

The Iona Community and the ecumenical movement: External influences and internal changes

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Abstract

This article teases out the relationship between the Iona Community (founded 1938) and the ecumenical movement (both nationally – Scotland and the UK – and internationally), and the steps the Community took to enable itself internally to be more ecumenical. The first part of the article reviews the original brief of the Community – a missional ‘brotherhood’ that would work for the Church of Scotland’s Church Extension Scheme, using the base of the Iona Abbey as a training ground. Yet the Community quickly caught international missionary and ecumenical attention and the project was drawn beyond this original framework, becoming engaged in missional and ecumenical endeavours in and beyond Scotland. The second part of the article reflects on how these alternative engagements questioned the internal diversity of the Community, and how young people, lay people, ministers from other denominations and finally women pushed for their involvement in the originally male, clerical body. The article ends by drawing upon the work of Aruna Gnanadason who argues for a new paradigm of ecumenism that shakes the patriarchal, clerical powers of church boundaries and embraces realistic, messy, diversity in church bodies as the starting place for ecumenical endeavours.





The original community

In the first issue of *The Coracle*,¹ George MacLeod (the founder of the Iona Community) explained that the purpose of the publication was to refute the misunderstandings facing the Community and the voluminous requests for information.² Wishing to set aside one criticism of the ‘return to Rome’ he reassured readers that,

The Abbey in its day stood on the outposts of an idea that was of the essence of our Faith—and must be made the essence of our Faith again—that there is but one Faith, One Lord, One Baptism, One God and Father of us all. Fatal, indeed, will be all these “efforts at Community” if we seek to blind our eyes to the rents there are in “the garments of Christ” to-day. “The grave dangers we are in by reason of our unhappy divisions” ceases to be a pious regret as we face the sin of our disunion in the setting of God’s potentially united earth. The background of all our thinking must be the sense of a Church that is worldwide, whose welcome is for all.³

The Iona Community, then, would be a community *in* the Church of Scotland, belonging to the Church that is worldwide. It involved ministers training for the Church of Scotland spending the summer on the Isle of Iona to rebuild the historic Iona Abbey in community with craftsmen (in a 50:50 balance). The off-season then saw the training ministers apprentice, in pairs, in disadvantaged, industrial parishes.⁴

Ralph Morton, the Deputy Leader of the Iona Community from 1944, explained in 1953 that, ‘it was the recognition of the needs of the parish, particularly in the industrial areas, that led to the founding of the Iona

¹ *The Coracle*, the official publication of the Iona Community, launched in October 1938: <https://iona.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Coracle-11-Oct-1938-1.pdf>.

² George MacLeod, “Concerning this Publication”, *The Coracle* (October 1938), 1.

³ George MacLeod, “What is Our Immediate Destination?” *The Coracle* (October 1938), 4.

⁴ Ron Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose: The Iona Community* (London: Fount, 1988), 66.



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Community.⁵ George Wilkie, an early Iona Community member (joining in 1945), in an interview with Anne Muir who collected oral testimonies of the Community with members active from 1938 to 1969, similarly emphasised that the ‘real’ aim of the Community lay in the parishes :

[George MacLeod] saw us going and setting up a community within the Parish, similar to the one on Iona, and there might be a bit of a connection between the two, but that was where the community was to exist – not on Iona [...] the real community had to be in the parish. So I don’t think George anticipated the Community becoming the sort of continuing organisation it has become.⁶

Wilkie firmly placed this experiment within the boundaries of the Church of Scotland, and asserted that it was not envisioned as a continuing community at all. It was proposed as a means of filling gaps in the parish-based make-up of the Church of Scotland by restoring an important piece of Scottish Christian history, Columba’s Iona Abbey. Yet, the Abbey that was the laboratory (as MacLeod phrased it) of this experimental Community had ecumenical conditions.⁷ In 1899 the Duke of Argyll gifted the Cathedral to the ‘whole Christian world’ through the creation of the Iona Cathedral Trust, in connection with the Church of Scotland.⁸ The Duke deliberately did not make the then Church of Scotland minister of Iona a Trustee, knowing his anti-ecumenical stance.⁹

Despite his interconnected ideals for the Community to work within the structures of the Church of Scotland, MacLeod’s scheme was not adopted at the 1938 General Assembly. He did not alert the Home Mission Committee before asking the General Assembly to adopt his scheme and this caused a long debate about the Community in the Assembly, not necessarily at odds with the idea, but with the lack of preparation. It was

⁵ Ralph Morton, “The Work of the Community – In Parishes in Scotland”, *The Coracle* (December 1953), 15.

