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Reformed Theological Tradition in Scotland With Particular Reference to Confessions and Catechisms up to c.1620

Introduction

Until the late-sixteenth century one cannot convincingly speak of a distinctively *Scottish* Reformed theology. Instead, there was in Scotland the import, reception, appropriation, recycling and dissemination of the Reformed theology genre in its various articulations and nuances, a diversity which is now appreciated better (Muller 2011, 11–18; Muller 2012, 13–50; Denlinger 2015, 101). This implanting resulted from the cumulative impact of international Protestantism on Scotland, making the country open to impulses of the ‘transregional Reformation’ (Foresta 2005, 189). Multiple stimuli occurred through various means of transmission. One landmark was the preaching of a returned exile, the martyred George Wishart (d.1545). His ‘Reformed’, but more particularly, purported ‘Zwinglian’ credentials tend to be exaggerated, since his trial exhibited common Reformation axioms rather than any marked ‘confessional’ slant. Yet Wishart had uncommon Reformed associations. Around 1540 he had visited Oswald Myconius, Oecolampadius’s successor in Basle, and Heinrich Bullinger in Zurich who furnished him with some contemporary theological documents. Moreover, an English translation (Laing 1844, 7-23) by Wishart of the circumspect Latin version of the First Helvetic Confession (1536) was posthumously published in London in 1548 – the only printing in any language of that confession before 1581 (Saxer 2006, 38). That Latin version had toned down manifestly Zwinglian sacramental notions for diplomatic reasons. Wishart’s translation arguably helped nudge British Reformation thinking towards the moderate Swiss and South German theology, especially on the sacraments. This was consolidated by the Geneva-Zurich consensus of 1549, disseminated implicitly by the bestsellers of Calvin’s *Institutes* and Heinrich Bullinger’s *Decades* (Campi 2014, 121).

Scottish alignment with Reformed theology occurred in the wake of earlier Lutheran and Erasmian humanist impacts, neither of which was completely submerged. The Reformed impetus was from not just the Continent, but also England. From the late 1550s, the 1552 English Book of Common Prayer (to which John Knox had contributed as a Church of England clergyman) was used in Scotland among pro-Reformation groups. And the English Forty-Two Articles of Religion (1552/53) also helped encourage the adoption of Reformed theology among Scots – bearing in mind that that confession has been assessed as ‘arguably

the most thorough and advanced systematic expression of Reformed doctrine at the time' (Kirby 2009, 373). However, with the 1560 religious revolution, the priority for a generation was implementation of the Reformation. Relatively speaking, Scotland was a fragile, fringe country with limited human and financial resources. Most time was consumed on staffing the financially depleted new Kirk, on re-educating the people on religion, on educational reform, and on contentious matters like church government (presbyterian, episcopal, or mixed) as well as on tug-of-war relations with the civil authority. Papal authority and systems were not easily replaced; the historic ecclesiastical hierarchy was side-lined, and the Crown was unstable, so that filling the vacuum at any level was problematic.

Both John Knox and Andrew Melville cemented links with Geneva. Yet Knox's role in the new Kirk was essentially exhortative and prophetic as a 'preacher-theologian' (Torrance 1996, 2) rather than scholarly. This and continuing religious insecurity also helps explain why post-1560 there was a dearth of creative theology in Scotland until the Reformed orthodox Edinburgh theologian and teacher, Robert Rollock (d.1599). His work on covenant theology synthesizing Law and Gospel and re-aligning sacramental dimensions helped strengthen that configuration in general Reformed theology. Rollock's publications at home and abroad made him the first Scottish Reformed theologian to have an appreciative European audience.

However, public awareness of religious affairs in the country largely focussed on other matters. These were practical issues relating to worship and practical ecclesiology. They are frequently misrepresented as being among the chief identifiers of Reformed theology in Scotland, although none of them features in confessions of faith and catechisms.

Issues and priorities in Scottish public theology

This refers to such headline topics. Citing them straightaway will clear the air. For "Reformed tradition(s)", "Reformed theology or theologies," "Reformed confessions," "Reformed catechisms," "Calvinism," "Scottish Protestantism," "Scottish presbyterianism" etc. were not wholly synonymous, irrespective of commonalities. They are prisms, rather, of "single but variegated Reformed tradition" (Muller 2004, 141) or constitute a "flexible unity" as in Scripture (Jacobs 1959, 22). Yet some high-profile causes and attitudes in Scotland were not essential to such mainstream Reformed thinking. Nor did they have a confessional status. They did sit with Reformed "traditions", but with no universal acceptance in the Reformed world. Four examples follow.

One was John Knox's political theology of direct, active resistance to 'tyrannical' [Catholic] rulers, often wrongly cited as emblematic of "Calvinism." But in Scotland and elsewhere, this was a minority view despite some appeal in the late-1550s. It was not an agreed doctrinal or confessional tenet, rather a matter of opinion. The predominant Reformed attitude was conservative, guided by Romans 13 (Hazlett 2016, 252-253). Discussions of resistance by Reformed theologians were predominantly subdued and politic before the seventeenth century. Till then, prudential, but still formally qualified, obedience to the civil authority irrespective of its religion or oppressive behaviour was the norm. Some progressive political thinkers of a Reformed background (like George Buchanan in Scotland) or Reformed lay theologians (like Philippe Duplessis-Mornay in France) did promote active resistance to real tyranny. This was based on emerging covenant and social contract concepts in which divine law was a factor. Such thinking was generally speculative and had no formal connection with prudential Church theology at the time.

