

# The Revival as a Dimension of Scottish Church History

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Though the motto of the city of Glasgow has been changed to suit the lifestyle of later generations of Glaswegians, as it is first on record in 1631 it takes the form: "Lord, let Glasgow flourish through the preaching of thy Word and praising thy Name".<sup>1</sup> What happened when the ministers of Glasgow, or of any other Scottish city or village, gave themselves wholeheartedly to the "preaching of God's Word"? Over considerable periods of time there might seem small enough result, but, now and then, a minister who had been preaching for years without visibly disturbing man, woman or beadle, found himself with a congregation which suddenly decided its minister was preaching more convincingly than ever before, which wept, groaned and moaned under his preaching, and which followed him to the manse in droves after sermon, seeking his counsel. The minister had a revival. That such revivals resulted from Scottish preaching cannot be gainsayed, for at times they received much notice, not always kindly, in the contemporary press, were productive of many pamphlets, some of them ill-natured, and in general were a theme of controversy, at times acrimonious, but that these revivals occurred frequently throughout a period of more than 150 years of Scottish church history, were widespread across the country, and were of significance as the continuing source of much that was effective in the life of the Scottish church, might not be readily suspected from our standard volumes on church history. There are obvious reasons for the neglect, for revivals have a will o' the wisp nature, coming and going apparently as they please, with little deference to acts of Assembly or overtures from subordinate courts of the church, and their sources, courses and conclusions often seem indecipherable. Difficulties of analysis and definition, even of nomenclature, whether we are to distinguish, for example, between revival and awakening, further complicate the study, and the student is faced with what is often peculiarly daunting raw material, a mass of hagiography, and of religious clichés in which original facts are lost under the improvements of edifying editors. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the *douce* historian slipping past on tiptoe, and Burleigh, Bulloch and Drummond have two indexed references to "revival" in three volumes. It is an area in which very little satisfactory work has been done and not much has been attempted, but the thesis here offered is that, in spite of

<sup>1</sup> *The History of Glasgow*, ed. J. F. S. Gordon (1877), i, 36.

past neglect, revival is a dimension of Scottish church history which deserves to be taken seriously.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of time and space, the seventeenth century offers two incidents, the Stewarton sickness<sup>3</sup> c. 1625, associated with the work of the Rev. David Dickson, and the revival at Shotts in 1630, which accompanied the preaching of the Rev. John Livingston (then aged 17), on a Monday following a communion, a preaching credited with some 500 converts.<sup>4</sup> Shotts and Stewarton roughly bracket a central and western province, scene of much activity in the following century. This activity is associated with, though not primarily caused by, the arrival in Scotland of George Whitfield in 1741, who had a very contemptuous press in the *Scots Magazine*, but despite (or perhaps because of) his brush with the Secession leaders became very popular. The Cambuslang Wark was the most spectacular, and certainly the best-known event of its kind in Scottish religious history.<sup>5</sup>

The Rev. William McCulloch, the parish minister, was a "yill minister", one whose appearance in the tent at the sacrament promoted an immediate drift towards the refreshment booths. After an undistinguished ministry of ten years he saw, in the winter of 1741-1742, the first signs of awakening in his congregation. Some of them had attended Whitfield's preaching in Glasgow, and McCulloch had himself begun to read to them reports from America, especially of the work associated with Jonathan Edwards. On Thursday, 18 February, after sermon, 50 people in evident distress followed McCulloch to the manse, and as excitement grew, by the end of May about 300 were believed to have been affected. It was only at this point that McCulloch wrote and obtained from Whitfield a promise of a visit in the week before the July communion. Whitfield preached at 2 p.m. and again at 6 p.m. and at 9 p.m. on the Tuesday of that week and, after his third sermon, McCulloch took the pulpit and continued until 1 a.m. On Saturday Whitfield returned to Cambuslang, when an audience of 20,000 was reported. Two preaching tents were set up and all day Sunday, while relays of ministers preached, relays of communicants approached the Tables. On the evidence of the tokens issued 1,700 communicated, but, as always, the audience for the preachers was many times larger.

2 Useful general works are: J. Gillies, *Historical Collections relating to remarkable periods of the Success of the Gospel* (1754), reprinted with continuation by H. Bonar (Kelso, 1841) and W. J. Couper, *Scottish Revivals* (Dundee, 1918). (Only 37 copies printed.)

3 Gillies, *Historical Collections*, 182, 198, citing Wodrow's *Life of Dickson*.  
4 *Ibid.*, 198-199.

5 A. Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival* (London, 1971); useful biography. Some source materials in Gillies, *Collections*, and in D. Macfarlan, *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, n.d. ?1845).

Whitfield preached once more on the Sunday evening, a sermon memorable to many of his hearers, though his biographer described it as meagre in the extreme: "we look in vain for a single passage of interest or power".<sup>6</sup>

The Rev. Alexander Webster of Edinburgh now made a startling proposal, that another communion season should be immediately appointed. It was a novel idea but was supported by Whitfield, and the kirk session appointed 15 August. Estimates of the attendance run as high as forty or even fifty thousand, but Whitfield, with more experience in estimating open air audiences, thought about thirty thousand, but if even this seems generous, when one recalls that the population of Glasgow was just over 17,000 it must be noted that crowds came, not only from all over the west country, but from Edinburgh and from at least as far north as Crieff and Muthill. Three-thousand communicants were counted, but it was estimated that another 1,000 would willingly have gone to the Tables, but failed to get tokens.

