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RELIGIOUS IDENTITY IN A CENTURY OF SECULARISATION: THE EDINBURGH CHURCHES SINCE 1900

STEWART J. BROWN

TWENTY YEARS AGO there was a broad consensus among historians that Scottish society had been largely secularised by the early twentieth century: faith in any transcendent being, it was widely believed, was waning, churches were emptying, politicians viewed the churches as marginal, and religion was destined to fade away. In consequence, there was relatively little interest among historians in twentieth-century religious practices and beliefs or the institutional development of churches.

But in recent years, this view of secularisation has come under question. First, the research of a number of social historians of religion in Britain, and especially the seminal work of Professor Callum Brown of the University of Dundee, has demonstrated convincingly that the main impact of secularisation came later in the twentieth century, and this has brought historians of twentieth-century Britain, including Scotland, to take religion far more seriously as a social and cultural force.[1] Second, it has also become abundantly clear that outside Western Europe, religion continues to exercise a powerful influence over the lives of most of the world's population. In our globalised world of unprecedented geographic mobility, migrants bring new religious beliefs and observances into host countries, and re-invigorate existing beliefs. All this has contributed to renewed scholarly interest in religion in twentieth-century Britain, as recently reflected in the publication of two major books – Keith Robbins' *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church 1900–2000*, and Callum Brown's *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*.[2] This chapter will explore developments in religious belief and practice in Edinburgh during the last tempestuous century.

THE EDINBURGH CHURCHES ON THE EVE OF THE GREAT WAR

The religious scene in early twentieth-century Edinburgh was lively, diverse and sometimes contentious. Church membership in Scotland as a whole reached its all-time peak in 1905.[3] Regular attendance at public worship was a sign of respectability and frequently an expression of communal identity. Levels of church participation were high, whether this involved attending worship, or joining in the array of social activities attached to local churches, including Sunday schools, choirs, literary clubs, temperance societies, mothers' meetings, Women's Guilds, Boys' Brigades, Boy Scouts (after 1908), Girl Guides (after 1910), football clubs, boxing clubs, games rooms, rambling clubs and cycling clubs. The Sunday Sabbath was strictly observed, with most shops and pubs closed and the streets largely silent. A number of Christian denominations competed for members in a free marketplace of religion, in which the existence of the established Church of Scotland – the Church recognised by law to provide religious instruction and observances to the Scottish people – was combined with full toleration of other denominations.

The city of Edinburgh was home to a number of Christian denominations and hundreds of impressive church buildings. Most inhabitants were Presbyterian and Reformed in their religious adherence, and we will consider the Presbyterian denominations shortly. But there were other Churches. There was the Scottish Episcopal Church, which was increasingly confident and secure in its Scottish identity. In Edinburgh, the Episcopalians had a number of churches. The mother church of the

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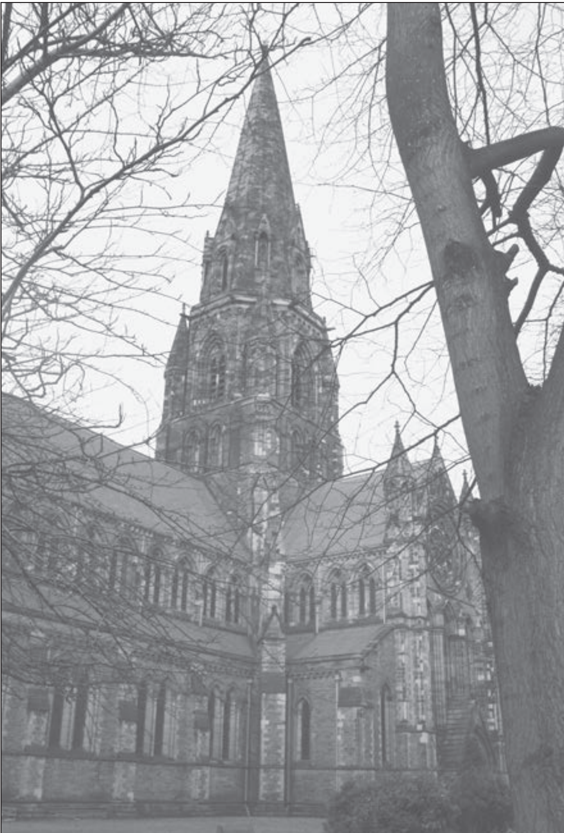

Fig. 1. St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral. *(Photograph by Teri Hopkins-Brown.)*

diocese of Edinburgh was the imposing neo-gothic St Mary's Cathedral in the city's prosperous West End; it had been designed by the celebrated architect, Sir Gilbert Scott, and consecrated in 1879 (fig. 1). There was also the sombre beauty and dignity of Old St Paul's church off the Royal Mile, where Episcopal worship had been conducted, often amid persecution, since 1689, and from where the congregation, under its saintly rector, Albert Ernest Laurie (who would receive the Military Cross for his care of the wounded at the battle of the Somme) carried on a socially committed mission among the poor in the Old Town. There was the exquisite St John's church on Princes Street, with its plaster ceiling vault modelled after Henry VII's chapel in Westminster Abbey and its connection with the eminent Victorian, Dean Ramsay, author of the famous *Reminiscences*. And there were the evangelical churches of St Peter's, Mayfield, and

Fig. 2. St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral. *(Teri Hopkins-Brown.)*

Christ Church, Morningside.[4] The number of Episcopalians was small – perhaps 5% of the city's population – but they included wealthy and influential merchants and professionals.

Edinburgh also had a sizable Roman Catholic community, representing about 9% of the city's population. The Edinburgh Catholics were mainly poor first or second generation migrants from Ireland, concentrated in the Cowgate and lower Royal Mile, and often worshipping in the stately St Patrick's church in the Cowgate (built 1771–74 as an Episcopal church, then purchased by a United Secession congregation, and then, in 1856, reopened as a Roman Catholic church). In what was then a deprived district in the eastern New Town, there rose the solemn gothic of St Mary's chapel, built in 1814 (fig. 2). Although modest in size, it became the

Fig. 3. St Peter's Roman Catholic Church, Morningside. *(Teri Hopkins-Brown.)*

Fig. 4. Father John Gray. *(Private collection.)*

pro-cathedral of the diocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh following the restoration of the Scottish Roman Catholic territorial episcopate in 1878. The bright, Italianate St Peter's church (consecrated in 1904), in genteel Morningside, reflected yet another side to Edinburgh's Catholic community (fig. 3). The first priest of St Peter's, the gifted poet, Father John Gray, had been a close friend in his youth of the playwright and novelist, Oscar Wilde, and Father Gray was widely (and wrongly) believed to have been the model for the central figure of Wilde's disturbing novel of physical beauty and corruption, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (fig. 4). Along with his close friend, the Catholic convert Marc-André Raffalovich, Gray was well connected in British cultural circles, and Raffalovich's Edinburgh salon attracted renowned authors and artists from across Europe.[5]

Edinburgh was home to Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers, Brethren and Methodists, with attractive stone churches that exuded staid respectability. These included Nicolson Square Methodist Church, opened in 1816 and said to