A second more widely, but also not quite universally, accepted phenomenon in Scotland was shared with Wittenberg radicalism (Andrew Carlstadt), early Zwinglianism, and increasingly influential English puritanism. This was the pursuit by the precisianists in the Kirk of a strictly biblicist, "regulative principle" on secondary religious customs and usages which others viewed as permissible. The radical application in the name of Scripture and of the (neo-Platonizing) "pure worship of God" untainted by material aids and rituals ruled out what some other Reformers saw as things indifferent (*adiaphora*) in religious practice. The justification was the lack of "express" sanction in, or necessary deduction from, the Bible (Wright 2004, 179; Allen 2016, 41). In Scotland, the policy eliminated the major Christian festivals and 'non-biblical' liturgical usages as illegitimate human innovations. This contrasted with the attitude of several other Reformed churches, and especially the Church of England. However, the prevailing austere stance of the Kirk was neither unanimously assented to in Scotland nor axiomatic in Reformed theology, as it verged on binding the conscience. It was contrary to confessions like The Tetrapolitan Confession (art. 22), The Lausanne Articles (art. 10) The First Helvetic Confession (art. 24), The Second Helvetic Confession (chap. 27), The Forty-Two Articles (art. 33), and The Thirty-Nine Articles (art. 34). And the 2-1 majority in the so-called episcopalian General Assembly at Perth in 1618 that was willing to accept the liturgical changes proposed by James VI had obviously no difficulties reconciling such usages with their faith, conscience, and Reformed theology.

A third contention was church government. Within Reformed Protestantism three paradigms conflicted: the episcopal, the presbyterian, and the congregational polities (Hazlett

2016, 248-249). All claimed biblical warranty. Yet for the early Reformers including Knox, precise church polity was not an article of faith – even if most Reformed thinkers favoured ministerial parity. In Scotland, however, doctrinaire presbyterianism belonging to the visible Church’s essence and claiming New Testament authority was adopted ultimately into the banner of faith and national identity, as in the National Covenant (1638). The Second Book of Discipline (1578) presupposed such a doctrine, derived from Theodore Beza in Geneva;¹ presbyterian tradition cited it as the hallmark of Scottish Reformed Christianity. Yet such a reductionist notion was never accepted by all Scots. Nor was it explicit in any Reformed confession (not even Westminster) or catechism anywhere as the divinely prescribed form of Church government. Yet it has often been cast as an obligatory Reformed article of belief. For those who claimed divine prescription, presbyterian church polity became mandatory.

Lastly, there was the question of balancing the spheres of church and civil power in religion and society – sometimes projected in binary church-state terms (Hazlett 2016, 249-252). The issue was linked to church discipline. Scottish Reformed thinking tends to be depicted as inherently oppositional, that is, keenness to keep secular authority at arm’s length. This was certainly true of the (presbyterian) Kirk. The position can be legitimately categorized as “Calvinist” or at least “Genevan”, due to the paramount concern for autonomous church discipline or internal authority, even if Calvin, unlike the Scots Confession (chap. 18), did not make it a third, essential “mark” of the Church. No Genevans advocated separation between church and state. Rather, their distinctive roles must be demarcated: the civil power has a legitimate interest in religion (*in sacra*), whereas the internal spiritual and doctrinal jurisdiction (*in sacris*) of the Church should be sovereign to avoid mixing and confusion of secular and spiritual spheres. However, if Scottish rulers, legislators, presbyterians and episcopalians were divided on the issue, this was also because there were incompatible doctrines in the wider Reformed world.

The alternative view emanated from Zurich. Zwinglian thinking granted the civil power so much religious competence that the de facto outcome was a unitary entity, a quasi-Byzantine single sphere embodying a fusion of church and society. This was not just a religion of the state, but also a state church, as most notably in Swiss German churches and England. Such a Reformed “Erastian”² model was rooted in the Imperial Early Church, Old

¹ In contrast, Calvin’s Ecclesiastical Ordinances were based on the premiss that the presbyterial order was beneficial for Church, but not a constitutive element of it.

² The Swiss, Thomas Erastus, in Heidelberg was the chief theoretician in the late-sixteenth century of the proactive supremacy of the civil authority in all church affairs.

Testament Jewish kingship, and appealed especially to Caesaro-papist monarchical ‘nursing fathers’ of the Church, as the Aberdeen Confession of 1616 put it (Dennison 2014, 111; Shaw 2004, 531, Hazlett 2020, ■■). Rulers committed to Reformed theology, like King James, heartily agreed. This general situation, then, disclosed ecclesiological fissures within Reformed churches. Authoritative textbooks and confessions of faith skirted around the issue. If Reformed confessions usually had a section on the civil magistrate, this rarely went beyond general declarations of loyalty to secular government as divinely instituted, and expectations of rulers’ responsibilities as “lieutenants of God” to “maintain the true religion” of the first table of the Law (Scots Confession, chap. 24).

