

Chalmers Lectures 2017

Lecture One – Walls Without Church (Glory Without Power)

I want to begin by thanking you warmly for coming or for clicking in if you are out there in cyberspace, by thanking the Church for appointing me and waiting for me as Chalmers Lecturer and by thanking the Kirk Session and Minister of St Giles for making available this historic church as a venue for these three lectures.

That there are three lectures means that we will all have to pace ourselves. I want to try and lead an argument and make a case about reforming the church and to build it over these three weeks. We are going to move from the general to the particular and the detailed suggestions I want to make for specific reforms are going to come mostly in the second and third lectures, so I ask for your patience in that respect, particularly in the questions, so that I have something left to say on the 15th.

Reasons for Writing

Tell someone you are writing a book on the future of the Kirk and their instant response is likely to be some version of the quip 'so it has one?' Another favourite is - 'so it'll be a short book then'.

I have felt very inadequate in tackling this subject - I have a very clear sense of my own limitations - if these lectures have any gifts to give to the church, among them will be the gift of being wrong. My hope is that they can serve the church by contributing to a positive and creative conversation about its future.

There have been some very important conversations about reform within the Church of Scotland since the year 2000 and some significant reports and proposals - some of which have led to change, some of which have been set aside.

But given the scale of the challenges we are facing, I do not think we have yet done enough.

With some very honourable exceptions, too often, across the Church, we treat our presbyterian identity and its institutional expression as a running joke; we are prepared to ironise it relentlessly and to complain about it endlessly, without putting enough serious effort into devising constructive options for reform.

My growing suspicion has been that this reaction reflects a sense of disempowerment and even distress. People have been laughing instead of crying and because they did not know what else to do.

In the conversations I have had with a range of folk within the church - I sense that mood is beginning to change - the challenges are too serious and too imminent - as one person said to me - there's nowhere left to hide.

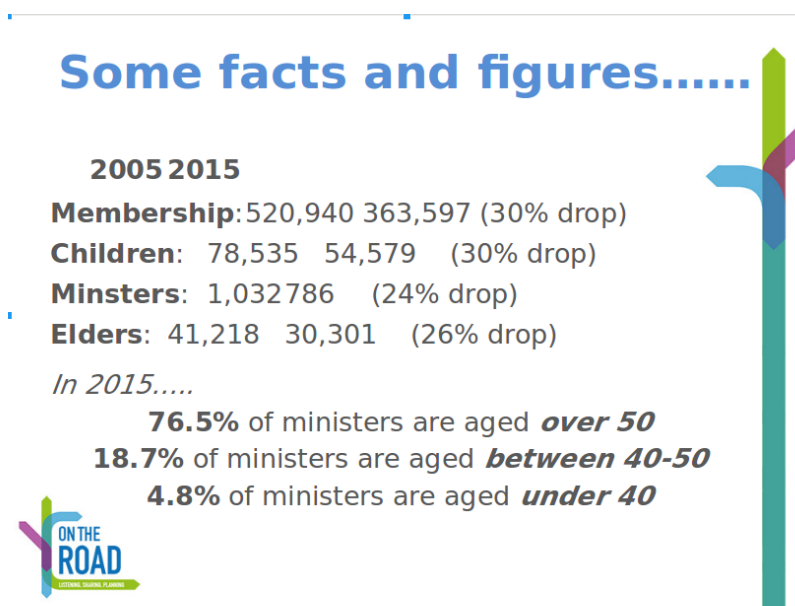
So I want to begin these lectures, as I begin the book, with this question:

"What Just Happened?"

What Just Happened?

There are two simple answers to that question, both of which are also very challenging and complicated, when we begin to unpack them.

Decline Happened



and

Secularisation Happened.

DECLINE happened

Table 1 sets out the turning point and the onset of decline in membership from this mid century peak:

Table 1. Church of Scotland Membership 1950-2016

YEAR	Membership
1950	1,271,247
1956	1,319,574*
1960	1,301,280
1970	1,154,211
1980	953,933
1990	786,787
2000	607,712
2010	445,646
2011	432,343
2012	413,488

2013	398,389
2014	363,000
2015	352,912

The Church of Scotland reached a peak of membership in 1956, when it registered 1,319,574 members - in 2015 the membership stood at 352,912.