Fig. 5. Nicolson Square Methodist Church with its Georgian façade. *(Teri Hopkins-Brown.)*

have the finest Georgian façade of any Methodist church in Britain (fig. 5), and, at Tollcross, the Methodist Central Hall, completed in 1901, with its ribbed ceiling and exquisite art nouveau stained-glass windows. On George IV Bridge, the Congregationalists had the large Augustine Church, completed in 1861, with its fancifully ornate tower forming a distinctive landmark. For the Baptists, there was the historic Charlotte Chapel on Rose Street, founded in 1808. Between 1902 and 1915, this congregation added some 1000 new members under their energetic minister, Joseph Kemp, and they rebuilt their church in 1911. There were vibrant independent mission halls, such as Carrubber's Close Mission on the Royal Mile, with its impressive building erected in 1883 with the financial assistance of the celebrated American revivalist, Dwight L. Moody; it offered animated services, with emphasis on Moody's 'three Rs' – 'ruin by sin,

Fig. 6. Mansfield Place Catholic Apostolic Church. *(Teri Hopkins-Brown.)*

redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Holy Ghost' – for folk in their working clothes. There was also the large and sumptuous Mansfield Place Catholic Apostolic Church, built between 1872 and 1876 (fig. 6). Members of this church believed that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit had returned and that the second coming of Christ in glory was imminent. The church's interior was decorated with a series of richly coloured murals painted in the 1890s by the celebrated artist Phoebe Traquair. Their high liturgical worship began at six in the morning, and was illuminated by hundreds of candles which played upon the murals and brought a luminous sense of the divine. And there was a small Jewish community, perhaps 500 strong, which combined both a professional, educated elite and impoverished refugees from the pogroms of Eastern Europe. According to the statistics compiled by Robert Howie, there were 70 non-Presbyterian churches or synagogues in Edinburgh in 1891.[6]

Fig. 7. Tolbooth Church, Old Town, with its spire designed by Augustus Welby Pugin. *(Teri Hopkins-Brown.)*

The large majority of Christians in Edinburgh, however, were Presbyterian. There were two main Presbyterian denominations in early twentieth-century Edinburgh. The larger of the two was the Church of Scotland – the Church by law established – which had 59 separate churches in the city in 1891.[7] These included the historic city-centre churches, among them Greyfriars, the Tolbooth, the Tron, the Canongate and St Giles in the Old Town, St Andrews and St George's in the New Town, and St Cuthbert's nestled under the Castle Rock to the west of Princes Street Gardens. The Church of Scotland was confident and authoritative. It had by 1906 successfully weathered the storms of the prolonged disestablishment campaign that had been waged in Scotland since the early 1870s, and it expressed the continuing connection of Church and State. Edinburgh was the annual meeting place of the Church of Scotland's General Assembly – which was its supreme court, legislative assembly and executive body. The General Assembly, made up of nearly 600 ministers and elders from across Scotland, was opened each year in May in the presence of the Crown's Lord High Commissioner, amid pomp and procession. The Assembly met in the Tolbooth church, built in the 1840s (fig. 7). While the building had been designed by James Gillespie Graham, its majestic, 240-foot high spire, one of the most distinctive features of the Edinburgh skyline, was designed by Graham's friend, the celebrated neo-gothic architect and Catholic convert, Augustus Welby Pugin.[8] The Presbytery of Edinburgh, which governed the city's established Church, consisted of the minister and a ruling elder from each of the city's parish churches, along with the professors of divinity; its monthly meetings were normally attended by over a hundred members.

Worship within most Edinburgh established churches had been enriched from the 1860s by the Scoto-Catholic movement, which had revived historic liturgies and read prayers, restored medieval church interiors, added stained-glass windows, and introduced organs, congregational singing of hymns, choirs and music directors.[9] Sermons had become shorter than in earlier decades, and now lasted about 30 minutes, while most ministers now preached from a prepared text or notes, rather than as the Spirit moved them. The Scoto-Catholic renewal movement was most evident in St Giles. In a series of renovations

Fig. 8. Palmerston Place Church, its façade modelled on that of Saint Sulpice, Paris. *(Teri Hopkins-Brown.)*

beginning in 1872, its interior had been stripped of unsightly partitions and galleries and returned to something like its late medieval grandeur. Its funereal monuments had also been restored, and (from 1883) its nave was hung with Scottish regimental battle flags. It was Scotland's national abbey – Scotland's 'National Valhalla', according to one twentieth-century author, or the 'Casket for the Heart of Scotland', according to another.[10] Its early twentieth-century ministers, J. Cameron Lees and (after 1910) A. Wallace Williamson, were figures of national influence in Scotland; they enjoyed close ties to the royal court and aristocracy, in part through their role as Deans of the Order of the Thistle, Scotland's order of chivalry, which had its home in St Giles. (The sumptuous Thistle Chapel, with its intricate carvings, was completed within St Giles in 1911.)

The other main Presbyterian denomination was the United Free Church, which had been formed in 1900 by the union of the Free Church and United Presbyterian Church – Presbyterian denominations which had broken away from the established Church of Scotland in order to preserve their spiritual independence from state interference. In 1891, there had been 58 Free Church congregations and 42 United Presbyterian congregations in Edinburgh, and most of these were now United Free Church congregations.[11] They included some grand churches, among them Free St George's, with its towering spire, and Palmerston Place church, with its handsome façade modelled on the Parisian Saint Sulpice church (fig. 8). The beginnings of the new United Free Church had been stormy. The Union of 1900 had been achieved largely through the vision and leadership of Robert Rainy, Principal of the Free Church College (New College) in Edinburgh, who hoped that it would be a step towards a larger reunion of all Scottish Presbyterians. The Union was celebrated with a great public event staged in Edinburgh's Waverley Market. The celebration, however, was marred by the decision of a tiny minority within the Free Church, some 30 congregations located mainly in the Highlands, not to join the United Free Church. This minority raised a legal action in the civil courts, insisting that they represented the true ethos of the Free Church and that they were thus entitled, under the law of trusts, to the whole Free Church property. In an historic decision in 1904, the British House of Lords, the supreme court of the realm, found in favour of the Free Church minority and awarded them all the property of those Free Church congregations that had entered the Union. Nearly 800 United Free Church congregations throughout Scotland were now forced to vacate their churches. The legal decision would have brought financial ruin to the new Church, had not Parliament intervened, passing an act in 1905 which provided for a more equitable distribution of property between the United Free Church and the Free Church Continuing. This redistribution included the division of the prominent Free Church buildings, known as 'The Citadel', on

Fig. 9. New College, 'The Citadel' on the Mound. *(Teri Hopkins-Brown.)*

the Mound (fig. 9). The United Free Church received the twin-towered New College and Assembly Hall, while the Free Church Continuing received the administrative offices on Bank Street, which now became home to the Free Church College.

During the prolonged legal struggle of 1900–05, Church of Scotland congregations had extended sympathy and support to the suffering United Free Church, in many cases sharing their church buildings with dispossessed United Free Church congregations. One result of this was a spirit of unity and co-operation between the Church of Scotland and United Free Church. In 1908, this spirit found practical expression when the two Churches began negotiations for an incorporating union. By 1914, they had come to an agreement on the articles of Union and were preparing to go to Parliament for legislation to clear away any legal obstacles. The Churches were also preparing a set of articles of belief for a united Church – articles that would reflect the evolving Reformed doctrines of the past half century, including the shift in emphasis from divine judgment and eternal punishment to the love and forgiveness of God and the moral example of Christ.