Summary texts in Scotland illustrative of Reformed theology

Various confessions and catechisms in Europe disseminated Reformation theology from the Reformed perspective. Confessions can be located in modern editions among which only the first here cited is text-critical (Faulenbach and Busch, 2002–; Cochrane 2003; Pelikan and Hotchkiss, 2003; Dennison 2008–2014). There were three Scottish confessions: the Scots Confession (1560), the King’s Confession (1581), and the abortive New (or Aberdeen) Confession (1616). Reinforcing these were external confessions especially promoted in Scotland. These were the 1556 English Genevan Confession (attached to the Book of Common Order), and particularly the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) of Bullinger – approved on the whole and commended by the Kirk’s General Assembly while dissenting from the Confession’s acceptance of major Christian festivals.

The catechetical domain was more assorted. There are fewer modern editions, none text-critical (Bonar 1866; Torrance 1959). Published output in Scotland was modest compared to that in England (Green 1996, appendix), yet Scottish catechisms, probably not all printed, were manifold – and according to James VI, far too many, creating confusion! He complained about “the number of ignorant Catechismes set out in Scotland, by everie one that was the Sonne of a Good man; insomuch as, that which was Catechisme doctrine in one congregation, was in another scarsely accepted as sound and Orthodox.” Quoted (Milton 2018, ■■). A less-biassed modern observer also detected “individualism and reluctance to be tied to a standard version ... a uniform scheme of instruction ... with the same theology” (Donaldson 1990, 75-76).

The first published Scottish Reformed catechism involving creative input by a Scot was the edited Gaelic version of a Genevan Catechism done by John Carswell, Reformed bishop of the Isles (Thomson 1980, 95–108). This was connected with his Gaelic translation

(1567) of the Book of Common Order. Rather than translate the large Genevan Catechism of Calvin which was included in that, Carswell produced an expanded Gaelic version³ of the Genevan Little Catechism as also found in the Book of Common Order (1564). Thereby he transformed this shorter catechism into a basic apologetic text for use in Gaelic Scotland (and Ireland) to assist the conversion of Catholics.

As for Reformed, English-language catechisms in Scotland, the first one used up to the early 1560s was the Church of England Prayer Book Catechism. Soon to be more normative was the translation of Calvin's influential Genevan Catechism in French of 1542 (373 questions). Along with the Genevan Little Catechism, it was sponsored by the Church of Scotland as part of the Book of Common Order, and so was influential. Calvin's Catechism was republished regularly in Scotland up to the seventeenth century. Its dialogical and didactic format had been adopted by Calvin from Renaissance humanist and Reformation patterns (Kayayan 2009). Then came the Kirk-approved "Craig's Catechism" in 1581 (*ca.* 900 questions), by John Craig, the royal chaplain, followed in 1592 by "Craig's Short Catechism" or "Communion Catechism" (ninety-six questions). A less well-known catechism of 1602 was an elaborate one – partly question and answer, partly discursive exposition – published by John Davidson, author and minister in East Lothian. Known as "Davidson's Catechism" (1602), it was intended partly for pre-Communion candidates, and partly for Sunday catechism. Against spiritually destabilizing tendencies at the time (anxiety about, or indifference to, salvation) it emphasized assurance (Torrance 1996, 53-55), and so met an increasing need.

A major German Reformed catechism implicitly responding to the Council of Trent and reaching out to Lutheranism was the 1563 "Heidelberg Catechism" (129 questions), drafted by Zacharias Ursinus and Kaspar Olevianus. Its Latin original was translated into English in 1572. The Latin version, also republished in Scotland in 1591 and several times later, was used by Robert Rollock for teaching in the new Edinburgh college. In the same year, at the instigation of James VI, a new English version was issued in his name for use in Scotland, and later reprinted. Referred to as "The Palatine Confession", but entitled "*A Catechisme of Christian Religion*," this Scottish edition included notes and commentary from the Heidelberg theologian, Jeremias Bastingius. Subsequently it was sometimes appended to the Church of Scotland's Psalm Book and Book of Common Order, as in 1615 (Bonar 1866,

³ "Foirceadul Aithgearr an Chreidimh Christaidhe" [Short Catechism of the Christian Faith]. The full Genevan Catechism was not published in Gaelic until *c.* 1630.

113). The Heidelberg Catechism thereby acquired ‘semi-official status’ in Scotland (Milton 2018, 7). This corresponded to the high esteem accorded to it and the Heidelberg theology in England (Milton 2018, 5–6) and elsewhere, a theology which maintained predestination in the Calvinian sense (Lee 2009), if not manifestly in the Catechism, a common practice. The escalating kudos and status of the Heidelberg Catechism was sealed at the international Reformed Synod of Dort (1618-19), at which it was adopted as one of the three components of the ‘Formulary of Unity’⁴ (Selderhuis 2015, 9). This endorsed the Catechism’s standing in the Reformed world as well as the pedagogic value of its distinctive, human experiential structure of guilt, grace, and gratitude, the subjective side of the Covenant of Grace.

There were also Scottish catechisms in Latin for use in grammar schools. Influential was the 1595 *Rudimenta pietatis* (forty-one questions plus prayer samples) by Andrew Duncan, grammarian, educationist, minister, then professor of theology in France (Torrance 1959, 279–281). There were previous Scottish Latin catechisms. A metrical version of the Genevan Catechism, *Catechismus Latino carmine redditus* [Catechism Put Into Latin Verse] (373 questions), was published in 1573 by Patrick Adamson.⁵ Also in 1573 a smaller metrical catechism in iambic verse, *Parvus catechismus* [Little Catechism], was produced by the churchman and author, Robert Pont.⁶ This was a shorter catechism (forty-one questions) designed for pre-Communion use by youths with Latin. It was also based on Calvin’s fourfold structure in the 1542 Genevan Catechism. This, as in the *Institutes*, followed the themes of faith or belief (Apostles’ Creed), Christian living under the Gospel and the Law (Ten Commandments), prayer (Lord’s Prayer), and the sacraments (Jacobs 1959, 24-36; Torrance 1959, xii–xiii).