At the current rate of decline, by 2020, we will have lost around a million members since 1956.

Between 2005 and 2015 there was a 30% drop in membership which meant that we declined faster than any other major denomination in the UK. The Church of Scotland has lost the equivalent of an average sized congregation each week for the last ten years.¹

In that same decade up to 2015, there was a 30% drop in children, a 24% drop in ministers and a 26% drop in elders. As things stand more than 75% of our ministers, of which I am one, are aged over 50 - 95% are aged over 40. These are grim statistics.

Tracing the pattern of decline which set in from the early 1960s is not just a statistical and a sociological task, it is also a spiritual challenge for the Kirk. Not everywhere, but in most congregations, it has been a story of relentless decline. It is psychologically significant that most people in the Kirk, alongwith most ministers, are unlikely to have ever had the experience of being part of a growing congregation. It is sociologically and missiologically significant, that Church of Scotland membership is declining faster than that of any other major denomination in the UK.

A Tale of Two Censuses

Questions on religion were only finally included in the UK Census in 2001. After the Census, the Church of Scotland was braced for results which would highlight its decline, but the numbers in 2001 were not nearly as bad as some had feared. More than two million Scots identified their religion as "Church of Scotland" in the Census returns, representing 42% of the population, while just 27.5% or 1.4 million said they had "no religion". While this represented a substantial decline from what the levels would have been in 1971 or 1981, it still bore witness to a prior Scotland, much of which had understood and felt itself to be culturally Presbyterian. However, when the results of the 2011 Census came out, with the Church again braced for bad news, as its own numbers continued to plummet, this time there was little comfort to be found. The number of those identifying as 'Church of Scotland' had fallen by 20% to just over 1.7 million, while the number of those identifying as having 'no religion' had risen by 38% to 1.94 million. It's known in the trade as the rise of the 'Nones'. Presbyterian Scotland - which was never all of Scotland - was not yet entirely gone, but it was

¹ The comparison was made to me by Rev Dr Fiona Tweedie, Statistics for Mission adviser to the Church of Scotland.

fading fast. The Census, which perhaps functions best as a measure of a residual, cultural religiosity, was charting a rapid process of secularisation across Scotland and the Kirk was topping the charts for religious decline.

The question - what just happened? is intended to reflect a sense of shock, dismay and if you'll forgive the term, disbelief. I am not sure we have fully acknowledged the grief within the Kirk at how much has been lost - at how this has felt for those who have lived and ministered through these years. Nor have we properly begun to understand why the Church of Scotland has fared so badly in comparative terms.

As well as decline, the other answer to what just happened is that

Secularisation happened

Classic theories of secularisation, as they emerged within the Western tradition of social science, held that a decline in the social significance of religion would be an inevitable accompaniment to the rise of modernity.

The predictions of most secularisation theorists until the 1990s were that institutional forms of Christianity, which had been powerful in Europe for over 1000 years, were now facing a relentless decline. In the 1990s, Scotland's own Callum Brown offered a postmodern challenge to the modernist determinism of classic secularisation theory - he argued for a more open account of religious change - but having redated it to the 1960s and linked its cause to issues of gender in Scottish society, he was clear that secularisation should from this point be understood as a powerful reality, that it was probably irreversible and that this was a very good thing too.

Scotland's former *makar* Liz Lochhead (b.1947) is an example of Callum Brown's generation of women who came of age in the mid 1960s and quickly left behind the Church of Scotland (where her father had been Elder and Session Clerk) - There were too many ways, Brown suggests, in which the Kirk did not seem to understand or resonate with their understanding of being a woman in a changing Scotland.²

Liz Lochhead's poem *The Offering* begins "**Never in a month of them would you go back./ Sunday, the late smell of bacon/then the hard small feeling of the offering in the mitten.**"

² In conversation with her at Solas Festival in 2015, she told me her father had been Session Clerk

It is one of a few post 1960 literary texts which are essential resources for understanding the decline of the Kirk in terms of what happened inside people's *psyches*, their hearts and minds.³

It would be rare if not impossible to find an academic working in this field, who did not believe that secularisation was a very real phenomenon across Western Europe. But there are different strands to how this is understood.