All told, there were 230 churches in early twentieth-century Edinburgh. The city may well have been over-churched, as a result of nineteenth-century denominational competition; one frequently cited example of such over-building was the so-called ‘Holy Corner’, at the junction of Colinton Road and Morningside Road, with its four grandiose churches.[12] The Edinburgh pulpits were filled by formidable preachers, men of great learning and eloquence. Appointments to Edinburgh churches were highly sought after. Most Edinburgh ministers had at least eight years of university education – four years of undergraduate study followed by four years of postgraduate-level study in a Divinity Hall, where they were required to master Greek and Hebrew in order to study the Scriptures in the original languages. Many had also studied for up to a year at one or more of the Continental universities. Among Edinburgh’s celebrated preachers were Alexander Whyte and John Kelman of Free St George’s, James MacGregor of St Cuthbert’s, Wallace Williamson of St Giles, R. H. Fisher of Morningside, and Professor W. P. Paterson of Edinburgh University.

In 1905, Edinburgh possessed five theological colleges for the training of ministers. First, there was the theological faculty of the University of Edinburgh, located in the Old College, for the training of Church of Scotland ministers. Second, there was New College, for the training of ministers of the United Free Church. The third was the Free Church College on Bank Street on the Mound. The fourth was the Scottish Episcopal College, which had moved from Glenalmond in Perthshire to Coates Hall on Rosebery Crescent (near the cathedral) in 1892. Finally, there was the small but distinguished Theological College of the Scottish Congregational Churches, which since 1884 had occupied a large house at 30 George Square. This Congregational College, which later moved to Hope Terrace in 1921, would educate some notable figures, including Vera Findlay, the first woman ordained to a pastoral charge in a mainstream Scottish denomination, Peter Marshall, who emigrated to the United States in 1927 and became chaplain to the United States Senate, and Eric Liddell, the Olympic champion runner and China missionary.[13] (The lives of both Marshall and Liddell would be celebrated in popular films – *A Man Called Peter*, 1955, starring Richard Todd, and *Chariots of Fire*, 1981, starring Ian Charleson.)

Edinburgh’s place as an intellectual centre of religious thought also found expression in the Gifford Lectures. A series of Gifford lectures had been established in 1885 at each of Scotland’s four oldest universities for ‘Promoting, Advancing, Teaching and Diffusing the study of Natural Theology’; the lectures were endowed by a generous bequest from Adam, Lord Gifford, a justice of the Court of Session. The Edinburgh Gifford Lectures emerged as arguably the world’s most important lecture series in natural theology. The Harvard philosopher and psychologist, William James, presented a memorable series on ‘The Varieties of Religious Experience’ in 1902 in Old College; the published version remains a classic text in religious studies. Other pre-war Gifford lectures in Edinburgh included the philosophers Bernard Bosanquet and Henri Bergson.

Alongside Edinburgh’s tradition of the learned ministry, there was also a more recent tradition of religious revivalism. Many in early twentieth-century Edinburgh had memories of the great mission of the American revivalists, Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey, who had taken the city by

storm in late 1873 and 1874, winning thousands of converts, and instilling a love for gospel songs, as found in Sankey's enduringly popular *Sacred Songs and Solos*. Moody and Sankey returned to Edinburgh for evangelistic work in 1883 and Moody came on his own in 1891. In 1903, two American heirs to Moody and Sankey, Reuben Torrey (who 'preached the gospel') and 'Charlie' Alexander (who 'sang the gospel') conducted a revival mission in Edinburgh that claimed hundreds of converts.[14] There were further revival events in 1904–05 in Edinburgh, as part of a revival movement emanating from Wales, a revival that marked the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in Britain. One memorable event in 1905 was a march of singing witnesses up and down Princes Street, led by the Charlotte Chapel Baptist minister and elders 'in their frock coats and silk tile hats'.[15]

Few in early twentieth-century Edinburgh would have admitted to not being Christian. Many working-class folk, to be sure, did not attend church regularly. But Church leaders generally insisted that this resulted, not from working-class hostility or indifference to Christianity, but from an insufficient number of churches. They may have been naïve in this, underestimating the real alienation of some working people from Christian churches that could seem smug, self-righteous, or simply irrelevant to the harsh life experienced in Edinburgh's more deprived neighbourhoods. At any rate, for Edinburgh's religious leaders, the best solution to non-church-going was to build more churches and church halls. The early twentieth century was also a time of considerable home mission work and of energetic urban pastors who took a keen interest in social reform. The interdenominational Edinburgh City Mission, founded in 1832, was active in dispensing material charity and pastoral care. Many university students, moreover, embraced the settlement movement, which was a national social-service movement with a general Christian ethos that had begun with the formation in 1883 of Toynbee Hall in London. Settlements promoted student involvement in community service, tutoring, medical advice, legal assistance and youth work in deprived urban neighbourhoods. A New College Settlement was founded in the Pleasance in 1895, and the Edinburgh University Settlement ten years later in 1905. The Warden of the New College Settlement after 1908 was the personable Revd J. Harry Miller, who in 1911 was appointed to lecture at New College in practical theology and, after 1921, Christian sociology.[16]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, women could not be ordained in most Edinburgh denominations, just as they could not vote in parliamentary elections. During the struggle for women's suffrage before the Great War, female activists had appealed to the Churches for support, and many women had been hurt and angered by the refusal of most male Church leaders to speak out for what seemed a clear moral cause. In response, suffragettes held demonstrations at the General Assemblies of 1913 and 1914, and regularly disrupted worship services at Edinburgh churches with chanting or loud prayer; in March 1914, seven women were arrested and found guilty of breach of peace after disrupting a service at St Giles.[17] Women finally gained the vote with the Representation of the People Act of 1918.

There was also a considerable Edinburgh public interest in spreading Christianity overseas. City congregations raised funds for missions through special collections and crafts and bake sales, and hosted lectures from missionaries, often illustrated by lantern slides. A number of Edinburgh University graduates went off as missionaries, often as medical missionaries. The Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society, formed in 1841, assisted the education of medical missionaries, provided medical assistance to the poor through the Cowgate Dispensary, and maintained medical missions abroad in Nazareth and Damascus. Women were particularly attracted to the medical missions, finding in the mission fields greater opportunities to practice medicine than they could find at home. In 1894, the Free Church founded the Women's Missionary Training Institute in Edinburgh. The first Principal, from 1894 to 1913, was the formidable former India missionary, Annie Small. The Institute came under the authority of the United Free Church after 1900 and in 1910 moved to impressive new buildings at 23 Inverleith Terrace, later taking the name of St Colm's College. Women medical missionaries also received training at the Church of Scotland's Deaconess Hospital, which was opened in 1894 in Edinburgh.

