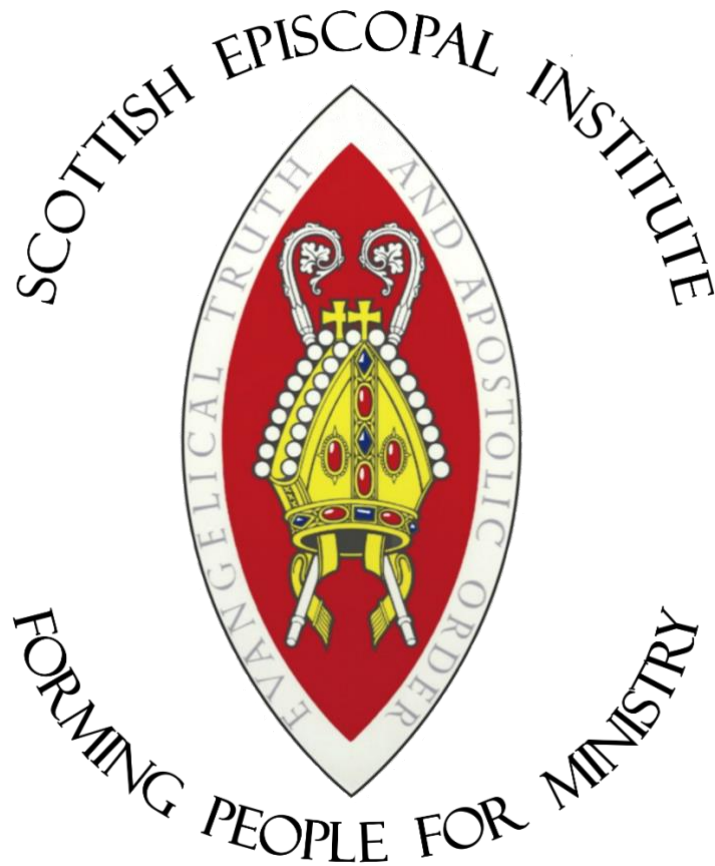


# Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal



Spring 2022 — Volume 6.1

*A quarterly journal for debate on current issues  
in the Anglican Communion and beyond*

ISSN 2399-8989



# Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal

The 'Saint Andrew Declaration' was signed with fanfare on St Andrew's Day 2021 in Edinburgh by Mark Strange, Bishop of Moray, Ross and Caithness and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, and James Wallace, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This number of the *Journal* attends to related historical and theological issues. This number is all the more relevant with the May 2022 signing of the St Margaret Declaration between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland.

## ARTICLES

- The Saint Andrew Declaration: A Shared History and a Shared Faith?  
Stephen Mark Holmes 7
- Presbyterians and Episcopalians: A Shared History in Scotland  
from a Presbyterian Perspective  
Alasdair J. Macleod 27
- Order, Ministry and Sacraments in the Church of Scotland  
Teri Peterson and Martin Ritchie 41
- Sacraments and Ministry in the Scottish Episcopal Church  
John Reuben Davies and Nicholas Taylor 69
- The Ecclesiology of the Scottish Episcopal Church  
Emsley Nimmo 81
- Presbyterian Church Government (by Divine Right)  
John W. Keddie 103
- The Church of Scotland and the Authority of Scripture  
Andrew T. B. McGowan 117
- The Scottish Episcopal Church  
David Jasper 129

## REVIEWS

- Douglas Galbraith, *Assist our Song: Music Ministries in the Local Church*  
Reviewed by Roberta Ritson 137
- Eric Stoddart, *The Common Gaze: Surveillance and the Common Good*  
Reviewed by W. John Carswell 139
- Richard Morris, *Evensong: People, Discoveries and Reflections on the Church in England*  
Reviewed by David Jasper 140
- Robert S. Heaney, K. John Kafwanka, Hilda Kabia, eds, *God's Church for God's World: A Practical Approach to Partnership in Mission*  
Reviewed by Nicholas Taylor 124

**Enquiries**

Enquires to the Revd Dr Michael Hull  
Scottish Episcopal Institute  
21 Grosvenor Crescent  
Edinburgh EH12 5EE  
Scotland-UK  
0131-225-6357  
[dos@scotland.anglican.org](mailto:dos@scotland.anglican.org)

**Disclaimer**

The opinions, beliefs and viewpoints expressed by the authors in the *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* do not necessarily reflect the opinions, beliefs and viewpoints of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church or the Scottish Episcopal Institute.

**Copyright**

The author of each article published here owns his or her own words. The articles in the *Scottish Episcopal Journal* may be freely redistributed in other media and non-commercial publications as long as the article is not abridged, edited or altered in any way without the express consent of the author. A redistributed article may not be sold for profit or included in another medium or publication that is sold for profit without the express consent of the author. The articles in the *Scottish Episcopal Journal* may be included in commercial publication or other media only if prior consent for republication is received from the author. The author may request compensation for republication for commercial use.

Volume 6.1 — Spring 2022 — ISSN 2399-8989

Revised Thursday 26 May 2022



## The Saint Andrew Declaration: A Shared History and a Shared Faith?

Stephen Mark Holmes

Rector, Church of the Holy Cross, Edinburgh  
Associate Tutor, Scottish Episcopal Institute

The Saint Andrew Declaration (SAD), which was signed by the leaders of the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church in Edinburgh on St Andrew's Day in 2021, commits the two churches to working together. It makes a mutual recognition of elements of Catholic unity in the faith and order of the two churches while acknowledging that they are not in full communion.<sup>1</sup> Like many others in ministry in Scotland in our two churches, I have friends in the other church. I studied at undergraduate and postgraduate level with those who are now ministers and even taught some of them at New College in Edinburgh. Socially our two churches are intertwined, and I am surely not alone in sometimes feeling closer spiritually and theologically to ministers of the other church than I do to some in my own. I might even, occasionally, agree with the Anglican novelist Rose Macaulay who wrote in 1953, 'How nice it would be if each Church were to publish a pamphlet full of compliments to the other! Why should there be all this ill-feeling?'<sup>2</sup>

There are, however, fundamental differences in faith and order between our two churches which were reflected in the less than fulsome welcome given to SAD when it was adopted at the 2021 General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church.<sup>3</sup> If SAD is to be anything more than ineffective mutual niceness between ecumenists, these differences and hesitations suggest that it needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny. I will do so from the

---

<sup>1</sup> The recognitions are found in section A of SAD, the Acknowledgements. The concept of 'full communion' and 'imperfect' or 'partial' communion is taken from general ecumenical practice, found in paragraph 3 of the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* of the Second Vatican Council. This is reflected in the mention of imperfect unity and fuller visible unity in SAD A.vi.

<sup>2</sup> Macaulay commenting on the 'ill-mannered' criticisms of Anglicanism by Roman Catholics and an Anglican response in the same vein, in Constance Babington Smith, *Last letters to a Friend from Rose Macaulay 1952-1958* (London: Collins, 1962), p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> The voting was 78 in favour, 21 against with 7 abstentions and the Synod minutes note several interventions critical of the Declaration.

perspective of history and historical theology and will make some suggestions as to how effective ecumenism might be done. The Lord prayed that we might all be one and this unity in our differences must be a reality rooted in honesty not a polite pretence based on falsehood.

### *The Preamble*

The Preamble is not part of the Declaration proper, and it has two parts, one giving the historical background of the churches and the other a description of the bilateral conversations of the 'Our Common Calling Working Group' out of which it arose. The Preamble says of the Group that, 'in the course of our discussions we have acknowledged our shared history and have named past conflicts'. The problem is that the churches in Scotland do not have a shared history but rather a series of conflicting denominational histories which I and others have explored and unveiled.<sup>4</sup> This historical sectarianism was first seriously undermined using modern historical scholarship by the Roman Catholic historians of the Scottish Catholic Historical Association and this task has been continued in the secular history faculties of modern Scotland and elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Episcopalian–Presbyterian ecumenism has thus contributed little to a more accurate understanding of the ecclesiastical history of Scotland, whereas those who were deliberately excluded and those professionally detached from Christianity have contributed most. The legacy of the old sectarian history has, however, survived and is found in the Preamble to SAD. It is unfortunate that a document that aims to reconcile Scotland's churches begins by perpetuating sectarianism.

The second sentence of the Preamble is: 'For over a century following the Reformation, the church in Scotland, and Scotland's monarch, wrestled over the order of the church: was it to be Presbyterian or Episcopalian?' This seems a straightforward historical statement, but it contains evidence of that sectarianism, so deeply rooted in Scottish society, which in 1999 the composer James Macmillan called 'Scotland's shame'.<sup>6</sup> To speak of 'the

---

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Mark Holmes, 'The Scottish Reformation was not Protestant', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 14.2 (2014), 115–27.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Mark Holmes, 'Historiography of the Scottish Reformation: The Catholics Fight Back?', in *The Church on its Past*, ed. by Peter D. Clarke and Charlotte Methuen, *Studies in Church History* 49 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), pp. 298–311.

<sup>6</sup> The Scottish Government, *An Examination of the Evidence on Sectarianism in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Justice Analytical Services, 2013), p. 10. *Scotland's Shame? Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland*, ed. by T. M. Devine (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2000).



Reformation' in a Scottish context is a common popular way of speaking of the events of 1559 to 1560 and it is clear that this is what the authors intend here. To do this, however, is to adopt a sectarian Protestant, and particularly Presbyterian, narrative which goes back to John Knox's sixteenth-century 'History of the Reformation in Scotland'. Historians speak of a 'long reformation' and there were a series of attempts to reform the Church in Scotland including Catholic movements associated with Bishop Elphinstone, Cardinal Beaton and Archbishop Hamilton which explicitly used the language of 'reformation'. 'Reformation' is thus not an exclusively Protestant activity. It can be argued that this Scottish Catholic Reformation continued after the political and religious coup of 1559 to 1560 in the Catholic colleges on the continent. To say 'the Reformation' with reference to the Protestant coup is to make a sectarian statement cancelling the Catholic reform movements. That this was the (one hopes) unconscious prejudice of those who wrote the Preamble to SAD is confirmed by the rest of this sentence. If someone writes that the church in Scotland after 'the Reformation' wrestled over whether to be Presbyterian or Episcopalian, it is clear that the author does not consider the large number of Scots who remained in communion with the Bishop of Rome after 1560 to be part of the 'church in Scotland' as they were clearly content to be neither of these options. Without explicitly saying that the Church of Rome is the Synagogue of Satan and the pope is the Antichrist, it is unfortunate that the SAD begins by suggesting that Roman Catholics are not part of the Christian Church.

Serious ecumenism does not exclude a dialogue partner in this manner and nor does it misrepresent the history of one of the partners in the dialogue. As well as the double repetition of the smallness of the Episcopal Church (true but one wonders if it is necessary to mention it here), the Preamble of SAD also claims that 'English immigration saw the establishment of Qualified Chapels which used the English Liturgy'. This is not true as Qualified Chapels allowed Scottish Episcopalians to worship legally if they repudiated Jacobitism.<sup>7</sup> English people also worshipped in and established Qualified Chapels but the emphasis on Englishness here in the Preamble is a hint of another aspect of Scottish sectarianism — the Presbyterian dismissal of Episcopalianism as 'the English Kirk'.

---

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Jones, 'The Qualified Episcopal Chapels of the North-East of Scotland 1689–1898', *Northern Scotland*, 20.1 (2015), 47–69. The authors of this part of SAD may have been thinking of the English Episcopal Chapels founded from 1842, although these too were not just founded for English people, David M. Bertie, *Scottish Episcopal Clergy 1689-2000* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 655.

It does not bode well for an ecumenical agreement if it begins with two major historical errors that reveal an underlying sectarianism. That two churches which have many professional historians among their members could not avoid these errors, at least by having the text checked by experts in the field, does not reflect well on the seriousness of the endeavour. I must declare an interest here as I pointed out these errors in an intervention at the 2021 General Synod, but no correction was made before SAD was signed by the Primus of the SEC and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the CofS. Although there may be procedural reasons for the lack of correction, that a means for the correction of factual error was not found does suggest that historical truth is not valued in the search for unity.

### *The Acknowledgements*

One may attempt to dismiss error and hidden sectarianism in the Preamble as not affecting the substance of the Declaration, and so it is worth looking at the Acknowledgements in section A. These confess a shared recognition that the essential elements of the Church of Christ are present in both churches. They also recognize that the unity expressed in these elements is not sufficient and they look for a fuller unity which is qualified as 'visible'. The Commitments in section B look to the future and in most cases reflect a partnership which is already active, especially at the local level, so the next part of this article will examine the affirmations of section A in the light of history.

I have a copy of a book by the non-juror Thomas Brett entitled *The Divine Right of Episcopacy and the necessity of an Episcopal Commission for Preaching God's Word and for the Valid Ministration of the Christian Sacraments proved from the Holy Scriptures and the Doctrine and Practice of the Primitive Church*. Published in 1718 in London, this copy is covered in approving annotations by the Scottish Episcopalian Bishop, Alexander Jolly of Moray (1756 to 1838). This book teaches that the Presbyterian Church of Scotland is not a true church because it does not have an episcopate and thus has illicit preaching and no real sacraments. This was a common view in the SEC in the past, as seen in the (re)baptism of John Skinner (1721 to 1807) in 1740 when he moved from the CofS to the SEC.<sup>8</sup> This view of the Church is expressed in a positive form by the moving words of the thirty-five-year-old Episcopalian priest and martyr, Robert Lyon, before his execution at Penrith in 1746 for involvement in the Jacobite Rising:

---

<sup>8</sup> William Walker, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Skinner, M.A., of Linshart, Longside* (London: W. Skeffington & Son, 1883), p. 28.

I continue steadfastly and constantly in the faith of our holy persecuted Mother, the Church of Scotland<sup>9</sup> (in the which I have the honour to die a very unworthy Priest) [...] It is a Church national and independent of any other, and every, power on earth, happily governed by her own truly primitive Bishops, as so many spiritual princes presiding in their different Districts, and in them accountable to none but God for the administration of her discipline : a Church whose Creeds demonstrate her soundness in the Faith, and blest with a Liturgy (I mean the Scots Liturgy) compiled by her own Bishops, nigher to the primitive model than any other Church this day can boast of [...] In a word a Church very near resembling the purest ages, and which, after more than half-a-century groaning under persecution and mourning in her own ashes, but all the while distinguishing herself not less by forbearance and charity to her bitterest enemies than by standing to principles and Catholic Unity.<sup>10</sup>

Whether put positively or negatively, this view of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland contradicts all the affirmations in the 'Acknowledgements' section of SAD. Such views are, however, rare or non-existent in the contemporary SEC. Today, helped by the twentieth-century ecumenical consensus that our unity is rooted in Baptism and the medieval recognition that lay people (including non-episcopally ordained ministers) can validly baptize, it is imperative for Episcopalians to recognize Presbyterians as being part of the one Catholic Church of Christ. For this, as for many things in contemporary Christianity even outside the Roman Church, the Second Vatican Council, and especially its decree on ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, is decisive. For Presbyterians the visceral horror of episcopacy, originally seen as satanic,<sup>11</sup> still survived into the twentieth

---

<sup>9</sup> By 'Church of Scotland', Robert Lyon means the Episcopal Church of Scotland. Episcopalians traditionally avoided giving this title to the Presbyterian ecclesial community which claimed it after 1690.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Forbes, *The Lyon in Mourning*, ed. by Henry Paton (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1895), I, pp. 14–15. Earlier in the speech, Lyon had repudiated the 'many errors and corruptions of the Church of Rome', and 'the distinguishing principles of Presbyterians and other dissenting sectaries [...] whom I always considered as [...] uncatholick and dangerous to the soul of a Christian', pp. 13–14.

<sup>11</sup> As just one example from before the Covenanting movement, Alexander Leighton (1570 to 1649), ironically the father of Bishop Robert Leighton, referred to bishops as 'anti-Christian or satanical' in his 1628

century, as seen by the General Assembly's rejection of various schemes for unity with the SEC.<sup>12</sup> This no longer results in denying the ecclesial nature of the SEC, although a residual prejudice against episcopacy does linger. There has even been a novelty among some ministers who, transposing the criteria of authenticity from ministry to sexuality, deny the authenticity of churches like the SEC which marry same-sex couples. For most members of the CofS and SEC, however, recognizing each other as part of the Catholic Church (SAD A.i) is not problematic, if we take the affirmation in SAD A.vi that our communion is 'imperfect' to mean that some elements of the Apostolic inheritance may still be missing.

Moving to A.ii we find a recognition that 'our Churches share in the common confession of the Apostolic Faith'. Again, this is not a problem if we understand the Apostolic Faith as that which is handed on in the Bible and the Catholic Creeds and Councils. There is, however, one problem. This is the status of the Westminster Confession as a 'subordinate standard' of the CofS and a document still signed by every office holder in the CofS. The status of the Westminster Confession has been under discussion in the CofS for a long time and adherence to the Confession has been weakened.<sup>13</sup> It is thus to be hoped that this outdated Calvinist statement can be disowned as a contemporary confession of belief, and perhaps be relegated to a merely historical document along with the Scots Confession of 1560, preferred by early Episcopalians. Reformed theology has a place in Episcopalian history, John Forbes of Corse (1593 to 1648), one of the Aberdeen Doctors, worked within this framework, but Scottish Episcopalianism moved firmly away from Calvinism in the eighteenth century, and it has no serious presence in

---

pamphlet *Zion's plea against Prelacy: An Appeal to Parliament* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1843), p. 71.

<sup>12</sup> Proposals involving bishops were rejected by the General Assembly of the CofS in 1959, following 'the Bishops Report', and in 2003, effectively ending the Scottish Church Initiative for Union (SCIFU) which had begun in 1996; the SEC Provincial Synod also rejected a similar scheme for unity in 1971 by which the SEC would become an Episcopalian Synod within a united Church of Scotland, Edward Luscombe, *The Scottish Episcopal Church in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: General Synod Office, 1996), pp. 118–22.

<sup>13</sup> The General Assembly's 'Declaratory Act anent the Westminster Confession of Faith' (1986) dissociated the CofS from the Confession's condemnation of monastic vows (22.7), its prohibition of marriage with 'Infidels, Papists or other idolaters' (24.3), its identification of the Pope as 'Antichrist, that Man of Sin and Son of Perdition' (25.6), and its condemnation of 'the Popish Sacrifice of the Mass' (29.2). The Act noted that CofS office bearers were not required to believe these statements.

the SEC today. There are today strictly confessional Reformed Presbyterian churches adhering firmly to the Westminster Confession and they deserve respect, but the Church of Scotland must decide whether it is primarily of their number or a part of the Catholic Church with a Reformed heritage but not demanding assent to early modern Protestant statements of faith. I suspect that the latter is the view of many ministers today and that, if a serious proposal for institutional unity is made, Episcopalians would only entertain unity with a church holding this view. It is good to note that the 2021 General Assembly has asked the Theological Forum of the CofS to consider a way forward and that the Forum's preferred option is an assent to the Apostles and Nicene Creeds and the basic statement of faith in the First Article Declaratory, with the Westminster Confession relegated to a separate collection of historical confessions.<sup>14</sup>

Sections A.iii, iv and v of SAD touch on the 'outstanding issues hindering full communion' mentioned in B.iv. A.iii claims that both sides 'acknowledge that in our churches the Word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion are faithfully administered'. This is based on a Reformed version of the marks of the true Church which is found in Calvin and the 39 Articles of the Church of England and, with the addition of church discipline, in classical Calvinism.<sup>15</sup> The statement that 'the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion are faithfully administered' can be understood in a number of different ways but, from an Episcopalian and ecumenical perspective, it is not unequivocally true of the CofS.

One of the great achievements of twentieth century ecumenism was a mutual recognition of the validity of baptism in the various churches. Few today would doubt the authenticity of baptisms in the CofS or SEC, but a recent paper from the CofS Theological Forum concerning ministry in lockdown published on the official CofS website proposes a method of baptism which, to one formed in classical theology, does not seem to be a faithful administration of the sacrament.<sup>16</sup> It suggests that baptism may be administered remotely with a minister on screen blessing the water and saying the baptismal formula (the 'form' of the sacrament in traditional theology) while someone else pours the water (the 'matter' of the sacrament). I have noted elsewhere that 'from a Catholic position this is not possible as, while anyone can baptize someone and the water does not need

---

<sup>14</sup> Church of Scotland's [Theological Forum](#) [accessed 26 May 2022]. The report is found in '[Theological Forum May 2021](#)' [accessed 26 May 2022].

<sup>15</sup> Belgic Confession Article 29.

<sup>16</sup> '[Reflections on Online Communion](#)'

to be blessed, this separation of the ‘matter’ and ‘form’ of the sacrament drives a wedge into the heart of the sacrament’.<sup>17</sup> It can thus be argued that this practice commended by the CofS is not a faithful administration of the sacrament of Baptism.

Another problem with baptism in the Church of Scotland, from an ecumenical perspective, can be seen in a comparison of the SEC and CofS Baptism rites. The SEC 2006 rite says, ‘the president immerses the candidate in the water, or pours the water upon the candidate’. The Order for Holy Baptism in *Common Order* 1994, 2005 edition, says ‘the minister pours or sprinkles water on each candidate’s head’, two options for the administration of the sacrament which go back to chapter 28 of the Westminster Confession, ‘dipping of the person into the water is not necessary: but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person’.<sup>18</sup> In Christian history the sprinkling of water is a relatively recent development. I suspect that its use in Protestantism may be a result of discussions in late-medieval scholasticism on the minimum required for the validity of a sacrament, as in many ways classical Protestantism contains fossilised elements of late-medieval piety and devotion. The use of sprinkling in baptism is, however, serious as it is seen by some churches as invalid: as not actually baptising someone. The Greek Orthodox bishop, Kallistos of Diokleia, said plainly, ‘Baptism by sprinkling or smearing is quite simply not real Baptism at all’.<sup>19</sup> While abuses can happen in all churches, these two official statements raise the question of whether,

---

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Holmes, ‘Real Presence? Theological Reflection on Online Eucharists’, *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 5.4 (Winter 2021), 91–92.

<sup>18</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1958), 28.3, p. 113. While some Scottish Reformers used the English Book of Common Prayer, most followed Knox’s Liturgy which said of Baptism ‘he taketh water in his hand and layeth it upon the childe forehead’, *John Knox’s Genevan Service Book, 1556*, ed. by William D. Maxwell (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1931), p. 110. Stephen Mark Holmes, *Sacred Signs in Reformation Scotland: Interpreting Worship, 1488–1590* (City of publication: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 169–71.

<sup>19</sup> *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition, A Study Text*, Faith and Order Paper No. 210 (World Council of Churches, Geneva), paragraph 45. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin Books, 2015), p. 271.

in an ecumenical context, the sacrament of Baptism is faithfully administered in the Church of Scotland.<sup>20</sup>

There can be little doubt that the sacrament of Holy Communion is faithfully administered in the CofS according to its own principles, or at least it is for members of that church to make judgements here. The affirmation in A.iii, however, which begins with 'We' and is offered in the name of both churches, implies that Holy Communion in these two churches is essentially the same thing. History and practice show this is not the case. An Orthodox friend who has attended many Western services recently said that, to the outsider, the SEC Eucharist and CofS Communion look like completely different activities. Up to the present a Church of Scotland minister needs to be ordained by a bishop to preside at the Eucharist in an Anglican Church (except in certain defined local ecumenical partnerships but even here there is no suggestion that the general rule is changed). This suggests that the Eucharist celebrated before and after this ordination are two different things in at least some ways (otherwise there would be no need for the ordination). While many members of the two churches may see their ministers as interchangeable and equivalent, this is not the case and the officially stated eucharistic doctrine of the two churches is clearly different.

We can see this in practice by looking at the Liturgy and practice of the Scottish Episcopal Church in three areas: real presence, eucharistic sacrifice and reservation of the blessed sacrament. There are a wide variety of views held by members of the SEC on the Eucharist, but the Scottish Liturgy clearly prays that the Father may send the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine 'that it may be the body and blood of your Son'. The Westminster Confession 29.5 and 6 explicitly denies that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ except in name only ('they are sometimes called by the names of the things they represent'), another link between Protestantism and late medieval theology, in this case sacramental nominalism. The Scottish Liturgy also clearly says that the bread and wine are offered as a sacrifice by explicitly applying to them the language of offering, 'we offer you these gifts' (1982 Scottish Liturgy). This phrase which comes from the mid-eighteenth-century addition of the words 'which we now offer unto thee' to the Scottish Liturgy to express common Episcopalian teaching that the Eucharist is a sacrifice. The 1986 'Declaratory Act anent the Westminster Confession of Faith' dissociated the CofS from Westminster Confession 29.2 which clearly teaches that there is no sacrifice in the sacrament, only a commemoration of Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and our sacrifice of praise. The Act,

---

<sup>20</sup> The Preamble to SAD notes that 'We have acknowledged that the theological, sacramental and liturgical emphases within our respective churches are consonant with the tradition which each represents'.

however, concerned teaching offensive to Roman Catholics and did not commit the CofS to Roman Catholic teaching on the papacy, the sacrifice of the Mass or monastic vows, thus the teaching against the eucharistic sacrifice remains while the offensive language is repudiated. While there is some interesting work being done now on the eucharistic sacrifice in Reformed theology, this work admits that this is quite untypical of Reformed sacramental discourse.<sup>21</sup>

The clear and official teaching of the SEC on the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine and on the sacrifice of the Eucharist as a part of the earthly liturgy are thus either not held by the Reformed Church of Scotland or expressly repudiated by it in its 'subordinate standard'. As a result of its teaching on the real presence of Christ in the elements, for centuries the SEC has reserved the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist for communion outside the Liturgy.<sup>22</sup> This is also condemned by the Westminster Confession, 29.4, as is communion for the laity in the form of bread alone, something the SEC has done during the current pandemic with little objection. The CofS and SEC thus have very different theologies of the Eucharist which are expressed in very different eucharistic practice. Although I have taken part in eucharistic liturgies from the CofS Book of Common Order celebrated in a very Catholic Anglican manner, I suspect that Episcopalian teaching on the real presence and sacrifice of the Eucharist and our practice of reservation of the sacrament would not be welcome in most Church of Scotland parishes.

The Scoto-Catholic movement in the CofS and its expression in church architecture brought Presbyterian and Episcopalian eucharistic worship closer together. Scottish Calvinism also has its own high doctrine of the Eucharist, with a strong affirmation of Christ's spiritual presence and denial that the bread and wine are simply bare signs, but the problem here is that SAD A.iii makes the phrase 'faithfully administered' do too much work. From an Episcopalian point of view Presbyterian Holy Communion is faithfully administered if it is according to the teaching and practice of the CofS, but it is not faithfully administered if looked at from an Anglican and Catholic perspective. To this observer, the teaching of the Westminster Confession and the popular Protestantism found in both our churches is not faithful to Scripture and Christian tradition in general and it simply reflects the misunderstanding of the sacrament present in the Reformed tradition under

---

<sup>21</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, 'A Reformed Account of Eucharistic Sacrifice', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (January 2022), 1–21, which starts, 'I begin by acknowledging the sheer unlikeliness of my theme'.

<sup>22</sup> F. C. Eeles, *Reservation of the Holy Eucharist in the Scottish Church* (Aberdeen: W. Jolly, 1899).



the influence of decadent late-medieval scholasticism. Is this divergence, though, merely a question of the limits of comprehension? The SEC is in communion with the CofE which excludes the idea of offering the eucharistic sacrifice from its liturgies and has a place for Reformed eucharistic theology in its mainstream.<sup>23</sup> Is it an indifferent matter, such as the frequency of Holy Communion, usually celebrated less frequently in Presbyterian churches, another relic from late-medieval devotion? Does modern ecumenical sacramental theology mean that these divisions can be overcome? These questions need to be picked up elsewhere, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the affirmation of A.iii, despite its roots in previous ecumenical work, is studied ambiguity masking fundamental divergence.

A.iv and A.v similarly skate over the differences concerning holy orders and pick up themes from decades of ecumenical discussions. These two clauses are hard to disagree with, particularly as they contribute little to overcoming or reconciling the obvious differences in church order centred on the office of a bishop and the lack of a Catholic theology of holy orders in Presbyterianism. It would be hard today to say Christ and the Spirit are absent from the Presbyterian ministry, although one strand in Anglican teaching, found in Thomas Brett's book mentioned above and present in the SEC in the eighteenth century, would say just that. Three other main approaches to the necessity of the episcopate may be found in historic Anglicanism: that associated with Archbishop John Whitgift (1530 to 1604), where God has given no command as to how the Church be ordered and local circumstances should dictate the best solution; that associated with Archbishop Richard Bancroft (1544 to 1610) and Richard Hooker (1554 to 1600), which holds that the episcopate is clearly God's plan for the Church but it would survive without it; and that associated with Archbishop William Laud (1573 to 1645) and his followers, whereby it is essential — a view behind the restoration of the Scottish episcopal succession from England in 1610 and 1662.<sup>24</sup> These suggest Anglican ways of understanding and even valuing Presbyterian polity, but we are not tied to early modern theology. SAD A.v picks up a number of modern ecumenical developments to say that

---

<sup>23</sup> Even to the extent of giving in to Evangelical pressure and removing the word 'offer' from the offertory prayers beginning 'Blessed are you, Lord God' and replacing it with 'set before'.

<sup>24</sup> These positions are outlined in the excellent study of episcopacy in *Women Bishops in the Church of England: A Report of the House of Bishops Working Party on Women in the Episcopate* (Church House: London, 2004), 2.6, 1–9. These positions are associated with English theologians but the possession of Brett's book by Jolly shows that Scottish Episcopalians live in the same ecclesial milieu.

'personal, collegial and communal oversight (*episkope*) is embodied and exercised in our churches in a variety of forms, as a visible sign expressing and serving the Church's unity and continuity in apostolic life, ministry and mission'. It is not hard for an Episcopalian to see this oversight exercised by Presbytery and the General Assembly or for a Presbyterian to see a collective oversight in Episcopalian Synods. This is reflected in modern ecumenical agreements such as the Porvoo Agreement and the modern Anglican theology found in the Church of England's 1994 House of Bishops Occasional Paper 'Apostolicity and Succession' which can see an 'apostolic succession' in faith and order apart from the succession of bishops.<sup>25</sup>

One problem here is that this is an Episcopalian interpretation of Presbyterianism in the light of Christian tradition and ecumenical agreement. There is in at least parts of the Church of Scotland a functionalist theology of ministry which has no place for that Catholic and Anglican sacramental teaching on the three-fold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons which is found in the Canons and Ordinal of the SEC.<sup>26</sup> Deeper study of the theology of ministry is required, particularly of the nature of ordination and the status of elders. Are a Presbyterian Minister of Word and Sacrament and an Episcopalian Presbyter (Priest) the same thing? Is a Presbyterian Elder (Presbyter) the same as an Episcopalian Presbyter? Do these questions matter? I would answer No, No, Yes. At present it is clear there is no equivalence between the two ministerial polities, at least from the SEC side. SAD A.iv and v could thus also be seen as studied ambiguity masking fundamental divergence. Ecumenical advances here do make the phrases potentially less confusing, but again the CofS faces a choice. Does it remain a clearly Protestant Church, akin to the independent Evangelical churches that are springing up around Scotland, or does it follow the Anglican and Porvoo model and, on the basis of the ecumenical discussions of the last century, become an inclusive national or local church like the Church of England, the Church of Sweden and the Church of South India. I could, perhaps, formulate this dilemma better but it is clear that SAD again presents the CofS with a choice and only one option involves closer union (as opposed to cooperation) with the SEC.

*What are those behind the Saint Andrew Declaration up to?*

There have been years of cooperation between the SEC and CofS, why has this document been produced now? It has its origin in the bilateral 'Our

---

<sup>25</sup> 'Apostolicity and Succession', House of Bishops Occasional Paper (London: Church House, 1994) [accessed 26 May 2022].

<sup>26</sup> Doug Gay, *Reforming the Kirk: The Future of the Church of Scotland* (Norwich: St Andrews Press, 2017).

Common Calling Group' established in 2016 in the wake of the 2015 Columba Declaration between the CofS and CofE, which upset many in the SEC and provoked an apology to the SEC by the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is thus the product of a minor crisis in relations. In a longer perspective SAD comes at the end of a long series of failed attempts at institutional union by the two churches, noted in the section above on bishops. This culminated in the failure of the Scottish Churches Initiative for Union (SCIFU), rejected by the General Assembly of the CofS in 2003. SCIFU gave birth in 2010 to EMU, an agreement far short of institutional unity between the remaining SCIFU partners, Episcopalian, Methodist, and United Reformed. SAD, which is very close in wording to the Columba Declaration, may be seen as an attempt at a more modest and realistic form of ecumenical cooperation. It may also be seen by some as the last gasp of an old ecclesio-bureaucratic way of managing relations between denominations. It begins with bilateral conversations in a working group, formed in the wake of a different set of bilateral conversations, and it ends by appointing co-chairs of another working group which will report annually to the Committee on Ecumenical Relations of the Church of Scotland and the Inter-church Relations Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Some have said that a pontifical High Mass in St Peter's Basilica is a long way from the priorities of Jesus and the first disciples, but the same might easily be said of this ecclesio-bureaucracy.

On a deeper and more sociological level, SAD may be related to secularisation in Scotland and the current crisis in the CofS caused by the loss of its central place in Scottish society. This is reflected in the Church of Scotland's loss of members, from 1,320,000 in 1957 to 325,700 in 2018, and in its loss of the allegiance of the Scottish people in general, of whom 42% claimed to be CofS in the 2001 census, 32% in that of 2011 and an estimate of 22% according to the 2018 Scottish Household Survey. Other churches have seen decline, for example the SEC from 54,000 in 1994 to 28,600 in 2018 and the Free Church of Scotland from 15,500 in 1994 to 10,200 in 2016 (when 800 had relocated to the Free Church, Continuing). The crisis, however, does not seem to have bit as deep in these churches as they have less invested in their national position and their history has made a virtue of faithful smallness. One interpretation of this data is to see SAD as a desperate attempt by dying liberal churches to cling together as they fade away. On this analysis the lack of doctrinal clarity in the Declaration would be an expression of indifference to Christian doctrine on the part of those to whom it does not really matter. If that is the case, perhaps the most significant dividing lines are less between denominations but within them.