Some academics have questioned how secularisation relates to life beyond Europe. Christianity continues to grow as a global religion, as does Islam. Some areas of the world including parts of Eastern Europe, appear to have shown signs of desecularisation. North America and the USA in particular, despite also being an advanced capitalist society, continues to show much higher levels of religious participation than Europe. Although nones are on the rise there also...

Let me refer briefly to three other perspectives on secularisation.

The sociologist Grace Davie has drawn attention to the phenomenon of what she calls 'vicarious religion' across Europe - arguing that while religious participation is declining, religion is still valued by a silent majority, who want it to be there, while not wanting to have much to do with it. This raises questions about what happens to religiosity when secularisation takes place - does it disappear, does it simply evaporate, or does it go quiet, go dormant.

Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead's influential study *The Spiritual Revolution* explored changing religious behaviours in the town of Kendal - drawing on philosopher Charles Taylor's theories of *subjectification* or a turn to the subject/to the self in Western culture. The classic example here is the person who says "I'm not religious but I see myself as a spiritual person". The search for authentic ways of being a self, of being ourselves - is seen as driving what people do with religion and how they do it. What they call the holistic milieu - a constellation of spaces and practices for developing body, mind and spirit - is growing in response to this search, particularly among women over 40. Where churches were growing, they suggested it was most often where they offered vividly experiential and self-involving ways to practice Christianity and particularly where this also brought with it a sense of belonging to a distinctive community. Those least likely to attract people were congregations offering an inherited, external moral code, but lacking distinctive social identity and heightened personal experience.

³ Text is in *Dreaming Frankenstein: and Collected Poems 1967-84*, Birlinn May 2011. For a brief critical commentary on 'The Offering' see *Liz Lochhead's Voices*, ed. Robert Crawford and Anne Varty, EUP, Edinburgh, 1993, pp71-2

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, in his 2007 book *A Secular Age* offers a profound and subtle account of secularisation, in which he describes how the ways we imagine and experience the world have changed over the past 500 years - from an instinctive and immediate awareness of spirituality, to a more distant, buffered and sceptical experience of the world. As someone sympathetic to faith, Taylor describes a range of different ways in which human beings now imagine, pursue and experience what he calls 'fullness'.

"Our age" he claims "is very far from settling in to a comfortable unbelief."⁴ Taylor suggests that as secularisation advances within Western societies, we may reach a kind of fragile equilibrium, which is capable of tipping in different directions. In some societies, he believes there may still be further movement towards a more secular outlook, with increasing numbers of people identifying religion as a problem and gravitating towards what he calls a self-contained, "immanentist" view of life.⁵ However, Taylor also offers a distinctive reading of 'secularisation and its discontents'⁶, suggesting that in the 21st century, the most secular societies may find that "many young people will begin again to explore beyond the boundaries" of a "waste land" of immanence. In these societies, blaming what has become a relatively weak religious domain for human ills will seem increasingly implausible. Not only that, the record and capacities of a now dominant humanism and secularism for meeting human aspirations to "fullness" of life will be increasingly questioned.⁷ Those of us living in the most secularised societies in the world may find that beyond the post-Christendom period we are currently living through, we may be about to experience, even if this happens patchily across Europe, a post-secular and post-atheist phase in our culture.⁸ This, we should note, would not be the same as a revival of religion, although it might create conditions favourable to that. In the first instance, it would represent a feeling, a *zeitgeist* or cultural mood, in which secularism and atheism no longer felt like progressive forces, which had the cultural winds in their sails, but were themselves the object of increasing critique, scepticism and disillusionment.

What just happened? well decline happened and is still happening...
secularisation happened and is still happening...

but what comes next - and what should we do about it?

⁴ Taylor 2007, 727

⁵ Taylor 2007, 770

⁶ The phrase, a punning paraphrase of Freud's 1929 book *Civilisation and its Discontents*, has been used by multiple authors, so no single attribution seems possible.

