

Drawing on the Resources of a Neglected Reformation

Kenneth J. Stewart*

email: ken.stewart@covenant.edu

**Dr. Kenneth J. Stewart is Professor of Theological Studies at Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia. Amongst his published works are Ten Myths about Calvinism (IVP, 2011) and In Search of Ancient Roots (IVP, 2017).*



Today, a Christian standing in the Reformed tradition and identifying as a Presbyterian will be of no particular ethnic heritage. Such a Christian believer may as well be of Brazilian or of Korean heritage as of the more customary Scots-Irish ancestry. All this is as it should be as an anticipation of the heavenly kingdom in which the populace is drawn from “every nation, tribe, people and language” (Rev. 7.9).

Yet, this essay will argue that while this expression of the Christian faith can function perfectly without respect to ancestry or dialect, people identifying with this expression of the Reformed tradition desperately need to become familiar again with its Scottish origins. The reason? Presbyterians worldwide are functioning increasingly without reference to our period of origins: the half-century of Scottish church life extending from 1550-1600. This era helped to establish concepts of governance, conceptions of recognized ministry, and patterns for worshipping God. Our dilemma is that, increasingly, we cannot consult these Scottish roots because we have lost sight of them.

A concrete example will help us to grasp what is at stake. There has been a recent discussion within some Presbyterian churches about the acceptability of partaking of the Lord’s Supper “all in one” with the bread or wafer dipped in the communion chalice (a practice called ‘intinction’).¹ In those discussions,

¹ In 2013, presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America failed to ratify an amendment to the Book of Church Order which would have prohibited this practice. <http://byfaithonline.com/intinction-amendment-fails/> accessed June 21, 2017

how many at the discussion table were in a position to say, “the biblical basis for our historic practice of partaking of the elements separately is thus and thus...?” Very few, I believe. My point is that the Scottish Reformation heritage is no longer our conversation partner. It is as though we have only our own generation to talk to.

A New or an Old Predicament?

In North America, it appears that we have been confronting this ‘deficit’ situation for about a half-century. In 1960, the publishing house of the former Presbyterian Church in the United States, John Knox Press, published the US edition of a biography of John Knox, *Plain Mr. Knox* by the Scottish writer, Elizabeth Whitley. (1960 was the 300th anniversary of the formal adoption of the Reformation in Scotland).² I know of no subsequent publication in America of material bearing on the Scottish Reformation released by a Presbyterian publishing house.

In this same period there has also been a steady diminution of theological instruction regarding Scotland’s age of Reform. A minister-scholar in the United Church of Christ, Bard Thompson, included excerpts from the Scottish service book of 1564, the *Book of Common Order*, when he compiled his useful anthology, *Liturgies of the Western Church* in 1961.³ In the then-United Presbyterian Church in the USA, Princeton Seminary maintained until 1976 a specialist in Scottish Church History, Norman V. Hope; at his retirement, no successor was named in this subject area. Robert M. Healey, a church historian at University of Dubuque Theological Seminary published serious articles on Scotland’s Reformation era until his retirement in 1993.⁴ Today, if Scotland’s Reformation receives attention at all in North America, it will tend to be only in university departments of history. North American seminary curricula seem to have left off any interest it had in this in the past.⁵ These are stern charges. Can they be substantiated?

² *Plain Mr. Knox* had been published in the U.K. by Skeffington Press in 1960 and by John Knox Press, Richmond, VA in the same year. Happily, this good entry-level biography has been kept in print by Christian Focus Publishers, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland

³ New York: World Publishing, 1961. See chapter IX.

⁴ Robert M. Healey, “The Preaching Ministry in Scotland’s *First Book of Discipline*”, *Church History* 58.3 (1989), 339-353; Robert M. Healey, “John Knox’s “History”: a “Compleat” Sermon on Christian Duty”, *Church History*, 61.3 (1992), 319-333; Robert M. Healey, “Waiting for Deborah: John Knox and Four Ruling Queens”, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 25, No. 2, 1994, 371-386;

⁵ The writer has anecdotal evidence that Scottish church history received strong attention in the classrooms of Dr. David Calhoun, emeritus professor of Church History in Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis. Dr. Dale W. Johnson of Erskine Seminary, Due West, S.C. co-authored a volume, *John Knox: An Introduction to his Life and Works* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009).

