



RE-SOUNDINGS

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re-soundings.com

Copaidh de chlag Adhamhnain, Teampall Odhrain, Eilean Ì.
Replica of Adamnán's bell, St. Oran's Chapel, Isle of Iona.



Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception,
The future futureless, before the morning watch
When time stops and time is never ending;
And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning,
Clangs
The bell.

AD 563

Túr-cluig eaglaise, Eilean Leòdhais.
Church belfry, Isle of Lewis.



AD 597

Calum Cille a' fàghinn bìas air Eilean I.

Columba dies on Iona.

DÈ SEÒRSA FUAIM A THA A' TIGHINN À TÙR-CLUIG FALAMH? WHAT IS THE SOUND OF AN EMPTY BELFRY CHIMING?

Alasdair Mac an Tòisich
Alastair McIntosh

Na smaoinich thu riamh mu eaglaisean nan Eilean agus carson a tha na h-uiread le tùr-cluig as aonais clag? Airson seo a thuigse, feumaidh sinn tuigse a bhith againn an toiseachd air an eachdraidh.

Tha eachdraidh bheò tric gar fàgail ain-fhoiseil, ach tha i a' toirt dhuinn tuigse a bharrachd air an àite bhon tàinig sinn, sa bheil sinn, agus air ceann-uidhe ar cuairt-beatha. 'S iad sin na dorsan a tha am pròiseact *Re-soundings* air fhosgladh dhòmhsa.

Mas robh stuthan-spreadhaidh no amplachadh (amplification) ann, b' e an clag an rud a b' fheàrr airson fuaim chruaidh, sheasmhach cheòlmhor a chruthachadh. Bha iad a' dèanamh àrainneachd fuaime a bha a' comharrachadh bheàrnan agus tim, no a' dèanamh gàirdeachas simplidh, àigheach. Faodaidh iad seo a dhèanamh ann an dòigh a tha diadhaidh no neo-dhiadhaidh.

Tha cluig le dàimh làidir do sgeulachdan air mar a thàinig an saoghal gu bith. Ann an Hionduthachd agus creideamhan aosmhor eile tha an *ghanta*, no clag an teampaill, a' gairm an anama gus fuaim a' chruthachaidh – an *Om* no *Aum*. Tha an t-aon rud ann an Crìostaidheachd le *Logos* no 'Facal' Dhia a bha mar sradag a' chruthachaidh aig toiseachd soisgeil Eòin.

Tha luchd-fiosaigs cuideachd a' bruidhinn air cruthachadh an t-saoghail le samhlaichean air fuaime. Thàinig an domhan gu bith, a rèir coltais, leis a' Bhrag Mhòr bho chionn 14 billean bliadhna. 'S dòcha gun tig gnothaichean gu crìch le sgiùgan, mar fuaim a' chrionaidh is mì-rian a' tighinn air an domhan, a' toirt a h-uile càil a th' ann gu deireadh.

Co-dhiù, chì sinn dè thachras.

Have you ever looked at churches in the Western Isles, and wondered why so many have a belfry but no bell? To understand why this is, we need to understand our history.

Living history is seldom a comfortable experience, but it is exciting, because it helps us to understand better where we're coming from, where we're at, and to reflect on where we might want to go. For me, that is the door that the *Re-Soundings* project has helped to open.

Before the invention of explosives or modern amplification, bells were the loudest sound that could easily be reproduced in a reliable and musical way. This made them the perfect instrument for creating a soundscape by which both space and time could be variously defined, claimed, imposed, or simply and joyously, celebrated. These, in ways that could be both secular and sacred.

Bells are closely associated with the creation of reality. In Hinduism and from ancient times, the *ghanta*, or temple bell, calls the soul back to the primal sound or vibration of creation – the *Om* or *Aum*. Its Christian equivalent might be the *Logos* or "Word" of God that sparks creation's incarnation at the beginning of John's gospel.