In 1910, Edinburgh's leadership in the missionary movement was recognised when it was selected to

host the World Mission Conference for the planning of co-ordinated action by the world's Churches. The conference brought together 1216 delegates, representing some 160 Protestant missionary societies and missionary boards from around the world, for a week of meetings held in the United Free Church Assembly Hall on the Mound. Although the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches declined the invitation to send delegates (the Roman Catholic Church did send observers), it was an impressively multi-denominational gathering. With its motto 'the evangelisation of the world in this generation', the conference was not only a seminal event in the history of missions, but is generally regarded as marking the birth of the modern ecumenical movement.[18]

THE GREAT WAR AND THE PRESBYTERIAN REUNION OF 1929

With the beginning of the Great War in August 1914, Edinburgh ministers rallied to the cause, delivering sermons and addresses on the war as a righteous crusade, a struggle for God's cause. 'We stand', proclaimed Wallace Williamson, minister of St Giles, on 9 August 1914, 'as we have always stood, for the great apostolic principles of humanity, patriotism, loyalty and religion'.[19] For John Kelman, United Free Church minister of Free St George's in Edinburgh, preaching on 2 September 1914, the war promised to restore moral values to the nation, ending 'the anxious and unsatisfying luxury which conventionality has imposed upon the past'.[20] For W. P. Paterson, Church of Scotland minister and Professor of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh, preaching on 26 August 1914, 'the perils and uncertainties of war are leading us back to God'.[21] With the beginning of the war, insisted Norman Maclean, Church of Scotland minister of Colinton parish, Edinburgh, 'everywhere the sanctuaries filled, the eyes turned inward, for instinct is mightier than reason. The smoke of battle has revealed the face of God.'[22] A number of Edinburgh ministers volunteered as chaplains; they received no training to speak of, and for many, it was a matter of purchasing a uniform at Aitken and Niven's clothing store, and then within hours finding themselves at the Western Front, seeking to provide pastoral care to men amid unspeakable horrors. At least one Edinburgh minister, Gavin Lang Pagan, Church of Scotland minister of St George's, enlisted as a combatant and was killed in action in April 1917. Congregations prepared parcels of foodstuffs and clothing for the men at the front; they held special prayer services, and provided homes for Belgian refugees. As the lists of casualties grew, ministers – who were often themselves grieving for lost sons – spent long hours in consoling bereaved families.

The two main Presbyterian denominations had suspended their Union negotiations at the outset of the war, in order to concentrate their energies on the national emergency. In 1916, the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and United Free Church both formed special commissions to explore the moral meaning of the war. These commissions, however, were heavily academic and they sounded some uncertain notes in their respective reports in 1917, describing the war as a divine visitation upon a selfish and materialist generation, and as a chastisement intended to humble the nation and bring it to collective repentance. Such language found little support among anxious or bereaved families in the pews, and most ministers assured congregations that their loved ones were fighting and dying in God's cause.

When the war came to an end in November 1918, the Presbyterian Churches acted to assert their influence and authority over a war-weary and grieving Scotland. In the final months of the war, they had revived their negotiations for Church Union. Early in 1919, the two Churches together launched a National Mission of Rededication. For weeks, mission workers visited homes and distributed tracts; congregations held special prayer services, and then, on Rededication Sunday, 19 April 1919, congregations stood and solemnly pledged to work for the sovereignty of Christ in all aspects of life. At its meeting of May 1919, the Church of Scotland General Assembly created a 'Church and Nation Committee' to oversee post-war reconstruction and see to the fulfilment of the Rededication Pledge. Many returning veterans and their families felt gratitude to God for bringing them through the fiery furnace, and church attendances increased in the immediate post-war years.

Others, however, were burdened with grief for lost sons, brothers, lovers, husbands and fathers. The bereaved sometimes sought consolation in

unconventional religious forms. During and immediately after the war, there was a resurgence of spiritualism, as the bereaved sought to communicate with dead soldiers through mediums and séances. So large was the spiritualist movement that the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland decided in May 1920 to appoint a committee on 'Supernatural Psychic Phenomena' to investigate. The committee, which included Professor W. P. Paterson of the University of Edinburgh and Professor W. A. Curtis of New College, sent ministers (presumably in disguise) to attend séances and investigate the phenomena at first hand. In its report to the Assembly in 1922, the committee observed that it had seen much fraud but also evidence of supernatural occurrences that it could not explain. It recognised that spiritualism was a response to a deep human need that the Churches were not meeting. 'Although the Church of Scotland in its doctrine', the committee noted, 'has always maintained the existence of the Blessed Dead, yet in its practice at some periods it has been severely reticent in regard to the future life'.[23]

A triumphalist note was sounded when Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, the supreme commander of the British Expeditionary Force, visited Edinburgh in May 1919. Addressing a joint meeting of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and United Free Church in the Assembly Hall on the Mound, he was given a hero's welcome and standing ovation. Haig had been born in Edinburgh and was an elder of the Church of Scotland; he believed that he had received divine guidance in his battle plans.[24] For many he was a model of the Christian warrior, God's chosen instrument in saving the nation and bringing victory. The cult of Haig found further expression with his death early in 1928. Thousands stood in silence in the Old Town to honour the funeral cortege as it brought the body to St Giles church on a moonlit February night, and tens of thousands more filed past the coffin as it lay in state in St Giles, before it was removed for interment at Dryburgh Abbey in the Borders. 'It seemed', recalled the minister of St Giles, Charles Warr, 'as if Douglas Haig was coming home surrounded by the spirits of Wallace and Bruce and Claverhouse and Montrose and all of Scotland's mighty warriors'.[25] Meanwhile, across Scotland, hundreds of war memorials were raised or

Fig. 10. First General Assembly of the United Church of Scotland, 1929. *(Courtesy of New College Library.)*

commemoration plaques were placed in churches – culminating in the completion of the sombre Scottish National War Memorial, with its shrine, soft lights and stained-glass windows, in Edinburgh Castle. City ministers took leading roles, and the choir of St Giles led the singing, at the opening ceremony in 1927.[26]

The two Presbyterian Churches were united in 1929 (fig. 10). The formal Union agreement was signed in the Martin Hall of New College, where the event was memorialised with a Latin inscription on the west wall. The first meeting of the General Assembly of the reunited Church was held in what was then a vast bus garage, the 'Industrial Hall' on Annandale Street, off Leith Walk; it was the only building large enough to accommodate the 12,000 people who attended the ceremony.[27] For many, this event not only restored the Church of Scotland as the true expression of the nation's spiritual identity but it also promised to usher in a revival of the nation's faith. The Church Reunion was followed in 1931 by the Forward Movement, a national campaign aimed at reviving the Church of Scotland's influence over Scotland's social and intellectual life. Then in 1933 the Church of Scotland launched a church extension campaign, which aimed to build new churches and church halls, especially in the new housing areas that were being developed on the outskirts of Edinburgh and other large cities.

There was also renewed revivalist activity. In 1934 the Church of Scotland appointed D. P. Thomson, a physically large and jovial war veteran and minister, as a full-time evangelist. Thomson had begun his evangelistic work in the 1920s in company with his friend, Eric Liddell, before Liddell left Scotland in

1925 for the China mission. 'The contrast', one admirer later recalled, 'between the booming, ebullient D. P. and the quiet, diffident Liddell could not have been greater'.[28] Thomson was popular with the young, and among his many activities he organised a group of Edinburgh Student Campaigners, who were influenced by the English Industrial Christian Fellowship and carried on missions to labouring folk in Edinburgh and neighbouring industrial towns.

