

THE MASTER'S TRUMPET

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From the Editors

THIS ISSUE OFFERS THREE ITEMS BY FREE CHURCH FATHERS which illustrate or elucidate the presentation of the gospel. We open with a meditation by Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843) on the love of God. The preacher seeks to alarm unconverted souls by warning them that God has no love of complacency for them, in the sense of esteeming them. He then urges them that mercy may be found with God, who, though he is angry with them, yet has a gracious heart which flows to all Christless persons with a love of infinite pity. The chief happiness of a soul is to find the love which God showers only on those who are in Christ.

Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) writes about the perplexity in which a hearer may be entangled if he fails to respond with simplicity to the plain directions of the gospel call.

James MacGregor (1830-1894), resting on the foundations laid by his mentor William Cunningham, presses the inadequacy of Amyraldianism both as theology and as a method of gospel presentation. In the course of doing this, he unravels the subtleties involved in Amyraldianism, gives a sharp definition of the position, comments on its reemergence in Scotland, and defends the orthodoxy of the earlier Secession tradition in its attachment to the Marrow theology. He notes that Amyraldianism loses its appeal when it is seen that the difficulties it seeks to resolve have been successfully addressed by various commonplaces of old school Calvinism, such as God's sincere invitation to all men to believe and be saved. MacGregor holds forth the same doctrine as M'Cheyne, though with different terminology, speaking of a divine complacency in the sense of a delight in man's holiness and happiness so that God sincerely mourns over the misery of the unbelieving impenitent as lost. MacGregor speaks of this complacency (using the word in the sense found in Turretin, *Institutes*, III.15.8 & 11) as inherent in God's nature, and presenting to all unconverted men alike the same motive and encouragement to faith. In 1868, MacGregor succeeded James Buchanan in the chair of systematic theology at New College, Edinburgh, and soon took up his pen in opposition to a theologically uncircumspect Union movement.

We close by restating the classical Reformed principles which underlie the Free Church of Scotland's perspective on ecclesiastical constitutions.

The Triumphant Persuasion

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

“For I am persuaded, that neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38–39.

THE COMFORTING AND INVIGORATING DOCTRINE of this precious passage is, that a soul in Christ cannot be separated from the Love of God.

ALL CHRISTLESS PERSONS ARE BY NATURE OUT OF THE LOVE OF GOD. God has no love of complacency towards unconverted souls. He sees nothing amiable in them—he sees nothing for which he can possibly love them. “What is man that he should be clean, and he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous? Behold he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight! How much more abominable and filthy is man who drinketh iniquity like water?” “The righteous God loveth righteousness.” It is his very nature to do so; he cannot but love it wherever he sees it. But there is no righteousness in Christless persons; there is not so much as one clean white spot in their whole garments. By nature “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” Therefore, it is impossible God can love the unconverted with the love of complacency. He must change his nature and become another God before he can cherish the least spark of esteem for an unconverted soul. But it may be objected, did not God so love the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, and did not Christ shew great tenderness to *sinners* when he was on earth? Oh yes! we readily admit it, for it is quite true God loves Christless persons *with a love of infinite pity*. If you saw a man lying wounded, bleeding, and dying, your heart would flow out with compassion all at once—the benevolence of your nature being appealed to, you would love him with the love of pity. But if you found out that he was a wicked, abandoned man, you could not esteem him; your love of pity would continue, yea, it would be greater than before, but you could not have any love of esteem for him.

As a sinner, he would be an object of *pity* but not of *complacency*. Just so is it with God. He saw the whole world lying in wickedness, and every imagination of man's heart only evil continually; and his gracious heart flowed out in pity towards the children of men;—"for God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son." "He is not willing that any should perish." "God willeth all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." "I have no pleasure," says he, "in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Ah, see what a large heart of pity God had! It embraced "all men." It embraced "the whole world"; and, therefore, did he provide an infinite and all-sufficient ransom to which all are invited—to which all may come. Jesus, as the exponent of the Father's heart, says, "Come unto me *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But does God esteem Christless souls? Ah no! God would require to change his essential nature, and become a wicked God before he could love unconverted, Christless men with *a love of esteem*. If he were a wicked God, then he could love wicked men. But so long as he is "the pure-eyed God," he cannot have a spark of esteem for sinners, however much they may esteem themselves, or be esteemed by their fellow-sinners in the world.

God not only does not see anything to love, but he sees much to hate in Christless persons. In the seventh Psalm it is written, that "God is angry with the wicked every day." And again, in the eleventh Psalm, it is written, "The wicked, and him that loveth violence, his soul *hateth*." And again, in Psalm thirty-fourth: "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil." "He that hath not the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God* abideth on him." "*Cursed* is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." "Because of these things cometh *the wrath of God* upon the children of disobedience." It is a part of the nature of God to love holiness, and to hate wickedness wherever he sees it. In whatever heart he discovers it, he cannot but hate it. God must cease to be God, before he ceases to hate the wickedness of the wicked. But an objector may say—If God hates Christless persons on account of their sins, then he can have no pity for them. But why not? He is infinitely just, but he is infinite in compassion too. He must cease to be God before he can cease to be compassionate. "He delighteth in mercy." Yea, the more he is angry with a soul, the more does he pity that soul, for its case is all the more deplorable, that it has rendered

itself obnoxious to his holy displeasure. When Christ was on earth, it is said, “he looked round *with anger*” on some sinners, “being *grieved* at the hardness of their hearts.” Here is the very thing you say cannot be. Here is *anger* and *pity* in the same breast. The lightning of just anger, and the tear of compassion were in his eye at the same moment. This is the very “image of the invisible God.” Again: “When he came near and beheld the city (Jerusalem) he wept over it,” and yet said, “now they are hid from thine eyes.” Here the Saviour gave it over to perdition with the tears in his eyes, and the words of regret upon his lips. This was infinite compassion, and yet infinite indignation. This is “the express image of God’s person.” “In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” If God were in human nature he would weep at the very time he pronounced the holy sentence of wrath.

Let me here speak affectionately and faithfully to all Christless persons. I would implore you from this to learn exactly where you stand with regard to God. Let it sink deep into your ears and hearts, that *He has no love of esteem for you*. He never had: and he never will have, until he sees you in Christ. You see many things in yourselves that you admire, and you foolishly think that God will also admire them. Perhaps you pray a little in secret, and read the Word. Perhaps you feel some glowing of affection in hearing the preaching of the Gospel, and you think all the time that God will look on that and approve it, and, as a necessary consequence, esteem you on account of it. But learn here, that God sees nothing good in it—nothing worthy of his love. If you are out of Christ, you are all loathsome in the sight of the Holy God, and even your very “righteousnesses are *filthy rags*.” Perhaps you are amiable, good-natured, kind, hospitable; your friends love and admire you, and you think God must also admire you. But learn plainly that God sees nothing to admire in you. He knows you are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” You do none of all your fancied meritorious deeds out of regard for him, and nothing will be regarded by him with complacency, unless done with an eye to his glory. And being out of his love, *you are under his wrath*. There is no other alternative. If you are out of his love, you *must* be under his wrath. You are the creature of his hand, and, as a moral agent, God cannot be indifferent to you or to your actions. God is angry with you every day. The wrath of God abides upon you at all times! If you go on a journey, the wrath of God

hangs over you all the way! If you go out to work, the wrath of God is hanging round your neck! If you sit down to your daily meals, the wrath of God is close by you! If you sleep, it rests over you all the night long! At any moment it may crush you into hell; it may be today or tomorrow, or some day next week! The *time* is uncertain, but the *thing* is sure! Whenever God cuts the thread of life, the wrath that is upon you will do its office. Oh! dear souls, how can you remain in this fearful and perilous condition? Oh! be persuaded *now* to believe in Jesus, and thereby escape the “wrath to come.” Your case is a very melancholy one, but it is not hopeless. *God has infinite pity for you.* His pity is as infinite as his wrath. He has no pleasure in your dying; he would rather that you would turn and live. He has provided blood enough in Christ to blot out all your sins; and raiment enough to cover your nakedness.

The more he is angry with you on account of your sinfulness, the more does he pity you. Christ strives most after the salvation of *Jerusalem* sinners. The more you have provoked him, the more ready is he to cover you under his wings. Turn, sinner! turn! God will not always wait. He has said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man.” “Give glory to the Lord your God before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and when ye look for light he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.”

ALL WHO ARE IN CHRIST ARE IN THE LOVE OF GOD. When any sinner is made willing to close with Jesus Christ as a Surety, then it is a righteous thing with God to love that soul with the love of esteem. *He sees nothing now to hate in that soul.* “He sees no iniquity in Jacob, and no perverseness in Israel.” When any sinner is persuaded to embrace the Lord Jesus as his Surety, the sufferings of Christ are counted his, and so in him he has suffered for all his sins already. When the sinner stood before God in himself, God could not but loathe him; but when the sinner stands before God not in himself, but in Christ, “the Son of his love,” then God sees no iniquity in him; his sins have been carried away into “a land of forgetfulness, and cast into the depths of the sea.” They were once “like scarlet,” they are now “white as snow”; and the sinner begins to sing, “O God, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away and thou comfortedst me.” “As far as the east is distant from the west, so far hast thou removed our transgressions from us.” *Anxious sinner*, close quickly with Christ. Come out of

darkness into “marvelous light.” God is angry with you every day, so long as you remain out of Christ; but His anger will be all turned away the moment you consent to be found in the Lord Jesus.

God sees something to love in the soul that is in Christ. When a sinner accepts of Christ as his Surety, he accepts not only of his sufferings but of his obedience too—his infinitely pure and lovely obedience. This is all put upon the believing sinner. This is the “clothing of wrought gold,” this is “the raiment of needle-work.” Where God sees that upon the soul of the sinner, he cannot but love him with a love of infinite esteem and divine complacency. “This is my Beloved Son,” he says, “in whom I am well pleased.” Just as the sweet-smelling garments of Esau, when put upon Jacob, drew out all the affection of the heart of Isaac, and he said, “The smell of my son’s garments is like the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed”; so do the sweet-smelling garments of Christ (for “all his garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces”) draw out the infinite affection of the heart of God toward the sinner who is “accepted in the Beloved.” Then comes to pass the saying which is written, “He will be silent over thee *in his love*—he will rejoice over thee with singing”; and again, “The Father himself *loveth* you.” *Anxious sinner*, close with the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be in the love of God. There is nothing happier for the soul than to be loved. To be loved even by an affectionate dog is pleasant. To be loved by a little child is sweeter. To be loved by wise and good men, that is sweeter still. But oh! to be loved with the infinite heart of God, that is best of all. Oh, to feel that “*God is love!*” Sinner, you have seen the midday sun pouring its rays into the bosom of a calm sea—an unceasing shower of golden rays—till the sea becomes a sheet of living gold, till its darkest caves were illumined, and every gem sparkled with heaven’s light. Such is the love of God to the soul of a sinner in Christ—an unceasing, infinite shower of love! Oh! taste and see that the Lord is gracious. Only close with Christ and you will cry out, *God is love!* GOD IS LOVE!

AND NOTHING CAN SEPARATE THE SOUL IN CHRIST FROM THE LOVE OF GOD. “Once Christ’s, aye Christ’s”: whom he loveth, he loveth unto the end. None can ever be separated from the love of God who once come into it. There is no quality more precious than permanence. The most of the joys in the world do not last. The flowering of the apple tree is pleasant and lovely when, in early summer, it comes out with its ten

thousand blushing promises; but its blossoms soon fade, are separated, and fall off the tree. The gourd of Jonah was pleasant while it lasted, but he was soon separated from it. It came up in a night, and perished in a night. The sweetest friends are united only to be separated. One may almost see the shroud beneath the wedding garment. The love of the creature is not “an enduring substance.” Sometimes the kindest change, and cease to love us, or at the longest, they die—and we are separated. But oh! how different the love of God! *It is an enduring good.* It is a flame that is never extinguished—the “good part” that cannot be taken away. “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This sublime chapter having opened with a strong declaration of no condemnation in Christ Jesus, it is meet that it should close with a declaration equally strong, of no separation from Christ Jesus. It is a delightful and animating theme with which the chapter terminates. The last object it presents to the eye is Jesus. The last accents that linger on the ear are the love of JESUS.

