Theology and Scottish National Identity

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1. CELEBRATING THE SCOTTISH REFORMATION BACKWARDS TO 1960

The 450th anniversary of the Reformation in this country was marked by a number of events at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, several conferences and a moving celebration at St Giles that included representatives of other churches and faiths. A former Moderator, Dr John Miller, preached at that service and offered a perceptive and measured assessment of the Scottish Reformation from the perspective of the Kirk. The singing of the metrical Psalms, especially in some of their earliest forms, was one of the most inspiring features of the celebration.

The dominant political theme of the anniversary celebrations, however, was that the Reformation had contributed positively to Scottish society through the educational system that it spawned. In particular, through the attainment of high adult literacy rates, the educational programme of the Kirk facilitated the great achievements of the Scottish Enlightenment in the 18th century. This was generously acclaimed by Tom Devine writing in *Life and Work* and in other publications.[1] Devine of course is the leading Scottish historian of our day and he is someone who describes himself as a 'cultural Catholic'. In much of what was subsequently said by the Moderator in 2010 and at the special Sunday evening service of commemoration at the Assembly, this refrain was heard many times again. The Reformation had given Scotland an educational system of which it could be proud. Building on earlier medieval ideals, it had promoted the work of our schools and universities around the country, advocating a system of comprehensive education. Here at least was something everyone could celebrate and of which we need not be embarrassed.

This reception of the Scottish Reformation in 2010 raises several questions. Was the Reformation not primarily a theological movement intent on recovering the gospel in the life of the church, partly through a recovery of the Pauline doctrine of justification and a commitment to place the authority of the Bible over and if necessary against that of church tradition? The Reformers sought the renewal of church and society accord-

[1] E.g. Tom Devine, in *Life and Work* (2010), 11–13.

ing to the Word of God. They aimed at a godly commonwealth in which church and state were bound together in a close partnership, each fulfilling a divine mandate in its province and both together working to the glory and obedience of God. Education was a feature of this movement but this was largely directed to the reading of Scripture in the vernacular. It did not aim at secular progress although it was not antipathetic to this. The Reformers indeed would have been deeply troubled by the more deistic inclinations of the leading moderates such as Hutcheson, Robertson, Blair and Reid, all Presbyterian clergy who ranked amongst the leading Enlightenment scholars of the 18th century. So why make so much of this dotted line connecting the Reformation to the Enlightenment? The answer must be that this narrative enables one to appropriate the gains of the Reformation for a more inclusive vision of Scottish society. Education is an ideal of other churches and faiths, as well as of humanism. Insofar as the Reformation can be enlisted for this cause, it can be celebrated for its civic contribution even while recognising its religious dimension.

Contrast this with the 400th anniversary celebration of the Reformation in 1960. This took place at the beginning of a decade which witnessed that sudden and rapid process of secularization which in many ways is still with us, at least as far as the decline of the national church is concerned. In 1960, nobody spoke about the Scottish Enlightenment. Why was that? The reason is that the term was not invented until the 1970s, a sign that the signification of Scottishishness itself is a fluid activity and that recent constructions of our cultural identity have tended to eschew religion.

The 1960 celebrations were impressive in many ways—there was a flurry of popular books based on serious scholarship. These were devoted to studying John Knox, the Reformed churches, and the wider history of the Kirk. The Queen spoke at the General Assembly, the first monarch to do so since her ancestor James VI, son of Mary Queen of Scots. She described the Kirk as the national church of Scotland and celebrated its inclusiveness and public contribution. The Moderator was Principal Burleigh, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at New College. He gave a closing address to the Assembly which still repays study. The Reformers, he insists, did not create a new church. They belonged to the one catholic church which they sought to reform within the realm of Scotland. 'The Reformers aimed at National Reformation which they were persuaded would ensue from a Reformation of the Church of Scotland, the Kirk of God within the realm.'[2]At the same time, Burleigh insisted that the Reformation drew attention to the importance of the local congregation, for

[2] *Life and Work* (1960), p. 174.

this was where the marks of the church—preaching, sacramental administration and godly discipline—were most apparent. We can return to this point later because it affords a relevant reflection for the presence and mission of a church today. In a society in which the Kirk has ceased to be the dominant civic institution, the local congregation can still flourish and attest the gospel even when it expresses the faith of a minority.