GRIM YEARS: ECONOMIC DISTRESS, THE GENERAL STRIKE AND SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

There was considerable suffering among Edinburgh's working classes. After 1919, wartime government contracts and economic controls had been quickly brought to an end, and millions of soldiers and sailors were demobilised. The result was massive unemployment. Moreover, the long-term costs of the Great War, in terms of lost productivity, lost overseas markets, lost men and talent, bereaved and broken families, and massive national debt, now became manifest. Amid the social distress, there were growing class tensions, while some, embittered by unemployment and poverty, angrily abandoned Christianity.

Church leaders were deeply concerned over the social crisis. This was especially true in the Presbyterian denominations, which were intent on reviving the authority of the national Church in post-war Scotland. Presbyterian ministers found the polarised post-war society perplexing; it was far from the national unity that many had expected following victory in the Great War and the progress towards Presbyterian reunion. In the early 1920s there was conflict in the troubled coal mining industry, which led to a lock-out of the miners and then, as other trade unions rallied behind the miners, to the general strike in early May 1926. During the general strike, some Edinburgh ministers were loud in their denunciations of labour, while Presbyterian leaders refused to endorse the Archbishop of Canterbury's call for a negotiated settlement. Professor Alexander Martin, Principal of New College, wrote in the *Scotsman* that the general strike had to be broken 'at whatever cost'.[29] When the general strike was called off after nine days, James Harvey, moderator of the United Free Church General Assembly of 1926, proclaimed it to be 'a victory for God'.[30]

Following the general strike, the Church of Scotland made a half-hearted attempt, in response to an impassioned appeal from the miners' union to the General Assembly of 1926, to mediate a settlement in the Scottish coal fields. However, when the coal owners refused the Church's mediation, Presbyterian leaders hastily dropped their offer and the lock-out of the miners continued. The Church of Scotland now decided that what the locked-out miners of Fife needed was a revivalist campaign, which it conducted in the autumn of 1926. But the mining families, hungry and angry after months of lock-out, were in no mood for revival, and the campaign collapsed. The following spring, students from Edinburgh's New College went to West Fife to try to revive the campaign, but with no more success.[31] However, one of these New College student revivalists, the war veteran (and future Old Testament professor), Norman Porteous, was so deeply moved by the conditions he witnessed that he took a ministerial charge in West Fife upon completing his studies.

The 1920s were a troubled and confused time and many were drawn to extreme views. These included the politics of racial and ethnic hatred. Indeed, some leading Presbyterians came to believe that social salvation would only come through restoring racial 'purity'. For them, the root cause of all Scotland's social distress could be traced to the migration of Irish Roman Catholics into Scotland, a migration that had begun in the early nineteenth century as Irish men and women had come to industrialising Scotland in search of employment. Although migration had largely ceased after the war, these Protestants believed that the Irish Catholics who had settled in Scotland were a 'corrupting' influence and 'weeds' that had to be removed. In a shameful episode in their history, the mainstream Presbyterian Churches officially embraced these racist attitudes. Beginning in 1923, the General Assemblies of both major Presbyterian denominations launched a combined campaign against what they termed the 'menace' of 'Irish immigration'. This campaign continued into the late 1930s. It included demands that the State halt all migration of Irish Catholics into Scotland, disenfranchise Irish-born Catholics,

deny Irish-born Catholics social welfare, and forcibly repatriate many, if not all, to Ireland. In formal petitions to government and public reports and addresses, Presbyterian leaders, especially John White, described Irish Catholics as an 'inferior race', which was corrupting Scottish racial purity through intermarriage, and creating social division and unrest.[32]

Most leaders of the Presbyterian 'Irish immigration' campaign were based in Glasgow and the West, where there was a large Catholic population of Irish background. But curiously it was in Edinburgh, with its Catholic population of only about 9%, that anti-Catholic rhetoric boiled over in the mid 1930s into street violence. In the spring and summer of 1935, there were anti-Catholic demonstrations and riots, orchestrated by Protestant Action, a militant organisation led by the Leith-based Baptist anti-Catholic agitator, John Cormack. A veteran of the Great War, Cormack had gained a reputation in the late 1920s as a fiery spokesman for the Edinburgh Protestant Society on the city's speakers' corner at the foot of the Mound. At its height in the mid 1930s, Protestant Action commanded about a third of the municipal vote in Edinburgh.[33] From the beginning, Cormack combined anti-Catholic oratory with violence and intimidation, gathering a gang of street thugs whom he dubbed the KKK ('Kormack's Kaledonian Klan'), or as they became known, 'the Ks'. The provocative nickname 'KKK' referred to the post-Civil War racist organisation in the United States that experienced a resurgence in the 1920s and was carrying on a campaign of lynchings and intimidation directed at blacks, and also at Roman Catholics and Jews, in defence of an 'American way of life'.[34]

The Edinburgh unrest began on 27 April 1935, when a crowd of 10,000 disrupted a reception hosted by the City Council for the Catholic Young Men's Society in the City Chambers on High Street. Early in June, thousands demonstrated violently when the freedom of the city was granted to the Australian prime minister, Joseph Lyons, who was a Roman Catholic. The violence peaked in late June, when Protestant Action orchestrated a series of assaults on a Catholic Eucharistic Congress meeting in the city. On 25 June a mob of 30,000 besieged the Congress participants at St Andrew's Priory in Morningside, battling with police and attacking buses full of families, including children, with rocks and bottles as they sought to escape. Throughout the summer of 1935, Catholics had to mount 'all-night vigils' to protect their churches from arson and vandalism, while priests were openly assaulted on the streets.[35] Most of Edinburgh denounced the violence, which was all too similar to Nazi thuggery on the streets of Berlin. It was also clear to many that the racist and sectarian language of the Church of Scotland since 1923 had contributed to the violence. Writing to the *Scotsman* in late June 1935, one anonymous Church of Scotland minister confessed to being ashamed of his Church's recent history of 'bullying and intolerance' and noted that it was time for the Scottish people not only to denounce the Edinburgh street rioters but also to look closely at the activities of the General Assembly of the national Church.[36]

After the violence of 1935, the Church of Scotland's campaign against Irish immigration lost support; a minority of Protestant zealots would