⁶ Anne Muir, *Outside the Safe Place: An Oral History of the Early Years of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2011), 31.

⁷ George MacLeod, “It is a Laboratory”, *The Coracle* (October 1938), 3.

⁸ Iona Cathedral Trust, “History”, <http://www.iona-cathedral.org.uk/history/>.

⁹ Ron Ferguson, *George MacLeod: The Founder of the Iona Community* (London: William Collins & Co Ltd, 1990). 147.



decided that an ad hoc Committee of fifteen would be appointed to examine the scheme to decide if it should be adopted by the General Assembly in the future. Alongside many articles praising the project, there were also polemical articles that argued his project was creating a ‘mini monasticism’ in Scotland and was creating ‘little George MacLeods’.¹⁰ A community based upon Scottish Celtic monastic ideals, to invigorate the Presbyterian mission, was controversial. The Community was not fully integrated into the Church of Scotland until 1951.



Outside ecumenical and missionary attention

Following the first summer of his ‘experiment’ George MacLeod was invited to India to attend and speak at the third International Missionary Conference, held in Madras Christian College, Tambaram, in the December of 1938. In his speech to the conference MacLeod encouraged the church to ‘become a movement again’, and, drawing upon the cooperative or family nature of Christianity, believed that ‘limited Christianity is breaking up, so that World Christianity may take its place.’¹¹ In response to his speech, the American John Mott, chairman of the IMC, wrote how it was ‘never to be forgotten’ and agreed that local fellowships were necessary to rebuild a Christian witness.¹² The November 1939 issue of the IMC Secretary J. H. Oldham’s war-time fortnightly publication *The Christian Newsletter* recorded that the

¹⁰ “The Iona Scheme”, *Edinburgh Evening Citizen* (07/05/1938), from the Macleod of Fuinary and Iona Community archive in the National Library of Scotland (NLS Acc.9084/129). Further documents from the archive are referenced (as here) with the NLS sequence number. See <https://digital.nls.uk/catalogues/guide-to-manuscript-collections/inventories/acc9084.pdf>.

¹¹ George MacLeod, “Winning the World for Christ”, *Addresses and Other Records: International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 48–53, 52; George MacLeod, *Madras Congress 1939 [sic]* (NLS Acc.9084/223). This is one of the earliest uses of the phrase ‘World Christianity’, earlier than either H. P. Van Dusen or William Temple; see Dana Robert, “Historiographic Foundations from Latourette and Van Dusen to Andrew F. Walls” in *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew Walls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 148–49.

¹² John R. Mott, Letter to G. MacLeod, April 1939 (NLS Acc.9084/223). MacLeod also published a positive letter from Mott in the June 1941 issue of *The Coracle*.



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Community was ‘full of promise’ and the goal of creating a ‘living home of Christian fellowship’ in Scotland should be celebrated.¹³ Oldham also invited Ian Fraser, a member of the Community from 1942, to discuss his work as an industrial chaplain.¹⁴ The exposure given to MacLeod’s community by these two leading figures in the missionary movement helped put it firmly in the realm of projects for the ecumenical missions network to take note of.

The Iona Community was also quickly understood as a vital resource to the national ecumenical movement. MacLeod was on the board of the Scottish Ecumenical Youth Committee, and Community member Archie Craig was the first General Secretary of the British Council of Churches from 1942–1947.¹⁵ They were also drawn into the missionary endeavours across Scotland, with the Iona Community being involved in the 1953 ecumenical Tell Scotland campaign, run by Church of Scotland evangelist Tom Allan. Tell Scotland’s aim was to renew the church life of Scotland by empowering the clergy to train the laity to witness to their communities, with the underlying emphasis that ‘the agent of effective mission is the church itself, the redeemed community.’¹⁶ MacLeod was on the Parent Committee and Ralph Morton was on the steering committee.¹⁷ Tell Scotland was first discussed in an Iona Community Meeting in the September of 1953, where it was decided that each monthly meeting of 1954 would have a section dedicated to the campaign.¹⁸ The Community agreed that their policy for working with Tell Scotland was to ‘encourage other ministers in their Presbyteries to embark on Parish Missions and to

¹³ J. H. Oldham, “The Iona Community”, *The Christian Newsletter* (22 November 1939) (NLS Acc.9084/129).