Other features of the 400th anniversary celebrations included a strong commitment to the democratic and egalitarian nature of Scottish Presbyterianism and a residual sense that Roman Catholicism remained a foreign religion. 'Romanism' indeed was a term that continued to be used frequently in 1960, two years prior to Vatican II. The Principal of Aberdeen University, Sir Thomas Taylor, an elder of the Kirk, is quoted. 'If Scotland had fallen England would have followed and the whole history of Europe would have been changed. The Inquisition might have been found in the streets of Edinburgh. One man saved Scotland—John Knox.'[3]

In the years prior to 1960, we should also recall that the Church of Scotland rejected the so-called 'Bishops Report' which would have introduced bishops into presbyteries, thus paving the way for a union of the Church of Scotland with the Church of England. This episode requires further historical investigation, but it is clear that a decisive factor in the defeat of these proposals was the role played by the *Scottish Daily Express*, then the best-selling paper in the land.[4] Arguing that bishops were an English and Erastian form of church government fundamentally at odds with the more Scottish and egalitarian Presbyterian order, the *Scottish Daily Express* persuaded many that the sacrifices of the Reformers and covenanters had served the nation well. These should not be overturned by a misplaced ecumenical enthusiasm for an alien form of church polity. This episode reveals two features of the articulation of Scottish identity at the time. The first is that Scottishness is closely associated with a form of Protestantism. The country continues to display a monolithic religious identity that reflects a national character which has evolved over several centuries. Secondly, this identity could be happily expressed within the United Kingdom. The *Scottish Daily Express* of course was a staunchly unionist newspaper and affirmed a distinctive Scottish identity within the British nation. We should also recall that the last time the Conservative and Unionist Party held a majority of seats in Scotland was at the 1955 General Election, the high watermark of conservative politics coinciding with the peaking of Kirk membership at 1.32m. (In 1955, the Con-

3 *Life and Work* (1960), p. 268.

4 See the account in Harry Reid, *Deadline: The Story of the Scottish Press* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2006).

servatives secured 36 out of 72 seats in Scotland with 50.1% of the popular vote.) So up until 1960, Scottishness tended for many to be associated with being Protestant or more particularly Presbyterian, this taking place within the context of a commitment to the United Kingdom, itself a Protestant state.

2. HISTORICAL SOUNDINGS

In what follows, I shall offer some historical and theological observations on the religious construction of Scottishness. Although these are not intended as a comprehensive treatment of religion and Scottish national identity, they may help to expand and qualify the aforementioned observations.

(i) Prior to the Reformation, we find ways in which Catholic Christianity reinforces a sense of Scottish identity. The Declaration of Arbroath (1320) had fused religious and political aspirations by comparing Bruce with biblical figures such as Joshua or Judas Maccabaeus, political leaders who had been raised by God to liberate their people. In the 15th century, we find the temporal rule of the Scottish monarch aligned with the spiritual rule of the bishops and the Pope. This partnership of crown and church is apparent in the foundation of the three medieval universities in St Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen. (Edinburgh of course is a modern civic institution.) Other features of Scottish religious identity included devotion to national saints (e.g. Columba) and pilgrimages to their shrines. So the notion that Scotland may in part be defined by its particular expression of Christianity is already present long before the 16th century Reformation.[5] In some ways, the recent retrieval of Celtic Christianity can be seen as an attempt to recover an indigenous Scottish tradition that is owned by both Catholics and Protestants. Despite questions about its historical provenance and distinctive theological identity, Celtic Christianity may still serve some ecumenical purpose in its celebration of Columba, missionary to Scotland.

Nevertheless, both before and after 1560, there were more secular ways of constructing Scottish identity. Michael Lynch has pointed to the significance of the legal system, the practice of map making, the transmission of medieval epics of Wallace and Bruce, and the writing of Scottish history itself as multiple attempts to develop a sense of Scottishness.[6]

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5 See for example William F. Storrar, *Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1990), and William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: A Historic Quest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

6 See Michael Lynch, 'A Nation Born Again? Scottish Identity in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries' in *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-Mak-*

(ii) The Reformation itself is a complex phenomenon in relation to Scotland's national identity. In significant respects, it is a European and British movement. Knox had ministered to English exiles in Geneva. With his associates, he imported the theology of Bucer, Calvin, and Bullinger through the Scots Confession. The Protestant movement succeeded against a Catholic monarch in part through the support of the English crown. The Bible that was read in Scotland was the Geneva Bible, an English not a Scots translation. Hence the Reformation contributed significantly to the decline of Scots as a literary language. My colleague Jane Dawson, who is writing a new biography of John Knox, claims that he can be enlisted for the causes of unionism, independence, or devo max depending on what you take from him. In this respect, he is a politically ambivalent figure who does not easily fit modern stereotypes. Nevertheless, as the Reformation proceeds in Scotland we can discern the development of an identity that is both political and religious. This differentiates Scotland as a nation, albeit within a United Kingdom following the union of crowns in 1603. Roger Mason has written:

