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The Responses of Scottish Churchmen to the French Revolution, 1789–1802

In the late eighteenth century struggles for burgh reform and for the abolition of Church patronage began to stir the political consciousness of the ordinary people of Scotland, raising questions concerning the nature and conduct of authority. These found further and greater expression in the debate which surrounded the French Revolution at the end of the century. 'Throughout Great Britain the controversy excited by the French Revolution embittered society as well as political life,' wrote W. L. Mathieson, 'but in Scotland its influence knew no bounds'.[1]

In 1782 only eight newspapers were published in Scotland. By 1790 there were twenty-seven. Soon Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791–2) was being widely read; in spring 1792 the Home Secretary, Henry Dundas, was burned in effigy in Dundee and Aberdeen; trees of liberty were planted up and down the country; and there were political riots in Lanark, Aberdeen, Perth, Dundee and Peebles. Instead of the expected loyalist demonstration in Edinburgh on the King's birthday, there was more rioting, during which one man was killed. In July 1792, the first Society of the Friends of the People in Scotland was formed in Edinburgh, a society considerably more radical and accessible to the labouring classes than its English namesake. The governing classes had shown a detached interest in the French Revolution in its early months and years but, as both French aggression and radical activity at home increased, the British governing orders began to link the two and to attack them both. Politically-conscious society in Scotland, as in England, split between support for and hostility to the French Revolution. As Henry Cockburn later remarked, 'Everything rung, and was connected with the Revolution in France.... Everything, not this or that thing, but literally everything, was soaked in this one event.'[2]

The fears of the British authorities in the early 1790s were well expressed by the Rev. Dr Thomas Somerville of Jedburgh in his autobiography: 'The safety of all surrounding nations was at stake.

1 W. L. Mathieson, *The Awakening of Scotland 1747–1797* (Glasgow, 1910), 141.
2 H. Cockburn, *Memorials of His Times* (Edinburgh, 1856), 80.

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The very existence of civil society was in danger.'[3] As a Church of Scotland minister, Somerville was not merely an onlooker, for religion no less than politics came under the scrutiny of those influenced by French principles. Moreover, the church played a large part in the lives of Scottish people, both individually and corporately, at local and national levels, and its reaction was clearly an important part of the Scottish response to the French Revolution. The established Church of Scotland was by far the largest of the Scottish Churches, both in terms of membership and of geographical coverage. It also clearly had a much greater historical weight than the Seceding denominations and, as an instrument of order which claimed a more than human authority, it had tremendous influence throughout society. This article will, therefore, chiefly consider the attitudes of ministers of the Church of Scotland, examining their responses to the Revolution and its effects on Britain. It will then proceed to look at the responses of the other denominations.

As John Young, Anti-Burgher minister of Hawick, wrote in 1794, 'never were the minds of men so intent upon political subjects, nor so many pens employed in political discussions, as since the year 1789'.[4] In Nancy Murray's view, the clergy of the established Church of England wrote more earnestly and more often about the French Revolution than any other group of men in England.[5] In eighteenth-century Scotland, as in England, the sermon was one of the most popular forms of political discourse, and many were written, preached and published to meet the challenge of the French Revolution. The number of printed sermons probably represented only a fraction of the number of politically-oriented sermons which were actually preached, and even those sermons which did not explicitly refer to the French Revolution often spoke of the duties of subjects or the benefits provided by the State.[6] Nationally-observed thanksgiving and fast days encouraged this rush of political sermons; and it is mainly from this source that the responses of Scottish churchmen to the French Revolution will be examined.

On the whole, Church of Scotland ministers had not initially rejected the French Revolution: like many in Britain, they underwent a tidal change in their attitude towards it. William Robertson at first denounced Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

3 T. Somerville, *My Own Life and Times, 1741–1814* (Edinburgh, 1861), 266.
4 J. Young, *Essays on the Following Interesting Subjects* (Edinburgh, 1794), 1.
5 N. U. Murray, 'The Influence of the French Revolution on the Church of England and Its Rivals, 1789–1802' (Oxford University D.Phil. Thesis, 1975), 1.
6 This was certainly the case in England: see J. E. Bradley, 'Church, Clergy, and Counter-Revolution in England, 1789–1800' (a paper presented at the annual conference of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies at New Orleans in April 1989).

(1790) as 'ravings', and Somerville called it 'the ranting declarations of aristocratic pride'.[7] They had some dislike for Burke anyway, for he had disapproved of Somerville's mission to Westminster in 1791 to lobby MPs for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (which, in theory, applied against the Church of Scotland as well as against Dissenters in England). Thomas Hardy, Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Edinburgh University and Moderator of the General Assembly in 1793, wrote of their initial response to the Revolution: 'We saw a great people reclaiming the inheritance of men, and boldly aspiring to be free.'[8] Their idea of 'the inheritance of men' was more limited than that of the radicals and, for this reason, they did not think themselves inconsistent when they changed, with the outbreak of war in 1793, to denounce what the Revolution had become. By then it could no longer be seen as moving towards a moderate, constitutional monarchy. 'Necessity cannot be pleaded for a change so violent and so complete.'[9] The king of France had not been a treacherous man and, even if he had been, he should have been deposed rather than executed.[10]

It is true, as John Brims points out, that the French Revolution did not create all the social and political tensions of late eighteenth-century Scotland;[11] nevertheless, it greatly aggravated a climate of tension, suspicion, grievance, and unrest. This heightened the insecurity of the Moderate party of churchmen about their dominant position within the Church of Scotland (which was increasingly challenged by the Evangelical or 'Popular' party), and about the position of the Church of Scotland within national life and in relation to the government. It determined that the primary concern of the Kirk's ministers would be with the practical effects of the Revolution — its encouragement of domestic radicalism — rather than with an academic interest in its philosophies and progress. Moderate churchmen portrayed the British radical leadership as a set of unscrupulous men who encouraged discontent and incited anarchy as a means of gaining wealth and status for themselves. This view ignored the complexity of the radicals' responses to Paine's *Rights of Man*, since it equated an interest in the book with an agreement with all it contained.[12]