Kilsyth,<sup>7</sup> the fame of which stands next to the revival of Cambuslang in 1742, had been ministered to by the Rev. James Robe since 1713 without startling results, and even when the minister began in 1740 to preach especially upon regeneration, there was no immediate reaction; to his disappointment few of his people made their way to Cambuslang itself; and a visit of the Rev. John Willison, on his way home from Cambuslang to Dundee, apparently failed to win any response. A month later, calling at a friend's house, Robe found 12 of the servants in distress and by the following Sunday cries from men as well as women accompanied his preaching. After sermon such numbers flocked to the manse, that even an adjacent barn could not hold them, and Robe led them back to the church, sending meanwhile to the minister of Cumbernauld to come to his aid. Between them they interviewed 30 persons, 20 from Kilsyth itself, and by midsummer it was estimated that 200 out of a population of 1,100 had been awakened. The awakening was often noisy, with loud cries and bodily distresses which Robe disliked, but he discovered that to have his elders remove the noisy was in the end a greater disturbance than leaving them alone. Whitfield, who preached twice to audiences estimated at 10,000, wrote, "such a commotion I believe you never saw. O what agonies and cries were there!"<sup>8</sup> Since the Kilsyth communion had fallen on the same date as the first Cambuslang communion, and nothing unusual was apparent, Robe's elders suggested an autumn communion, which took place in October, from 8.30 a.m. until Sunday evening, by which time 22 Tables and 1,500 communicants had been served.

<sup>6</sup> Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 116.

<sup>7</sup> Gillies, *Collections*, 441-452, 458.

<sup>8</sup> Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 130.

Such events could not but have repercussions, and M'Laurin of Glasgow writing in August 1743 to a correspondent in New England, spoke of five areas of particular revival in addition to Cambuslang and Kilsyth, namely, St Ninians, with Gargunnoch, Muthill, Torryburn with Carnock, and Nigg.<sup>9</sup> Nigg properly belongs to the Easter Ross province, but of the midlands and west it was said "in less than two months . . . there were few parishes within twelve miles (sc. of Cambuslang) . . . but had some more or fewer awakened there, and many at a much greater distance".<sup>10</sup> The list of those known to have been affected includes Irvine, Stewarton, Kilmarnock, Bothwell, Blantyre, East Kilbride, Glasgow, and the parishes along the Campsie Hills such as Baldernock, Cadder, Campsie, and Kirkintilloch.

A second early province of revival lay in the north-east of Scotland, beyond the Moray firth, where there had been a revival or awakening in Nigg in the 1730s. In the next decade many parishes in the Presbytery of Tain were affected, together with parishes in the Presbyteries of Chanonry, Dingwall and Dornoch, as far north as Golspie. Mention is also made at this period of revival in Nairn.<sup>11</sup>

There had been some small sporadic incidents of revival in the Highlands in the course of the eighteenth century, but a third province within the Highland belt can be more clearly identified by a series of revivals in Moulin (1799), Arran (1805 and 1812), Kilmuir and Snizort in Skye (1812), followed by a revival in Breadalbane and a succession of awakenings in Lewis well into the 1820s. In the case of Moulin, the accidental presence of an Anglican evangelical, the Rev. Charles Simeon at a communion season led to an invitation to take part, as a result of which the local minister the Rev. Alexander Stewart was himself powerfully moved, and some years later, in 1799, saw revival amongst his congregation.<sup>12</sup>

There was a pause of some years after these Highland revivals and the next group in the nineteenth century has its epicentre once more in Kilsyth, where the memory of the 1742 revival had been kept green, and there was a continuity of at least one fellowship-meeting from that period. Here the Rev. William Burns longed to see some similar awakening under his own ministry, but, apart from some excitement in the Sunday school, it was 1839 before the event was precipitated by the preaching of

9 *Ibid.*, 125.

10 *Ibid.*, 124.

11 Gillies, *Collections*, 453-456.

12 A. Stewart, *Account of the late Revival of Religion at Moulin* (1800). Arran, Skye, and Lewis are described in *Tracts* v, viii and x of the Glasgow Evangelical Corresponding Society, 1830. For the Highlands, in general, see J. MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland, 1688-1800* (Aberdeen, 1951).