Robert M. M'Cheyne, *Revival Truth*, London 1860.

Appropriating the Calls of the Gospel

Thomas Chalmers

“On the Warrant which each man has to appropriate the Calls of the Gospel to himself, and what that is which marks his doing so,” *Institutes of Theology*, Edinburgh 1849.

I DO NOT THINK THAT ENOUGH OF STRESS has been laid by theologians or Christian ministers on the various particular terms in which the overtures of the gospel are couched for presentation to the world. Each man would understand the import of a special message to himself, but he may not see how the Bible can be understood, as being adequately and fully such a message. An express letter from the upper sanctuary, with his name and designation, might satisfy him; but in the general record of Scripture, that name and that designation are nowhere to be found. He reads calls and entreaties and promises innumerable, but there wants something to warrant his own confident appropriation of them. We hold that the want he complains of is not in the Bible, but somewhere else. This, however, he does not perceive, or at least does not proceed upon. He does not see, distinctly or confidently, how this universal can be transmuted into an individual revelation; or what entitles him to lay hold of encouragements and offers as designed particularly for himself, which are only found in a book that circulates at large, and is left, without any specific destination impressed upon it, to go vaguely and diffusively over the face of the earth. And so, in reading the Bible, he holds converse only with generalities. His own heart remains uncheered, his own path unshone upon.

It is needless to expatiate on the power of those terms in which the overtures of the gospel are framed, and by which, without the nomination of a single individual, each individual may hold them as pointedly and specifically addressed to himself—giving them at once a general diffusion among all, and a personal direction to every. Let me only once more enumerate them. All—“Look unto me, all

ye ends of the earth, and be saved." Every—"Every one that asketh receiveth." Any—"If any man open the door I will enter with him into fellowship." Whosoever—"Whosoever will, let him drink of the waters of life freely." He, a pronoun as generic as the human family—"He that believeth shall be saved." World, a term co-extensive with its rational and accountable generations—"Christ is set forth a propitiation for the sins of the world." Sinner, a designation that misses no one individual of the species—"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." I do not see how any designations or terms can at all be devised more comprehensive than these, insomuch that I hold it an indisputable maxim in theology, that the *word* and the *offer* of salvation are co-extensive the one with the other: or, of whomsoever it may be said that the word of salvation has reached him, of him also it may be said that the offer of salvation has been made unto him.

There is a conscience within every heart that may be said to intimate individually to each man, both his special delinquencies and his special danger because of them. But as far as Scripture is concerned, he has as good reason to take to himself the comforts of the gospel, as to take to himself the terrors and threatenings of the law. For it has been well remarked, that whatsoever the defect or completeness of the warrant may be on which a man appropriates to himself the declarations of the one, it is in all respects the same with that on which he appropriates the declarations of the other. If he tremble because of the saying, That cursed is every man who breaketh the commandment, why, on the other hand, does he not rejoice in the commensurate saying, That blessed is every man who believeth in the Saviour? If he sink into despondency and dismay, or, to borrow the language of Scripture, if he be weary and heavy laden because of the judgments denounced upon all, why does he not take heart again, when he reads the invitation addressed unto all, Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest? If he gather from the Old Testament, that whosoever sinneth is under condemnation, and so views himself as an outcast from the friendship of God, why is it, when he gathers from the New Testament, that whosoever will may come and drink of the waters of life freely—why is it that he refuses to draw water out of the wells of salvation? In short, the terms in which the gospel holds forth an amnesty to the world, are co-extensive with the terms in which the law holds forth a condemnation to the

world. If the man cannot rejoice in the belief that he is included in the gospel's proclamation of mercy, because he does not read his name or his designation there, why does he tremble in the belief that he is included in the law's proclamation of vengeance, seeing that he can as little read his name or his designation there? If the overtures of Divine forgiveness, like so many pointless generalities, pass him by, how is it that the terrors of the Divine wrath, couched and conveyed though they are in language of the same generality, have such special application given to them, and so enter his soul like an arrow sticking fast?

Perhaps we can give the reason. Perhaps it is that his sense of guilt is but a product from the workings of conscience alone. It may be only a natural, and not at all a Scriptural conviction—an operation by the law of the heart, and not by the law of revelation. Had his apprehensions of punishment been derived from the Bible, they might have been quieted by the expectations of pardon derived from the same fountain; for certain it is, that as far as the word of God is concerned, the comforts of the gospel are directed as pointedly and specifically to every reader as the menaces of the law. A belief in its statements fully warrants the individual application of them; and if the application be not made, and so the heart retains its despondency, then, making the one the test of the other, from the languor or the non-existence of individual hope, would we infer the languor or the non-existence of faith.

There can be no doubt, then, from the way in which the message of the gospel is constructed, from the very language in which it is framed and by which it announces itself to men, that each individual man has a full warrant in the objective truth of Scripture, for appropriating to himself the calls and the overtures which it addresses to the world. Now the question is, what is the first palpable effect which such an appropriation will have upon him? or, in other words, what is that which most significantly and most decisively marks its having been made? We have no doubt upon the subject, in the case of a general announcement made by any human or earthly superior to a general multitude. Let him only be conceived to cast abroad among them a general promise or invitation, that all who should meet him at an assigned place, should obtain a certain and specified benefit from his hand; or, varying the terms even as the gospel does, that whosoever repaired to that place, or that any who repaired to it, or that every man who repaired to it, should have the benefit realized upon

him, there can be no doubt, that in each of these intimations, there are sufficient materials for a warrantable and valid appropriation. They hold forth a distinct pledge and promise to each individual of the assembled multitude; and, whoever he may be, he has but to take an intelligent view of the statement which has been made, and to make an intelligent application of it. Let him only believe in its honesty and truth; and, with the full gait of assurance, may he enter and move onward on the pathway which leads to the place of assignation, and rejoicing in the confident hope of the fulfilment which has been held out to him there.

It cannot be difficult to assign what is the first palpable thing which an appropriation in this instance will lead him to do, and which thing will be at once the effect and the indication of his faith. He will betake himself to the place of invitation. He will enter on the road that leads to it, and move with assured pace, just in proportion to the confidence which he feels in the honesty of the invitation. His very first footstep in the direction of the bidden walk and the bidden way, may he regarded as the first distinct and noticeable evidence of the faith by which he is actuated. Observers do not see the mental phenomenon, or the faith itself; but they see the hopeful and obedient movement, and from this they infer the faith. Even he himself does not look reflexly on the faith that is in him, but his mind simply rests on the truth of the Promiser, and is occupied with the certainty and value of the thing promised. The terms of the invitation were enough to warrant an appropriating faith, and his compliance in deed and in action with the order given, is enough to evidence it. It were difficult for others, perhaps even for himself, to ascertain the faith by the direct view of it as a mental phenomenon. But it may be gathered at once from the broad and palpable exhibition of his obedience.

This applies, in all its parts, to our faith in the gospel. Eternal life is there held out as the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and the way is prescribed by which to reach it. We have already, I trust, made it obvious how by the terms in which it is held out, each man within hearing of the gospel has a right to appropriate the thing offered to himself, and to go forth on the bidden walk in the confident possession or confident prospect thereof;—that walk is the walk of repentance, or of new obedience. When the earthly benefactor invited the approach of those whom he addressed, and accompanied the invitation with the promise of some large and liberal gratuity, he did not bid them

wait till the faith had arisen in their minds—he bade them instantly to move; and they, by their instant obedience, gave proof of the faith being already within them in vigorous and practical operation. They were not called upon to ascertain it before obedience; they ascertained it by obedience—the obedience to which they were urged at the very outset of this communication. It is true, unless they had put faith in this communication, they would not have stirred, and the doing as they were bid was the immediate effect of their faith, which was therefore anterior in influence and anterior in time to their obedience. But though the faith must have first existed, that is not to say the faith must first be known to exist, ere the obedience is attempted. You do not look reflexly on the faith by an exercise of consciousness, and then start on the bidden career of activity; but the faith immediately prompts the activity, and indeed it is through the medium of the activity that the power and reality of the faith are first and most satisfactorily ascertained.

At all events, there are initial calls to plain and palpable doings from the very commencement; and you respond to these, not by feeling inwardly after the faith, but by following externally the impulse of it—by plainly doing what you are plainly bidden to do. It would be deemed preposterous in the case now specified to lay an arrest on the movement, till by search and entry among the arcana of the mind the faith had been found. Instead of this, you are required on the instant, and with all practical urgency, to enter on the movement, and simply, if the faith exist, whether it be known at the time to exist or not, the movement follows. There is nothing in all this to embarrass either the initial or the progressive footsteps of this process. The man is simply told what he is to expect, and what he has to do for the fulfilment of his expectation; and if he believe what is thus told, he expects and he does accordingly. There is both a mental phenomenon here—that is, the expectation; and an outward movement—that is, the doing; and had the former not been in previous being and operation, the latter, it is undoubted, would not have taken place. But that is not to say we must look inwardly, and take accurate survey of the phenomenon, ere we act outwardly on the plain and palpable direction which has been given to us. The connexion between the inward and the outward will not less surely take effect, although we should not take metaphysic cognizance of the same—just as surely as the satellites of Jupiter would describe their mathematical courses, although

no mathematical survey had ever been made of them. A plain man, in the circumstances we have now alleged, will feel no embarrassment. He is told what to hope, and where to go for it; and, without mystification or metaphysics, he hopes as he is told, and goes as he is bidden.

Now to me it appears quite obvious that Christianity, in its initial overtures to man, supplies the materials for just as distinct and intelligible an outset. We have already told how, by the very terms which it uses, it singles out every man as a special object for its invitations and its calls; so that each may proceed on its primary addresses to the world, as if they were made individually to himself. And then if the question be put, In what way shall he respond to these addresses? I would say, just by doing the very first injunctions of performance which it mixes up with the very first announcements of promise. It promises eternal life, and it bids us take the way which leads to it. And our proper response to this is just to depend on the promise, and to do the bidding. There can be no mistake as to the promise—forgiveness to all who will through the blood of a satisfying atonement. There can be no mistake as to the bidding—repentance, and turning unto God, and doing works meet for repentance—ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well. There seems nothing wanting here but the plain understanding of a very plain thing. With but belief in the truth of the message, we see not what should intervene to stay an immediate result, and that at the very first hearing, of a heart animated by the hope, and a hand directed to the obedience of the gospel.

The New Testament presents every man with a view of heaven's door opened in the distance before him, and calls on every man to enter on the way of holiness which leads to it. We can imagine nothing more lucid than these direct and primary overtures from heaven to earth—so that if sounded forth upon the world by a trumpet of universal proclamation, it were anything rather than a trumpet which sounded uncertainly. Yet who will deny, since theologians have taken it up, and the haze of a thousand controversies has now gathered upon the question, that it is altogether beset with uncertainties? They have clouded, because they have overborne with their endless commentaries, what in itself is conspicuous as noon-day. Men's minds are lost in the perplexity of long and intricate argumentations, and are bewildered to find that path to heaven, of which, nevertheless, it may be said, that, as delineated and set before us in Scripture, a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.

The reasons for this unfortunate obscuration are mainly reducible to two. The first is, that although nothing can be more patent than those objective realities, by a faith in which it is that the simple Christian is practically set agoing, yet nothing, at the same time, may be more dark and puzzling to him than the description which an inquisitive theology has attempted to make of the subjective process. In Christianity, both the promise held forth and the direction given are as plain matters, as far as the understanding of them at least is concerned, as any parallel promise with its accompanying direction which can be specified in ordinary life. And yet there is no such case, however familiar, that, if subjected to the same treatment with that of the gospel, might not be involved, even as it has been, in most perplexing metaphysics.