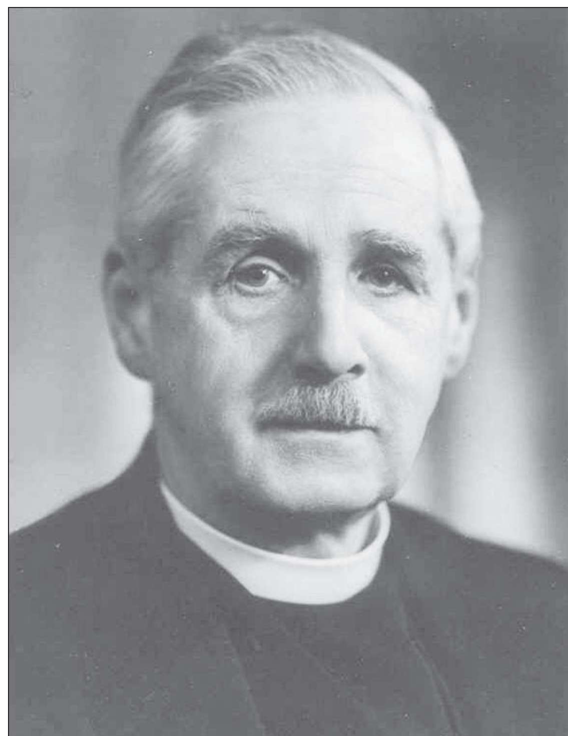

Fig. 11. Very Revd Professor John Baillie (1886–1960). *(New College Library.)*

continue the General Assembly protests against 'Irish immigration' until 1952 – and Cormack's Protestant Action group remained a political force in Leith until the 1960s – but in Edinburgh as a whole such blatant sectarianism declined. While disgust over the anti-Catholic street violence was undoubtedly a major cause, other factors were also at work. In the later 1930s, new figures emerged to leadership in the Edinburgh Church of Scotland. They included Professor John Baillie, a distinguished Scottish theologian who had taught for a number of years in the United States, where he had become a close friend of the American liberal theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr. Baillie had returned to Scotland in 1934 to become professor of Divinity at Edinburgh's New College and he helped bring a new ethos to the city's religious life (fig. 11). Another new figure was Ronald Selby Wright, who was ordained to the Canongate church in 1937, and who took an active role in youth work in the deprived Old Town district. Wright, who was 'preached' into his charge at the Canongate by Baillie, had no time for sectarian language or prejudice.[37]

After 1935, moreover, the Edinburgh Churches were waking to the threats to all civilised life posed by the tyranny and racist ideology of the Nazi regime in Germany. There was also a renewed commitment to the ecumenical movement and the witness of all the world's Christians. In 1937, the second decennial meeting of the Faith and Order Conference, one of the fruits of the great Edinburgh 1910 World Mission Conference, was held at New College, bringing together some 414 delegates from 122 Christian communions in 43 different countries to discuss ecumenical co-operation in matters of doctrine and worship.[38] In April and October-November of 1939, following an invitation initiated by his friend, John Baillie, Reinhold Niebuhr delivered two sets of Gifford Lectures in the Rainy Hall of New College.[39] The German-American theologian Niebuhr was a staunch opponent of racial and class oppression, and his Gifford lectures, published as *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, defined a realistic Christian response to totalitarian ideologies. The two-volume work remains one of the great theological achievements of the twentieth century. By the time of his second set of Gifford lectures, Britain was at war with Nazi Germany, and an attack by German bombers on Rosyth naval base and the Forth Bridge during his third lecture provided, one historian has observed, 'an apocalyptic background' to his thoughts.[40]

With the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the Edinburgh Churches again rallied behind the defence of the realm, though the mood was more chastened than in 1914. At its first wartime meeting, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland appointed a special 'Commission for the Interpretation of God's Will in the Present Crisis', which was instructed both to explore the meaning of the war and 'to examine how the testimony of the Church to the Gospel may become more effective in our land, overseas, and in the international order'.[41] To head the Commission, the General Assembly named John Baillie of New College. The three main reports of what became popularly known as the 'Baillie Commission' defined a new ethos for the Church of Scotland. These reports called on the Church of Scotland to cease seeking to impose a religious authority over Scotland, but to embrace instead co-operation with other denominations in a religiously pluralistic Scotland. Humility, responsibility, service and conciliation should be the watchwords of the national Church. It should set itself against all movements which 'invite and demand a total devotion to the ends of a particular nation, to the blood of a particular race, or to the traditions of a particular plot of earth' and seek instead 'to lead men's minds forward to the desire for wider community'.[42] The Baillie Commission marked a break with the policies of the Presbyterian 'Irish immigration' campaign of the 1920s and 1930s. There was an attempt by John White and conservatives in the General Assembly of May 1944 to secure the rejection of the Baillie Commission's reports and the dismissal of the Commission.[43] White's motion, however, was defeated by a large majority, and the Baillie Commission reports would shape the ethos of the post-war Church of Scotland.

REVIVAL, ECUMENISM AND SECULARISATION

Post-war Edinburgh was characterised by growing co-operation among the religious bodies. Influenced by the shared sacrifices of the war, there was a general consensus among the Churches that the

social welfare reforms of the post-war Labour Government were broadly in line with Judaic-Christian social teachings. With the onset of the Cold War, many viewed the world in religious terms – as the Judaic-Christian civilisation in Western Europe and North America confronting an essentially atheist and totalitarian Stalinist Soviet Union and its satellites. The creation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948 strengthened the ecumenical commitments. John Baillie was appointed to the Central Committee of the WCC at its inaugural meeting in Amsterdam in 1948, and then, at the second meeting of the Council, in Evanston in 1954, he was named one of the six WCC World Presidents.[44] The Iona Community, an ecumenical fellowship founded in 1938 by the Christian social activist, George MacLeod, endeavoured to unite Christians for social reform; it recruited a strong post-war Edinburgh membership. Edinburgh's New College (which after 1935 had become home to the University of Edinburgh Faculty of Divinity) became a post-war intellectual centre of the ecumenical movement, a status that was enhanced with the appointment in 1950 of Thomas F. Torrance, a young dogmatic theologian and future leader in the ecumenical movement (fig. 12), and the appointment in 1956 of John McIntyre, a philosophic theologian with wide international contacts. The ecumenical vision contributed to the prolonged negotiations for a union of the Church of Scotland, the Church of England, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church of England, which began with the so-called 'Bishop's Report' of 1957 and drew to a close in 1968. Although the union negotiations proved unsuccessful, they did contribute to closer Anglican-Presbyterian relations.[45]

Fig. 12. Very Revd Professor Thomas F. Torrance (1913–2007). *(New College Library.)*

The post-war Edinburgh Churches made effective use of the developing broadcasting media. There had been a significant increase in religious radio broadcasting during the war, with Ronald Selby Wright of the Canongate, the 'Radio Padre', becoming a familiar voice across Britain. In 1945, the BBC appointed Ronnie Falconer, a Church of Scotland minister, as its first full-time director of religious broadcasting in Scotland. His initial radio broadcast was of the 'Battle of Britain Service', conducted on 15 September 1945 in the city's Turnhouse Aerodrome. This was followed a few weeks later with the 'Thanksgiving for Victory Service' conducted at St Giles cathedral. Regular television broadcasts began in Britain in 1952, and Falconer ensured that the Churches had a prominent role. The first televised worship service in Scotland was broadcast in 1952 from St Cuthbert's church, Edinburgh, where the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, William White Anderson, led the service.[46] Televised sermons became a regular feature of Edinburgh life.