his son, the Rev. William Chalmers Burns. Burns, junior, locum in St Peter's, Dundee during Robert Murray McCheyne's absence in the Holy land, was awaiting placement by the Foreign Mission Committee. He returned from Kilsyth to similar scenes in Dundee and was thereafter involved in revivals in Perth, in the Lawers area, in Fife and, most spectacularly, in Aberdeen, where his activities prompted the presbytery to make a detailed investigation into his work. Apart from Burns' preaching, the Kilsyth awakening expanded into adjacent parishes and the outlying villages near Glasgow.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from a small awakening in Ferryden, Montrose<sup>14</sup> there was now a pause until events outside Scotland brought repercussions within. At the Free Church Assembly of 1858, Dr M'Lean, Lafayette College, Pennsylvania spoke of the latest movements in the United States, and events in Ulster aroused widespread interest; in the summer of 1859 there was news of "striking down" in Scotland; and a gathering at Dregghorn attended by 17,000 was reported. These were a prelude to three years during which revival flourished throughout all Scotland, a movement which the Rev. Dr Buchanan, moderator of the Free Church General Assembly described as stretching "from East Lothian, to the outer Hebrides, from the shore of the Moray Firth to those of the Solway, and all through the central mining and manufacturing districts". One marked area of impact was the fringe of fishing villages around the coast, Eyemouth, Dunbar, North Berwick, Cockenzie, Newhaven, then across to Cellardyke, Kirkcaldy, Pittenweem, a new outburst at Ferryden, Fraserburgh, Banff, Portsoy, Cullen, Portknockie, Findochty, Portessie, Buckie, Portgordon; as the fishing boats went north, revival went with them, to Latheron, Pultneytown, Lybster, Wick. It was not merely a coastal movement of fishing villages, for Aberdeen was strongly affected, Huntly became an inland centre for the north-east and summer after summer great assemblies gathered in the Castle Park, under the aegis of the Duchess of Gordon; for 10 weeks the town hall of Perth was packed; and farther south both Glasgow and Edinburgh were involved.<sup>15</sup> An American divinity student, E. Payson Hammond, who had come over to further his own theological education, became involved in meetings in Musselburgh, then moved over to the west, where he preached in Glasgow, and in Motherwell and became the central figure in a widespread movement in the towns and countryside of Annan and

<sup>13</sup> *A narrative of the surprising work of God in the conversion of souls in Kilsyth, Finnieston and Cumbernauld* (Glasgow, 1839). I. Burns, *The Pastor of Kilsyth* (1860); I. Burns, *Memoir of W. C. Burns* (1870); *Evidence on Revivals given before a Committee of the Presbytery of Aberdeen* (1844).

<sup>14</sup> A. Bonar, in *Free Church Missionary Record* (1847), 218.

<sup>15</sup> J. E. Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening* (London, 1949); full bibliography.

Dumfries.<sup>16</sup> In response to a questionnaire sent out towards the end of the period by the Free Church, 42 out of 66 presbyteries reported "decided revivals".

In the ensuing 12 years the embers of 1859-1861 kept starting up in small fires, then in the autumn of 1873 Moody and Sankey arrived in Edinburgh. It was here and in Glasgow that their chief impact was felt, though there were visits to Dundee and they travelled widely in a kind of whistle-stop tour of Scotland. None of Moody's subsequent visits retained the flavour of the first; something had gone out of the situation, and one asked "where were the shining faces?"<sup>17</sup> There were many other evangelists who came and went — Chapman, Alexander, Gipsy Smith, Billy Graham; and there were areas and times which could still possibly justify the word "revival", but there seems to be a significant change which justifies making 1873-1874 the terminal point of this study; and the next question to be asked is what patterns are apparent.

Three provinces of early revival have already been noted, a west midlands province, a second, centred upon Easter Ross, and a third, more general, Highland province. The first two have this in common: they were open to infiltrating puritanism. John Knox had spoken of the west as a "receptakle of Goddis servandis of old",<sup>18</sup> and its openness to influences from the south, either directly or by way of Ireland, is patent. In Ross-shire the situation is less clear, but there is a tradition that the parishes had been settled early by refugees from the south in Covenanting times, and before that the presence of Commonwealth troops in Inverness was significant. As early as 1651, it was noted by an English observer that "there is a very precious people who seeke the face of God in Sutherland and divers parts beyond Invernesse . . . the people in those parts will rather leave their owne Ministers, and come to private houses where our officers and souldiers meete together".<sup>19</sup> Roundhead soldiers settled in the north, and James Porteous, famous minister of Kilmuir Easter, and involved in the revivals, was of this stock.<sup>20</sup>

For the aspect of Scottish religious history presently under examination, puritanism had three things to offer. Its theological standpoint had a specific place for conversion. Though it has been pointed out that conversion may be regarded as a "general human behavioural unit", not peculiar to Christianity,<sup>21</sup>

16 Anon., *The Revival in Dumfries* (Dumfries, 1861).

17 Attributed to Dr Dale of Birmingham, *Moody Centenary Celebrations* (Glasgow, 1937), 44.

18 Knox, *History*, i, 105.

19 C. H. Firth, *Scotland and the Commonwealth* (Edinburgh, 1895), 31.

20 MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 117.

21 J. C. Brauer, *Conversion: from Puritanism to Revivalism* (John Nuveen Lecture, University of Chicago, 1978), 227.

puritanism gave it a very special place in its understanding of that faith. "Almost every Puritan of stature appears to have had a profound conversion experience. They preached for it, they sought it, they recounted it in spiritual autobiographies, and in hagiographies, they checked its authenticity with those already converted, and they disdained those who had not experienced it".<sup>22</sup>