Scotland Passed Over in Silence?

The three volume *Presbyterians in the South* of the late Ernest Trice Thompson commences with immigrant Presbyterians who had reached Chesapeake Bay.⁶ The seven volume series of the late Hugh Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, in so many ways admirable, gives not so much as a page to the Scottish Church in his fourth volume (2002) which is devoted to the Reformation period.⁷ The recent second volume of Zondervan's two-volume *Church History: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day* (2015) co-authored by John Woodbridge and Frank James contains *no* separate treatment of Scotland's Reformation. The contemporary of John Knox, Mary Queen of Scots, appears in the Woodbridge-James volume only because she eventually represented a destabilizing threat to English Queen, Elizabeth I once she fled southward into England. But the unstated assumption of most such volumes is that we will find out what we need to know about the Reformation heritage in the English-speaking world from Elizabethan England and from the European Continent. By such a method of reckoning, Reformation Scotland is just a sub-plot that a curious person would need to investigate independently. A slightly older two-volume set, *The Story of Christianity* (revised 2010) by the Cuban-American Methodist, Justo González, devotes five pages to John Knox and the Reformation in Scotland.⁸ That is all.

Admittedly, the dearth of reference to Reformation Scotland is not so total in Commonwealth countries as has been just described in the U.S.A. On account of the 2003 publication of Ian P. Hazlett's *The Reformation in Britain and Ireland*⁹ readers in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries have been somewhat better served.

But We Are Calvinists not Knoxians

But someone will say, "What you say about a neglect of Scotland may be true and it may be lamentable, but remember -- we are Calvinists not Knoxians. Remember, it is our historical connection *to Geneva* that matters most". This attitude could be called a Geneva-centric approach; it has been dominant for decades now. It is an orientation that seems very widespread today, especially among those who profess a strong Reformation interest. Nevertheless, we cannot carry on any longer in reliance on this Geneva-centric theory, for three reasons:

- The Geneva-centric theory is undermined by the actual historical immigration patterns. To speak simply of America, within which this

⁶ Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* 3 vols. (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963-1973)

⁷ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002

⁸ Justo González, *The Story of Christianity* 2 vols. (New York: HarperOne, 2010)

⁹ Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003.

writer resides, census data gathered within the last decade has shown that when asked to identify their ancestral heritage, more than 11 million Americans still identify themselves as of Scottish or Scots-Irish descent. This compares to only 1 million Americans who claim any Swiss ancestry.¹⁰ The Reformed theological tradition was *not* brought to America by Swiss (let alone Genevan Swiss) immigrants, but by the Scots-Irish. Have we faced up to the implications of this?¹¹ No one needs to pretend to be of Scots-Irish descent when they are not. But unless we recover a sense of how the Reformed theological tradition was actually transmitted to our various countries, we will misconstrue a host of questions. To use the modern parlance of “reception history”, the path by which the Reformed theological tradition was received and diffused into the western hemisphere was by way of Scotland. It was spread by immigration and through missionary evangelization.

- The Geneva-centric theory does not explain either Presbyterian life as it has actually unfolded. Reflecting on this question from within the USA, the writer observes that numerous divisions within the Presbyterian family --already in existence at the time of large-scale immigration in the eighteenth century-- were transported here from Scotland. The former United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. which merged into the Northern Presbyterian church in 1958 (and which to a considerable degree has re-emerged today in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church) had an identity which it brought with it from Scotland. So also the Covenanters or Reformed Presbyterians (sponsors of Geneva College at Beaver Falls, and the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (sponsors of Erskine College and Theological Seminary, Due West, S.C.). None of these groups originated in North America: their people emigrated here from Scotland, with their movements already in existence.¹² Geneva and Genevan immigrants have no light to shed on such matters.
- The Geneva-centric theory is also historically unhelpful in explaining the origin of our actual church practices. The General Assembly as an annual national deliberative gathering has come to us from Scotland, not Geneva; so also has the office of moderator, the units of the synod

¹⁰ See Wikipedia, “Scots-Irish Americans”, “Swiss Americans”.

¹¹ D.G. Hart, *Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 71, notes that it was the German, Dutch and Scottish expressions of the Reformation which spread most overseas through immigration.