There was also a flurry of revivalist activity from the late 1940s, including the Edinburgh Churches Campaign, the Iona Community Parish Mission and, in 1950, the Radio Mission of the BBC in Scotland. In 1952, a number of Scottish Protestant Churches launched the inter-church 'Tell Scotland' movement that aimed to co-ordinate the various evangelistic initiatives. This climaxed in the Scottish evangelistic crusade of 1955 led by the charismatic young American Baptist preacher, Billy Graham.[47] While most of his crusade focused on Glasgow, Graham held a rally on 20 April 1955 in Edinburgh's Tynecastle Park that attracted 20,000. There was, however, also much concern over Graham's methods of crusade evangelism, which did not

always translate into lasting increases in church membership and which may have diverted commitment away from the Tell Scotland campaign. For George MacLeod, Graham's fundamentalist gospel was a form of escapism from pressing social problems and set evangelism in Scotland back by years.[48] Yet many lives were changed, and Graham would return to hold mass rallies on 25 and 26 May 1991 in Murrayfield Stadium.

In the 1960s, women, who had always been the mainstays of congregational life, began entering the ranks of the clergy. In 1929 the Congregational Union became the first major denomination in Scotland to ordain women to the ministry. But the struggle for women's ordination in the other Churches proved a much longer one. In 1931, the Marchioness of Aberdeen and 335 other women brought a petition to the General Assembly for the admission of women to the eldership of the newly united Church of Scotland. A motion was sent in 1934 to the presbyteries, but overwhelmingly rejected by a vote of 50 presbyteries to 16. With this crushing defeat over the eldership, all hopes for women's ordination to the ministry in the Church of Scotland receded for a generation. Then in 1963, Mary Lusk, a Church of Scotland deaconess and assistant chaplain at the University of Edinburgh, revived the issue when she petitioned the General Assembly to be ordained. She deeply moved the Assembly with a speech of calm sincerity and conviction of her calling, and helped ensure that women's ordination was again sharply debated. In 1968, with the approval of a majority of presbyteries, the General Assembly finally adopted an act permitting the ordination of women to both the ministry and eldership on the same terms as men.[49] The Methodist Church began ordaining women to the ministry in 1974, the Scottish Episcopal Church agreed to ordain women in 1994, and the Baptist Union of Scotland voted to allow their churches to ordain women in 1999.

There was increased co-operation between Protestants and Catholics, a co-operation assisted by changes within both Scottish society and the Roman Catholic Church. The spread of comprehensive high schools and grants for university study after the Second World War provided new opportunities for Catholic working-class children; more and more Catholics flourished in business and the professions. In 1951, Gordon Gray, aged only forty, was appointed Catholic archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh and became one of the youngest archbishops in the Catholic Church. Born and raised in Edinburgh, Gray was committed to strengthening the Scottish identity of his Church; he banned, for example, the sale of the *Irish Weekly* from Catholic chapels in the archdiocese.[50] He nurtured friendships with ministers outside his Church, among them Ronald Selby Wright of the Canongate.[51] Between 1962 and 1965, Gray was active in the Second Vatican Council, which inaugurated a major liturgical and ecclesiastical reorientation within the Roman Catholic Church. When he became a Cardinal in 1969, the event was celebrated with a civic dinner in Edinburgh that included leaders of different Churches.[52]

The Dominican House on George Square, designated a House of Study by the Order, developed close relations with the University of Edinburgh from the 1970s, sending candidates to New College for part of their theological training.[53] In 1979, a Dominican, the popular Catholic university chaplain and historian, Father Anthony Ross, was elected Rector of the University of Edinburgh by the students and alumni. That same year, an appointment panel made up of six representatives of the University of Edinburgh and six representatives of the Church of Scotland recommended James P. Mackey, an Irish Roman Catholic theologian and a laicised priest, for the prestigious Chair of Divinity at New College. Presbyterian conservatives were furious over the nomination and the six Church representatives were summoned before the bar of the General Assembly, where they were threatened with disciplinary action. But the General Assembly did not have the authority to block Mackey's appointment, while many in the Church of Scotland applauded it as a victory for tolerance and academic freedom.[54] Within five years Mackey's colleagues had elected him Dean of the Faculty of Divinity.

In 1982 Pope John Paul II made his historic papal visit to Scotland. In Edinburgh, he conducted mass for 44,000 in Murrayfield stadium. He also visited the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. He was met in New College quadrangle by the Moderator of the General Assembly, Professor John McIntyre. Their handshake under the statue of John Knox marked for many the beginning of a new era

and a sign that Scotland's 837,000 Roman Catholics were fully part of Scottish life (fig. 13).[55] However, decades of sectarian strife could not be easily erased, and sectarian animosities continue to rankle. In August 1999, the gifted Scottish Catholic musical composer, James Macmillan, delivered a lecture at the Edinburgh International Festival in which he spoke passionately of a 'visceral anti-Catholicism' permeating Scottish national life, including the professions, the schools and universities. The lecture sparked a vigorous debate, and a book of essays edited by the distinguished Scottish historian, Tom Devine, explored the persistence of sectarianism.[56] None the less, progress has been made and co-operation between Protestants and Catholics continues.

The spirit of ecumenical co-operation has found expression in new organisations. A Scottish Churches Council was formed in 1964 and this was succeeded in 1990 by ACTS, or 'Action of Churches Together in Scotland'. ACTS seeks to promote greater unity among the Churches and greater inter-denominational co-operation in the social sphere; its member denominations include the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, the Congregational Union, the Society of Friends, the United Free Church, the United Reformed Church and the Salvation Army. In Edinburgh, local ecumenical action groups have developed in association with ACTS, including Edinburgh Churches Together, the Leith Council of Churches, Murrayfield Churches Together, and South East Edinburgh Churches Acting Together. There is also an Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association, founded in 1989, to promote understanding, mutual respect and co-operation in civic improvement among the different faith communities in Edinburgh. It hosts visiting lectures, sponsors talks to local schools, helps to mediate conflict and organises the annual Edinburgh Festival of Spirituality and Peace. The growing religious diversity of Edinburgh was illustrated with the opening in 1998 of the majestic King Fahd Mosque and Islamic Centre in the Potterow, near the University of Edinburgh. The Centre for Theology and Public Issues, founded in 1984 by Professor Duncan Forrester at New College, has provided an intellectual forum, including conferences, public lectures and publications, for interfaith discussions of matters of civic and national social policy. The Centre has organised seminal conferences on such themes as the distribution of wealth, prisons and punishment, and peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.[57]

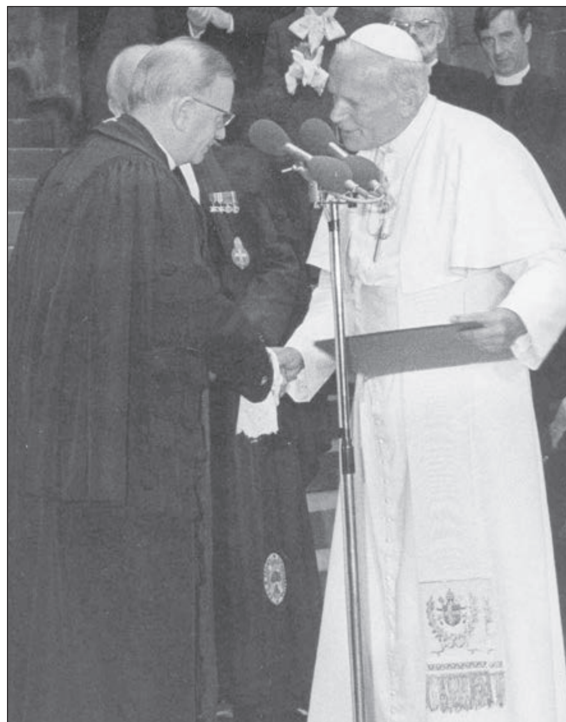

Fig. 13. Very Revd Professor John MacIntyre, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and Pope John Paul II, Edinburgh 1982. *(New College Library.)*