This theological attitude, in its turn, gave birth to a literature of experimental theology. Much detailed work remains to be done on the theological reading-matter available, and the extent to which it was used by the general reading public in Scotland, but enough information is already available to show widespread theological literacy, and a widespread presence of English puritanism and its derivatives. The library of William Hog, merchant and banker in Edinburgh, correspondent of Wodrow, Boston, Davidson and others, illustrates this.<sup>23</sup> Authors whose works were in Hog's collection included Ainsworth, Bolton, Burroughs, Flavel, Greenham, Goodwin and Howe. It was perhaps an exceptional library, for the Hogs were known to be "bookish", and by the time of William Hog, junior, Doddridge's *Rise and Progress*, and works by the Americans Edwards and Dickinson had been added to it, with others, but knowledge of such works was by no means confined to the Hogs. Flavel's *Collected Works* were published by subscription in Edinburgh in 1731, and 695 Scots put down their names for copies.<sup>24</sup> One of the Cambuslang converts, John Parker, had read writings by Isaac Ambrose,<sup>25</sup> apparently a favourite in Scotland, for 1,081 subscribers ordered over 1,400 copies of the Glasgow edition of the *Prima* (1737), almost 400 subscribers are named for another Glasgow edition in 1757, and when the *Complete Works* appeared two years later at Dundee, there were 966 subscribers, ordering 1,015.<sup>26</sup> Laslett has dealt with the 1757 subscribers in some detail. Their addresses range from Paisley in the west, to Fyvie, Keithhall and Culsamond in Aberdeenshire, and they include 24 farmers, 12 maltmen and distillers, no less than 120 weavers, and a great variety of small groups and individuals such as colliers, soap-boilers, hat-makers, comb-makers, coopers, glaziers, joiners, blacksmiths and hammermen.<sup>27</sup> As Parker had been familiar with Ambrose, another man influenced by the

22 *Ibid.*, 230.

23 I. A. Muirhead, "Familiar Letters between intimate Friends", *ante*, xvii (1971), 226.

24 F. J. G. Robinson and P. J. Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists, a revised guide* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1975), 16.

25 Macfarlan, *Revivals*, 117.

26 Robinson and Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists*, 19, 34.

27 P. Laslett, "Scottish Weavers, cobblers and miners who bought books in the 1750s", *Local Population Studies . . . Newsletter*, no. 3 (1969), 7-15. The 1757 edition of Ambrose is absent from Robinson and Wallis.

Cambuslang Wark is reported to have been a regular reader of Owen, Traill, and Witherspoon.<sup>28</sup>

William Hog, senior, was one of the directors of the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and the work of this Society may well have been determinative for the appearance of the Highland revivals.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, William Guthrie's *Christian's Great Interest* was one of the text-books in the Society's schools, together with Alleine's *Alarm to the Ungodly*. There were Gaelic translations of both; the books were read generally throughout Scotland; and they were in the hands of Cambuslang converts. The minister of an adjacent parish, Carmunnock, left a legacy to provide copies of Alleine for the inhabitants of his parish.<sup>30</sup>

Besides offering a theology, and a literature of conversion, puritanism laid a practical emphasis on the fellowship-meeting. Such meetings among the Commonwealth soldiers and officers were drawing interested persons in Inverness in the mid-seventeenth century,<sup>31</sup> and a lively interest in them characterized the Hogs and their friends,<sup>32</sup> but the function of the fellowship meeting, or prayer meeting will become clearer after considering the constituency in which revivals appeared and some of the dynamic elements involved. The constituency in which revivals came and went included both Lowlands and Highlands, and few areas of Scotland proved completely immune. Fishing villages from Eymouth north to Wick, totally rural areas, small country towns like Huntly, Annan and Dumfries, weaving and mining communities like Kilsyth and its neighbours, the large towns and cities, Dundee, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, all at one time or another, and sometimes on several occasions, were the scene of revivals. In Edinburgh, in the Moody season "all classes without exception have been represented at the enquiry meetings . . . the highly educated and cultivated, and the very ignorant; students at the university and working men; old men and women, and boys and girls from schools; respectable church-going people, even church members; and sceptics, scoffers, drunkards, libertines and prodigals".<sup>33</sup> It is clear this list exaggerates, and it is known from other sources that, powerful as Moody's impact was in generating active concern for the betterment of the lowest classes, he rarely himself came within sight of them.

In Aberdeen, in Radcliffe's time, another generalisation is made, a little more restrained, and probably a more accurate

28 T. Brown, *Annals of the Disruption* (1893), 774.

29 MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 221ff.

30 *Ibid.*, 6 and *passim*; Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 78.

31 See n. 19 above.

32 Muirhead, *ante*, xvii, 226-227. The S.P.C.K. itself arose out of one such society, MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 236.

33 W. J. Couper, *Revivals*, 150, from an unnamed source.

assessment: "all classes . . . specially marked in the case of assistants in banks and solicitors' offices, in the numerous drapery and other establishments, and among engineers, joiners, painters, masons, plumbers, boat-builders, shipwrights and coachbuilders. Scarcely a shop could be found in the whole length of Union Street, without at least one young man who had come under the influence of the Revival. And the awakening extended to university students . . . of Theology, Arts and Medicine".<sup>34</sup>

More specific evidence is, however, lacking. The Glasgow Committee for Moody's first visit bought a register in which it was intended that the names of all converts should be recorded; it does not now exist and it is questionable whether it was ever used.<sup>35</sup> Individual workers kept lists for their own interest, but, in so far as these may survive they are not easily tracable.<sup>36</sup> There is an interesting series of case histories for Ferryden, about twenty-five in number, fishermen, or women working in the fishing industry.<sup>37</sup> Earlier than the Ferryden revival, both Burns junior and senior appear to have kept notes on converts, which have not been traced, although, if some examples given in Islay Burns' biography of his brother are typical, W. C. Burns' notes were poor. Notes by Murray McCheyne of his first communicants immediately after the revival in Dundee do survive, but Burns was supposed to have left him a full list of converts which McCheyne annotated in the light of their subsequent history.<sup>38</sup> The location of this list is not known.