A more nuanced view would be to see two of the three Scottish churches which claim a territorial mission to the whole nation (the third

being the Roman Catholic Church) recognising that today they can't do this alone. The adoption of the 'Radical Action Plan' by the 2019 General Assembly was a brave and realistic attempt to respond to the current crisis in the CofS and its financial implications, but the proposed radical reduction in number of ministers and parishes means that the CofS is now just one Christian group among others in an increasingly secular Scotland. It can now no longer pretend to be 'a national Church representative of the Christian faith of the Scottish people' (3<sup>rd</sup> Article Declaratory), a historically dubious claim long disputed by Roman Catholics and Episcopalians. In practice, the reorganisation of the CofS means that it is withdrawing from communities across Scotland, sometimes in the poorest areas, and other denominations have stepped into the gap to be the 'local church'. Stenhouse Baptist Church has done just that in a part of Edinburgh where the local Church of Scotland church closed. Anecdotal evidence suggests that SAD may be an attempt to help the SEC and CofS work together 'to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry' (3<sup>rd</sup> Article Declaratory), but that would require practical cooperation and a recognition that Christian belonging is more than just a tidy arrangement on a map. Every Episcopal Church I have encountered has people who have discovered that Presbyterian worship does not supply their spiritual needs and I have met English Anglicans who are happy to worship with the Church of Scotland. This raises the question of whether SAD is pointing in the wrong direction by affirming more agreement than actually exists.

### *Other ways forward*

There may be other ways forward for the Christian communities of Scotland that don't involve those Declarations and Initiatives so beloved of church leaders. I began this article by contradicting SAD and saying that the churches in Scotland do not have a shared history but rather a series of conflicting denominational histories. Revisionist academic history can, however, challenge this and help reconciliation. Looked at in a different way, the three main churches in Scotland today which have a realistic claim to serve the whole nation do have a shared history into which their denominational narratives can be read in a way that subverts sectarianism. Put simply, from the Catholic Church in Scotland before 1560, the Roman Catholic Church still possesses its communion with Rome, the Scottish Episcopal Church its bishoprics and the Church of Scotland its parishes. Elements in their sectarian histories or theology might deny the others their validity as churches, but historically and legally they are all the continuation of the old Church. This argument is strengthened as each explicitly sees itself as a part of the Catholic Church and each bases its faith on Scripture and the ancient Creeds. In a nation where almost all were Christian, Christian

difference was significant; today, where secularism and other faiths have a high profile and popular knowledge of the Christian story is fading away, what Christians hold in common becomes more significant. This could give hope for the developments necessary for the two estranged parts of the 'reformed' Church of Scotland to come together. In this context the adoption by the CofS of the Anglican 'Five Marks of Mission' is significant but so are the proposals of the CofS Theological Forum concerning the Westminster Confessions. The SEC is already in full communion with a church that holds to the faith of the ecumenical creeds but also has a place for an outdated historical document that few really assent, namely the Church of England and the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. For the CofS, as for the CofE, the incompatible eucharistic theologies which have their roots in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may be reconciled and overcome in the light of an ecumenical eucharistic theology which was developed in the twentieth century on the basis of a renewed reading of Scripture and the writings of the patristic period. The real ecumenical breakthrough here may not be the studied ambiguity of SAD but the work of the CofS Theological Forum dislodging the impediment of the Westminster Confession.

These historical and theological tasks involve a reappraisal of our shared history, and they still look towards some form of institutional unity, but cultural factors are equally important. The CofS is no longer the church that stole Christmas and locked up the swings on the Sabbath, but it is still heir to the fanatical, iconoclastic side of the Scottish Protestant Reformation and still holds to what some would see as an excessively spiritual Reformed sacramental theology. The dark side of Scottish Presbyterianism needs to be named, studied and rejected. This is hard because this was the side that won in 1690 and subsequently controlled the interpretation of Scottish history, a pervasive control that is even today being rolled back in the secular world of academic history.<sup>27</sup> A rejection of the dark side of Presbyterianism was an aspect of the Scottish literary and artistic renaissance of the twentieth century, famously expressed in Edwin Muir's poem 'The Incarnate One':

---

<sup>27</sup> Much of the revisionism is in the field of the long Scottish Reformation up to the myths surrounding the Covenanters, but even our understanding of the Scottish Enlightenment has been obscured by sectarian history. Kelsey Jackson Williams, *The First Scottish Enlightenment: Rebels, Priests and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) builds on earlier work to reveal an intellectual renaissance among Episcopalians and Roman Catholics which continued to flourish in Jacobite circles but has been little noticed in 'official' Scottish history.

The windless northern surge, the sea-gull's scream,  
 And Calvin's kirk crowning the barren brae.  
 I think of Giotto the Tuscan shepherd's dream,  
 Christ, man and creature in their inner day.  
 How could our race betray  
 The Image, and the Incarnate One unmake  
 Who chose this form and fashion for our sake?

The Word made flesh here is made word again  
 A word made word in flourish and arrogant crook.  
 See there King Calvin with his iron pen,  
 And God three angry letters in a book,  
 And there the logical hook  
 On which the Mystery is impaled and bent  
 Into an ideological argument.

This needs to be taken seriously, although much of the legacy of the dark years is gone from the CofS today, with its affirmation of music and the arts. If we cannot have an honest conversation about such legacies, and I have seen no evidence that we can, then any number of common declarations will be worthless. The current reappraisal of Scottish involvement in slavery and reassessment of the persecution of witches show how important this process is, but the ongoing reassessment of the Scottish Reformations shows how dealing with structural prejudice is a long process. The SEC too needs to re-examine its own history and the Church of England also lives with its own legacy of iconoclasm (and shows how well it can be overcome) but there is an important place in Scotland for an explicit cultural and spiritual reconciliation. How might this be done?

When Hew Lorimer carved a remarkable statue of Our Lady on a pillar at All Saints Episcopal Church St Andrews, he wrote:

My statue at All Saints of the Virgin and child somehow had to convey my conviction that the Virgin was forgotten by Scotland, and that this neglect had had a hardening effect on our great Scottish character. I have always called the sculpture 'Ecce Mater tua', 'behold your mother', addressed both to the Royal and Ecclesiastical Burgh of St Andrews, where the statue stands, and to Scotland.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Miranda Forest, *A Guide to Hew Lorimer, the MoD Rocket Range, and Our Lady of the Isles* (2020), p. 45.

This statue is a prophetic act, it points to an unimaginable future where Christian Scotland comes together again in all its parts. I saw a glimpse of this in the mid-1980s at the Haddington pilgrimage, that great creation of Patrick Maitland, 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Lauderdale. Leaders of the three main churches of Scotland came together with hundreds of their flock for pilgrimage, prayer, the sacraments, spiritual healing and the veneration of Our Lady of Haddington. The problem with ecumenical agreements and declarations is that they veer between compromise and the lowest common denominator, leaving, as in SAD on the sacraments, fundamental disagreement in our common faith. True unity is spiritual and involves a full sharing of cultural and religious gifts — different ‘takes’ on our common faith. I suspect that only Mary, the Mother of God, can bring us together, after all she did say of her Son ‘do whatever he tells you’ (John 2.5). Perhaps what we need to see is a procession of Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics in Haddington saying the rosary together, singing psalms and praying for justice and healing in our country.

With this vision in mind, it may even be that our ideas of unity need to change, and we need to give up on producing more documents and even trying to join up the institutions. A New Zealand Anglican priest recently suggested that instead of a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we should have a Week of Prayer for Christian Diversity, commenting:

In the Northern Hemisphere Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we often end up seeing quite a lot of ideas that the solution to Christian disunity is to clone and cookie-cutter one way of being a Christian and impose that on all. Unity by uniformity. One size fits all.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps Jesus is happy that we have different types of Christianity, because people come in different types. Perhaps he just wants us to be friends (John 15.15) and is bemused by our obsession with institutions. In an elegy for an ecumenical community of which I was once a member, Rowan Williams recently wrote that:

People sometimes talk about sensing that we are entering an ‘ecumenical winter’. I’m not convinced, if I’m honest, largely because I don’t think the prolonged courtships of complex institutions are the only determinants of the climate. Time and time again in the last few decades, in very diverse contexts like Taizé or Iona or various Christian activist groups working for peace or environmental responsibility, people have discovered

---

<sup>29</sup> Liturgy, [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#) [accessed 26 May 2022].

that ecumenism begins in doing the washing-up together and discovering what exactly they can and must invest in the ongoing business of a practical life shared and common purpose.<sup>30</sup>

‘Ecumenism begins in doing the washing-up together’. Perhaps the institutional ecumenical winter is a good thing, calling us to change our vision and move away from the adolescent optimism of the third quarter of the twentieth century which formed so many in mainstream Christian leadership today. The St Andrew Declaration is a flawed document and represents a tired approach, but it is at least a sign of communication and the desire to talk. The blandness of the Declaration is an invitation to the type of critical honesty I have attempted here. Perhaps its point is to point us away from itself. Deeper work needs to be done on theology and culture in Scotland, and, above all, we need to meet in deep prayer and intellectual endeavour to encounter the full glory of the mystery of Christ.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps we need to revisit together the teaching of the creeds and the ecumenical councils of the first millennium. After the failure of so many well-meaning attempts to create unity and the inadequacy of what passes for ‘ecumenical worship’, we and our leaders need to reflect on whether we have been walking down the wrong road. As a new start, let us go together to Our Lady in Haddington, in St Andrews and in Carfin and ask her what we should do.

The poet Peter Davidson was inspired by Lorimer’s title for his statue and used it as the epigraph to his fine poem ‘Commendation of Scotland to the Care of Our Lady’, verses from which may form an apt ending to this proposal for a new sort of unity:

Your pilgrimage: we’ve always gone on foot  
Gone step by step, clay, ploughlands, on our own;  
Long years of Kings; the years we’ve lived alone,  
And what came after: broken stone, wars, loot...

When we go down into our northern earth

---

<sup>30</sup> Rowan Williams, ‘Foreword’, in *Christine Charwood and Jessica Gatty r.a., Hengrave Remembered 1974–2005* ([n.p.]: Religious of the Assumption, 2021), p. iii.

<sup>31</sup> An excellent start is the three-volume *History of Scottish Theology*, ed. by David Fergusson and Mark Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), which breaks away from the sectarian narrative by attempting to include all the voices of Christian theology in Scotland. The next step is to bring these voices together in serious dialogue.



To join the rest of Adam's sons below  
Queen of St. Andrews, Edinburgh, Glasgow  
Pity our winter journey from our birth

O Queen of Scotland, we can ask no place  
But a low lodging in your Purgatory  
To weep our history, to see your glory  
Your crown of graces in your altered grace.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Peter Davidson, *Works in the Inglis Tongue* (Cambridge: Three Tygers Press, 1985), pp. 11–14, based on parts of Péguy's 'Presentation de la Beauce Notre Dame de Chartres'.



# Presbyterians and Episcopalians: A Shared History in Scotland from a Presbyterian Perspective

Alasdair J. Macleod

Lecturer in Church History, Highland Theological College,  
University of the Highlands and Islands

The Saint Andrew Declaration unquestionably marks a step of rapprochement between the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church in 2022, but the preamble to the Declaration acknowledges the difficulties presented for progress in this direction by the history of conflict between Presbyterian and Episcopal principles in the Scottish Church: ‘For over a century following the Reformation, the church in Scotland, and Scotland’s monarch, wrestled over the order of the church: was it to be Presbyterian or Episcopalian?’<sup>1</sup>

In fact, this is stating things mildly. Few theological debates have genuinely been waged with the sword, but the question of how the post-Reformation Church of Scotland was to be governed was one. When Jenny Geddes hurled her stool at the Bishop in the High Kirk of Edinburgh on 23 July 1637, she did so in protest against a change in worship instituted by Episcopal authority, overruling prior Presbyterian practice.<sup>2</sup> When that riot escalated to open war between the Scottish Covenanters and the forces of King Charles I in 1639 and again in 1640, the conflicts were remembered under the name ‘Bishops’ Wars’ to signify the vital central question: how the Scottish Church was to be governed. Though chiefly cold conflicts, these wars nonetheless resulted in casualties, 600 to 1000 killed — comparable to the Falklands War — and, more to the point, presaged the wider conflict of the War of the Three Kingdoms, which is thought to have killed more than 200,000.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, although the question may indeed be stated in narrow, administrative terms — ‘how shall the Church be governed?’ — history adds force and weight to the topic that cannot be evaded. Men have killed, and men and women have died, for each view.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Saint Andrew Declaration [accessed 20 January 22].

<sup>2</sup> D. B. Calhoun, ‘Geddes, Jenny’, in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. by Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp. 352–53.

<sup>3</sup> Casualty estimates from ‘Wikipedia: Bishops’ Wars’ [accessed 20 January 22] and ‘Wikipedia: Wars of the Three Kingdoms’ [accessed 20 January 22].

Furthermore, history establishes that the implications of the question are wider than the merely administrative. Even if we accept the association of Presbyterian polity with Calvinist theology and Episcopal polity with Arminianism as specific to the context of the Caroline regime of the 1630s, there is no denying the political implications of Episcopacy. A church ruled by Bishops would, of course, be far easier for a King, wielding powers of patronage, to dominate, than a church governed by representative courts. Therefore, to 1689, the advocacy of Episcopacy was invariably associated in Scotland with the defence of the political prerogatives of the monarchy, and monarchs uniformly sought to advance the power and the prestige of the bishops. The only reason why this changed in 1689 was the existence of two separate claims upon the Scottish throne, that of the exiled James VII, and the joint claim of his daughter Mary II and her husband William of Orange, with the Scottish bishops remaining steadfastly loyal to the former, the 'king over the water'. The situation therefore favoured Presbyterianism in Scotland, and thus the system of church government that continued to be repressed in England and Ireland was established in Scotland, and advanced in its hold over the nation during the long eighteenth century with the full weight of State power behind it. Even if this aspect of political implication has little resonance now that the Jacobite wars have receded in history, and royal power has been reduced to the ceremonial, there is no denying the affinity of Presbyterianism with modern representative democracy. Episcopacy, in its purest form, is the ecclesiastical equivalent of feudalism, and it is noteworthy that in practice modern churches of the Anglican Communion have now adopted hybrid forms of governance, with 'general synods' importing Presbyterian values as a counterbalance to the individual prerogative inherent in Episcopalian structures.

But the core issue at the heart of the historic Presbyterian-Episcopal conflict was theological. Who was the Head of the Church? While framing the question in these terms may appear to prejudge the issue, given the biblical attribution of this position to the Risen Christ,<sup>4</sup> it is important to remember that in the English Reformation, Henry VIII claimed nothing less than the title 'Supreme Head of the Church of England', and exercised that headship in the appointment of bishops.<sup>5</sup> Later English monarchs may have been prepared to downgrade this to the less loaded term, 'Supreme Governor', while retaining their patronage, but Presbyterians continued to see governance by representative courts not merely as more reflective of the evidence for the governance of the Apostolic Church, but as the actual exercise of Christ's

---

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5.23 and Colossians 1.18.

<sup>5</sup> ['Wikipedia: Supreme Head of the Church of England'](#) [accessed 24 January 22].

authority in contradistinction to that of an earthly monarch. The framing of the debate in such apocalyptic terms helps to explain how it became an issue of bloodshed historically, but also underlines how the distinction between Presbyterian and Episcopalian remains more than one of mere hereditary loyalty. If Episcopalians prize the supposed 'apostolic succession' of their bishops, Presbyterians equally prize the multiplicity of presbyter-bishops in each congregation, and the representative character of church courts, as fidelity to Christ himself.

By adopting a broadly chronological approach to the 'shared history' of Scottish Presbyterians and Episcopalians, this paper will seek to elucidate the origins and trace the development of the Presbyterian-Episcopalian debate in the Scottish context. In taking the 'Presbyterian perspective', the paper will defend the historicity and integrity of Presbyterian governance as a position of essential continuity with the Apostolic Church, and as the form of government most reflective of the will of its own church members, while not, of course, denying the sincerity of genuine Scottish defenders of Episcopacy and acknowledging the international significance of both parties. After all, if the Church of Scotland is the mother of all Presbyterian churches worldwide, so the Scottish Episcopal Church is the prototype for all Anglican Communion churches outside the structures of the Church of England, and, by its bishops' consecration of the first independent bishop of the United States, is also a progenitor of these churches.

### *The Celtic Church and the origins of the Scottish episcopacy*

Whatever conclusions are reached regarding the role of the 'overseer' or *episkopos* in the Apostolic Church, the evidence of the early history of the Scottish Church cannot sustain any assertion of continuous episcopal governance. Scotland was not evangelised under the authority of diocesan bishops, and that it was long after this time, not until the high Middle Ages, that a full geographical episcopate was established.<sup>6</sup> The Christian Gospel came to Scotland from Ireland by means of the Celtic Church, and, typically of that church, the governance structure imported to Scotland was that of the local monastery and of its abbot. Columba, the most renowned of the Celtic missionaries, was not a bishop, but rather led the Scottish mission as presbyter-abbot of Iona; it was to local monasteries, and above all to the abbey of Iona rather than to any episcopal see that the early governance of the Christian Church in Scotland fell. Indeed, Iona seems only to have decreased in importance once the era of Viking raids had made its

---

<sup>6</sup> D. F. Wright, 'Episcopacy', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 295–96.

accessibility by sea rather a vulnerability than an advantage, leading thereafter to the alternative prominence of St Andrews, and later Dunkeld.

While too much weight cannot be given to the Presbyterian writers of the nineteenth century who eagerly read back their Presbyterianism into the structures of the Celtic Church,<sup>7</sup> equally it must be acknowledged that the Celtic Church was in no sense episcopal in governance. Bruce Ritchie observed that the Celtic Church had bishops, but that these were men set apart for their apparent sanctity of life, not for any administrative capacity, and that their role was chiefly sacramental and itinerant, rather than administrative and offering governmental supervision of the church in a defined region.<sup>8</sup> Crucially, in the Celtic Church, bishops were subject to abbots, an inversion of the governance structure of Rome.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, with consecration divorced from the restraint of a particular number of dioceses, the number of bishops in the Celtic Church multiplied, and James Bulloch has observed the significance of legends that speak of groups of twenty and even one hundred bishops of the Celtic Church meeting in one place, and rightly noted: 'Such tales, even if inaccurate, reveal what the chronicler regarded as perfectly possible'.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the establishment of the territorial episcopate in Scotland seems inescapably associated with the controversial influence of the Hungarian-born Queen Margaret, consort of Malcolm III (1058 to 1093), who was so instrumental in imposing strict conformity with Rome upon the Scottish Church. The division of the land into geographical dioceses occurred during the reigns of her two sons, Alexander I (1107 to 1124) and David I (1124 to 1153). From then until the Reformation, the Scottish Church would be governed by bishops, but rather than being ultimately subject to the English Archbishop of York, was directly subject to Rome as her 'special daughter'. Only in the fifteenth century did Scotland gain archbishops of her own.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, the introduction of territorial bishops was preferred by the Scottish crown as conforming the Scottish Church to continental practice,

---

<sup>7</sup> For example, Thomas M'Lauchlan, *The Early Scottish Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1865).

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Ritchie, *Columba: Faith of an Island Soldier* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2019), pp. 67–70.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, 'Episcopacy', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 295–96.

<sup>10</sup> James Bulloch, *The Life of the Celtic Church* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1963), p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, 'Episcopacy', in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 295–96. Note that the reference to 'David II' as a son of Margaret in this entry is an obvious misprint for David I.

but there can also be no denying that a territorial episcopacy was a system far easier for a monarch to dominate than a decentralised church chiefly led by local abbeys.

The Celtic Church may not have been especially prototypical of Presbyterianism, but equally it is patent that its structures offer no precedent for an authoritative geographical episcopate, and that there is no continuity of such an institution from the early centuries of Christianity's presence in Scotland. Rather, an authoritative territorial episcopate was imposed on the Scottish Church by royal prerogative, as a step of conformity with Rome, and at the behest of monarchs educated by their mother to consider the continental model of governance superior to that of Scotland's Celtic heritage. In its origin, episcopacy was both a fruit and an instrument of royal power exercised over the Scottish Church.

### *The Reformation and the government of the Church*

The Reformation of 1560 brought radical disruption to the government, doctrine and function of the church in Scotland: the Scottish Church was reformed not by a group of Protestant ministers being consecrated as a reformed episcopate to take charge of the Scottish dioceses, but by a general assembly of ministers and ruling elders of the Scottish Church. While all accept that Presbyterianism in the full sense was not introduced into the Church of Scotland until the approval of Andrew Melville's *Second Book of Discipline*, the essential elements of it were present in the functioning of the privy kirks as a separate network of Protestant churches in the 1550s, and in the actual progress of the Reformation itself in 1560. Some Roman Catholic prelates, such as John Hamilton, Archbishop of St Andrews, were left unmolested in the titular possession of their sees, so little interest had the Scottish Reformers in professing to continue the succession of the medieval church.<sup>12</sup> The Scottish Reformation rather proceeded on the core assumptions of the parity of the ruling and teaching elders, with no acknowledgment of any higher office of authority in the Church, and of the final authority of the gathered court of such elders, not of the prerogative of any individual. John Knox, though by far the most able, experienced, and internationally recognised Protestant minister in Scotland, served only as the Moderator of some meetings of the General Assembly, and even declined appointment as a superintendent.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 191–92. As late as 1567, all but four of the Scottish bishoprics were still held by Roman Catholics.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Dawson, *John Knox* (London: Yale, 2019), pp. 219–20.

Certainly, it is true that the appointment of some Reformed ministers as superintendents of regions of the Church's labour broadly co-extensive with the old dioceses, has led some to claim that the Church of Scotland in the 1560s was prototypically Episcopalian,<sup>14</sup> but this charge cannot hold water. The superintendents were specified in the *First Book of Discipline* as an arrangement to address the temporary historical situation of extreme shortage of Protestant ministers to serve the newly-Reformed country, 'a thing most expedient for this time', rather than being any kind of permanent ideal.<sup>15</sup> That the superintendents were not bishops was evident from the absence of any ceremony of consecration, the absence of any claim to apostolic succession or use of the title of 'bishop', the absence of any sacramental role distinct from that of another minister, and the subjection of their authority to the General Assembly as a gathering of ruling elders and ministers. Furthermore, only five of the thirteen dioceses ever had a superintendent appointed over them, indicating that this role was considered far from indispensable to the function of the Reformed Church of Scotland. Perhaps most telling of all, when bishops were temporarily accepted by the Scottish Church in 1572, none of the superintendents became a bishop, and when the *Second Book of Discipline* was accepted in 1578, introducing full Presbyterian structures, the roles of the surviving superintendents continued, being evidently considered compatible with Presbyterian order.<sup>16</sup>

The Concordat of Leith of 1572 permitted the appointment of largely nominal, or 'tulchan', bishops, chiefly at the behest of the Scottish nobility, and for the purpose of accessing endowments belonging to the pre-Reformation Church; in practice the compromise was open to abuse, and was rapidly superseded.<sup>17</sup> The order prescribed by the *Second Book of Discipline* left no room for diocesan bishops by clearly defining the offices of the church as minister, elder and deacon only, with the term 'bishop' considered to apply to the minister of the congregation. However, though approved by the General Assembly in 1578, the Second Book never received

---

<sup>14</sup> Gordon Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960). Chapter 5 offers the most learned defence of this view.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), p. 161.

<sup>16</sup> Kirk, *Patterns of Reform*, chap. 5. This remains the fullest study of the role of the superintendents, and decisively answers points raised by Donaldson.

<sup>17</sup> J. Kirk, 'Leith, Convention of' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 479–80.



full endorsement from the State, leaving the door open to a future introduction of episcopacy.<sup>18</sup> In 1599, James VI did precisely that, introducing bishops initially as parliamentary commissioners, but with gradually increasing powers until 1610 when a fully-functioning Scottish episcopacy was restored, with the consecration of three Scottish bishops by English bishops, returning again the concept of an apostolic succession to the Scottish Church.<sup>19</sup> James had a notoriously high view of the power of the monarch, the 'Divine Right of Kings', and in this diverged from the constitutional thought of his tutor, George Buchanan (1506 to 1582), who maintained that the monarch's power was subject to law, and to the consent of their subjects.<sup>20</sup> This contractual view of kingship, arguably evidenced in Scottish constitutional thought as early as the Declaration of Arbroath (1320) was of course far more readily consistent with Presbyterianism.<sup>21</sup> The assertion of the individual prerogative of the monarch cohered comfortably with the assertion of the individual prerogative of the diocesan bishop, especially when the former effectively appointed the latter. From 1618, the General Assembly ceased to meet, rendering the courts of the Scottish Church wholly subservient to the bishops, who themselves were submissive to the will of the monarch. As Burleigh observed, James VI 'had almost succeeded in introducing the ecclesiastical system of Henry VIII in which the king was pope'.<sup>22</sup>

Again, episcopacy had been imposed upon the Scottish Church by the crown, as a step of conformity with the wider Church — in this case with the church in James's Southern Kingdom, though the fact that it was also a step towards the government of the Church of Rome was not lost upon the stricter Presbyterians. Furthermore, Episcopacy itself enabled the direct imposition of the will of the monarch upon the Church, both in doctrine and in worship. The representative court by which the Scottish Reformation had been enacted had been replaced by a quiescent hierarchy; the free judgment of the Scottish Church that the offices prescribed in the New Testament were only three had been over-ridden by royal prerogative; most seriously of all,

---

<sup>18</sup> J. Kirk, 'Second Book of Discipline' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 765–66.

<sup>19</sup> H. R. Sefton, 'Episcopalianism' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 296–98.

<sup>20</sup> J. D. Douglas, 'Buchanan, George' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 106–07.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J. D. Douglas, 'Arbroath, Declaration of' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 21–22.

<sup>22</sup> Burleigh, *Church History of Scotland*, p. 209.

the views of the membership were no longer consulted in the governance of the Scottish Church. The stage was set for conflict.

*The Covenants and war over church government*

The imposition of episcopacy did not immediately lead to confrontation. The change was principally one of overall governance, not of local practice, and congregationally, much of the work of the Scottish Church continued largely unaffected by tensions over church government. Even the notorious Five Articles of Perth, which had been forced through the last Assembly of 1618 with all the threats and guile of James VI behind them, seem to have occasioned little unease beyond the ministry, and indeed enforcement of them by the bishops seems to have been unenthusiastic.<sup>23</sup> While there were local cases of ministers being forcibly imposed upon congregations, and of ministers facing discipline for their resistance to the Articles, these carried no hint of the popular uprising to come.

It was not, therefore, against the principle of the rule of bishops that the covenanters chiefly rebelled, nor against the monarch's role in their appointment. Rather, the riots of 1637 erupted because of a change in worship: specifically, the imposition of a prayer book, largely modelled upon that of the Church of England, by royal authority, exercised through episcopal prerogative.<sup>24</sup> It was, therefore, the actual exercise of episcopal government that resulted in the eruption of popular indignation that produced the National Covenant. By exercising authority without consultation of the membership of the Scottish Church and enacting change with no avenue of appeal, the Scottish bishops had acted consistently with Episcopalian principles, but had provoked a storm of popular outrage. Jenny Geddes's reputed cry as she hurled her stool in St Giles', 'Villain! Do you say Mass at my lug?' underlined the key concern of many Scots: that the Scottish Reformation was being reversed and the Scottish Church being brought into conformity with Rome.<sup>25</sup> Although, at that stage, there was no question of the Reformation in England and Scotland wholly being reversed by Charles I, it is equally true that the whole direction of travel of all the Caroline reforms was in the direction of outward conformity to Rome, only with the King exercising near-papal authority. The riots of 1637 were not, therefore, merely, or even principally, an expression of fear that the stakes and gibbets of 'Bloody Mary' would return to the British Isles, they were rather an

---

<sup>23</sup> Burleigh, *Church History of Scotland*, pp. 208–09.

<sup>24</sup> Susan Hardman Moore, 'Laud, William' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, p. 472.

<sup>25</sup> Calhoun, 'Geddes, Jenny' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 352–53.

expression of outrage that, in the view of the people, royal authority was displacing the authority of Christ in his Church. Thus, while there were more issues than the government of the Scottish Church raised by the National Covenant, all ultimately converged upon the question, how the Scottish Church was to be governed.

The National Covenant did not explicitly condemn episcopacy, but it did pledge its subscribers to preserve the freedom of the Scottish Church from state control. In practice, the General Assembly, which met for the first time in twenty years in Glasgow in 1638, acted decisively to abolish episcopacy and depose the bishops.<sup>26</sup> The prayer book controversy therefore reached a head on the question of the legitimacy of bishops as an instrument of civil authority imposed upon the Scottish Church, and this remained the key point at issue in all the ensuing controversy until the Revolution Settlement of 1690. The 'Bishops' Wars' of 1640 to 1641 were therefore appropriately named, and the entire Scottish engagement in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms was to obtain the extension of Presbyterianism throughout the British Isles in line with the Solemn League and Covenant. Under Cromwell, while the Assembly was prohibited from meeting and the Scots were divided between Resolutioners and Protesters, they remained Presbyterians by conviction. The Restoration of Charles II in 1660 left him in a strong enough position to re-impose Episcopalianism once more by declaring all laws passed since 1638 illegal, but many who conformed, and even some of those who agreed to receive consecration, such as Robert Leighton (1611 to 1684), professed that they accepted an episcopal compromise only for the sake of peace.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, two of the most appreciated authors of this period among later Presbyterians are Leighton himself, chiefly for his notable commentary on 1 Peter, and a younger conformist, Henry Scougal (1650 to 1678), whose book *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (1948) has become an evangelical classic. Many Covenanters, however, refused to go this far, and some would not accept the later indulgence that the King offered for Presbyterian worship, but continued to conduct covert open-air services. Some even reached the point of armed revolt against Charles II, and the 'Killing Times' of the 1680s saw thousands slain in conflict, by judicial action or by extra-judicial killings for covenanting principles. As Burleigh has observed:

---

<sup>26</sup> D. Stevenson, 'Glasgow Assembly' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, p. 364.

<sup>27</sup> J. D. Douglas, 'Leighton, Robert' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 478–79.

In ordinary covenanting folk, even in the fiercest of the field preachers, there glowed a warmth of devotion to Christ Jesus the Redeemer, and a fervent loyalty to His Crown and Kingdom, to the Kirk of which he was the only King and Head.<sup>28</sup>

This was not mere stubborn insistence upon the superior virtue of Presbyterian administration, it was the expression of emphatic conviction that Presbyterian government was the exercise of Christ's Kingship, and the intrusion of hierarchical bishops an intrusion upon that.

The conflicts that raged in Scotland between 1640 and 1689 were therefore wars fought over church government. Though the heart of the issue remained the question whether the monarch would be able to dominate the Scottish Church, the specific focus of the conflict was the episcopacy, because it was through bishops that the King's power was exercised in the Church.

#### *The Revolution Settlement and church government since 1690*

The Revolution Settlement was the outcome of the transitional period of 1688 to 1690, which was initially experienced in Scotland as something of a vacuum of power. James VII's power had broken, and he had fled from London, but Scotland was remote and initially untouched by the invasion of William of Orange, who had landed at Torbay in Devon on 5 November 1688. The Scottish Lord Chancellor, the Roman Catholic Earl of Perth, a ruthless persecutor of the Covenanters, fled from Edinburgh after being assaulted by a mob in December 1688. The crowd smashed up the Roman Catholic chapel at Holyroodhouse where the King and his favourites had reintroduced Mass, and where the Jesuits had schools and a printing press. The books, beads, crosses, and images were burnt in the streets. Lord Perth was captured shortly afterwards, trying to flee on board a ship to the Continent dressed as a woman, and was thrown in prison at Kirkcaldy.<sup>29</sup> Scotland was therefore without a King, and without a Lord Chancellor.

On 13 February, William and Mary jointly accepted the crown of England from the English Parliament, and a Convention of the Estates of Scotland, which would effectively function as a Scottish Parliament, was summoned for 14 March, where a letter from William would be presented. This Convention met in a tense atmosphere, with the threat of civil war very real. Edinburgh Castle was still held for James, and its guns were trained on Parliament House, but the hard-line Covenanters, the United Societies, were

---

<sup>28</sup> Burleigh, *Church History of Scotland*, p. 256.

<sup>29</sup> Charles G. McCrie, *Scotland's Part and Place in the Revolution of 1688* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1888), pp. 166–68.

also in arms and a guard of 500 paraded in the city where their minister, James Renwick, had been executed just months before.<sup>30</sup> The Convention was representative of both sides. Leading Jacobite peers attended, bearing a letter from James, as did the bishops. Both letters were read, first William's, which was typically cautious and guarded, and then James's, which stood upon royal prerogative, and threatened charges of treason against his opponents. As William Ferguson has written:

This alarmed the waverers among the Episcopalians who feared that in the event of James's restoration their natural allegiance would be made to cover not just the King's majesty but also the spiritual claims of the Pope. Rightly, this episode has been regarded as the main determinant of the course followed by the convention. [...] At a stroke, his stupid letter reduced James' active sympathisers in the estates to a relatively small body of committed Jacobites of whom the chief was Viscount Dundee.<sup>31</sup>

With few other than the bishops continuing to support James, Dundee abandoned the Convention, and on 11 April, the crown of Scotland was offered jointly to William and Mary. The terms of the offer were enacted in the Claim of Right, a hugely important piece of constitutional legislation, which rejected the supremacy that the Stewart kings had claimed over the rule of law, limited the power of the monarch over Parliament, and condemned episcopacy as 'a great and insupportable grievance and trouble to this Nation'.<sup>32</sup> On 11 May, William accepted the terms of the Claim of Right, with the provision only that he was not going to be a religious persecutor. With William's approval, a full Scottish Parliament met and began to reform the Church of Scotland on Presbyterian, though not strictly Covenanting, principles.

The key deciding factor behind Scotland's ecclesiastical settlement being Presbyterian was not, therefore, mere politics. Political factors had greatly undermined support for the episcopacy, such as the fact that the bishops owed their appointments to a king who openly desired to turn back the Reformation, and continued to support his rule, and the fact that they continued to support James once his continued rule was no longer tenable.

---

<sup>30</sup> McCrie, *Scotland's Part and Place in the Revolution*, pp. 170–71; David Osborne Christie, 'Bible and Sword: The Cameronian Contribution to Freedom of Religion' (unpublished Th.D. thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2008), pp. 209–11.

<sup>31</sup> William Ferguson, *Scotland, 1689 to the Present* (Edinburgh, 1968), p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Ferguson, *Scotland, 1689 to the Present*, p. 5.