> In terms of imagining Scotland…one can say with some certainty that the fundamental objective of the Scottish kirk was the creation of a godly commonwealth ruled by a godly prince in accordance with the law of God.[7]

This idea runs deep in the political theology of the covenanters. By virtue of the Reformation in 1560, Scotland was a covenanted nation which had entered into a pact with God. Or, to put it another way, Scotland had been singled out by divine providence to play a distinctive role amongst the nations. This determined all areas of national life whether secular or religious. Equations of Scotland with Old Testament Israel are apparent in the writings of many leading Scottish divines of the 17th century. In 1634, Samuel Rutherford could write, 'Now, O Scotland, God be thanked, thy name is in the Bible'.[8]

The vision of a godly commonwealth has been the cause of much celebration with respect to its ideals of comprehensive education, poor relief and the accountability of political rulers to the law of God. This is apparent in the *First Book of Discipline* in 1560, its sequel in 1578, and other foundational documents of the Reformation. From our late modern perspective, however, it can also be seen to generate several problems. First,

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ing of Scotland through the Ages, ed. by Dauvit Broun, R. J. Finlay and Michael Lynch (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1998), pp. 82–104.

7 Roger Mason, *Imagining Scotland: Scottish Political Thought and the Problem of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 12.

8 Ibid., p. 13.

there is the theological difficulty in reading Scotland as a new Israel. This political exceptionalism is not warranted by Scripture. There is only one Israel, chosen by God. Much of its history is characterised in any case by political failure and a very ambivalent reading of the authority of the earthly monarch. In the New Testament, we find little warrant for constructing the church as a political entity that will take its place alongside other empires, nations and secular regimes. If anything, there is now a clearer differentiation of the secular and the religious. The church is an international movement that flourishes within a political order that is under the law of God. But it does not require a godly prince to legislate in favour of the church. Even more remote is the notion of a nation state that is peculiarly blessed by God as a latter day chosen people. To perceive one's own country as a new Israel, another covenant nation raised up in human history by God, is to risk distorting the significance of the only Israel and the church.

A second and related difficulty concerns religious diversity. The vision of the godly commonwealth seems to assume that there is only one church in the realm to which all of its citizens belong. This is a feature shared with medieval Christendom. By virtue of birth, each child is baptized into the church and thereafter is under its discipline. Hooker's celebrated remark that every member of the commonwealth is a member of the Church of England (and vice-versa) might equally well have applied to Scotland and its Kirk. Within this ideal of a nation defined by its unitary religious faith there is little scope for dissent, diversity, or even a pluralism of Protestant groupings. Significantly, two of the most powerful 17th century treatises written against the emerging ideal of religious toleration were produced by George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford in Scotland. Their opposition to diversity was animated by the conviction that a nation should aspire to ordering the totality of its life according to the Word of God. Hence while England witnessed the burgeoning of different groupings, sects, and churches in the second half of the 17th century, Scotland retained a more unitary ecclesiastical culture.

(iii) The 18th century was in some respects the golden age of Scottish Presbyterian identity within the Union.[9] Supportive of patronage, the economic and cultural benefits of the Union, and the Protestant hegemony within the UK, the dominant moderate party within the Kirk could celebrate its dual identity as Scottish and British. The Scotland over which

[9] See Duncan B. Forrester, 'Ecclesia Scoticana', in *Forrester on Christian Ethics and Practical Theology: Collected Writings on Christianity, India, and the Social Order* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 259–66.

the Kirk presided has been described by Devine as 'the parish state'.[10] National life was shaped by the aims of the Church of Scotland, particularly with respect to education, poor relief and moral discipline. Although their theology was markedly different from that of their covenanting grandparents, the moderates viewed the establishment of Protestantism and its Scottish variant as a mark of divine providence. The benefits of the Protestant establishment, the Union of 1707, and the advance of the British empire were all celebrated by Scottish preachers through much of the 18th century. The leader of the moderate party, Principal William Robertson, epitomises much of this era.