In the previous century, Robe in Kilsyth<sup>39</sup> and McCulloch in Cambuslang took notes, in some cases McCulloch made converts write accounts of their own experiences. These have survived in two fascinating volumes containing information relating to about 110 people.<sup>40</sup> The case histories are anonymous but a key exists. Here alone does one come really close to the converts of a Scottish revival. McFarlan printed some selections last century, and the material was extensively used by Fawcett.

There were said to have been about 200 families resident in

34 Anon., *Reminiscences of the Revival of Fifty-nine and the Sixties* (Aberdeen, 1910), 48. For Radcliffe, the English lawyer and evangelist, see *Recollections of Reginald Radcliffe*, by his wife (London, n.d.).

35 MS. minute book of the Glasgow Committee for Moody's visit. I am indebted to the principal and secretary of the Bible Training Institute, Glasgow, for access to this source.

36 One private list is mentioned in J. Pollock, *Moody without Sankey*, 116; another in the *Free Church General Assembly Proceedings* (1887), 75.

37 W. Nixon, *An Account of the late work of God at Ferryden* (1860).

38 I. Burns, *Memoir*. McCheyne mentions his own notes: *Memoir*, 491. The notebook with notes of first communicants is in New College Library, Edinburgh.

39 Gillies, *Collections*, 450-451.

40 For access to the McCheyne and McCulloch MSS., I am indebted to the librarian of New College Library and his staff.

the parish but converts came from all over the west of Scotland. It appears that the most likely age-group to be affected were those who were about 21, but a surprising number of older converts occurred.<sup>41</sup> Agriculture, weaving and mining dominated the employments in the parish, but while the first two of these are strongly represented, on the surviving evidence there was little impact on the mining community. While there are on record the daughters of a "portioner", of a schoolmaster and of an Edinburgh lawyer, as well as an unidentified baillie of Hamilton, the revival was clearly of the working-class community, the servant-girls, farm servants, weavers and shoe-makers.

This community was a surprisingly literate one. There is information about 66 of McCulloch's cases. Only one individual is described as "illiterate"; one could "read a little"; three were in their teens before they learned to read. Of the 65 who were to some degree literate, at least 14 could write; one referred to taking notes of sermons, and several had written their own accounts of their experiences. There is reference to Bible reading in 47 instances, and a considerable fluency of quotation; 51 individuals referred to familiarity with a catechism, and some could recite the answers. The range of additional reading covered works by Jonathan Edwards, Isaac Ambrose, Whitfield, Willison, the inevitable Guthrie, and some other works. Sometimes reading posed problems; thus the only collier knew that the Turks had their Koran, and the Catholics their traditions, both of which were to be rejected as "man-made"; but then, he wonders, is not the Protestant Bible also "man-made"? What might be called the "theological literacy" of Cambuslang converts rests upon home upbringing (frequently mentioned), and on a constant exposure to preaching. What it is possible to see in detail in Cambuslang probably is true of many of the Scottish revivals; they flourished on a considerable degree of religious literacy.

A second component of the social situation is insecurity, not so much any single insecurity, but rather a complex of insecurities communal and individual. No minister before William Chalmers Burns (1837) would have contemplated preaching for a revival. This was his singular and significant contribution to the changing scene of revivalism in the middle and later nineteenth century in Scotland. Prior to the time of Burns one waited, hoped, and prayed for the Holy Spirit; and of course, went on preaching. No one has yet attempted a study in depth of this preaching from the point of view of the revivals. One generalisation which might be tentatively made is that what the coming of revival did in macrocosm, vividly, communally and at large, much faithful preaching did in microcosm for individuals. There was no

41 See Appendix below.

discontinuity between what the minister saw with joy at the revival season, and what he was hopeful of seeing occasionally as a result of his work Sunday by Sunday. There is a significant letter written by McCheyne in which he identified what had happened dramatically in his absence, under the work of Burns, with "the work I have observed going on from the very beginning of my ministry".<sup>42</sup> Similar conclusions can be drawn from the number of instances in which individuals identified what came to a head for them in a revival with something initiated by a sermon preached under ordinary conditions by their own minister. Certainly ministers were more specific in their teaching at some times than at others, and McCulloch, Robe, Stewart of Moulin, and Burns, senior, had all been giving lectures on sanctification to their congregations at some point prior to the revival. Again, preachers advised self-examination, and instructed as to the "marks" which should be looked for when the Christian made trial of his "saving interest".<sup>43</sup>

One effect of such preaching was that of a steady removal from its hearers of the shores and supports of their self-confidence, by its rejection of "good living", of the possibility of compounding in any way by anything man can do, for his sin, and by warnings against being satisfied with "peace of the devil's making". Thus the deceits of false hopes, false peace and security, the false stirring of "animal spirits", together with the personification of all threats in the Devil, are exposed to view. There was, of course, "hell-fire preaching", but it is questionable whether the constant elaborations of warnings on this theme have much more effect on its contemporaries than the warnings and elaborations of the horrors of nuclear warfare have today. The case histories more often show less a fear of hell than a kind of sense of lostness, often coupled to a surprising extent with a shocked concern about the dishonour which lives have done to God.

Another area which prompts speculation, but which has so far lacked detailed investigation is the question of election. "Am I one of the elect" was a question one was invited to consider narrowly, and the marks were expounded by preachers, and of course by William Guthrie. Weber argued that preoccupation with one particular sign, namely, that God made his elect to prosper, provided a psychological breeding ground for the application of the puritan vigour of business efficiency. Pondering

<sup>42</sup> A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of R. M. McCheyne* (Edinburgh, 1868), 489. McCheyne elsewhere rejects the term "revival meetings". "It will not be maintained by anyone, that the meetings in the sanctuary every Lord's day are intended for any other purpose than the revival of genuine godliness, through the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints" (*Ibid.*, 493).