Under these circumstances, the bishops could expect to receive no support from above, from the new monarchs, for their continued rule over the Scottish Church. But the decisive rejection of the bishops came from below: decades of persecution had not undermined the Scottish people's desire for a Presbyterian Kirk. The Scottish bishops were not loyal to James merely from a conscientious regard to their vows: unlike their English counterparts, their legitimacy and principal support came from the crown. As Archbishop Patterson wrote, the Scottish Bishops could not oppose the crown, for 'here if the court chance to frowne on us, it is far otherwise [...] so that our bishops here ly open to far greater tentations to yeeld to the importunities of Court than yours do'.<sup>33</sup>

In demanding a Presbyterian settlement for the Church of Scotland, therefore, the Convention spoke not only for hard-line Covenanters, but for the Scottish people in general. This is evident not only from the decisive action of an elected and broadly representative Convention of Estates, but from the rapid and general acceptance of the Revolution Settlement. Resolutely Episcopalian clergy were either 'rabbled' from their charges — itself evidence of the popular feeling against them — or were tolerated under terms of strict political quiescence and with a clear understanding that they would be succeeded by Presbyterians. The principal achievements of the Scottish Church since 1690, including the effective evangelisation of the Highlands and Islands, extensive overseas missionary endeavours, and major contributions to international theological scholarship, belong chiefly to Presbyterians. The non-juring Episcopalians continued to maintain services, and were legally tolerated from 1712, but remained few in number and so politically associated with Jacobitism that as late as 1720 the consent of the exiled 'James VIII' was sought for the consecration of a Bishop of Edinburgh.<sup>34</sup> The Scottish Episcopal Church only began to revive significantly in the nineteenth century, but even at the height of Scottish Church membership in the late 1950s, its 56,118 members compared to the 1.32 million of the Church of Scotland.<sup>35</sup> Any objective historian must give fair acknowledgment of the distinctive contribution of Episcopalianism to modern church life in Scotland, including the fine architecture of its churches gracing many towns and cities, valuable contributions to religious hymnody and literature by some of its members, and its frequent comment on public questions. On the key point of difference, however, between Episcopacy and

---

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Ferguson, *Scotland, 1689 to the Present*, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> H. R. Sefton, 'Episcopalianism' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 296–98.

<sup>35</sup> John Highet, *The Scottish Churches* (London: Skeffington, 1960), p. 213.

Presbyterianism, the overwhelming preference of the Scottish people for the governance of presbytery was expressed in 1689 to 1690, and by majority affiliation ever since.

### *Conclusion*

From this brief survey of the shared history of Presbyterians and Episcopalians, several concluding observations may be drawn regarding the long and fraught debate over church government:

1. History shows that territorial episcopacy has always been imposed on the Scottish Church from without, whether by crown, nobility or Rome.
2. Episcopacy has historically functioned as an instrument of monarchical authority over the Church, rather than expressing the will of its members in an organic and representative manner.
3. Presbyterianism coheres with the attainments of Scotland's constitutional history, specifically with the contractual model of kingship and the representative model of government. Episcopalianism inherently does not, and hence has been heavily modified in recent years to offer a more democratic structure palatable to modern views of appropriate governance.
4. Presbyterianism has historically been advocated as expressing nothing other than Christ's kingship over his Church, which helps to explain the intensity of historic conflict over this question, as well as likely ruling out any prospect of full incorporating union between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church on the basis of some form of hybrid structure for the foreseeable future.
5. Scottish Christians owe a mutual shared debt both to Episcopalians and Presbyterians and can, and should, value the legacies of Robert Leighton and Henry Scougal, and of the Scottish Episcopal Church more generally, alongside those of John Knox, Samuel Rutherford and Thomas Chalmers, and of Scotland's Presbyterian Church.





# Order, Ministry and Sacraments in the Church of Scotland

TERI PETERSON

Minister, St John's Parish Church, Gourrock

MARTIN RITCHIE

Pastor-elect, The Presbyterian Church at Tenafly, New Jersey, USA

As one might expect from a tradition associated with the words 'protest' and 'reform', historically a significant proportion of the doctrine and practice of the Reformed tradition has been characterised by what we do not do, and what we do not believe. In an effort to be distinctive from the Roman Catholic tradition out of which the reformed Church of Scotland arose, sixteenth and seventeenth century lines of difference were polemically stated. This is particularly notable in the early confessions and liturgies of the reformed Kirk. Significant sections of the Scots and Westminster confessions target Roman Catholic polity and liturgical doctrine and practice in vitriolic terms. Although the General Assembly issued a *Declaratory Act Anent the Westminster Confession of Faith* in 1986, in which it dissociated itself from several sections of the rhetoric of the confession against monastic life, marriage to 'Infidels, Papists or other idolators', the Pope, and the Mass, some of this attitude persists today, especially about sacramental doctrine and practice, and how authority is exercised in the Kirk. Though in the twentieth century through a succession of rich reports to the General Assembly, and ecumenical dialogue, the Church of Scotland made strides forward in recovering distinctive Reformed doctrine and polity from the bitter territory of the Reformation period, the Kirk still exists for some of its own members and of other churches as a narrowly presbyterian caricature.

We are particularly aware in writing for this journal that our two traditions have an especially close but also fraught relationship, developing as they did as dimensions of the reformed Church of Scotland, and then as separate strands within the fraught and polarised political and religious landscape of seventeenth century Scotland. Some of what we say as regards the doctrine and practice of the Church of Scotland is shared with the Scottish Episcopal Church, even though our current approaches are distinctive. The extent of our distance apart varies according to period, place, and people. In this era of the *St Andrew Declaration*, we write in a spirit of openness, inspired by the notes of reconciliation in the Reformed approach to the Lord's Supper, which mandate us to meet each other as disciples of Christ, despite the challenges over the areas of sacramental life and church order which are the subject of this essay.

### *Confessional standards*

The Church of Scotland's supreme rule of faith and life is Scripture, alongside which is the subordinate standard of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The *Articles Declaratory* act as a partner 'constitution' of the church and affirm our embrace of the historic ecumenical creeds. In terms of church order, the *First and Second Books of Discipline* (1560 and 1578, respectively) are foundational, and their key themes can be discerned (with some modulation) in the polity of the church today. The *Form of Presbyterial Church Government* (1645) was strongly influenced by both and the presbyterian agenda of the Westminster Assembly (1643 to 1653). In terms of worship, the *Westminster Directory of Public Worship* was influential. Wrapped around the *Westminster Confession and Directory*, however, is our tradition of moderating our relationship with them through successive acts of the General Assembly.

An examination of the approach to the *Westminster Confession* in the various Scottish Presbyterian denominations that were finally re-united in 1929 demonstrates the growing unease with the effectiveness of a confession written in the heat of religious and political strife in the 1640s. This awareness led the United Presbyterian Church to pass a Declaratory Act in 1879 in the hope of checking and counterbalancing some of the implications of the *Confession*. The Act introduced 'liberty of opinion' on such points in the Standards 'not entering into the substance of the faith'. The Free Church passed a similar Declaratory Act in 1892, while the Church of Scotland in 1910 changed its Formula of Subscription to soften acceptance of *Westminster* in its 'entirety'.<sup>1</sup> This 'liberty of opinion' is rooted in the *Westminster Confession's* own insistence that God alone is Lord of the conscience.<sup>2</sup> Whilst not a doctrine in itself, 'it is historically and constitutionally a major characteristic of the Church'.<sup>3</sup> It is a feature of the *First Article Declaratory* and reflects the compromise between those who wanted to constrain doctrinal change and those 'who wanted the church to be able to reform its doctrine and self-understanding in light of present experience and knowledge'.<sup>4</sup> This 'conscience clause' is contained within the ordinal, given assent to by ministers, elders, and deacons, and is the reason that it is not possible to be completely categorical about a Church of Scotland

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Report of the Theological Forum', *Reports of the Church of Scotland General Assembly* (2021), 9:1.

<sup>2</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XX:2 [accessed 19 February 2022].

<sup>3</sup> *The Constitution and Laws of the Church of Scotland*, ed. by James L. Weatherhead (Edinburgh: The Board of Practice and Procedure at 121 George Street, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> *Constitution and Laws*, ed. by Weatherhead, p. 27.

position on many matters of doctrine and practice, particularly given the range of opinions found within the Reformed tradition. On the other hand, this conscience clause makes possible a diverse and broad church, full of varying rich perspectives on doctrine and the sacraments. Perhaps aptly in a church which values the mantra of being Reformed and always reforming, doctrine is dynamic. Orders and ministry are perhaps less contested ground but are inevitably tied to debates and developments in doctrine and practice. At the 2021 General Assembly, the *Theological Forum* reported on its deliberations around the status of the *Westminster Confession* and the Assembly endorsed a consultation of presbyteries under the Barrier Act process. The Forum noted that:

Many people doubt that a document of this length, level of detail, confidence, and force should have such a significant status within the church. Such a maximal text encourages narrow boundaries within belief in areas of faith which have generated a vastly broader range of theological positions both before and after the writing of the Confession.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible that a suite of confessions may be adopted, similar to the route taken by the Presbyterian Church USA, which would shift the *Westminster Confession of Faith* from the status of mandatory subscription to that of being one of a number of confessional documents that offer guidance along with Scripture and the ecumenical creeds and in the context of the Church of Scotland's *Articles Declaratory*. This would have the effect of opening doctrine and practice more fully to the influences of earlier documents such as the *Scots Confession* of 1560, but also to the rich sweep of ecumenical thought through the ages and in our present context. It could be said that such a move would more honestly reflect the range of doctrine and practice in the present-day Church of Scotland which currently shelters under the conscience clause.

### *Church order and ministry*

Since the Reformation era, the foundational positive statement of what defines the reformed Church of Scotland has been as articulated in Chapter 18 of the *Scots Confession*: 1. The Word of God rightly proclaimed; 2. The sacraments rightly administered; 3. Discipline rightly practised. Binding these three marks together and measuring the faithfulness of the church is the task of the courts of the church, which are made up of those holding

---

<sup>5</sup> 'Theological Forum', *Reports of General Assembly*, 8.6.

various ordained offices, each of which has a particular role in ensuring that the church is always run decently and in good order.

Ordained ministries should be those which are concerned not just for one part of the Church's life and activity, but for the Church as such, for its character as the Church. They are ministries whose concern is to keep the Church faithful to its nature and calling.<sup>6</sup>

The identity and purpose of the Church is rooted in Christ, who is the sole head of the Church:

It is Christ who fulfils God's purpose: 'Christ's ministry is the ministry', the unique and final redemptive action of God's own grace and power, confronting human inadequacy, effecting human wholeness. [...] we can't talk about ministry in the Church without awareness of the action of God in Christ, which is the true, effective ministry in and to the world. The Church cannot then see its own ministry as something free-standing, with a character and goals determined by the Church's decisions. The Church's ministry is not independent of, or even supplementary to, Christ's ministry, but rather is derived from it, and serves it.<sup>7</sup>

The ordering of the Church's ministry is for the purpose of providing a framework for fulfilling Christ's ministry in the world.

### *Three offices*

The ordained offices in the Church of Scotland include Minister of Word and Sacrament (sometimes called 'Teaching Elder'), Elder (or 'Ruling Elder'), and Deacon. Much ink has been spilled on the biblical bases for these particular offices, especially as regards the two types of presbyters (elders). Calvin and other reformers pointed to both Hebrew Scripture traditions of division of labour, and to the New Testament at 1 Timothy 5.17, 'let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching' — the implication being that some elders are engaged in preaching/teaching, while others are engaged in some other aspect of ministry that is also presbyteral in nature. As the *Form of Presbyterial Church Government*, a part of the work of the Westminster divines, puts it:

---

<sup>6</sup> 'Panel on Doctrine', *Reports of General Assembly*, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> 'Panel on Doctrine' *Reports of General Assembly*, 2000.

As there were in the Jewish Church elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the Church; so Christ, who hath instituted government, and governors ecclesiastical in the Church, hath furnished some in his Church, besides the Ministers of the Word, with gifts for government, and with commission to exercise the same when called thereunto, who are to join with the Minister in the government of the Church. Which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders.<sup>8</sup>

None of the three orders of ministry are steppingstones to the other, each has their own calling and purpose within the Church, though it is of course possible that a person ordained to one role may subsequently be called to another, and if that discernment is upheld by the whole then that person would also be ordained to that office.

These three offices have been given to the Church by Christ, who alone is head of the Church, that they may exercise oversight and keep good order.<sup>9</sup> Decision making and oversight at any level of the Church of Scotland's life is not vested in one person, that there may be no confusion as to whom rightful Head is. Thus, the *episkope* is exercised corporately: locally via the Presbytery and nationally via the General Assembly, with each being made up of minister, elder, and deacon members. Presbyteries are made up of all ministers and deacons within a geographical area, plus elders in equal number to ministers from the area congregations. The General Assembly is made up of commissioners from each presbytery's membership. Elders, deacons, and ministers of Word and Sacrament are people who have been set apart within the community for the task of leading and measuring the church's faithfulness to the Word of God. Of course, every member of the Body is meant to minister to each other and to the world, as that is the common task of all baptised Christians. Some are then called, by both God and the community, for tasks of ministry and collective governance, and they are ordained for that purpose.

### *Ordination*

Ordination, in serving to authorise and inaugurate ministries within the Church, is not an end. It has been said that 'what determines ordination is the end to which ordination is directed and intended by the

---

<sup>8</sup> *The Form of Presbyterial Church Government*, 1647 [accessed 3 March 2022].

<sup>9</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXV:6.

Church. Ordination is directed towards the ordering of the of the Church's ministry.'<sup>10</sup>

Ordination in the Reformed tradition does not mark an ontological change, but rather a functional one — and yet we also recognise the work of the Holy Spirit within the person being ordained, not to change them at an existential level, but rather to equip them for the task to which God has called them:

For centuries the Church has ordained some of its members to specific and limited service with focused functions and recognition of specific responsibilities. Services of ordination in the Church of Scotland, unlike those of the Roman Catholic Church, are not seen as conferring an indelible mark, or character, on the individual, but celebrate the call of God, and the endowing by God with gifts to fulfil their obligations, of the individuals so ordained. While the parallels may be a little difficult to accept, there is something in the service of ordination that is related to various 'rites of passage' in the way that they acknowledge change in the individual and the relationship of the community to the individual, like marriage, bar mitzvah, and the taking of oaths of office as a politician. [...] It also is a means where the person received public acknowledgement that he, or she, is endowed by God with gifts for the distinctive service to the community.<sup>11</sup>

Those called to serve in these ways must have their call affirmed by others, and undertake training for the task to which they have been called:

The Church of Scotland has always laid great stress on a prayerful discernment, careful preparation and lawful ordination of those called by Christ to serve God's Word and Sacraments to God's people. This has not been because they have been seen as a separate or superior order of Christians but due to their calling to serve holy things, the Gospel and Body of

---

<sup>10</sup> 'Panel on Doctrine', *Reports of General Assembly*, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> 'Eldership Reflection Paper', Church of Scotland Mission & Discipleship Council, 2013 [accessed 3 March 2022].

Christ, pointing people away from themselves and faithfully to Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup>

This is true of all three ordained offices, not only the ministry of Word and Sacrament. According to the Second Book of Discipline:

Ordinatioun is the separatioun and sanctifeing of the persone appointit of God and his kirk eftir he be weill tryit and fund qualifeit [...] [...] the ceremonyis of ordinatioun ar fasting and earnest prayer, and the imposition of hands of the elderschippe.<sup>13</sup>

This was the point in the Scottish Reformation when the laying on of hands was returned to the ‘ceremonies’ of ordination, as previously it had been deemed unnecessary or even a gateway to superstition. It is of note that it is the eldership — meaning all presbyters, both ministers and elders — who are to participate in the imposition of hands. Including all presbyters in the ritual was, and is, a way to manifest the Reformed understanding of ordination and succession: that it is through the community of God’s people, empowered by the Spirit, that authority is given, not through one single person or one single line of authority. The communal *episkope* and the crucial belief that the call to an individual also involves the community are evident from the moment of ordination.

When a person senses a call to ministry of Word and Sacrament, that call must be affirmed by their community and by the wider church. Ministers of Word and Sacrament are called, trained, and assessed. Their sense of vocation must be affirmed by various bodies within the Kirk, and they cannot be ordained until they have been called by a congregation and the Presbytery has concurred. This three-way call, between the person, the congregation (or other ministry such as chaplaincy), and the Presbytery is part of how the Church of Scotland lives out its belief that the Holy Spirit is best discerned in community, never solely alone. They are then ordained by the Presbytery on behalf of the whole Kirk. A similar process is true for deacons, who are called by God and community, trained and assessed by national bodies within the church, and ordained by Presbytery on behalf of the whole Kirk to a ministry of Word and Service. Their vocation is lived out in a variety of contexts. While these two are common offices in many denominations, the Reformed churches are distinctive in the ordination of

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ministers of the Gospel: A Policy Statement for the Board of Ministry, Committee on the Theology and Practice of Ministry*, Church of Scotland. 2000 [accessed 26 May 2022].

<sup>13</sup> *Ministers of The Gospel*, 3.6.

what other traditions would call a ‘lay person’ to office, the office of ruling elder.

### *Ruling elders*

Elders exercise their ministry primarily locally, and there is no national system of training or assessment. Each congregation discerns from within their number who God is calling into leadership, and elders are trained and ordained locally — yet they are not only elders for that congregation, but for the whole Church, and they are meant to ‘take their due part in the administration of its affairs’ (this is one of the promises in all ordination vows) including potentially serving as elders in Presbytery, the General Assembly, or committees and councils of the church nationwide.

Elders are not only charity trustees, though increasing OSCR requirements do make them that. Nor are they simply technical assistants to the minister, carrying out tasks and supporting the minister’s leadership, though they may well also be that in some cases. Rather, elder is a spiritual office whose:

distinctive ministry is not the service of the Word but the service of response to the Word [...] Whilst ministers are ordained to dispense the Word and Sacraments to the people, elders are set apart to help the people in their reception of the Word and in their participation in the Sacraments, and to seek the fruit of the Gospel in the faith and life of the community. Elders are meant to represent the people, and to fulfil their ministry from the people toward God. Thus their specific calling is to help the faithful from within their midst.<sup>14</sup>

*The First Book of Discipline* (1560) made the eldership a one-year-at-a-time term, so that the church would not be endangered by someone with a personal agenda serving a lengthy term, and so that elders could retain their livelihood while also inhabiting this office. The elders were to engage primarily in oversight and discipline of the parish and congregation:

to wit, in judging and discerning causes; in giving of admonition to the licentious liver; in having respect to the manners and conversation of all men within their charge; for by the gravity of

---

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Forsyth, ‘An Introduction to the History and Theology of the Eldership Within the Church of Scotland’ (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Mission and Discipleship Council, 2015), p. 97 [accessed 3 March 2022].



the seniors, the light and unbridled life of the licentious ought [to] be corrected and bridled.<sup>15</sup>

This was not an ordained office, but rather an almost administrative one, focused on the third mark of the church and thus enabling the minister to focus on the first two.

Less than two decades later, *The Second Book of Discipline* (1578) refined the understanding of eldership into one of the orders of ministry, alongside other presbyters. Though both insist that it is God who calls people to eldership through the voice of the congregation, and the *Second Book* did not intend to create another class of clergy, in 1578 the elder took on a further role beyond simple administrative and disciplinary matters. Elders were to take on an additional pastoral care role and occasionally a teaching role (as part of their duty to examine those who seek admission to the Lord's Table). They were also given to share in the task of oversight of the ministry of the whole congregation: 'As pastors and doctors should be diligent in teaching and sowing the seed of the word, so the elders should be careful in seeking the fruit of the same in the people.'<sup>16</sup> This role of enabling the congregation's response to the Word, and seeking its fruit — measuring the faithfulness of the people to the word of God, is done from within, in a sense, as the elders are members of the congregation, set apart — but not above — for this task of oversight. They are not merely a social club, nor is eldership a reward for lengthy church membership, but rather a role for ministry within the community. Those who are called to this role are also therefore meant to be people of good character, though what that means is not explicitly spelled out: 'What manner of persons they ought to be, we refer it to the express word of God, and, namely, the canons written by the apostle Paul.'<sup>17</sup>

The chief mechanism for exercising this office is through the Kirk Session, a local body of elders: 'Their principal office is to hold assemblies with the pastors and doctors for establishing good order and execution of discipline.'<sup>18</sup> While the *Second Book of Discipline* allowed for the fact that not every congregation may have a body of elders, but rather that an elder or group of elders may serve across several parishes, in today's Kirk the current practice is for every congregation to have a kirk session, which may be made up of anywhere from three up to dozens of elders, each of whom is ordained

---

<sup>15</sup> *The First Book of Discipline*, ed. by James K. Cameron (Glasgow: Covenanter's Press, 2005), p. 176.

<sup>16</sup> *The Second Book of Discipline*, 6.5 [accessed 3 March 2022].

<sup>17</sup> *Second Book of Discipline*, 6.3.

<sup>18</sup> *Second Book of Discipline*, 6.9.

for life and most commonly serves for life as well.<sup>19</sup> In addition to their role as charity trustees, according to the Church Courts Act (Act III 2000):

It is the duty of the Kirk Session to maintain good order, to cause the Acts of the Assembly to be put in execution and, subject to the provision of Act I, 2010 and Act I, 2019, to administer discipline, to judge and determine cases, and to superintend the religious and moral condition of the parish.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the Session (made up of elders and minister(s)/deacon(s) together) fulfils a local *episkope* in the congregation, overseeing mission and communal life, and enacting national church decisions at the local level. It is for this reason that the eldership is an ordained office within the Kirk, having parity in all church courts with ministers and deacons, while not exercising what might be called 'clerical' functions in the way that ministers do, and deacons may.

Secondarily, many kirk sessions organise the work of elders via a district system, which originally enabled elders to take responsibility for discipline and catechising (or at least testing preparedness for the Lord's Table) for a section of the parish. Under this system an elder was assigned to a geographical area of the parish and tasked with visiting people for the purpose of ensuring they were adequately prepared for admission to the Lord's Table, including the distribution of communion tokens, and also encouraging moral uprightness and calling to account those who engaged in inappropriate behaviour. If the visit did not result in reform of character, then the elder would bring the person before the Kirk Session for discipline.<sup>21</sup>

As the role of the church as moral disciplinarian receded and as the 'fencing of the table' changed over time, the district system has evolved into primarily a pastoral care and oversight responsibility rather than a disciplinary one, though in some places the district elder also still retains the responsibility of inviting members to Communion services. In the twenty-first century increasing numbers of kirk sessions are doing away with the district system as shifts in understanding of discipline, pastoral care, and

---

<sup>19</sup> There is major reorganisation underway in the Church of Scotland at the time of writing, and this practice may well be under new consideration, including recent legislation allowing elders to serve terms on Session while retaining other roles of eldership when not active on the Session.

<sup>20</sup> *Church Courts Act, Act III 2000*, Church of Scotland [accessed 26 May 2022].

<sup>21</sup> *Second Book of Discipline*, 6.8.

ministry to the parish have taken place. With those roles being undertaken by people who have not necessarily been ordained to the eldership, the spiritual office of elder is again coming to the fore, with renewed emphasis on elders as spiritual leaders and servants of the congregation alongside the minister, albeit from a different angle (as previously discussed).

The eldership is a means by which leadership may emerge within the life of the local church; the ministry of the eldership is exercised not personally, primarily, but rather collegially, elders acting with one another and with ministers of Word and Sacrament. Drawn from within the local church, elders are a reminder to the church that the call to service is addressed primarily to it, to the whole people of God. Elders in this view are not simply representatives of the congregation (or even of the wider community), but are holders of a permanent, spiritual office in the church.<sup>22</sup>

### *Deacons*

Some have argued that the office of elder as it has evolved in the past two centuries is more akin to the biblical office of deacon, and indeed there is some overlap in the areas of both word and service. The discernment of the Kirk has continued to see two separate orders, however, following Calvin who:

characterised Presbyterian Ministry as being the fulfilment of the commandment of Jesus in Mark 12.30, which he sees as relating to worship, with the Diaconal Ministry as the fulfilment of the second commandment, Mark 12.1, an expression of love or charity.<sup>23</sup>

The Panel on Doctrine in their 2001 report asserted that ‘There is an underlying unity between kerygmatic and diaconal forms of ministry, yet each has its own particular focus, the former in witness, the latter in service.’<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, the sixteenth century understanding of the diaconate as a calling to serve the poor evolved over the next two centuries into essentially a treasury office, concerned primarily with overseeing and disbursing church funds. The Church of Scotland recovered the service-oriented role of deacon in the late 1800s, when the Revd Archibald Charteris

---

<sup>22</sup> *Reports of the General Assembly, Report of the Panel on Doctrine, 2001.*

<sup>23</sup> Ronnie Aitchison, *The Ministry of a Deacon* (London: Epworth Press, 2003), p. 83.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Panel of Doctrine’, *Reports of General Assembly, 2001.*

envisioned a pathway for women to serve in both the local church and the mission field. The first deaconess was 'set apart' (not ordained!) in 1888, and many women took up the call to service at home and abroad, though it took some time for the local church to accept the role. Charteris originally advocated for the ordination of deacons, but it took another hundred years for the Kirk to discern that shift. Steps along the way included the ordination of women as elders (1964) and subsequently ministers (1968), which many thought would lead to the end of the diaconate, since until that point it had been the only route for women to serve the church in any official capacity. The diaconate continued to evolve with the incorporation of the Lay Missionaries which brought men into the diaconate, and then the eventual decision to ordain deacons, rather than commission them, in 2002. Throughout, however, the focus of the deacon has been primarily an office of Word and Service, distinct from both the ministerial office of Word and Sacrament, and from the office of ruling elder (whose ministry is primarily local and rooted in one congregation), yet the diaconate is also complementary to the other orders. Many deacons understand themselves as enablers, that the church might fulfil its calling. 'It is a ministry that enables others also to do ministry.'<sup>25</sup>

### *Ministers of Word and Sacrament*

To keep Christ's Body faithful to participation in Christ's ministry and mission, and to guard it from its own activism and idolatries, we dare to believe that Christ gifts his Church with mature and suitable disciples called by God and authorised by the Church to proclaim the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Such ministers of the Gospel are called to be communicators, enablers and exemplars of the Way of Jesus Christ, in order to nurture the wider ministry of Christ's Body, and not to supplant it. These particular recognised and authorised forms of service are not the ministry. They exist to serve the ministry of the whole people of God, as we all share as disciples in the one ministry of Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Ministers of Word and Sacrament are the most visible of the ministries of the church, and often the one most associated with the word 'ministry'. Their task is actually very particular, as the name suggests: to bring God and people together through the vehicles of proclamation/teaching and celebration of the sacraments. Yet the task of ministry is of course much

---

<sup>25</sup> *Deacons of Word and Service* [accessed 2 March 2022].

<sup>26</sup> *Ministers of the Gospel*, 2000.

broader than it would at first appear. The proclamation of the Word takes form in the obvious ways of preaching and teaching, and also in less obvious ways of pastoral care (bringing the Word of God to bear on personal situations), administration (ensuring the church's life is in accordance with the Word), and myriad others:

Our offices of minister and elder, though different, lead the church's life and service in complementary ways. The ministry of Word and sacrament maintains the church by exercising a personal ministry of proclamation and presidency, ensuring the faithfulness and continuity of the church grounded in the unchanging gospel.<sup>27</sup>

The task of proclamation of the Word belongs primarily to ministers of Word and Sacrament, though it may also be shared with deacons and elders, and indeed in more recent times among the whole people of God. The Reformed understanding is that the word itself may be experienced in three forms — the Word of God revealed in Jesus the Christ; the Word of God written in Scripture; and the Word of God proclaimed and celebrated in the Church. It is through the ministry of the Word that people are drawn to Christ, taught his way, and empowered to live faithfully. To understand the proclamation of God's word as an experience of the Word is to understand the weight borne by the one doing the proclaiming.

The weight of that task has meant that for some periods of the Kirk's history, it has occasionally appeared that Word outweighed Sacrament, particularly during periods when communities found it difficult to access an ordained minister. But the two cannot be separated, one naturally leads to the other and back again. Indeed, recent reports of the Theological Forum have reaffirmed that people are also drawn to Christ and empowered for faithful living through the sacraments as well as the Word, and so they ought to be held always together. Robert Bruce's 1589 sermons on the Lord's Supper even make the assertion that:

The Sacraments are appointed that I may have Him more fully in my soul, that I may have the bounds of it enlarged, and that He may make the better residence in me. This no doubt is the

---

<sup>27</sup> 'Panel of Doctrine', *Reports of General Assembly*, 2001.

reason why these seals are annexed to the evidence of the simple Word.<sup>28</sup>

As in all the orders of ministry in the Church of Scotland, those called to ministry of Word and Sacrament are called and ordained for their task — called as the people they already are, trained and prepared both academically and spiritually, yes, but not changed into someone else at the moment of the laying on of hands. There is no hierarchy of ordination nor even between those ordained and not — though those ordained to this office bear authority within the community and therefore responsibility. ‘Ordained ministries do not differ from one another, or from non-ordained ministries, in rank or prestige, but they may indeed vary in character and scope.’<sup>29</sup> In our haste to dissociate ourselves from any ideas of clerical supremacy, though, we have sometimes seen people primarily through the lens of their task, rather than as whole human beings whom God calls in all their fullness, with all the gifts and graces the Spirit offers them and also all the foibles and challenges of any other imperfect human being:

Our Reformed emphasis in ordination has been on the setting apart to a particular pastoral function, rather than on a sacramental act conferring the indelible mark of a priestly status. With that proper emphasis on function, we have tended to neglect the theological and human significance of the being of the person who is ordained to that function. The two are inseparable and dynamically related to one another in ordained ministry.<sup>30</sup>

When we keep these aspects in the correct balance, understanding that God calls fallible human beings to these roles within the church, gifting them for the purposes of leading the people forward in God’s mission, we are better able to exercise collegial oversight and to hold one another accountable to ‘lead lives worthy of the calling to which you have been called’ (Ephesians 4). The parity of these ordained offices means that it is equally the right and responsibility of every presbyter or deacon to exercise that discipline with one another, as well as to share in the administration of the church’s affairs on a wider level.

---

<sup>28</sup> *The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper: Sermons on the Sacrament preached in the Kirk of Edinburgh by Robert Bruce in A.D. 1569*, ed. by T. F. Torrance (London: James Clarke, 1958), p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Panel of Doctrine’, *Reports of General Assembly*, 2001.

<sup>30</sup> *Ministers of the Gospel*, 2000.

It may be less clear how the call to ministry of Word and Sacrament relates to the oversight role of a presbyter in the church. In 2001 the Panel on Doctrine determined that there are four criteria for ordained ministry:

Ordained ministries are those which: i. are concerned not just with one part of the church's life, but with keeping the church true to its nature and calling; ii. are understood to be ministries of the universal church; iii. have their vocation to ministry tested and affirmed by the church; iv. endure through time. These four criteria are intended to express the conviction that ordination is not the gateway to ministry as such, but rather the gateway to certain ministries which are concerned with the character of the church as the church. Ordination gives order to the church's ministry. Ordained ministries are concerned with the identity of the church, its unity through time as well as its unity throughout the world, its calling to be Christ's witness and servant in the world. These ministries exist to hold the church to its true nature and calling; therefore they operate not in isolation or distinction from the church and its calling, but as a part of it charged with particular responsibility.<sup>31</sup>

Here we see the connection to the Word and Sacrament task outlined earlier: 'to hold the church to its true nature and calling'. When taking part in the oversight of the church's life, calling it to faithfulness and holding it accountable when it falls short of the three marks of the true church, the minister of Word and Sacrament brings the living Word to bear on even the most mundane of administrative affairs, a reminder that God's interest is not only in the big picture but also in the details, and that we are called and gifted by the Spirit to witness to Christ and glorify God in everything we do.

The Church has no independent ministry of its own. Rather, it is called to participate in Christ's ministry or service. It is when we see all forms of Church ministry in relation to Christ's ministry, that we see them in true perspective. Scripture offers us a rich picture of the life of service embodied in Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup>

In ordering the ministry of the Church in this way, we do not claim it is the only way. Rather, the 'presbyterian system of church government and order of ministry claims only to be agreeable to the Word of God, and subject to continuing reform according to the Word of God, the needs of contemporary

---

<sup>31</sup> 'Panel of Doctrine', *Reports of General Assembly*, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> *Ministers of the Gospel*, 2000.

mission and ecumenical dialogue'.<sup>33</sup> We recognise that there are other systems that are agreeable to the Word of God, and we pledge ourselves to be always attentive to how the Spirit is moving in our contemporary context and our understanding of the Word, so that we may be *semper reformanda* — always being reformed.

### *A sacramental Kirk*

The early Reformed confessions make clear that the sacraments were central to the life of faith. Baptism in Scotland post-1560 was a common occurrence, but in practice the Lord's Supper was infrequently celebrated, despite Calvin's preference for weekly communion, and the suggestion in the *Forme of Prayers* that it might be shared once a month.<sup>34</sup> This infrequency was largely for practical rather than ideological reasons. The aspiration to place a minister of Word and Sacrament in every parish was unrealised until well into the seventeenth century, and Readers (some of whom had been Roman Catholic priests or monks) led local worship in most parishes until the availability of authorised ministers of Word and Sacrament was increased.<sup>35</sup> However, they were not authorised to preach or preside at the sacraments. Despite this, the Lord's Supper was prominent in the spiritual landscape of the Kirk and held a central place in the preaching of leading figures such as Robert Bruce, Minister at Edinburgh, and John Welch (John Knox's son-in-law), Minister at Ayr.<sup>36</sup>

In the *Scots Confession* of 1560, following Calvin, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are seen as those instituted by Jesus as

---

<sup>33</sup> *Minsters of the Gospel*, 2000.

<sup>34</sup> The *Forme of Prayers* was a forerunner of our current *Book of Common Order*, first published in a Scottish edition in 1564, based on Calvin's usage, and heavily influenced by the orders used by the English-speaking congregation in Geneva.

<sup>35</sup> See John McCallum's persuasive account of how slowly the one minister for each parish aspiration developed in John McCallum, *Reforming the Scottish Parish: The Reformation in Fife, 1560–1640* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Robert Bruce, *Sermons upon the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper: preached in the Kirk of Edinburgh be M. Robert Bruce, Minister of Christes Euangel there: at the time of the celebration of the Supper, as they were receaved from his mouth* (Edinburgh: Waldevrave, 1591); John Welch, 'Sermon XXX', in *Forty-Eight Select Sermons Preached by That Eminent and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, Mr John Welch, sometime Minister of the Gospel in Air*, (Edinburgh: R. Drummond for W. Gray, 1744), p. 344.



outlined in Scripture and derived from the Jewish traditions and rites of Circumcision and the Passover meal. Their purpose is seen as being:

Not onelie to make ane difference betwixt his people and they that wes without his league: Bot also to exercise the faith of his Children, and, be participation of the same Sacramentes, to seill in their hearts the assurance of his promise, and of that most blessed conjunction, union and societie, quhilk [which] the elect have with their head Christ Jesus.<sup>37</sup>

This confessional perspective is reinforced in the liturgies and rubrics of the Scottish *Forme of Prayers*. The Prayer of Exhortation from its Lord's Supper liturgy uses powerful experiential imagery to describe the idea that the sacraments are effective for us:

Let us consider then, that this Sacrament is a singular medicine for all poore sick creatures, a comfortable help to all weake Soules and that our Lord requireth no other worthinesse on our part, but that wee unfeinedly acknowledge our naughtinesse and imperfection. Then to the end that wee may bee worth partakers of his merits, and most comfortable benefits, (which is the true eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood) let us not suffer our mindes to wander about the consideration of these earthly and corruptible things (which wee see present to our eyes, and feele with our hands) to seek Christ bodily present in them, as if hee were inclosed in the bread and wine, or as if these elements were turned and changed into the substance of his flesh and blood: for the only way to dispose our Soules to receive nourishment, relief, and quickning of his substance, is to lift up our minds by faith above all things worldly and sensible, and thereby to enter into Heaven, that wee may find and receive Christ, where hee dwelleth undoubtedly very God and very man, in the incomprehensible glory of his Father, to whom bee all praise, honour and glory, now and ever. Amen.<sup>38</sup>

The *Westminster Confession* takes the imagery into the seventeenth century territory of sacramental covenant and bonding, describing the Lord's Supper as being:

---

<sup>37</sup> *Scots Confession*, ed. by G. D. Henderson (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew's Press, 1937), p. 83.