⁷ See James K.A. Smith's 2014 book *How (Not) To Be Secular - Reading Charles Taylor*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2014.

⁸ The ideas explored here are on the borderlands between sociology of religion, prophetic spirituality, and missiology and need to be held within an overarching understanding of divine providence. There is no claim of inevitability and no claim that technique or strategy can secure outcomes.

I want to suggest that there are four great tasks in front of the Church of Scotland today:

1. Spiritual Renewal - listening and responding to God
2. Liturgical Renewal - remaking the public worship of the church
3. Missional Refocusing - committing ourselves to a holistic theology of mission
4. Institutional Reform - reshaping and restructuring our institutional life

In these three lectures, I am going to be focusing on the third and fourth of these - so I will say very little in particular about Liturgical Renewal - I have written on that before and I hope to do so again.

I. Spiritual Renewal

I am not going to say much on this - but I want to say something. I believe there are others in coming months and years, who will write more insightfully than I can, on the call to spiritual renewal. I am expecting that a few people, not all of them well adjusted, will write or e-mail to scold me for paying attention to polity and structures when what the church really needs, is thoroughgoing repentance and renewed devotion to prayer and scripture. I am the last person to discourage either repentance or prayer or scripture reading and I am sure both I and many of you are in great and continuing need of them. My plea to such people would be that we do not need to see such prescriptions as alternatives to the kinds of refocusing and reform I am going to devote these lectures to.

So let me simply say this. I fully believe that unless the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain that build it. The Church of Scotland as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, lives only by the grace and power of God, our Maker and our Redeemer. We live and die, we stand or fall by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, crucified, risen and ascended - the Saviour of the World - who was before us in the beginning with God and as God - who calls us to follow him in the present - who awaits us at the end - when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of the Christ.

As the body of Christ, we live by and through the work of the life-giving Holy Spirit.

As a Christian, I believe that the fullness of life which Charles Taylor speaks of, which people in Scotland long for and strive for, is to be found in knowing this one, true, triune God and Jesus Christ, the one sent to us because God so loved the world.

I believe that a true spiritual renewal involves a holistic renewal of our Christian witness. Which is why we need to test the spirits, when people want to talk of revival or renewal. It is not true revival if people are anguished about micro ethics, but shed no tears over macro ethics. If they care about temperance, but not about Trident. It is not true revival if men lament their lust for women, but not their sexism. It is not true revival if people speak in strange tongues, but do not speak out against injustice and speak up for the poor. It is not true revival if people throw their fiddles on the fire - if they create an unbridgeable cultural gap between ceilidh and congregation. It is not a true spiritual renewal if it makes us less human, less alive, less loving, less merciful, less open to art and beauty and sensuality and life.

I can already sense some people out there reaching for the green ink...
Everything does depend upon the prayer - Come Holy Spirit.

2. Liturgical Renewal

I will say even less about liturgical renewal. Just this - that in a broad church, I believe it will take different forms. For some it will come through classical music and finely crafted liturgy, for some it will come through Messy Church and Matt Redman, for some it will come through a renewal of intense and passionate expository preaching, for some it will come through exploring gifts of the Spirit, for others it will come through a recovery of ancient spiritual practices. For some it will come through Rend Collective for others it will come through the Iona Community. We are a diverse church - God's tastes are wider than mine. As a Reformed Church, what all of these should share is a deep attentiveness to scripture, to hearing God's Word - and what I dare to hope they also share, is a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. When that renewal comes, it will move us on from the dull mediocrity of middle of the road traditionalism, from joyless formalism, from trite pietism, from funereal communions, from boring sermons, from musical snobbery, from liturgical correctness, from liturgical sloppiness, from evangelical privatisation of the gospel, from the liberal progressivist reduction of the gospel to social ethics... I could go on.. but I won't. That's another lecture, another book, another rant...