Robertson of course remains connected to the older theological traditions and practices that he is self-consciously revising. Affirming the moral and social cohesion created by religion, he is a strong supporter of the establishment of the Church of Scotland while also in favour of extending greater toleration to Roman Catholics. The moral texture of society is given close attention (as it is in Adam Smith) and, like other moderate thinkers, Robertson is committed to a programme of national virtue that is advanced not only by scholars and politicians but also by preachers. But the Moderates are not politically complacent or morally lax. Richard Sher has pointed to the way in which the rhetorical device of the 'jeremiad' is brilliantly adapted by moderate preachers such as Blair and Carlyle.[11] With echoes of the covenanting sermons of the 17th century, they castigate their congregations for moral laxity, greed and selfishness. Fast days are called at times of national crisis, especially during the American war of independence. Their sermons urge repentance and a return to the ways of true religion. Within this preaching, the Reformation discourse of 'providence' is again marked. There is a sense in which God has particularly blessed the people of Scotland (and Britain) although this is combined with a lament about backsliding and a call for acts of penance and reform.

Nevertheless, the cracks within this vision of a Scottish Presbyterian nation are increasingly apparent by 1800. The secessions of the 18th century had eroded the monopoly of the established church as had the rise of independent and free churches. Callum Brown has estimated that by 1820, around one third of Scots already adhered to other churches.[12] This

[10] T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: 1700-2000* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), pp. 84–104.

[11] Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), pp. 207–12.

[12] Callum Brown, *The Social History of Religion in Scotland since 1730* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 31.

figure would rise dramatically after the Disruption of 1843 with only one third remaining within the auld Kirk. One consequence of this much greater plurality was the decline of church discipline across the country. Kirk sessions could no longer regulate the behaviour of persons adhering to other churches. The default assumption that everyone was subject to the discipline of the national church no longer seemed plausible. With urbanisation and migration, the population of Scotland became more mobile and so less easy to monitor.

(iv) Into the 19th and 20th centuries, the story is one of religious resurgence with belated attempts to reinvigorate the Reformed notion of a godly commonwealth. Sometimes presented as an era of doubt and lost faith, the Victorian period in Scotland was as much a time of religious renewal. This is true of the Disruption, the rebellion of the pious against a system of patronage in the national Kirk. Chalmers and his followers initially attempted to create a rival establishment, purer in form that the one from which they had seceded. Only later did his successors come to embrace voluntarist principles with enthusiasm, as did their United Presbyterian counterparts. At the same time, the Kirk gradually recovered its self-confidence through the work of leading figures such as John Tulloch, John Caird, and Norman McLeod. Its worship was renewed according to more catholic principles, as a result of the influence of reforming ministers such as Robert Lee, William Millican, and James Cooper.

Nevertheless, the late Victorian period is also a time of continuing religious diversity. Three large Presbyterian blocks emerged, following the appearance of the United Presbyterian Church. This proliferation accounts today for the multiplicity of church buildings in all our towns and cities. The Scottish Episcopal Church also exhibited a renewed confidence and embarks on an ambitious programme of church building. Immigrants arrived from Ireland to work in Scottish cities, their Catholic identity being preserved and nurtured by the increased presence of priest also from Ireland. If the Church of Scotland struggled to maintain its links with an urban working class, the same could not be said of the Roman Catholic Church.

With the reunion of the Presbyterian churches in 1929, we find once again attempts to reassert the pan-Protestant identity of Scotland with the Kirk as its principal means of expression. The chief architect of the union was the formidable Dr John White, minister of the Barony Kirk in Glasgow. Yet his achievements and reputation were tarnished by a series of intemperate attacks on Irish Catholics whom he represented as racially and religiously alien to Scotland. He was not alone in this, as reports from the General Assembly in the 1920s make evident. Under White's leader-

ship, the Church and Nation Committee in 1923 resolved to petition the government to restrict further immigration from the Irish Free State and even to deport those Irish-born Catholics who received poor relief or held a prison record.[13] White's biographer, Augustus Muir, made not a single reference to this episode, perhaps because it had become an embarrassment to the Kirk by the mid-20th century. It was left to Professor Stewart Brown from Chicago to set the record straight on his arrival at New College in 1988.

Within this socio-historical context, we should read the Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland. These were recognised by the Church of Scotland Act of 1921. Declaratory Article III is the most relevant in this context.

