

THE RECORDER



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Historical Society (NSW/ACT)



SAINT KILIAN - The Apostle of Franconia

In 1971 my wife and I, with our two small children, arrived in the picturesque city of Würzburg in southern Germany, for an extended stay. It was here that we first met St. Kilian, a stern looking statue in bishop's attire and sword in hand, standing with other saints on the old bridge over the River Main. Kilian's name became familiar to us, but his history remained unexplored - until now. Editor

Saint Kilian was an Irish missionary bishop and is considered the Apostle of Franconia, an area in the northern part of Bavaria, where he began his work with the Franks towards the end of the 7th century. According to Irish sources, Kilian was born to noble parents around the year 640, near Mullagh, County Cavan, Ireland. Various references to his later martyrdom mention that he was distinguished from his youth for his piety and love of study, and embraced the monastic life. Later writers say that he was a monk in the celebrated monastery of Hy, which became known as Iona.

Eventually he made up his mind to be a missionary, leaving Ireland in the summer of 686 with eleven companions. Kilian's group landed in Gaul, crossed the Rhine and travelled up river until they reached the mouth of its tributary, the Main, sailing up as far as the town of Würzburg.

Kilian resolved to preach the Gospel there, but first journeyed with his companions to Rome to receive missionary authority from the pope. Pope John V, whom he expected to find, had died and was succeeded by Conon, from whom Kilian obtained his authority.



St Kilian's statue in Würzburg.

Early references to Kilian say that he was made bishop *before* leaving his native land, although later authorities believe his elevation occurred later in Rome. In accordance with the custom then prevailing in the Irish Church, it is most likely he was assigned as bishop to no particular diocese, but was a district or travelling bishop, while in Ireland.

Upon returning to Würzburg, their labours continued during 687 and the following years. The original group separated on the return journey, some departing to seek other fields of missionary work, while Kilian with two companions, the priest Colmán and the deacon Totnan, came back to Würzburg. He took this town as the base for his activities, which extended over an ever increasing area in East Franconia and Thuringia.

On his return from Rome to Würzburg, however, Kilian found that the Duke Gosbert, who had converted to Christianity with a number of his subjects, had married his brother's widow, Geilana. Killian explained that the duke's marriage with Geilana was unlawful under Christian law, and secured the duke's promise to separate from her, making an enemy of the pagan woman.

She plotted vengeance against the saint and, in the absence of the duke, caused him and his two companions to be secretly murdered, their corpses being immediately buried at the scene of the crime, together with the sacred vessels, vestments, and holy writings. This is generally believed to have happened on 8 July, 689.

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SAINT NICHOLAS OF MYRA - AKA Santa Claus

Rev Grahame Ellis reflects....

Writing for the Church History Newsletter to be distributed in December makes me think not just about Santa Claus, but about the Saint whose memory lies behind the American character. 'Santa Claus' comes easily to the tongue, if not the mind, and has an effect on the hip pocket nerve of many parents. But there is more to be said. Much more.

As members of the Uniting Church who have access to the Calendar of Commemorations in Uniting in Worship, we are exhorted to remember Saint Nicholas of Myra. His Festival Day is 6th December and it is not too difficult to see how he is easily caught up in the Festive Season. He is the Patron Saint of Children. But not only Children.

Here is a list of his patronages - Russia, Greece, Apulia (the heel part of Italy, sort of), Bakers, Pawn Brokers, Sailors, Prostitutes, and of course Children. Behind each of these patronages there is a story, all of them intriguing. Stories about poverty, a 'me-too-movement', possible shipwreck, an execution and child abuse.

Of course, the purists want to prove to me that these stories are not historically verifiable. They are right. Just as it is right that there is no historical record of 'The Prodigal Son'. But that fact does not seem to have diminished the significance of the character who 'came to himself'. From my defensive position, I draw attention to another fact. Despite the lack of solid historical sources for the stories of St. Nicholas, and acknowledging the real possibility that they, to some

extent, have been 'made up', nobody seems to be making up stories like these about you and me, dear reader. Nice and polite as we may happen to be.