3. Missional Refocusing

The third task confronting us in the Kirk, I want to call a missional refocusing. In becoming more vivid and life-affirming, our spirituality and our worship will bear witness to a new ecumenical consensus about mission. Lesslie Newbigin wrote of his hopes for such a theological consensus in the 1950s, which was then overtaken by a period of polarisation between liberals infatuated with religionless Christianity, who virtually equated mission with humanisation and

social progress and evangelicals who craved a tighter focus on evangelism and personal salvation. Here in Scotland, where that consensus had animated initiatives like **Tell Scotland**, the subsequent divergence pulled people apart. Newbigin's return to the UK in the 1980s was one catalyst in the emergence of a new consensus from the 1990s onwards, of which David Bosch's book **Transforming Mission** was a key marker. The theological lens through which this was focused, was the idea of the *missio dei* - the mission of God. There are often quoted definitions of this from Jurgen Moltmann and from James Torrance - the most succinct is perhaps Tim Dearborn's formulation: "It is not the church of God which has a mission, it is the mission of God which has a church". Mission begins in the heart of God, there is mission Bosch says, because God loves the world. The *missio dei* enables a postcolonial understanding of mission, no longer something done by the sending churches of the North to the global South, we are all the objects of mission before we are ever its subjects.

The *missio dei* offers an overarching vision of the work of God in creation and redemption, of the life of the world in all its dimensions, called to be reconciled to God-in-Christ, through the renewing and life-giving work of the Spirit. And the mission of God has a church. The words of the risen Christ in John 20:21 reveal the dynamic at work: 'as the Father has sent me so I send you'. This is the word which incorporates disciples into the *missio dei*, which confirms and ordains the church as the church apostolic.⁹

In seeking the consensus which Newbigin and Bosch pointed us to, we can also see convergence today between the the Lausanne Movement's 2011 **Cape Town Commitment**¹⁰ and the World Council of Churches 2013 statement on Mission and Evangelism, **Together Towards Life**.¹¹ There are still some significant differences of emphasis between the two documents, but there is also an important degree of common ground - a common ground which I believe would be affirmed by the mainstream opinion of at least two thirds of the Kirk today. I am open to being shown a better formulation if you have one, but I value the strength and clarity of the Anglican Communion's **Five Marks of Mission**:

⁹ see also John Flett, **Apostolicity**, Downers Grove, Ill. IVP, 2016

¹⁰ For the text of the Lausanne Movement's 2011 Cape Town Commitment (agreed by the 2010 Cape Town conference) see <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>

¹¹ http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/20699/Mission_statement.pdf

The Five Marks of Mission are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society,
to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation,
and sustain and renew the life of the earth

This is the kind of full-spectrum lens which I believe we need to refocus the life and work of the Church of Scotland. It calls evangelicals beyond individualism to social and ecological ethics. It reminds liberals of the importance of evangelism and discipleship. It is succinct and memorable enough to use in Christian education and catechising. It reflects what David Bosch called an “emerging, ecumenical, missionary paradigm”.¹² It is a vision of mission which could unite the church and inspire the church. If we can find ways to improve the five marks without spoiling them, or alienating one another, we can do that as well.

This is the key insight which I think can be the star which guides us on the next stage of the Kirk’s journey - it is not my insight - it is an emerging consensus across many churches today - especially those like ourselves, which need to reimagine our calling in the face of decline and secularisation. Missiology frames ecclesiology which frames ministry.

4. Institutional Reform

The final task confronting the Church of Scotland is the task of institutional reform. Reform which is shaped by the missional refocusing of the church’s life.

I want to begin here by thinking about two inheritances which have shaped the Church of Scotland, the traditions of Reformed theology and the traditions of Presbyterian polity or governance.

In 2017, the year in which we mark the 500th anniversary of Luther’s Wittenberg theses, we recall Luther’s reforming restatement of the *notae ecclesiae* - the marks of the church - the true preaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the sacraments - to which was added in the Scots Confession, a third mark of: ecclesiastical discipline, uprightly administered.

¹² Bosch 1991, 368ff

The reception of the reformed tradition in Scotland, led the church through a series of struggles, some of them bloody, to affirm that its government was Presbyterian.

In this last section of the lecture, I want to reflect on the inheritance of Presbyterianism - on its gifts and graces, its shadows and deficits and its promise for the future.