Physicists also speak about the creation using metaphors of sound. The universe, they say, began with Big Bang some fourteen billion years ago. One way in which it might all end is with a whimper – like the sound of a receding cosmic chime as the forces of "entropy", or progressive disorder, cause everything slowly to run down.

Well, we'll wait and see.

AD c.697

Bha fuaim na comharrachadh air toiseach-tòiseachaidh a' chruthachaidh ann an *Genesis* cuideachd. Thuirt Dia – “Biodh solus ann” – agus tha fhios dè thàinig às dèidh seo. Tha sgrìobhaidhean Èireannach bhon 11d linn, *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* no *Leabhar nan Ionnsaighean*, ag innse dhuinn gur i a' Ghàidhlig a bhathas a' bruidhinn ann an Gàradh Edein, a' ciallachadh mar an ceudna gur i cànan Dè.

An ath thuras a chluinneas tu an t-salm Ghàidhlig, “Bibh sàmhach 's tuigibh gur mi Dia ...”, bidh mothachail gu bheil firinn nam facal a' dol thairis air ciall nam facal fhèin. Mar a thuirt an t-Urr Aonghas Mac a' Ghobhainn (an uair sin na mhinistear aig Eaglais Shaor Chrois) ann an agallamh sna 1990an le Fiona NicDhòmhnaill, “Anns a' Ghàidhlig, 's ann a thathas a' cur na tha siud de notaichean-maise ris na sailm is gu bheil a h-uile duine a' seinn fonn eadar-dhealaichte ach tha iad a' tighinn còmhla is a' cur gleans sònraichte riutha. Dhòmhsa dheth, tha e mar ... fuaimean nàdair uile a' tighinn còmhla mar-aon.”

Anns a' Bhioball, tha na trì sailm mu dheireadh ag iarraidh oirnn Dia a mholadh nar n-aoradh ann an co-theagasg an t-saoghail nàdarraich air fad – maille ris a' ghealaich, a' ghrèin agus na reultan. Thathas a' toirt oirnn seo a dheànamh le tiompan is ciombalaibh fonnmhor – an dà rud mar chluig air an dèanamh rèidh.

Ann an Ecsodus 28, tha Dia ag òrduchadh gun tèid fallainn a dhèanamh dha Aaron à aodach gorm is le cluig òir air a h-ìomall, seo gus an, “cluinnear a fuaim, an uair a thèid e steach do'n ionad naomh an làthair an Tighearn, agus an uair a thig e a-mach, a chum nach bàsaich e.”

Tha na cluig an seo a' samhlachadh a' ghluasaid eadar naomhachd agus saoghaltachd. Tha fuaim nan clag a' fosgladh agus a' dùnadh nan dorsan a-steach gu fìor fhèin-fhiosrachadh. Tha iad ag àrdachadh an anama agus ga thoirt air ais chun na h-àbhaist nuair a thig an àm thighinn às an t-saoghal dhraoidheachd.

Sound marked the onset of creation in the book of *Genesis* too. God said – “Let there be light” – and the rest is the unfolding of history. An 11th century Irish text, the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* or *Book of Invasions* points us to the truth that Gaelic would have been the original language of Eden, with which, presumably, God spoke.

Next time you hear the Psalms being traditionally sung in Gaelic, “be still and know ...” Such sounds speak truths beyond the words alone. As the Rev Angus Smith (then of Cross Free Church) said in a 1990s interview with Fiona MacDonald: “In Gaelic you use so many grace notes and everybody can be slightly different but it all merges together into a kind of shimmer. And to me, it's like ... all the sounds of nature merging into one.”

In the Bible, the last three Psalms of David invite us to glorify (and enjoy) God in praise with the whole of created nature – with the moon, the sun and other stars. We are urged so to do with tambourines and cymbals, both of which are flattened versions of bells.

In Exodus 28, God instructs that the priestly robe for Aaron should be made of blue fabric with golden bells around its hem. This, so “its sound shall be heard when he goes in unto the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, that he die not.”