<sup>38</sup> From the 'Exhortation Prayer: Lord's Supper Liturgy', *Forme of Prayers* (Edinburgh, 1564), p. xx.

For the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the sealing of all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body.<sup>39</sup>

The rubric following the liturgy for the Lord's Supper offers this summary interpretation:

If so bee that any would marvell why wee follow rather this order than any other, in the administration of this Sacrament, let him diligently consider, that first of all wee utterly renounce the error of the Papists: Secondly, we restore unto the Sacrament his owne Substance, and to Christ his proper place. And as for the words of the Lord's Supper, wee rehearse them, not because they should change the substance of the bread or wine, or that the repetition thereof, with the intent of the Sacrificer should make the Sacrament (as the Papists falsely believe) but they are read and pronounced to teach us how to behave our selves in that action, and that Christ might witness unto our faith, as it were with his owne mouth, that hee hath ordained these signes to our spiritual use and comfort: wee do first therefore examine our selves, according to Saint Paul's rule, and prepare our mindes, that wee may bee worthy partakers of so high mysteries, then taking bread, wee give thanks, break, and distribute it, as Christ our Saviour hath taught us. Finally, the administration ended, wee give thanks again, according to his example, so that without his word and warrand there is nothing in this holy Action attempted.<sup>40</sup>

It is significant that such a rubric was felt to be necessary. Clearly, the dominant Calvinist position on the action and content of the Supper could be interpreted as being little different from Roman Catholic understandings of God's presence in the sacramental. It seems that the writers of this text held a middle ground between memorialism and transubstantiation.

The *Scots Confession* takes forward its middle route on the elements of bread and wine when it describes their 'setting apart'. This is reinforced in the *Westminster Confession*:

---

<sup>39</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* XXIX: 1 [accessed 1 March 2022].

<sup>40</sup> Rubric following the Lord's Supper Liturgy, *Forme of Prayers*, p. xx.

The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to him crucified as that truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit the body and blood of Christ; albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain truly, and only, bread and wine, as they were before.<sup>41</sup>

This language is significant in how it relates to that used for the call of ministers. The minister of Word and Sacrament is also set apart for the purposes of revealing the Word in both preaching and the sacraments. Not changed, but inhabiting their authorised role of proclaiming that Christ is host in the supper:

That Sacramentis be richtlie ministrat, we judge twa things requisite: The ane, that they be minisrat be lauchful Ministers, whom we affirme to be only they that ar appoynted to the preaching of the word, into quhais mouths God hes put sum Sermon of exhortation, they being men lauchfullie chosen thereto be sum Kirk.<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps most significantly, there is no emphasis placed upon this call being in any sense part of a chain of transmission that is dependent upon individual ministers, it is the work of God that is paramount. The role of the presiding minister therefore also required to be clarified — Jesus is the host:

By him alone wee have entrance to the throne of thy grace, that by him alone wee are possessed in our spiritual Kingdome, to eate and drinke at his Table, with whom wee have our conversation presentlie in Heaven, and by whom our bodies shall bee raised up againe from the dust, and shall be placed with him in that endlesse joy which thou, O Father of mercie, hast prepared for thine elect before the foundation of the world was laid. And these most inestimable benefits wee acknowledge and confesse to have received of thy free mercy and grace, by thine only beloved Son Christ Jesus: for the which therefore, wee thy Congregation, moved by thine holy Spirit, render all thankes, praise, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup>*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXIX: 5.

<sup>42</sup>*Scots Confession*, p. 89.

<sup>43</sup> 'Prayer of Thanksgiving: Lord's Supper Liturgy', *Forme of Prayers*, p.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* underscored the rejection of transubstantiation eighty years later:

Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.<sup>44</sup>

However, *Westminster* closes the gap quite considerably by including in the 'Directory of Worship' a more explicit notion of 'epiclesis' than either the *Scots Confession* or the *Forme of Prayers*:

Earnestly to pray to God, the Father of all mercies, and God of all consolation, to vouchsafe His gracious presence, and the effectual working of His Spirit in us; and so to sanctify these Elements both of Bread and Wine, and to bless His own Ordinance, that we may receive by faith the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, crucified for us, and so to feed upon Him, that He may be one with us, and we with Him; that He may live in us, and we in Him, and to Him who hath loved us, and given Himself for us. All which he is to endeavour to perform with suitable affections, answerable to such an holy Action, and to stir up the like in the people. The elements being now sanctified by the Word and Prayer, the Minister, being at the Table, is to take the Bread in his hands [...]<sup>45</sup>

It is this emphasis on the sanctification of the bread and wine through all that has happened in reading of Scripture, singing psalms, prayer, and preaching, that characterises the mainline of Reformed views of the Supper. Westminster sacramental theology is adamant about the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, making explicit what is only implied in the *Scots Confession* and *Forme of Prayers*, but is careful to avoid tying her down to specific objects, actions, or moments. It is the overall context and shape of worship

---

<sup>44</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXIX: 7.

<sup>45</sup> *The Westminster Directory of Public Worship*, ed. by T. Leishman (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons for The Church Service Society, 1901), p. 45.

that leads to sanctification within the Supper. This doctrine of the Church of Scotland has not changed to the present day.

In all of this, we can discern the heightened sacramental ‘temperature’ of late sixteenth-century Scotland that was expressed so powerfully by Robert Bruce (1554 to 1631), Minister of Edinburgh:

The Word leads us to Christ by the ear: the Sacraments leads us to Christ by the eie. Twa senses of al the rest quhilk [which] God has chosen, as maist meete for this purpose to instruct us, and bring us to Christ. For that doctrine mann be maist effectual and mouing that walkens and steirs up moniest of the outwards senses; that doctrine that walkens not onely the eare, bot the eye, the taist, the feeling, and all the rest of the outward senses, mann move the hart maist, mann be maist effectual and pearcing in the saul: Bot sa it is, that this doctrine of the sacraments mouis, steirs up, and walkins moniest of the outward senses; therefore it mann be (gif we cum weil prepared to it) maist effectual to steir up the inward senses of the dull hart. <sup>46</sup>

### *Liturgical dimensions of the Sacraments*

The *Scots Confession* was at pains to stress that their position was not merely memorialist. In strong terms they declare ‘And this we utterlie damne, the vanity of thay that affirm Sacramentes to be nathing ellis bot naked and baire signes.’<sup>47</sup> For these reformers, the sacraments were held to be dynamic *community* moments in which God was felt to be active through the work of the Holy Spirit. This belief was reflected in the way that the Supper was ‘staged’. The choreography of Reformed liturgy in Scotland was one of the most dramatic transformations of the church after 1560. Turning the axis of the long two-cell nave and chancel churches around 90 degrees, the pulpit was invariably placed on the long north or south wall. Attached to the pulpit was an iron bracket into which a baptismal basin was placed, the baby being baptised with the minister remaining in the pulpit. In front of the pulpit was a flexible space in which the ‘long tables’ were set up, and this liturgical space was also the focus of repentance and reconciliation rituals. This liturgical geography placed a new emphasis on the people of God gathered around the Word in Scripture, praise, prayer, preaching and sacraments.

*The Forme of Prayers* outlines the suggested choreography of the Lord’s Supper:

---

<sup>46</sup> ‘Sermon 1’, in *Mystery of the Lord’s Supper*, ed. by Torrance, p. xx.

<sup>47</sup> *Scots Confession*, 85.

The exhortation ended, the Minister commeth down from the Pulpit, and sitteth at the Table, every man and woman in likewise taking their place as occasion best serveth: Then hee taketh bread, and giveth thanks, either in these words following, or like in effect.<sup>48</sup>

Steering clear of the sacrificial imagery of the Mass, the Reformed emphasis fell on the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus, remembered and proclaimed amongst the community of faith. The experience of gathering around tables and passing the bread and wine amongst each other recalled the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples in a powerful way. Sadly, this tradition has been largely lost due to the tendency in the nineteenth century liturgical revival to restore medieval arrangements in older kirks and to build new ones in that manner. This was compounded by a loss of the common cup tradition amidst urban public health concerns in the nineteenth century. Thomas Chalmers's congregation in Glasgow was amongst the first to reintroduce a fixed communion table, and to have the communicants remain in their pews for the entire service. This pattern was eventually interrupted by groundbreaking buildings of the 1960s such as St Columba's Parish Church in Glenrothes and Craigsbank Parish Church in Edinburgh, whose modernist designs drew on the precedent of the centrally planned 1592 church at Burntisland in Fife. This had been the first major church built after 1560, virtually unique due to the practically universal conversion of the existing rectangular medieval parish churches. Burntisland had a square ground plan, with the congregation gathered on four sides focusing on pulpit and communion tables in the centre. Sadly, the momentum of these modernist projects has not been sustained, and many new churches in the twenty-first century Kirk follow a 'long' model, with a permanent raised platform dictating the location of the communion table. However, in some locations communions 'in the round' can happen, making possible the Westminster Directory's direction of 'the table being more decently covered, and so conveniently placed, that the communicants may orderly sit about it, or at it'.<sup>49</sup> The re-ordering of St Giles' High Kirk in Edinburgh, including the installation of a central stone communion 'table' in the crossing also lends itself to relay rings of communicants standing around the table. This physical arrangement emphasises the idea of God present in the gathering, as opposed to the elements, or indeed uniquely mediated through the presider at a distance in an east-end chancel.

---

<sup>48</sup> 'Rubric prior to Prayer of Thanksgiving', *Forme of Prayers*, p. xx.

<sup>49</sup> *Westminster Directory*, p. 46.

*Baptism in the Kirk*

While the doctrine of the Lord's Supper has remained constant in a Calvinian direction since 1560, baptism has been more contested, but only seriously in the post-Christendom era of the late twentieth century, when it became a major focus for theological debate. Until then, the Reformation consensus on infant baptism was sustained, even if it was fracturing below the level of confessional doctrine.

Article XXIII of the *Scots Confession* affirmed baptism for 'the infants of the faithful as well as those of mature years' and so leaves the door open for infant or adult baptism, against anabaptist ideas circulating in Europe. Baptism was seen as a setting apart, a sealing of the assurance of promise in hearts through a conjunction and union with Jesus. The *Scots Confession* deployed powerful imagery to describe this union, asserting that 'wee assuredlie believe that be Baptisme we ar ingrafted in Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his justice, be quhilk [which] our sinnes ar covered and remitted'.<sup>50</sup> This imagery is continued in the *Forme of Prayers* baptism liturgy which asks the father of the child: 'Do yee here present this child to bee baptised, earnestly desiring that it may bee engrafted in the mysticall body of Jesus Christ?'<sup>51</sup> Later, the *Westminster Confession* declares that:

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life; which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his Church until the end of the world.<sup>52</sup>

As with the Lord's Supper, Baptism is seen as a corporate action of the body of Christ, and so is to be performed in the face of the congregation, with the sense of Christ's presence in the gathering, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. However, *Westminster* follows a similar line to that of the Lord's Supper in addressing the question of baptism's instrumentality:

The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such

---

<sup>50</sup> *Scots Confession*, p. 85.

<sup>51</sup> *Forme of Prayers*, Baptism Liturgy, p. xx.

<sup>52</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXVIII: 1.

(whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.<sup>53</sup>

The point here is that Baptism does not depend upon us performing a ritual in the church. The action is God's:

Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated. <sup>54</sup>

However, amidst the proliferation of denominations in the Scottish Reformed scene, many emphases had emerged concerning baptism. The principal area of contention arose out of the biblical challenge. Could it be said that infant baptism was mandated in the New Testament? Calvin and the Scottish Reformers had placed their emphasis upon Jewish Circumcision and Passover as models for the Christian sacraments, thereby associating baptism with infant males. New Testament accounts of baptism of whole households provided further back up to this argument. However, Scripture itself provides evidence of believers' baptism, and therefore the stage was set for contention in the Church. An attempt was made to address this with a Special Commission of the Church of Scotland led by Revd Professor T. F. Torrance, which resulted in a landmark report to General Assembly in 1963. The Report was accepted by the General Assembly as a 'valid statement' of the doctrine of baptism, rather than as an authoritative interpretation, which in classic Church of Scotland fashion left the door open for a diversity of views and failed to provide a definitive position.

The Commission's emphasis followed the *Scots Confession* and Calvin towards the saving acts of God's love which he has already fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ and makes the individual share in the fruit of his finished work. The emphasis was shifted from baptism as covenant (rooted in the *Westminster Confession*) to baptism as grace-filled. This revived Christological emphasis was significant for the Kirk and heightened the liturgical symbolism of baptism in water. The report states that 'In Baptism, it is Christ himself who acts, uniting the baptised to himself, who once and for all united himself to humanity in his incarnation'.<sup>55</sup> In this account, we are firstly united to Christ's body, then secondarily, united to the body of the Church, and it is about God's action in Christ and in the continuing work of

---

<sup>53</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXVIII: 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXVIII: 5.

<sup>55</sup> 'Panel of Doctrine', *Reports of General Assembly*, 2003.



the Holy Spirit rather than about an individual profession of faith. One of the drawbacks of this emphasis, was that there seemed to be no action on our part in baptism — it was all done by God in Christ, although the emphasis on baptism in the face of the congregation does emphasise the role of parents and church family in instruction and bringing up the child in the family of faith. The outcome of the Commission, despite only qualified endorsement, was that infant baptism remained the norm.<sup>56</sup>

Changing cultural times continued to bring into question the practice of infant baptism and in 1983 the *Panel on Doctrine* assessed the practice of 'indiscriminate' infant baptism. Its conclusion was to continue to favour infant baptism, but to emphasise the legal situation where a parent had to be a member of the church for infant baptism to be allowed. This decision meant that the tension continued between the church law requirements to qualify for baptism and the 1963 report's theology of the grace of God in baptism. In 1999, a further report reflected the objections of two parties: those who simply disapproved of infant baptism, and those who objected to the requirement of parental faith. Both asserted that the 1963 report had presented a maximalist vision of the grace of God in Christ reflected in the act of baptism. If it was ever there, consensus had now broken down, and in practice infant dedications were increasingly happening as an alternative to baptism. The report of the *Panel on Doctrine* in 2003 remained strongly Christocentric and as Nimmo notes:

It finds the promise of baptism in the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and observed that baptism, as the beginning of the Christian life, incorporates the individual into both the local and the universal community of the Church. Ultimately, baptism represents a seal upon the gift of grace and the response of faith.<sup>57</sup>

The 2003 report showed considerable movement. It reflected *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry's* call for baptism to be a focus of unity amongst the churches, rather than a sign of narrow church membership. However, it also moved to rebalance the doctrine of the grace of God in baptism and the response of faith of the baptismal candidate. The 1963 report's emphasis on baptism into Christ's life, death and resurrection began to be treated as a scriptural rather than sacramental symbol. The emphasis was shifted

---

<sup>56</sup> Paul Nimmo, 'Baptismal Theology and Practice in the Church of Scotland', in *Worship and Liturgy in Context: Studies and Case Studies in Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2009), p. 98.

<sup>57</sup> Nimmo, 'Baptismal Theology', in *Worship and Liturgy in Context*, p. 105.

towards the great commission of Matthew 28.19, with baptism now part of the evangelical mission of the church and becoming a seal upon the loving gift of grace and our faithful response to it.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the 2003 report presented baptism upon profession of faith as the primary model, with infant baptism seen as complementary. Despite the strong scriptural foundations of this change of emphasis, this could be said to be 'new' territory for the Church of Scotland. However, as Susan Morrison has pointed out, 'the soteriological and Christocentric nature of baptism was still affirmed, but within this understanding there was an acknowledgement that baptism is neither grace nor faith, but both'.<sup>59</sup> This is very much in line with the *Scots* and *Westminster Confessions*. The resultant development of liturgies of welcome and dedication for infants has perhaps equipped the church to better engage in the kind of primary mission outwith the membership of the church that may in time lead to commitment that can be recognised in baptism upon profession of faith. The final church law word on the matter came in the 2003 amendment to Act V of the General Assembly, the *Consolidating Act Anent the Sacraments*. The act as amended gives equal status to infant baptism and adult baptism upon profession of faith. In practice, though, infant baptism remains a prominent feature of Kirk life, the norm in many congregations, perhaps influenced by social, cultural and regional factors as much as by church doctrine.

*Conclusion: An ordered sacramental Kirk?*

Successive reports of the *Panel on Doctrine* and the *Theological Forum* have explored our sacramental life and the way that it is ordered. On each occasion, the reports have reinforced our sacramental heart, but with significant modulation in response to our Reformed tradition, and the need to be alive to God's mission in contemporary Scotland. The challenges to patterns of ministry which had been developing through the late twentieth century started to be more significantly felt in the early twenty-first century and gave rise to a fresh round of examination of the nature of ministry, driven by a reducing number of candidates in training for Ministry of Word

---

<sup>58</sup> Nimmo, 'Baptismal Theology', in *Worship and Liturgy in Context*, p. 105.

<sup>59</sup> Susan Morrison, 'A Study of the Special Commission on Baptism (1953–63) and Developments in Baptismal Doctrine and Practice in the Church of Scotland since 1963' (Unpublished thesis, University of Glasgow, 2016), p. 191 [accessed 4 March 2022].

and Sacrament, and an accompanying reduction in finance available to fund centrally paid stipends. Traditional congregations without a minister and Fresh Expressions of church alike began to clamour for a relaxation around who could preside at the Lord's Supper. As a result, the General Assembly called for a report on sacramental ministry, which was debated by the General Assembly in 2019. The report asserted that central to our understanding of the sacraments were the following:

- Following the example and command of Jesus Christ, the Sacraments are essential for the life and growth of the Church as the people of God;
- As Reformed Christians, the Sacraments are understood as material signs of the grace of God declared in preaching;
- For that reason, the Sacraments can never be separated from Word.
- The calling to preach the Word and celebrate the Sacraments is recognised by the Church and affirmed in the act of ordination;
- As such, only those who are called and ordained to preach the Word should celebrate the Sacraments.<sup>60</sup>

So far, so Reformed. In his 2005 essay, *The Tradition of the Lord's Supper*, Peter Donald wrote:

Even after the so-called ecumenical twentieth century, congregations are more likely to look for common ground around shared prayers or action, and possibly the preaching of the Word, but almost never around the Lord's Table. In the face of awkward problems, the easiest option is to keep out of the most difficult arenas. This is a serious cop-out. Is there not a continuing challenge before the church both to articulate and live a common witness which takes seriously in our own day those issues of unity and holiness and catholicity and apostolicity, such as we believe mark the church of Jesus Christ? Partisanship over against separation from others on the same path is pain-filled and contrary to belief in the body of Christ.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> 'Joint Report on Sacramental Ministry', *Reports of General Assembly*, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Donald, *The Tradition of The Lord's Supper*, p. 3 [accessed 10 February 2022].

Will we be able to rise to this challenge as our two denominations consider how much further we can go in mutual recognition of both common ground and distinctiveness in our orders of ministry and sacraments?

# Sacraments and Ministry in the Scottish Episcopal Church

## John Reuben Davies

Research Fellow, School of Humanities, University of Glasgow  
Associate Tutor, Scottish Episcopal Institute  
Member, Liturgy Committee of the Faith and Order Board

## Nicholas Taylor

Rector, St Aidan's, Clarkston  
Associate Tutor, Scottish Episcopal Institute  
Convenor, Liturgy Committee of the Faith and Order Board

The Scottish Episcopal Church finds its origins in the end of the Stuart monarchy, when those holding to Episcopacy found themselves excluded and expelled from the Church of Scotland as non-Jurors. And it was the sacraments and ministry, as expressed through liturgy and episcopacy, which especially defined Scottish Episcopacy against Presbyterianism.<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning, the essential and defining position of Episcopalians was their commitment to an episcopal polity and opposition to presbyterian government of the Church. Episcopalians nevertheless co-existed within one Church of Scotland, with no separate ecclesial identity from the Presbyterians, until the revolution of 1688 and its consequences played out with the deposition of James VII in 1689. The Scottish bishops were not prepared to break the oaths they had made to King James, which they viewed as inviolable so long as James had not abdicated. Hence

---

<sup>1</sup> Recent work on the earlier history of Scottish Episcopacy forms an edited collection in *Scottish Church History*, 47 (2018), drawn on in Rowan Strong's excellent theological survey of the period, 'Episcopalian theology 1689–c.1900', in *The History of Scottish Theology, Volume II: From the Early Enlightenment to the Late Victorian Era*, ed. by David Fergusson and Mark Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 265–83. See also Alasdair Raffe, *The Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland 1660–1714* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012); Rowan Strong, *Episcopalianism in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Religious Responses to a Modernising Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Episcopalians were gradually evicted from the Church of Scotland, which was now officially Presbyterian in its government and ministry.<sup>2</sup>

Until this point, few Scottish Episcopalians espoused a theology of *iure diuino* or divine-right episcopacy against the predominant presbyterian theology. Divine-right episcopacy — advocated in early seventeenth-century England by Richard Bancroft, Thomas Barlow, and William Laud — affirmed that episcopacy was by divine, not human right, and that the king had supremacy in matters ecclesiastical. And so, before 1689, the Episcopalian defence of episcopal government had tended to rely on arguments based on the royal will as the supreme head of the Church. Presbyterians opposed this position on the grounds that the headship of the Church belonged properly to Christ.<sup>3</sup>

The early years of the eighteenth century saw growing division among non-juring bishops over the extent of royal authority in the Episcopal polity. An older party of bishops favoured a form of ecclesiastical government by the bishops acting collectively, as a college. This ‘college’ party, also held to the nomination of bishops by the Stuart monarch. The newer bishops, consecrated since 1705, argued for a diocesan structure, and for episcopal election by the diocesan clergy.

In addition to the differences over ministry, a controversy over the administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion also emerged around this time too. Four ‘ancient Usages’, absent from the English Book of Common Prayer of 1662, had by 1716 become a point of dispute. The diocesan party of bishops, mostly influenced by English non-Jurors, advocated the practice of these four ‘ancient Usages’: the mixing of water with the wine in the chalice; prayers for the dead; the epiclesis (or invocation of the Holy Spirit over the elements) in the Eucharistic prayer; and the prayer of oblation in the Eucharistic prayer.<sup>4</sup> To these four usages, one ought

---

<sup>2</sup> Until 1792, the only Episcopalians to whom public worship was allowed were those who ‘qualified’ according to the Scottish Episcopalians Act 1711. ‘Qualification’ involved the use of the English Book of Common Prayer (1662) and, most importantly, praying by name for the protestant sovereigns (William and Mary, Anne, and Georges I, II and III), especially at the ‘Collects for the King’, and the prayer for ‘Christ’s Church Militant here in earth’.

<sup>3</sup> An account of the issues is provided in Raffe, *Culture of Controversy*, pp. 34–37.

<sup>4</sup> For the English background, see *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, ed. by Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 403–07.

also to add the reservation of the sacrament for the sick.<sup>5</sup> The position of the diocesan pro-usages party — known as ‘Usagers’ — was that the Usages were primitive and apostolic, and that they were therefore essential elements of the liturgical tradition. Tradition was authoritative where biblical warrant was not explicit. Those opposed to the Usages, who inhabited the ‘college’ party, held to an exclusively scriptural standard, asserting that Scripture had revealed all necessary elements of church life.<sup>6</sup>

The leading apologist and promoter of the Usages and the diocesan system was Bishop Thomas Rattray (1684 to 1743), who was largely responsible for shaping Episcopalian sacramental theology and ecclesiology.<sup>7</sup> Rattray not only supported the introduction of the Usages, but produced a translation of the Liturgy of St James, set out for liturgical as well as scholarly use.<sup>8</sup> His enduring legacy was his influence on the Scottish Communion Office.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Rattray’s work on the Liturgy of St James could be seen as ‘a significant step in the direction of a definitive Scottish Liturgy [...] the precipitating factor in producing the 1764 Liturgy, and the chief single influence upon it’.<sup>10</sup>

The liturgy for the Eucharist became a defining element of Episcopalian identity. Rattray’s sacramental theology, which influenced the development of the Scottish Communion Office in the eighteenth century, closely was associated with the English non-Jurors’ 1718 revision of the Eucharistic liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, and expressed a theology of eucharistic non-corporeal sacrifice, supporting a real presence of Christ in the Eucharist by the virtue and power of the presence of Christ through

---

<sup>5</sup> See Nicholas Taylor, ‘Liturgy and theological method in the Scottish Episcopal Church’, *Scottish Church History*, 47 (2018), 143–54 (pp. 147–50).

<sup>6</sup> See Robert D. Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic: The Constitution of the Church in High Church Anglican and Non-Juror Thought* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), pp. 50–54.

<sup>7</sup> See Rowan Strong, ‘Rattray, Thomas, of Craighall (1684–1743)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) [accessed 11 March 2022].

<sup>8</sup> ‘Order for celebrating the Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist’, in *The Ancient Liturgy of the Church of Jerusalem* (London, 1744), pp. 113–22.

<sup>9</sup> W. Douglas Kornahrens, *Bishop Thomas Rattray and his Ancient Liturgy of the Church of Jerusalem*, Joint Liturgical Studies 92 (Norwich: Hymns Ancient and Modern, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Wallace Douglas Kornahrens, ‘Eucharistic Doctrine in Scottish Episcopacy, 1620–1875’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2008), p. 13.

the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> In the Scottish Communion Office of 1764, Christ's 'one oblation of himself once offered' (from the English order) became his 'own oblation of himself once offered'. This modification allowed for an interpretation that included Christ's sacrificial self-offering being made not only on the Cross, but also in the Last Supper and the Eucharist.<sup>12</sup> Christ's presence in the sacrament was independent of the believer's faith.<sup>13</sup>

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, Episcopalian theologians were moving away from the English non-juring position, maintaining that the Eucharist is not a sacrifice, but a 'feast upon a sacrifice'. Some, such as Bishop Alexander Jolly (1756 to 1838), meanwhile, did maintain that the Eucharist is commemorative of the redeeming sacrifice of Christ and therefore sacrificial language was appropriate.<sup>14</sup>

In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the influence of Tractarian theology produced the 'Eucharistic Controversy' in what was now a fully emancipated Scottish Episcopal ecclesial polity, with seven dioceses. In 1857, Patrick Cheyne (1794 to 1878), the incumbent of St John the Evangelist, Aberdeen, used a series of Lenten sermons to argue against the eighteenth-century Episcopalian eucharistic theology, and in favour of 'a Real, Objective Presence' of Christ.<sup>15</sup> The Bishop of Aberdeen suspended Cheyne from his office as a priest until he renounced the teaching in his sermons.<sup>16</sup>

Alexander Penrose Forbes (1817 to 1875), Bishop of Brechin (1857 to 1875), who supported Cheyne when he appealed to the Episcopal Synod,

---

<sup>11</sup> *A Communion Office, Taken Partly from Primitive Liturgies, And Partly from the First English Reformed Common-Prayer-Book: Together with Offices for Confirmation, and the Visitation of the Sick* (London, 1718).

<sup>12</sup> *Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, ed. by Hefling and Shattuck, p. 410.

<sup>13</sup> The most influential supporting work was by John Johnson (1662 to 1725, an English juring High Church sacramental theologian, sympathetic to the non-Jurors), in *The Unbloody Sacrifice, and Altar, Unvail'd and Supported: In Which the Nature of the Eucharist is Explain'd*, 2 parts (London: Robert Knaplock, 1714–1718).

<sup>14</sup> Strong, 'Episcopalian theology', p. 271.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Cheyne, *Six Sermons on the Doctrine of the Most Holy Eucharist* (Aberdeen: A. Brown, 1858).

<sup>16</sup> Cheyne's sentence was cancelled four years after his condemnation, when he gave the Bishop of Aberdeen a satisfactory explanation of the disputed passages in his sermons: Gibb N. Pennie, 'The trial of the Rev. Patrick Cheyne for Erroneous Teaching on the Eucharist in Aberdeen in 1858', *Scottish Church History Society*, 23 (1987), 77–93.



was the most prominent theologian of the Scottish Episcopal Church during the mid-nineteenth century. Forbes, in his first charge to his diocesan clergy, also expounded an objective understanding of the eucharistic presence of Christ. In fact, Forbes argued (in line with the theology implicit in the Scottish Communion Office) that the sacrifice of Christ was not limited to the Cross, but embraced the whole of his life lived sacrificially in obedience to his Father, so that as the living and glorified Christ he was able to re-present this sacrifice to the Father.<sup>17</sup> Forbes also supported the adoration of the eucharistic elements: 'Either Christ is present, or He is not. If He is, He ought to be adored; if He is not, *cadit quaestio*'.<sup>18</sup> And he posed the rhetorical question to his clergy, why Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians should have regarded unworthy reception as a serious matter if the wicked only merely received bread and wine and not Christ.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Forbes upheld the Scottish Communion Office, because he saw that liturgy as more supportive of his eucharistic theology compared with the Book of Common Prayer's Order of the Administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion.

In 1865 Alexander Penrose Forbes produced *Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία* [The Divine Liturgy]: *The Scottish Communion Office done into Greek* (London: Joseph Masters, 1865).<sup>20</sup> The book was indirectly related to a dispute surrounding the Scottish Communion Office that had been going on since before Forbes was elected to the see of Brechin, a controversy which had come to a head at the Episcopal Church's Synod of 1863.<sup>21</sup> In the Code of Canons of 1811, Canon XV was intended to secure 'the primary authority' of the Scottish Communion Office as the authorised service of the church in the administration of the Holy Communion, while it ratified the permission previously granted by the bishops to retain the English Office in all

---

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Penrose Forbes, *Primary Charge delivered to the Clergy of his Diocese at the Annual Synod* (London: Joseph Masters, 1857), pp. 39–42; Strong, 'Episcopalian theology', p. 277.

<sup>18</sup> Forbes, *Primary Charge*, p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> Forbes, *Primary Charge*, p. 26–29.

<sup>20</sup> For what follows, see John Reuben Davies, 'The Brothers Forbes and the liturgical books of medieval Scotland: Historical scholarship and liturgical controversy in the nineteenth-century Scottish Episcopal Church', *Scottish Church History*, 47 (2018), 128–42.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, J. Marshall, *Fragment of a Brief Defence of the Scottish Communion Office against the Attacks of the Rev. Edward Craig, the Rev. D. T. K. Drummond, and others* (Edinburgh, 1843). For a full account of Alexander Forbes's involvement in the controversy, see Rowan Strong, *Alexander Forbes of Brechin: The First Tractarian Bishop* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 101–58.

congregations where it had been in use. The Scottish Communion Office was nevertheless to be used at the consecration of bishops; and every bishop was required to give his assent to it.

The Scottish Communion Office, it should be remembered, was still that of 1764, with no specific naming of the monarch. The prayer of consecration had an epiclesis, which, like the non-juring Communion Office of 1718, came in the 'Eastern position', after the words of institution, rather than, as in the first Prayer Book of Edward VI (1549), before. The English Communion Office was that of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England.<sup>22</sup>

During the early 1860s, using Gladstone's powerful political support, Bishop Forbes was leading a campaign to save the use of the Scottish Communion Office, now used by only a minority of Episcopalians, from being repudiated in favour of the English Book of Common Prayer. In the decisive Synod of 1863, it was enacted through Canon XXIX that the English Book of Common Prayer 'is, and shall be held to be, the Service Book of this Church for all the purposes to which it is applicable'. Forbes's limited measure of success, however, was that under Canon XXX the use of the Scottish Communion Office was allowed in any congregations whose existing practice had been to use it.<sup>23</sup>

In 1912, however, the Scottish Episcopal Church acquired its own Book of Common Prayer, which incorporated the Scottish Communion Office or The Scottish Liturgy. A definitive version of the Scottish Book of Common Prayer, which shared some significant material with the Church of England's 'Deposited' book of 1928, was published in 1929, and remains in use today.

In October 1966 the College of Bishops authorised their own revised text of the Scottish Liturgy 1929, which simply incorporated most of the permissive variations which had been authorised since the Synod of 1960–61. This revised liturgy took final form as the Scottish Liturgy 1970 and retained the key elements of the Scottish liturgical tradition, in the epiclesis (positioned after the institution narrative and anamnesis) and the eucharistic oblation. One reason put forward for retaining the epiclesis, at the time losing favour in Anglicanism, was that the Church of Scotland's Book of Common Order (1940) contains an epiclesis similar to the Church of South

---

<sup>22</sup> William Jardine Grisbrooke, *Anglican Liturgies of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Alcuin Club Collections 40 (London, 1958), chap. 19.

<sup>23</sup> 'Ecclesiastical Law and the Code of Canons', in *Scottish Episcopal Church: Code of Canons 2017* (Edinburgh, 2017), pp. 5–31 (p. 11).

India's liturgy.<sup>24</sup> During the succeeding decade, however, the pace of liturgical change increased, and in 1977 the *Experimental Liturgy 1977* was recommended by the Provincial Synod (as the General Synod was then known) for authorisation by the College of Bishops, and was the first Scottish Episcopal text to address God as 'you'. This experimental rite was superseded in 1982 by the definitive *Scottish Liturgy 1982*, which continues as the principal liturgical form for most congregations in the SEC. The text of this rite has been dynamic, subject to periodic revisions to accommodate refinements in language and broadening of the tradition to include provision for seasons of the ecclesiastical year.<sup>25</sup> The process of liturgical renewal is continuing and will undoubtedly see further enrichment of the tradition during the coming years.

Although there are antecedents, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed an apparently widespread desire for online eucharistic worship — and even remote consecration and reception of the eucharistic elements — which manifested during the period when public worship was restricted or prohibited.<sup>26</sup> This is suggestive of two, inter-connected, developments in Western culture: individualism and consumerism. The avoidance or disregard of community, which is of the essence of the Eucharist as an act of the gathered body of Christ, reflects perhaps an area of long-running neglect in the Church's teaching. This has allowed the intellectual and spiritual space to emerge within which modern and postmodern Christians have developed a privatised spirituality, in which liturgical piety that concentrates on the reception of Holy Communion, and its benefits to the individual. Not only is the corporate dimension of Christian identity neglected, but the worshipper

---

<sup>24</sup> *Modern Anglican Liturgies 1958–1968*, ed. by Colin Buchanan (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 150.

<sup>25</sup> There have been revisions involving the addition of seasonal Eucharistic Prayers (Christmas, Epiphany, and Creation) and inclusive language, in 1996 and in 2021/22. This work is ongoing.