The child whom you call to approach you across the floor, and to receive from your hand the apple which you are holding forth to its view, is at no loss how to proceed in making out the acquisition which you intend for it. Yet the data I contend upon which it acts are not more obvious, more apprehensible, than the data set before us all by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and upon which we are required to go forth on our movement for that heaven which is placed with its open gate and its waving flag of invitation in the perspective before us. The child is exclusively objective in its contemplations. All its regards are directed to outward things: the apple held out for its acceptance—the order to come for it—the path by which it moves towards the object its desires are set upon. It is altogether an objective influence which has set it agoing, and set it rightly agoing. Still, however, there is a real subjective process going on within the recesses of its little bosom, however unconscious it may be, or incapable of reflexly observing its order or its laws. Yet another may accurately describe the process, though it cannot; and among other things may remark, and justly remark, on the precedency of the child's faith to the child's obedience. It was faith, in fact, which gave movement and direction to its very first footstep, and which upheld it along the continuous path from its place of departure to its place of arrival. Yet for any practical object, it were of no earthly use to tell the child so; and it were still more preposterous to exact from it the certainty of having the faith, ere it did any of the plain things which it had been bidden do.

But this is just the preposterous thing done by our speculatists and our system-framers in theology, to the man who, under the first

invitations of religious earnestness, may be said to be yet in the infancy of his religious course. Instead of being plied with the broadly and conspicuously objective, he is perplexed among the subjective intricacies of a mental and metaphysical process. The assurances of pardon, the calls of repentance are deafened, as it were, by immersion in the depth of inextricable subtleties; and between ministers and hearers, so great is the bewilderment as to verify the observation I have heard from my departed friend, Robert Hall—that the majority of evangelical ministers knew not how to lay down the gospel, so as that a man of plain and ordinary understanding should know how to take it up.

We now proceed to the other check which a misconceived or misapplied orthodoxy lays upon instant obedience: and that is the dread of legality which it has inspired. Men have been so much told of the danger of self-righteousness, that, lest they should incur it, they are fearful of putting their hand to any work of righteousness at all. Men have been told so strenuously, that to seek a justification by works is the high road to perdition, that they are positively afraid of works altogether. To disentangle this perplexity, we ought ever to recollect, that a sense of the necessity of good works and a sense of their merit are in no way necessarily associated. It is hard, indeed, that, as if wire-bound, we must not move a footstep in executing the plain directions of the gospel, because legality may chance to found a claim upon them.

It is with the greatest satisfaction and pleasure that I observe a confirmation of these views in the following sentences from Jonathan Edwards:—"It is quite a wrong notion that some entertain, that the more they do the more they shall depend on it; whereas the reverse is true—the more they do, or the more thorough they are in seeking, the less will they be likely to rest in their doings, and the sooner will they see the vanity of all that they do. So that persons will exceedingly miss, if ever they neglect to do any duty either to God or man, whether it be any duty of religion, justice, or charity, under the notion of its exposing them to trust in their own righteousness. It is very true that it is a common thing for persons, when they seek salvation, to trust in the pains they take; but yet, commonly, those that go on in a more slight way, trust a great deal more securely to their outward services than he that is pressing into the kingdom of God does to his earnestness."

Amyraldism

James MacGregor

The Question of Principle Now Raised in the Free Church Specially Regarding the Atonement, Edinburgh 1870.

FIRST, WHAT IS THE MATTER REALLY IN QUESTION? The circumstance which has occasioned the raising of a question here is, that within recent memory there was a controversy about the Atonement in one branch of what now is the United Presbyterian Church; and that in view of that controversy there is a reasonable doubt, whether the United Presbyterian Church is now completely at one with ours with reference to the Atonement. The controversy, while it lasted (1840–1845), appeared to disclose the existence in the United Secession Church of two schools of theological opinion regarding this matter, whose views were seriously antagonistic. The controversy issued in the granting (in 1845), by that Church, of a virtual toleration in her pulpit to those views of the new school which had been denounced by the other party as opposed to the Westminster Confession and the Word of God. In 1847, the United Secession Church became incorporated with the Relief Church as the United Presbyterian Church, without having in any way withdrawn that virtual toleration to those views. And in view of those facts of public history, there is a reasonable doubt regarding the matter of Atonement, whether the United Presbyterian Church is manifestly at one with ours, sufficiently for the purpose of incorporating Union. And it is this occasion of the question that gives the clue for discovering what, precisely, is the matter really in question.

The Committee's Report, by quoting statements of the Confession regarding all the five "points" of the Calvinistic scheme of doctrine, may tend to suggest the impression that the matter in question is *Arminianism* or *Pelagianism*, or some doctrine plainly *anti-Calvinistic*. If, then, all the Churches be found cordially accepting all the five Calvinistic points, those who here are influenced only by the Committee's Report may imagine that all reasonable doubt as to the unity of the Churches' mind is now of course at an end. But this imagination will be a mistake. To

direct the mind merely to the Calvinistic points is to lead it away to matters regarding which there never has been a reasonable doubt, and lead it away from the one only matter about which there has been and is a reasonable doubt. For, when we follow up the clue furnished by that occasion of the question, we shall find that the matter, the only matter, really in question here is, not Arminianism, and much less Pelagianism, but what, for brevity's sake, I shall call *Amyraldism*.

Amyraldism is a convenient designation for a phase of theological opinion which has repeatedly appeared in the bosom of the Reformed or Calvinistic Church; first in the French Reformed Church two hundred years ago, and more recently in the United Secession Church in Scotland within the memory of this generation. And although the present question has reference only to our new Scotland, yet for illustration of the question it may be profitable to look to old France—after the example of the Committees, which, it appears, have considered these matters “in the full and free light of ecclesiastical controversies, ancient and modern, foreign and domestic.”

As soon as we look at this phase of opinion, “in the full and free light of ecclesiastical controversies,” we become aware that to direct the mind to Arminianism, Pelagianism, or anything directly *anti*-Calvinistic, is to turn it away from at least Amyraldism. For Amyraldism is at no point directly anti-Calvinistic. It does not presuppose a rejection of Calvinism at any point. On the contrary it presupposes an acceptance of Calvinism at the points on which it touches. The points on which it touches are, election and redemption or atonement. With reference to these points, it affirms the Calvinistic particularism—particular election of God's love, and particular redemption by Christ's death. It thus is not directly anti-Calvinistic: no one but a Calvinist *can* be an Amyraldian. But—and this is the distinguishing characteristic of Amyraldism—while holding the Calvinistic particularism, of election and redemption, it holds, *in combination with* this Calvinistic particularism of both, an *un*-Calvinistic (not directly *anti*-Calvinistic) universalism of both or of either.

Amyrald, for instance, was avowedly a Calvinist. He—along with Testard—was repeatedly absolved by the National Synod of his Church (1637–1645), on the ground that he had not directly impugned any one of the five Calvinistic points as set forth by the Synod of Dordt. But, in combination with the Calvinistic particularism, he held an *un*-Calvinistic universalism. Thus, with reference to election, he did not deny that there

is a special purpose of God, to save a definite number of lost men, which infallibly determines the actual salvation of them all. But he affirmed that there is, besides, a more general saving purpose, intention, or desire of God, having reference to all men, which does not determine the actual salvation of any one, but which puts it in the minister's power to say with truth to every one, "God loves *thee*, or desires to save thee." In conversation with Romanists he had been confronted with the difficulty which we all must have felt in harmonising, if we have attempted to harmonise, the Calvinistic particularism of election with the Scripture universalism of the gospel call; or the fact that God has chosen only some men to salvation with the fact that He sincerely invites all men to believe and be saved. And, without abandoning his professed belief in that particularism, he sought a solution of the difficulty in the doctrine of an un-Calvinistic universalism as now explained—a doctrine which he found in the writings of Cameron his master. But so far was he from regarding this doctrine as directly anti-Calvinistic, that he and his school would not so much as admit they held a new substantive doctrine at all. What they had devised, they maintained, was, rather, merely a new method of dealing with sinners about the gospel call. And hence the name of Methodists, by which they chose to be known.

The inward occasion of the reappearance of Amyraldism in Scotland may, perhaps, have been that same painful feeling of difficulty, referred to as having partly occasioned the rise of the new method or doctrine in France. A disciple of the new school once said to me—"What I want is, to be able to say to every sinner, Christ died for *thee*." And if he meant by this to assign to the dying Christ any *purpose, intention, or desire* to save every sinner of mankind, then his *formula* was, in meaning, precisely coincident with Amyrald's "God loves *thee*, or desires to save thee." For in all the relative controversies, "ancient and modern, foreign and domestic," the matter in question has always been the objective *destination* of salvation to men, or of men to salvation; and it does not affect the question whether we regard the destination as eternally existing in the divine decree of election, or whether we regard it as existing in the mind of God incarnate on the cross, in His execution of that decree in time. In both aspects it occasions precisely the same difficulty with reference to the universal Gospel call:—how can this be consistent with a limited destination? And it is certain that, as in old France, so in new

Scotland, the new school of opinion, if not originating in the attempt to solve that difficulty about the gospel call, has at least claimed, as one great advantage on its side, to have found a solution of the difficulty.

While in speculative France the subject—of destination—was discussed in connection with election as well as redemption, in practical Scotland it was discussed almost exclusively in that relation in which it comes most directly home to men's business and bosoms—i.e., in its connection with the death of Christ. In Scotland, too, the new school was not *anti-Calvinistic* at any point. The only individuals among them found anti-Calvinistic at any point were expelled from the ministry. The disciples of the new school were thus honourably faithful, in somewhat tempting circumstances, to the Calvinistic particularism of redemption by Christ's death; or to the doctrine that Christ in dying was giving His life with a view to the salvation of a definite number of lost men, and that the intended effect of His dying for *them* was infallibly to secure, by purchase, the salvation of them all. But, as in Amyrald's case, so in theirs. Along with that Calvinistic particularism they contended for an un-Calvinistic (not directly anti-Calvinistic) universalism.

Some of the new school did not manifestly differ from the old: so far as they were concerned, the controversy may have been a logomachy—e.g., Dr Heugh, of Glasgow, in his speech at the Synod meeting, 1845, said that—"He understood by this general relation no more than he had preached since he had preached at all—that the Atonement of the Saviour was sufficient for all, suited to all, and free to all." Regarding some, it is extremely difficult to determine what they really meant to affirm; and not unlikely that they themselves had no clear consciousness of a definite meaning in their utterances. The difficulty is augmented by the ambiguity of the expression, then much in vogue, a "two-fold reference" of the Atonement. But a judicial consideration of the surviving records of the controversy will result in the conclusion of Principal Cunningham—*clarum et venerabile nomen*—that the doctrine of the new school, so far as it was a new school, was in substance Amyraldian. And I think that the expression that most fairly defines the theological position of the school, so far as really new, is one that was employed to define it at the time, although it came to be repudiated by members of the school when contending for the thing expressed—viz., a "two-fold substitution" of Christ for sinners in His death. It was not denied that

Christ in dying was in a special way the substitute of the elect—that the offering of His life was strictly the payment of the ransom price of theirs, and as such infallibly secured by purchase the salvation of them all. But it was affirmed that there was, besides, a more general substitution of Christ for all men, which has not secured by purchase the salvation of any one, but which puts it in a minister's power to say with truth to every sinner, "Christ died for *thee*."

In illustration of the view I have given of their opinion, I here make some extracts, which I have collected from the published Report of that discussion, of Synod 1845, in which the controversy came to a climax. As to the view really held by the school, the following may be regarded as decisive:—"That the death of Christ is a satisfaction, or atonement for all; that is, a universal atonement, expiation, or ransom."—Balmer's Statement, quoted by Hay, p. 12. Hay's own representation of the new school view is condensed in the expression, "double suretyship" (p. 17), and expanded in the sentences (10–12), of which the following are fragments:—"That Christ had made satisfaction for all men; . . . that Christ had made an atonement for all men. . . . He now found that the doctrine of a general reference of the Atonement was neither more nor less than this, that Christ died for all men."

