

## Donald Cargill (1627-81)

Donald Cargill was a minister of God's Word; he was clear minded and heroic, fighting in the battle for truth and liberty.

He was not perfect, but even the most objective person could not question his faith and his character must be remembered in light of the times in which he lived. One writer described him as "a faithful watchman, moody and self-mortified" yet with all his moodiness and sorrowfulness he was "a man most affectionate, mild and charitable, who within the boundary line of certain fixed ideas could vigorously think out his subject, and express his thoughts with great nerve and precision" and for these views he was prepared to suffer and die.

### Early Life

He was born in 1627 in Raffray, Perthshire, attending a parish school in Aberdeen. He worked for some time as a mercantile and in agriculture, but returned to study Philosophy in St. Andrew's University in or around 1645. There is no record of him finishing his studies there, but this is not surprising as life in Scotland, not least among Professors and students, at the time was so politically charged with disputes between Cavaliers, Covenanters, Resolutioners and Protesters with the Solemn League and Covenant having been signed in 1643.

He was a timid man, always very conscious of his own sinfulness and often felt inadequate, which hindered him from entering the ministry earlier despite his father's desire for him to do so. Nonetheless he was licensed in 1653 and in 1655 he was ordained minister of Barony Church Glasgow at a time of much religious interest and spiritual mindedness with a third of Glasgow having been burned down 2 years previously.

Cargill married a widow soon after his ordination, but she died within a year of their marrying, leaving him charge of her 3 sons, and 2 daughters to her previous marriage.

In 1663 two Acts were passed by Charles II attacking religious liberty. The Act of Supremacy appointed the King as supreme judge in all matters civil and ecclesiastical. The Act Rescissory repudiating the Solemn League and Covenant and declaring that the Reformation of that time as rebellious and treasonable. These Acts were followed by the beheading of some of the notable champions of the cause of religious liberty at the time. It was not long before Cargill was judged not worthy by the King's Council to hold office as a minister in Glasgow and he was exiled, not least for failing to observe a day set aside for commemorating the King's birth and restoration to the throne.

Despite his exile he visited Glasgow and took every opportunity to minister to them either in their homes or in the fields.

### Experience of Persecution

In August 1663 non-conforming ministers were told they must leave their parishes and not reside within 20 miles of them or within 6 miles of Edinburgh. Then in 1669 came the Indulgences, which were in effect a royal permission to exercise the functions of the ministry under certain prescribed conditions reserving to the Government the right to control the ecclesiastical acts of the ministers. The Second Indulgence prescribing more objectionable conditions on ministers was enacted in 1672.

Cargill spent some time, as many ministers at the time had done, in Holland and on his return to Scotland found that peril was no less and he on many occasions escaped capture only narrowly.

The punishments at the time on non-conformists and attendees at "illegal conventicles" varied between heavy fines, exile, slavery and even imprisonment. Despite this Cargill preached many times and although they could have been politically charged and controversial they were said to have been in the main full of evangelical fervour.

## Final Year and Death

Cargill ministered alongside Richard Cameron. He was not present at Cameron's death at Ayrsmoss on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1680, but he preached Cameron's funeral sermon. On 12<sup>th</sup> September he preached to an immense crowd at Torwood, between Larbert and Stirling. His text was Ezekiel 21:25-27: "And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." In his sermon he proceeded to excommunicate Charles II from the church of which Charles claimed to be the head. He also excommunicated: James, Duke of York, the king's brother; the Duke of Monmouth; the Duke of Lauderdale, the king's former commissioner in Scotland; the Duke of Rothes, Chancellor of Scotland and president of the Privy Council; Sir George Mackenzie, the king's Advocate; and Thomas Dalrymple of Binns, general of the king's forces.

Cargill's action electrified the government and a price of 5,000 merks (about 250 English pounds) was put on his head. However, Cargill continued to work ceaselessly, risking arrest by his frequent appearances at conventicles. His last public appearance was preaching the Word on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1681. The next morning he was seized while in bed. He was tried in Edinburgh and sent to the gallows on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1681. When on the scaffold he sang part of the 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm from the 16<sup>th</sup> verse to the end.

As he awaited execution he tried to address the people but the drums drowned him out. As he ascended the ladder he said he did so, he said, with less fear than when he entered the pulpit to preach. His last words were, "Farewell, all relations and friends in Christ: farewell acquaintances and all earthly enjoyments: farewell reading and preaching, praying and believing, wanderings, reproaches, sufferings. Welcome joy unspeakable and full of glory. Welcome Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." He was beheaded with four other martyrs and their heads placed upon the Netherbow Port.

James Renwick, aged 19, was present at Cargill's execution. Cargill's testimony on that occasion sealed Renwick's resolve to identify himself with the suffering church.