¹⁴ Ian Fraser, *Features of the Thatcher Legacy: A Theological Critique* (Glasgow: Iona Community Publications, 1993).

¹⁵ Letter from Archie C. Craig, “Ecumenical Work” (1945) (NLS Acc.9084/160).

¹⁶ Reports of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1954, 220, as quoted in Alexander Forsyth, *Mission by the People: Re-discovering the Dynamic Missiology of Tom Allan and His Scottish Contemporaries* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 32.

¹⁷ Meeting Minutes 23rd June 1955, *Tell Scotland 1953–1959* (NLS Acc.9084/254).

¹⁸ “Minutes of a Meeting of the Iona Community”, 22/09/1953 (Plenary Papers 1950–54). The Plenary Papers are held in an Iona Community archive.



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help in the working out in particular situations the lines in which we serve Scotland.¹⁹ The vision of a whole church on mission together, was replaced by an overtly evangelistic campaign as a result of Billy Graham being invited to tour Scotland.²⁰ The decision to move away from empowering the laity towards mass evangelism was disputed by MacLeod and Morton publicly.²¹ Morton wrote in *The Coracle* how the invitation was ‘inadequate and even dangerous’; it would ‘disrupt the serious and long-term work of the Tell Scotland movement [...] and the need to see the full Gospel reflected in the life of the Church.’²² MacLeod’s issue did not lie with Graham, or his evangelical denominational positioning, but with his relatability to this missionary campaign that was devised as a grass-roots operation aimed at encouraging and building up the laity.²³ MacLeod believed Tell Scotland should not have been simply encouraging a one-time encounter with a dynamic Christianity but with a unified, holistic and hopefully continuing encounter with Christianity as a way of life. The Community’s vision was displaced with Graham’s invitation and eventual campaign, and the Community retracted their public support.

By 1952 MacLeod was reconsidering the place of ecumenism for Iona. In a letter to Lesslie Newbigin he asked for advice on how to approach unity on Iona, ‘in order to fulfil the wishes of the Duke of Argyll.’²⁴ MacLeod stressed to Newbigin his frustration at two ecumenical events that had been held on Iona the summer prior. The first event saw fifty members of the Scottish Ecumenical Youth Council come to Iona.²⁵ The second was held by the Student Christian Movement and brought twelve Russian Orthodox, twelve Anglicans and twelve Presbyterians to the Island. MacLeod explained he was hurt by Father Vladimir taking the

¹⁹ “Minutes of a Meeting of the Iona Community”, 10/11/1953 (Plenary Papers 1950–54).

²⁰ For an in-depth discussion of the Tell Scotland campaign see Forsyth, *Mission by the People*.

²¹ Forsyth, *Mission by the People*, 34–39.

²² Ralph Morton, “Foreword”, *The Coracle* (October 1954), 4.

²³ See George MacLeod, “Should Billy Graham Tell Scotland?” (Letter 28th April 1954), *Tell Scotland 1953–1959* (NLS Acc.9084/254).

²⁴ George MacLeod, Letter to Lesslie Newbigin, 27th September 1952, *Unions File 1952–1959* (NLS Acc.9084/257).

²⁵ Invitation Letter 1942, *Scottish Ecumenical Youth Committee* (NLS Acc.9084/287).



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Orthodox students to the back of the Abbey to avoid participating in passing the elements but was ‘positively offended’ when ‘Father Curtis followed with the Anglicans’. He argued with the Anglican priest that a Benedictine monk felt able to pass the elements last summer and some of the Anglican students decided to participate despite the priest.²⁶

As Convenor of the Union Committee which established the 1947 Church of South India (CSI), uniting Reformed, Methodist and Episcopalian churches, Newbigin was ecumenically-speaking leaps and bounds ahead of the struggling British scene.²⁷ MacLeod even suggested performing a rite that does not belong to the Church of Scotland in the Abbey to enable inclusion and asked ‘isn’t it time to get a replica of the CSI in this country?’²⁸ Newbigin’s reply motivated MacLeod to press on with issues of Faith and Order. Members of the Iona Community appointed a steering committee of MacLeod, Ralph Morton, Archie Craig, Cecil Thornton and W. Neill Moir to assess the relatability of the CSI union to the British context.²⁹ This group primarily researched the possibility of union between the Presbyterian and Anglican churches.³⁰ To not align themselves with the Church Relations Committee, which they felt was taking too much time, they functioned as a non-official ad hoc society, but MacLeod stressed that the ‘heritage of Iona [makes] it more than just a society.’³¹ By the January of 1954 this small group had 175 members and met with ‘experts’ in Candlemakers Row, Edinburgh, to discuss in depth

²⁶ MacLeod, Letter to Lesslie Newbigin.