Presbyterianism is, in essence, a system of church government - although, when we see that it has taken subtly and markedly different forms in different places and times, we might find that we need to talk about presbyterianisms. Ours is not the only game in town, nor I will argue, should it rest on the conceit that it is 'the original and best'.

Although technically it is only a form of polity, in reality it has been more than that and it has birthed more than that within Scottish culture. It has acquired an ethos, a spirituality - a cultural persona - it has become a brand.

If we are going to reform it - we need to reclaim it and re-evaluate it and re-think it.

Donald MacLeod, former Principal of the Free Church of Scotland College in Edinburgh writes of the development of presbyterianism in Scotland:

John Knox, of course, set up no presbyteries, and this can easily lead to the conclusion that he was no Presbyterian. But Presbyterianism is not government by Presbyteries, but government by **presbyters**, and the essential principles of such a polity were already set in place by Calvin in Geneva. Here already it was perceived that the words **presbyters** and **bishops** referred to one and the same office; and here, too, it was laid down that churches must be governed not by one individual, but by a plurality of such presbyter-bishops. There had to be a **presbyterion**: a college or council of presbyters, "which was in the church what a council is in a city." (Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.XI. 6). Hence the Scottish presbytery, the Genevan consistory and the Dutch classis.¹³

MacLeod identifies Alexander Henderson's *Notes on the Government and Order of the Church of Scotland*, published in 1641, as "the best succinct exposition of Scottish Presbyterianism". In particular, he is drawn to what he calls Henderson's brilliant summary of the genius of presbyterian polity; that it offers "**superiority without tyranny, parity without confusion, subjection without slavery**".¹⁴

¹³ Article on Donald MacLeod's website, published April 6 2015; <http://www.donaldmacleod.org/?p=483>

¹⁴ op cit. - quotation from Alexander Henderson's 1641 *Notes on the Government and Order of the Church of Scotland*, via www.freescotcoll.ac.uk/images/files/Classics/Hendersonsgovernmentandchurchorder.pdf

Presbyterian governance is built around a tiered, hierarchical system of courts and councils, which is designed to offer this “superiority without tyranny”. In addressing this, it addresses a perennial political problem, which is not so different in form, whether it is within the church or within wider civil and political society: how to unite, represent and involve people in governance.

Marianne Wolfe puts it succinctly: “Each governing body makes its decisions by majority vote, the representatives of the larger part of the church having the power of review over governing bodies representing a smaller part of the church.”¹⁵ The weighting and calibration of the system has changed in different places and at different times, but these family resemblances have persisted. The power of review, is the presbyterian form of **episkope** or oversight, which is exercised communally by the courts and their representatives, not in a personal form by a bishop.

Because of the cultural critique of Presbyterianism which has grown up in Scotland - think of Alan Jackson: *‘O Knox he was a bad man, he split the Scottish mind, one half he made cruel, the other half unkind’* or Tom Nairn, paraphrasing Diderot - *‘Scotland will be reborn when the last Church of Scotland minister is strangled with the last copy of the Sunday Post’*. - references like Henderson’s to ‘the genius of presbyterian polity’ have become rare things. We are more likely to encounter or maybe even to demonstrate a grumpy Monty Pythonesque - ‘What did the Presbyterians ever do for us?’

So let me ask you - What did the Presbyterians ever do for us? - its not a rhetorical question...

If we ask the question seriously, we will find we get some very mixed answers. We will find ourselves with mixed feelings.

We will recover the memory that Presbyterianism was seen as subversive of monarchy and episcopacy and hierarchy - because it was.

We will recover the memory that Presbyterianism was a powerful political model which influenced the design of secular political systems and constitutions, not least, via John Witherspoon, the federal constitution of the USA.

We will recover the memory of a federal system, which aimed to represent diversity while maintaining unity, which created checks and balances to resist institutional bullying.

We will recover the memory of a parliamentary system - the attempt to create a place for hope out of the violence of 16th and 17th century societies

¹⁵ op cit. 283

- to create forums where talking and deliberation would be an alternative to violence and schism.

We will recover the memory of a law governed system - where rules could empower the weak and restrain the powerful - where people had a right to vote and learned to use it.