Here, bells fulfil the shamanic function of signalling the transition between the secular and sacred. Their sound both opens and closes the gates of higher consciousness. It elevates the soul and then regrounds it back into normality when the time comes to step back out of ritual space.

Aig an àm a choinnich Linn an Umha is Linn an Iarainn, bha an clag a' samhlachadh fìor àrd-inbhe de dhìadheachd. Bha cumhachd aige mollachd no beannachadh a dhèanamh. Tha seo air a chomharrachadh air an stairsnich eadar na linn-tean draoidheachd is Crìostaidheachd an eachdraidh nan Gàidheal – an seann tiomnadh is tiomnadh ùr againn fhìn.

Chaidh *Buile Suibhne* (*Boile Shuibhne*), mar a th' aig na seann sgrìobhaidhean Gaeilge air an sgeulachd, eadar-theangachadh gu Beurla le Seamus Heaney mar *Sweeney Astray*. Air an oidhche ro Chath Maigh Rath ann an 637, tha an Rìgh Albannach Suibhne air a dhùsgadh le gliongach uabhasach taobh a-muigh a dhaingean.

A' dèanamh na fuaimhe, bha Naomh Rònain; a' tulgadh a chluig is a' glèidheil chòirichean an fhearainn far an deigheadh a eaglais a togail.

Tha diofar tionndaidhean air sgeulachd Rònain, ach cò aig a tha fios? 'S dòcha gur e seo an duine a thathas a' cuimhneachadh le làrach Teampall Rònain air an druim bhos cionn Teampall Mholuaidh aig Nis, Leòdhas. 'S dòcha gur ann dhàsan a bhuineadh an crois a lorgadh aig Rònaigh an Taibh, no gur ann aire-san a chaidh Bàgh Naomh Rònain far Eilean Ì ainmeachadh, is manachainn ann.

Fiù suas chun an là an-diugh, tha sinn beò air talamh naoimh. Mar a tha am bàrd R.S. Thomas ga chur ann an, *The Moon in Lleyn*: "These very seas/are baptized. The parish/has a saint's name time cannot/unfrock."

Cha b' ann mar seo a thachair dha Suibhne againne, ge-tà! A rèir an t-seanchais, leum a-mach a leabaidh le fearg mhòr air. Rug a bhean air a chòta is i a' feuchainn ri stad a chur air, ach 's ann thuit a chòta dheth is chaidh an rìgh fiadhaich a-mach – liormachd!

At the juncture of the bronze and iron ages, a bell signalled considerable religious standing. They had the power both to bless and curse. A fine illustration of this comes from the threshold of the Druidic and the Christian eras in the Celtic world – our indigenous "old" and "new" testaments.

Buile Suibhne, as the medieval Irish manuscripts call the story, has been translated by Seamus Heaney as *Sweeney Astray*. On the eve of the Battle of Moira in 637, the bombastic west Scottish king, Sweeney, is awakened by a terrible clanging outside his stronghold.

There was Saint Ronan, swinging his bell to lay claim to territory on which to build his church.

There are many localisations of Ronan, but who knows? Perhaps this was the same version of the archetypal saintly figure as is remembered by the ruins of Teampall Rònain on the ridge above Teampall Mholuidh (Saint Moluag's Church) at Ness on Lewis. Perhaps the same one whose enigmatic cross was found on North Rona, or who gave his name to Saint Ronan's Bay on Iona and its nunnery church.

Even today, we tread on holy ground. As R.S. Thomas put it in his poem, *The Moon in Lleyn*: "These very seas/are baptized. The parish/has a saint's name time cannot/unfrock."

Not so, such immunity from unfrocking for our man, Sweeney! In the story he leapt out of bed in a terrible rage. His poor wife tried to grab his crimson coat in restraint, but it came away in his hands, and the warlord ran outside – stark naked.

