

The Fight for the Reformed Faith

The Decline of Reformation
Calvinism
in 19th Century Scotland

Part Four.

WATCHMEN AND WATCHWORD

If the orthodox party in Scotland's 19th century Free Kirk were radically outnumbered, they were certainly not out-fought on the field of theological battle. While they lived, they stood firm, and checked sufficiently the flood-tide of apostasy in high places such that the final eclipse of Orthodoxy was delayed until the early 1890's, when the rolling programme sustained by the "generous evangelicals" eventually triumphed. These "generous evangelicals" were certainly lacking in generosity towards anything that smacked of strict Confessional Calvinism. Their whole strategy was aimed at getting around the rigid Biblical Orthodoxy demanded by their ordination vows, and their prime tactic right from 1843 was the attempt to unify the Free Kirk with the Amyraldianised Secession Churches, these latter being led by high profile Amyraldian scholars like Balmer and Brown. In parallel with this tactic were other tactics, surreptitious undermining of the Scriptures, open failure to adequately discipline error, (indeed, even the malicious "disciplining" of so orthodox a man as Jonathan Ranken Anderson), opened doors to German Higher Criticism, and unofficial espousal of distinct Arminian and Amyraldian practices, which included the popularisation of hymns as opposed to Psalms, "revivalism" and mass-campaign evangelism.

The orthodox responded by counter-attacking on all these fronts. We have seen how they fought against the union proposals⁷⁶ up until Dr. Wood's riposte in the General Assembly of 1865. A major factor in Dr. Wood's resistance to the union proposals was the unorthodoxy of the UPC on the doctrine of the Atonement, and though he and others pressed the issue, the "generous evangelicals" virtually ignored this factor in all their responses. If any doctrine of the UPC at all worried any of them, it was the UPC's dissent from the doctrine of Establishment.

Heavily out-voted at the 1865 Assembly, the orthodox rallied their forces by

⁷⁶ Cf. BRJ No. 24 (Oct.-dec 1998) pp. 45 to 46.

the April of 1866, when the first issue of a new monthly magazine appeared, edited by James Begg. "*The Watchword*" was the second Scots religious periodical to bear this title,⁷⁷ and was aimed at addressing the union controversy from the orthodox standpoint. Begg was himself sympathetic to union as a principle, but decidedly unwilling to have any sort of union at the expense of any truth. The magazine was to have a decisive part to play in the battle, reflecting as it did the orthodox position on the Atonement and on the Establishment principle. Begg and his supporters had profound suspicions that the rest of the Scottish press was effectively "heavily influenced by the pro-unionists"⁷⁸ so it was *The Watchword* alone which really put forward the orthodox position. That it did so effectively is evidenced by its results. First, the pro-union party found it necessary by 1868 to issue a counter-periodical, also a monthly, called "*The Presbyterian*."⁷⁹ May 1868 saw the first issue of this counter-blast to the orthodox, which was edited over its first 18 months by a name that was to prove all too auspicious for future events.....one Robert Rainy. Rainy and his successors in the editorial chair were to give the magazine "a platform to those who favoured union", but as it drew towards the close of its production in July 1873, it had more or less conceded that union with the UPC was not at that time, feasible, and consequently its message had become somewhat anodyne, merely advocating as much unity as possible between all Scottish Presbyterians despite any prevailing denominational division. This is evidence enough that Begg and *The Watchword* had done their work well, and that their message had got through to masses in the Free Kirk and in Scotland at large.

Indeed, so incisive was the style of "*The Watchword*", that it attracted to itself a great deal of odium from pro-unionists. One of the foremost contributors to it was the stalwart Dr. Hugh Martin, the magazine's co-editor.⁸⁰ He defended the orthodox position with "a vigorous directness which was said to have brought 'many reproaches and much obloquy' upon the editor."⁸¹ Suffice it to say that Begg's back was plenty broad enough to bear all these reproaches, and he stuck to his task doggedly until July 1873 when the last issue was published. In that same month its rival, "*The Presbyterian*" ceased publication. This was no coincidence, the fact was that by that date neither magazine had a *raison d'être*, the orthodox had triumphed. Union with the UPC was shelved, and delayed by some thirty years.