¹² See the entries in the D.G. Hart, ed *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005)

and the presbytery. It could hardly be otherwise, for Geneva in Reformation times was a mere canton with a total number of pastors ranging between 7 (in 1538) and 16 (in 1554).¹³ What kind of a model could Geneva provide for those attempting to apply the Reformed faith to a nation? It was in Scotland that the rudimentary conception of Reformed church government which was functioning in Geneva was gradually adapted to a pre-existing national church consisting of about 1,100 congregations.¹⁴

Thus, the point being urged is that Presbyterian origins in Scotland in that first half-century are foundational for the church polity, foundational for the conceptions of ministry, and foundational for the ways of worshipping God which form the heritage of Christians in the Presbyterian family. And, this argument is not undone by the fact that today's Church of Scotland (a doctrinally-comprehensive denomination) has fallen on hard times and is doctrinally unstable.¹⁵ This argument is not based upon the Church of Scotland as it now is; it is instead a question of the first principles from which our movement arose. The question is one of whether we can come once more to be "in conversation" with those first principles.

How can we proceed? I propose to take three broad topics, each of which are of considerable importance for Presbyterians today, and to show how conversation with our foundation-era (1550-1600) can help to illumine our contemporary discussions.

I. The Broad Scope of the First General Assemblies

The first Presbyterian General Assembly ever held took place in Edinburgh in the summer of 1560. Present were a mere 7 ministers and 35 other persons (only 2 of which were ruling elders); there were as well representatives of Scottish towns already supportive of the Reform, the landed lesser nobles and university leaders.¹⁶ At that point, Protestantism was advancing both by bold preaching and by the military efforts of the Army of the Congregation against

¹³ William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 58.

¹⁴ Robert M. Healey, *The Preaching Ministry in Scotland's 'First Book of Discipline'*, *Church History*, 58.3 (1989), 343. The French Reformed Church was also trying to apply the Reformed framework of polity on a large scale in this same period, yet with this difference: they were setting up an alternative ecclesiastical body, which replicated the still-existing Roman Catholic system. In Scotland, legislation of 1560 ended Roman Catholicism's jurisdiction in the country.

¹⁵ The Church of Scotland has declined from a membership of 1,300,000 in 1960 to about 350,000 today.

¹⁶ J.I. Weatherhead, "General Assembly" in the Nigel M. Cameron, ed. *Scottish Dictionary of Church History and Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 353-354.

opposition loyal to the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise. The Scottish Reformed Church had to this point consisted of unrecognized congregations (we would call them ‘underground churches’). Parliament met of its own accord (without the customary royal approval) and sanctioned the meeting of this first General Assembly. Admittedly, from a strictly legal point of view, the General Assembly also had no constitutional right to meet without the consent of the Queen Regent. But then, as she was not likely to approve meetings which she knew intended to overthrow the decayed Roman Catholic system, the Parliament and Assembly were prepared to go forward without her approval.

The summoning of a General Assembly was an attempt to realize in Scotland a principle (called the ‘conciliar’ principle) which had been recovered in the preceding centuries of Christian history. That principle was that councils were comprised of representatives drawn from *across* the church (rather than only members of a church hierarchy) which had the spiritual authority to determine liturgical, theological and disciplinary questions for the church. This Scottish assembly understood itself to be the *national* council of the Church within Scotland, something quite in line with the occasional summoning of international councils. The General Assembly was therefore not, strictly speaking, *denominational* (inasmuch as there was but one Christian church in Scotland), but national, because the Church of Scotland was intending to address the needs of the nation as a whole. The official written record (which we today call the “Minutes” of our Assemblies) the Scots called *The Book of the Universal Kirk*.¹⁷ Sometimes the gathering was termed “the general assemblie of this whole realme”.¹⁸ Its concerns went beyond what might be categorized as strictly religious, for it also aimed to exercise supervision over Scotland’s three existing universities, over public education and poor relief.

Today, we cannot pretend that our annual Assemblies are a comprehensive General Assembly of the church of Jesus Christ as it exists in our various nations, but we can *aspire* to be that and we can deliberate ambitiously with those wider horizons of education and public welfare in view. Let us do everything we can to avoid narrow tribalism and provincialism. We should assemble to do more than church housekeeping.