Icon of St Nicholas, patron saint of sailors

In the stories about St. Nicholas, and the stories of all the saints, there is something that has its origin in the life of that particular Person - Jesus. As the church remembers, she does not just highlight events in the past but makes possible the on-going influence of the Saint's saintliness. And this in no way usurping the status of the Second Person of the Trinity. Rather, a contemporary particularity can be quite helpful. In this connection I did find the words of Gordon Wakefield, in an article on canonisation, helpful and warm:

'The disturbing truth is that God, the high and holy Redeemer, is not sufficient for us in His transcendent majesty. We need, in life and most of all in death, human faces, and although we have Jesus he may be lost in the mists of antiquity if not in the clouds of heaven, unless he brings us into the companionship of our friends and

his, and we see his 'countenance divine' in the lineaments of those, who in their time on earth, have revealed to us his love.'

The ongoing influence of St. Nicholas found expression in the life of a Russian Orthodox Icon painter, Leonid Ouspensky (1902 - 1987). After a long commitment to atheism, Leonid found himself inspired by icons and benefited from the discipline of 'writing' them. Under the influence of St. Nicholas, his life changed. From God knows what source, he was compelled to write, 'when Nicholas was raised to the dignity of Bishop he said, "This office demands a different type of conduct, so that one may live no longer for oneself but for others." This love for others is his characteristic feature and is manifested by the great variety of forms of his solicitude for men: his care for their preservation, their protection from the elements, from human injustice, from heresies.'

Here are some irrefutable facts that anchor St. Nicholas in the history of the church: born in Lycia in Asia Minor, where he was appointed Bishop, imprisoned by Diocletian, released by Emperor Constantine, attended the Council of Nicea in 325. There is an argument about where his bodily remains lie, but electronic surveys are near to solving that problem.

But what do we do on December 6th with all this information? Or any other day for that matter. Judith Wright, our beloved Australian Poet, offers a suggestion in her poem, 'The Slope':

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GEORGE MUELLER - an unconventional, eccentric saint

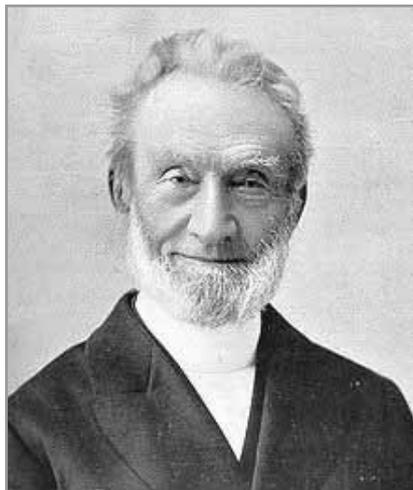
George Mueller was born in Kroppenstedt, Germany on September 27, 1805 and lived almost the entire nineteenth century, dying on March 10, 1898 at the age of 92. He saw the great awakening of 1859 which he said "led to the conversion of hundreds of thousands." He did follow up work for D. L. Moody, preached for Charles Spurgeon, and inspired the missionary faith of Hudson Taylor.

Mueller spent most of his life in Bristol, England and pastored the same church there for over sixty-six years, a kind of independent, premillennial, Calvinistic Baptist church that celebrated the Lord's supper weekly and admitted non-baptized people into membership.

If this sounds unconventional, that would be accurate. He was a maverick, not only in his church life, but in almost all areas of his life. But his eccentricities were almost all large-hearted and directed outward for the good of others. A. T. Pierson, who wrote the biography which Mueller's son-in-law endorsed as authoritative, captured the focus of this big-hearted eccentricity when he said, George Mueller "devised large and liberal things for the Lord's cause."

His discovery of the all-encompassing sovereignty of God became the foundation of Mueller's confidence in God to answer his prayers for money. He gave up his regular salary. He refused to ask people directly for money. He prayed and published his reports about

the goodness of God and the answers to his prayer. These yearly reports were circulated around the world, and they clearly had a huge effect in motivating people to give to his orphan work.



George Mueller in later life

In 1834, at the age of 28, he founded The Scripture Knowledge Institute for Home and Abroad, because he was disillusioned with the post-millennialism, the liberalism, and the worldly strategies of existing mission organisations, like going into debt. Five branches of this Institute developed,

- 1) *Schools for children and adults, to teach Bible knowledge,*
- 2) *Bible distribution,*
- 3) *Missionary support,*
- 4) *Tract and book distribution,*
- 5) *Orphanages "to board, clothe and Scripturally educate destitute children who have lost both parents by death."*

The accomplishments of all five branches were significant, but the one he was known for around the world in his own lifetime, and still today, was the orphan ministry. He built five large orphan houses and cared

for 10,024 orphans in his life. When he started in 1834 there was accommodation for 3,600 orphans in all of England and twice that many children under eight were in prison.