It is evident that Hugh Martin was a central figure in this triumph. His renowned scholarship was to earn him a D.D. courtesy of Edinburgh University in

⁷⁷ During the Disruption period John Menzies published between Oct. 1842 and March 1843 a religious magazine called "*The Watchword*", supporting the anti-patronage position.

⁷⁸ Cf. DSCOT ref. *The Watchword*. As a testimony to *The Watchword's* position, we might note the description of it given by Hamilton:Op.cit. p.98 that it challenged the Free Kirk to retain orthodoxy.

⁷⁹ Also the second Scots religious journal to bear this name. The first ran monthly from January 1843 to January 1845. Published by James Adam of Arbroath it was aimed at propounding the principles underlying the Disruption and the newly forming Free Kirk. Cf. DSCOT ref. "*The Presbyterian*".

⁸⁰ Dr. Hugh Martin (1822 -1885) had retired from the pastorate of Free Greyfriars, Edinburgh, by 1865 due to ill health. Cf. DSCOT in loc.

⁸¹ Cf. DSCOT in loc. "*Watchword*".

1872, and from his pen there flowed from 1859 onwards a plethora of learned and important books and articles.⁸² Not only was he active in opposing the heterodoxy of his own denomination, this alert watchman was also keen to counter the blasts of heresy coming from external sources. He was aware of the influx of Amyraldianism not only in the UPC and the Free Kirk, but he noted the same deviation as having gained ground amongst the Independents. In getting a firm establishment amongst these latter, it of course acted as a further "seed-bed" from which Amyraldianism could be transplanted throughout Scotland, and indeed it was so doing under the pretence of Calvinistic Orthodoxy. Reacting against the militant Arminianism of the Morrisonian movement amongst Scotland's Independents, one Ralph Wardlaw, an associate and colleague of the famous Haldane brothers,⁸³ began to promulgate clear-cut Amyraldian dogma. Behind him in support stood the Glasgow Independent churches, and the man's status, reinforced by his association with the Haldane's, must have been very pervasive. Martin at once spotted the dangers lurking herein, and penned a fine response which indicates at once where Scotland's orthodox minority stood vis a vis any relaxation in Westminster's atonement dogma. We quote herewith:

"Under the pretence of enlarging the aspects of grace it (Wardlaw's Amyraldianism) achieves most effectively a precisely opposite result. For to bring in a Covenant of Grace in order to limit the application and circumscribe the effectual results of an Atonement in its own nature and accomplishment unlimited, is surely one of the most perverted and perverting schemes that could be adopted.... To introduce a Covenant of Grace as an instrument for the *limitation* of Grace is at once an insult to the human understanding and a travesty of the Divine wisdom. In any such view of its nature and extent it must assuredly cease to be called a Covenant of Grace. The grace is all in the prior arrangement or achievement, which it has been agreed on this scheme to call the Atonement; and the covenant is a covenant circumscribing the grace into limits narrower than, its own. It is therefore a Covenant not of grace but of alarming judgment. Nay, more: it is a Covenant of reasonless, arbitrary and capricious judgment.... And a Covenant coming into play . . . to exclude in point of fact vast multitudes from all beneficial effects of an Atonement, which, in its own nature, had as beneficial bearings on them as on any and all of those who are ultimately to be saved—a Covenant such as this, it is utter folly to call a Covenant of Grace. It is not a Covenant of Grace in any sense, but a Covenant of Judgment; and not a Covenant of Sovereignty, but of arbitrary and reasonless and terrific judgment."⁸⁴

No beating about the bush here. One can see, too, from the outline of his polemic, the profile of the target at which he is aiming.....a kind of "Calvinism" which has been seriously "genetically modified", to put it in modern parlance. And one can appreciate something, if only a little, of the tone of "*The Watchword*" when

⁸² Ibid. ref. "Martin, Hugh".

⁸³ Notably **Robert Haldane**, 1764 - 1842 famed for reviving Calvinism amongst a group of influential students at Geneva in the early years of the 19th Cent. The two Haldane brothers became Baptists in 1808. Rob. Haldane's commentary on Romans was reprinted by the BOT from about 1959 and on.

⁸⁴ Quoted in **John MacLeod** : *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh B.O.T. 1974) pp. 248 - 249.

Martin wrote in it.