This General Assembly (which at first met twice per year) rapidly tackled three main projects, which would affect the life of the national Church of Scotland for many decades to come:

- 1) The Assembly was first authorized by Parliament to provide a written program for national Reformation. What was sought was a scheme which could entail the transformation of the extensive

¹⁷ The minutes of Assembly for the period from 1560 to 1616, referred to by this name, were only published in book form in 1839, edited by Alexander Peterkin. Another fuller edition, edited by Thomas Thomson, was published in three volumes 1839-1845.

¹⁸ Acts of the Parliament of Scotland, iii. 23 quoted in Duncan Shaw, *The General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland 1560-1600* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1964), 19

Roman Catholic structure in place across the nation into something recognizably Protestant. More than one draft was honed. This manual of polity and discipline was prepared and returned to the Parliament for approval in late 1560. This ‘First Book of Discipline’ in an amended form remained in force until 1578, when a ‘Second Book’ superseded it. This second work reflected a changed situation, which had developed considerably across two decades. By 1578 there were now a sufficient number of functioning Reformed congregations to allow for the formation of presbyteries when previously there had only been larger territorial synods.

- 2) The assembled Parliament of Scotland had also requested the Assembly to proceed with the writing of a brief Confession of Faith (the Scots Confession) which eventually guided the church until the days of the Westminster Assembly 85 years later. A committee of six men, all with the first name of John, produced this confession. Of course, the most famous contributor was John Knox. Their work, done under the pressure of time, took a mere four days; “team effort” is the term aptly chosen to describe their collective effort.¹⁹ The Parliament then approved this Protestant statement and banned any further celebration of the Roman mass inside Scotland.
- 3) By 1562, the General Assembly had also adopted a book of set orders of service for use across the nation. The Assembly commissioners endorsed a pre-existing book that had been used in the refugee congregation at Geneva in which John Knox and a co-pastor, Christopher Goodman, had earlier served. That earlier book was known as the *Form of Prayers used in the English Congregation at Geneva*.²⁰ The General Assembly published it in 1564 as the *Book of Common Order*.²¹ We will have reason to return to this.

¹⁹ It is widely supposed that a draft of this document may have existed in advance and that four days was spent in polishing it. David F. Wright, “The Scottish Reformation: Theology and Theologians” in the *Cambridge Guide to Reformation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 175.

²⁰ A modern edition of this book, first published at Geneva in 1556 was published under the editorship of W.E. Maxwell as *John Knox’s Genevan Service Book* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1931).

²¹ The Genevan volume, adapted for Scottish use in 1562 and 1564 has been reprinted periodically. Two known editions are those of G.W. Sprott and Thomas Leishman, *The Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland, Commonly Known as John Knox’s Liturgy, and the Directory for the Public Worship of God Agreed Upon*

What emerged from this opening phase of the General Assembly's work was a determination to foster a common Protestantism for the whole nation characterized by a reasonable unity of doctrine, practice and worship.

But second...

II. An Eclectic Approach to Ministries and Offices

The meager attendance at the first General Assemblies drew attention to the fact that the Church of Scotland, as a Reformed entity, was still more of an "idea" than a reality. It was one thing to say that this Protestant church now existed in law. But where were the personnel to come from when there had been no Protestant colleges or seminaries to prepare leadership? In facing this challenge, the Church of Scotland set the bar higher than many other young Protestant churches of that day. Not only in England but even in Geneva, many individuals were employed in pastoral leadership who were barely distinguishable from pre-Reformation Catholic priests (in fact many of them had been just that). They could not be dismissed or replaced until and unless more qualified replacements were available. Yet, in Protestant Scotland, a much more rigorous system had come into play.²²

In 1560, there may not have been more than 12 qualified Protestant ministers in all of Scotland (and upwards of 1100 parishes). Almost all of these individuals had formerly been monks or priests who had come to endorse the Reformation by 1560.²³ How would they manage with so few? Just by establishing a range of additional recognized ministries which in time, would prove to be no longer necessary. Three examples:

- 1) **The Superintendent** was a person adequately qualified to serve as a Protestant minister, but who – in addition to providing pastoral ministry in a single congregation – was responsible for travelling widely through an assigned territory of hundreds of square miles to plant new congregations, to advise congregations lacking pastors and to recruit candidates for the ministry.²⁴ The

by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, 1868) and *The Liturgy of John Knox Revised by the Church of Scotland in 1564* (London & Glasgow: Hamilton, Adams & Co, 1886).