<sup>43</sup> Macfarlan, *Revivals*, 204, 206. Cf., Hog of Kiltarn in MacInnes, *Evangelical Movement*, 185.

over other marks may have produced a subconscious drive in other directions. McCulloch was already aware of the distinction between an uncontroverted profession and an authenticated one, which was later going to cause such trouble in the Highlands. "Besides what concerns a credible confession, and a suitable walk and conversation, some require that persons . . . should be able to give some account of their experience of the grace of God".<sup>44</sup> It was, even before this time, the custom in the synod of Ross "to admit none to the Lord's Table till they be in a condition to give some satisfying account of their experiences in religion."<sup>45</sup> There was, therefore, in such circles a premium on "experimental" religion, and although warnings were given against mistaking mere animal spirits for the movings of God's Spirit, there must remain a strong suspicion that there might exist subconscious drives towards the satisfaction of providing such evidences. It is difficult to cite precise proofs of such a drive, but the evident envy and longing with which individuals describe their attitudes towards the conversions of others seems in itself, significant. There is the plaint of Elizabeth Jackson: "so many were getting good and I was getting none"; and the comment of Sarah Gilchrist: "when I observed the crying and fainting of many . . . I was made to wonder at my own stupidity in not feeling more sensibly the power of the truth".<sup>46</sup>

No doubt events which increased communal or individual insecurity played a part. Before Cambuslang there had been a time of dearth, almost of famine, and in January, 1740, a gale of frightening intensity swept the west of Scotland. The second awakening at Kilsyth came close behind the cholera scare of 1832. There were many individual cases of seriously disturbing experiences. At Cambuslang, Parker had suffered a serious illness, and Bessie Lyon the death of a near relative. A death in the Manse family at Kilsyth was one of the reasons which had brought young Burns home, and later, a miner, a convert was killed in a pit accident.<sup>47</sup> At Ferryden one convert had had an illness of two years' duration, followed by the shock of having to wash and prepare for burial the body of one of his children.<sup>48</sup> Instances could be greatly multiplied and if it is observed that, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries illness and death were frequent and conversions and revivals rather less so, yet the power of such events, as an assault on the security of individuals, particularly if there were already some instability, is undoubted.<sup>49</sup>

Theology offered an over-all interpretation of such events in

44 Macfarlan, *Revivals*, 150.

45 Gillies, *Collections*, 452; letter of Mr Halley, Muthill, 1743.

46 Macfarlan, *Revivals*, 124, 194.

47 *A Narrative of . . . the conversion of souls in Kilsyth . . .* 29.

48 Nixon, *Account*, 16-17.

49 As Zwingli and Chalmers could also testify.

terms of God's providential overrule of individuals and of societies, and the desire to find such an interpretation of life was common to the preachers and to the listeners, particularly the desire to see events in terms of a sovereignty of God moving towards the realisation of its purposes in human history. This, indeed, has been put forward as a basic mechanism of the power of revivals to be infective. The existence of this power is clear: "again and again mere knowledge of what had happened, triggered an immediate reaction elsewhere";<sup>50</sup> and this is as clear in Scotland as in America of which the comment was written. McCulloch read to his people accounts of the American awakening under Edwards, and of the work of Whitfield;<sup>57</sup> in the following century news from America was generally powerful in setting up sympathetic stirrings,<sup>52</sup> and Ulster in the 1850s had a powerful impact in Scotland.<sup>53</sup> J. B. Boles has argued for the part played by a desire to complete the pattern, generated by a world-view eager to identify and share in possible "signs of fulfilment" of the plan of God's sovereignty. Thus "a tremendous upsurge of spirituality anywhere . . . would seem to presage the determined efforts of God to effect his purpose. Such a revival would seem the vanguard of the new dispensation, a creative display of God's wonder-working powers." So the news of revivals, exaggerated reports of the crowds, strange and inexplicable phenomena, conversions and transformations would encourage the longing to become a part of this "fulfilment of the times", and news of revival serves to release "the millennial hopes of the faithful."<sup>54</sup> It ought also to be remembered that the infective spread of cults and crazes goes on quite apart from the religious area and theological world views!

In contrast to the individualism of conversion, the revival is a community phenomenon, and this raises problems about the transition from one to the other, problems of why it is that the preaching of ministers does not simply go on producing conversions, of how the insecurity of individuals becomes a communal affair, why its resolution also manifests itself in a communal fashion, and why hysteria takes over with cries, weepings, cataleptic trances, visions and dreams. The preachers, for the most part, disapproved of such things, maintaining that

<sup>50</sup> J. B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805* (Kentucky, 1972), x.

<sup>51</sup> New College Library, McCulloch MSS., i, fo. 103; ii, fo. 333.

<sup>52</sup> Nixon, *Account*, 8.