Lastly, there was input from Robert Rollock. The first was his 1596 catechism of 102 questions on God’s covenant: *Quaestiones et responsiones aliquot de foedere Dei* [Some Questions and Answers Concerning God’s Covenant], now accessible in English (Denlinger 2009) The second is an instructive text for theology students that Rollock inserted into his 1593 Romans commentary between chap. 8:30 and 31. It was among loci or Ramist-style epitomes dealing with various doctrinal heads. This was “On the Sacrament” in relation to the Covenant – a somewhat side-lined topic in the study of Rollock and of evolving Reformed

⁴ That is: the Canons of Dort, the Belgic (Dutch) Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism.

⁵ Chaplain to the Scottish Regent, and later archbishop of St Andrews. He also translated the Scots Confession into Latin (1572).

⁶ Provost of Trinity College, Edinburgh, at the time. Six-times Moderator and co-author of the Second Book of Discipline (1578).

orthodoxy (Muller 2016, 174; Hazlett 2016, 254–255). It also is now available in English (Denlinger 2013).

Backdrop of Reformed theology and confessions

Since confessional and catechetical material used in post-1560 Scotland belonged to the relatively commodious Reformed genre, we will sketch its general nature for orientation (Allen 2016; Backus and Benedict 2011, 1–21; Busch 2003; Campi 2014, 57–81, 151–168; Campi and Kirby 2016; Jacobs 1959; Muller 2000a; Muller 2000b, 3–17; Muller 2004; Muller 2016, 168–170; Nimmo 2016; Rohls 1998; Rohls 2003). All the Scottish texts belong to this brand. It can be characterized under a) status and role, b) form, c) historical profile, and d) theological nucleus.

a): The doctrinal status and role of Reformed confessions and catechisms was mostly well understood, if not always explicitly expressed. They were subordinate and replaceable statements of testimony (expository or dialogical) to belief responding to the revealed Word of God in Scripture – the “oracles of God.” They claimed to recover ‘true religion’ and provide a road map to divine truth and salvation. They were human aids to understanding. Beliefs necessary for salvation are only those found in Scripture or proven by it, the supreme authority in faith and worship, as in the Thirty-Nine Articles, art. 6, and the Aberdeen Confession, arts [8–11]⁷. And although Reformed confessions had a common biblical *fons et origo* along with an imperative to witness, none could bind the conscience. This facilitated liberty of expression and some doctrinal variation. There was no Reformed ecclesiastical headquarters or magisterium. There was no sovereign, confessional monolith, individual or school commanding total allegiance (Muller 2000b, 6). Instead, confessional proliferation obtained, although by the time of the Synod of Dort (1618/19) a common mind or consensus functioning as a hypothetical doctrinal norm wary of permissive diversity was emerging (Foresta 2015, 196–198). Yet while aspirations to regulated consensus, harmony, and uniformity were expressed, no Reformed, single, universally joint declaration on *all* key theological topics materialized; there remained nothing equivalent to the *status* of the Tridentine decrees, Confession and Catechism (1545–66), or of the corpus of authoritative texts included in the Lutheran Book of Concord (1580).

Compared to its Lutheran sibling, confessional Reformed theology was not confessionalistically immured. Reformed confessions had no claim to be comprehensive, universal, or authoritative digests of symphonic Reformed theology (although the Second

⁷ The Confession’s articles were unnumbered – numbers here and throughout are from Hazlett 2020.

Helvetic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism were highly prestigious). In an international and polycultural context, identifying marks of Reformed confessions within limits were: fluidity, pluralism, multiplicity, heterogeneity, provisional relativism ('we, here, now, confess this'). They were a working consensus and a moving mosaic, but within agreed orthodox parameters determined by foundational Reformation doctrines. This pattern was contingent and fortuitous, not a strategy. The statements reflected a recognizable religious climate rather than a fixed dogmatic canon. Such documents were ad hoc, occasional texts with a DNA of territorial particularity (rather than universality), provisionality, conditionality, and conscious fallibility. This implied that that there was no definitive interpretation of Scripture on everything. The Scots Confession's preface made the point, echoing Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles (1523), the Synod of Berne's Foreword (1532), the First Confession of Basel (1534), the Latin (1536) and English (1548) versions of the First Helvetic Confession (1536). However, that confessions only embodied what certain people at particular times made of Scripture was also unambiguously maintained by (some) Lutherans, as in the 1577 Formula of Concord (Pelikan and Hotchkiss, 169).