²² The challenges faced by the Scottish Reformed Church in this period are helpfully summarized by Robert M. Healey in "The Preaching Ministry in Scotland's *First Book of Discipline*", *Church History* 58. 3 (1989), 339-353.

²³ The sources from which the first Protestant ministers of Reformed Scotland were drawn is explored in detail by James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), chap. 4, "Recruitment for the Ministry in Reformation Scotland".

²⁴ The Scottish superintendent is described in the *First Book of Discipline* (1560) in a segment, which because it is not introduced by the standard numbered heading, is understood to be a last-minute insertion. See James K. Cameron, *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1972), 115-128.

intention was to find ten or twelve such men; in reality, they located only five. It was a quarter-century before these individuals worked themselves out of a job. But the superintendent kept pastor-less churches open and functioning by relying on two kinds of persons, one of which was...

- 2) **The Reader**, who was first and foremost a professing Christian of upright life.²⁵ Like the superintendent, he was also quite possibly a former Catholic priest or monk who professed support for the Reformation, but was not considered trustworthy enough or well-prepared enough to function as a pastor in his own right. A reader was authorized to lead simple services of Scripture reading and prayers with the prayers taken out of the agreed-upon *Form of Prayers* (later called *Book of Common Order*). The only sermon he could deliver was one earlier prepared by an approved pastor. Readers were not permitted to baptize or to administer the Lord's Supper (these because they were required to be twinned with proclamation, would require the visit of the Superintendent or a visiting minister). Over time, some who began as readers advanced to a stage of greater usefulness, i.e. exhortation.

- 3) **The Exhorter** was a person who similarly may have earlier been a monk or priest – or then again may have been a baker or a school teacher. This was an individual who had a strong Bible knowledge and who was judged capable of giving an address or an exhortation from the Scripture.²⁶ Again, this temporary office did not necessarily carry with it authorization to conduct weddings or to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. In those early decades, particularly a country congregation would have considered itself fortunate to have an exhorter lead its services – rather than only a reader. Some exhorters eventually proved themselves sufficiently that they gained the status of full ministers.

The process of helping these servants of the church to 'upgrade' their theological preparation was made available, region by region, in a weekly 'exercise' held each Monday. Senior, better-educated ministers would deliver rigorous model sermons and demonstrate how to draw out the doctrine and application for the benefit of less experienced ministers and exhorters. In their weekly 'exercise', the Scots were maintaining a practice which the English Puritans called the weekly 'prophesying', the Dutch called the 'coetus', and

²⁵ Cameron, *First Book*, "Fourth Head", 105

²⁶ Cameron, *First Book*, Fifth head, 111-112.

the Genevans called the weekly ‘congregation’. The practice seems to be traceable to Zurich in Zwingli’s time; in Zurich this was the “prophezei”. In Reformation Scotland, each six or eight congregations were expected to collectively support the Monday ‘exercise’ in their locale.²⁷ It was really a form of what we would today call Theological Education by Extension.

Given the vast territories supervised by the superintendents, assisted by readers and exhorters (and the few pastors available) the basic geographical unit of the Reformed church soon emerged as the ‘synod’ – a much larger geographical territory than the eventual ‘presbytery’; a presbytery could only be more narrowly defined when a higher proportion of congregations were served by qualified ministers. The standard for ‘admission’ (not ordination) to the ministry was high: The pastor must be one who “they judge apt to feed the flock of Jesus Christ, who must be examined as well in life and manners, as in doctrine and knowledge”.²⁸

A congregation was assured of the right to nominate a candidate for their pastoral vacancy; if they failed to nominate a candidate within forty days of beginning their search, the superintendent could intervene to provide a name. Every such candidate was subject to examination in doctrine and life by the superintendent and other nearby ministers; he was also required to preach a public trial sermon on an assigned text. If approved, he was publicly presented with a Bible and led into the pulpit. This simple gesture (and not the laying on of hands) was a symbol of his formal installation as pastor. He had thus been “admitted to the ministry”.²⁹