<sup>53</sup> The Commission of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland appointed a pastoral letter to be read in all churches regarding the "extraordinary work of God at present going on in the North of Ireland" and also drawing attention to recent events in America, and in Wales, 10 August 1859. Printed in J. Bruce, *The Revivals and the Church* (Edinburgh, 1859), 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> Boles, *Revival*, xi, 61; cf., J. Erskine, *Signs of the times considered* (Edinburgh, 1742); Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 122.

they were at least irrelevant, if not dangerously distractive.<sup>53</sup> Robe, however, found it caused more disturbance to have his elders remove the noisily afflicted than to put up with them; but wherever possible it was the custom to remove such subjects, and to encourage them to avoid coming to meetings which might disturb them. The outbursts, however they might be disapproved of, were characteristic of most phases of the revivals, and may be linked to the communal characteristics of the movement, since they can be interpreted as calls for help, as ways of externalising inner distress to command the sympathy and enlist the help of the community. Nixon remarked significantly of the work in Ferryden: "if one instrumentality, rather than another is to be condescended upon . . . at all stages of the work the converse that they held with each other, anent their sorrows and their joys, was among the most easily recognised means by which the Lord carried on his work of grace."<sup>56</sup> Few observers have remarked on this and yet clearly the element of communal "do-it-yourself" is one of the regular aspects of revivalism. The preachers, their long sermons, special seats for the anxious, counselling sessions, represent only part of the characteristic revival. The whole community seeths and bubbles with informal gatherings, with prayer meetings, hymn or psalm singings, and impromptu counsellings. A visitor thus describes Kilsyth: "on Saturday's night before the communion, after the sermon was over, I went to the Braehead eastward, and looked around: the candles were burning in every place; that blessed echo of prayers, and sweet singing of songs made me almost faint for joy".<sup>57</sup> Similar scenes accompanied revival elsewhere; individuals or small groups praying at the hedge-backs, kitchens and barns crammed with people, some distressed, some trying to alleviate the distressed, others declaring the means by which they had come to their own peace. There are of course ministers going round the scene — over a hundred at some time or another shared in Cambuslang — but there was an immense amount of lay counselling. Two of the most useful workers at Cambuslang were themselves converts of an earlier Whitfield meeting in Glasgow, but anyone could take a hand: "my master with whom I learned my trade at that time, took me out into the fields and gave me good counsel".<sup>58</sup>

It is here that the long tradition of the fellowship meetings, going back into the seventeenth century, was extremely important. In such meetings, lay men and women gathered, sometimes together, sometimes in separate associations, at more or less

55 Cf., the warning given by Dr Burns of Paisley at Kilsyth, *Narrative*, 25; and Nixon, *Account*, 13-14.

56 Nixon, *Account*, 10.

57 Gillies, *Collections*, 452.

58 New College Library, McCulloch MSS., ii, fo. 377.

frequent intervals. Tradesmen, who worked for daily wages, arranged with employers for a deduction for time spent at the weekly meeting; a common mechanic might travel ten or twelve miles fortnightly, or even weekly, to attend.<sup>59</sup> Fellowship-meetings are recorded from most parts of Scotland, and on the occurrence of a revival, or an awakening, immediately multiplied in numbers. They organised themselves often without the knowledge of the minister; thus McCheyne has to ask from the pulpit for reports of prayer meetings going on in his congregation, and from the replies which survive it is clear that, while a visit from the minister would be welcomed, the meetings were spontaneously brought about without reference to him.<sup>60</sup> The genesis of a very unstructured meeting can be seen in Ferryden. A young woman has been converted shortly after midnight on Friday night; next day "she brought (her neighbours) in crowds to her house during the Saturday from an early hour, and caused them to feel greatly increased distress, as they gazed on her emancipated state".<sup>61</sup>

What function did such gatherings play? Probably a variety of functions at different times. The more fully structured meetings (for which a number of printed *Directions* exist) kept alive the hope of revival, and because self-examination in "experimental religion" had a stated part in their fellowship, they may well, have contributed, given other favouring factors, towards effecting awakenings. In the height of the crisis, the effect of such meetings, whether formal or informal, must have been to recycle emotion. They retained what individuals had reached in the official services and after meetings, where distress had not reached a point of resolution, it would be retained and explored until resolution came, and in general terms a continual feed-back of emotions from individuals into the community was maintained. Such a recycling of emotion, once the revival had begun, must have been a significant element in fuelling its continuance, and perhaps evidence can be detected that the success of revivals was linked to the size of the community and the relation of that to a successful recycling process. It was markedly more difficult to set a revival going in a city, and that it could be done at all must stand on the existence of sub-communities (notably tightly knit congregations) which could maintain the recycling process. This would seem to fit the pattern of the Moody visit, for example, where the greatest success was with church-members and adherents, or with the more recently back-slidden who could be re-placed within a community with the least difficulty.

Revivals of course did die away and, as the local situation began to drain itself of emotion and life returned to a quieter

59 Macfarlan, *Revivals*, 89, 101.

60 New College Library, McCheyne MSS.

61 Nixon, *Account*, 10.

level, the fellowship-societies and prayer groups continued to be significant factors in retaining the results of the intenser period.