C.8TH CENTURY

Croisean àrda Eilean Ì air an cruithachadh. Beachd gur i crois Naomh Udhram an tè as sine dhen cneithir a tha air fhàgail.

High crosses of Iona carved. St. Oran's cross is believed to be the earliest of the four remaining.

Thilg e a chiad shaighead agus mhairbh e fear de dheisciobail Rònain. Chuimsich e an dara saighead air Rònain fhèin, ach bhuail e air a chlag naoimh aige gun dochann sam bith ga dhèanamh air.

Thuir Rònain ri Suibhne gum biodh a chlag, "mar mhollachd chun nan craobhan dha, is e mar isean am measg nan geugan." Dheigheadh an truaghan na isean is e a' falbh a shabaid sa bhatail an ath là. Thurchair mar seo dha, a rèir an t-eadar-theangachaidh Bheurla aig Heaney:

*His brain convulsed,
his mind split open.
Vertigo, hysteria, lurchings
and launchings came over him,
he staggered and flapped desperately,
he was revolted by the thought of known places
and dreamed of strange migrations ...
the weapons fell from his hands
and he levitated in a frantic cumbersome motion
like a bird of the air.
And Ronan's curse was fulfilled.*

Ged bu mollachd i, bha beannachd na cois. Chuir Suibhne seachad an corr dhe bheatha mar isean, a' dèanamh bàrdachd mu nàdar samhail nach fhacas a-rithist gus an do nochd bàrdachd ùr ann an California sna 1960an.

Tha e a' dol air spiris air Creag Ealasaid agus an Uamh Naoimh Donnain air Eilean Eige. Tha e a' cur a chùil ri fòirneart is ri Crìostaidheachd fhuar le, "cluig eaglaisean a tha ri cànrain is bleith," ach aig an aon àm ag ùrnaigh ri Crìosd - "Cuir am measg do mhilseachd mi." Tha anam a' faighinn fois tro Dhia is nàdar, fìor agus fiadhaich.

*From lonely cliff-tops, the stag
bells and makes the whole glen shake
and re-echo. I am ravished.
Unearthly sweetness shakes my breast.*

With the first throw of a spear he killed one of Ronan's disciples. The second was aimed at the saint himself, but the weapon bounced harmlessly off his holy bell.

Ronan's response was to tell Sweeney that his bell, "will curse you to the trees, bird-brain among the branches." The hapless king would turn into a bird as he entered the following day's battle. So it came to pass, that:

*His brain convulsed,
his mind split open.
Vertigo, hysteria, lurchings
and launchings came over him,
he staggered and flapped desperately,
he was revolted by the thought of known places
and dreamed of strange migrations ...
the weapons fell from his hands
and he levitated in a frantic cumbersome motion
like a bird of the air.
And Ronan's curse was fulfilled.*

But here was curse as blessing in disguise. Sweeney goes on to live out his life as a bird, creating some of the finest poetry of deep ecology ever written until California started dreaming in the 1960s.

He roosts on Ailsa Craig and in Saint Donan's cave on Eigg. He gives up the ways of violence. He spurns a cold churchianity with its "church bells that whinge and grind," and yet, his prayer is to Christ - "Blend me forever in your sweetness." His soul finds rest in God and nature, true and wild.

*From lonely cliff-tops, the stag
bells and makes the whole glen shake
and re-echo. I am ravished.
Unearthly sweetness shakes my breast.*

c.8TH CENTURY

Doras, Teampall Odhrain, Eilean I, c. 1900 © Àrainneachd Eachdraidheil na h-Alba.
Church belfry, Doorway, St. Oran's Chapel, Iona c.1900 © Historic Environment Scotland.



c.9TH CENTURY

Cluig-hàimhe ceàrnagach umha air an deanamh an Alba

Scottish quadrangular cast bronze hand-bells

Air adhart a-nise chun an Ath-leasachaidh san 16mh linn, leis na cluig a' cànrann is a' bleith air aire nam Pròstanach is iad a' cur an-aghaidh coirbeachd agus neo-chuimseachd na h-Eaglaise Caitligich sna meadhan aoisean.