<sup>26</sup> John Reuben Davies, 'Eucharist, Church, and judgment: initial questions about the liturgical and ecclesiological implications of the COVID-19 pandemic', in *Church, Ministry, and Coronavirus*, ed. by Nicholas Taylor, *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 4.2 (Summer 2020), 71–83; for antecedent expressions of this phenomenon, see Nicholas Taylor, *Lay Presidency at the Eucharist? An Anglican Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), pp. 142–76. This may be linked to the phenomenon of 'believing without belonging', described by Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 71–90, as well as to individualism and consumerism, and the unwillingness (and/or fear) to interact with others.

ceases to be an active participant in the priesthood of all believers, either in worship or in going out into the world 'to love and serve the Lord'. As is explicitly stated in the text of the liturgy, and is accordingly the doctrine of the Church, the Eucharist is a corporate act of sacrifice, wherein worshippers unite themselves with Christ, offer the gifts of bread and wine to God, 'and with them ourselves, a single, holy, living sacrifice'.<sup>27</sup> The theology of the Eucharistic Prayers in *Scottish Liturgy 1982* emphasises not the personal benefits of reception, but the commitment of the Communicant to participation in the saving work of Christ in the world. This represents some development from the more individualistic piety reflected in the orders for the administration of Holy Communion in the *Scottish Book of Common Prayer* (1929) and *Scottish Liturgy 1970*, and from the Anglican custom of an early morning celebration of the Eucharist, without music or sermon, at which congregants were wont to be scattered as widely as possible in the space available, and at no point to acknowledge each other. The renewed emphasis on the corporate essence of the Eucharist has been a valuable insight from the liturgical movement of the past century, and a necessary corrective to practices which had taken hold in many places, and one which the restrictions imposed on account of the pandemic, and the fears and anxieties generated thereby, must not be permitted to erode. The Eucharist is not for passive reception, but for active participation.

The preceding discussion has intimated several aspects of the liturgical tradition of the SEC which merit further elaboration. It is a truism of Anglican theology that doctrine is expressed definitively in worship, and not in statements or declarations issued by ecclesiastical bodies, current or historical. Worship is the context in which Scripture is received, and the texts of the authorised liturgies reflect truly, if not systematically, the teaching of the Church. This principle was reaffirmed in 2017 when Canon 31 was revised, removing the opening statement, 'The doctrine of marriage [...]', on the grounds that, irrespective of whether marriage between consenting adults of the same sex was to be permitted, the Code of Canons is not the appropriate vehicle for doctrine.

The Scottish Episcopal Church does not operate in isolation either from other parts of the Anglican Communion, or from its ecumenical partners in Scotland, Britain and Ireland, Europe, and globally. On the

---

<sup>27</sup> *Scottish Liturgy 1982*, Eucharistic Prayers I–IV; Eucharistic Prayer V reads, 'Together with him we offer you these gifts: in them we give you ourselves'; *Scottish Liturgy 1970*, together with the *Scottish Book of Common Prayer*, has, 'And here we humbly offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee'.

contrary, theological reflection on sacraments and ministry has quite consciously been prosecuted in an ecumenical context for the past several decades, the St Andrews Declaration representing a phase in a process which has proved costly and potentially divisive, but to which the Church remains unequivocally committed. The influence of both pan-Anglican and ecumenical movements may be discerned in the background to the processes of liturgical renewal which have been under way for the past several decades. The second Vatican Council (1962 to 1965) has provided perhaps the most significant impetus for renewal, not only in the Roman Catholic Church but for global Christianity. Its wider influence may be attributed in part at least to the ecumenical movement, consolidated and reinvigorated through the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1946. This has been far more significant than the real or alleged crypto-romanism detected in some Anglicans, especially as the reforms of Vatican II precipitated something of a crisis for conservatives of both communions.

While the Roman Catholic Church has never joined the WCC, it has engaged fully in many of its activities, not least the Commission on Faith and Order. The publication in 1982 of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*,<sup>28</sup> commonly known as the Lima Document, expressed a degree of 'convergence' in theological thinking between churches of diverse history, tradition, and cultural context, including those whose founding documents reflected the bitter theological disputes and enduring enmities of the European Reformation and its aftermath. Over the ensuing decade, churches responded to *BEM*, which responses were published in several volumes. That of the SEC appears in Vol. 2 of *Churches Respond to BEM*.<sup>29</sup> This expresses substantial agreement with *BEM* on baptism, and notes that, as the rite of incorporation into Christ it has ecumenical implications which have not been realised. Noting that baptism precedes admission to Communion, the SEC registered this issue as a potential impediment to unity with any denomination which admitted unbaptised people to Communion. On the Eucharist, the SEC Response notes the compatibility of *BEM* and the ARCIC (1) Final Report concerning the Real Presence and affirms that sufficient agreement has been reached in eucharistic faith and practice to remove any obstacles to unity. On Ministry, the SEC Response to *BEM* draws attention to its essential agreement with Vatican II in emphasising the calling of the whole people of God, and to the 'coherence' between *BEM* and the ARCIC (1) Final Report on ministry and ordination. On the interconnectedness of the priesthood of the faithful and of that of the ordained

---

<sup>28</sup> Faith and Order Paper 111 [accessed 19 December 2021].

<sup>29</sup> Ed. by Max Thurian; Faith and Order Paper 132, pp. 48–56 [accessed 11 March 2022].

ministry, the Response cites with approval the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. While affirming its commitment to the historic episcopate, the SEC also recognised that the quest for Christian unity could not require any denomination to repudiate its own heritage. Differences in doctrine of ministry remain challenges to Christian unity, but a common subscription to *BEM* would represent significant progress in this direction. The Response also identifies two outstanding issues requiring further work, in both of which areas there has been significant development in the SEC over the ensuing decades: admission of the baptised to Communion before Confirmation, and the order of Deacons.

In the decades following *BEM* and the response of the churches to it, the SEC has seen considerable liturgical renewal in the areas of baptism and the Eucharist, with accompanying changes in discipline to affirm that baptism is the right (as well as the rite) of admission to Communion; confirmation has become essentially a rite of affirming baptismal promises, and remains a prerequisite to ordination, but not to admission to Communion or to holding any lay office in the church. This is reflected in Christian Initiation 1998, subsequently replaced with Holy Baptism 2006 and Affirmation of Holy Baptism (for Confirmation and Renewal) 2006. The order for the Eucharist, Scottish Liturgy 1982, has been subject to periodic revision and expansion, which is ongoing, while earlier rites of 1929 (preserving post-Reformation Scottish traditions) and 1970 (a blend of Scottish usage and the fruit of Anglican and Roman Catholic liturgical renewal) remain in use. The sacraments have, however, not been subject to systematic theological reflection or reporting by the Doctrine Committee, but the Liturgy Committee has been rigorous in its preparations for revision of specific rites.<sup>30</sup>

It is in ministry that substantial theological and practical work has been undertaken within the structures of the SEC. The Diaconal Working Group has continued to reflect, advise, and support the work of vocational

---

<sup>30</sup> See *Towards Liturgical Renewal in the Scottish Episcopal Church*, ed. by John Reuben Davies, *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 3.4 (Winter 2019). Members of the Committee have also published substantial works in this area: David Jasper, *The Sacred Community* (Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2012); *The Language of Liturgy: A Ritual Poetics* (London: SCM, 2018); Nicholas Taylor, *Lay Presidency at the Eucharist?; Paul on Baptism* (London: SCM, 2016). See also the discussion of Jasper's contribution in *The Language of Liturgy*, ed. by Nicholas Taylor, *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 3.2 (Summer 2019).

Deacons in the church.<sup>31</sup> The Diaconate has also been the subject of considerable reflection by members of the Doctrine and Liturgy Committees.<sup>32</sup> The Episcopate has similarly been subject to rigorous and controversial theological reflection by the Doctrine Committee,<sup>33</sup> at a time when the exercise of that office has proved controversial in some parts of this church. While no equivalent study of the presbyterate has yet been undertaken, the Doctrine Committee brought together diverse strands of research and reflection in *Theology of Authority in the Ministry of the Church*.<sup>34</sup> While this is not the definitive statement of the SEC, or of its Doctrine Committee, it does seek to consolidate the fruit of research and reflection to date, and to become the basis for further theological reflection on the church and its ministry.

The SEC attaches considerable value to ‘evangelical truth and apostolic order’, as is emphasised in the emblem which adorns its ‘pub sign’ and all official documents. While assent to ‘evangelical truth’ may appear little more than lip-service to conservative critics, ‘apostolic order’ is central to thinking about liturgy and the sacraments, and to ministry. While the authorised liturgies of the SEC are subject to a process of constant renewal, in which the work of the Liturgy Committee is commissioned and supervised by the Faith and Order Board, scrutinised by the College of Bishops, and ultimately subject to the authority of General Synod,<sup>35</sup> it is quite consciously rooted in the ancient traditions of the Church catholic — not in the

---

<sup>31</sup> *Truly Called by God to Serve as a Deacon: The Report of the Bishops’ Working Group on the Distinctive Diaconate* (1987); *Truly Called ... 2* (Diaconal Working Group, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> *The Diaconate*, ed. by John Reuben Davies, *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 4.4 (Winter 2020).

<sup>33</sup> *The Episcopate*, ed. by David Jasper, *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 2.4 (Winter 2018).

<sup>34</sup> *Grosvenor Essay 13* (Edinburgh: General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church, 2020).

<sup>35</sup> As stipulated in Canon 22, new rites or revisions to existing rites are subject to the same Synodical processes as are required for alteration to the Canons of the SEC. This requires a majority vote at first reading, followed by referral to Diocesan Synods for comment, before a second reading at which a two-thirds majority is required, with General Synod voting by houses. This process normally follows a period of several years during which material, once approved by the Faith & Order Board, is authorised by the College of Bishops for experimental use, during which feedback may be received by the Liturgy Committee and incorporated into revisions preceding commencement of the Synodical process.

archaeological sense beloved by liturgists of the past century obsessed with finding contemporary use for any and every text discovered, nor in the narrow sense of clinging to Scottish particularities, but rejoicing to inhabit a living and dynamic tradition of worship. The distinctive orders of ministry are similarly cherished, not merely as theologically grounded human agencies of divine grace, and a corrective to the crass and exploitative managerialism which has become fashionable, but as embodying continuity with the work of the apostles of Christ — not in the sense of perpetuating the discredited ‘conduit pipe’ fantasy of unbroken lineage asserted by seventeenth century Ordinals and fetishized by some Anglo-Catholics, with the view to delegitimizing the ministries of other Christian denominations. Much as we value continuity with ancient tradition, this consists in faithfully transmitting that which we have received, the Gospel proclaimed by the apostles, and the ordering of the corporate life and worship of the body of Christ, and especially in celebrating the sacraments as instituted by Christ. This is not a matter of legalistic preoccupation with periphera, but of freely sharing a gift which we have freely received, but which we have also preserved at considerable cost.



# The Ecclesiology of the Scottish Episcopal Church

Emsley Nimmo

Rector, St Margaret's Church, Aberdeen

It was Richard Holloway, former Primus and Bishop of Edinburgh, who wrote in *Leaving Alexandria* that the Scottish Episcopal Church was a bit like 'the embarrassing wee drunk uncle at the Anglican Dinner Party'. This statement was very much in the inimitable style of Richard's couthie human touch, but it does convey a truth about the Scottish Episcopal Church, that although it is part of the Worldwide Anglican Communion it is the one Province that was not founded by the will of British Imperialism. Even the American Episcopal Church was founded on a rejection of that Anglican Erastianism which was so entwined with the British Crown. The American Church began *in amoeba* in an upper room in the Longacre, Aberdeen on 14 November 1784 when three Aberdeenshire Bishops, Robert Kilgour, Arthur Petrie and John Skinner, who strictly speaking by the law were regarded as being in rebellion against the British Crown, consecrated Samuel Seabury as the first bishop *apud Americanos*. Seabury himself regarded the Scottish Church as that 'venerable remains of the old apostolical church of Scotland' which preserved primitive doctrine 'pure and undegraded'.<sup>1</sup>

Article V of the Concordat signed at Berrybank House, Kittybrewster, Aberdeen on 15 November 1784 between Seabury and the Scots Bishops stated that 'the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist, or the Administration of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, is the principle Bond of Union among Christians.'<sup>2</sup> Seabury then took the Scots Rite across the Atlantic, and it was subsequently adopted on 14 November 1789 at the Episcopal Church's Convention as the basis of the American Rite. Quite clearly this emphasises the quintessential importance of the sacramental in our understanding of the nature of our ecclesiology. One of Seabury's successors in office in Connecticut one hundred years later stated, 'that in giving the primitive form of Consecration, "Scotland gave us a greater boon than when she gave us the Episcopate".'<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Seabury, *Discourses on Several Subjects*, vol. I (Hudson: William Norman, 1815) p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> E. E. Beardsley, *Life and Correspondence of Samuel Seabury* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1881) pp. 150–53.

<sup>3</sup> *American Church Review*, July 1882.

*Historical evolution of the Episcopal Church in Scotland*

Perhaps the best precis of what the ecclesiology of the Episcopal Church is about is contained in the speech of Robert Lyon, a non-arms bearing padre in the Forfarshire Regiment in the Rising of 1745, which he delivered at the scaffold at Penrith before he was hung drawn and quartered on SS Simon and Jude's Day 1746. He said:

But what more naturally falls to my share to consider, and what I fear has been still less regarded in the long persecuted state of my dear mother, the Church of Scotland, that Church of which it is my greatest honour to be a member and a priest, tho' undeserving of either; a Church, national and independent of any other and of every power upon earth, happily govern'd by her own truly primitive bishops, as so many spiritual princes, presiding in their different districts, and in them, accountable to none but God for the administration of her discipline; a church, whose creeds demonstrate her soundness in the faith, and who is blest with a liturgy I mean the Scots Liturgy, compil'd by her own bishops nigher to the primitive model than any other church this day can boast of — in one word a church very nearly resembling the purist ages.<sup>4</sup>

I remember quite clearly the greatly revered former Primus of the Scottish Church Francis Moncreiff, Bishop of Glasgow and Galloway saying, 'What is it that holds the Church together? Is it the Bishops? No [...]. Is it the Canon Law? No [...]. Is it the Eucharist! Yes, that is what holds the Church together!'<sup>5</sup>

The Eucharistic celebration is at the heart of our ecclesiology. It is at the heart of the final command of Our Lord. It is the one thing that he told us to do: 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22.19d).<sup>6</sup> This is the action at the heart of our faith: it pulls the community of faith together and the 'action' is central in our Scottish understanding of sacramental theology. In *The Ecclesial Nature of the Eucharist* produced by the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission Scottish Joint Study Group in 1973, the view was clearly expressed that:

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert Forbes, *The Lyon in Mournin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1975), pp. 14–15.

<sup>5</sup> Moncreiff was a towering figure, and he was renowned in his day as the friend of curates, especially showing concern for their welfare. I personally was impressed with his style — a pastor of pastors.

<sup>6</sup> τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. With ποιέω in the second person present active imperative.

the Eucharist has been cherished as the supreme gift of God to his Church [...] it is in the celebration of the Eucharist that the faithful experience and express most fully that unity which must always be the first characteristic of the Church of Christ. The Eucharistic sacrifice 'is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life [...] Strengthened anew at the Holy Table of the Body of Christ, the faithful manifest in a practical way that unity of God's people which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most awesome sacrament.'<sup>7</sup>

The Episcopal Church in Scotland came out of the Church of Scotland in 1690 at the Revolution Settlement. From the Reformation until then the Episcopalian party had held control of the Kirk with the Presbyterians only in outright control in the 1590s, 1640s and 1650s. It was a system of Bishops in General Assembly which in the main worked reasonably well. After 1690 Episcopal clergy were driven out of the Presbyterian Establishment; a process that took 50 years to complete. During the period of the Jacobite Risings, it was the Liturgy that held the Church together.

When the persecution of the Penal Laws died down, and with their removal in 1792, Bishop John Skinner of Aberdeen began the task of uniting the majority native Scots congregations with the minority English Qualified Chapels, a process that led to the Synod of Laurencekirk in 1804 and further subsequent amalgamations which formed a new Episcopal Church in Scotland.<sup>8</sup> The modern Episcopal Church had begun, except that it was to be at the expense of its Scottishness, which was sacrificed on the altar of Anglicisation, even though Skinner himself had referred to the English qualified clergy as the 'English Mission'.<sup>9</sup>

This essay seeks to investigate the historic Eucharistic doctrine being at the beating heart of Episcopalian ecclesiology along with the distinctive Scottish Episcopalian understanding of the nature of the office of bishop as has generally been understood and practised.

The fateful interview in London in 1689 of Bishop Alexander Rose of Edinburgh with William of Orange when William walked away from Rose, in an ecclesiological and liturgical sense, may have been a blessing in disguise. The days of Erastianism and the interference of subsequent Stuart monarchs in the affairs of the Church came to an end. The Scottish Book of Common

---

<sup>7</sup> *The Ecclesial Nature of the Eucharist*. Scottish ARCIC, 1973. p.15.

<sup>8</sup> There were 50 Scottish Episcopal clergy and 18 English clergy. *Moore Papers — Lambeth Palace Library*.

<sup>9</sup> Skinner to Boucher, 11 January 1793. Aberdeen Diocesan Archives MSS 3320 6 105.

Prayer published in 1637 during the first episcopate had an unfortunate debut: it triggered the Covenanting Movement which instituted Presbyterianism in place of Episcopacy in the Kirk. The 1637 Prayer Book was never used when Episcopacy was restored in Scotland at the Restoration. Set liturgies were not enthused during the period of the second episcopate. Failed liturgical experimentation under the Stuarts gave way to liturgical freedom in the wake of the Revolution. The Church, no longer shackled to the State, certainly after 1731, was free to elect its own bishops (a privilege of the pre-Constantinian Church). Liturgical experimentation went on apace. The early eighteenth century was a time when the minds of Episcopalian divines were concentrated on the liturgy. The Church had been extruded from its temporalities: parsonages, churches and cathedrals. That made for a huge change in the understanding of our ecclesiology. The question in reality was and is: what is the belief that holds the Church together? The answer, quite simply, is the liturgy. The λειτουργία, derived from λαός and ἔργον, the work of the people, is what holds the Church together.

Three distinct influences were brought to bear on the development of post-Reformation liturgy in Scotland. Firstly, the Church of Scotland at the Reformation developed its own liturgical tradition based on the Continental Reformers and the distinctive influence of John Knox. Secondly, there was the influence of Prayer Books from England. At the Scottish Reformation, the English Book of Common Prayer of 1552 was in use before John Knox's Book of Common Order of 1564 appeared. Thirdly, the influence of Eastern rites came to bear on liturgical development as the seventeenth century progressed. This process began with the Aberdeen Doctors, principally John Forbes of Corse in the first episcopate. John Forbes was:

concerned above all to look beyond the immediate controversies of the Church of Scotland to the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of which it must be part. It is because of its sectarian implications that he is so opposed to the National Covenant, and the [later] attempt to force Presbyterianism on an unwilling England by the Solemn League and Covenant fills him with horror. His eirenic temperament; his wide perspective; his anxiety to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential in matters of faith and church government are elements which have too seldom been present in Scottish ecclesiastical controversy.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> H. Sefton, *Scotland's Greatest Theologian* (Aberdeen: University Review, 1974), p. 352.

For Forbes and the Aberdeen Doctors, Episcopacy was for the *bene esse* of the Church and was not the *esse* itself. Forbes's understanding of the Church of Scotland and its relationship to the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church was picked up by Bishop Archibald Campbell in the early 1700s.

*Reformed understanding of the nature of the Eucharist*

The Scottish Reformation and the influence of John Knox is often misunderstood. It is generally assumed that the Scottish Reformation followed that of John Calvin and the model of Geneva. Knox himself describing Geneva as 'the maist perfect school of Christ'.<sup>11</sup> However there was influence too from Zurich and the teaching of Ulrich Zwingli. The magisterial Continental reformers Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin were key figures in Reformed theology. Both influenced the Scottish tradition through John Knox who had resided in Dieppe, Frankfurt and Geneva. The Continental Reformers in their efforts to define what Reformed theology believed greatly encouraged a freshness and vivacity in sacramental theology which naturally had an influence on liturgy. T. F. Torrance states that Calvin operated with a dynamic view of space, composed of waves of tensions and dissonances, rather than constituting a static container or product.<sup>12</sup>

By virtue of Calvin's concentration on God and the activity of God in Christ — on things invisible and unlocatable except in the transformed self — he was naturally suspicious of what is visible and externally locatable. Hence he was critical of Luther's apparent Aristotelian receptacle concept of space, and for that reason rejected the Wittenberg reformer's Christology and his understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Indeed, his Augustinian preference encouraged a Neoplatonist hermeneutic. But Calvin also appreciated the force of Luther's trust in the divine promise, and insisted that in the Lord's Supper Christ's body and blood are truly present.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> J. Dawson, *John Knox* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 28–32.

<sup>13</sup> B. D. Spinks, *Sacraments, Ceremonies and the Stuart Divines: Sacramental Theology and Liturgy in England and Scotland 1603–1662* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 173.

He infamously stated, 'I rather feel than understand it'. Calvin's concept of the sacraments is marked by the duality of external and internal, visible and invisible, perceptible to the senses and perceptible to the mind, sign and thing, physical and spiritual, mouth and heart, all of which he derived from neo-Platonic Augustinian thought. Institutes (IV.14.1) defines the sacrament as a 'visible sign of a sacred thing, or a visible form of an invisible grace'.<sup>14</sup>

Calvin developed Zwingli's understanding of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the sacramental. For Zwingli the importance of the Lord's Supper is seen as the renewal and inspiration of the whole people of God. Attention is not directed to the bread and wine but to the dynamic power of the presence of the resurrected Christ in the hearts and lives of God's people which affects the whole life of the community.

In this connection, it is important to note the different approaches of the Reformers: Luther expects, in the Lord's Supper, the bodily union of the receivers with the body of Christ (in the elements). Zwingli expects, in the Lord's Supper, the union of the soul of the celebrators with the divine nature of Christ (present in human nature through remembrance of his suffering). Calvin expects, in the Lord's Supper, the union of the soul of the receivers with the body of Christ (in heaven).<sup>15</sup>

These points appear strongly in the teaching of John Knox, who in a sense, in *A Summary, according to the Holy Scriptures, of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* (1550), confesses the supper to be:

ane holy action, ordaynit of God, in the whilk the Lord Jesus, by earthlie visibill thingis sette before us, lifteth us up into heavenlie invisibill thingis. And also that herewith the Lord Jesus gathereth us into ane visibill bodie, so that we be memberis one another, an mak altogether one bodie, whairof Jesus Christ is onlie heid.<sup>16</sup>

Later in the same work, he says:

For it is not his presence in the bread that can save us, but his presence in our hartis through faith in his blude, whilk hath waschit out our synnis, and pacifeit his Faitheris wrath towardis

---

<sup>14</sup> H. J. Selderhuis. *The Calvin Handbook* (Michigan and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), p. 346.

<sup>15</sup> G. W. Locher, Zwingli's Thoughts, cited in D. Shaw, *Renaissance and Zwinglian Influences in Sixteenth Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edina Press, 2012), pp. 32-33.

<sup>16</sup> J. Knox, *Works*, cited in Shaw, *Renaissance*, p. 33.

us. And again, yf we do not believe his bodilie presence in the bread and wyne, that shall damn us [...]<sup>17</sup>

J. S. McEwen, sometime Professor of Church History in the University of Aberdeen said [...] 'I know nothing quite like this anywhere else in Reformed teaching'.<sup>18</sup>

The above citations of Knox encapsulate the teaching of Zwingli with his stress on the importance of spiritual presence at the heart of celebrators, on the importance of the doctrine of the Ascension in relation to the understanding of the Supper and the congregation becoming the body of Christ as a result of this holy action. Knox wrote in 1550, 'In the Lord's Supper, all sit at a table; no difference in habit nor vestment between the minister and the congregation.'<sup>19</sup> The practice was identical with that of Zurich and not according to Calvin in Geneva where each communicant came forward to stand and receive the bread and wine.<sup>20</sup>

Knox also celebrated communion in private houses as in 1555 to 1556 as a sign of the presence of the Church, emphasising that it is the Eucharist that holds the Church together. Calvin would have argued that the Church had to be 'settled' before communion was celebrated. The concept of 'action' was a firmly held view in reformed Scottish thought. The Eucharist was held to be 'the Action,' 'Do this [...]' this was still prevalent in Episcopalian thinking where in the liturgy of 1764 (which was entitled *The Communion Office of the Church of Scotland*)<sup>21</sup>; the word 'DO' was printed large.<sup>22</sup>

For Calvin the sacrament is God's gift and consists of word and sign; as instruments used by God it works through the Holy Spirit and faith, and its aim and the additional value above the Word is the strengthening of the faith and of fellowship with Christ. Calvin enters at length into the work of the Spirit where he picks up on Zwingli's thought and further develops it in *Institutes* (IV.14:7–10, 16–17, 19). Selderhuis explains:

---

<sup>17</sup> J. Knox, *ibid.* p.33.

<sup>18</sup> J. S. McEwen, *The Faith of John Knox* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> J. Knox, cited in Shaw, *Renaissance*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>20</sup> Maxwell, *Genevan Service Book* cited in Shaw, *ibid.* p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> *The Communion Office of the Church of Scotland* (Aberdeen: Alexander Murray).

<sup>22</sup> The same obtains for the Gaelic liturgy of 1764 'DEANAIBH'... 'DO'...contained in the 1895 Gaelic Prayer Book. The 1764 Rite became the *Textus Receptus* of the Scottish Liturgy which evolved into the 1929 Scottish Prayer Book rite.

The sacraments provide a true witness of the fellowship with Christ, but 'only when and as often it pleases God' and it is the Spirit of God himself 'who grants and accomplishes what the sacraments promise'... They function properly only when the 'internal teacher the Spirit' opens the ear, eye and soul. He is the one who brings God's gift with him, places the sacraments in us' and sees to it that they bear fruit. God does not confer his power on external signs...The sacraments are mere servants, but the power to work rest with the Spirit, without his power 'they will profit nothing.'<sup>23</sup>

It can be argued that this is where there is a divergence between Anglo-Catholicism and High-Church Episcopalianism: that the former is Aristotelian and the latter Neo-Platonic in respective understanding of the Eucharist. On the one hand the Aristotelian position on transubstantiation was a metaphysical contradiction, resulting in carnal or corporeal presence-physical; and earthly. In contrast the Neo-Platonic asserted 'real' or 'spiritual' or 'mystical' or 'sacramental presence'. The elements, the words of institution, words of divine promise and the Holy Spirit are able to give what is promised, without either crass or sophisticated ideas of metaphysical change. Faithful trust was required that God would disclose the bread and the wine as an invisible depth of Body and Blood. The 'real presence' was far more real than transubstantiation.<sup>24</sup> The Scottish tradition would approximate to the Neo-Platonic.

By the time of the First Episcopate in the Church of Scotland knowledge of Greek liturgies was of wider currency in the West. We know that the renowned John Forbes of Corse, Professor of Divinity at King's College Aberdeen, leader of the Aberdeen Doctors and one of the greatest patristic scholars and theologians that Scotland has ever produced, was reading Greek liturgy.<sup>25</sup> He in many ways initiated a process which encouraged Episcopalian Divines in the Church of Scotland to look to the East. This legacy was received and developed by the non-Jurors (Jacobite theologians) in the post-Revolution settlement not only with their devotion to primitive rites but also with their particular fascination with what became known as the Usages. The disestablishment of episcopacy allowed for liturgical development and experimentation that previously had been held back, hindered and frustrated, by political interference. In that sense disestablishment was a boon.

---

<sup>23</sup> Selderhuis, *Calvin Handbook*, pp. 347–48.

<sup>24</sup> Spinks, *Sacraments*, p. 175.

<sup>25</sup> Spinks, *Sacraments*, pp. 90ff.



St Basil the Great (330–379), Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, what is now central Turkey, known as one of the Cappadocian Fathers, was a

... towering figure in the history of the Church, and one of the great liturgies, still used ten times a year by the Orthodox Churches, is ascribed to him. The Liturgy of St Basil used today incorporates some later material, but there is no doubt that Basil did produce the liturgy used by Christians speaking Greek, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian, Egyptian, Arabic, Old Slavonic, Georgian and Romanian. Since he helped to form Christian thinking about their fundamental doctrine – the Trinity – and shaped the worship of countless eastern and oriental churches, it is very significant indeed that he claimed to know of authentic Christian traditions not recorded in the Bible ... He gave many examples: signing with the cross (at baptism), blessing the oil for anointing, anointing itself, facing east to pray, and the words of epiclesis at the Eucharist. *All these concern worship ...* These ‘unwritten mysteries’ were both unwritten and mysteries. The word ‘mysteries’, in this context, meant aspects of the faith that were not fully open to human language and logic. They were beyond words, ineffable, and in this sense *could not* be adequately or completely expressed in words because they derived from, and represented something beyond, the material world in which language and logic function.<sup>26</sup>

This analysis by Margaret Barker has a familiar ring about it, especially if you are acquainted with the non-Jurors and their passion for the ‘usages’ as unwritten mysteries.<sup>27</sup> Basil influenced Neo-Platonists.

There is a definite thread running through the theology of the Caroline Divines, the non-Jurors, the Hackney Phalanx and the Oxford Movement.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> See Alexander Nimmo, ‘Archibald Campbell: A Pivotal Figure in Episcopalian Liturgical Tradition’, in *The Scottish Liturgical Traditions and Religious Politics: From Reformers to Jacobites, 1540–1764*. Edited by Allan I. MacInnes Patricia Barton and Kieran German (Edinburgh: University Press, 2021), pp. 175–76.

<sup>28</sup> See Alexander Emsley Nimmo, ‘Bishop John Skinner and the Resurgence of Scots Episcopacy’ (unpublished doctoral thesis; University of Aberdeen, 1996). The Hackney Phalanx was a group of English High Churchmen who assisted the Scottish Church towards the removal of the Penal Laws in 1792.

One group feeds on and has influence on the other. The non-Jurors were particularly interested in Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. They were the successors of the Caroline Divines and while earlier theologians were content to maintain a sacrifice in the Eucharist and a real spiritual presence in the Sacrament, the later Non-Jurors attempted a more elaborate definition of their belief. Bishop Thomas Deacon perhaps best explains their position:

the Priest *does* as Christ did ... he next repeats our Saviour's powerful words 'This is my Body ... This is my Blood' over the Bread and the Cup. The effect of the words is that the Bread and Cup are made authoritative Representations or symbols of Christ's crucified Body and of His Blood shed; and in consequence they are in a capacity of being offered to God as the great Christian Sacrifice ... God accepts the Sacrifice and returns it to us again to feast upon, in order that we may be thereby partakers of all the benefits of our Saviour's Death and Passion. The Bread and Cup become capable of conferring these benefits on the priest praying to God the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon them. The Bread and Cup are thereby made the Spiritual, Life-giving Body and Blood of Christ, in Power and Virtue.<sup>29</sup>

With regard to the Presence of Christ in the Sacrament, the conception of the non-Jurors was expressed in the words that Christ was present in 'power and effect' which may practically amount to what is sometimes called Virtualism.<sup>30</sup> But that was not the line of Archibald Campbell who objected to the words 'power and effect' or 'virtually'. He considered them to be just as objectionable as transubstantiation. He could not see the reason for trying to explain the *modus*: to him that was irrelevant. Campbell wrote that God has nowhere determined the *modus* or Manner of Christ's real Presence in the Sacrament, therefore 'we are left at full *Liberty to Conceive, or Think Differently* of the *Modus or Manner* of His Presence in the *Holy Eucharist*, provided we believe that there He is *Present Verily and Indeed*, and are in

---

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Deacon, *Comprehensive View* (contained in Henry Broxap, *The Later Non-Jurors*, Appendix II Non-Jurors Doctrine and Ceremonies (Cambridge: 1928), p. 318. Also, online at Project Canterbury AD 2002, pp. 1–2.

<sup>30</sup> Deacon, *Comprehensive View*, pp. 3, 320.

*Charity* with those who differ from us, and that we maintain no *Modus* which is not Consistent with the *Analogy of Faith*.<sup>31</sup>

Campbell was clearly and refreshingly out to be inclusive. He did not acquiesce in making admission into Christ's membership straighter and narrower, on account of dogma, than Christ Himself would have made. Membership of Christ's Mystical Body for him was something that was open and inclusive. Campbell's understanding is curiously modern and perhaps offers a way forward in contemporary ecumenical dialogue between the Churches on the nature of the eucharist.

### *The office of bishop: Its development*

In tandem with all this the extruding of the Episcopal party within the Church of Scotland spelled the end of territorial Episcopacy and meant that those of Episcopalian persuasion had to re-assess their understanding of the nature of the office of bishop. Archibald Campbell, although consecrated at Dundee in 1711, continued to reside in London, where he obviously proved to be of great use to the beleaguered Church in Scotland. In London he was able to influence people on behalf of the Scottish Church. Collections were also undertaken to relieve the impoverished condition of the Scots clergy. This was commended by John Skinner (*Tullochgorum*), Dean of Aberdeen, in his *Ecclesiastical History of Scotland*.<sup>32</sup>

With the death of Bishop Alexander John Rose in 1720, however, it was suggested at a meeting of the Edinburgh clergy, that the Scottish bishops, John Fullarton, William Falconer, Arthur Millar and William Irvine, ought to constitute themselves into a college. No mention was made of Campbell and Bishop Gadderar resident in London, in fact they were not consulted until it was a *fait accompli*. They had been ignored on account of the fact that Campbell and Gadderar were 'Usagers' and the Edinburgh clergy were hostile to the 'Usages.'<sup>33</sup> Bishop Fullarton who was chosen to succeed Bishop Rose, was appointed Bishop of Edinburgh and to act as *Primus inter Pares*, and the Chevalier (James VIII) was duly informed. He styled himself *Primus*

---

<sup>31</sup> Archibald Campbell, 'An Essay upon the Holy Eucharist, wherein the Modus, or Manner of the Conversion of the Sacred Symbols, into the Body and Blood of Christ, and particularly the Modus of Transubstantiation, is considered. A Preservative Against several of the Errors of the Roman Church', appended to his *Doctrines of a Middle State between Death and the Resurrection* (London: 1721) pp. 285–319 (p. 289).

<sup>32</sup> NRS, CH12/12/284; John Skinner, *An Ecclesiastical History of Scotland*, 2 vols (London: T. Evans, 1788), II, p. 608.

<sup>33</sup> John Parker Lawson, *History of the Scottish Episcopal Church Since the Revolution in 1688* (Edinburgh: Gallie & Bayley, 1843) p. 212.