From the historian's point of view no single element emerges as the identifiable "cause" or "catalyst"; rather the history of the Scottish revivals presents a picture of a variety of interacting conditions. Fundamental to these is the varied element of insecurity, theological, social, personal. A community seemed to reach a point at which the strains within its life became more and more dynamically charged until they can no longer be sustained by the existing religious and psychological stabilities of its members. The transition to new and more stable structures does not take place, perhaps cannot take place, by degrees, in any pattern of gradual, slow adjustment. The over-stressed situation suddenly breaks, and once this has happened in one section of the community the recycling of its emotional products provides for its continuance over a period. It is a situation such as is dealt with by catastrophe theory — a situation of multiple strains the transition of which to a new stability can only take place with suddenness and in events of violence.<sup>62</sup>

In such a community, some individuals will be disturbed but fail to reach a new and stable solution, and others will only create temporary stabilities, which will later decay, hence the well-known complaints that revivals are merely upsetting and their effects do not last. The ministers involved seem to have accepted this philosophically. "In an orchard in spring you may see a wonderful display of beautiful blooms . . . it is only a moderate proportion of these that ripen into full-grown healthy fruit. So has it generally been in regard to any wide awakening in any part of the church".<sup>63</sup> But there is no real reason to question that others did emerge with more stable structures of faith, religious emotion and conduct of life, and since what has happened in these cases is basically what the minister has been trying to achieve in general such results take their places as a strong contribution to the life of the church.

At this point some have tried to play the numbers game. Numbers do get 'bandied about — 70 converts in Chapel of Garioch, 100 (or was it 200?) in Ferryden<sup>64</sup> — but the idea that there exists a numerate group of Christians in the community and a numerate group of non-Christians and that the proved, or disproved, transference from one group to another might validate (or invalidate), a reported revival seems naïve in the extreme. There are, however, hints of a more satisfactory, though

62 E. C. Zeeman, "Catastrophe Theory", *Scientific American*, vol. 234 (April, 1976), 65-83.

63 Nixon, *Account*, 7.

64 *Ibid.*, 7-8. Upwards of a 100 first communicants, but a careful survey by the elders suggests over 200 affected.

unquantifiable, kind of evidence. The Rev. Mr Bain, Free Church minister of Chapel of Garioch, reported to the General Assembly in 1865 that, five years after revival, at recent elections of elders and deacons, five out of seven elected elders, and seven out of 11 deacons had been "subjects of the revival movement".<sup>65</sup> A rather more remarkable piece of evidence comes in 1887. The Free Church of Scotland was in the habit of sending out deputies to conduct systematic visitation throughout the congregations of the church. It was then reported: "Our deputies have often noted the fact that they have found ministers all over the country, who thank God for faithful fellow-workers in office, who were brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ during the revival and evangelistic labours of the years 1859-1860".<sup>66</sup> It is the more remarkable that this comment comes after the Moody missions to which it would have seemed more likely that an appeal might be made. But these too made a contribution. W. M. Macgregor, speaking at the Moody centenary in 1937, claimed that "the element of permanence is one of the conspicuous things of the first mission. . . . There was scarcely one of our churches which did not participate in some way in the abiding results".<sup>67</sup>

Victorian religion in Scotland is not to be completely understood unless the revivalism, which had older and deeper roots, is seen as one of its proper dimensions and not as an occasional aberration. From time to time there certainly were aberrations, but it was the return of the revival or awakening, at more or less regular intervals, which continually refuelled the life of the churches, replenishing them with dedicated workers and office-bearers. Yet after Moody's first visit this dimension of church life has begun to fade. The reasons are too complex to be discussed at length here. Theological literacy diminished, increasing secularization provided other outlets for energies which had previously more limited but more serious goals, older theologies were being disturbed, if not dismantled. Above all, there was a change in the concept of revival. Kilsyth in the summer of 1838 was at first sight no different from previous Scottish revivals, the centrality of the local ministry, the significant association with the Lord's Table, the appearance of spontaneity. But William Chalmers Burns was a new phenomenon. He had discovered he had a gift for breaking down audiences; he was the revivalist preacher whose aim was to make revivals happen. In America, Charles Grandison Finney was working out a theory for this. "A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophical

<sup>65</sup> *Free Church General Assembly Proceedings* (1865), 18-19.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, (1887), 75.

<sup>67</sup> *Moody Centenary Celebrations* (Glasgow, 1937), 43.

result of the right use of the constituted means".<sup>68</sup> Moody's first campaign has still the old flavour, but the "use of the constituted means" was there, in a vast concentration on detail which lacked little but the more developed scientific technology of a Billy Graham campaign. It is least arguable that this was, for Scotland, the revival to end revivals.

APPENDIX

Cambuslang Converts  
(based on McCulloch MS., New College Library, Edinburgh)

*Marital Status*

	Single	Married	Widow	Unrecorded
Males	6	6	—	26
Females	25	12	3	31

*Age*

	Under 16	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-40	over 40	Unrecorded
Males	1	3	9	5	2	7	7
Females	4	12	30	9	8	5	8

*Occupations* (where personal occupation is not recorded, that of father (f) or husband (h) is given if known.)

carter (h)	schoolmaster (f)	weavers (40)
collier	servants (4)	journeyman weaver
collier (f)	seamstresses (2)	weavers (f) (2)
cooper (f)	ship's carpenter (f)	waulker
day labourer (h)	shoemakers (3)	waulker and dyer
farmer (f)	shoemakers (f) (3)	wool merchant (f)
gardener	shoemaker (h)	wright (f)
gardener (f)	smiths (f) (2)	writer (f)
merchant (f)	soldier	
maltman (f)	soldier (h)	
mason	tailor	
packman (f)	tailor (h)	
portioner (f)	tenants (2)	
sailor (f)	tenants (f) (9)	

68 C. G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (London, n.d.), 5. The lectures first appeared in 1835.