b): On the form of Reformed confessions there was no prescriptive template, so that structural variations are evident. In Scotland, for example, the short 1581 King's (or Negative) Confession is not obviously conventional. Its core just catalogues anathematized Catholic beliefs and practices. It has been usually overlooked by later historians, however, that its author, Craig, placed the Confession at the end of his lengthy Catechism for pedagogic reasons. Normally the Apostles' Creed undergirded most Reformed confessions. This resulted in two, commonly constitutive, elements enabling thematic flexibility. First, the re-affirmation of ancient Christian beliefs, and second, contemporary controversial topics like Scripture, Law, Gospel, justification, sacraments etc. Systematically, the binding chain became: God doctrine (or Scripture), anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology (plus sacraments), eschatology, and civil authority. The Scottish confessions of 1560 and 1616 reflect this sequence, as do catechisms.

c): On historical profile: sixteenth-century Reformed confessions implicitly steered a discernible path between the perceived two poles of Reformed theology: Zurich and Geneva, personalized as Zwingli/Bullinger and [Bucer]/Calvin (Stewart 2017). Any dissensus was mitigated by the Zurich Consensus (1549) between Bullinger and Calvin – chiefly in relation to sacramental theology (Campi and Kirby 2016; Jacobs 1959, 36–39; Nimmo 2016, 88). Henceforth a tacit Reformed concord prevailed on that. Unity and solidarity in the face of both Catholic and Lutheran repudiation was a major factor. And as Calvin wrote to Berne that

year: unity of faith, sharing the same Gospel and mutual fellowship transcended any “diversity of Church authority” (Campi and Kirby 2016, 31–32). This did not require a common theological position on all matters, but it consolidated a common lexicon. It facilitated reconciled difference on sacramental understanding as well as latitude on church-state relations, ecclesiology, predestination, covenant, worship etc. Semantically the *modus vivendi* enabled the later term, “Reformed”, to supersede the restrictive “Zwinglian” and “Calvinist” (Muller 2016, 169). Hence, while the Scots Confession has a marked Genevan flavour on dogmatic matters, elements in it also echo the Zurich Consensus (sacraments as “seals” of the Covenant exercising faith). In short, acceptance of Reformed theology in Scotland (and England) did not exclude internal preferences (MacCulloch 2007, 914–917).

d): Definition of the nucleus of distinctively Reformed teaching is elusive due to its evolving and mutating nature; identification can be distorted by chronology, screenshots, retrospective imaging and teleological assumptions. Various interpretative models are on offer. One is the fivefold-alone badge: Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone, God alone – all of which exclude human merit in salvation. But since these are common Reformation principles and obvious in the Scottish documents, such an identity card is insufficiently designated as “Reformed.”

Another fivefold formula, TULIP, was narrowly schematic and devised by later Reformed high orthodoxy: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement (selective or particularist salvation), irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints – concepts underlying the Canons of the Synod of Dort. Some have seen the formula as more stringently ‘Calvinist’ than inclusively Reformed; others have wondered how far ‘Calvin’ would recognize it. Current research suggests that far from being innovative, the Dort theology with its refined, infralapsarian, technically single predestinarian thrust (positive election of some with reprobation of the rest understood as implicit and passive rejection (by ‘preterition’ rather than explicit divine damnation in a double decree) was perfectly compatible with covenant theology (Van Asselt 2016, 225; cf. Weber 1962, 376). It was accepted and defended by Zurich theologians at Dort. It was compatible the predestination notions adumbrated or expressed in Reformed confessions (Muller 1985, 234–235, 292). Rather than licensing the sharply scholastic Calvinism of supralapsarian double predestination – an alternative Reformed doctrine (Gomarus) – the Synod of Dort distanced itself from it (Selderhuis 2015, 88, 90).

A third model is also available. This construct is a nine-fold, scholastic and linear ‘order of salvation’ orchestrated by God, referring to the hypothetical sequence in time of

causes and effects culminating in salvation: calling, regeneration, adoption, conversion, faith, justification, renewal, sanctification, and perseverance (Weber 1962, 355–406; Muller 2012; Allen 2016, 37–39). Reformed theologians devised this ultimately out of two beliefs. First: the eternal decree of election to salvation executed in time, and second: the promises, sacrificial signs and seals of a covenant of grace synthesizing Law and Gospel in the lives of unmarked elect believers gratefully practising the “third use of the Law” as the expected ethical norm (Muller 2012, 161-243). No confession articulated the order of salvation systematically. But it can be traced within them, including the Scottish confessions – especially the accentuation of sanctification and Spirit-powered automatic “good works” flowing from justification (Weber 1966, 362-364). This was evident in the Scots Confession (ch. 13 & 14), the Aberdeen Confession art. [27], and Canons of Dort, First Head, nos 12 & 13.

Lastly, Reformed thinking is marked by its focus on the ecclesial dimension in the process of salvation (Eber 1997, 411-16; Allen 2016, 40-43). Both the creedal “Catholic Church” and the “communion of saints” are the partly secular, partly celestial cradle and socio-spiritual community enabling the divine will for human salvation to be accomplished through the entire body of Christ. Accordingly, “ecclesiology” in Reformed theology looks far beyond the monodimensional visible Church. Following the typically Reformed affirmation of the intrinsic unity of the Old and New Testaments and so Law and Gospel, the Church is woven into election and Christology; the covenanted ecclesia originates with Adam/Eve and Abraham in anticipation of its revealed head – Christ crucified. The transcendent Church both extends back to creation and has an eschatological destiny. True doctrine as the Word of God is inseparable from the Spirit, who alone illuminates the Church’s understanding. The marks of a visible Church, an imperfect image of the true invisible Church, need to be defined to demarcate it from a false Church, even if the number of marks has varied in Reformed traditions. Church order and discipline were seen by some as a requisite third mark of the Church’s essence, since the true Church is not wholly invisible, and the holiness of the visible Church is insecure. Scottish theological voices assented to this third mark – but not unanimously, as the Aberdeen Confession silently revealed.