*Vicar General and Metropolitan.*<sup>34</sup> Campbell called Fullarton ‘a Pope ... “with Millar and Irvine his cardinals.”’<sup>35</sup>

The clergy of Angus and St Andrews soon after requested that Bishop Falconar should assume spiritual superintendence over them. In the Diocese of Aberdeen, however, clergy and laity sought permission to proceed to the election of a bishop, but the person, Dr George Garden, was on account of his Bourignonism, not acceptable to the College of Bishops, who suggested that there was no need for a new consecration if the clergy were prepared to accept one of the existing bishops. Bishop Campbell was then chosen, but the College did not approve, since he was a Usager. Holding himself canonically elected Bishop Campbell sent his friend Gadderar, as his vicar, while he remained in London.<sup>36</sup> Both Campbell and Gadderar were supporters of diocesan government as the only true and primitive practice, according to the eighth canon of the first Council of Nice. On the resignation of Bishop Campbell in 1725, on account of poor health, Gadderar assumed the office of the Aberdeen District.<sup>37</sup>

John Sage had been recommended for the Professorship of Divinity at St Mary’s College St Andrews by Archbishop Arthur Rose, but on account of the Revolution this was not carried out. He was consecrated a College Bishop in 1705. He had published *A Vindication for the Cyprianic Age* in 1695 in which he investigated the concept of the College System. When Alexander Rose of Edinburgh, the last of the pre-Revolution bishops died in 1720, the remaining bishops (all of them post-Revolution) inherited the responsibility to preserve and manage the Episcopal succession. The inevitability of mortality had gradually done away with diocesan Episcopacy between 1689 in 1720. During this period the apostolic succession had been preserved by surreptitious consecrations performed without informing or getting the approval of King James VIII.

The college bishops argued equity within the episcopate was best guaranteed by their non-territorial arrangement. They also restored royal supremacy and returned to King James the *conge d’elire*, the right to make nominations to the episcopate. James retrospectively ratified Fullarton’s elevation and the consecration of all the bishops Fullarton was appointed to the board of trustees which advised the Jacobite Court on Scottish affairs.<sup>38</sup> The College of Bishops did not set an agenda for its governance of the church

---

<sup>34</sup> Nimmo, ‘Bishop John Skinner’, Appendix II.

<sup>35</sup> LPL, Brett Papers, MS 1536.

<sup>36</sup> Lawson, *History*, pp. 228, 234.

<sup>37</sup> NRS, CH12/12/298.

<sup>38</sup> K. German, *Non-Jurors, Liturgy, and Jacobite Commitment 1718–1746*. Records of the Scottish Church History Society, vol. 2018, pp. 81–82.

but quickly set out their stall in opposition to the Usages, labelling them dangerous to the preservation of the Episcopal Church in Scotland. Kieran German has further argued that the College [of] Bishops declined to recognise any value or purpose in promoting ceremonial practices which gave the impression the church was veering towards Roman Catholicism, a move which would strengthen the Presbyterians' position as the *de facto* Protestant Church in Scotland and also undermine the political ambitions of James VIII in Scotland and Britain by attaching to them a Romanising religious agenda. Most of all, it was the damaging potential of internal disputes to further weaken and perhaps split the church which worried the College.<sup>39</sup>

### *The appointment of bishops: The eighteenth century*

This was where sacramental theology and the praxis of appointing bishops in the Episcopal Church became intertwined and is where the way we elect bishops today originated. The early decades of the eighteenth century are crucial to our understanding of our contemporary church within the Scottish context. For those who favoured the Usages they believed in diocesan episcopacy ... that the diocese had the right to elect its own bishop. This accorded with ancient primitive practice. It was their opinion that the diocesan system also ensured the independence of bishops which they believed to be the Apostolic example free from the jurisdiction of crowns or ecclesiastical colleges<sup>40</sup>.

In 1720 Archibald Campbell wrote to the College arguing for organisation of the bishops by districts promoting the rights of presbyters and proscribing any civil magistrate the power of nomination or the veto of such. His advice went unheeded.<sup>41</sup> Pressure to permit diocesan bishops was exerted by the clergy of Angus and Mearns in 1720 when they asked John Falconar to serve as bishop. Falconar unilaterally agreed thereby setting a precedent.<sup>42</sup> The College of Bishops then acquiesced in a similar arrangement in Aberdeen, in 1721, permitting the clergy to elect a 'temporary superintendent' from their own number, but as we have already noted the Aberdeen presbyters had elected Archibald Campbell as their

---

<sup>39</sup> German, Op cit, p.82. Injunctions & Remonstrances by College of Bishops at Edinburgh, against the 'Usages', 12 February 1723 (NRS, CH12/12/126; Copy of College of Bishops to James Gadderar, Edinburgh, 29 March 1723, and copy of his answer, 1723 (NRS, CH12/12/128); see also the Hodden Papers (AUL, MS 3320/6/83).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 83.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 83.

bishop. Despite the College refusing to ratify his election Campbell held himself to be Bishop of Aberdeen and had dispatched James Gadderar to the diocese to serve as his vicar depute. Gadderar thus came under attack of the bishops for his 'usurpation' of the see and his schismatic encouragement of the Usages there. Even his use of the Scottish Prayer Book was deemed inappropriate.<sup>43</sup>

However, the appointment of Gadderar, with his determined stance, was the straw that broke the camel's back. Gadderar energetically began promoting the Usages in the diocese. He issued a declaration from Aberdeen that he would always use the Usages, which was witnessed by clergy and laity alike. He also stated he would only allow the holy Eucharist to be administered in the 'primitive' fashion.<sup>44</sup> He was duly invited to oversee the Diocese of Moray by presbyters there. Undeniably he was a well-respected and beloved figure. Crucially, his local management of the diocese reinvigorated the communion in the towns and villages of Aberdeenshire, with the first ordinations taking place for a generation.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately the Scottish Liturgy of 1637 was never really used after its debut in St Giles Edinburgh. On account of political expediency, it was not revived in the Second Episcopate. In fact there was little to distinguish the difference between a Presbyterian service and an Episcopalian one at that time. Excepting the Episcopalians would have used the Lord's Prayer, the Glory be to the Father and the Creed. Worship in Scotland had been reduced to the baldest and rudest in Christendom. Liturgical practices had changed little since the days of the Covenanters and the English Puritan influence. Even the psalmody was only sung to fourteen tunes!<sup>46</sup>

Due to the costly reproduction of 1637 Prayer Books, Gadderar had the 1637 Liturgy reprinted in Aberdeen. It was locally known as the 'wee bookie.' These 'wee bookies' were reprinted between 1722 and 1736. As Liturgy developed there were various editions printed in 1722, 1724, 1735

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.83. College Bishops to James Gadderar, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1723, and a copy of his answer, 1723 (NAS, CH12/12/128: Archibald Campbell to John Falconar, 12 April 1722 (NAS, CH12/12/287).

<sup>44</sup> German, *Op Cit.* pp.83-84. Declaration by James Gadderar, Bishop of Aberdeen, that he will always use the 'usages' in Holy Communion, 1 March 1723. NAS.CH 12/12/10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Presbyters and deacons of Aberdeen to the Scottish Bishops, 10 September 1723 AUL MS 3320/110/6; James Gadderar to Archibald Campbell, 26 April 1723 CH 12/12/727.

<sup>46</sup> This 'bald' tradition obtained in the Church of Scotland until the emergence of Robert Lee at the Greyfriars' Kirk Edinburgh in the mid 1840's.

and 1736. This was of course to accommodate the 'Usages.' It was an aspiration to have *our awin Scottish Usage*. In 1724 Gadderar with his fellow bishops expressly permitted the use of the Scottish liturgy.<sup>47</sup>

After Archibald Campbell resigned, Gadderar was elected to the see by the presbyters of Aberdeen in 1725. When the College confirmed Gadderar's election, they did not consider that to mean assent to diocesan episcopacy across the country. They first sought to reinforce their own number by elevating like-minded presbyters to the episcopate. They elevated Robert Norrie, a known anti-Usager, but did not assign him a district. Norrie's fitness for episcopal office was not convincing. In the wake of the Toleration Act, he had courted controversy when he refused to introduce the English Liturgy to his church at Dundee. Indeed, he had preached against it, causing his congregation to disperse to rural parishes for want of ceremonial services, and provoking the intervention of Bishop Rose of Edinburgh. That affair revealed Norrie's low-church character, his obliviousness to the sentiments of his bishops and fellow clergy and his congregation, as well as his lack of diplomacy. Following the death of Usager John Falconar, Bishop of Angus, the Mearns and eastern Perthshire in 1724, the college bishops saw their opportunity and imposed Norrie to the superintendence of that district. It was an attempt to suppress the Usages which had universal support in Perthshire. Norrie was imposed despite Thomas Rattray being the preferred choice. No respect was given by the College to the presbyters' choice.<sup>48</sup>

In 1727 the first step was taken in the reorganisation of the Church and this related exclusively to the episcopal order and included regulations for the election of bishops by the presbyters of the diocese and subsequent confirmation of such elections by the presiding bishop. By 1731 the Usager diocesan bishops and anti-Usager college bishops reached a compromise. A Concordat was agreed where the Usager party gained the ascendancy. There was to be a Primus (although without metropolitanical authority), all bishops were diocesans and elected by the presbyters, and the Usages were permitted. No man should be consecrated a bishop without the consent and approbation of the majority of the other bishops, and any election by the presbyters could only occur after the Primus had issued a Mandate with the consent of the other bishops.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.85. Original Articles of Agreement, in the handwriting of Dr Thomas Rattray of Craighall, 'twixt Bps Fullarton, Gadderar, Millar, Irvine, Cant and Freebairn, as to primitive usages, 9 July 1724. The Concordat NAS CH12/12/130.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 87-88.

There was a system of co-adjutor bishops in the eighteenth century. This was irregular practice where a bishop could have a coadjutor consecrated to assist in the running of the church. These were appointed by the College, perhaps John Skinner and Alexander Jolly of Moray being the most renowned. In the case of John Skinner, Bishop Robert Kilgour's clerical colleagues were happy to acquiesce in Skinner's promotion. It was assumed that when the Diocesan resigned or died the coadjutor would step forward. By the 1830's the clergy were requesting a more 'free election' for the appointment of coadjutors and there were suggestions as to Canonical provision for this.

As regards the canonical process for the election of diocesan bishops there were no significant changes (other than the innovation of Lay Electors in 1863, a representative was chosen from each incumbency) for almost 200 years, that is between 1731 and 1911, and that seemed to have served the Church well. In 1911 the right of nomination was extended to Lay Electors. Although voting had still to be taken in orders, it was no longer required to be in separate Chambers. If no election was made within three months from the date of the mandate, power was given to the Elector's meeting to delegate the election to the Episcopal Synod. In confirming an election, each bishop was required to intimate to the Primus within 21 days whether he assented to the election, or had sufficient reason to be dissatisfied with the suitability of the person elected. Female communicants were also given the right to take part in the election of Lay Electors. The most momentous alterations, and subsequently the greatest dissatisfaction with the process, have taken place within the last thirty years.

The foregoing is a description of some of the historical process, but what is the nature of a Scots Bishop? First and foremost any thoughts of prelacy neither ought to be imaged nor entertained. The traditional style is distinctive and is best described in Bishop Richard Holloway's recent eulogy at the funeral of Bishop John Taylor at Kirriemuir:

John Taylor, this fatherless boy, this 'lad o' pairts', was a good student at Banff Academy, a ten-mile bus trip from Aberchirder, up there on Scotland's high right shoulder, sticking out into the North Sea. But he was also an outstanding athlete. School football champion for three years, and a good allrounder in every other sport, his career was interrupted by a bout of TB that kept him in hospital for months and disqualified him from the National Service that was then compulsory for all 18-year-old males. As well as an accomplished athlete, John was [also] a talented artist and a gifted water colourist, so it was no surprise that, after doing a general degree at Aberdeen University, he



seriously considered training to be an architect; but he finally decided on the priesthood; so, after two years at Edinburgh Theological College, he was ordained to a curacy at St Margaret's Gallowgate Aberdeen. It was there he met and fell in love with Edna, a member of the congregation, who was then Secretary to the Editor of the Aberdeen Press and Journal, and they married in 1959. I could continue this address by listing the parishes John served in as rector, the 9 curates he lovingly and effectively trained in the arts of ministry, before his career culminated in his consecration as Bishop of Glasgow in 1996, as if Christian ministry were a career, and becoming a bishop a professional achievement. In the Scottish Episcopal tradition, bishops are pastors, not rulers; shepherds, not prelates. And that was the key to John's ministry. He cared for his flocks, not as dumb beasts who needed to be driven and scolded, but as fellow-Christians struggling to follow Christ's path of love and service. He did this by careful and eloquent preaching of sermons whose very brevity was part of their punch and effectiveness. And he got alongside his parishioners in all their human needs, because he himself was in touch with his own frailties. His was what might best be described as a 'companionate ministry'. Clergy are often tempted to exceptionalism; the delusion of difference, apartness. Not John Taylor. It was his humanity that was his best pastoral asset, and he maintained it when he became a bishop, a pastor to the pastors, which is all a bishop is'.<sup>49</sup>

### *Archbishops and the office of Primus*

Within the College itself there is the office of Primus. Some time ago a former Primus George Henderson wrote an interesting commentary on the nature of the office of Primus. Henderson suggested that one of the hidden roles of the Primus was 'to shepherd the shepherds.'<sup>50</sup> The Scottish Church had a 'Chief Bishop' Primus Episcopus or Summus Episcopus at Dunkeld in the ninth century and at St Andrews in the tenth and eleventh centuries. When diocesan organisation took shape in the twelfth century, no see had primacy over the others. Scotland therefore had no archbishop though York claimed metropolitan authority. The claim was finally abandoned after one hundred years of resistance, and in 1192 the Scottish Church was proclaimed a special daughter of the Holy See, subject only to the pope.

---

<sup>49</sup> Holloway's permission was given to cite this excerpt.

<sup>50</sup> G. K. B. Henderson. Primus. Onich, Inverness-shire. January 1996.

Local Church government consisted of a provincial council or synod presided over by one of the bishops elected at each meeting and styled 'Conservator of the privileges of the Scottish Church'. Gordon Donaldson comments 'The Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church somewhat resembles the Conservator, but in his title and appointment for life the modern office is based on the Primus Episcopus of earlier times'. Archbishops appear on the Scottish scene near the end of the medieval period: St Andrews 1472 Glasgow 1492. Donaldson writes... 'the innovation (archbishops) never found much favour in the eyes of the Scots and many of the most unhappy incidents in Scottish History are associated with the brief experiment in archbishoprics.' Be that as it may, it was obsequious deference to the royal supremacy which finished off the post-Revolution archbishoprics — appointments to both were forbidden by the Royal Patron as were appointment to the dioceses. Presumably there were regarded as plums to reward loyal service when the King enjoyed his own again.

Alexander Rose the last of the pre-Revolution bishops exercised the whole government of the church to the exclusion of his brother prelates. John Fullarton his successor as bishop with responsibility for Edinburgh and the first Primus was styled 'Primus Vicar General and Metropolitan.' Arthur Millar who succeeded Fullarton was accorded metropolitanical power 'until the See of St Andrews be restored.' Andrew Lumsden (Primus 1727–1731) was the first to renounce all metropolitanical authority... 'this was to be held "in commission" by the whole Episcopal body- the so called College.' But the use of the phrase "in commission" is a clear enough indication that the arrangement was regarded as temporary and as late as 1743 the stern canonical provision against primatial aggression was somewhat softened by setting it in a context of 'the present situation of the Church.'

In Skinner's *History* (Letter 59) the arrangements formalised in 1743 are presented as a design which the Bishops had struggled successfully to accomplish- after the primitive model, as he puts it, where each bishop had a *portio gregis* and all were thereby entitled to a share in government *in solidum*, and a Primus who was to have no other privilege among the bishops than that of convoking and presiding. Thus an arrangement which more or less is afforded respectability by an appeal to antiquity, that is to Cyprian's Dissertation on Unity.

Cyprian stated at the seventh Council of Carthage 1 September 256...

It remains that we severally declare our opinion on this same subject, judging no one, nor depriving any one of the right of communion, if he differ from us. For no one of us sets himself up as a bishop of bishops, or by tyrannical terror forces his colleagues to a necessity of obeying; inasmuch as every bishop

in the free use of his liberty and power, has the right of forming his own judgement, and can no more be judged by another than he can himself judge another. But we must all await the judgement of our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone has the power both of setting us in the government of His Church, and of judging of our acts<sup>51</sup> therein.

This is what Robert Lyon was making reference to in his speech at Penrith that the bishops are subject to God alone. Certainly he would have viewed that from an anti-Erastian consideration. After the Revolution the bishops were no more subject to the State and after 1720 the monarch. However that does not mean that a bishop in our tradition can do what they want. There has always been an accepted *modus operandi* which has reflected a *modus vivendi*.

On account of the persecution that afflicted the church in the eighteenth century, bishops, priests and lay people were all in the same boat. Everyone suffered and because of that there is a much closer social bond between clergy and laity in this church. A bishop in Scotland has authority not by dint of office but by and through the respect that that person has from the clergy and laity. Prelatic behaviour on an English model does not work in Scotland.

### *The influence of English immigration*

There is a glaring historical misunderstanding in the Saint Andrew Declaration. English immigration did not see the establishment of English Qualified Chapels.<sup>52</sup> The Qualified Chapels began life as churches where Scots, and a lot of them closet Jacobites, could use the English Prayer Book within the strict confines of the law. St Paul's Loch Street, Aberdeen built in 1721 being one of the most renown. It had claim to house the first organ in Scotland since the Reformation being built by London organ builders in the 1720's. This all being 130 years before the Church of Scotland saw its first organ in the Greyfriars Edinburgh. The Qualified Chapels were used by Government troops in Scotland, but the origins of these chapels are Scots. The Tobacco Lords in Glasgow being some of the most enthusiastic supporters. English immigration into Scotland came with industrialisation

---

<sup>51</sup> J. Stevenson. *Episcopal Authority: A New Eusebius* (London: SPCK, 1957), p. 258.

<sup>52</sup> See K. German, *The Episcopalian Community in Aberdeen in the Jacobite Period*. and T. Clarke. *Jurors and Qualified Clergy: Adopting the Liturgy at Home and Abroad and Abroad in Scottish Liturgical Traditions and Religious Politics*. *Op cit*.

in the latter part of the 1700's. In fact recent research would attest that the greatest influx of immigration into Scotland in the Victorian era was not Irish, as is generally assumed, but English.

This had an effect on the Episcopal Church. Many young men and good young men of promise moved from England to Scotland in the wake of the Oxford Movement as it was easier to be educated for the priesthood and to be ordained priest in Scotland. Fr John Comper notoriously being one of them did much as a mission priest in Aberdeen's East End. Paradoxically he became one of the greatest supporters of and champion of the Scottish Liturgy during the intense anglicising period of the late Victorian Episcopal Church. Others like Charles Wordsworth had a different perspective. He came at William Gladstone's enthrone to become the first Warden of Glenalmond College and used his casting vote to elect himself Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane. He was in many ways Scotland's first ecumenist trying to persuade the Church of Scotland to unite with the Episcopal Church. Sadly he neither understood Scotland nor the Presbyterian Establishment.<sup>53</sup>

English influence comes and goes. Arguably at the moment we are living in an intense high of 'Englishing'. In my early years as a priest there was a policy called the 'Tartan Curtain' where effort was made to find 'native reared' clergy for positions first before looking elsewhere. However that task was made even more difficult when the decision was made to close Edinburgh Theological College at Coates Hall which attracted not only native ordinands but students from all over the world on account of the close connection with the School of Divinity (New College) of the University of Edinburgh. Not only was Coates Hall at the heart of the Church but it possessed one of the best theological libraries in Scotland. It should not be overlooked that it was the first Theological Seminary in the Anglican Communion and began life under the direction of Bishop Arthur Petrie at Folla Rule, Aberdeenshire<sup>54</sup>, in the immediate decades after the last Jacobite rising. All the current members of the College of Bishops were ordained priests in England. The process inaugurated by Bishop Skinner of Aberdeen sacrificing the Scottishness of the Scottish Episcopal Church on the altar of Anglicisation continues.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> A. E. Nimmo, 'Charles Wordsworth, Bishop of St Andrews, 1853–1892: Reconciler or Controversialist?' (M.Phil. thesis: University of Edinburgh) 1982.

<sup>54</sup> A. B. Macgillivray, *Meiklefolia: The Saga of an Episcopalian Odyssey* (Old Meldrum: 1980).

<sup>55</sup> Nimmo, 'Bishop John Skinner and the Resurgence of Scottish Episcopacy'.

### *Conclusion*

What does the Saint Andrew Declaration mean? The cold winds of change are blowing even more sharply what with declining congregations, amalgamations of charges, closure of buildings and the sale of rectories and manses. The loss of physical footprint is going to cause severe impairment in the ability of the wider church to witness in Scotland. The Episcopal Church has cut itself away from its historical origins from within the Church of Scotland. One could argue that political expediency and sheer practicality especially in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have pushed us into the embracing (but suffocating) arms of Anglicanism. But at what price?

The tenets which we held as essential such as the right of a diocese to elect its own bishop have recently been imperilled. Douglas Kornahrens has recently published an excellent paper on liturgy and our *awin Scottish usage*.<sup>56</sup> Some would argue that recent liturgical development no longer expresses our distinctive theology and more likely reflects personal idiosyncrasies rather than the tradition. The question is what is distinctively Scottish that have we to offer the nation. Arguably not a lot and certainly not episcopal managerialism. We as a church seem to have sadly moved away from our roots. The distinctiveness of our native tradition that made us what we are is being lost. As the years roll on, I suspect the future will pronounce its own verdict.

---

<sup>56</sup> See W. Douglas Kornahrens, 'Bishop Rattray and his Ancient Liturgy of the Church of Jerusalem', *Joint Liturgical Studies*, 92 (2020).



# Presbyterian Church Government (by Divine Right)

John W. Keddie

Principal Emeritus, and Lecturer in Church History & Principles,  
Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) Seminary, Inverness

The renowned nineteenth century Scottish theologian, John ('Rabbi') Duncan (1796 to 1870) in one of his quaint but perceptive sayings stated: 'I'm first a Christian, next a Catholic, then a Calvinist, fourth a Paedobaptist, and fifth a Presbyterian. I cannot reverse this order.' Someone asked if this could be likened to circles within each other, the first the widest and best. To this, Duncan replied: 'I like better to think of them as towers rising one above the other, though narrowing as they rise. The first is the broadest, and is the foundation laid by Christ; but we are to build on that foundation, and, as we ascend, our outlook widens.'<sup>1</sup> In a distinct way this article reflects such an outlook!

The subject of ecclesiology (doctrine relating to the Church) is not easy to address today.<sup>2</sup> This is because there is such diversity among, and even within, churches on church government, worship, sacraments and offices. In the light of such diversity, it is considered by many to be unrealistic to claim a divine right (*jus divinum*) for any particular church government or practices. So far as an applicable 'regulative principle' is concerned, the ready acceptance of diversity in church order and ordinances make it so mutable that the very idea of maintaining a *jus divinum* in ecclesiology is considered by many to be *passé*.

## *Church government — its importance*

The doctrine of the Church and its worship, discipline and government are of importance because it is not just a man-made institution, simply to be seen as ruled and governed by men and changed at their whim. It is an institution ordained by Christ of which he is Head. The Father has 'put all things under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the Church' (Ephesians 1.22). His rule and authority are not to be usurped. He determines how the Church is to function and how he is to be worshipped. This is exactly what

---

<sup>1</sup> William Knight, 'The Creed within the Creed', in *Colloquia Peripatetica* (Edinburgh and London, 1907), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Derek W. H. Thomas's contribution, 'The Doctrine of the Church in the Twenty-First Century,' in *Always Reforming: Explorations in systematic theology*, ed. by A. T. B. McGowan (Leicester: Apollos, 2006), pp. 328–52.

we find in the Great Commission: ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ (Matthew 28.18–20).

It is not a matter, either, of indifference (*adiaphora*), far less mere pragmatism. Rather it is the duty of the Church to claim a *jus divinum* (divine right) for church government and practice. This inevitably relates to convictions as to the supreme authority, and normative application, of Scripture in all matters of faith, worship, discipline and church governance. This is the rub of the matter: it stands to reason that a church must be organised and have some sort of uniformity in both faith and practice, rather than a disparate diversity within the same church body.

This is not to say that those who differ in the matter of Presbyterian church government are to be considered as not true churches or not truly Christian. Clearly churches can become ‘Synagogues of Satan’ (Revelation 2.9; 2.13), and ‘dead’ (Revelation 3.1), or ‘loveless’ (Revelation 2.4) or ‘lukewarm’ (Revelation 3.16). But that can apply equally to Presbyterian churches as to any other, whatever the claims outwardly for a ‘divine right’ of church government! Yet these letters of Christ to the churches in Asia minor do emphasise one vital mark of a church, namely, discipline, an important ingredient of any faithful church, of whatever denomination or form of church government, and potentially fatal when it is found wanting.

### *Some telling statistics — the deterioration in attendances*

Whilst it might be said that Presbyterianism is still the predominant form of church government in Scotland, this is not so assured in the present day, not only because of the diversity of opinions within the Presbyterian family of churches in Scotland, but also from the statistics of church attendances (presumably one of the motivations for the Saint Andrew Declaration?)<sup>3</sup>.

In 1931, after the union of the United Free Church with the Church of Scotland two years earlier, it was reported that the Church of Scotland had

---

<sup>3</sup> ‘Saint Andrew Declaration’ [accessed 28 February 2022]. This ‘Declaration’, involving and engaging the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church, lays the foundations, through a series of acknowledgements and commitments, for the two churches to work together in response to a common calling to minister to the whole people of Scotland. It was signed by representatives of both denominations on 30 November 2021 [accessed 28 February 2022].



2720 congregations and 1,280,620 church members.<sup>4</sup> It is sobering to record that by 2020 the number of congregations in the Church of Scotland was down to 1245 (i.e., down 54%!) and church members to 297,435 by the end of that year, ‘a fall of 5% from 2019, and 33% from 2010’.<sup>5</sup> The *Assembly Trustees Report* in 2021 reported that in 2019 the number of worshippers attending worship amounted to just 88,415, or 28% of the membership of the church.<sup>6</sup> ‘Implosion’ seems not too strong a word to use in the context.<sup>7</sup>

In the same year (2019) the Scottish Episcopal Church reported a membership of 27,585 and attendances of 11,782 worshippers (43%).<sup>8</sup>

The significance of the numerical decline in Church of Scotland attendances may be highlighted by noting the reported average weekly attendance at Mass within the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland of 127,003 in 2019 (fuelled, no doubt, by immigration from predominantly Catholic counties of Eastern Europe).<sup>9</sup> In the light of this, to speak of Scotland as a Presbyterian nation today would be a bit of a misnomer.

*The impact of ecumenism — the deterioration in doctrinal convictions*

Since the church unions in Scottish Presbyterianism in 1900<sup>10</sup> and 1929<sup>11</sup> the predominant ‘model’ in the resulting conglomerates has been a ‘broad

<sup>4</sup> J. R. Fleming, *A History of the Church in Scotland 1875–1929* (Edinburgh, 1933), p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Supplementary Report of the Assembly Trustees’, May 2021 [accessed 28 February 2022].

<sup>6</sup> ‘Supplementary Report of the Assembly Trustees’, May 2021 [accessed 28 February 2022]. It may be noted that these figures relate to the situation *prior* to the Covid-19 pandemic.

<sup>7</sup> See ‘Scottish Episcopal Church Unites with Church of Scotland to Pause Inevitable Death’ [26 May 2022].

<sup>8</sup> See ‘Scottish Episcopal Church, 37th Annual Report’ [accessed 28 February 2022].

<sup>9</sup> See ‘Catholic Church in Scotland’ [accessed 28 February 2022].

<sup>10</sup> In 1900 the majority of the Free Church of Scotland, arising from the ‘Disruption’ in the Church of Scotland in 1843, united with the United Presbyterian Church, which had incorporated most of the broken pieces of the eighteenth-century secession churches. Thus was the United Free Church of Scotland formed. From this union a constitutionalist minority of the Free Church opposed the union and continued as the Free Church of Scotland throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. It remained a conservative and traditional Calvinistic Reformed body.

<sup>11</sup> In 1929 the majority of the United Free Church united with the Church of Scotland.

church' one, in which doctrinal standards were eroded in the interests of mere 'institutional union.' The truth is that diversity of doctrine, worship, discipline and church government within the same church, through broadening adjustments to the Questions and Formula which bound the ministers and other office bearers to the church's 'Standards', were simply covered up. Conflicting liberal and conservative evangelical understandings of Christ and Christian faith were left to co-exist in an internal disequilibrium. In other words, ironically, there was an implicit internal contradiction of ecumenicity! In this way the church plumped for diversity over uniformity and the philosophy of the Enlightenment over the theology of the Reformation.

In reality, such unions were carved out with fingers crossed, so to speak, and were about appearances rather than real unity on the basis of clear spiritual and doctrinal commitments. Malcolm Muggeridge (1903 to 1990) in his essay 'Consensianity', written after a visit to the World Council of Churches at Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968, put it, rather caustically, this way: 'the most vital elements in the Christian story have [...] derived from dissidence, rather than agreement [...] At Uppsala [...] they were able to agree about almost anything because they believed almost nothing.'<sup>12</sup>

Why mention this? Because the 'consensus' has inhibited or effectively suppressed discussion of principal differences about matters relating to church government as well as church doctrine, worship and discipline. It has left conservative evangelical ministers and congregations, again ironically, in effect as 'Independents' within Presbyterian churches. Today the clamour is for inclusiveness rather than dissidence, which the latter is, one supposes, a sin to ecumenists.

It is, therefore, with some diffidence that one embarks upon a discussion of church government. It is important to realise that the *system* of government in a church itself, be it Presbyterian or otherwise, does not preserve that church from spiritual and numerical decline. For a church to have real 'life' it needs the work of the Spirit of God and the presence of the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, and, in addition, a clear adherence to the authority and truths of Scripture as the Word of God.

*Persuasion about church government — as a divine right?*

In Romans 14.5 the Apostle Paul wrote: 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.' In a sermon on this text, preached by the Revd Professor

---

<sup>12</sup> See: [Malcolm Muggeridge — Jesus Rediscovered](#) (3 February 2010) [accessed 26 May 2022].

David Welsh as retiring Moderator of the Church of Scotland Assembly, held in Edinburgh in May 1843,<sup>13</sup> Dr Welsh was to state that:

While, in other Churches, the course of affairs has shed much light upon topics connected with doctrine, and worship, and practice, Scotland, in a special manner, has been the theatre for the development of what relates to the government of the Church and the kingly character of the Redeemer.<sup>14</sup>

There is a right of private judgement, though that does need to be qualified by the point that no one has any right to exercise judgement contrary to the teaching of the Bible. But the Christian, on matters where there may be legitimate differences of opinion, not least on matters which do not relate to salvation of the soul directly, will always exercise a charitable spirit. However, we must turn to the matter of church government, in which differences of opinion abound. And, yes, while every man must be fully persuaded in his own mind, even in this there should be a desire to strive after a *de jure* position, what used to be called *jus divinum*.

*Organised or not organised, or how and why organised?*

There have been significant differences on the matter of the organisation of the Church. It goes without saying that a church must be organised in one way or another. As William Binnie (1823 to 1886) put it: 'A Church must be either organised or not organised. It cannot be both at once.'<sup>15</sup> The question then is: How should it be organised? In one place John Duncan stated that: 'It is strange that all Christendom becomes Presbyterian on an ordination day.'<sup>16</sup> By this he meant that such occasions gather people together and

---

<sup>13</sup> David Welsh, 'Sermon XII: The Limits and Extent of the Right of Private Judgement' in *Sermons of the late Revd Dr David Welsh* (Edinburgh, 1846), pp. 319–51.

<sup>14</sup> Welsh 'Sermon XII' in *Sermons*, ed. by Surname, p. 350. This was in the context of the 'Disruption' that year which involved an exodus from the Church of Scotland by over 400 ministers and hundreds of thousands of people. Dr Welsh tabled the Protest at that Assembly prior to hundreds of Commissioners leaving St Andrew's Church in George Street to proceed to follow their convictions and form themselves as the Church of Scotland Free.

<sup>15</sup> William Binnie, *The Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1882), p. 111. Binnie, originally a Reformed Presbyterian, became Professor of Church History in the Free Church College, Aberdeen (1876 to 1886).

<sup>16</sup> Knight, *Colloquia Peripatetica*, p. 75.

tacitly acknowledge the 'oneness' of the Church as a body in relation to setting apart a man for the ministry.

The fact of *organisation* is written large over the Church in both Old and New Testaments. In the Exodus from Egypt, and the giving of regulations for the children of Israel, there is a command of conformity to God's regulations given through Moses. We see this, for example, in the book of Deuteronomy, which is a 'regulative principle' — a *jus divinum* — from beginning to end. These regulations come from God's Word and not man's whims, or preferences. This is summed up essentially in the last verse of Deuteronomy chapter 12: 'Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it, you shall not add to it nor take away from it' (v.32). Compare this with the last chapter of Revelation (22.18–19). By any measure that is challenging for any church seeking to be faithful to Christ, not least in its form of church government.

In the New Testament this is very clearly seen, for example, in Acts 15 in which there is an account of an early 'Assembly' at Jerusalem. The Church was collective, and one, with an increasing number of 'congregations', particularly proliferated through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Presbyterians say it looks Presbyterian in structure, democratic in action, and inclusive of ministers and elders. This 'Presbyterianism' seems perfectly clear, for example, in the various instructions given by the Apostle Paul in relation, for example, to the appointment of elders in churches (Titus 1.5–9). Indeed, this oneness of the Church in multiple congregations, is also implicit in the very nature of the case in the New Testament letters, including those we have from the Lord Jesus to the churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 2 and 3). All this is seen to be perfectly consistent with a 'divine right' Presbyterianism and, besides this, shows the uniformity and simplicity of church order, worship and offices. In this way, a Presbyterian form of church government is seen to be 'agreeable to the Word of God'.

But we must draw a picture of the 'genius' of Presbyterianism, albeit all-too-briefly. In this we will touch on differing prevailing forms of church government among professing Christian churches. Bear in mind that we do not deny genuine Christianity and a genuine gospel of grace in other non-Presbyterian bodies, even when we are inclined to stress a *de jure*, rather than a *de facto*, Presbyterianism. It is church government we are considering and not Christian orthodoxy. As we can refer to deficiencies in a church's doctrine, worship and discipline, we can also refer to a church's deficiencies in church government. As we mentioned before, happening to have a *jus divinum* in the *form* of church government does not mean that there may not be serious deficiencies elsewhere, in the doctrine, worship or discipline in the Church, deficiencies which may indeed prove ultimately fatal to it as a spiritual force or even to its continuance altogether.