After the Morrisons and other anti-Calvinists were expelled, the personal interest of the controversy was concentrated on the case of the two professors, Brown and Balmer, regarding which I here transcribe some notes which I find among my papers. They had been suspected of Morrisonianism. They therefore made their Statements to the Synod of 1843, in which they declared for the special substitution. But they were still accused of having, even in those Statements, declared for a general substitution. Balmer's Statement (e.g. as quoted above, at second hand from Dr Hay), is perfectly clear and conclusive against him. Brown's *expressions* were more guarded. And he may never, with full and clear consciousness, have embraced the doctrine of the new school. But the reading of Dr Cairns' Life of him has left on my mind a decided impression that he was in the groove of Amyraldism.

The resolution of Synod (1843), on the back of those Statements, expressed delighted satisfaction; and declared (1) unmistakably for particular redemption, but (2) vaguely and ambiguously with reference to the general aspects of redemption. This gave so little satisfaction to

the Church (United Secession), that in 1845 there came up *forty-seven* memorials, petitioning the Synod to rescind the resolution of 1843. The rescission was refused by a majority of Synod, many of the ministers formally dissenting from its finding. And the only satisfaction given to these was in an expression, thrown into the answers to their Reasons of Dissent, affirming the “exclusive suretyship” of Christ, i. e., His being the surety only of the elect.

The Reasons of Dissent contained the following quotation from the *Testimony of the General Associate Synod*, 1804:—“We assert and declare that Christ died for the elect, and for them only. The death of Christ, possessing infinite merit, is, indeed, in itself sufficient for the redemption of all mankind. But in respect of the Father’s assignation, and His own intention, He died only for the elect. . . . All for whom Christ died shall infallibly be saved. . . . We therefore condemn, and testify against, the following error, . . . that Christ died in some sense for all men.” A curiously ambiguous sentence in the *Testimony* of 1830 is said to have been inserted at the instance of Dr (then Mr) John Brown.

So far my notes under this first head. They are intended to show that the only matter in question, the only matter, that is, in connection with which there is any reasonable doubt, whether the Churches are at one, is Amyraldism, particularly in the form of a doctrine of universal redemption or “two-fold substitution.” While this has been their leading intention, they have been intended at the same time, with a view to facilitate inquiry under the following heads, to show what, precisely, that Amyraldism is and is not. And, unless the representation have been an utter failure, it has already appeared from these notes that a most effective method of *preventing* real inquiry into the one only matter here in question would be, to lead the Church away on a wild-goose chase, after everything or nothing, over the whole domain of the doctrine of Grace.

2nd, What is the real question about this matter?

There is a theological question, that has been frequently touched on since the beginning of the Union movements, regarding which I feel disposed to make a statement at this stage of my speech. And yet I am hampered by a fear that the introduction of that statement here may be a contribution from me towards leading the Church courts away from the real question; while I am earnestly persuaded that, for them to be

led away in any way from rigorous judicial consideration of that real question would be a serious calamity to the Church. I therefore shall compromise the matter by making the statement, but at the same time formally protesting that it is not regarding the real question. And perhaps it may be found that this ostensibly irrelevant statement shall, apart from its intrinsic merit or demerit as a contribution to Christian theology, do some service by adding to the intelligent interest of readers in the real question of principle about this matter now before our courts.

I. A question which is *not* the real question. The question which, under this self-condemnatory description, I propose to discuss here is this:—Does Amyraldism (or self-styled Methodism) really give such a solution of the difficulty, in connection with particular election and redemption, as will give it a title to the favour of men who are seriously Calvinistic in their views? To this question I answer, No:—it removes no real obstacle from the sinner's way to lost life in God, but really interposes obstacles in his way. And the ground on which I answer this is exhibited in the following notes:—

It *removes* no real obstacle. Amyraldism, with its *un-Calvinistic* universalism, occasioned, both in France and Scotland, a full and explicit recognition on the part of old-school Calvinists of what I shall call *the true Calvinistic universalism*. And this true Calvinistic universalism shows that no obstacles really are removed by Amyraldism. For the true Calvinistic universalism extends to the following details:—

First, *The Gospel Offer and Call*, addressed to all sinners of mankind. *How* a sincere invitation to all men can be harmonized with the doctrine or fact of the election and redemption only of some men, Calvinists of the old school do not pretend to explain; just as neither old school nor new pretend to explain how God can seriously address the Ten Commandments to all men, while only to some men he has resolved to give the power to obey them. But old school men and new, while confessedly unable to give a *rationale* or explanation of the fact, yet affirm the fact itself, that God is sincere in bidding all men obey the commandments of the Decalogue. And in like manner the old school men, though confessedly unable to give a *rationale* or explanation of the fact, yet affirm the fact itself, that God sincerely invites all sinners to believe and be saved. The perfect unanimity with which they affirmed this in the old time is significantly illustrated by our own Confession, in

not laying any stress on the fact, not making it the subject of a distinct chapter, article, or even sentence, but simply referring to it cursorily, in an utterance regarding the Covenant of Grace. The fact would certainly have been set forth more formally and prominently in our Confession if in the old time it had been seriously questioned by any noteworthy party among Calvinists; if, for instance, any noteworthy party among them had been of the same mind as Andrew Fuller's first congregation in our new time, who would have him to preach the gospel only to the elect, and would fain have prevented him from addressing to the unconverted its gracious offers of salvation. The manner in which the fact appears in our Confession really shows that, to the apprehension of the Confessors, the fact was in their old time an undisputed commonplace. And certainly the fact has not been disputed, either in France or in Scotland, by those Calvinists of the old school with whom the Amyraldians have had to do. The most thorough-going old-school Calvinist in Scotland at this hour is as faithful in offering free salvation to all men as any Amyraldian in Scotland can be.

Second, A *Divine complacency* in man's well-being and well-doing. While persistently maintaining that there is no such thing in God as a saving purpose, intention, or desire, that does not infallibly determine salvation, the old school maintain also that there is in His nature a certain complacency or delight in man's holiness and happiness; such that He is really pleased when men obey His law, and really displeased when they obey not; and that He sincerely mourns over the misery of the unbelieving impenitent as lost, while sincerely rejoicing over the blessedness of penitent believers as saved. They affirm that this complacency, inherent in God's nature, is most wondrously illustrated in the great work of His redeeming grace, and ought to be set forth as a motive and encouragement to saving faith. And they affirm, besides, that it presents the same aspect of motive and encouragement to faith towards all unconverted men alike, without any discrimination of elect from non-elect.

Third, Certain *aspects of redemption*, as achieved in Christ's death. While persistently maintaining that there is no real substitution or suretyship of Christ but for the elect, the old school have affirmed that God's redeeming grace in Christ has certain aspects towards all men indiscriminately. Thus, for instance, it secures to them all a

season of suspended judgment and offered mercy. Again, it provides an inexhaustible fulness of saving merit, or power of right amply sufficient in itself for the salvation of all men. And, once more, in the great atoning sacrifice it gives an open way, by which God comes with free salvation to men, and all men are freely invited to go for that free salvation to God. These three general aspects of redemption have been recognised by the old school of Calvinists both in Scotland and in France. But there are points in this connexion on which I must make episodal notes:—

As to the *connexion* of all-sufficiency of grace with the universalism of the gospel offer. Regarding the *nature* of that connexion, there has been some disagreement, at least in words. Some have spoken of the all-sufficiency as being a basis of the offer, in the sense of constituting a *warrant* to sinners in the appropriation of Christ, or to ministers in their invitation to sinners. But this way of speaking has been objected to—in my estimation, justly—as untruthful, dishonouring to God, and fitted to encourage delusive hopes in men. The fact of there being abundant provision in a certain house does not warrant a hungry stranger in entering and feasting. That abundance can of itself serve only as a *motive* to enter, or *encouragement* to enter. It cannot of itself really serve as a *warrant*, in the proper sense of this term. The only thing that can really serve as a true warrant is an invitation or permission from the owner of the house. In like manner, we say, the all-sufficiency of grace in Christ does not of itself constitute a true warrant to us, who “were afar off,” in taking Him and His riches of grace to ourselves. Our only true warrant in this act of faith, the minister’s only true warrant in inviting us to faith, is the permission or invitation of God in His Word. It is only from this Word that we can know it is His will that all sinners of mankind should receive for salvation His riches of grace in Christ. And, having this true warrant in the Word, the express declaration of His will, what we have in the all-sufficiency of that grace is not, properly, a supplementary warrant, but only a motive to faith or encouragement in believing. Otherwise, *the invitation shall no longer, on God’s part, be free and sovereign*; but constrained, or of necessity, necessity consequent on the death of Christ. And the foolish virgins shall find in eternity that “the door was *not* shut.” For if the door be now kept open by any necessity consequent on the death of Christ, and not solely by the free sovereign pleasure of God, it will follow that it must remain open for ever and ever; because

all through eternity it shall remain a fact that Christ has died, and has achieved an infinite fulness of merit by His obedience unto death. But, on the other hand, if in eternity the door be shut by the free sovereign pleasure of God, it will follow that there is no such thing as a necessity to keep it open consequent on the death of Christ, and that it is only God's free and sovereign pleasure that now has opened it in time, and keeps it open through time. This question, however, about the precise *nature* of the connexion between full sufficiency and free invitation is not, properly speaking, a question between Amyraldism and old-school Calvinism, but one that has been discussed among old-school Calvinists themselves, and regarding which they can afford to agree to differ.

These episodal notes I shall now follow up by a digression, in the form of a practical remark. Calvinism is not constituted merely by the five Calvinistic "points." The "points" in the system are only as bones, by which the fair living body of truth is kept from collapsing into a mere chaotic mud-heap. And the flesh and blood, and blooming beauty, of that fair living body cannot be exhibited nor seen apart from those things I now have enumerated under the description of the true Calvinistic universalism. Those things, therefore, in order that men may be drawn as "with the cords of a man," must shine on the forefront of all our preaching. To set forth the "points" *so as* to hide those things from view, would be to present to men's embrace a frightful skeleton—nothing but bones—instead of the fair living body of truth divine. It may be that some old-school Calvinists in France or Scotland, or both, though theoretically recognising the humaner aspects of the truth, were yet in their practical teaching too exclusive in presentation of the "points"; and that the new movement in both countries may have owed its origin, or force, in some measure, to a recoil of humanity from the ghastly caricature—nothing but bones—thus pressed on its embrace. And certainly if we, in our practical teaching, so caricature our grand Calvinistic system that it shall appear to be all "points," nothing but bones, there will be a recoil of humanity from our teaching; and the recoil thus provoked may result, in our day, in something far more formidable than mere Amyraldism.

Returning, now, from both digression and episode, I recall attention to that from which I started, viz., the proposition that Amyraldism, both in France and in Scotland, occasioned a full recognition, by old-school

Calvinists, of what I have described as the true Calvinistic universalism. When the old-school Calvinism had in this way exhibited its own true nature, Amyraldism was thenceforward manifestly shorn of a large part of its argumentative strength. For a very large part of what has been advanced ostensibly in support of an un-Calvinistic universalism is really relevant only to the maintenance of *that* universalism which has always been cordially owned by the old school. Thus far, therefore, Amyraldism has really done nothing towards smoothing the sinner's way to salvation in Christ; for thus far, (i.e., in all that can be truly said in support of a *bona-fide* gospel call to all sinners, a divine complacency in man's well-being and well-doing, and *some* general aspects of redemption), thus far Amyraldism has not originated any thing new or peculiar, but merely given new emphasis to some commonplaces of the Calvinism of the old school.

At the same time, the new school came into peril of losing not a few of its disciples. For many of these, it may be presumed, had been influenced in joining the movement by an anxious desire to vindicate those common-places; and these would find, as soon as the old-school Calvinism had explained itself, that for the vindication of those common-places there is no need of a new school:—Thus one of them once said to me, after I had read in his hearing a paper on the subject, "I prefer your old-school Calvinism to our loose new schoolism." And when the old school had, by explaining itself, reclaimed its own common-places, the *residuum*, Amyraldism pure and simple, stripped of popular irrelevancies, presented certain aspects which might well dispose sober-minded men among its adherents to reconsider their position of adherence to it.

