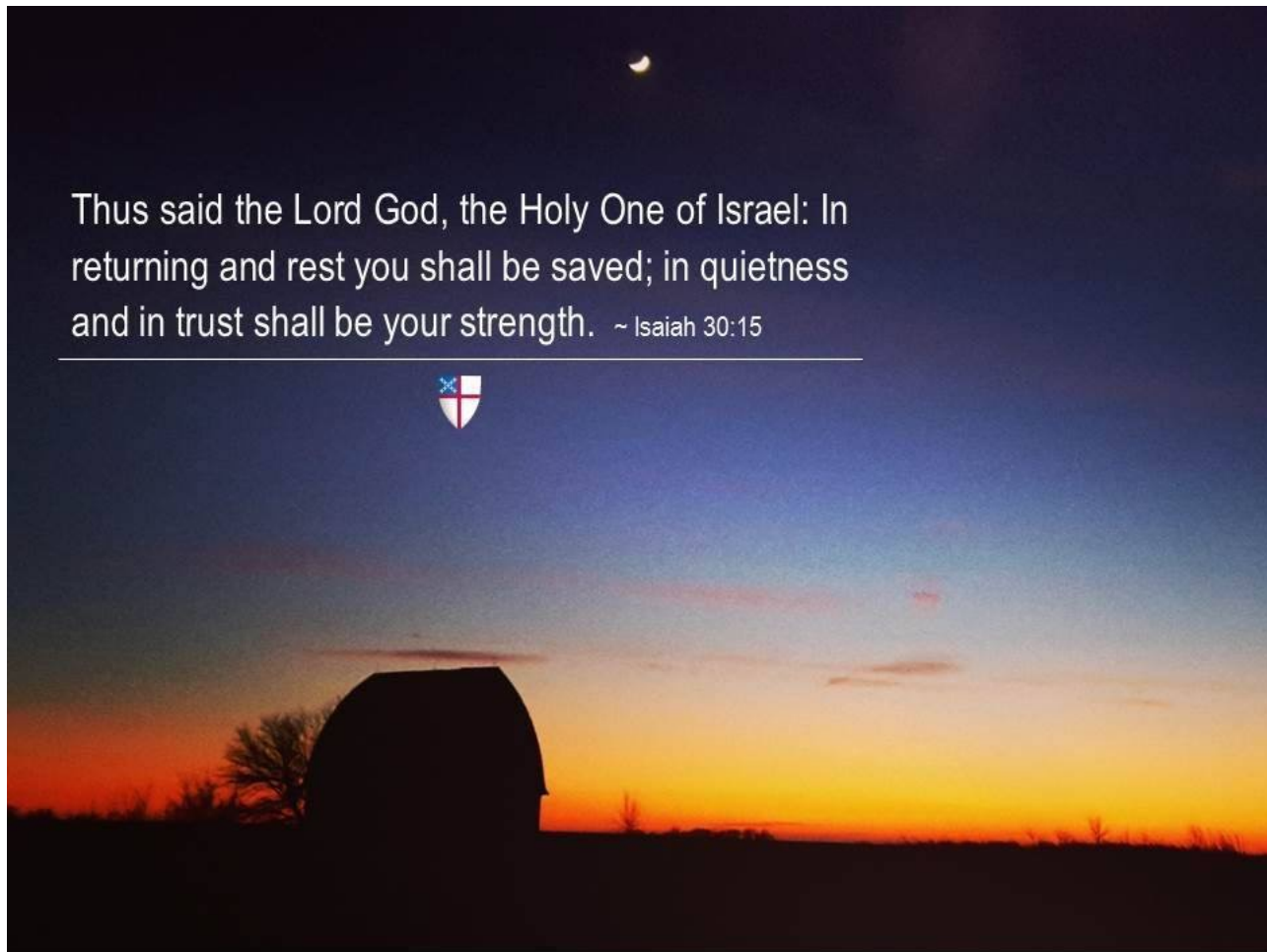
We think today of families who are struggling to cope with the ongoing restrictions to normal life, especially those who live in small homes with no outside space. We pray for an abundance of tolerance to help ease their less than ideal circumstances.

Today we give thanks for young climate activists. A UN survey shows that demand for green business and jobs is particularly high among young people, who have been a driving force behind getting the issue onto the political agenda.

We remember with thanks the numerous Mothers' Union members who, over the years, have used their God-given gifts to change the world. We pray that, in our day, we'll also be willing to use our gifts to help transform lives and communities

We pray today for the church across the world, especially in places where they are experiencing hardship and persecution. We stand together with our sisters and brothers and pray for God to bring relief from their circumstances.

Thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. ~ Isaiah 30:15



Lord Jesus, you prayed that we would all be united together so the world would believe and experience your love. Help us to put aside that which keeps us apart and work together to share your love through our actions and our lives.

Holy God,
you know the disorder of our sinful lives:
set straight our crooked hearts,
and bend our wills to love your goodness
and your glory
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God,
you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
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and your likeness in all your children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all
things,
now and for ever.

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Speaking to the Soul

Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful
praise! For the Lord Most High is awesome. He is the great
King of all the earth.

Psalm 47:1-2 NLT

Clapping is extremely eloquent. It uses no words but it
conveys very powerful messages. There is all the difference
in the world between clapping that is dutiful and polite, and
clapping that is enthusiastic and noisy. They convey
completely different messages. I am glad that the Bible
encourages us to clap precisely because it takes us beyond

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words. However well-chosen and eloquent our speech it can never fully express how great, majestic and awesome our God is.

I was not brought up to make much use of my body in worship. Standing up, sitting down and shutting my eyes were the sum total of my bodily worship! I

had an aunt who was high church and she did a lot of kneeling. Lifting hands or dancing in worship were well outside my experience until I was in my 20s. What mattered were the words. Of course the words do matter and we will always want to use them as we praise God but I am glad that we live in days when many have rediscovered the importance of using our bodies in worship.

Clapping, it seems to me, is a particularly appropriate way of worshipping God because, like singing, it binds us together with those around us. Our clap is small and makes little noise but when it's combined with other clapping people there is a great body of united sound. If you have been to a sports match you will know how important clapping is. It can



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be used positively and negatively. A team will immediately know the difference between a slow hand clap and a clap of approval! God deserves the most enthusiastic and confident worship that we can bring and I am sure that it delights his heart when he hears the thunder of clapping.

QUESTION

Have you experienced clapping in worship, and if so what did it mean to you?

PRAYER

Loving God help us to worship you with our bodies, our minds and our spirits. Amen.