Thug co-oibriche Luther, fear Philip Melanchthon, òrdugh seachad dha na sagairtean gun robh seinn nan clag airson sìth na chleachdadh a bha "neo-riatanach agus leanabaidh". Bha an t-Ath-leasachadh ann an seagh na "Ath-leasachadh fuaimne", le diofar bhuidhnean a' sabaid an-aghaidh a chèile chum smachd a bhith aca air na bha ri chluinntinn san àrainneachd, agus seo mar chomharra air an ùghdarras aca.

Leis na Caitligich a' seinn nan clag a' comharrachadh nan naomh agus mar mhaiseachd ann an aoradh, bha na Pròstanaich gan càineadh mar chleachdaidhean "iodhalach", "diomhain is faoin-ghlòireach" no dìreach "buaireanta".

Dha mòran dhen luchd-leasaiche, bha na cluig ceadaichte airson innse dè an uair a bha e is airson daoine a tharraing gu ùrnaighean no searmonan, ach chan ann mar eileamaid sàcramaideach de dh'aoradh.

Ach tha an campanologist (eòlaiche air cluig) Gearmailteach Philip Hahn ag innse dhuinn mar a thachair ann an Ulm (ainmeil mar bhaile Lùtaireach) ann an 1617, nuair a sheinneadh còig cluig a' dèanamh gàirdeachas mòr a' comharrachadh lùbailidh an Ath-leasachaidh. Bha cleachdaidhean eadar-dhealaichte aig na Pròstanaich bho àite gu àite is bho linn gu linn.

Bha batailean a' dol air adhart an Sineubha leis na cleachdaidhean ùra gan cur an gnìomh. Ann an 1536, thugadh air John Calvin a dhol a dh'fhuireach an Sineubha le caraid dha, fear Guillaume Farel. Bha Farel na fhear a bha gu math làidir an-aghaidh nan Caitligeach agus chuir e sgiobaidhean daoine ri chèile a dheigheadh timcheall nan eaglaisean Pàpanach, ag obair air na sagairtean is cailleachan-dubha agus a' milleadh iomhaighean, dhealbhan diadhaidh is chlag a lorgadh iad.

Fast forward to the 16th century Reformation, and bells that "whinge and grind" were again an issue for protestors – or "Protestants" – who challenged what they saw as the corruption and excesses of the medieval Roman Catholic church.

Luther's co-worker, Philip Melanchthon, instructed priests that ringing bells for peace was "unnecessary and childish". The Reformation was, in part, an "acoustic Reformation". Rival factions battled to take control of the soundscape, and thereby imprint their authority.

While Catholics rang out bells to celebrate the saints and to ornament worship, their Protestant adversaries considered such practices to be "idolatrous", "vain and ostentatious" or plain "annoying".

For many of the reformers, bells were only permissible to signal the time, or to summon people to prayer and sermons, but not as a sacramental part of the worship.

Mind you, as the German campanologist (or bells scholar) Philip Hahn points out: in the Lutheran city of Ulm in 1617, five bells were swung to celebrate the "great pleasure" of the Reformation Jubilee. Actual Protestant practice varied greatly from place to place and from time to time.

Geneva was a battleground for ringing in the changes. In 1536 John Calvin was persuaded to settle there by his best friend, Guillaume (or William) Farel. Farel was a fiery practitioner of authoritarian religion. He stirred up mobs that went round Catholic churches, haranguing the priests and nuns, smashing icons, whitewashing religious paintings, and pulling down the bells.

c.12TH CENTURY

A' chiad teampall, a rèir fiosrachaidh, ann an Steòrnabhagh, air a choisrigeadh air Adhamhan, agus air aithneachadh mar St Lennan's.