> As a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people it acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry.[14]

One might argue that the use of the indefinite article draws the sting from any claim that the Kirk is *the* national church, but it seems clear that this latter construction is exactly what was intended by the subsequent remark about bringing the ordinances of religion to 'the people' as opposed to any portion or sub-section of the population. Recent readings of this text have attempted to see this as expressive of a worthy missionary reach to all the people of Scotland.[15] No-one is excluded. The Church of Scotland exists not just for its own members but for all of Scottish society. How this is received by our ecumenical partners is not clear to me and whether they have even been asked is doubtful. To suggest that this distinguishes the Kirk from other bodies is dangerously hubristic. In 1921 the wording of Declaratory Article III seemed to assume that Scotland was a Protestant nation and that therefore the Kirk had a duty to supply the 'ordinances of religion' to its people. It represented not so much a mission to the whole people as the maintenance of an indigenous Protestant identity. This idea has persisted even into the 21st century. As Lord High Commissioner, the Prince of Wales remarked to the General Assembly in 2000. 'I could not be more proud to stand before you this morning as Lord High

[13] Stewart J. Brown, 'The Social Ideal of the Church of Scotland during the 1930s', in *God's Will in a Time of Crisis*, ed. by Andrew Morton (Edinburgh: Centre for Theology & Public Issues, 1994), pp. 14–31.

[14] See Douglas Murray, *Freedom to Reform: The 'Articles Declaratory' of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p. 143.

[15] *Church of Scotland 2010 General Assembly* (Edinburgh, 2010), Section 25.

Commissioner … because this Office is a precious symbol of the long history which has bound together Church and Sovereign for nearly 450 years in a relationship of shared responsibility in their care for the people of Scotland.'[16]

Despite attempts of the General Assembly to maintain the notion that the Church of Scotland is the national church of Scotland, I believe that we do better to recognise that this article belongs to a different historical context. It is not one that is likely to be recovered in any foreseeable future, partly on account of secularism, partly on account of religious pluralism and partly on account of ecumenism. We have always been a hybrid nation—ethnically, tribally, religiously, linguistically, and culturally- and we are likely to become increasingly so in the future. The churches can provide some seasoning or leavening to this amorphous lump, but it should not seek to construct it in a way that is religiously monolithic.

3. SCOTLAND TODAY

The time has passed when the Kirk can speak *for* the people of Scotland, as if it were the institutional expression of an indigenous religious identity. The future is one in which the church must speak *to* the nation. What we require is not so much a theology of the Scottish nation as a public theology relevant to the socio-political context of contemporary Scotland. There are rich resources in our traditions which will assist with this task, but these will be better discriminated and released by forsaking outmoded notions of a Protestant nation. In some ways, this new setting may be experienced as liberating. For too long we have had to put up with a negative stereotyping of Christianity, especially its Calvinist variant in Scotland. It is time for a more balanced and judicious reception of the past. There is much of importance in Catholic and Protestant social thought about the commonweal, the significance of community, the need for public accountability of politicians, the ends of economic life and the care of the poor and disadvantaged.

The millennium celebrations took place a year after the return of the Scottish Parliament. This raised some important questions about whether the Kirk was recognised by the Scottish Parliament in much the same way as it is by Westminster. Its *de jure* status is probably unaltered, although independence would raise some interesting questions. But the *de facto* position of the Scottish Parliament is that all faiths should be treated in an even-handed way without the privileging of any group or body. We

[16] Cited by Ian Bradley, *God Save the Queen* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), p. 193.

see this in the weekly moment of spiritual reflection at Holyrood and in the attempt to communicate and consult with ecumenical and inter-faith bodies. Johnson Mackay offered this comment in the run-up to the new parliament:

> It is clear that those preparing for a Scottish Parliament expect it to be even-handed not only as between Christian denominations but as between different faiths. In an ecumenical multi-cultural Scotland, the traditional status of the Church of Scotland as the national Church is irrelevant to the role which the communities of faith can play.[17]

Not much has happened since 1999 to change that verdict, although we might note the ease with which the new Parliament has now adopted a regular service of kirking at St Giles, provided that it is seen as an ecumenical and multi-faith occasion. In some respects, this attests the continuing relevance of the Kirk to the public realm, providing what Grace Davie has called 'vicarious religion'.[18] Yet the current disposition of the Scottish Parliament represents not only the increasing diversity and secularism of modern Scotland but also the conviction that Scottish identity is no longer articulated by ethnicity, race or religion. If you live here, you count as Scottish no matter where you're from or what you believe.

This is reinforced by many of the significant social changes that have taken place since the 1960s. These have been described vividly by Callum Brown in his 2001 study *The Death of Christian Britain*.[19] Secularism is not so much a long slow process lasting centuries as a sudden series of upheavals that has brought about a growing dissociation of church from society over one or two generations. This is evident in the loss of Sunday as a day of rest, in the decline in baptisms and church marriages, the closure of many buildings as centres of worship, weekly church attendance falling to a figure of *c*. 7%, and the near total absence of young people in many of our congregations. With it, there is an accompanying loss of public significance, authority, visibility and political salience. The trends suggest that this is unlikely to change in the near future. What conclusions might we draw from all of this?