The more malignant aspects of Amyraldism are as follows:—

First, The notion of any saving purpose of God that does not infallibly determine salvation; or, in other words, of a frustrated intention or disappointed desire, of His; this notion is not only on the face of it unscriptural, but in the heart of it offensive even to our natural reason, because inconsistent with the very nature and perfections of Deity. Nor does the notion gain anything, in respect of spiritual seemliness, when transferred from God's eternal decree to the execution of that decree in time on the cross. For the notion of any substitution of Christ that does not infallibly secure by purchase the salvation of all for whom He died, is deeply dishonouring to the person and work of the adorable Substitute.

Again, The two notions alike (or the notion in its two applications alike), must, where seriously entertained, tend to undermine the believer's assurance of hope. For that assurance is ultimately founded on the truth, that all God's purposes are unchanging and effectual, and that no sinner can ever perish for whom Christ gave His life on the cross. The assurance, therefore, is fatally undermined by the notion, that there is a changeable or ineffectual purpose of God, and that many of those for whom Christ gave His life shall nevertheless fall into death eternal.

Once more, The two notions alike (or the notion in its two applications alike), must tend, where seriously entertained, to prevent unbelievers from coming to God in "full assurance of faith." It is at this third point that Amyraldians deem themselves strongest. Hence, as I have said, in France they assumed the name of *Methodists*, under the impression that their doctrine constitutes a method or way, more excellent than had previously been known among Calvinists, of leading sinners to salvation through faith, and particularly of helping them over the difficulty, already referred to, in the way of believing. And it is at this point—their strongest—that I find them weakest.

Their doctrine here not only gives no real solution of the difficulty it professes to solve, but really tends rather, by creating new difficulty, to harden men in unbelief instead of winning them to faith. For, while presenting to men's eye a delusion and a snare, it diverts their attention from the one revealed way of life and peace. It thus is fitted to make sceptics rather than believers. Such is my finding, the result of much study of the subject, most of which had no regard to the Union question. And the grounds of this finding may be conveniently set forth in the form of the following *apostrophe*, to an imagined brother minister of the Amyraldian way of thinking:—

Your notion of a general purpose of God (as distinguished from that special purpose about which you and I are agreed), permits you, you tell me, to say to every sinner, "God loves *thee*, or intends or desires to save thee." But at the same time it binds you, if you will be in this matter an honest man, to go on to say, further:—"Yet, I cannot tell thee whether He loves thee *so as* to secure thy salvation, or *so that*, once knowing that He loves thee, thou shalt know at the same time that thy salvation is infallibly secure. For aught that I can tell thee, regarding what I call His love to thee, He may have sovereignly ordained thee to thy deserved doom of everlasting death."

Your notion, again, of a general substitution of Christ in His death (as distinguished from that special substitution regarding which you and I are agreed), enables you, you tell me, to say to every sinner, “Christ died for *thee*.” But at the same time it binds you in Christian honour to add:—“Nevertheless, I cannot tell thee whether He has or has not really redeemed thy soul from death. If thou believe not now, thou art under condemnation now:—the clouds of God’s wrath brood over thee unremoved; the lightning curses of His law pursue thee through life; and, though Christ have in some sense died for thee, yet, for aught that I can tell, He may, even in dying, have been purposely leaving thee to death eternal.”

To an awakened lost soul, what is this boasted *method* of yours but a manifest delusion, and snare, presenting a mocking *mirage*, instead of true water of life; having a word of promise to the ear, which is broken to the hope and faith. And while the lost soul’s attention is thus drawn away by your doctrine to treacherous sinking sands, at the same time it is drawn away *from* the one solid Rock, the true way of life, as set forth in the old unambiguous language of Canaan. That language runs thus :—

“I cannot tell thee whether God loves thee as He loves His own, nor whether Christ has died for thee, as He surely has died for all the elect: that can be known to men only when Christ lives in thee, and thou lovest God and man. Nor can I explain to thee *how* the free invitation of the gracious gospel to all may be harmonized with the sovereign particularism of grace in election and redemption. There is a mystery here too vast for my narrow and shallow comprehension. Here I have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. But this I can tell thee, for this is what God has told me in His word:—His love, with which He loves His own, is freely offered to thee as thy life. The all-sufficient fulness of His Christ is freely offered to thee as a ‘way’ to life in His love. The bosom of that love which is life is wide open to thee as the sky. The arms of that love are stretched out far to thee from the cross. The voice of that love cries, Come, to thee, in the Spirit, through the Bride. And if only thou hear, thy soul shall live. Only give thyself over, a lost sinner, into the arms and bosom of that freely-offered love, and that love of God shall be thy portion, and the righteousness of Christ shall be thy white raiment, and the Spirit of Christ shall be thy new and true life, and thou shalt be saved, for ever and ever.”

So speaks the Calvinism of the old school,—“upright, downright, and straightforward.” The practical tendency of its clear-ringing utterances has been shown, through many ages and lands, in the conversion of myriads of sinners to God, as well as in a peculiarly deep and strong establishment of believers in their faith and hope. In order to be accepted and loved by all true children of God on earth, as it is accepted and loved by all His children in heaven, it needs only to be known and understood by His children on earth as it is known and understood by His children in heaven—who know nothing of an ineffectual purpose of God, or of a substitution of Christ that does not infallibly secure salvation by purchase: (Witness their songs in the Apocalypse.) And thus, for the prevention or cure of Amyraldism, we should prescribe an intelligent appreciation of that old-school Calvinism on which it professes to be an improvement: believing that in this case the principle applies—“No man, having tasted old wine, straightway desireth new; for he saith, The old is better.”

How far such considerations on second thought have influenced the new school, it is not easy to judge with confidence. Amyrald, it appears, after the first heat of controversy was past, refrained in his later years from harping on Amyraldism, having found it, perhaps, to be at best a theological “mare’s nest.” But in other cases in France, it unhappily appeared that Amyraldism was only the first step towards Arminianism or Socinianism. In Scotland, on the other hand, while a few of the early leaders went off into Arminianism, and were consequently expelled from their Church, with the school as a whole, once the new doctrine was fairly articulated, the tide appears to have turned; so that it may now be hopefully inquired whether the surviving members of it have not in substance resumed the position of the old school, though still retaining in some cases an un-Calvinistic form of expression. And, generalising from history and from the nature of the thing, we may speak of Amyraldism thus:—It is not a system on which any community can long repose in stable equilibrium. It represents a condition of unstable equilibrium. Any community that once has embraced it will soon be found moving away from it, either up and back towards Calvinism of the old school, or down and forward towards Arminianism or worse. And the direction of this ulterior movement, upward or downward, will depend, under God, on the general condition, intellectual and spiritual, of the mind of that community in which it takes place.

2. *The real question* here is, whether, with reference to the matter in question, the *Churches* have been *shewn* to be sufficiently at one.

There is much reason to believe that Amyraldism is excluded from the pulpit of our Free Church by her law; or, in other words, that it is condemned, expressly and directly, by the Westminster Confession.

What, then, we inquire, is the doctrine of the Confession here? It has been said in this connection, that the Confession speaks only to the positive Calvinistic “points,” or the aspects of sovereign grace towards the elect, and leaves quite undetermined all questions about possible further aspects of that grace, or possible aspects of it towards the non-elect. And this opinion may appear to receive some colour of antecedent probability from the circumstance that, at the time when the Confession was being written, Amyraldism had not yet invaded Britain in any appreciable force. So late as the time of the Revolution, Louis du Moulin, in a Latin pamphlet on the subject published at London, could name no noteworthy British Calvinist, among Non-conformists, by whom the new doctrine had been publicly embraced, excepting the multifarious Richard Baxter.

But, *per contra*, with reference to antecedent probability, I make the following statement:—The authors of the Confession were bound, in terms of the Solemn League and Covenant, to have due regard, in their whole work of reconstruction, to the example of the “best Reformed Churches.” Their eyes were thus directed to the Continent. And on the Continent, for years before the Westminster divines assembled, the Amyraldian controversy had been raging in the Reformed Church of France, so as to elicit public letters to her of inquiry and warning from the Reformed Churches of Holland and Switzerland. And it is antecedently most improbable that those divines should, in their Confession, have ignored a grave theological controversy, ostensibly affecting the vitals of the faith, which was then convulsing the Calvinistic world before their eyes; and which, as will be remembered by readers of Baillie’s *Letters*, was at the time a matter of grave solicitude to their minds and their hearts.

The inference suggested by antecedent probability is corroborated by authorities deservedly high in repute. Of these I shall here cite only two, from very opposite quarters. On the one hand, Daillè, the great advocate of Amyraldism, in his *Apologia pro Duabus Synodis* (A.D. 1655), by far the greatest work in defence of that system, shows very significantly that, in

his estimation, the Westminster Confession does not leave the question of Amyraldism open. He manages to fill a whole volume with what he regards as testimonies in favour of Amyraldism from all sorts of leading Calvinistic works, from the Synod of Dordt back to the Reformation, and far back beyond the Reformation, including even the utterances of Dordt Synod itself! But he does not venture to quote so much as one word from the Westminster Standards. On the other hand, I refer to Dr Cunningham, incomparably the greatest authority in such a case as this,—regarding the meaning of the Westminster Confession in its relative utterances,—that ever has pronounced a judgment in such a case. I have already referred to his having said, in the deliberate and judicial utterances of his *Historical Theology*, that the characteristic opinion of the new school in the United Secession Church was coincident in substance with that of Amyrald and his school. I now refer to his view of the relative teaching of the Westminster Confession. And I record the fact, patent to any reader of his *Historical Theology*, that in Dr Cunningham's estimation the universalism now in question, so far from being left open by the Confession, is condemned by the Confession, formally and expressly, not only once, but again, and again, and again; and that Dr Cunningham not only says this, but in his own estimation proves it, from the relative utterances of the Confession.

The following statements of the Confession are to the point:—

“III. 6. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, *they who are elected*, being fallen in Adam, are *redeemed by Christ*; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation. *Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.*

“VIII. 5. The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He, through the Eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father, and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven *for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.*

“8. *To all those for whom Christ hath purchased salvation, He doth certainly apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them, &c.*

“XI. 4. God did, from all eternity, decree to justify *all the elect*; and Christ did in the fulness of times die for *their* sins, and rose again for *their* justification.” (The italics in this and the preceding statements are mine.)

The statements themselves, duly regarded in the light of the circumstances in which they were prepared, are manifestly fitted, and presumably intended, to condemn *every* sort of un-Calvinistic universalism, Amyraldian as well as Arminian. They appear, at least, to be intended to express, among other things, what is expressed in the following statement of the *Consensus Helveticus*—a document prepared (A.D. 1676) for the avowed purpose of condemning Amyraldism:—“Accordingly, in the death of Christ, only the elect, who in time are made new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), and for whom Christ in His death was substituted as an expiatory sacrifice, are regarded as having died with Him, and as being justified from sin; and thus, with the counsel of the Father, who gave to Christ none but the elect to be redeemed, and also with the working of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies and seals unto a living hope of life eternal none but the elect, the will of Christ, who died, so agrees and conspires in perfect harmony, that the sphere of election by the Father, redemption by the Son, and sanctification by the Spirit, one and the same.”—(Canon 13, quoted by Hodge, on the Atonement, pp. 365–366.)

Dr Cunningham contends that this view of the matter results inevitably even from the one statement (VIII.8):—“To all those for whom Christ hath purchased salvation, He doth infallibly apply and communicate the same.” And that the matter has always been thus understood in our national Church, except where there have been circumstances obviously tending to bias the judgment, may appear from the following note:—

There is no good reason to believe that, prior to the rise of that new school in the United Secession Church, an un-Calvinistic universalism was ever embraced by any party of Calvinists in Scotland. It has been said in this connection, that the new school only revived a doctrine that had previously been promulgated by the “Marrow” divines, including the first fathers of the Secession. This has been said so often and so confidently that some may regard it as matter of course. But in fact it is demonstrably the opposite of the truth. From those divines it would be easy to produce statements in favour of *some* sort of universalism,

and in this way to show that they were Amyraldians;—the same way in which Dallaeus could show, to his own satisfaction, that all Calvinists before Amyrald were Amyraldians. But the question here is, whether they deliberately contended for an *un-Calvinistic* universalism. And to this question it happens that they, with full and clear consciousness, have unmistakably answered for themselves.

