



THE MESSAGE BOARD
A Newsletter from
A. Roy Medley, General Secretary



Personal Reflections

Volume 39 – October 22, 2009

Lessons from Ireland

Part 1

For two weeks, we, a band of 13 pilgrims, traveled across Ireland exploring the beginnings of the Christian faith in that beautiful country.

As we walked around and into passage tombs (structures that, like Stonehenge, predate written history), I was struck by the universal and primitive human urge to connect with the divine. Though they varied in size from the huge stone and earthen structure at Newgrange that dominates a hilltop, to smaller ones scattered around farmers' fields in the Boyne River Valley outside Dublin, each represented the urge to worship that is present within us. Their inner walls covered with beautiful designs whose meaning is unknown, nonetheless, still evoke a sense of the mystery of the sacred. Those at Newgrange particularly reminded me of the energy and wonder of Van Gogh's "Starry Night," in what seemed to me to be a celebration of the glory of the heavens and the primal desire to honor the power that created them and what they represented to these ancient ancestors. They were clearly designed to invoke and express awe in worship.

Equally impressive was the value this early community placed in these structures. This prehistoric community had, like Medieval Europeans building cathedrals such as the one at Chartres, invested tremendous time and energy as a society in their construction. Huge boulders that weighed tons were quarried in mountains miles away and brought to Newgrange. Here they were skillfully fitted together with a single window perfectly aligned with the rising sun at the winter solstice, so that its first rays of light penetrated the passageway and perfectly illuminated the central ritual area.

The outer surface was decorated with glistening quartz stones imbedded among the boulders in a pattern that added beauty to its features. Like the huge boulders that formed the edifice, these too were brought from a great distance for the sole purpose of adorning the structure.

As I stood both outside and inside these ancient structures that represent the soul's opening towards God, my thoughts turned to Dawkins and others who have recently sought to put new energy into the attempt to deny the existence of God. Here at Newgrange, their efforts seemed pitiful in the face of the undeniable inclination of the human heart towards belief and worship of God. This urge is primal and is manifested in every world culture. Many centuries later, St. Augustine would pen words that sum up this innate universal urge to worship: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

The urge towards God expressed in awe and worship is deep within us. Just as Newgrange was so constructed that the light of the winter solstice might pierce its inner darkness, so we were created that the Light of the World, Jesus Christ, might pierce the darkness of our hearts and understanding. We no longer live in unknowing wonder groping blindly for God, but now live in the light, "for it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

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Office of the General Secretary • American Baptist Churches USA • PO Box 851 • Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

800-ABC-3USA, extension 2274 • Roy.Medley@abc-usa.org

www.abc-usa.org