One of the great effects of Mueller's ministry was to inspire others, so that "fifty years after Mr. Mueller began his work, at least one hundred thousand orphans were cared for in England alone."

He did all this while he was preaching three times a week from 1830 to 1898, at least 10,000 times. And when he turned 70 he fulfilled a life-long dream of missionary work for the next 17 years until he was 87. He travelled to 42 countries, preaching on average of once a day, and addressing some three million people.

From the end of his travels in 1892 (when he was 87) until his death six years later he preached in his church and worked for the Scripture Knowledge Institute. At age 92, not long before he died, he wrote, "I have been able, every day and all the day to work, and that with ease, as seventy years since." He led a prayer meeting at his church on the evening of Wednesday, March 9, 1898. The next day a cup of tea was taken to him at seven in the morning, but no answer came to the knock on the door. He was found dead beside his bed.

As Mueller was to say to a group of young Christians, "*the secret of all true effectual service, is joy in God, having experimental acquaintance and fellowship with God Himself*".#

SAINT KILIAN

From pp 1

When the duke returned to her, Geilana denied knowing the location of the missionaries. Folklore has it that the actual murderer went mad, confessed his crime, and died miserably, while Geilana herself eventually died insane.

Kilian and his companions seem to have been forgotten after their martyrdom. But fifty years after their death, when the English missionary St Boniface and his companion St Burchard arrived in the area, they found evidence of Kilian's influence. St Burchard, appointed by Boniface as the first bishop of Würzburg in 752, built a cathedral on the spot where the martyrs were said to have met their deaths. He had their relics unearthed and buried within a vault of that cathedral church.

News of Kilian's martyrdom was brought back to Ireland and is recorded in the ninth-century Irish Martyrology of Tallaght. Hymns and folk-songs were composed in his honour. There was a house of Irish monks in the city of Würzburg from the ninth century until the fifteenth century and there are manuscripts of Bible Commentaries written in Old Irish still to be seen. In 1989, to mark 1300 years since the martyrs' deaths, Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich visited the city to lecture about these writings and historical contacts.

The present-day St Kilian's Cathedral in Würzburg is one of the largest Romanesque churches in Germany, with

Kilian as the principal patron saint of the city. His figure appears on seals and coins, and the Kiliani Fair (Volksfest) held for two weeks every July, is the occasion for the annual Kilian Pilgrimage. His feast day is July 8th.



*St Kilian's Cathedral in Würzburg
Photo: Robert Harding*

From the old bridge, Colmán, Totnan, and Kilian portrayed wearing a bishop's mitre and holding a sword, which was the instrument of their martyrdom, still watch over the city, perhaps bewildered by the throng of people hurrying by.

*My thanks to The Catholic Encyclopaedia and Wikipedia.
Editor*

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR GREETINGS

*WISHING YOU ALL
PEACE AND JOY
IN THIS
CHRISTMAS SEASON
WITH GOOD HEALTH
& HAPPINESS IN 2019*

SAINT NICHOLAS

From pp 2

The Slope

*I call you up, true men who lived
and died;
my dead beloved, my guides, my
living friends.
I say your names, I sing you to my
side.
Keep far from me the sickness of
despair.
Even on the last black slope
among mad images that rave or
weep,
let all your voices call me back to
air:
show me my true beginnings
and their ends.*

The Editor writes

Judith Wright's words, "I say your names", started my search for other names for Saint Nicholas: Santa Claus, St. Nick, Sint Nikolaas or Sinterklaas, Sankt Niklaus, Pelznickel or Kris Kringle ?

Then Grahame Ellis' reference to St Nicholas' bodily remains: In 2017, a team from the University of Oxford radio carbon tested a fragment of a pelvic bone said to be from St. Nicholas. The test confirmed that the bone fragment, owned by an American priest, was dated from the saint's era (traditionally 270 to 343). Archaeologists hope to match the bone to others purportedly belonging to St. Nicholas, including those in a crypt in Bari, Italy, since the 11th century.

The Orthodox Church in America website has a detailed biography of St Nicholas. #



Bari Cathedral of St Nicholas