Earliest known date for chapel in Stornoway, possibly dedicated to Adamnan, but corrupted to St Lennan's.

Na *Petite chronique* (cunntas goirid) air na làithean seo, tha an cailleach dhubh *Poor Clare*, tè Jeanne de Jussie (1503–1561), ag innse mu na thachair mas tàinig oirre teicheadh à Sineubha tràth aon mhadainn an 1535. Le ionnsaighean gan toirt air a’ mhanachainn, bhathas air a ghoid na chumadh na cailleachan beò. Bha na cailleachan air am maoidheadh, agus bha aca na èisteachd ri searmonan Farel a bha a’ feuchainn ri toirt orra pòsadh a dhèanamh ri fìor fhireannaich Phròstanach.

Tha an taisbeanadh Re-Soundings a’ fosgladh an Steòrnabhagh air 12mh Cèitean. Sgrìobh Jeanne de Jussie mun aon là ann an Sineubha an 1535 mar a leanas:

... those dogs removed the bell from Notre Dame de Grace and threw it down from the steeple to destroy it. It was said that several of them struck it as hard as they could with stones and hammers, but they could not damage it. Afterward they went to see the bells at the monastery of Palais and at the parish of Saint-Gervais because they wanted to melt them down and make weapons to use against monseigneur and the Christians. Every day they caused some new scandal.

Bhiodh an t-aon seòrsa milleadh ga dhèanamh air feadh cinn a tuath na h-Eòrpa, agus air feadh Bhreatainn. Gheibh sinn tuigse nas fheàrr air an dìth chlag ann an eaglaisean nan Eilean tro smaoinichadh air an fhòirneart seo; fòirneart air a dhèanamh leis an dà chuid Caitligich agus Pròstanaich.

Mar fhìor samhla a’ cur an-aghaidh na h-eachdraidh de dh’fhòirneart, tha Màiri Killin agus Ùistean Watt, an luchd-ealain air cùl a’ phròiseict, air cluig a chruthachadh às sligean-urchrach bhon Chiad Chogadh.

In her *Short Chronicle*, a diary of those iconoclastic days, a *Poor Clare* nun, Jeanne de Jussie (1503–1561), describes the events that led to her order having to flee Geneva early one morning in 1535. Their convent had been progressively robbed of all its means of sustenance. The sisters were repeatedly threatened, and subjected to forced sermonising by Farel who wanted to marry them off to good Protestant husbands.

May 12th marks the opening of the Re-Soundings exhibition in Stornoway. Of that day in Geneva, 1535, Sister Jeanne recorded

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Similar iconoclasm was to take place across northern Europe, including the British Isles. One way to understand our Hebridean empty belfries is therefore as a throwback to the violent religion of violent men of violent times. The violence was from both sides of the sectarian divide.

In a powerful symbolic reversal of making bells, Mhairi Killin and Hugh Watt, the artists behind the *Re-Soundings* project, have taken shells from the First World War and cast them back into bells.

c.12TH CENTURY

Teampall Odhrain, Eilean I, gun fhiosrachadh buileach cuin. Air a thòpail an toiseachd, thathas a’ saòl-sinn, mar teampall adhlacaidh le Somhailte no le mhac Raghnaill. Tha an teampall na shuidhe ann an cladh bhon 8mh Linn.

St. Oran's Chapel, Iona, exact date unknown. Probably built as a burial chapel by Somerled or by his son Reginald. The chapel sits in an 8th century burial ground.

Iomraidhean

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- MacDonald, Fiona (1994). *Island Voices*, Canongate, Edinburgh.

Dhòmhsa dheth, tha na h-eaglaisean gun chluig a' toirt oirnn cuimhneachadh gu feumas cur às de dh'fhòirneart creideimh ge brith cò is coireach ris. Feumaidh sinn ar sùilean a thogail an-àirde a choimhead air adhart gu àm far is urrainn dhuinn a ràdh, "Tha na làithean seachad a-nis/agus ann an eachdraidh/a bhios iad gu brath."