A cautionary note in this connection was rightly sounded by G. D. Henderson, in his 1952 Chalmers' Lectures on *Presbyterianism*:

Dr Thomas Chalmers [...] said in one of his sermons that 'the way to subordinate the human history is to obtain possession of the human heart'. His words [...] serve [...] to remind us that it is the Gospel, and not this or that method or means of proclaiming it, that will save. Neither an old and tried and venerated constitution nor the latest Utopianism will of itself establish the Kingdom. History shows how far the effectiveness of a particular form of government has depended upon those who have operated it. Without fire, it has been said, no acceptable sacrifice. In discussing Presbyterianism as a form of Church Government we must, then, realise that apart from a truly Christian purpose, a consecrated spirit, a surrendered will, no means or methods can succeed.<sup>17</sup>

*Presbyterian Church government in Scotland — a brief introduction*<sup>18</sup>

The earliest ecclesiastical documents of the Reformed Church in Scotland — the *Scots Confession* and the *First Book of Discipline* (both 1560) — cannot be said to make clear a Presbyterian Church order. It is argued that church order is implied, and at least does not imply an Episcopalian structure. The *Book of Discipline* does mention just ministers (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Heads), elders and deacons (8<sup>th</sup> Head) as church offices. The *Second Book of Discipline* (1578) is, however, more explicit in maintaining what would become known as Presbyterianism. This is especially evident in the seventh chapter: 'Of the Elderships, and Assemblies, and Discipline.' The eleventh chapter, 'Of the Present Abuses Remaining in the Kirk Which We Desire to be Reformed', is significant for its rejection of traditional Episcopal forms.<sup>19</sup> This *Book of Discipline* places the order in the church squarely in the hands of elected

---

<sup>17</sup> G. D. Henderson, *Presbyterianism*, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1954), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> For an introduction to the history of Presbyterianism in Scotland see James Kirk's article 'Presbyterianism' in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. by Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1993), pp. 673–76. This article deals almost exclusively with historical 'vicissitudes', especially involving Church and State and Presbyterian and Episcopalian conflicts and does not specifically relate the issues to biblical principles, practices or precedents.

<sup>19</sup> [First and Second Books of Discipline](#) [accessed 24 February 2022].

church leaders, ministers and elders, in presbyteries, synods and a general assemblies.<sup>20</sup>

Enduring all sorts of power struggles with King James VI (1566 to 1625; VI & I from 1603) in relation to suppression of the Church's spiritual independence, as well as his personal desire to impose Episcopal forms and orders, the Scottish Kirk was established as Presbyterian in 1592.<sup>21</sup> The subsequent most significant movements in establishing Presbyterian church government in Scotland were connected with the reforming Assembly of the Scottish Kirk in 1638 and, following that, the Westminster Assembly (1643 to 1649), and the Revolution Settlement (1688 to 1690), finally restoring Presbyterianism in Scotland.<sup>22</sup> Among the documents produced by the Westminster Assembly was 'The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government and of the Ordination of Ministers'. This was completed in 1645 and approved by the General Assembly of the Scottish Church that same year (whilst it reserved the right to allow continuing debate on certain details, including the offices in the church, and the rights and interests of presbyteries in the calling of ministers). After a general statement about the nature of the church, the 'Form' deals with the various officers, with their attendant responsibilities. It then deals with the form of Kirk Sessions (though that term is not used), Presbyteries (called 'Classical Assemblies'), and what are called 'Synodical Assemblies: provincial, national and ecumenical'. In every paragraph of the 'Form' Scripture references are designed to demonstrate agreeableness to Scripture at all points. The remainder of the 'Form' is taken up with matters relating to the ordination of ministers.<sup>23</sup>

Subsequently the ordination vows of the Scottish Presbyterian churches required ordinands (elders and deacons) to 'own and acknowledge the Presbyterian Church Government of this Church, by Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Assemblies [...] So strong was this vow that the elders/deacons were also to affirm that such government

---

<sup>20</sup> See the article by Ronald J. VanderMolen, 'Discipline, Books of', in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. by Donald K. McKim, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 103.

<sup>21</sup> *Act for abolisheing of the actis contrair the trew religion* [accessed 24 February 2022].

<sup>22</sup> *Act Ratifying the Confession of Faith and Settleing Presbyterian Church Government*, 1690, c. 5 [accessed 26 May 2022].

<sup>23</sup> In his thesis *Jus Divinum: The Westminster Assembly and the Divine Right of Church Government* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1969), J. R. De Witt provides a scholarly discussion of the issue of the 'Divine Right of Presbytery' as discussed in the Westminster Assembly.

was ‘the only government of this Church; and do you engage to submit thereto, concur therewith, and not to endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion thereof?’ As for probationer ministers on being inducted to a congregation, this was to be positively affirmed:

Are you persuaded that the Presbyterian government and discipline of this Church are founded upon the Word of God, and agreeable thereto; and do you promise to submit to the said government and discipline, and to concur with the same, and not to endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion thereof, but to the utmost of your power, in your station, to maintain, support, and defend the said discipline and Presbyterian government by Kirk-Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Assemblies?<sup>24</sup>

This strong form of adherence to the Presbyterian church-government was basically the norm in the Scottish Church up to the end of the nineteenth century, since when vows have become much looser, in line with the ‘broad-church model’ which has prevailed in the twentieth century, effectively shifting the church’s foundation in the process.

#### *Types or forms of church government — a summary*

In discussing forms of church government, it is inevitable that some distinction be drawn among churches organised on a different structural basis. All such professing churches may consider that they — at least broadly — conform to a biblical model. That is the debatable area. At this point we will confine ourselves to a brief consideration of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian form. This seems more relevant in the context, bearing in mind the claims of those brethren of Congregational, or Independent, principles and practices, such as Congregationalists, Baptists, Pentecostals and Christian Brethren.<sup>25</sup>

It is to be borne in mind that the question of a church’s *polity* is not the chief end of the Church, which must be to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ in carrying out His Great Commission (Matthew 28.19–20). That may be carried out effectively under any form of church government, whatever their perceived deficiencies. The form of church government will not *ensure* the

---

<sup>24</sup> These are the forms adopted in the Free Church of Scotland in 1846, basically following the Questions of the Church of Scotland, from which the Free Church emerged in 1843.

<sup>25</sup> For a brief discussion, see, D. B. Murray’s article on ‘Independency,’ in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History*, ed. by Cameron, pp. 427–28.

preservation of orthodoxy in any body. However, because it may not be of *primary* importance, this does not mean that a church government is of little importance. The question of the form of church government is not a matter of indifference, as it is answerable to Christ. It is incumbent upon any church to reflect in its organisation what it is persuaded is agreeable to the Bible.

*Episcopal church government.* This form of church government, called in the older books *prelatical*, is basically a *hierarchical* form. In this form there is a visible gradation of church offices with authority centralised in those who occupy the highest ranks. The rule of the church is basically vested in bishops who have authority over all the various church officers and congregations in a particular area (diocese). This is the authority exercised downwards through various strata of clergy. Diocesan bishops are themselves often subject to archbishops whose sphere of hierarchical authority will cover several diocesan areas. This is the basic hierarchical structure of the episcopal system of church government. In this category is found the Church of Rome and also Anglican, Methodist, and Orthodox (Eastern) churches. As a 'broad church' the exercise of the Episcopal form of government varies in degree between and even within churches or denominations: (1) High Church: There are those in the basic Episcopal system who maintain that Christian ordinances and ordinations are only valid if conducted by Christ and the Apostles or *those commissioned by them through apostolic succession*. Particularly this is carried out through bishops who are considered a higher order than presbyters (elders) or deacons. On this view, strictly speaking, no man can preach or administer sacraments unless he is ordained by a bishop. In other words, as Binnie put it: 'Where there is no bishop, there is and can be no Church; and no man is a lawful bishop unless he can show that his 'orders' are derived from the apostles in unbroken succession.'<sup>26</sup> This is precisely the episcopal form maintained by the ritualistic, sacerdotal and high-church element in the Anglican churches — and even 'higher' in the so-called Anglo-Catholics — as well as the Orthodox and Roman Churches. This effectively unchurches those who have not fallen in with such 'apostolic succession,' including Lutheran, Reformed and Independent churches the world over. That factor is a significant argument against this theory of church government. (2) Low Church: There are those of a prelatical or episcopalian persuasion whose attachment to that form rests largely on traditional and practical grounds. It is maintained that the system lends itself to proper order and has been largely prevalent in the history of the Church from the second century. That is what is maintained at any rate. The Low-Church advocates do not hold to the strict 'apostolic succession' dogma. They would not hold the Episcopal form to be the only

---

<sup>26</sup> Binnie, *Church*, p. 118.



legitimate polity. They admit there may be a true church without a bishop. This view was reflected in prominent Anglicans at the Reformation. There have been outstanding Low-Church Episcopalians with whom the staunchest Presbyterians and Independents will have love and sympathy, such as Bishop J. C. Ryle (Liverpool) and, in more recent times, Archbishop Marcus Loane (Sydney).

The breakdown in the Episcopal system from a biblical standpoint lies in the want of any such hierarchical structure evident in the New Testament and the fact that the terms 'elder' and 'bishop' or 'overseer' are used interchangeably for the same office. The name for the office of elder is a translation of the Greek *presbyteros*. However, this term is clearly used interchangeably with the Greek word *episkopos*, which cannot mean 'bishop' in the Episcopal sense but is simply 'overseer.'<sup>27</sup> This is clear, for example, in Paul's letter to Titus. There Paul instructs Titus to appoint 'elders' in all the cities of Crete (1.5). However, he goes on to describe the same person as a 'bishop' (v.7).

*Presbyterianism.* This is a *representative* form of church government, which Presbyterians (though not all) have claimed as having a 'divine right' or *jus divinum*. William Binnie has helpfully and succinctly outlined the characteristic features of the Presbyterian Church polity: (1) *'In every congregation the stated oversight of affairs is entrusted to officers chosen by the people from among themselves.'*<sup>28</sup> There are three offices in the Presbyterian Church: minister or pastor, ruling elder and deacon. Some Presbyterians take a 'two-office' view, holding that there are only elders and deacons, distinguishing in the case of the elders a *teaching* from a strictly *ruling* function. The responsibility of elders is to exercise spiritual oversight in a congregation, taking care over the life and conduct of the flock and ensuring that the ordinances are duly maintained as purely as possible. The office of deacon, however, is spiritual but administrative, attending to the 'outward business of the house of God'. These officers are elected from within the congregations by the members of these congregations. 'Thus', wrote Binnie, *'according to the Presbyterian system, every congregation or local Church is a corporation capable of managing its affairs by means of representatives chosen for the purpose out of its own membership.'*<sup>29</sup> (2) *'There is in every congregation a pastor — one at least — who is also an elder,*

---

<sup>27</sup> This word is used only 3 times in the New Testament, in 1 Timothy 3.1–2, and Titus 1.7 with reference to office in the Church. It is also used by Peter in his first letter (2.25) with reference to Christ as Overseer of our souls, but with no reference to office in the Church.

<sup>28</sup> Binnie, *Church*, p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Binnie, *Church*, pp. 112–13. Italics in the original.

*but whose special duty is to minister the word and sacraments.*<sup>30</sup> The pastor or preaching elder is the officer of highest rank in the Presbyterian Church. In the Free Church of Scotland, the distinction has been made between the pastor and the elder, and the relationship of pastor to ruling elder is well stated in the *Catechism of the Principles and Constitution of the Free Church of Scotland* issued in 1882. The question is asked: 'How many kinds of presbyter are there?' The answer is given: 'Two — pastors, and ruling elders, who assist the pastor in the government of the Church.'<sup>31</sup> The biblical texts provided in support of this are: 1 Timothy 5.17, 1 Corinthians 12.28, and Romans 12.8. (3) *In all cases in which the arrangement is possible, neighbouring congregations are associated under a common government.*<sup>32</sup> Practically speaking this is arranged geographically, ministers and ruling elders being commissioned by congregations to represent these congregations and constitute a Presbytery in each geographical location. In turn presbyteries are grouped together in wider geographical areas to form 'Provincial Synods,' generally bodies of review. Representatives from all the presbyteries in the whole area covered by the church geographically will annually comprise the General Assembly, charged with the oversight of the whole work of the church in all the affairs common to all the congregations that comprise the church, after the pattern of the assembly described in Acts 15. Binnie commented:

Next to its conformity to Scripture, the boast of this system is that it combines, more perfectly than any other, a jealous solicitude for the liberty of the Christian people, with due regard to the interests of effective and orderly government.

He further added that:

It is a fine example of popular government, tempered and guided by the official teachings of an educated ministry, and so organised, with gradations of representative assemblies, as to provide for the union of many particular Churches in one ecclesiastical fellowship.<sup>33</sup>

In other words, practically speaking it combines an element of the structures of both Episcopalian and Independent models in a happy harmony which *at its best* will reflect the catholicity of the church. This, it may be said, is what

---

<sup>30</sup> Binnie, *Church*, p. 113.

<sup>31</sup> Question and Answer 434.

<sup>32</sup> Binnie, *Church*, p. 113. Italics in the original.

<sup>33</sup> Binnie, *Church*, p. 113.

might be expected of a form of church government agreeable to the Word of God.

*Conclusion — Is Presbyterianism agreeable to the Word of God?*

One of the questions put to probationers at their ordination in the Free Church of Scotland since 1846 (and in other conservative Presbyterian churches today too) states:

Are you persuaded that the Presbyterian government and discipline of this Church are founded upon the Word of God, and agreeable thereto; [...] ?<sup>34</sup>

In his *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, Gerald Williamson helpfully summarises the essential principles of church government, as revealed in Scripture. Williamson concludes:

Inasmuch as the presbyterian form of Church government is the *only* form of Church government which is agreeable with these biblical principles, truth requires that we testify that it alone is sanctioned by Christ, and that the other forms are without warrant from the Word of God. This does not mean that Churches without presbyterian government are necessarily to be declared false Churches (nor that all Churches that preserve presbyterian government are true Churches). But as far as government is concerned no Church is pure unless it is presbyterian.<sup>35</sup>

Essentially this is the *jus divinum* principle, namely, the divine right of Presbytery. In relation to *jus divinum*, John Macpherson put its application well when he wrote:

We hold that the characteristic principles of Presbyterianism are found in Scripture, and that other forms of Church polity are, as compared with Presbyterianism, defective, inasmuch as they ignore certain of those principles to which they give exclusive attention. This claim for a full and satisfactory ground in Scripture for the characteristic principles of our Church system

---

<sup>34</sup> *The Subordinate Standards and other Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Kessinger, 1851), p. 463.

<sup>35</sup> G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1964), p. 233.

is all that we mean to assert when we maintain, as against Prelacy and Congregationalism, the divine right of Presbytery.<sup>36</sup>

Much as many would wish it not to be the case, the truth is that the form of Presbyterian church government and that of the Episcopalian (and Independent) are incompatible in church order and offices: in other words, in ecclesiology. Therefore, any contemplated coming together, however well meant, on any other basis than merely friendly relations or informal fellowship, is ultimately fraught with issues of disharmony, besides having the potential for power-struggles between essentially incompatible forms of church order.

---

<sup>36</sup> John Macpherson, *Presbyterianism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1879), p. 10.

# The Church of Scotland and the Authority of Scripture

Andrew T. B. McGowan

Director, Rutherford Centre for Reformed Theology  
Professor of Theology, University of the Highlands and Islands

To understand the position of the Church of Scotland on the authority of Scripture, it is necessary to do a number of things. First, we must examine the confessional statements of the Church of Scotland, in order to identify the official position. Second, we must recognise the impact of Liberal Theology<sup>1</sup> on the C of S, leading to the weakening of subscription to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* required by ministers and elders, by means of Declaratory Articles. Third, we must examine the Panel on Doctrine report of 1988, which demonstrates the changes which had taken place in the C of S's core views on the authority of Scripture. Fourth and by contrast, we consider the view of the authority of Scripture among those involved in the evangelical resurgence. Fifth, we must assess how these various factors leave the Church of Scotland's view of authority today.

## *Confessional statements*

When the Scottish Reformation took place in 1560, Knox and others wrote the *Scots Confession*<sup>2</sup> which became the theological standard for the Church of Scotland's life and doctrine. The *Scots Confession* remained the doctrinal standard of the Church of Scotland until 1647, when it adopted the *Westminster Confession of Faith*<sup>3</sup> and associated standards. If we now turn to these confessional statements, we find a strong degree of harmony in their statements.

1. *The Scots Confession*. Unlike the later *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Scots Confession* does not begin with a chapter on Scripture, but it does have a statement in the preface which identifies the place that Scripture had in its composition and (almost uniquely among Reformed confessions) makes it clear that if anyone can show from Scripture any place where they have made a mistake, they undertake to provide an answer from Scripture or to correct the relevant section:

---

<sup>1</sup> When the expression 'Liberal Theology' is used with upper case letters it refers specifically to that school of theology created by Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack and Hermann.

<sup>2</sup> The Scots Confession [accessed 16 September 2020].

<sup>3</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith [accessed 16 September 2020].

Protesting, that if any man will note in this our Confession any article or sentence repugning to God's holy word, that it would please him of his gentleness, and for Christian charity's sake, to admonish us of the same in writ; and We of our honour and fidelity do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God (that is, from his holy Scriptures), or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss.

Chapter 18 of the *Scots Confession*, 'Of the Notes by Which the True Kirk Is Discerned From the False and Who Shall Be Judge of the Doctrine', makes some comments on Scripture and its authority:

the doctrine taught in our kirks is contained in the written word of God, to wit, in the Books of the Old and New Testaments. In those books, we mean, which of the ancient have been reputed canonical, in the which we affirm that all things necessary to be believed for the salvation of mankind, is sufficiently expressed; the interpretation whereof, we confess, neither appertained to private nor public person, neither yet to any kirk for any pre-eminence or prerogative, personal or local, which one has above another; but appertained to the Spirit of God, by the which also the Scripture was written. When controversy then happeneth for the right understanding of any place or sentence of Scripture, or for the reformation of any abuse within the Kirk of God, we ought not so much to look what men before us have said or done, as unto that which the Holy Ghost uniformly speaks within the body of the Scriptures, and unto that which Christ Jesus Himself did, and commanded to be done. For this is a thing universally granted, that the Spirit of God, which is the Spirit of unity, is in nothing contrarious unto Himself. If then the interpretation, determination, or sentence of any doctor, kirk, or council, repugn to the plain word of God written in any other place of the Scripture, it is a thing most certain, that theirs is not the true understanding and meaning of the Holy Ghost, supposing that Councils, Realms, and Nations have approved and received the same: For we dare not receive and admit any interpretation which directly repugneth to any principal point of our faith, or to any other plain text of Scripture, or yet unto the rule of charity.

This passage presents four points in opposition to the teaching on Scripture contained in the Roman Catholic *Council of Trent*,<sup>4</sup> which was written sixteen

---

<sup>4</sup> The Council of Trent.

years earlier. First, it limits the term Scripture to the books of the Old and New Testaments and does not recognise the apocryphal books as canonical. Second, it affirms the sufficiency of Scripture, namely, that everything necessary to be known for salvation is taught in Scripture. Third, it rejects the right of the church to determine the interpretation of Scripture, holding this to be the work of the Holy Spirit. Fourth, it affirms the principle that Scripture must be compared with Scripture in order to understand its meaning, since all Scripture comes from the Holy Spirit and he cannot contradict himself.

When the authors of the *Scots Confession* come to address the doctrine of Scripture directly, in chapter 19, the statement of the doctrine is short and to the point:

As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make the man of God perfect, so do we affirm and avow the authority of the same to be of God, and neither to depend on men nor angels. We affirm therefore that such as allege the Scripture to have no other authority, but that which is received from the Kirk, to be blasphemous against God, and injurious to the true Kirk, which always heareth and obeyeth the voice of her own Spouse and Pastor, but taketh not upon her to be mistress over the same.

Although a short statement, it addresses the question of 'authority' and once again stands in sharp contrast to the statements in the *Council of Trent's* teaching on Scripture. The authority of the Scriptures is affirmed to be from God and it rejects as blasphemous the notion that the Scriptures derive their authority from the Church.

2. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. All of the key Reformed themes noted above which are found in the *Scots Confession* are also expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (henceforth *WCF*). The most significant statement is found in *WCF* 1:2 where it describes Scripture as 'the Word of God written'.<sup>5</sup> Later in the chapter, it affirms the unique authority of Scripture: 'The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men'.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> *WCF* 1:2.

<sup>6</sup> *WCF* 1:6.

Like the *Scots Confession*, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* affirms the importance of the Holy Spirit for the interpretation and meaning of Scripture:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.<sup>7</sup>

This emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit extends to the question of the authority of Scripture: 'our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts' (*WCF* 1:5).

It is evident that the official position of the Church of Scotland, as expressed in her official confessional statements, gives high prominence to the Word of God as the final authority for the church and for individual Christians. Although the *WCF* remains the Principal Subordinate Standard of the Church of Scotland, however, changes in theology at the beginning of the twentieth century led to changes in the formula of subscription to the *WCF* which is signed by ministers and elders upon ordination. To those changes we must now turn.

### *Declaratory Articles*

As a result of German biblical criticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, allied to the developing Liberal Theology of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Harnack and Hermann, many Christians began to doubt the authority of Scripture. Towards the end of the nineteenth century this began to be evident in Scotland. The most notable example of this changing position came when Professor William Robertson Smith<sup>8</sup> of the Free Church College in Aberdeen faced a trial in the Free Church General Assembly after publishing some articles in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, of which he would later become editor. The article which drew most criticism was entitled 'Bible'. He was eventually deposed from his chair for advocating higher critical views. On the other side, Professor James Orr of the United Presbyterian Church began to write books

---

<sup>7</sup> *WCF* 1:4.

<sup>8</sup> There is a [website](#) devoted to Robertson Smith which has a brief biography and many interesting links.



criticising the higher critical views and defending the authority of Scripture.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Orr's book on Scripture indicates that, although holding to a strong view of the authority of Scripture, he was no inerrantist.<sup>10</sup>

In the midst of these debates over the authority of Scripture in the light of higher criticism, Presbyterian Churches began to reconsider what should be required of ministers and elders in their ordination vows in relation to the *WCF*. Until this time subscription was *simpliciter* but now it began to be qualified. The United Presbyterian Church was the first church in Scotland to adopt 'Declaratory Articles' in relation to confessional subscription. These articles, adopted in 1879, included a key declaratory article which would later be adopted by the Free Church of Scotland and later again by the Church of Scotland which stated:

That, in accordance with the practice hitherto observed in this Church, liberty of opinion is allowed on such points in the Standards, not entering into the substance of faith, as the interpretation of the 'six days' in the Mosaic account of the creation: the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace.

The key expression here is: 'liberty of opinion is allowed on such points in the Standards, not entering into the substance of faith'.

In 1892, the Free Church passed its own Declaratory Articles. This led to a small number of ministers and a large number of members leaving the Free Church, believing that it had abandoned the Disruption principles of 1843. These dissenters formed the Free Presbyterian Church.<sup>11</sup> The passing of the Declaratory Articles brought the Free Church into alignment with the United Presbyterian Church and led to union with that church in 1900, forming the United Free Church of Scotland, although a small but significant number refused to enter the union and remain today as the Free Church of Scotland.

In order to facilitate union between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, the Church of Scotland adopted its own 'Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland'. These are imbedded in an Act of Parliament, called the 'Church of Scotland Act 1921'.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> For example, James Orr, *The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897); and James Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament* (London: James Nisbet, 1905).

<sup>10</sup> James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (London: Duckworth, 1909).

<sup>11</sup> Free Church of Scotland Declaratory Act 1892 [accessed January 2021].

<sup>12</sup> Church of Scotland Act 1921 [accessed January 2021].

This paved the way for the union between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church in 1929. Once again, a small number did not enter the union and remain today as the United Free Church. It is important to point out, however, that these Articles Declaratory of 1921, while permitting liberty of opinion on matters not entering into the substance of the faith, did affirm a strong view on the authority of Scripture, as is obvious from part of Article 1:

The Church of Scotland adheres to the Scottish Reformation; receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life; and avows the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith founded thereupon.

Despite the advance of higher critical biblical studies, the emergence of Liberal Theology and the weakening of conviction regarding the authority of Scripture, the Church of Scotland remains officially committed, through its affirmation of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as its 'Principal Subordinate Standard' and of its Articles Declaratory, to the view that the Scriptures are 'the Word of God written' and are the 'supreme rule of faith and life'. The reality on the ground, however, is quite different and to that we must now turn.

#### *The Panel on Doctrine report of 1998*

A century of higher critical biblical studies and Liberal Theology weakened the commitment to Scripture among ministers, elders and members of the Church of Scotland. The Articles Declaratory condition the subscription to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* such that, at their ordination, ministers and elders affirm the 'Confession of Faith of this Church' except in those matters which 'do not pertain to the substance of the faith'. The Church of Scotland, however, has never defined what it means by the 'substance of the faith' and so there are theologians and ministers who are members of the C of S and yet have publicly denied the doctrines of the Incarnation, the Resurrection and more. The standard answer is that they do not believe a literal interpretation of these doctrines to be 'of the substance of the faith'. The question of the authority of Scripture was raised in the 1988 report of the C of S's Panel on Doctrine. The report was on 'The Interpretation of Scripture'.<sup>13</sup> The report began by affirming the authority of Scripture:

In addressing the many questions raised in the act of interpreting the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, we

---

<sup>13</sup> Panel of Doctrine report of May 1998 [accessed February 2022].

note that the authoritative position of the Scriptures in the Church of Scotland is established by the *Articles Declaratory*. There is no sense in which this report should be understood as offering an alternative understanding of the authority of the Scriptures. However, the acknowledgement of an authoritative position does not predetermine the act of interpretation. Rather, it directs the Church — and each member who addresses, and is addressed by, the Scriptures — towards the supreme rule of faith and life which we receive in the Word of God. It is because we acknowledge the authority of Scripture that we are constrained to begin the task of interpreting it.<sup>14</sup>

The Panel's report then reflected on Article 1 of the *Articles Declaratory*, with respect to the authority of Scripture. As we noted earlier, the Article says, 'The Church of Scotland adheres to the Scottish Reformation; receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life; and avows the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith founded thereupon.' The Panel report states: 'We note the use of the word "contained", suggesting as it does that the Word of God is not to be identified exclusively with the written Scriptures.'

At this point the Panel was reflecting a view which was becoming common in the Church of Scotland, namely, that the Scriptures 'contain' the Word of God but are not the Word of God in their entirety. This came about through a misunderstanding of the second question and answer of the *Shorter Catechism*: 'Question 2: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? Answer: The word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him'. The Westminster Divines were guarding against the idea that the Word of God was to be found in the apocryphal books, they were certainly not implying that the Word of God may or may not be found in Scripture. That is why their emphatic description of the Scriptures as 'the Word of God written' is so important. In any case, the argument that the Word of God is only 'contained' in Scripture has been successfully challenged by the Revd Dr Liam Jerrold Fraser, currently chair of the Church of Scotland's Theological Forum.<sup>15</sup>

The Panel on Doctrine report goes on to further undermine confidence in the authority of Scripture when it says:

---

<sup>14</sup> Section 1.2 'The Bible in the Church of Scotland'.

<sup>15</sup> Liam Jerrold Fraser, 'The Kirk, The Word, and the Text of Scripture', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 34.1 (Spring 2016), 71–78.

In upholding ‘the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments’ we are not asserting that everything found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the Word of God. Such an assertion might appear to require us to justify the slaughter of other races to make room for Israel, the number of wives King Solomon enjoyed, the wish to see babies of hostile adults battered on rocks. In our own century, too literal an identification of fragments of Scripture as ‘Word of God’ has been made the pretext for Nazi oppression in Germany and for the apartheid supported by the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. Every Christian, consciously or not, brings some interpretative process to bear on the reading of the Bible. Every Christian also accords Scripture a unique status: God’s Word by which all theology, all Church life and all ethical decisions must be judged. An evaluation of the whole is necessary for this, rather than the selection of proof texts.

That clear statement ‘we are not asserting that everything found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the Word of God’ stands in marked contrast to the Church of Scotland’s confessional statements and its Articles Declaratory. It is, however, a reflection of what the more liberal side of the C of S believes. In the remainder of the report, questions of interpretation are explained and differences in approach to Scripture (even among the Panel itself) are delineated. One cannot avoid the conclusion, however, that despite the way it began, the report was more likely to undermine confidence in the authority of Scripture than to affirm it.

The nature and content of many subsequent reports to the General Assembly demonstrate the effects of the Panel’s report, in that Scripture is no longer held to be authoritative in the way it once was. Indeed, successive General Assemblies have demonstrated a willingness to reject the clear teaching of Scripture. One example of this concerns the legitimacy of same-sex sexual relationships.

In 2009 the General Assembly sustained the induction of the Revd Scott Rennie to a church in Aberdeen, despite an appeal from a minority within the Presbytery of Aberdeen. Mr Rennie had stated his intention to live in the manse with a same-sex partner. In the view of the protestors, the clear teaching of Scripture in respect of same-sex sexual acts was ignored. This led to the General Assembly appointing a Special Commission, chaired by Lord Hodge. It reported back in 2011, indicating that the Church of Scotland was on a ‘trajectory’ towards recognising same-sex relationships. Then we had a Theological Commission appointed, at the suggestion of Lord Hodge, to

consider the biblical and theological issues underlying the subject. This Theological Commission reported in 2013. The members of the Commission represented opposing views on the subject.<sup>16</sup> Both views were laid out for the Assembly to choose. The General Assembly chose to ignore the report and instead to accept a counter motion, the effect of which was confusion! The Church of Scotland affirmed that the position of the C of S was that we do not ordain those in same-sex relationships, however any congregation which wants to do so has permission to go ahead, with one or two provisos!

Finally, the Theological Forum report to the General Assembly of 2017 was presented by the Very Rev Professor Iain Torrance. He concluded in his speech that there was no theological impediment to the Church of Scotland proceeding to recognise the validity of same-sex relations. Part of the Theological Forum's remit is 'To articulate and develop the doctrinal understanding of the Church in accordance with Holy Scripture and with reference to the confessional standards of the Church of Scotland', yet there was no serious engagement with Scripture or with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in the Panel's report. At the forthcoming General Assembly in 2022, following the report of the Legal Questions committee in 2021 and depending upon the results of current Barrier Act procedure, the General Assembly will probably be asked to permit a self-selecting group of ministers to conduct same-sex 'marriages'.

### *Resurgence of Evangelicalism*

Despite these trends and 'trajectories', there remains within the Church of Scotland many who affirm the traditional position regarding the authority of Scripture. During the first half of the twentieth century, evangelicalism within the Church of Scotland was at a low ebb. There had always been an evangelical and Reformed constituency within the Church of Scotland, which held to the authority of Scripture, but the influences of Liberal Theology had weakened the movement. Ministers who studied theology during this period had few evangelical professors and lecturers. In the middle of the twentieth century, however, there began to be a resurgence of evangelicalism. The Revd Tom Allan, a Church of Scotland minister in Glasgow, was one significant figure in this resurgence. He was also involved with the 'Tell Scotland' movement, which eventually led to Billy Graham coming to Scotland.

In terms of the growth of evangelicalism within the Church of Scotland in the second half of the twentieth century, however, perhaps the most

---

<sup>16</sup> I served on the Commission.

significant figure was the Revd William Still.<sup>17</sup> From a Salvation Army background, he began his ministry in Aberdeen to considerable acclaim, attracting hundreds of young people to Saturday night rallies and with a significant congregation on Sundays. He came to believe, however, that the need of the day was a recognition of the authority of Scripture and a ministry which taught systematically through the Bible, chapter by chapter, supported by prayer. This systematic expository ministry was a return to the practice of Zwingli and Calvin. The organisations and other meetings of his congregation were stripped away, and a simplified structure formed, focussing on the Sunday preaching, Wednesday evening Bible study and Saturday night prayer meeting. Others joined Mr Still in this move towards systematic exposition of Scripture, notably the Revd James Philip in Edinburgh, the Revd George Philip in Glasgow and the Revd Eric Alexander, initially in Ayrshire and then in Tom Allan's old church, St George's Tron in Glasgow. Many divinity students in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow attached themselves to these congregations and a wider movement began. Mr Still created the Crieff Fellowship where like-minded evangelicals could gather. At its height almost 400 ministers would attend. He also founded Rutherford House as a research and education centre in Edinburgh tasked with promoting evangelical theology in the Church of Scotland and beyond.

Convictions regarding the authority of Scripture were also developed and nurtured by a number of other movements and organisations. Many evangelicals were nurtured in their youth by Scripture Union which led to the pattern of daily Bible study, in the confident assurance that it was indeed the Word of God. In the universities, the Inter Varsity Fellowship (later the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship) nurtured the faith of many with weekly Bible teaching, fellowship, prayer and missional outreach. This was also a period when evangelical publishers were beginning to provide literature to help encourage people in their evangelical convictions. In particular, Inter Varsity Press was publishing books which enabled evangelical divinity students to maintain their convictions regarding the authority of Scripture, in face of Liberal Theology and similar trends. This growing movement of evangelicalism became a strong minority within the Church of Scotland. It did not achieve all that it might have done, partly because Mr Still and others were opposed to any kind of organised planning for debates within the Church of Scotland, where evangelicals were often played off against one another and lost crucial votes. Organisations like Forward Together and Covenant Fellowship Scotland have tried to unite and encourage evangelicals within the Church of Scotland but have often found

---

<sup>17</sup> See Francis Lyall, *Gilcomston: An Aberdeen Congregation* (Aberdeen: Paragon Publishing, 2020).

it difficult to motivate busy ministers and elders to devote time to internal church battles.

In terms of the theological colleges at which Church of Scotland ministers were educated, the situation had changed considerably by the end of the twentieth century. Evangelicals were not so derided and criticised as they had been earlier in the century, indeed the Highland Theological College, a Reformed and evangelical college, was added to the places where prospective ministers of the Kirk could carry out their studies. Even in the four ancient university divinity departments, the second half of the twentieth century showed marked changes. This was a time when, largely through the work of Karl Barth and others, Liberal Theology in the classical sense, was dead. Between then and now, many of the theologians and biblical scholars who have taught in Scotland have been constructive theologians in the mould of J. K. S. Reid, T. F. Torrance, James Torrance, John Webster, Bruce McCormack, Oliver O'Donovan, Elizabeth Shively, N. T. Wright, I. Howard Marshall, David F. Wright, David Fergusson, Kevin Vanhoozer, Paul Nimmo, Alan Torrance and others. Not all of these would affirm the doctrine of Scripture as found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* but all would have a significant commitment to the authority of Scripture in their teaching and writing.

### *The current situation*

We are thus left in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the Church of Scotland, in its confessional and constitutional statements, remains committed to the view that Scripture is the Word of God written and that it is the supreme rule of faith and life. On the other hand, many within the C of S no longer believe in the supreme authority of Scripture and are content to accept beliefs and practices which are in clear denial of what is taught in Scripture. Or, like the Panel of Doctrine in 1988, they affirm the authority of Scripture but use 'interpretation' to undermine what many would regard as the plain meaning of the text.