1873 was the watershed year on the union debate. Acrimony and bitterness were piled on with the pressure for union until matters reached a head in that year, and it is appropriate now to look at the work of the orthodox as they headed up their unequal battle toward that surprise triumph.

We have seen how by the Assembly of 1865, the pro-union party were by-passing all reference to the deficiency of the UPC with regard to the Westminster Standards and the Atonement in particular. Such deficiency was “whitewashed” over with mealy-mouthed words that insisted that the UPC had no differences with the Free Kirk over the Atonement. Against this view of the Union Committee’s report Dr. Julius Wood had stood forth, and ably exposed the deception. Though the orthodox lost the ensuing vote in that Assembly, and the band-wagon for union rolled on, again we find in the 1866 Assembly men such as Forbes and Gibson standing in opposition, Prof. Gibson arguing strongly against the Amyraldian view of the Atonement then espoused by the UPC. Again, the pro-unionists dodged the issue, but their failures to address these matters were by now becoming obvious to the Kirk at large, that year marking a “significant increase in support for the anti-unionists.”⁸⁵

In the 1867 Assembly the Union Committee presented a report that pronounced that there was no bar to union between the Free Kirk and the UPC on the grounds of doctrine. In this report however, some 24 presbyteries were listed as having suggested that there was a need for further debate on these issues to remove any doubts, 16 Presbyteries wanted to see fuller examination of the area concerning the Atonement issue, and 15 Presbyteries asked whether there was an actual intention to “alter, modify, or abridge the Confession.”⁸⁶ Clearly, contrary to the Union Committee’s presentation of the matter, there were large misgivings abroad, and it is notable that the Presbytery of Meigle pointed out how the Union Committee’s 1866 Joint Statement on Union most pointedly missed out any reference to the Confession Ch. III Sect 6: “.....Neither are any other redeemed by Christ...but the elect only.” Despite these misgivings, Robert Rainy urged that the Union Committee be re-appointed, and had the audacity to say that there “was no obstacle to the accomplishment of union” because the view of the UPC on the Atonement was “in its whole substance” (whatever that may be supposed to mean) “identical” (gawp) “with the doctrines of the Confession...”⁸⁷

Dr. Julius Wood again got to his feet, and effectively accused Rainy of a cover-up. In that he served on this very Committee himself, he was in a position to know the facts first-hand, and he knew that the Committee itself was divided. Rainy obscured this too. As Hamilton judiciously says, “It is difficult to disagree with

⁸⁵ Cf. Hamilton Op. cit pp. 94 on.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 94 citing *Proceedings of the Free Kirk 1867 Assembly*.

⁸⁷ Ibid p. 96 again quoting *Proceedings*.

Wood's observations. The course of the Proceedings and Debates during 1867 in particular, give the impression of a 'conspiracy of silence'"⁸⁸ But Wood delivered another heavy blow on the floor of that Assembly, he maintained that the UPC men on the Committee (with whom he had first hand contact) held to an Amyraldian view of the Atonement which was, he declared, "flatly contradictory" to the Free Kirk's understanding of the Confession on this matter.⁸⁹ At this juncture he was challenged by Sir Henry Moncrieff⁹⁰ who insisted that when the UPC spoke of Christ satisfying divine justice for all men;

"I understand them to mean nothing contrary to this (that Christ was the substitute for the elect), but simply that the atonement was designed in the eternal counsel of God to be sufficient for all men, so that a free offer might be made to all on the ground of it."⁹¹

At this point we might blink, and pause to reflect on the "Marrowism" incipient in Moncrieff's statement. It looks strongly as if "Marrowism" had effectively blinkered him as to the dangers of Amyraldianism, and we ought to remind ourselves too, at this juncture, that the whole UPC was a conglomeration of descendants from the original "Marrow-men", and that they too, seem not to have been able to discern the dangers of Amyraldianism. Although Boston and the original Marrow leaders had eschewed Amyraldianism, the logic of their theology contained an irresistible bias that homed their successors right into that heresy. Hamilton judiciously says: "It is difficult.....to accept Moncrieff's assessment"⁹²

More inside information concerning this Assembly was revealed in a pamphlet published in 1870, written by the stalwart Prof. MacGregor, the Professor of Systematic Theology at New College, Edinburgh.⁹³ In it he noted that there were strong reasons for regarding the UPC as unorthodox on the Atonement because of her Amyraldianism, and that even during Union discussions, some UPC ministers had openly demonstrated publicly in favour of an un-Calvinistic Universalism.⁹⁴ He wrote:

"The more malignant aspects of Amyraldianism 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 nat-

⁸⁸ *Ibid* p.96. Hamilton also notes that Robert Buchanan, who was the Convener of this Union Committee, is completely silent on matters over doctrine, a silence that is further continued by his biographer, N.L.Walker.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*. p. 97.