²⁷ Mark T. B. Laing, *From Crisis to Creation: Lesslie Newbigin and the Reinvention of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 20–24.

²⁸ George MacLeod, Letter to Lesslie Newbigin, 27th September 1952 (NLS Acc.9084/257). MacLeod was concerned with intercommunion when he worked as a Padre for Toc H, an interdenominational movement started in the battlefields of WWI by Rev Philip Clayton, and disagreed with the later Toc H stance of allowing Anglicans to refuse other Christians the Eucharist. “Toc H in Scotland”, *Toc H Journal* IV, no. 3 (March 1926): 106–07.

²⁹ “Meeting: Community House”, 21st November 1952, *Unions File 1952–1959* (NLS Acc.9084/257).

³⁰ *Presbyterian-Anglican Union 1953–1958* (NLS Acc.9084/286).

³¹ The Inter-Church Relations Committee at this time were still focusing on bringing together local Free Church and Church of Scotland Congregations following on from the 1929 Union. Steering Committee, 21st March 1952 (NLS Acc.9084/286).



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the CSI Union. It was decided by the April of 1954 however that no movement would be possible until the quadrilateral discussions with the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church of England, the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church, convened later that year.³² The 1957 General Assembly determined that the eventual unity proposals ‘imply a denial of the Catholicity of the Church of Scotland and of the validity and regularity of its ministry within the Church Catholic.’³³ The report did not achieve a successful union. MacLeod’s Moderator’s address at the end of the General Assembly called for ‘patience about Bishops and impatience about Bombs’³⁴

Following the decisions of the General Assembly and General Synod after the quadrilateral report MacLeod and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, exchanged letters. They also communicated through the outlet of *The Times* before corresponding in private. In 1959 MacLeod questioned the Church of England’s stance on the legitimacy of Presbyterian ordinations, asking for an ‘official statement.’³⁵ Archbishop Fisher replied with the 1920 Lambeth appeal which extended the apostolicity of Anglicanism to other denominations.³⁶ MacLeod responded with an example of a young English boy who he took to a local Anglican church not wanting him to be the lone Presbyterian but to enable him to have fellowship. The first question the Anglican priest asked the boy, MacLeod outlines, was if he promised to never go to a Presbyterian sacrament again, the result being that the boy never returned to a church.³⁷ MacLeod was concerned with the real-life practice of ecumenical engagement. The Lambeth appeal meant nothing to the past Moderator if it did not translate into action.

³² April 1954 Meeting (NLS Acc.9084/286).

³³ George MacLeod letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury G. Fisher 17th July 1959, *Inter-church Relations* (NLS Acc.9084/73).

³⁴ George MacLeod, Letter to G. Fisher, 10th June 1957 (NLS Acc.9084/73). MacLeod’s pacifist agenda has been well documented. See Ferguson, *George MacLeod*, 130.

³⁵ Letter from G. Fisher, 27th July 1959 (NLS Acc.9084/73).

³⁶ Letter from G. Fisher, 27th July 1959. See Mark Chapman, “The Lambeth Appeal and the Appeal of Britain”, *The Ecumenical Review* 72, no. 4 (October 2020) for a critical review of the appeal’s limited scope and reception.

³⁷ George MacLeod, Letter to G. Fisher, 30th July 1959 (NLS Acc.9084/73).





Internal diversity: Ecumenical, youth, lay, women

The first ecumenical member of the Community was Harry Barrow, a minister in the Presbyterian Church of England, who had ‘been on Iona each year since [the Community’s] inception, and who had frequently expressed a wish to join the Community.’³⁸ He joined in 1952, the year after the Community was integrated into the Church of Scotland. However, the Board, shared between the Community and the Church of Scotland, only extended membership to other denominations in 1993.³⁹ The first Roman Catholic member, Chris Mercer, did not join until 1976.⁴⁰ Allowing the laity, and women, into full membership of the Community were more painful conversations.