The answer is such as might have been expected from their *general* relation, of antagonism, to Baxterianism. Their adversaries, such as Principal Hadow, accused them, on account of certain statements in the *Marrow*, of holding an un-Calvinistic universalism of redemption. Those statements of the *Marrow* have certainly at first sight an Amyraldian complexion: such, for instance, as the statement, addressed to the unconverted sinner, “Christ died *for you*.” But the “Marrow” divines with one consent repelled the accusation as a calumny. They endeavoured to explain those statements of the “Marrow” in a strictly Calvinistic sense: for instance, they explained the statement, “Christ died for you,” as meaning simply, “Christ is dead *for you to come to*,” if you will. The repudiation and explanation are recorded in Boston’s Notes on the *Marrow*; in Riccaltoun’s *Sober Inquiry*; and, *instar omnium* in this connection, in the famous doctrinal manifesto of the Secession fathers (A.D. 1742), their “Act Anent the Doctrine of Grace.” The value of their explanations, as an exposition of the *Marrow*, is a matter of no consequence to us here and now. The matter of real consequence here and now is the fact that, in addition to a general repudiation of un-Calvinistic universalism of redemption, they gave such explanations of the detailed statements of that book as would never have been given by any but Calvinists of the old school. And this is perfectly in keeping with the strain of their statements when the case of the *Marrow* was before the Church Courts. (For which see Brown of Whitburn’s *Gospel Truth*.) I do not see how any clear-thinking man, who fairly considers their statements *to the point*, can fail to embrace as the only tenable conclusion, that those fathers did not hold any really un-Calvinistic universalism, and that the universalism they really held was only what we have described as true Calvinistic.

An *experimentum crucis* was furnished by the case of Mr Mair, one of those fathers. An overture from the Presbytery of Edinburgh had called the attention of their Synod of 1754 to a “matter of public notoriety, that

the Arminian Scheme of Universal Atonement and Redemption as to purchase was lately revived and industriously promoted, in somewhat of a new and ensnaring form.” Thereupon the Synod published an “Act concerning Arminian errors,” including a series of doctrinal articles, of which the following is one:—

“III. That there is but *one special redemption*, by the death of Christ, for all the objects thereof; as He died, in *one and the same respect*, for all those for whom He in *any respect* died: or, He died out of *the greatest special love* for all in whose room He laid down his life; with an intention of having *them all* effectually redeemed and saved, unto the glory of His grace.”

The italics here—which are not mine—are very significant. From those articles Mr Mair dissented, at first without reasons; but afterwards (1755), among other reasons, for the following, which was laid before the Synod by a Committee, in an extract from his reasons of dissent:—

“That, besides the special objective destination and intention of our Lord’s death, respecting the elect, there was some kind of general or universal objective destination and intention thereof in the transaction is of the New Covenant: That in some sense Christ was made sin for all the hearers of the gospel, and made satisfaction for the sins of all those to whom he is exhibited by the gospel; yea, that in some sense Christ died for all mankind, or shed His blood for them—making a full payment of their debt, and a satisfaction to justice for their guilt, by some kind or manner of intention in His making satisfaction: And that this universal objective destination of the death of Christ necessarily belongs to the ground on which sinners may be invited to Christ; that an excluding all such concern in or claim to the death of Christ, as for the man in particular, until he believe, leaves no access for an applying faith: And that the purchase of Christ admits of a further and larger consideration than is treated of in our Standards.”

In affirming a “*special* objective destination and intention of our Lord’s death,” Mr Mair showed himself to be no mere Arminian. But in affirming, along with this, “some kind of *general* or universal objective destination thereof,” he showed himself to be an Amyraldian, precisely anticipating the leading position of the new school in the United Secession Church. And in maintaining that that universalism is necessary as a basis of the gospel offer, and that “the purchase of Christ

admits of a further and wider consideration than is treated of in our Standards," he anticipated, with curious precision, two of the most important subsidiary positions of that school. How, then, was he dealt with by his Church, which that school has in this matter professed to represent to our time?

"The Synod did strictly prohibit him from teaching or venting any tenets or opinions contrary to the articles of truth asserted in the Act of Synod dissented from; and particularly from venting or teaching the above and such other tenets or opinions which were evidently subversive of our received and sworn-to Standards of doctrine."

After two years of dealing with him, during which he proved invincibly firm in those "tenets or opinions," the Synod laid him under the censure of *deposition* and *lesser excommunication*. The preceding account of his case is derived from a *Display of the Secession Testimony*, by the master hand of Adam Gib (1774). The Secession fathers, it will be observed, condemn his doctrine as being "evidently subversive of our received and sworn-to Standards," so that *their* weighty testimony now falls to be added to what has already been said in support of the view, that Amyraldism is condemned by the Westminster Confession. And their deposition and excommunication of Mr Mair shows how far Amyraldism, or un-Calvinistic universalism, was from being embraced by the only school of Calvinists in Scotland by whom any one imagines that it ever was embraced previous to the rise, within our own memory, of the new school in the United Secession Church.

This historical fact may itself be regarded as a good reason why there should now be serious judicial consideration in our Church Courts with reference to the doctrinal matter in question. For it appears to show that any departure on our Church's part from her position, as maintaining the Calvinism of the old school, would be on her part a departure from the doctrinal type of the Reformation Church of Scotland. And, on the other hand, the fact that the Scottish Church, up to the rise of that new school within our memory, was uniformly of the old school when Calvinistic at all, is an additional presumptive evidence in favour of the view that the new-school doctrine is excluded from the pulpit of our Church by her law; or, in other words, is condemned by the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The Church in Relation to Its Constitution

Sherman Isbell

A CONSTITUTION IS THE BODY OF PRINCIPLES WHICH, by reason of their being assigned an elevated status, provide continuity in the government of a society. In the British context, civil constitutions are an accumulation through the centuries of royal concessions to Parliament, of common law residing in judicial decisions which provide an analogy for future judgments, of unwritten but universally recognized political precedents and conventions, and of parliamentary legislation. Access to a diffuse constitution of this kind is by way of numerous historical precedents and written documents, which either were an original sanction for certain rights and prerogatives, or else merely reflect, illustrate and expound what has been long-accepted practice.

The Church of Scotland's constitution follows a similar pattern, inasmuch as it embraces elements of pre-Reformation canon law such as the parochial system, centuries of legislation by the General Assembly, two sixteenth-century Books of Discipline, the seventeenth-century Westminster Standards, and finally, acts of Parliament which ratified the Established Church's prerogatives, patterns of government and theological beliefs.¹ All of this, with the exception of the civil statutes, became the constitutional heritage of those churches, such as the Free Church of Scotland, which originated as secessions from the Church of Scotland, when corruptions in the Established Church, or the intrusions of the civil magistrate into the scriptural prerogatives of the Established Church, prompted attempts to preserve within a separate ecclesiastical body the principles that hitherto had been upheld in the national church.²

We may consider three senses in which the Scottish Presbyterian tradition has employed the term *constitution*. George Gillespie, writing in 1641, frequently alludes to individual laws and regulations of the church as *constitutions*: "and if therefore all Christians are by the private judgment of Christian discretion...to try and examine all decrees and constitutions of any Synod whatsoever, to know whether they may lawfully receive

the same . . .”³ The same sense of the word is found in the Church of Scotland’s Barrier Act of 1697: “that before any General Assembly of this Church shall pass any acts, which are to be binding rules and constitutions to the Church. . . .”⁴ Alexander Henderson, also writing in 1641, uses the word to designate the characteristic form, composition and membership of the church’s superior courts: “The provincial Synod is of the same constitution with the Presbytery, and doth consist of all the Ministers, and one Elder having commission, as before, from each particular Church within the province.”⁵ From these and similar usages, the modern meaning of the term, signifying a body of fundamental principles with which all other legislation must harmonize, gradually emerged during the years between the Glorious Revolution of 1689 and and drafting of the U.S. Constitution in 1789.⁶ The Glorious Revolution, which secured a Protestant succession to the throne, and the Treaty of Union of 1707, which brought England and Scotland under a single parliament, provided the occasion for attempting a permanent settlement of controverted issues, by giving civil and ecclesiastical recognition to a stable body of fundamental law, elements of which were entrenched or inviolable.⁷

Thus, in 1690 and 1693, the monarchs and the Scottish Parliament ratified the Westminster Confession as the confession of the Established Church, together with the Presbyterian government of the church. In preparation for the Treaty of Union, the Scottish Parliament in 1707 passed an Act for Securing the Protestant Religion and the Presbyterian Church Government, which was to be incorporated into the Treaty, in order “that the true Protestant religion, as presently professed within this kingdom, with the worship, discipline, and government of this Church, should be effectually and inalterably secured.”⁸ In the same period, the General Assembly put in place the Barrier Act (1697), the questions and formula of subscription (1694 and 1711), legislation against innovations in worship (1707), and a codification of disciplinary process (1707), which continue to be prominent elements in the constitution of the Free Church of Scotland.⁹

The church’s warrant for assigning a regulative function to a body of fundamental law is analogous to the rationale for perpetuating subscription to a theological creed or confession, documents which indeed are an element in the church’s fundamental law. Inasmuch as Christ has instituted in the Scriptures a government for his church, and has

commissioned and authorized his church both to maintain instruction in the truths of his Word, and also to secure a rule among his people which will be faithful to biblical principles of righteousness, it is proper for the church's government to digest biblical doctrines and principles of righteousness, and to require that its office bearers commit themselves by vows to respect those constitutional standards.

There is no implication that the church is moving away from deference to Scripture when it adopts a set form of rules for the conduct of government and discipline. Such rules of procedure are no imposition on the Christian liberty of the members of the church, if those rules fairly apply biblical standards of equity and justice, for they do but call the people to obey the Word of God. Nor would there be stricter adherence to Scripture were the church to approach each judicial case by taking up at that moment a fresh examination of biblical principles, rather than by having recourse to a digest which had resulted from prior reflection on Scripture. Indeed, a form of process which is the product of generations of considered judgment, and which employs language tested on countless, varied occasions, represents a superior wisdom in striving to implement biblical principles.¹⁰

Settled rules give needed assurance concerning the character of the oversight which will be exercised by church rulers. Even as Reformed churches, by their adherence to theological confessions, disclose the doctrine that may be expected from their pulpits, so likewise their rulers will not ask for the submission of church members without regard to settled forms of procedure which are seen to embody biblical justice, and if the eldership refuse to uphold the rules they have advertised, they are not worthy of the confidence of church members. The people have a right to know how the church rulers will preserve access to due process, and to see their rulers making conscience of the vows they have taken to defer to the rule of law.

Archibald Bruce knew whereof he spoke when in 1808 he reflected on the necessity of safeguards against tyrannical conduct by church rulers: "All people who have been anxious to secure their liberties, against the inroads of arbitrary power, have settled a particular constitution of political government, with a system of known laws, and fixed rules for the administration of justice, especially in criminal causes, that the innocent may not be rashly condemned, and that the guilty may have a fair and

patient trial. It is no less necessary that the authority settled in the church, which is all of a subordinate and limited kind, should be duly guarded against despotic exertions, both by the restraints expressly imposed by the supreme authority and written laws of her divine Lord, and by approved forms and rules of government and discipline consonant thereto, agreed upon in churches. . . . Such public tests and rules should operate as checks or constitutional fences against the private views or pleasure of individual teachers, and particular acting judicatories; and they serve, like public laws in a state, to ascertain the rights and liberties of ministers and church members, in opposition to innovations, or the arbitrary exercise of power over them in the society. Hereby all may more readily perceive how far they are either bound to receive the doctrine of their teachers, or to submit to judicative or disciplinary sentences of church courts.”¹¹

The purpose, then, of a church constitution is to secure the position of certain doctrines and principles of just administration in the life of the church. The warrant for such a constitution is that, inasmuch as Christ has charged the eldership to hold fast the form of sound words and to commit the apostolic tradition to faithful men who will perpetuate it, it is morally proper for the church to require that its rulers give guarantees and pledges of their fidelity in adhering to the doctrine, worship and government held forth in the church’s subordinate standards (Heb. 6:16–17, 2 Cor. 1:23, Exod. 22:7–11, Westminster Confession XXII).