⁹⁰ **Moncrieff** (sometimes spelt Moncreiff) Sir Henry Wellwood Moncrieff (1809 - 1883) inherited a baronetcy from his father, and was also a Free Kirk Minister. He had studied his theology under Chalmers, was a leading proponent of union, but more conservative on such matters as Higher Criticism, arguing against Robertson Smith. Cf. **DSCOT** in loc.

⁹¹ **Hamilton**, op cit p. 97 again citing *Proceedings*..

⁹² *Ibid*. p97.

⁹³ Cf. *ibid* pp.96-97. Entitled "The Question of Principle now raised in the Free Church especially regarding the Atonement" **MacGregor** therein gave full support to Wood's complaint.

⁹⁴ **Hamilton: Ibid** p.97.

ural 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 personal work of the adorable Substitute.

“Again, the two notions alike (or the notion in its two applications alike) must, when 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, when seriously entertained, to prevent unbelievers from coming to God in full assurance of faith.’ It is at this third point that the 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.”⁹⁵

To return to the actual events at the 1867 Assembly, we find that despite all the evidence, Rainy's motion, which consisted of an acceptance of the Committee's report, recommendations, and re-appointment, was carried by a majority of over 200. The effect was to roll the debate onwards for another year, but the orthodox men had evidently made their mark at large amongst Free Kirk people and presbyteries, wherein reservations over union were now running deep on a broad scale, and that because of doctrinal matters, the very issue the Committee was persistently sidestepping.

The ensuing years from 1867 to 1873 saw the “*Watchword*” continue its polemics. The antics of some of the “generous evangelicals” both in the Free Kirk and in the UPC over this period were to provide plenty of ammunition for the orthodox guns. Come the 1869 Assembly, and the Union Committee reported again, and again fudged the doctrinal issues, again insisting that there was no difference between the two churches on the matter of the atonement, rather it was just a matter of two different ways of expressing the same truth.⁹⁶ This attempt to blur the differences provoked incisive polemics from “*The Watchword*”, which was able again to catalogue fact after fact to the contrary. Nevertheless, again in the 1869 Assembly, the pro-union majority managed to get their own way.

In that year Dr. John Kennedy published his fine little book: “*Man's Relations to God.*” It is evident from Kennedy's polemical material encouched in this volume

⁹⁵ Cited in: Macleod: Op cit. pp. 250 - 251.

⁹⁶ Hamilton Op cit. p 99.

that he was aiming his shots both at Amyraldians and at Calvinists who compromised with Amyraldians and Arminians by holding a "double reference" doctrine in their Atonement theology. Such enemies he saw not only without, amongst such as the UPC, but also within. Kennedy isolated the "Marrow-men", and the tendency for "marrowwists" to lurch toward a form of universalism. The Marrow formula: "Christ did not die for all men, but He is dead for all men" besides being something of a linguistic chimera tends to hold enwrapped within it the same logic of a double-referenced atonement as one finds in Amyraldianism. In fact, of the two systems, Amyraldianism is logically more stable than the Marrow. A "marrow-man" will either have to justify his system on the basis of "paradox", or allow the force of the "marrow" logic to drive him into the Amyraldian camp. The decidedly unsatisfactory nature of admitting "paradox" into the heart of one's beliefs tends to generate an ever-increasing bias toward the Amyraldian solution over time. The history of the "Marrow" denominations is ample testimony to this. Kennedy lost no time in elucidating and criticising all these features:

"The doctrine that God has in the Gospel published, "a deed of gift and grant" constituting Christ, in some sense, the property of all to whom "the word of salvation" is sent, might in some minds be no deadly poison, and might in some hands do no deadly work, because regarded and explained as meaning, that Christ might warrantably be received by faith; but *it has dangerous tendencies* (Emph.mine Ed.). It ministers to the prevalent craving for a hope, not resulting from actual faith in the living Christ of God.