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17 Johnston Mackay, 'Is the Kirk Still Relevant? Home Truths about Influence as a National Institution', in *The Realm of Reform: Presbyterianism and Calvinism in a Changing Scotland*, ed. by R. D. Kernohan (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1999), p. 63.

18 Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case: Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2002), pp. 19–20.

19 Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Since 1960 we have witnessed a resurgence of Scottish culture, this coinciding with the growth of Scottish nationalism. These trends, however, have coincided with the decline of the churches. This has ensured that very little attention has been devoted to religion in recent discussions of Scottish identity.[20] In some ways, this might be welcomed. After all, it was never the burden of apostolic Christianity to represent ethnic or national identities. When it has become too closely aligned with nationalist movements, the church invariably faces the temptation of subordinating its claims and practices to more secular ends. National churches have too often blessed foreign wars of conquest and aggression. Released from the obligation to maintain a Protestant national identity across the whole territory of Scotland, the churches might find other forms of mission and ministry.

The churches have generally been more politically salient where their local presence is strongest and most influential. Without an earthed commitment to place and community, the church's voice lacks authenticity at a more national level. This is the primary location for mission to a post-Christian society—the proclamation and enactment of the faith in ways that contribute positively to social capital, public well-being and personal transformation. To this extent, the local enhancement of communities and ministries of Word and sacrament as noted earlier by Principal Burleigh in his 1960 address continues to repay attention. The church is where its people are. It does not derive its identity from a centralised office or hierarchical structure. *Salt of the Earth*—the study of the social capital generated by faith communities in Glasgow—remains one of the most encouraging studies for church today,[21] suggesting that their influence may be much more significant than you would believe from the media.

Insofar as a renascent Scottish culture will continue to draw upon earlier resources—artistic, philosophical, literary, educational, and scientific—we should expect Scottish church history and theology to become

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[20] Note however the commendable discussion of the possible status of the Church of Scotland in an independent Scotland in *The Church of Scotland General Assembly 2013* (Edinburgh: 2013), Section 22. 'Any constitutional settlement should secure a democratic, civil and plural Scotland, in which religion is neither imposed upon nor excluded from public life, but its presence and influence in the public sphere negotiated in democratic forums.' 22/6.

[21] Meg Lindsay (text), *The Salt of the Earth: A Report on the Contribution of the Churches to Glasgow's Renewal and Regeneration* (Glasgow: Neil Baxter Associates on behalf of Glasgow Churches Action, 2007); cf. the account of the report's work by the BBC <http://j.mp/BBCsalt> [last accessed, 18 May 2013].

increasingly important fields of study. If we can avoid either hyper-criticism or slavish adherence to the formulations of the past, then we might find that these continue to contribute insights and resources for contemporary Scotland. One area in which this is badly needed is in the construction of a cultural Protestantism that is more benign and positive than most of the constructions on offer today. Cultural Catholicism flourishes through the celebration of Irish folk culture but Protestant analogues are much harder to find in contemporary Scotland. This task might require attention being devoted to Scottish language, literature, philosophy, and other traditions, both religious and secular, in an effort to see Protestant culture as more than the mere negation of the Catholic Other.[22]

None of what I have argued should suggest that faith is now to be relegated to a domain of private life-style choice. The churches remain the largest voluntary bodies in Scottish society and they can continue to contribute to the formation of civic well-being, international cooperation and good government. But they do so not alone and not as the state's exclusive partner—their contribution takes place alongside other faiths and secular bodies, often with the need to form strategic alliances, to work alongside and to learn from best practice elsewhere.[23]

As we have seen, Scottish identity has morphed over several centuries with religion often playing an important role in its construction. If its capacity to express national identity has declined, we may yet see this as an opportunity for other forms of public engagement by which the Christian faith continues to display its significance for our society. The 500th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation in 2060 will inevitably provide a further benchmark for assessing the public role of the Kirk in Scottish life. Doubtless future commentators, who are even now making their appearance in our maternity wards, will have little difficulty in detecting the ephemeral nature of these reflections.

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22 Cairns Craig has provided some important points of reference for this task in *Intending Scotland: Explorations in Scottish Culture Since the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

23 I have sought to argue this in *Church, State and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).