Highlights of Scottish confessional, catechetical and teaching material

Scottish productions exhibit the thought-world just delineated. The essential doctrines of the 1560 Scots Confession reflect early-Church Catholic (Nicene-Chalcedonian and Augustinian)

orientation on the one hand, and Reformation concerns on the other (Hazlett 1987; Hazlett 2009). Although performative (“*we believe, we confess*”), proclamatory, evangelical and eschatological rather than expository or analytic, the chief inspiration is Calvin. This reflects Knox as co-author. The immediate giveaway of Genevan roots is that chapter 1 is on God, whereas confessions of Zurich and English provenance begin with Scripture. Another genetic similarity to Calvin is the Gospel-Law sequence rather than Law-Gospel as in Luther and Bullinger. Yet the confession does not simply reproduce Genevan theology or constitute ‘Calvinism’ as later understood. It is more of an obvious family resemblance. While election (in Christ) is a theme (chap. 8), and there are passing references to the ‘eternal and immutable decree’ (chap. 7) and the ‘reprobate’ (chaps. 8, 17, 25) there is no explicitly predestinarian theology. This has prompted speculation about Knox’s reticence (MacLean 2015), but then no contemporary confession or catechism addressed the topic. Instead, three chapters (9–11) emphasize the ground of redemption as the crucified, risen, and ascended body of Christ.

There are non-Calvin features, such as discipline defined as a third mark of the (visible) Church’s essence (chap. 18). There is a stress on the exercise (suppression) rather than the spiritual end of discipline. Predominantly, unqualified notions of obedience to the civil rulers are expressed. Other aspects slightly distort Calvin presentationally, such as highlighting “regeneration and sanctification” at the expense of justification in a manner that might encourage moralism. Hence the uninhibited affirmation not of mandatory, but inevitable “good works” (chaps 13–15). Yet these are not meritorious, since righteousness is only imputed; rather they are necessary godly fruits of the Spirit in serving others and combatting social and economic injustice. Moreover, the expressed total depravity notion (chap. 3) does not quite correspond to Calvin’s more nuanced anthropology.

The confession’s inclusion of a proto-covenant theology of salvation history is an innovation in Reformed confessions, anticipating future developments. Extraordinary is the attention (three chapters) devoted to the Eucharist. Compatible with the Zurich Consensus, the sacrament is an added-value seal of the Covenant and strengthens faith. Furthermore, following Calvin it is a “mystical action ... wrought by the Holy Ghost” of union with Christ by eating and drinking his flesh and blood in a spiritual way that will ultimately transfigure human physical bodies also. In line with Calvin and Luther, it is “Christ Jesus who alone makes the sacrament effective” (chap. 21) in faith, but not because of it.

That the Scottish Reformation was largely a preached-Word affair is thereby not corroborated. The sacrament was seen as the visible Word in the Augustinian sense. Next-generation theologians like Robert Bruce suggested an extra-dimension in the Eucharist,

since ‘you may get the same thing better than you had it in the Word’ (quoted in Wright 2004, 188), namely the ‘whole Christ’ in his humanity (Torrance 1996, 57). And if subsequently, both covenant and decretal predestination theology seemed to make the sacraments redundant or rites of passage, a corrective is in Robert Rollock’s neglected excursus “On the Sacrament” in his Romans Commentary (Denlinger 2013, 206–211): the Lord’s Supper is a *necessary* confirmation of the promises of the covenant of grace. And echoing Bruce, Rollock remarks tellingly that the sacrament exposes participants to heavenly realities ‘*better* than the Word alone’ (208), for it “represents and applies certain heavenly realities *more* than the Word by itself can do ... and produce greater faith in that Word” (210). The received “realities” specified are the application of “Christ’s substance, his cross, his benefits.”

Additionally, Rollock’s recovery of the concept of “sacramental union” in discussing the Augustinian notion of the union of the sacramental sign and the reality signified is striking. “*Unio sacramentalis*” (as against natural, local, carnal or physical union in the signs) had originated in Luther as a formula to apprehend the proper real presence of Christ’s true body, and then developed by Martin Bucer as a mediating formula between Lutherans and Zwinglians. The mature Reformed understanding relates not so much to any elements-focussed real presence of substances, as to union with Christ within the entire sacramental framework – the larger “sign” or ritual experience which fuses the parallel heavenly and earthly realities.

On covenant theology, Rollock’s ‘catechism’ (for university students) succinctly expounded two covenants shaping salvation history, one of pre-Fall works, the other of grace (Denlinger 2009, 109-129) The latter, dramatized in the Lord’s Supper, is the overarching one, grounded in “the virtue and merit of Christ’s cross and satisfaction.” Rollock’s treatment of the covenant of grace dialectically vis-à-vis the covenant of works became exemplary. However, his promotion of covenant theology should not be regarded as militating against predestinarianism, since in his Romans Commentary he affirms (in contrast to the future Dort Canons) what seems to be a supralapsarian double decree (Rollock 1594, 142).