We will recover the memory of an assembly which from 1707-1999, functioned in some ways as a surrogate Scottish parliament.

If that seems like a rather romantic account of Presbyterianism, perhaps that is no bad thing. I have been reflecting this week on some of the cultural lessons from Brexit and the first days of a Trump presidency - If we have no love for our institutions, if we simply ironise and denigrate them, we will not value and maintain them and we will not have the patience or the heart to do the work of reforming them.

ON THE LESS ROMANTIC SIDE: if we ask what Presbyterianism did for us and for Scotland

We will also recover the memory of an institution whose governance was monopolised by men for 400 years

We will recover the memory of an institution whose desire for godly discipline too often became prurient and Pharisaical

We will recover the memory of an institution which at its worst approved statements which were racist and sectarian

We will recover the memory of an institution which could be punitive towards rebels or dissenters

We will recover the memory of an institution which developed a cultural reputation for being formalist, miserabilist and Philistine.

(The phrase joyless Presbyterian comes to mind more easily than Presbyterian party planner.)

We will also recover the memory of an institution which contained elements of both representative democracy and participatory democracy, but in which the representative element has always been stronger. In his 1954 book, *Presbyterianism*, the Scottish scholar G.D. Henderson notes that "Calvin would have called his system aristocratic and representation does develop rather an aristocratic principle of government."¹⁶

And we will recover the memory of an institution which while it could empower people by asking a lot of their participation - could also exhaust and overwhelm them and come to seem remote from them, particularly as

¹⁶ Henderson 1954, 61

its central bureaucracy began to grow from the middle of the 19th century onwards - to quote Henderson again, "It may be that Presbyterianism asked too much and gave too little..."¹⁷

With an eye to thinking about reform, I want to finish by reflecting on those last two points:

If as Henderson, suggests, the elders and ministers, the presbyters were presbyterianism's aristocrats -

Perhaps the role of the congregation is one of the key deficits within the evolution of Scottish Presbyterianism. For too long, 'congregationalism' has been used as a kind of foil against which Presbyterians have defined their own polity. In the Church of Scotland, the 'aristocratic' character of traditional representative Presbyterianism has meant that a certain pride is taken in emphasising Cox's statement that "The Kirk Session is not answerable to the congregation but only to superior courts".¹⁸ Even today, on the floor of the General Assembly, a proposal may be effectively resisted on the grounds that it is taking us down the slippery slope to congregationalism. The downside to this way of defining presbyterianism is a failure to see the extent to which it has led to an overly negative construal of the role of the congregation and a reluctance to grant it any additional and significant powers. A failure perhaps to trust it with enough freedom or to give it enough responsibility.

My last point - relates to the remark, which I confess to having been haunted by since I read it - "It may be that Presbyterianism asked too much and gave too little."

Henderson makes the comment when discussing how in the USA, Presbyterianism was overtaken in the westward movement by the new frontier friendly traditions of the Baptists and Methodists - which seemed to give more in terms of experience and ask less in terms of bureaucracy.

So I end by wondering aloud about two things - people in Scotland today have embarked in increasing numbers upon an unprecedented cultural experiment - the attempt to make sense of their lives without religion. Secularisation is built on the promise that we will find other ways to celebrate, to cope with suffering and death, to confront evil and to find meaning in the daily rhythms of life - other ways apart from religion, which will bring us greater fullness of life. I am personally very doubtful about its ability to make good on that promise. So we should watch this space - this immanent frame.

¹⁷ Henderson 1954, 154

¹⁸ Cox, J. Practice and Procedure in the Church of Scotland, quoted in Wolfe & Pickford 1980, 35

But we also need to ask this - What kind of witness have we given to fullness of life in Christ? Why have we been declining faster than almost any other church in the UK? Have we asked too much and given too little?

And if so, are there ways in which we are being called to reform our life and work, which might help to change that?

Next week I will focus on Money and Ministry, looking at both ministers and elders

On the 15th in the the final lecture I will focus on Presbyteries and Councils - looking at the federal balance of the Church as a whole.

Thank you so much for your time and attention.