But what should strike us is that the Reformed Church of Scotland, which had gone on record in its *First Book of Discipline* as maintaining that the ordinary offices of the church were the pastor, the elder and the deacon was ready to work constructively with the ‘raw’ situation in which this biblical standard could not yet be maintained. The reformers did not mortgage the future by putting into these offices individuals who were not adequately prepared to fill them, i.e. individuals who, because ill-prepared, would discredit themselves and perpetuate error and superstition. They utilized readers and exhorters to help them function in the prolonged period necessary to produce a new generation of Christian leaders. The five superintendents of regions (ten had been hoped for) augmented their own work of pastoral oversight by securing colleagues, designated “commissioners”, so that all ministry would be supervised. All who exercised this supervision (superintendents as well as commissioners) were themselves made answerable at regular intervals.

²⁷ James K. Cameron, ed. *The First Book*, Ninth Head, 187-188

²⁸ James K. Cameron, ed. *The First Book* Fourth head, 96

²⁹ The use of the practice of laying on of hands, not originally in favour in 1560, was re-introduced in the 1570’s. See James Kirk, ed. *The Second Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1980), Head III, item 12, 180.

And this reasonable eclecticism did not die with those first decades. Fresh signs of it appeared in the 19th century, when the population of Scottish cities mushroomed due to industrialization. The Church of Scotland then instituted the ministry of “Bible Women” and “Church Sisters” so as to best respond to the needs for ministry to women and children in crowded urban tenements.³⁰

III. A Restrained yet Eclectic Approach to Liturgy, Sacraments and Sung Praise

Leading Scottish Reformers such as John Knox and his associate, John Winram, stood in reaction to the Roman Catholic teaching they had formerly upheld (Knox had been a priest and Winram a Dominican monk). They also stood in reaction to what they considered to be remaining traces of superstition in the Tudor-era Church of England – in whose ministry both served in years when they were unwelcome in Scotland. Such men and their comrades sought simplicity, a close and unvarnished following of N.T. practice.

After the death of English King Edward VI in 1553, Knox and Winram had joined hundreds of other English Protestant refugees in European cities such as Emden, Frankfurt, Zurich and Geneva. Knox and Winram sought – while in Europe – to be free from what they considered as questionable features of Tudor Anglican worship: obligatory reading of prayers, kneeling at the Communion, and the wearing of prescribed ministerial garments for the administration of the Communion. In consequence, when they went home to join in the final push to establish the Reformation in Scotland in 1559-60, they were adamant that the worship of the Scottish Reformed Church would be free of such obligations. This was the approach emphasized in the service-book Knox and his close associate, Christopher Goodman, brought home to Scotland from Geneva in 1559.

Yet please understand that no Scottish Reformer of 1560 favored a style of worship that left everything to the impulse of the moment. The Assembly, in employing the pre-existent *Form of Prayers* of the English refugees at Geneva, provided a *Book of Common Order* that provided orders of service for all major occasions; it contained model prayers that could be used either ‘as-is’ or with modification. Proper ways of baptizing and administering the communion were set out (always, they must be preceded by preaching of the Word), as was the proper way of admitting superintendents and pastors to their offices of ministry.

Consistent with this principled yet eclectic approach, in 1566 when the neighboring Church of England began to insist afresh upon an unvarying use of the *Book of Common Prayer* and required forms of ministerial dress (with scores of Anglican pastors refusing to do so), the Scottish Reformers took

³⁰ L.O. Macdonald, “Women in Presbyterian Churches” in the Nigel M. Cameron, ed. *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 883-888.

objection. They drafted a letter to the Church of England appealing for liberty for their brothers.³¹

In the administration both of baptism and of the Lord's Supper, the Scottish emphasis was on simplicity:

In Baptism we acknowledge nothing to be used except the element of water only (that the word and declaration of the promises ought to precede), wherefore whosoever presumes in Baptism to use oil, salt, wax, spittle... and [the sign of] crossing accuseth the perfect institution of Christ Jesus of imperfection....