However, while the post-war Edinburgh Christian churches were on the whole becoming more committed to social action, more ecumenically engaged, and more tolerant, something else was happening. Many Edinburgh churches were emptying. To an extent, this resulted from church unions and the movement of families from the city centre to the peripheries. But there was also a real overall decline in Edinburgh church adherence. An early warning was sounded in 1946, when Allan Easton, minister of a church extension charge in Pilton, a council housing estate on the city's north side, observed that the churches were failing to establish themselves in the new housing areas. Edinburgh, with its historic churches and traditions, was, he believed, too concerned with preserving institutional structures – including ecclesiastical

bureaucracies, venerable church buildings and ceremonies – and not enough with adapting its mission to a changing society.[58]

The drift from the churches became still more pronounced from the 1960s. The decline was particularly acute in the Church of Scotland, which saw its overall membership plummet from about 1,300,000 in 1957 to a little over 600,000 by 2001 (although at the census of 2001, over 2.1 million Scots defined themselves as adhering to the Church of Scotland).[59] The 1970s and 1980s also witnessed the rapid demise of the traditional Scottish Sunday, with increasing shop and pub openings, and more and more sporting and leisure events. For many Edinburgh inhabitants, Sunday lost all religious significance. The social historian Callum Brown has suggested that this declining church adherence resulted in part from the 1960s cultural rebellion against conventions, associated with experimentation with drugs, sexual liberation, and rock music, and in part from the growing percentage of women in the workforce. It was women, he argued, who had traditionally provided for the spiritual nurture of families, ensuring that children said bedtime prayers and that children and husbands had clean Sunday clothes, were up and bathed on Sunday morning, and made their way to Sunday worship. But from the 1960s, many women, balancing the demands of careers, family and most of the household chores, did not have the time or energy to ensure their families attended regular Sunday worship.[60] These form a plausible set of explanations, though they do not explain why religious decline proceeded more rapidly in Edinburgh than in cities in the United States, where there was also a 1960s counter-culture and where women experienced similar pressures. Another explanation, advanced by a former New College lecturer, Robin Gill, focuses on the over-churching of cities such as Edinburgh, where denominational competition in the nineteenth century had left a legacy of too many large stone churches. Denominations are naturally reluctant to dispose of stately church buildings with rich histories. At the same time, the cost of having too many churches can be small congregations struggling with the mounting costs of maintaining older buildings, and this can discourage new members. Many in Edinburgh, of course, simply ceased to believe in the truths of Christianity as a result of scientific, historical or moral criticisms of the faith, or because of personal tragedies or traumas which they could not reconcile with continued faith in the Christian God. Others, who may have retained a personal set of beliefs, grew detached from the institutional Edinburgh churches, with their historic liturgies, their sober hymns, their large stone buildings, and their associations with an older social and political order. The churches could seem too tradition-bound, too solemn, too 'respectable' or too unadventurous, and unable to compete with the increased range of recreational and leisure activities available on a Sunday.

During the 1980s, some came to see another cause of decline in the free-market policies of the Thatcher Government. These policies, it seemed, were not only polarising Scottish society, but also promoting materialism, rampant consumerism and selfishness at the expense of Scotland's traditional religious and communal values. Church leaders, including members of the influential Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland, became highly critical of Thatcherism. In May 1988, Margaret Thatcher, with characteristic boldness, visited the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and confronted her critics with an address, her 'sermon on the Mound', in which she expressed the main elements of her personal faith. She professed belief in the benefits of wealth creation, individualism, equality of opportunity, and a personal morality rooted in the Bible. In Scripture, she provocatively maintained, 'we are told we must work and use our talents to create wealth'. She quoted St Paul's pronouncement that 'If a man will not work he shall not eat'. Many were appalled by what they viewed as a brazen attempt by an English prime minister to instruct the learned ministers and elders of the Kirk on Christian doctrine and practice.[61] Indeed, during the coming year some Church leaders became convinced that Scotland needed its own national parliament. The General Assembly called on Christians to take an active role in revived debates over Scottish devolution, and a conference was held at Carberry Tower, outside Edinburgh, to discuss Scottish self-government from a Christian perspective.[62]

Others, however, applauded Thatcher's pluck, and agreed with much of what she had said. In response to the chorus of clerical criticism of

Thatcher's address, her admirers maintained that too many ministers were pronouncing on economic and social questions of which they had little real understanding, at the expense of their real duties of pastoral care, Bible study and preaching.[63] For some, there was a sense that since the Second World War and the work of the Baillie Commission, the Churches had been leaning too far to the left politically, and had become overly concerned with social causes. Conservatives felt a need to return to Scriptural authority and individual discipline, while they suspected that ecumenical commitments were bringing churches to dilute their doctrinal standards.

Curiously, since the 1980s, it has often been Edinburgh's more liberal congregations with strong social and ecumenical commitments that have been struggling with declining membership, while more conservative evangelical churches, such as the Church of Scotland's Holyrood Abbey Church, the Baptist Charlotte Chapel, and the Episcopal St Paul's and St George's on York Place, have been successful in recruiting or retaining members. New evangelical initiatives, meanwhile, including the 'Church without Walls' movement adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2001, have sought to re-energise Christian life by shifting attention away from institutional churches to spreading the gospel in communities.

CONCLUSION

The religious life of Edinburgh remains lively and diverse, and it is becoming more so with small but growing Islamic, Hindu and Sikh populations. To be sure, a smaller proportion of the city's population now attends public worship than was the case a century ago. And although St Giles continues to hold civic services to mark key dates, often with processions representing the historic corporate bodies in the city, the Churches no longer exercise the influence over civic policy that they did a century ago. Most churches are experiencing declining memberships, and some historic church buildings have closed – among them the Tron in the Old Town, which closed as a church in 1952, St George's on Charlotte Square, which closed as a church in 1964, and the grand Tolbooth with its Pugin-designed spire, which closed as a church in 1984.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, many attended church because this was viewed as a sign of respectability. Church attendance is no longer necessarily perceived as a sign of respectability. On the contrary, in light of religiously motivated acts of terror in recent decades – whether in Belfast, New York, Baghdad or Mumbai – some have come to connote any religious practice with fanaticism and intolerance. None the less, according to the government's decennial census of 2001, which included a question on religious belief, some 66% of the Scottish population defined themselves as having a religious faith and 65% of the population defined themselves as Christian.[64] Some Edinburgh churches are flourishing, and all the city's religious communities benefit from an enhanced spirit of co-operation. And certainly the city would be an emptier place without its faith communities, representing belief in, or a longing for, a higher truth and a higher good.

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