The church constitution, some of whose elements are frequently referred to as subordinate standards, is situated in a middle position between, on the one hand, the supreme authority of the Word of God, the truths of which the constitution professes to represent and guard, and, on the other hand, the inferior status of the church’s ongoing legislative acts, which, if they are to be competent, must be in accord with the constitution. The constitution, then, is a standard to which potential legislation must conform, but it is a standard which itself takes a subordinate and dependent stance in relation to Scripture.

The constitution, like the inferior legislation, is laid under the biblical requirement that the church may exhibit no other doctrine, form of worship, principle of church order, or rule for righteous living than those sanctioned in God’s Word. The restriction inherent in a closed canon of Scripture is reflected in the church’s confinement as to its doctrine and practice, for the Bible’s own rule is that authorization must be sought

within the text of Holy Scripture. The church's role is a limited one, administrative and ministerial, whose legislation is to be simply explanatory and expository of what Christ has already legislated in Scripture.¹² When the church departs from this divine ordinance, the conscience is not obligated by its decisions, for the church has stepped outside the bounds of its authority.¹³ But when the church is faithful in its assigned function, the actions it takes should receive the deference due to an ordinance of God for declaring and applying the truths of his Word.¹⁴

We should take note of a distinction between the principles of church order revealed by Christ in Scripture, and the expedient details by which a particular church chooses to carry out those directions.¹⁵ William Cunningham cautions that one should not claim that Scripture specifies the varying arrangements by which the fundamentals of Presbyterian government are to be implemented. Referring to the profession made in the ordination vow of ministers in the Free Church of Scotland, to the effect that "the Presbyterian government and discipline of this church are founded upon the word of God, and agreeable thereto," Cunningham observes that "The language here employed is cautious and temperate, and is thus well suited to the circumstances of a solemn profession to be made by a numerous body of men, who might not all see their way to concur in stronger and more specific phraseology. Besides, it is to be observed that the profession respects not merely the fundamentals or essentials of Presbyterianism in the abstract, which alone can be reasonably maintained to have the clear and positive sanction of apostolic practice; but 'the Presbyterian government and discipline of this church,' including the detailed development of the essential principles of Presbyterianism as exhibited in the actual constitution and arrangements of our church, and of all this in the concrete, or taken complexly, nothing higher or stronger could with propriety be affirmed, than that it is founded upon the word of God, and agreeable thereto."¹⁶

A church constitution, therefore, sets forth an agreed interpretation of Scripture regarding critical matters that need to be settled in order to have stability in the communion and government of the church. This consensus about doctrine and practice enables collective labor by the eldership, gives assurance to the members of the church as to what can be expected in the teaching, worship and discipline administered by the eldership, and provides an instrument for perpetuating the church's adherence

to a set of principles. The constitution lays a foundation, securing the church's posture on a range of issues, and appointing a framework within which the General Assembly must operate in passing legislation.

Moreover, a further restraint regarding church legislation was put in place by the passage of the Barrier Act of 1697. In order to prevent sudden innovations and to secure due deliberation, as well as to promote harmony by keeping the action of the Assembly in accordance with the mind of the generality of the eldership throughout the church, and to give opportunity for all the ministers and ruling elders to judge for themselves as to the mind of Christ, an act of the General Assembly which would establish standing law and binding rules for the church was required to be adopted first as an overture to the presbyteries, and only after a majority of the presbyteries had expressed concurrence could the overture be passed into law by a subsequent General Assembly.¹⁷

The constitutional framework, and the provision for retarding any alteration of binding rules, serve as a cherished safeguard for minorities on a church court, or for individuals at the bar of the court. Authority does not rest with a majority of the moment if they are acting without deference to the constitution, or if they ignore those rules and forms of procedure which may be removed or altered only by resort to a prescribed process. Presbyters have a contractual obligation to conduct the government of the church in compliance with the rule of law, and no court has a right to ask members of the church to submit to actions which are out of accord with the law of the church. Neither a king nor the majority of a presbytery is above the law, but confined by it. When the acts or decisions of church courts are thus without due legal authority, the action is said to be *ultra vires*; the action is null and void, because the court has exceeded its lawful powers and the confines within which it has sworn that it will conduct its business.¹⁸

This was the impetus for a resistance to measures taken by the Moderate party when it was in the ascendancy in the General Assembly in the mid-eighteenth century. John MacLaurin explains, "That there are two senses put upon what we promise at our ordination. The first is, that we will give a blind and unlimited active obedience to whatever arbitrary orders may at any time be given by our superiors in the executive part of the government of the church, though never so directly contrary to the established rules and standing acts either

of Christianity, or of this church, and that we will not so much as take upon us to examine into or judge of such contrariety. The other is, that we will maintain the established doctrine, worship, discipline and government of the Church of Scotland against all the opposition, which any of them may, in providence, be exposed to, even from our superiors, who may bring us into trouble and persecution upon that account Consequently that we must exercise our own understanding in judging of the nature and tendency of what is required of us. That our submission to judicatories in their due subordination must be according to the standing acts and constitution of the church, and that if any executive power shall happen to trample upon them, or shall do, or require to be done, anything that tends to the prejudice of our present constitution; we shall be so far from concurring with them, that we shall, to the utmost of our power, resist any such attempt.”¹⁹

Given that it is morally warrantable for a church to establish a constitution, and then to perpetuate instruction in the truths it has professed, by exacting from office bearers a vow of adherence to the church’s standards, it follows that there is a stewardship laid upon those who accept office on such terms. If subsequently they find that they no longer believe the constitutional principles of their church, they should labor to resolve their doubts, but if that cannot be achieved, it is their duty to leave office in that church, because they will not be able to discharge conscientiously the responsibility espoused in the vow.

What, then, are we to think when a majority of office bearers in a confessional church drift away from belief of some element of the constitution, and desire to carry the church with them in surrendering its doctrinal profession? When a church requires of candidates for office that they take vows as the condition for being admitted to that place of trust, is it permissible for them, upon being installed in office, to use their position to release themselves from the pledges they have given, substituting a looser formula of subscription or otherwise slackening the church’s adherence to the principles referenced in their vows? The difficulty is not removed even if a substantial portion of a church is no longer persuaded of the doctrine once professed. As Hugh Martin wrote in 1871, “A majority may prove treacherous to a vow, just as an individual may: nor is it in the power of the multiplication table to settle a question of morals.”²⁰ In considering whether a church constitution is susceptible

to alteration, there are issues of theory to be examined, but in the background is the practical peril of spiritual infidelity and a lack of moral integrity. For an office bearer to seek to revolutionize the constitution of his church, in violation of his vows of office, is not a godly procedure.

Apparently no church has given as much attention to issues respecting constitutional change as has the Free Church of Scotland. The matter was debated in presbyteries, general assemblies, in print, and finally in civil court, for over forty years, culminating in the 1904 judgment in the House of Lords. The occasion for the controversy was the desire of a large part of the church to accomplish a union with another Presbyterian body, knowing that various issues on which the Free Church was constitutionally committed would be left an open question in the united church. A minority in the Free Church, whose spokesmen included James Gibson, James Julius Wood, James Begg, Horatius and Andrew Bonar, Alexander Moody Stuart, George Smeaton, John Kennedy and Hugh Martin, put up a determined resistance to the threatened subversion of the constitution, but this failed to prevent the union which was achieved in 1900, and the majority's response to the resistance was to articulate a radical philosophy of spiritual independence, by which they meant a liberty to follow Christ where they thought he was presently leading them, rather than being tied to earlier constitutional arrangements.²¹

In the United Free Church, the formula of subscription was gravely weakened, and adherence to the confessional teaching was modified in such matters as the establishment principle, predestination, and the extent of the atonement. Those in the Free Church who would not enter the union pleaded in the civil courts that when the majority abandoned the constitution they were not free to take the property with them, because the rightful owner was to be identified in terms of adherence to that constitution under which the property had been held. The case was appealed to the House of Lords, and in 1904 the continuing Free Church was awarded the property.

Judgments about property rights lie in the jurisdiction of civil authorities, who must determine which party is to be identified as that referenced in the trust documents. The continuing Free Church persuaded the law judges that the Free Church constitution gave the General Assembly liberty neither to loosen subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith, nor to lay aside principles found in the subordinate standards.

The Church of Scotland had long found itself hindered from altering its constitution, because Parliament's statutory ratification of the Church of Scotland's settled doctrine, worship and government had become the condition for the church's enjoyment of the privileges of establishment. But majorities in the churches which were formed outside the establishment, taking advantage of this independence from civil restraint, began shaking loose the doctrinal testimonies they had made in a previous generation. James Begg, writing in 1874, noted that in a non-established church, the constitution remains the instrument by which the civil authority may identify the religious tenets for the furtherance of which the church property is to be preserved. "How can Nonconformist Churches be kept to the maintenance of their own principles? This is a question which at one time we should not have thought of asking, although we might have been warned that it was not an unnecessary one by the lapse of so many English Presbyterians into Socinianism, so many Scotch Seceders into Voluntaryism, and of a large body of the Irish Presbyterians into Arianism.... Experience proves that Non-established Churches may accumulate vast masses of property. This property is undoubtedly given on the assumption that the fundamental principles of the body shall remain unchanged. Many of the men who gave the money have departed this life, leaving their property to be guarded by the Civil Law. The destination of all other property after men are dead is jealously watched and guarded by that law. And are we to suppose seriously that a mere majority in the Church Courts may do what can be done nowhere else? May not only make the most sweeping changes, no matter under what plausible pretexts, but at the same time by the same means turn over the whole property of the Church from the purposes for which the testators left it, to purposes which they would have strongly disapproved?"²²

A central issue in the Free Church controversy was with regard to the powers of the General Assembly. Was the Assembly at liberty to alter the fundamental principles of the church as given in the constitution? The continuing Free Church contended that the Free Church had inherited the constitutional framework of the Church of Scotland, and that the ancient constitution of the parent body had been out of the reach of majorities in a General Assembly. For example, Begg pointed to the commission given by Presbyteries to members of the General Assembly, dating back to 1695, by which they were required "to consult, vote, and

determine, in all matters that come before them, . . . according to the Word of God, the Confession of Faith, and agreeable to the Constitution of this Church, as they will be answerable,” and noted that “keeping in view the very limited powers conferred by their Commissions on members of the General Assembly, it can hardly be maintained that any Assembly, where members sit only under these Commissions, can alter the principles of the Church.”²³ The terms of the ordination vow, which was approved in 1711, also implied that the principles of the constitution were inviolable, for ministers were not only to own that the Confession of Faith is founded upon the Word of God, but also, to “firmly and constantly adhere thereunto,” and, to the utmost of their power, “assert, maintain and defend the same, and the purity of worship as presently practiced in this Church.” It was also noted that nothing was done to alter the existing principles of the church when the General Assembly in 1647 “did agree unto and approve” the Westminster Confession of Faith, for the act acknowledged the Confession to be “found by the Assembly to be most agreeable to the Word of God, and in nothing contrary to the received doctrine, worship, discipline and government of this Kirk.”²⁴

Another Free Church constitutionalist, James Gibson, cited a seminal assessment given by Archibald Bruce earlier in the nineteenth century, when shifts and changes were commencing in the Secession tradition. Bruce had argued that a church lost its identity when it abandoned the doctrine hitherto professed. “If a new constitution has been formed, the Protesters, who from the beginning have opposed the change, cannot so properly be said to have declined the jurisdiction of the courts thus modeled and constituted, as to have refused the legality of their new assumed powers. In strict propriety of speech, though we need not debate about the most proper use of the word, a person cannot be said to decline a jurisdiction he was never under,—nor to separate from a body unto which he was never united. A society, whether civil or ecclesiastical, that changes its laws, its terms of admission, its object, its means—becomes, to all intents and purposes, a new society, though it may retain the same name. In which case, the rules and authority exercised can only bind those who voluntarily submit themselves unto them. If standard-books and public terms of communion be the most authentic tests to distinguish one religious society from another; and if new doctrines, new rules of discipline, new formulas of admission, be

evidences of a new ecclesiastical constitution,—then the Synod have undeniably adopted a new one; though they may affect to hide the change by retaining the old names, as having something venerable in them; as the ship *Theseus*, at Athens, said to have been in the famous Argonautic expedition, that had so often been put into the dock, and underwent so many repairs (like the Synod's Testimony), as that not one plank of it remained the same, yet was still called *Theseus*.”²⁵

It must be acknowledged that a shift in the beliefs of a church will not be averted without the preserving grace of God manifested in a full and faithful pulpit instruction in each generation, vigilance in examining candidates for office, insistence upon an informed and honest subscription by office bearers, the diligent exercise of church discipline when office bearers diverge from the constitutional doctrine and practice, and office bearers maintaining an attachment of heart to the church's profession. The eldership must have the political will to enforce the constitution. But to recognize the need for a collective fidelity by church rulers is not to dismiss the critical role of a constitution which makes it morally improper for a church to retreat from the truth it has professed.