Ach tha mise a' faicinn rudeigin le ciall diadhaidh nas doimhne buileach sna tùir-chluig fhalamh, ge-tà. Tha diadhairean tric a' dèanamh sgaradh eadar dà sheòrsa creideimh – an *cataphatic* agus an *apophatic*.

Tha a' chiad fhear a' bruidhinn air Dia ann an dòigh togarrach agus an dara fear ann an dòigh neo-thogarrach. Tha creideamh *Cataphatic* ag èigheachd "Is gràdh Dia", le cluig is fàilidhean. Air an làimh eile, tha creideamh *apophatic* an seòrsa creideimh a tha simplidh agus rudeigin ìosal mar a th' againn le Crìostaidheachd Chlàireach nan Eileanan, agus mar a tha fìor mu chreideamhan leithid Zen.

Tha an dà sheòrsa creideimh nan slighean èifeachdach gu Dia, agus faodaidh na dhà a dhol an lùib a chèile a rèir fheumalachdan spioradail dhaoine fa leth.

Tha ministearan Zen uaireannan a' teagasg tro *kōans*, no toimhseachan spioradail. Cuiridh iad ceistean àraid, ag amas air inntinnean daoine a chur a smaoinneachadh air gnothaichean diomhair a-mach às an àbhaist, leithid: "Dè seòrsa fuaim a nì bualadh bhas le aon làimh?"

Tha mi fhìn tric a' coimhead suas ri far an robh na cluig uaireigin, a' coimhead tron bheàrn san tùr – a' faicinn na gealaich, na grèine is nan reultan – agus a' cur *kōan* orm fhìn.

Dè seòrsa fuaim a tha a' tighinn à tùr-cluig falamh?

Air ais thugam mar fhreagairt bho neamh.

Tha Dia ri chluinntinn ann an Tur-cluig a' Chruthachaidh.

To me, our empty belfries are a reminder of the imperative to move beyond religious violence from whatever quarter. We must lift our eyes to a future where, "Those days are past now/and in the past/they must remain."

But I see something of even greater spiritual depth encoded in the empty belfry. Theologians often distinguish two types of religion – the *cataphatic* and the *apophatic*.

The former speaks in positive statements about the divine while the latter speaks in the negative. *Cataphatic* religion might shout out that "God is love" and chime it out with bells and smells. In contrast, *apophatic* religion – you've got it – is the austere simplicity and understatement of our Hebridean Presbyterianism, and equally of paths like eastern Zen.

Both paths can be valid ways to God, and both can interweave to answer different spiritual needs.

Zen masters sometimes use *kōans*, or spiritual teaching riddles. They'll ask crazy questions, meant to trip the mind off its ever-so-logical tramlines and into the realm of mystery, like: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

I find myself looking up at our island's empty belfries, looking straight through them – seeing the moon, and sun, and other stars – and posing my own *kōan*.

What is the sound of an empty belfry chiming?

Back rings the cosmic answer.