While the King’s Confession (1581) is of historical interest and had significant long-term impact through the future National Covenant, it is not a normal confession (Hazlett 2012). Composed by John Craig, its form resembles a government communiqué reaffirming briefly the 1560 confession, but now adding a long list of banned Catholic beliefs and practices. Modern editions usually do not publish Craig’s appendix contrasting Scripture-friendly patristic testimonies with extracts from allegedly Scripture-hostile, contemporary

Catholic writers. The context of the Confession was a perceived national crisis arising from anxiety about Catholic infiltration and revival as well as fears about a general Catholic crusade in the wider geo-religious sphere. The text gained fame (or notoriety) around 1603 on James's accession to the English throne: the Confession in his name was republished by Protestant activists outside Scotland in English, Latin, French, Dutch and German in order to project a militantly anti-Catholic James internationally. By then, in fact, he was envisaging a via media and church unity, while still committed to Reformed doctrines. That aside, the resonance of the Confession over several generations helped generate an uncompromising image of Scottish Protestantism, so that it earned the name of the "Negative Confession."

This was not completely fair, because in its early life it had always been published as an appendix to "Craig's Catechism" (Torrance 1959, 99) designed to elucidate core Reformation beliefs (Torrance 1996, 50–53). Craig's dedication and preface reveal his thinking (Bonar 1866, 181–186). The catechism is a "spiritual exercise" for "the common people and children" both to dispel "gross ignorance" and to equip them to resist Catholic proselytizing. It is experimental, and not meant to replace the (Genevan) catechism of the Kirk, but to supplement it and assist the understanding of sermons. This reaffirms a paramount Reformation concern reiterated by Craig – cognitive grasp of the faith rather than just rote learning (Kayayan 2009, 630–631). He points out that his pedagogical model is mostly the fourfold structure of the Genevan catechism, but in "fewer words." The result is a Christocentric "brief summe" in the format of about 900 short questions and answers – a masterpiece of condensation, "a hard thing", he stated. Craig also reaffirmed Calvin's prestige in Scotland by recommending the *Institutes*.

Craig mentioned two innovations in his catechism. First, the initial sections are on anthropology. This is borrowed from the Heidelberg Catechism's point of departure: the dysfunctional human condition. Second, the last section avails of the order of salvation. In doing this he departed from Reformed catechetical practice by also introducing both election and eschatological judgement including damnation of the wicked – due to their sins, however, rather than prior eternal decrees. This is tacit single predestination, but not even the word "predestination" is mentioned.

Lastly: there is the proposed "New Confession" (Aberdeen Confession) of 1616, neither definitively authorized nor published at the time, yet a weather vane of fresh developments. It emanated from a largely episcopalian general assembly at Aberdeen in 1616 (Foster 1975, 126–132; Hazlett 2020, ■■). This ushered in the king's vision of reforming the Scottish Reformation along Church of England lines, combining updated Reformed theology

and repudiation of Roman Catholic doctrine with irenicism, liturgical ritual, more systematic and succinct theological formulation, enhanced episcopacy, and Aristotelian revival (Gordon 2002; Thompson 2010)

The king urged a new confession of faith, a new catechism, a new liturgy, higher ecclesiastical courts, and the restructuring of university theology faculties. Little got off the drawing board. What did materialize was a draft confession, arising out of preliminary work. The assembly remitted it to a subcommittee for revision prior to publication that included Robert Howie, Principal of St Mary's College, St Andrews, who had been involved in earlier confessional initiatives. The confession then vanished for reasons not yet fully appreciated (Hazlett 2020, ■■) – only to re-emerge, unrevised, in 1678 in David Calderwood's posthumous *True History* (1678). He had been present at Aberdeen in 1616 and identified the principal drafters of the text as two Edinburgh ministers, John Hall and John Adamson.⁸

The goal seems to have been a more presentationally elegant version than the Scots Confession – minus cluttering biblical and historical details. The apparent stylistic model was the English Thirty-Nine Articles, according to Archbishop John Spottiswoode (Hazlett 2020, xx), but contemporary scholastic trends were also a factor. The content echoed Reformed developments designed to fortify fundamental doctrines and confessional boundaries (Foresta 2015, 195–196). These were already evident in the Churches of England (Lambeth Articles, 1595) and Ireland (Irish Articles of Religion, 1615) as well as the imminent Synod of Dort.

Five examples follow: First: full-blown double predestination is briefly affirmed, abandoning traditional reticence in Reformed confessional contexts. As in the English and Irish texts, predestination appears in the context of the very first article in the Aberdeen Confession, on God, and follows both medieval tradition and Reformers like Luther, Zwingli, and Beza (Weber 1966, 466-469; Muller 2011, 13). This is not, therefore, a feature solely attributable to 'Calvinist orthodoxy'. Yet it in the Reformed context it did reflected a drift to supra- or prelapsarian predestination notions which were not endorsed by the infralapsarian Synod of Dort.

Second: Reformed sacramental consensus in the framework of a basic covenant theology is evident in articles [30–43]. There, the sacraments are subordinate to predestination and to "God's eternal covenant" as "seals of it" [32], but also strengthen faith

⁸ Adamson later became principal of the Edinburgh College. Hall was constant moderator, that is quasi-bishop of Edinburgh Presbytery.

uniquely and necessarily (Hazlett 2016, 254) – and in the sense compatible with Rollock’s teaching.