Without a prior constitutional determination of issues, it may be an elusive task to identify a church's doctrine, its spiritual character, and the justice of its property claims. Given the misapprehensions, prejudices, errors and unfaithfulness of men, struggles within the church over matters of doctrine will not be eliminated by having a settled body of fundamental principles, but there will be a larger measure of unity among the office bearers than if the church were destitute of a substantial constitution, and, in the event that a majority of the church will not respect the constitution, there remains an acknowledged platform on which the minority may stand and vindicate the truth. A minority needs to be mindful that not only are they not bound to acquiesce in the subversion of the constitution, but they have a duty, in deference to their vows, to act in protest to uphold it.

Although some may seek to cast off elements in the constitution of a church holding to the classical Reformed tradition, others will appreciate the perspective of Principal John Macleod of the Free Church of Scotland College, expressed in lectures he delivered at Westminster Theological Seminary in April 1939: “There is a well-worn tag to the effect that the Lord has yet much light to break forth from His Word. . . . At the same

time as believers have no doubt in regard to this matter, it holds of them in the measure in which they are well instructed and established in the knowledge of the Word that they are equally confident that the further light that is to break out will not cancel nor challenge nor detract from the brightness with which the light of the Word already shines. What is new will only intensify what is old. It will not darken it nor throw it in the shade. . . . It will be a thing of detail and not of wide-sweeping principle. . . . We need not fear for the Faith as it has been confessed from the first that it shall be shaken or overthrown. It is too well grounded in the sure warrant of the Divine Word to run any such risk. And as for the discovery of further truth such as will modify what is embodied in the Reformed Confessions, the system taught in the Reformed Faith is so truly an echo of the Apostolic word that those who hold it need not be put about in their mind nor give place to craven fears that it shall ever be set aside. . . . The truth already known may be known more fully and perfectly. It may be seen better in its own setting and in the connection and relations of its various parts. Its power and its beauty and its sweetness and its glory may be more richly known. Yet those who have learned the Gospel of the Glory of the Blessed God may rest assured of this, that any further truth which as light will break forth from the Word will have no quarrel with the truth and the proportion of what they have already come to know.”²⁶

Notes

¹ William Mair, *A Digest of Laws and Decisions Ecclesiastical and Civil Relating to the Constitution, Practice, and Affairs of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1923), pp. 1–20.

² James Begg, *Memorial with the Opinions of Eminent Counsel in Regard to the Constitution of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter & Co., 1874), pp. 137–139.

³ George Gillespie, *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: James Bryson, 1641), p. 152. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.x.2, 8, 28–29.

⁴ *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1638–1842* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing and Publishing Company, 1842), p. 260.

⁵ Alexander Henderson, *The Government and Order of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: James Bryson, 1641), p. 52. This is the sense evident in Henry Moncreiff Wellwood, *A Brief Account of the Constitution of the*

Established Church of Scotland; and of the Questions Concerning Patronage and the Secession (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1833), and in George Hill, *A View of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Waugh, 1835), which are delineations of the church's pattern of government and customary practice. Wellwood died in 1827 and Hill in 1819. An identical meaning is found in *The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland*, since its first published version in 1862, when reference is made, respectively, to the constitution of the session, the presbytery, etc.

⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, s.v. "constitution."

⁷ Cf. John Bonar, *The Nature and Tendency of the Ecclesiastic Constitution in Scotland* (Edinburgh: A. Donaldson, 1760), p. 4: "When I speak of our church, you will easily perceive, that I mean that ecclesiastic constitution, which in Scotland received the sanction of civil authority at the Revolution, and which, through a long course of years, and much opposition, had been rising to that state which she then attained." George Burnet, *Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Time* (Oxford: University Press, 1833), 5:289: "They insisted most vehemently on the danger that the constitution of their church must be in, when all should be under the power of a British parliament To allay that heat, after the general vote was carried for the union, before they entered on the consideration of the particular articles, an act was prepared for securing the presbyterian government." [Archibald Bruce], *Free Thoughts on the Toleration of Popery* (Edinburgh: Printed for the author, 1780), pp. 354–364; cf. p. 358: "If this be the case, what authority has the parliament of Great Britain to revoke these laws, or what obligation could an act of repeal lay upon the reclaiming people of Scotland, when passed? None at all. Such an act would be an absolute nullity, as it would be made in opposition to a primary and fundamental law of the constitution, and by a judicature to whom it is utterly incompetent. For it is an indisputable fact, that the conclave at Rome, or the congress in America, have as much a legal right to change or weaken the ecclesiastical establishment in Scotland as the parliament of Great Britain."

⁸ Printed in Alexander Taylor Innes, *The Law of Creeds in Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1867), p. 155.

⁹ *Acts, 1638-1842*, pp. 239–240, 403–415, 418–419, 453–456.

¹⁰ James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), 1:306–307, 314; Robert L. Dabney, "The Revised Book of

Discipline,” *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 2:313–314: “Language is naturally an imperfect vehicle of meaning; its ambiguities usually pass undiscovered, because no keen and contending interests test its possible or probable meanings. One may frame sentences which seem to him perfectly perspicuous; but no human wisdom can foresee the varying, yet plausible, constructions which the language may be made to bear. . . . Hence the old statutes are better, because their language has already been tested by the adjudication of a multitude of varying cases under them, and fixed by established precedents.”

¹¹ Archibald Bruce, *A Review of the Proceedings of the General Associate Synod* (Edinburgh: George Caw, 1808), p. 44. Cf. [John MacLaurin], *The Nature of Ecclesiastic Government, and of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland Illustrated* (Glasgow: J. Bryce and D. Paterson, 1754), pp. 11–12. Cf. Westminster Confession XX.ii.

¹² Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, 1:219. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.viii.9.

¹³ Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, 1:221.

¹⁴ Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, 1:237. Cf. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), pp. 53–54; Westminster Confession XXXI.iii.

¹⁵ Bannerman, *Church of Christ*, 2:216. Cf. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992–1997), 3:290–293.

¹⁶ Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 1:76.

¹⁷ *The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland In Her Several Courts*, eighth edition (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1995), pp. 82–83; *Acts, 1638–1842*, pp. 260–261, and cf. pp. 42–43 for a similar act in 1639.

¹⁸ James L. Weatherhead, ed., *The Constitution and Laws of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Board of Practice and Procedure, 1997), p. 197.

¹⁹ MacLaurin, *Nature of Ecclesiastic Government*, pp. 116–117. Cf. p. 119: “The difference between a free, and a despotic government, . . . consists entirely in this, that the first is a *legal* government, or a government *by laws*, the other an *arbitrary* government where the *mere will* and pleasure of those who have the administration in their hands prevails over the laws. . . . The peculiar advantage which we happy subjects of Britain have to boast of above the greatest part of the world is not so much the goodness of our laws: for what would that signify if the executive power could dispense with them at pleasure? But it consists in being under the government of

laws, and not of *men*. It consists in the executive powers being as much limited by the laws as the meanest subject.” And p. 150: “But if, without regard to the constant principles and standing laws of the church, the arbitrary commands even of the Assembly itself in their executive capacity, are to be substituted in the room of those laws which it is their business to enforce, and an unlimited active obedience to every order of this kind, however inconsistent it may appear to be with, or directly contrary to the most established principles and constitutional rules of the society, is to be insisted on as a term of ministerial communion, we have no scruple to declare it as our opinion, that this would be holding the ministry which we have received of the Lord Jesus by too precarious a tenure, and upon a condition that is not only ambulatory and uncertain, but that may prove ruinous and destructive (if we can judge by other instances in former times) to the most valuable interests of Christ’s kingdom . . .”

²⁰ “Are We To Have No Constitution?”, *The Watchword* 6(1871):9. Cf. David Calderwood, *Perth Assembly* ([Leiden]: 1619), p. 31, quoted in Thomas M’Crie, *Statement of the Difference Between the Profession of the Reformed Church of Scotland, as Adopted by the Seceders, and the Profession Contained in the New Testament and Other Acts, Lately Adopted by the General Associate Synod* (Edinburgh: George Caw, 1807), p. 32: “But, as I have said, our oath was with consent of the assembly and kirk of Scotland. Seeing we are sworn severally, how can the same persons, assembled together in one body collective, dispense with this oath, seeing they have sworn to defend during their lives? To consent to any alteration is not to defend during their lives, but rather to betray the cause, and incur perjury.”

²¹ For an extended discussion of the issues, cf. Kenneth R. Ross, *Church and Creed in Scotland: The Free Church Case 1900–1904 and its Origins* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1988).

²² Begg, *Memorial*, pp. 28 and 51.

²³ *Acts, 1638–1842*, p. 247; James Begg, *Purity of Worship in the Presbyterian Church as Set Forth in the Westminster Standards and Illustrated by Our History Since the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Lyon and Gemmell, 1876), p. 66.

²⁴ *Acts, 1638–1842*, pp. 158–159.

²⁵ [Bruce], *Review of Proceedings of General Associate Synod*, pp. 105–106.

²⁶ John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology In Relation to Church History Since the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1943), pp. 239–240.

WORSHIP SERVICES

Westminster Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Maryland
Sabbath services 2 PM and 6 PM, 7801 Persimmon Tree Lane.
Minister: Rev. Sherman Isbell, 3155 Lindenwood Lane, Fairfax, VA 22031,
telephone 703.359.0192, e-mail rsisbell@masterstrumpet.org.

Pilgrims' Hope Presbyterian Church, Cumberland, Maryland
Sabbath service 2 PM, 405 North Mechanic Street.
Information: Elder David Biser, 18105 Vernon Estates Drive, Oldtown,
MD 21555, telephone 301.478.5764, e-mail dbiser@masterstrumpet.org.
The service at Cumberland is an extension of Westminster Presbyterian
Church in Bethesda, Maryland.

Free Church Atlanta, Winder, Georgia
Sabbath services 11 AM and 2 PM, 1115 Jefferson Highway.
Minister: Rev. Warren Gardner, 1115 Jefferson Highway, Winder, GA
30680, telephone 770.867.5765, e-mail wegardner@masterstrumpet.org.

Dayton Free Church, Dayton, Ohio
Sabbath services 12:30 PM and 6:30 PM, New Burlington Friends Meeting
House, 2938 Cemetery Road, Xenia, Ohio.
Supply: Rev. Sean Humby, Apt. F, 2456 Wyoming Street, Dayton, OH
45410, telephone 937.252.1156, e-mail shumby@masterstrumpet.org.

Smiths Falls Reformed Church, Smiths Falls, Ontario
Sabbath services 11 AM and 6 PM, corner of Abbott and Elm Streets.
Information: P.O. Box 102, Smiths Falls, Ontario K7A 4S9, Canada.
Interim Moderator: Rev. John MacLeod, Free Church Manse,
Portmahomack, Tain, Ross-shire, Scotland KIV20 1YL, telephone
011.44.1862.871467, e-mail jmacleod@masterstrumpet.org.