The core work of the Iona Community had shifted from the ideals held in 1938, extending from ministers working in Church of Scotland congregations in deprived areas that were to influence the parish, towards communally run and organised projects that would connect faith to societal life. The first of these projects concerned youth work, and was inspired by a group held in the Roman Catholic tradition. In 1942, MacLeod and John Summers started a youth group in Canongate, Edinburgh.⁴¹ MacLeod and Summers explored several editions of the Roman Catholic *Young Christian Workers* magazine (YCW), from the September of 1940.⁴² The YCW were part of the international network *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* which sought to expose young Christians to social injustices and mobilise them for action.⁴³ The boys in the Iona Community’s Christian Workers League club were encouraged to think for and govern themselves. This allowed them to include women, just three months after the Christian Workers League opened, 27 years before the Community would make this decision⁴⁴ Youth pushed the Iona Community into becoming internally

³⁸ Macleod, Letter to G. Fisher, 30th July 1959.

³⁹ Norman Shanks, *Iona: God’s Energy* (London: Hodder, 1999), 184.

⁴⁰ Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose*, 117.

⁴¹ Ferguson, 117.

⁴² Letter from YCW office September 1940, *Youth File* (NLS Acc.9084/288).

⁴³ Justin Sands, “Introducing Cardinal Cardijn’s See–Judge–Act as an Interdisciplinary Method to Move Theory into Practice”, *Religions* 9, no. 129 (April 2018): 3.

⁴⁴ Muir, *Outside of the Safe Place*, 45; John Summers, “Christian Workers League”, *The Coracle* (June 1942), 25–28.



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ecumenically diverse by insisting on a Youth Associateship. The Women's Associateship had been established prior to 1943, and had 240 members by 1944,⁴⁵ and young people pressured MacLeod to explore Youth and Lay Associateship concurrently in 1943.⁴⁶ The adoption of these Associateships changed the exclusive boundaries of who could belong, in some way, to the Community.

Transferring from an Associate member to a full member was still impossible for those not ordained. Conversations about lay membership began in 1952, pushed by Ian Fraser and David Forrester, but were quickly dismissed by MacLeod who was convinced that the laity would not commit to their parish if too involved with the Community. These conversations resurfaced in 1961 with Carl Smith and David Jarvie providing an extensive paper about the place of the laity in the church.⁴⁷ MacLeod disagreed with their use of Hendrik Kraemer's 1958 publication *A Theology of the Laity*,⁴⁸ which discussed the limitations of the laity. MacLeod emphasised that the laity in Scotland were well equipped, yet distinct from the clergy who had a different function.⁴⁹ The conversation resulted in the setting up of a Commission, led by Iain Reid, which allowed the Community to decide to admit lay men, acknowledging that ordained people were ministers of the Word and Sacrament, both of which depended on the involvement of the laity. The clergy, he advised, were a 'servant of the laity.'⁵⁰ In 1963 Roger Grey of Portree, Skye, applied for Lay Membership after being an Associate for some years. The Community approved his application and recommended that he worked with the

⁴⁵ George MacLeod, "Women Associates", *The Coracle* (February 1944), 23.

⁴⁶ Morton, *The Iona Community*, 52; George MacLeod, "Our Rule", *The Coracle* (March 1943), 7–10. Ronald Ferguson and Kathy Galloway state that the order in which the various Associateships were created was Ministerial, Youth, and then Women Associate membership: Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose*, 71; Kathy Galloway, *Living by the Rule: The Rule of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2010), 136–37.

⁴⁷ "The Church, Laity and the Iona Community: The Place and Discipline of the Laymen in the Iona Community", *01/06/1961* (Plenary Papers, 1961–69).

⁴⁸ Hendrick Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958), 45.

⁴⁹ George MacLeod, "Comments on 'The Church, the Laity, and the Iona Community'", *1961* (Plenary Papers, 1950–54).

⁵⁰ Iain Reid, "Laymen in the Community", *1962* (Plenary Papers, 1961–69).