Our relation to the salvation of the gospel is such, that it cannot be ours till we are in Christ through faith; that we are required by God to accept of it in Him; and that it shall infallibly be ours if we believe in His name."⁹⁷

Again:

"The idea of the call (of the Gospel) being THE OFFER OF A GIFT has driven the Scriptural form of it out of the minds of many men altogether. This other was the form it alone assumed in the thinking and teaching of "the Marrow-men". To their successors it suggested more than these fathers meant. They began to regard it as necessarily an expression of love to the individual to whom it is addressed. **They desiderated some sort of interest of all in Christ before the call is accepted, in order to justify its being given.** Extending the idea of the Marrow-men's "deed of gift and grant," they reached at last the universal reference of the atonement, while still stretching a long arm to keep a weak hold of the Calvinism of the Confession. They hesitate not to say that without the universal reference they could not preach the gospel at all - in other words, that this is the only basis they find for the call of the gospel. And what do they find there on which to base the offer? A reference that avails for no definite end; that secures no redemption; and that leaves those whom it connects with the death of Christ to perish in their sins. This and no more they can find; and on this they base the offer of the gospel!" (Emph. mine Ed.)⁹⁸

Kennedy also says:

⁹⁷ John Kennedy: *Man's Relations to God* (Scotland: James Begg Society reprint 1995) page 58.

⁹⁸ Kennedy op.cit.: pp.56-57.

"That it (the Gospel) must be consistent with "the purpose of God according to election" for, while I cannot explain how the general proclamation of the gospel consists with the special purpose of God, I must not form any conception of the one which is irreconcilable with the other. There can be no warrant for saying, to all who hear the gospel, that God loves them, nor that Christ is their Head, or their Brother, or their Redeemer; for this would be utterly incompatible with the purposes and arrangements of the Covenant of Grace."(emph. mine, Ed.)⁹⁹

And finally it is apposite to consider his polemical blows against such a version of Calvinistic gospel preaching as that the "Marrow" promotes:

"...views of divine love.....raise two questions, which many a fool's attempt has been made to answer. (1) Why, if God designed only the salvation of some, does He address the gospel call to all without distinction? (2) How can an earnest call be addressed by God to those whom He doth not love?

(1) All Calvinists hold that the gracious design of God, in the preaching of the gospel, is the salvation of the elect through faith in Christ; and this is plainly intimated in the Word of God. Why then, it is asked, is the gospel preached to all? The answer must be, that "so it seemed good" in the sight of God; and the arrangement must be accepted as perfect on the credit of God's character. To some extent it may be defended against cavils. (a.) It seems *necessary* because the gospel is to be preached by men from whom the "secret things" are hidden. The mysterious thing is not, that the gospel is preached to all, but that it is preached by men. (b.) It seems *wise* because it meets the case of God's chosen, as sinners, in a state common to all the race. The gospel of the grace of God is most fitly preached to sinners, as such. From amongst the mass God gathers His chosen by a word and a work of grace adapted to the ruin common to all. He cannot come nigh to these in a revelation of grace without approaching all among whom they are. (c.) It is *becoming* that God Himself, and not another, should bring His own loved ones into view, and should do so by a work of grace. (d.) There is a design of God, in reference to the non - elect, which shall take effect by means of the gospel, to the praise of His glorious justice. There is a work of judgment, as surely as a work of grace, in connection with the gospel; and however we may shrink from realising this, it is plainly set before us in the light of Scripture.(Rom.11: 7 - 10).

The difficulty felt by many minds in dealing with the second question, is not owing to the necessary mysteriousness of the divine, but is one of their own creation. Regarding the call of the gospel as necessarily an expression of love, they cannot reconcile it with the doctrine of election. But is the call of the gospel an expression of love to each individual to whom it is addressed? True, the doctrine of the gospel is a revelation of God's love to sinners; and the embrace of divine love is assured to all who close with the call of the gospel. But is not this something very different from the call being an expression of love to all to whom it is addressed? True also, the call must be addressed in all sincerity and earnestness by God. But this is secured in perfect consistency with all the doctrines of Calvinism."¹⁰⁰

To be continued (DV).....

⁹⁹ Ibid. page 35.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. pp.45-46.