Even the evangelical movement has been damaged and divided by issues such as the recognition of the validity of same-sex sexual relationships. Many evangelicals, including a significant number of ministers, have left the Church of Scotland in protest. This inevitably means that those remaining in the Church of Scotland, who hold a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture, are a much-reduced group, with little influence.

Where then does authority now lie in the Church of Scotland? There is no space in this short article to develop the argument to any great extent but it would seem that, for many within the C of S, the supreme authority is not Scripture but the General Assembly. This is an unfortunate, even dangerous route to go down. At the Reformation, the Protestant churches chose to

affirm the supreme authority of Scripture, as interpreted by the Holy Spirit and to reject the supreme authority of the Church. The Reformers argued that all decision-making must be made on the basis of Scripture and that where the Church was seen to have departed from Scripture or built doctrines on some other basis (such as tradition), then those doctrines were to be rejected. They were also clear that the Scriptures did not derive their authority from the Church but rather the Church must submit to the voice of God speaking by his Spirit through the Scriptures. For the Church of Scotland to move to a place where the supreme authority is the General Assembly marks a turn away from Reformation principles. It also means that there is no agreed external authority (Scripture) against which the teaching and actions of the C of S can be judged.

Part of the evidence for this move towards the supreme authority of the General Assembly lies in recent decisions to centralise power and control. Forty years ago, the Church of Scotland had a number of Boards who were responsible for home mission, overseas mission, church and nation, finance and so on. Each Presbytery had a representative on each of these Boards, giving involvement in all decisions made. This was often cumbersome, but it gave 'buy in' to the work being done centrally. That has long gone and in the past few years the centralisation has been accelerated. We now have twelve trustees who are responsible for the main decision-making process. They also have a Chief Officer who manages the whole operation like a company CEO. In this new system, Presbyteries are largely marginalised and will be even more so when the number of Presbyteries is reduced from almost fifty to around twelve. The difficulties are obvious. For example, how can a Presbytery covering the whole of the Highlands and Islands properly function as a Presbytery, far less make any meaningful contribution to the central decision-making of the Church of Scotland?

### *Conclusion*

The Church of Scotland has travelled a long way since the Scottish Reformation of 1560. Following the Calvinistic rather than the Lutheran strand of the Reformation, the Scottish Reformers established a Reformed church which affirmed the supreme authority of Scripture and sought to apply that to every aspect of the life, teaching and practice. Now only a small minority within the Church of Scotland holds to the authority of Scripture as articulated by those Reformers. Many others give verbal assent to the authority of Scripture but in practice, certainly as represented by the decision-making of the General Assembly, this affirmation often rings hollow.



# The Scottish Episcopal Church

David Jasper

Honorary Professorial Research Fellow in Theology and Religious Studies,  
School of Critical Studies, University of Glasgow

Sir Walter Scott once wrote of ‘the ancient but poor and suffering Episcopal Church’.<sup>1</sup> In some ways, it seems, little has changed, though the suffering may be to a degree self-inflicted. In a poem entitled ‘Schism’ in *Lyra Apostolica* (1836), John Henry Newman, still then an Anglican, wrote, somewhat ambiguously of the Scottish Episcopal Church:

O rail not at our brethren of the North,  
Albeit Samaria finds her likeness there;  
A self-formed Priesthood, and the Church cast forth  
To the chill mountain air.<sup>2</sup>

It should not, perhaps, be forgotten that it was only in 1792 that the Episcopal Church was released from the fetters of penal legislation that almost brought it to an end. By 1830 it had six bishops, less than one hundred clergy and about fifteen thousand worshipping members. It was to grow during the nineteenth century but before Episcopalians today are tempted to overstate their condition, we would do well to reflect on the Episcopal Church as Newman viewed it.

Nor were the years following 1830 easy or, indeed, particularly distinguished for either the Church of Scotland or the Episcopal Church. The divisions and arguments within the national Church of Scotland, culminating in the Great Disruption of 1843, are well known, but the Episcopal Church, small and frail though it was, was not without difficulties of its own, reflecting, to a large extent, its odd and debated relationship with its much larger Anglican counterpart to the south — the Church of England. In the 1830s, largely speaking, Episcopalians of more northerly dioceses were faithful to that remarkable liturgical text, the Scottish Prayer Book of 1637 which, despite persistent tradition, was far less Laudian and English than it

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Stewart J. Brown, ‘Scotland and the Oxford Movement,’ in *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World, 1830–1930*, ed. by Stewart J. Brown and Peter B. Nockles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Lyra Apostolica*, 4th edn (Derby: Henry Mozley and Sons, 1840), p. 141.

was Scottish.<sup>3</sup> Looking back in its Eucharistic liturgy to the first Edwardine Prayer Book of 1549, the book of 1637 was held in high respect by the second generation Tractarians and Anglo-Catholics in England as evidenced in widely used works like Peter Medd's *The Priest to the Altar* (1861) where the Communion Office of 1637 is printed alongside that of 1549 and the Communion Office of the Church of America, that child of Scottish Episcopalians.<sup>4</sup> The doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament as affirmed by later Tractarians in England was here clearly and firmly upheld.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, Episcopalians further south in Scotland, and especially those on the borders with England, were more attached to the English Book of Common Prayer of 1662 and even tended to look longingly southwards to the Church of England arguing that the Scottish bishops were without authority as the Relief Act of 1792 had not given specific state authority to the bishops of the Scottish church.<sup>6</sup>

The split could also be very broadly described as between the Anglo-Catholics of the north and the evangelicals of the south. But the point to be made is clear: small and fragile though it was, the Episcopal Church of 1830 was as prone to divisions and internal argument as its larger companion, the state Church of Scotland. On the other hand, as John Parker Lawson made clear in his voluminous *History of the Scottish Episcopal Church* (1843), what finally held the Episcopal Church together in the nineteenth as in the eighteenth centuries was not simply the principle of episcopacy, but the credal and theological underpinnings and a well-articulated sense of tradition that found their focus in the episcopate: 'their creed, their solemn ritual, and their apostolical constitution'.<sup>7</sup> A solid theological basis has always been the firmest foundation for the Scottish Episcopal Church.

While it would certainly be an exaggeration to claim that the Scottish Episcopal Church in the middle and later years of the nineteenth century was simply a child of the Oxford Movement in England, it might indeed be stated

---

<sup>3</sup> See Gordon Donaldson, *The Making of the Scottish Prayer Book of 1637* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1954).

<sup>4</sup> See Bryan D. Spinks, *The Rise and Fall of the Incomparable Liturgy*, Alcuin Club, 92 (London: SPCK, 2017), p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> See Alf Härdelin, *The Tractarian Understanding of the Eucharist* (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1865).

<sup>6</sup> W. Blatch, *A Memoir of the Right Revd David Low* (London: Rivingtons, 1855), pp. 259–61; and Brown, 'Scotland and the Oxford Movement', in *Oxford Movement*, ed. by Brown and Nockles, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> John Parker Lawson, *History of the Scottish Episcopal Church from the Revolution to the Present Time* (Edinburgh: Gallie and Bayley, 1843), p. 481.

that Oxford's influence upon the Episcopal Church was enormous and profound. Under the initial influence of the Marchioness of Lothian in the early 1840s, and beginning with the building of the church of St John the Evangelist in Jedburgh, churches and colleges sprang up in Scotland under the influence of the Cambridge Camden Society.<sup>8</sup> Among them were William Butterfield's new cathedral in Perth, his College of the Holy Spirit on Cumbrae, and John Henderson's magnificent gothic buildings of Glenalmond near Perth. No less important were the eighty-eight further churches built for Episcopal congregations between 1840 and 1860, a time when clergy and worshipers doubled in number.

But the influence of the Oxford Movement was not simply in terms of new churches built by architects like Butterfield, Henderson and Gilbert Scott.<sup>9</sup> Nor was it only a matter of liturgical practice. For, as has already been noted, the roots of Tractarianism were profoundly and learnedly theological, its anti-Erastianism founded upon the ancient theology and tradition of the Church as received in the creeds, and above all a profound sense of the 'sacramental principle' which 'implies that God performs His works through the *instrumentality* of men [*sic*] and of material things which he makes the channels of grace in the economy of salvation'.<sup>10</sup> Of this principle, both catholic and apostolic, the office of the bishop is the primary guardian. Indeed, it is the primary principle of episcopacy.

What is sometimes neglected, however, is that there was an equivalent movement in the Church of Scotland, the so-called Scoto-Catholic Movement that began with Robert Lee, minister of the Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh which re-opened in 1857 after a terrible fire destroyed the old building in 1845. The founding of the Church Service Society in 1865 to nurture sacramental worship in the Church of Scotland was followed by the Scottish Church Society in 1891. The driving spirit of this latter Society was Dr John MacLeod of Govan, the Society recognizing the move towards Presbyterian reunion as primary and but an initial 'step towards the complete unity of the Church of Christ'.<sup>11</sup> One need only visit his church, Govan Old, today (though it is now redundant as a church) to appreciate the form of worship for which it was built: certainly to accommodate vast congregations who came to hear

---

<sup>8</sup> From 1845 known as the Ecclesiological Society, moving from Cambridge to London.

<sup>9</sup> Gilbert Scott designed the neo-gothic Church of St Paul in Dundee.

<sup>10</sup> Härdelin, *Tractarian Understanding*, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Rees, quoted in Bryan D. Spinks, *Scottish Presbyterian Worship: Proposals for Organic Change, 1843 to the Present Day* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2020), p. 99.

the Word preached, but also with a magnificent choir, organ and high altar for the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist with full choir.

Nor was this movement within the Church of Scotland limited to liturgical practice. At some deep level, it was also profoundly intellectual and theological, well aware of the principles of the Oxford Movement. As doughty (not to say dour) a Presbyterian as John Tulloch, Principle of St Mary's Divinity Hall, St Andrew's University, devoted a complete chapter of his book *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century* (1885) to the Oxford Movement. Tulloch wrote of the 'general character of the movement':

The great idea of the Church in its visibility and authority — in its notes of succession, dogma and sacrament, — sums up its meaning. Many will dispute the very possibility of any such Church or embodiment of spiritual power; but there are few who will not acknowledge that the Oxford movement has done more than all other movements in our time to revive 'the grandeur and force of historical communion and Church life'.<sup>12</sup>

Although by the 1880s, in Stewart J. Brown's words, 'the high Scoto-Catholic movement was beginning to transform the established Church of Scotland'<sup>13</sup> just as it had so profoundly furthered the revival of the Scottish Episcopal Church, it proved for both churches a missed opportunity in their mutual development. There is no doubt that priests like Alexander Penrose Forbes and his brother George Hay Forbes, both Oxford-educated Tractarians, made an enormous impact on the Episcopal Church in terms of liturgy, leadership and theological scholarship, the one as Bishop of Brechin from 1847, the other, a learned liturgist, as a mission priest in Burntisland, Fife.<sup>14</sup> But the deeply theological, not to say intellectual opportunity provided by Tractarian influence in Scotland was passed over — and remains forgotten and very largely inert to this day. Indeed, it was a missed opportunity, its theological energy wasted. There are, perhaps, many reasons for this, but two demand some attention here.

One of the most prominent, and intellectually acute, of the Scoto-Catholic ministers was James Cooper, a professor of ecclesiastical history at

---

<sup>12</sup> John Tulloch, *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain During the Nineteenth Century* [1885], The Victorian Library (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1971), p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, 'Scotland and the Oxford Movement', in *Oxford Movement*, ed. by Brown and Nockles, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> It was through George Hay Forbes that, eventually, the first seriously edited modern edition of the Use of Sarum was produced.

the University of Glasgow and an advocate of the union of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland on ‘ancient lines’, that is the theology and practice of the Early Church.<sup>15</sup> Cooper was also to envisage a union between the state churches in England and Scotland, arguing, indeed, for the restoration of the episcopate to the Church of Scotland. It was a proposal embraced by, among others, a Scotsman in the Church of England, the Archbishop of York, Cosmo Gordon Lang.<sup>16</sup> But what became clear — as was to happen again early in the present century, much to the fury of some Episcopalians, embarrassed at being caught off guard — was that there was a greater *political* pull between the two state churches, as a consequence of which the small Scottish Episcopal Church was rather forgotten. But forgotten also were the profound *theological* principles upon which the whole discussion should properly be founded, though, to be fair, this could not really have been said of Cooper himself. In the end, and as so often is the case, church politics overwhelmed more ultimately serious spiritual discussion, and conversations, as a result, faltered.

The second matter is linked to the first — that is the question of bishops. A revisiting of Marion Lochhead’s 1966 book, *Episcopal Scotland in the Nineteenth Century* will suffice to make my point. One has only to look at the loose-leaf cover, which, perhaps mercifully, is often discarded with use. It is a pencil drawing of an ample bishop in full episcopal robes, with mitre and staff standing inside the door of what appears to be a substantial neo-gothic church. His expression is severe, one might say, prelati, summing up, for me, a sentence in Lochhead’s Epilogue to her book. Quite simply she writes, ‘for many Presbyterians the Bishop remains a menace’.<sup>17</sup> After considering her pen drawing of a bishop, this is hardly surprising, for it is indeed a menacing image. But the matter really to be considered is not ‘the bishop’ but the nature and function of ‘episcopacy’. And at this very point Lochhead descends into a tone that is, at best, mildly offensive. She writes:

Many Scots, otherwise intelligent, tolerant and amicable, appear to see the Bishop in general as a mixture of Archbishop Sharp,

---

<sup>15</sup> See, H. J. Wotherspoon, *James Cooper: A Memoir* (London: Green and Co., 1926), pp. 146–47.

<sup>16</sup> Cosmo Gordon Lang, *The Future of the Church in Scotland* (Edinburgh: J. Gardiner Hitt, 1895); and J. G. Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949).

<sup>17</sup> Marion Lochhead, *Episcopal Scotland in the Nineteenth Century*. (London: John Murray, 1966), p. 268.

and proud prelate of the eighteenth century, and Bishop Proudie.<sup>18</sup>

John Sharp (1645 to 1714) was Archbishop of York from 1691 until his death in 1714. He held the position for longer than anyone since the Reformation, and was, indeed, a thoroughly grand figure in the church. Bishop Proudie never actually existed outside the pages of Anthony Trollope's Barchester novels, but has become a byword for being weak and hen-pecked as the Lord Bishop of Barchester. But quite apart from the fact that I rather dislike this use of literary caricatures and stereotypes, this is simply missing the point and offensive to intelligent Presbyterians like James Cooper. A little later Lochhead compares the idea of the 'bishop' with an extremely unfavourable view of the rather mechanical Presbyterian system of 'Committees, Courts and Presbyteries'. The Episcopalian has the good fortune, in contrast to the benighted Presbyterian, to be able to go

in confidence and privacy, for help and counsel at once paternal and authoritative [... and] The Bishop may take action, with full knowledge and balanced judgment; he [*sic*] can listen, speak and act.<sup>19</sup>

If all I had to read on the Scottish Episcopal Church was Marion Lochhead's book, I should have ceased being an Episcopalian years ago. It is not so much that she is wrong, but that she is vague and rather romantic (in the bad sense) and thus misses the heart of the issue.

When James Cooper spoke of a restored episcopacy in Scotland in the nineteenth century, he did so within the context of a theologically well informed and digested context. If there is to be true union based upon revived 'catholic and apostolic principles among the "mass of the laity"'<sup>20</sup>, then we need, with the first generations of Tractarians, to ground it in a firm knowledge of Christian theology and tradition within which a proper theology of the authority and nature of the episcopacy is revisited and articulated. Only then may we begin to entrust that spiritual vision into the erring hands of men and women. Then, perhaps, we can move on from today's fears of encroaching managerialism and a notable lack of theology, old arguments and differences based largely on habit and social prejudice (if we are really honest), obsessions with structures that are failing and perhaps need to be left to die in peace, and then the Church, as the Christian

---

<sup>18</sup> Lochhead, *Episcopal Scotland*, p. 268.

<sup>19</sup> Lochhead, *Episcopal Scotland*, p. 268.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, 'Scotland and the Oxford Movement', in *Oxford Movement*, ed. by Brown and Nockles, p. 77.

community forgetting all such labels as Presbyterian and Anglican, may again face the future bravely and humbly in the fear of the Lord.





## REVIEWS

Douglas Galbraith, *Assist our Song: Music Ministries in the Local Church*  
(Edinburgh: Saint Andrew's Press, 2021). ISBN 978-1-80-083010-3.  
310pp. £19.99 (softback and ePub).

This substantial volume draws upon a rich tapestry of church music across traditions and centuries, often in places far from Scotland as well as close to home. The title, taken from a hymn stanza addressed to angels (Richard Baxter, 1681), illustrates the delicate sensitivity needed in harnessing music to specific worship contexts.

Galbraith demands boldness too. Congregations must seek to glorify God wholeheartedly, in ways which match local circumstances. All are potential musicians, and the role of pastors and leaders of music is nurture of the entire assembly, enabling people to participate in fulfilling ways and also to listen actively. Music is clearly a significant ministry and not an 'add on'! Practitioners must therefore adhere to a safe church culture, promoting exemplary levels of mutual respect and well-being, as well as inclusivity.

The fact that simple innovations can be highly effective is borne out by the example of Sir James MacMillan writing responsorial psalms for a non-auditioned choir so that singers learn an unfamiliar melody in five minutes (p. 118).

The book is user-friendly as many of its well-referenced chapters could stand alone, helping clergy and working parties to address matters of particular concern. Headings such as 'Traditional or Contemporary? Getting the Balance Right' (Chapter 6) or 'Your Church has got Talent!' (Chapter 9) are magnetic.

The book is particularly helpful for anyone hoping to introduce new initiatives. There is a good balance between honouring the past and embracing fresh genres, the latter in ways which affirm rather than undermine. Patient listening must come to the fore and not sweeping generalisations.

Readers are encouraged to be experimental and adventurous when selecting music for worship. For example, Galbraith's chapter on contemporary music points to a bold middle way which eschews both hasty change and stale habit. Readers are shown the fresh power of an early medieval Easter Office when dramatized like a mystery play. The Christian calendar may invite daring choices which highlight the riches of the season in imaginative, novel ways. Having pointed out that many 'new' styles, genres and intentional juxtapositions are variations on what has gone before, Galbraith quotes Jock Stein: 'The new song can be an old song sung by those whom God is making new.' (p.97). Credit is also given to those editors who

swiftly recognise the timeless qualities of many old hymns while being contextually and critically aware enough to question other idioms and theologies.

New technologies also demand energy. Readers are invited to consider how old and new patterns might dovetail. At the same time, they are encouraged to reflect critically upon the explosion of screen usage since 2020. Intentional creativity is paramount. Those continuing to use live-stream or other audio-visual media should view these methods as vehicles for drawing users into God's presence. Quality and depth of worship should remain central.

Galbraith has listened carefully to many people with different skill-sets and to members of denominations outside his own. Readers are shown the importance of graceful learning when faced with the unfamiliar. Indeed, music has primitive power which may unite people of varying persuasions, bringing them into closer alignment with Jesus's vision of unity (John 17.21–23). While space is given to non-Western traditions an even more multicultural approach would have been welcome. At several points readers are invited to examine their own assumptions and baggage carefully. They are reminded how untapped treasure may lie in uncharted places.

Overall, this is a lucid, practical book, interwoven with love of the subject and also deep optimism. Many resources are listed in the appendices, including particular hymns, tunes and Bible passages as well as selected websites. The latter offer an integrated approach to worship planning. Liturgy, melody, and song should ideally be part of a seamless whole, demanding excellent levels of creative collaboration. Services need to be aesthetic, accessible and stirring, yet sufficiently spacious for unexpected movements of the Holy Spirit. There must also be room to note life's blessings and burdens while acknowledging the transformative power of Christ at the centre.

While a 'one size fits all' approach has no place in worship decisions, there is always rich potential for being drawn into relationship with God through playing or singing. Intuition is employed as well as intellect. Hymns and worship songs meld Scripture with passion and poetry, speaking to heart as well as head. Whether the churches be tiny or great, older or newly established, this book offers a wealth of suggestions, all stemming from wise experience.

Roberta Ritson  
United Reformed Church ordinand

Eric Stoddart, *The Common Gaze: Surveillance and the Common Good*  
(London: SCM Press, 2021). ISBN 978-0-33-406004-8. 216 pp. £25.00  
(softback and ePub).

‘Surveillance may commence before our conception if our mother tracks her menstrual cycle using her smartphone,’ (p. 3). With these words Eric Stoddart introduces the reader to a bewildering variety of technologies that have become so culturally ubiquitous that they are a taken-for-granted norm in our daily life. But who benefits, if anyone, in this new normal? What does it mean, for example, to be human or to be in community when life can be so easily reduced to numbers and persons datafied? How much information about our lives do we volunteer and how much is taken and used without our knowledge? Who is most vulnerable to exploitation in such a world? How can an individual defend against unwanted surveillance, or a government guarantee a free and fair election in a democratic society? What does the Bible say about surveillance and how might the metaphor of the shepherd serve as an example of surveillance for the *benefit* of those surveilled? Stoddart takes up these questions and many more like them in an effort to address a deeper concern about how surveillance might best be utilised as a technology for the common good. Building on established concepts of the common good, Stoddart offers a definition tailored for today’s culture of surveillance. He proposes ‘the common gaze,’ which he defines as ‘surveillance for the common good, inflected with a preferential optic for those who are (digitally) poor,’ (p. 41).

Surveillance is not a new issue nor a new question for governments, businesses and society to consider. Surveilling and being surveilled are, as Stoddart points out, as old as the Bible. What is new is the sheer volume of information that can be gleaned using modern surveillance technologies and, more importantly, what is done with it. There is a necessary relationship between the surveilled and the one surveilling that can be reciprocal and beneficial for both. A shepherd, for example, surveils the flock to ensure the welfare of the sheep but also to manage his investment and personal welfare. The sheep and the shepherd need one another, and the relationship is mutually enriching. But what happens when a shepherd surveils millions or tens of millions of ‘sheep’ who are unaware of being watched? What happens when information gleaned is then turned and used to affect behaviours, thoughts and beliefs solely for the benefit of the ‘shepherd’? At what point does a duty of care become instead a means for exploitation?

Stoddart argues that our society is well past the tipping point in this matter and provides innumerable examples of the ways in which technology companies have abused the personal data entrusted to them by those who use their products. Participants in a capitalist economy understand that

businesses want their money and use market research and advertising to affect financial transactions. What is different in our age of 'big data' is the specificity with which marketers can customize their message to people as individuals. What we consume in the media, for entertainment or information, is no longer the same for everyone, but is rather tailored to our own unique interests and predilections. But when our interests and predilections *themselves* are targeted for manipulation, a dangerous line has been crossed and a trust broken. It is one thing to be influenced on the choices we make about shampoo and blue jeans, but when the same methods of 'surveillance capitalism' are used to affect and shape public views about voting, race relations and foreign policy we are in unfamiliar territory. It is no longer simply a matter of selling more, it is a matter that profoundly affects the common good.

Stoddart covers a wide range of subjects related to surveillance and the common good and is in conversation with a multiplicity of authors both historic and contemporary. For the uninitiated it is at times difficult to follow his argument, especially in Stoddart's extended commentary on biblical metaphors of surveillance, which while creative, seem at times forced and unnecessary. Still, *The Common Gaze* is an important contribution to a field of inquiry that is truly hidden in plain sight. Ours is a surveillance society and we participate wittingly and unwittingly. In a culture that has made an idol of the new and all too often embraces technology as an unalloyed good, *The Common Gaze* offers a helpful pause and a means of reflecting on the ethical compromises that often come with it. Surveillance and the technologies that enable it are being developed at a rate that exceeds our ability to make sense of it or use it wisely. Stoddart offers his book as 'a provocation to question how we navigate the choices made to implement surveillance in its various forms,' (p. 197). He has helpfully framed the questions in this book and the world is watching to see how we answer them.

W. John Carswell  
Minister, Cadzow Parish Church, Hamilton  
Associate Tutor, Scottish Episcopal Institute

Richard Morris, *Evensong: People, Discoveries and Reflections on the Church in England*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021). ISBN 978-1-47-41422-1. xii, 317 pp. £25.00 (hardback).

So much of this book resonates with me. Richard Morris is just a couple of years older than I am and, like myself, a child of the vicarage, brought up in

the early 1950s in an England that was still feeling the effects of the Second World War. In many ways *Evensong* is an elegy for a dying church — an affectionate, though sometimes bitter, late office for an institution that one cannot quite get away from and yet which has, in almost every respect, lost its way, beginning with its leaders and its structures. Although this is a book about the still very established Church of England, much of it rings true also for my own adopted Anglican Episcopal Church of Scotland.

Morris's early years were spent in a working-class parish in Longbridge as mine were in a parish on Teesside. Across the years those endless incursions of the parish on one's home, the damp, poorly heated and furnished vicarage, the occasional and rather daunting visit by some grand clergyman with a title like 'archdeacon' requiring my sister and I to 'play quietly', still remain with me. Michael Ramsey was Bishop of Durham then and seemed not quite the benign old gentleman he later became. Indeed, I have to say, he and Joan were kindness itself to my wife and I when I was a young and rather impoverished college chaplain in Durham.

But from the beginning there was also a dim sense of the significance in our village on the edge of Teesside of Dad. An old family joke, of which one can only now be ashamed, had its origins in one of us affirming to a school friend that 'my Dad's more important than yours.' Richard Morris and I also have in common that we are now retired academics. He is not ordained, as I have been for nearly forty-six years, but like him I have earned my bread for all but three of those years in a 'secular' institution, a university — yet still the church somehow demands my obedience as if it granted me a living. The church is like that — always thinking it is somehow so much 'more important' in many ways.

Many of the clergymen — and they are all men — who fill the pages of this book are the friends of Morris's father, and therefore contemporaries of my Dad. Some of them were his friends also. Stuart Blanch, whom I knew when he was Archbishop of York and my Dad was Dean of York; Mervyn Stockwood, who confirmed me in St Peter's Church, Dulwich Common on 28 May 1963; Simon Phipps, whose book *God on Monday* I read as an ordinand many years later; Hugh Montefiore in whose choir I sang when he was vicar of Great St Mary's, Cambridge; John Robinson who was Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge when I was an undergraduate at Jesus College; Bill Vanstone whom I met once when he was quite an old man as we lectured together to a gathering of the clergy of Bangor Diocese in a draughty diocesan house in Aberystwyth; Archbishop Runcie, Bishop Jenkins of Durham... the list goes on. And now they seem from a different age. Some rightly and others often wrongly, as in the case of the saintly Bishop Bell, have lost their reputations — though my experience of public-school education in the middle years of the last century might add many more

stories of a 'safeguarding' nature from the culture of that time. But schoolmasters are less easy prey than clergy.

Morris's book expresses the great change that has come over institutional religion in the past half century and more, and it is largely a sad story. But *Evensong* is also full of connections and continuities, based in part on Morris's work as an archaeologist. Part Two, entitled 'a box of slides', links the Anglican Church with all those myths about Celtic Christianity, Glastonbury, the church of Chad, Bede and so on. As is so often the case, they turn out to be not quite so unbelievable after all. Though hardly true to 'history'. As Morris says, 'it turns out that the Age of the Saints is real, and every bit as ancient as tradition says it was all along' (p. 157). Glastonbury is perhaps the most interesting example with its story of the travel there of the biblical Joseph of Arimathea, the purported graves of Arthur and Guinevere and their chronicling in Sir Thomas Malory's (c.1415 to 1471) *Le Morte d'Arthur*. If ever there was a fake history this was one, yet in June 1909 the site of Glastonbury Abbey was acquired by Anglican trustees and there was a service of thanksgiving attended by no less than the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Archbishop of Canterbury and numerous lesser bishops. The abbey, it was reported in the national press, was restored to 'the English Church.'

But the vivid religious imagination, while often light on fact, can be powerful and, in a certain way very 'real'. I am at present working on a nineteenth century edition of a late medieval devotional poem, the so-called *Lay Folks' Mass Book*. The nineteenth century editor, one of those learned Anglican parish priests that have now more or less died out, more's the pity, strove to incorporate it into his vision of the 'catholic and apostolic' English Church whose worship stretches back, largely unruffled, far beyond the Reformation even in distinction from the 'Roman' rite. Modern liturgical scholars of course dismiss this continuity as nonsense with meticulously scholarly arguments. And, of course, they are right: but... but... such continuity is part of a religious imagination that contains a living truth — back from 1662 to 1549 to the medieval Sarum Use, and the prayers of the people that at some level never change.

But somehow what sustains this, shall we call it, apostolic procession of devotion? It is heard today ever more faintly. Lecturing to a group of, largely though not entirely, elderly Anglicans in London, clerical and lay, recently, I suggested that the assumptions that could be made even fifty years ago when substantial numbers of people knew 'by heart' a great deal of the Book of Common Prayer, cannot now be made. (I quoted Tess of the D'Urbervilles' spontaneous uttering of the Benedicite when she comes into the Valley of the Great Dairies, but I fear that fell on rather deaf ears, by and large.) How often at weddings in church are you reminded that few people

even know the Lord's Prayer any longer? It is just not part of our culture, even amongst those who still want, for whatever reason, a church wedding. But I am far from convinced that the Church of England, or the Scottish Episcopal Church, is really prepared to admit this. Not really.

And so we get to the last section of Richard Morris's book. It is about the years of the Second World War and just after, into the years when Richard was a small boy in Longbridge and I was a slightly smaller boy in Stockton-on-Tees, growing up in the vicarage. Many of the young clergy of those days were hardened by the war, at home or overseas, returned from service in the navy, the army or the airforce, as servicemen and chaplains. Some of them went back to their Oxford or Cambridge colleges to finish their degrees, and as Morris points out, being locked out of college in the late evening posed little difficulties for soldiers who had been on active duty. (Actually, I might point out, that those of us who were faced with the same obstacles some two decades later, were not particularly challenged by them either. Now, of course, the gates are rarely or hardly ever locked, or keys are issued.) But these were men who knew something of the world and who drew upon the spiritual values of people like Victor Gollancz, the political fervour of John Collins, or the wisdom of George Bell. Such people issued 'A Call to Christian Action in Public Affairs' to which, in 1946, so many people responded that the town hall in Oxford was packed, and the overflow filled the university church of St Mary — around three thousand people.

Here Richard Morris and I, I readily admit, begin to show our age. With the hierarchy of the church immovably immersed in (in that wonderful phrase of Christopher Brookmyre) its delusions of relevance, we wonder why churches are largely empty when serious theology and informed liturgical revision is replaced by helter-skelters and golf courses in the naves of great cathedrals. The church seems to forget that its faithful members, by and large, are not stupid and dislike being patronised. Managerialism, especially when not very well executed, and 'buzz' words like mission (not bad in itself but best done rather than talked about), engagement, or inclusion, can never replace true devotion and serious and critical theological attention to the culture of our times.

At the very end of the nineteenth century that serious, even perhaps over serious, clergyman, Percy Dearmer wrote at the beginning of his widely used *Parson's Handbook*, that its object was 'to help, in however humble a way, towards remedying the lamentable confusion, lawlessness, and vulgarity which are conspicuous in the Church at this time.' Well - *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Richard Morris's *Evensong* is wise, devout, uncompromising, perhaps aware that we are near the end and some of us should be allowed to say that as a matter of sadness, though for us to do so will be a matter of irritation to many. But as the 'unending dialogue' is heard

more faintly, most of the men and women about whom Morris writes, like my own father and mother and their generation, now 'will know what we cannot know, if there is anything to be known. For the rest of us it can only be a matter of faith' (p. 277).

David Jasper

Honorary Professorial Research Fellow in Theology and Religious Studies,  
School of Critical Studies, University of Glasgow

Robert S. Heaney, K. John Kafwanka, Hilda Kabia, eds. *God's Church for God's World: A Practical Approach to Partnership in Mission* (New York: Church Publishing, 2020). ISBN 978-1-64-065052-7. xvi, 204 pp. £16.21 (Kindle); £16.46 (softcover).

The Anglican Communion has for decades struggled to adjust to living and relating as a global, multicultural, movement. The presenting issues, at least so far as secular media have been concerned, have been to do with gender and sexuality, which previous patterns of links between communities on different continents did little to ameliorate. It has increasingly been recognised that there are quite profound theological issues, behind which there are a diversity of cultures which cannot, will not, and should not be suppressed in favour of the presumed normativity of the assumptions of conservative or liberal elements in the North Atlantic churches. Anglicanism is not a polychrome but otherwise homogenised version of a contested reconstruction of Christianity in England during the sixteenth or seventeenth century. Rather, the diversity of cultures is a gift, the theological diversity which this has generated is an enrichment, and the fruit of the encounter of the Christian Gospel in different places has brought a wealth of insights, rituals, and customs to be shared across the Communion, and with our neighbours.

This collection of essays was envisaged as a resource for the now twice delayed Lambeth Conference, but also for use in local communities, not least where Christians of diverse heritage encounter each other. Each essay is co-authored by two contributors from different backgrounds, so that each both reflects something of lived experience, but also offers insights into ways in which others might explore analogous situations and the issues they raise, individually or in groups. Questions for reflection and discussion, and suggested prayers, are offered at different points. It is conspicuous that food and table fellowship occur in different essays, both as challenges and as opportunities for engagement, learning, and growth. While the point is



nowhere emphasised, this applies both to worship and to extra-liturgical fellowship, which surely raises questions for a church in which the Eucharist has been reduced to its ritual skeleton, with merely token elements of bread and — in pre-covid days — wine consumed.

There is much food for thought regarding intra-Anglican relations, without even mentioning the increasingly obsolete divisions between catholic and evangelical. This volume, however, recognises that Anglicans live in relation, or lack thereof, with neighbours of other persuasion. A chapter by John Gibaut, former Director for Unity, Faith, and Order at the Anglican Communion Office, and Anne Burghardt, now General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, reflects not only on the relationships between Anglican and Lutheran churches in different parts of the world, but also on the authors' wide experience in ecumenical bodies and in engagement with churches of other traditions. Three chapters deal with inter-faith relations and are jointly written by an Anglican and a Jew and two Muslims. The latter two are particularly useful, while the former abounds in platitudes about Jerusalem without acknowledging, let alone confronting, the incremental exclusion of Christian and Muslim Palestinians from their homes and holy places there, an existential threat to the future of Christianity in the Holy Land which the Archbishop of Canterbury has belatedly admitted.

Not only does this volume offer resources for building and strengthening relationships within the Anglican Communion, it models it. The collaboration of contributors and of the editors would have required enormous dedication, particularly in the circumstances in which some of them live and work. The result is impressive, and the book is to be commended for use in local communities. While theologically demanding in places, and appropriately so, it is eminently readable and will reward being worked through, talked through, and prayed through.

Nicholas Taylor

Rector, St Aidan's Church, Clarkston  
Convener, Liturgy Committee of the Faith and Order Board