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Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Skye for two years.⁵¹ Later that decade the Rev James Maitland, a supporter of the 1962 laity decision and former warden of Community House, Glasgow, helped establish the Livingston Ecumenical Experiment alongside the Episcopal priest, the Rev Brian Hardy, and the Rev Hamish Smith from the Congregational Church in 1966. Amongst them there was a common conviction that Martin Luther's idea of the priesthood of all believers was of primary importance. James Maitland stated that 'the Church's primary ministry belongs to the laity, and the main job of the professional ministry is to help the laity recognize and answer its calling to be the Church scattered in every department of secular life'.⁵²

Kathy Galloway, the first woman Leader of the Community, commented that by the mid-1980s the Community was thoroughly ecumenical compared to how it had been at its founding.⁵³ The Community's blossoming identity as an ecumenical community within the wider ecumenical movement stands as a testament not to the theology of ecumenism but to a theology of the laity. Ron Ferguson demonstrates the extent to which the make-up of the Community had shifted by the 1980s when he lists the diverse jobs of the 180 plus membership at the time.⁵⁴ Within the Community, Kathy Galloway comments that,

The inclusion of women had as much to do with declericalisation and the increasing impact of things like feminism on the society in general. In lots of ways churches have been incredibly slow about some of that and slow about really taking that to its conclusion. Even the Church of Scotland, although it managed to have women ministers by 1968, it didn't manage to have women moderators for another 40 years.⁵⁵

The conversation about the place of women in church and society was happening at an earlier stage in ecumenical organisations such as the

⁵¹ "Minutes of a Meeting of the Iona Community", 16–17/01/1963 (Plenary Papers, 1961–69).

⁵² Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose*, 107.

⁵³ Kathy Galloway, Zoom Interview with William Gibson, 20th July 2023.

⁵⁴ Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose*, 131.

⁵⁵ Galloway, Zoom Interview with William Gibson, 20th July 2023.



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World Council of Churches (WCC) than it was in the Iona Community.⁵⁶ It was not until 1969 that Dr Nancy Brash became the first woman to join the Iona Community.⁵⁷ The Community lagged behind the Church of Scotland in recognising the place of women, but of course, from 1963, a member of the Community did not need to be ordained but still had to be male.

Ron Ferguson noted that ‘[t]he invisibility of women has to be seen in the context of the general assumptions of the time,’ but did not expand upon why a Community that purported to be trailblazers in counter-cultural just practice should not be held to their own account on this issue. He also admitted that ‘the Community’s acceptance of women came only because women persisted.’⁵⁸ Before full membership was allowed, the Community provided alternative opportunities for women; the Women Associates, formed in 1943, were a vibrant and semi-independent network and Dr Brash was invited to give a talk to all the Associates in 1965 where she shared her difficulties of often being viewed as a ‘second-class Christian’ in her work because she did not believe in biblical inerrancy.⁵⁹ Reflections from other members of the Community in the 1970s reveal that even when women were allowed to become equal members they were not always treated equally.⁶⁰ Accordingly, there appeared to be a greater level of enthusiasm for membership from those who were already heavily involved in the work of the Kirk. Kathy Galloway notes that the first women members ‘fitted the Presbyterian mould’.⁶¹ Brash was a former Church of Scotland medical missionary in North India and Ishbel Maclellan, another woman who was an early member of the Community, was a Church of Scotland deaconess working in India. It is questionable whether their inclusion as members had more to do with their prior

⁵⁶ Aruna Gnanadason, “Women in the Ecumenical Movement”, *International Review of Mission* 81, no. 332 (April 1992), 237–46.

⁵⁷ Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose*, 112.

⁵⁸ Ferguson, 112.

⁵⁹ This article only spanned 2½ pages, and articles from women were incredibly rare in *The Coracle* magazine, and often poems rather than longer content pieces. Nancy Brash, “Withdrawal and Involvement”, *The Coracle* (December 1965), 23–25. Kathleen Bliss and Marjorie Reeves were also invited to give talks to the Community in 1952 and 1967.

⁶⁰ Muir, *Outside of the Safe Place*, 139–41.

⁶¹ Galloway, Zoom Interview with William Gibson, 20th July 2023.