Third: in line with the order of salvation there are emphases on expected sanctification following justification [27] by the righteousness of Christ rather than by faith, the instrument only; also cited is the certainty of salvation [29] in the elect who, belonging to the true Catholic Church, are (effectually) called to eternal life in Christ [6 & 45].

Fourth: there is, arguably, implicit repudiation of a soteriological God-human synergism emerging in some international Reformed circles: Arminianism [24–26], seen by some as the new semi-Pelagianism. This only had a whispering presence at this time in some Protestant Scottish circles allegedly attracted to the more optimistic anthropology of Catholic tradition, the real cause of anxiety among orthodox Kirk custodians (Mullan 2000, 211-218).

Lastly: the absence of discipline as a mark of the Church is in line with broader Reformation thinking. Instead, like Calvin, the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Irish Articles, nurturing ecclesial faith is uniquely the work of preaching and the sacraments [30]. However, advanced presbyterian thinking required Church discipline, in the sense of a specific conciliar system of governance based on ministerial parity, as a defining mark to safeguard presbyterian polity in the true visible Church.

The draft Aberdeen Confession was a dead letter for reasons not immediately obvious, although its still-birth was sealed by the future reconfirmation of the 1560 Confession at the strongly presbyterian Glasgow General Assembly in 1638. Yet the 1616 Confession not only mirrored contemporary developments and issues, but also anticipated future conflicts. Certainly, on soteriology it was part of trajectory of developing doctrinal definition (influenced by Ramist, rational and succinct exposition); it led from the Lambeth Articles and the Irish Articles to the Synod of Dort and ultimately the Westminster Confession. The process did not require absolute uniformity in either formulation or content: like the Irish Articles, the Aberdeen Confession presented full double predestination, whereas Dort and Westminster expressed more of a single and still unconditional predestination of the elect with the non-elect passed by – reprobation by preterition or omission. This variation, including contrasting understandings of the atonement, reflected a degree of de facto latitude within Reformed orthodox parameters, and thus within Scotland as well, where advocates of various positions were found (Mullan 1985, 223-225).

Afterword

There is the question of the authority of the Dort Canons in Scotland. There was no Scottish General Assembly for nearly twenty years after the Synod to endorse them; but the 1638 Glasgow Assembly minute was to refer to the “venerable Assembly of Dort”, suggesting approval of its decisions. Theologians like several of the episcopalian ‘Aberdeen Doctors’ including Robert Baron, wrongly suspected to be Arminian sympathizers, discussed them very positively (Denlinger 2015, 97). He found them compatible with his thinking, categorized now as “hypothetical universalism” – whereby Christ’s death was for everyone, but only particularly effective for the unconditionally predestined elect, so that the result of the atonement remained limited.

That apart, the matter of apparent Scottish non-representation at Dort has been reopened. The traditional view was that “Scotland was not represented at Dort” (Mullan 1985, 216). The argument was that while there was indeed a Scot present at the Synod, Walter Balcanquahall from Cambridge university, he was there as part of the English delegation. However, more recent study affirms that Balcanquahall’s role was to represent the Church of Scotland (albeit as a stand-in for a delegation that was impeded by adverse weather) and as part of a joint “British” delegation. The Kirk’s specific representation is confirmed by new evidence from Balcanquahall himself, the Synod organizers, King James, and the archbishop of Canterbury (Milton 2005).⁹

While in seventeenth-century Scotland the shibboleth, “Arminian” was viral and bandied about as a smear word for anyone with whom some people disagreed on a range of issues, three points need finally to be made. First: any pretended manifestation of Arminianism in Scotland needs to be assessed by taking into account the differences between a) the authentic Arminius conceiving of a synergy between divine and autonomous human wills with an implied positive anthropology, b) the more advanced Remonstrant theology including resistible grace especially damned at Dort (Stanglin 2006, 387-394), c) so-called “native English” (or “Anglican”), mild, open-minded Arminianism or just “anti-Calvinism” identified by some in Scotland in figures like Archbishop William Laud and others claiming that the Thirty-Nine Articles were ambiguous and thus permissive, and d) much later radical Arminianism of a definite semi-Pelagian kind alien to Arminius, and also often associated with the Christological heterodoxy of Socinianism. Second: in accord with the Reformed understanding of confessions, they are not infallible, so that any ‘definition’ remained provisional and mutable. Third: in the early decades of the seventeenth century, there were

⁹ xxvii n. 43, 52, 148–150, 152 n. 18, 182.

(prudentially) no openly Arminian theologians in Scotland (Mullan 1985, 216–226). But it was talked about, especially by Scots who had also studied abroad. Such conversations implied refutation, it would seem. Contemporary rumours and accusations about perceived Arminian, and so unReformed, sympathies in some (nearly always episcopalians) have not yet been substantiated. There was no obvious divide in Scotland over grace and election at the time. The virtual Lydian stone of orthodoxy became church government. Passions and polemics meant that for many strictly orthodox Reformed with a priori presbyterian convictions, episcopacy was a magnet that attracted Arminianism, Erastianism and arbitrary civil over the Church, ritualistic liturgy, Popery, moral slackness, alien English aesthetics, irenicism and notions of religious toleration etc. Accordingly, issues were most definitely very confused in a chaotic world of increasingly fake news. The Reformed consensus of shared soteriological parameters, common confessions and catechisms did little to dispel that.

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