The Table of the Lord is then most rightly ministered when it approaches most near to Christ's own action. But plain it is that at that Supper Christ Jesus sat with his disciples; and therefore do we judge that sitting at a table is most convenient to that holy action....³²

It was required that both sacraments be administered 'in the face of the congregation', i.e. in public worship, rather than privately. Interestingly – just because the frequency of the Lord's Supper is for some Christians today a bone of contention – monthly administration of the Lord's Supper was recommended in the *Book of Common Order* for town churches, with a lower frequency of observance in the country due to the ministerial shortage. *The First Book of Discipline* of 1560, which underwent ongoing revision soon after the release of the *Book of Common Order* (1564) with its aids to public worship, acknowledged how difficult it was to maintain even this level of frequency given the shortage of ministers; it fell back on the general policy of four communions annually.³³

As to Holy Days or Feast Days, these were done away with – with Sunday, the Lord's Day becoming the sole day of Christian significance. In 1566, the Church of Scotland received copies of the cooperative confession jointly

³¹ As printed in Kingswood Hewat, *Makers of the Scottish Church at the Reformation*, (Edinburgh: MacNiven and Wallace, 1920), 240,241

³² Cameron, *First Book of Discipline*, Second Head, 91

³³ Maxwell, *The Liturgical Portions of John Knox's Genevan Service Book* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1931), 121 Church of Scotland, *The Liturgy of John Knox: Received by the Church of Scotland in 1564* (Glasgow: Thomas D. Morton, 1886), p. 138. Cameron, *First Book of Discipline*, Ninth head, 183. Those interested in the question of how Presbyterians struggled to increase the frequency with which the Communion was administered can consult the author's *In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian Past and the Evangelical Identity Crisis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2017), chap. 7, "Eighteenth Century Evangelicals and the Frequency of the Lord's Supper".

produced by the various Reformed cantons of Switzerland. This was the “Second Helvetic Confession”. The Swiss wanted to know “did the Scots approve?” The Scots wrote a formal letter emphasizing how highly they thought of this collaborative effort – except for one thing: the Second Helvetic Confession had made room for such special days of the Christian year which were directly associated with the earthly career of Jesus Christ: Annunciation, Birth, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. But the Scots were not convinced:

These festivals at the present time obtain no place among us: for we dare not religiously celebrate any other feast-day than what the divine oracles have prescribed. Everything else, as we have said, we teach, approve and most willingly embrace.³⁴

Understand that this meant *no* celebration of Christmas!

Marriages were prepared for by an announcing of the ‘banns’ (the intention to marry) three Sundays in advance; such marriages were solemnized at the close of Sunday worship services rather than on separate festive occasions.

And we should take special note that this same *Book of Common Order* (copies of which ordinary Christians were encouraged to own) contained the rudiments of a psalter-hymnal. Select Psalms of David were provided in meter for singing, as were certain other biblical materials. These included in versified form (for singing) the Ten Commandments, Lord’s Prayer, the Veni Creator (Holy Spirit), the Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis), Apostles Creed (12 Articles) and Song of Mary (the Magnificat). While it is true that hymn singing on a large scale was not commenced until the 1700’s, the principle that biblical material beyond the Psalms might be sung was recognized from the first. It will be of interest to some readers to know that there are underway in Scotland today serious efforts to examine what this earliest congregational singing can have been like.³⁵

Conclusion

Hopefully, this essay has made its case. It is not enough for us to have as our conversation partners *merely* Christians of our own generation. The Christian leaders of Scotland’s Reformation in the first 50 years have important things to tell us about the breadth and scope of our Assemblies, about principled

³⁴ John Douglas, rector of the University of St. Andrews led the signatories. The letter is reprinted in Kingswood Hewat, *Makers of the Scottish Church at the Reformation*, 322, 323. Their difference with the Swiss over the commemoration of particular days in the earthly life of Christ focused upon the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) chap. xxiv, “Of Feasts, Fasts and the Choice of Meats”. The Second Helvetic Confession is accessible in Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966) and Philip Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom* (New York: Harpers, 1877), vol. III.

³⁵ Resources for Understanding Early Scottish Psalmody are provided at: <http://www.wode.div.ed.ac.uk/>

eclectic ways of seeing the kingdom of Jesus Christ advance and of the importance of a holy simplicity in our ways of worshipping God. I firmly believe that we will be the poorer if we allow this legacy to go unrecognized for much longer.

A Brief Bibliography on Scottish Presbyterian Origins: 1550-1600

General History of Scotland's Reform Age

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*these volumes show some influence of the Scoto-Catholic or High Church tendency emerging within Presbyterianism in late 19th century