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endeavours within the Kirk, and the fact that overseas missions work offered women more opportunities for service, than the Community experiencing a feminist awakening. George MacLeod has been described as a ‘man’s man’⁶² and the Iona Community which he founded was described by some as a ‘Presbyterian brotherhood’.⁶³ Molly Harvey summarises MacLeod’s attitude well; in Anne Muir’s oral history of the Community, she says, ‘He was starting it off with this group of a dozen men: craftsmen and ministers. Women weren’t ministers, and women weren’t carpenters. I don’t think it would ever have occurred to him, and if it had occurred to him, he’d have certainly said, “No way!”’.⁶⁴

The challenges faced by women inside the Iona Community were not alien to women in the ecumenical movement. Ecumenist, Aruna Gnanadason notes that ‘some of the issues that women were raising forty or so years ago, continue to remain unresolved and continue to demand time and energy of women in the ecumenical movement today’.⁶⁵ The Community has made significant progress when it comes to the inclusion and participation of women in all aspects of its life, work, and worship despite its slow start in beginning the conversation. This includes the introduction and use of gender inclusive language in worship, the election of Kathy Galloway as the first woman leader of the Community in 2002, and representation in the membership, with 56% now being women. These changes have occurred concurrently with significant developments in the Community’s purpose and membership, moving from a ‘Presbyterian brotherhood’⁶⁶ with a clerical focus to a diverse, declericalised, ecumenical community. Gnanadason argues that the ecumenical movement must take account of the ways in which power and identity form an individual’s experience of the church. She presents a new paradigm of ecumenism which embraces diversity, crosses patriarchal divides, and warns against the dangers of creating a hierarchy in suffering, opting instead for a vision of ecumenism which embraces human solidarity and mutual support.⁶⁷ She states, ‘a holistic and inclusive image of God and of

⁶² Muir, *Outside the Safe Place*, 127.

⁶³ Galloway, Zoom Interview with William Gibson, 20th July 2023.

⁶⁴ Muir, *Outside the Safe Place*, 127.

⁶⁵ Gnanadason, “Women in the Ecumenical Movement”, 244.

⁶⁶ Galloway, Zoom Interview with William Gibson, 20th July 2023.

⁶⁷ Aruna Gnanadason, *With Courage and Compassion: Women and the Ecumenical Movement* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020), 149–54.



society challenges us to find those round tables that will provide a word of hope and of challenge to all women and men in the ecumenical movement'.⁶⁸ Kathy Galloway considers the main areas of concern for the Iona Community today are to be engaging with and promoting the participation of young people and minorities.⁶⁹ Traditional styles of ecumenism can view the issues of women, lay people or marginalised groups within the ecumenical movement as secondary or divisive issues compared to church unity or mutual theological understanding. Yet, Gnanadason proposes that 'through the self-affirmation of each one's specific identity, the bonds in a community are strengthened rather than leading to fragmentation and instability'.⁷⁰ The Iona Community still has a way to go when it comes to becoming the type of ecumenical community that Gnanadason envisions, especially in relation to race and age. Being truly ecumenical should reflect inwardly as well as outwardly.



Conclusion

Norman Shanks, Leader from 1995 to 2002, commented that members often do not know each other's denominational allegiance because it 'simply does not really matter'.⁷¹ The Community that was rooted into one denomination is now understood as an ecumenical body in itself. The dispersed Community of Shanks' time enters the ecumenical world very differently to the rooted and confident Community of MacLeod's 'experiment'. The Community joined as an Associate body to the national ecumenical instruments of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England and Action of Churches Together in Scotland in 1990.⁷² Additionally, with the aim of 'sharing Communion by the year 2000' two consultations were held on Iona, jointly with CTBI, which led to a petition asking for the sharing of communion at ecumenical

⁶⁸ Gnanadason, *With Courage and Compassion*, 152.

⁶⁹ Galloway, Zoom Interview with William Gibson, 20th July 2023.

⁷⁰ Gnanadason, *With Courage and Compassion*, 149.

⁷¹ Shanks, *Iona: God's Energy*, 186.

⁷² Shanks, 184. At the time CTBI was named the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. See also "Iona Community", *Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1994*, 436.



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events.⁷³ Following the British Council of Churches shift to a grassroots approach to become more inclusive, the Iona Community has turned away from hierarchies of ordained/lay and men/women, and works ecumenically internally allowing it to be received by the wider ecumenical movement.⁷⁴ Increased diversity in both groups allows for the strengthening of the ecumenical endeavour through each being reflections of the diversity of God's world.

⁷³ Shanks, *Iona: God's Energy*, 188. The Community's ecumenical group renamed itself 'Called to be One' in 1998.

⁷⁴ See Keith Clements, *Look Back in Hope: An Ecumenical Life* (Searcy: Resource Publications, 2017).