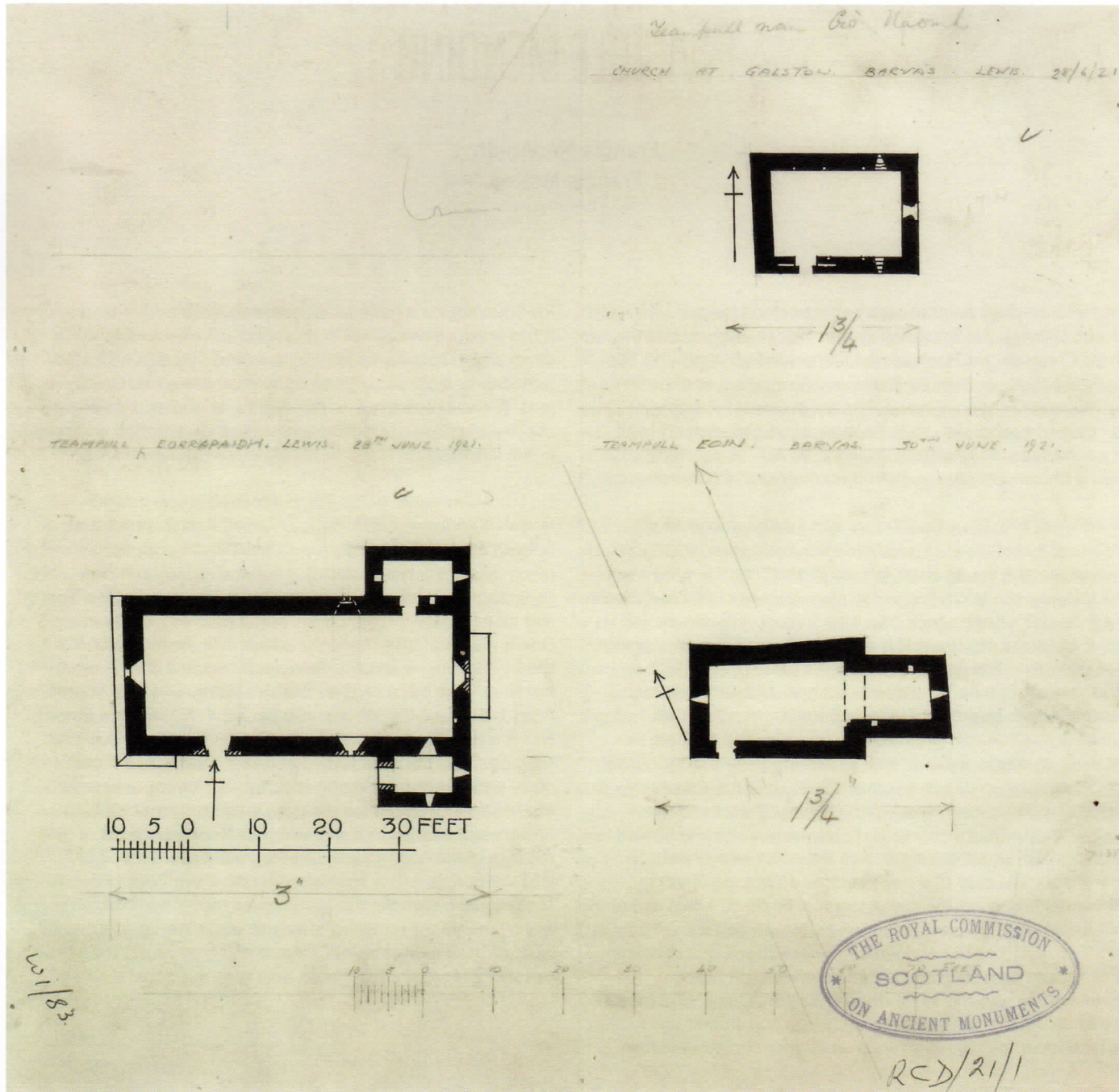
God sounds from the Belfry of Creation.

c.12TH CENTURY

Teampall Mholuaidh, Nis, Leòdhas. Chan eil fhios cuin dìreach a thogadh an teampall seo, ged a tha beachdan ann gu bheil e a' dol air ais chun na 6mh Linn. Na shuidhe air costa làn teampall is thobraichean ro am an Atr-leasachaidh.

St. Molluag's Chapel, Ness, Lewis. The exact date of the building is unknown. It has been suggested that the site, as a place of worship could date to the 6th Century. Sites within a coastline scattered with pre-Reformation chapels and holy wells.

Dealbhan an fhoillseachaidh; Teampall Eòin, Teampall nan Crò Naomh,
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c.1497

Lütten aig sgoll ann am Magdeburg.

Luther aittends school in Magdeburg.