7 J. D. Brims, 'The Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution' (Edinburgh University Ph.D. Thesis, 1983), 75, 59.
8 T. Hardy, *The Patriot* (Edinburgh, 1793), 4.
9 T. Somerville, *The Effects of the French Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1793), 1–7, 13.
10 T. Somerville, *Observations on the Constitution and the Present State of Britain* (Edinburgh, 1793), 64.
11 Brims, 'Scottish Democratic Movement', 156.
12 *Ibid.*, 280–3; A. Hunter, *The Duties of Subjects* (Edinburgh, 1793), 7, 20–2; Somerville, *Effects of French Revolution*, 14. For radical responses to the French Revolution, see H. T. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution*

Preachers were horrified by the enormity and violence of the events in France, the execution of Louis XVI being considered to have filled to the brim the French Convention's cup of iniquity. The French Revolution, many observed, had been deeply injurious to the cause of humanity; it had set a precedent for future evil, cruelty, and political turmoil. As Somerville wrote, 'the depravity of human nature has suddenly broken out into such excess of atrocity, as outdoes all examples of savage ages, and brings indelible disgrace upon the character of our species'.[13] The preachers believed that the British radicals and French revolutionaries shared a common political ideology, and they feared the collaboration apparently manifested by the French Edict of Fraternity in 1792 and by the addresses of congratulation sent to France by British radical societies. Some of them even perceived an international conspiracy of revolution, spreading ever closer to Britain and Scotland. Professor John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies*, and Dr James Thomson's *The Rise, Progress, and Consequences of the New Opinions and Principles Lately Introduced into France*,[14] both subscribed to the conspiracy theory in full. They informed their readers of an international movement, begun in 1775 among the corrupted Free Masons of Europe, called the Order of the Illuminati. The Illuminati taught doctrines subversive of morality and contentment, 'under the specious pretext of enlightening the world by the torch of philosophy', and with the express purpose of 'rooting out all the religious establishments, and overturning all the existing governments of Europe'.[15]

Robison, who had once been heavily involved in Scottish freemasonry, claimed that there were several thousand Illuminati brethren in London alone, many of whom must be well advanced in the hierarchy; and he pointed out that there was a network of Masonic lodges in Britain. He also traced certain radical phrases to the Illuminati — 'corresponding', 'affiliated', 'convention', 'reading societies', 'citizen of the world', 'liberty and equality', 'the imprescriptible rights of man', and so on. Thomson specifically connected various radical movements with the Illuminati, including the United Societies of Ireland, England and Scotland; the Edinburgh

1789–1815 (Oxford, 1985), and A. Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (London, 1979).

13 Somerville, *Effects of French Revolution*, 9.

14 Both published in Edinburgh, in 1797 and 1799 respectively. The most famous exposition of this theory was the Abbé Baruel's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (Paris, 1797).

15 J. Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe* (Edinburgh, 1797), 11.

Conventions; the Constitutional Society and the London Corresponding Society; and the 1797 naval mutinies ('the most alarming event which Britain has ever beheld').[16] Both writers called for the urgent abolition of all secret societies and assemblies (a demand met in 1797 by the Act against administering unlawful oaths, and in 1799 by the Acts against seditious and treasonable societies and against combinations) and for instruction in religion and morality to be carried out by ministers with still greater vigour. Thus although the ministers of the Church of Scotland had much to say about the revolution in France and the principles which underpinned it, they did not merely preach about it as a subject of general interest; their concern was with its practical effects on Britain and, more particularly, on Scotland. Their sometimes reasoned, sometimes emotive, responses to events in France were aimed at undermining domestic radicalism and promoting conservatism among their listeners and readers.

The sample of political sermons and pamphlets published by Church of Scotland ministers which has been used in this study comprises some twenty works. It includes publications by both Evangelical and Moderate preachers (with a variation in degrees of conservatism within the Moderate sphere), and also works by both city and small-town ministers, and by academic theologians. It is impossible to say with certainty that this is a wholly representative cross-section, but the striking similarities they display from their different theological and social viewpoints suggest that conclusions based upon this sample may be put forward as fairly typical of the views of ministers of the Church of Scotland. Had these ministers wanted to publish more liberal opinions on the Revolution, there would have been little to stop them doing so, but examples of this nature have not been found.

While the tone and style of sermons naturally varied from preacher to preacher, there were three main spiritual principles upon which these ministers based their political preaching. The first was that of divine sovereignty — the belief that God ruled over the world and intervened according to His will. He was not remote in the sense that He had set the world going and now played no further active part in its affairs. The Rev. Dr Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, a lucid and coherent Moderate preacher, wrote, 'The Almighty governs the world, not merely by general laws, but by constant superintendence and frequent interposition,'[17] and he illustrated this point from the history

16 J. Thomson, *The Rise, Progress, and Consequences of the New Opinions and Principles Lately Introduced into France, with Observations* (Edinburgh, 1799), 232–43.

17 A. Carlyle, *National Depravity the Cause of National Calamities: A Sermon from Jeremiah 6:8* (Edinburgh, 1794), 3.

of the Jews and of Christianity. God used direct intervention as well as the natural laws of cause and effect in carrying out His will in the world.

Secondly, these preachers believed that 'sin is the cause of all national evils, and if persisted in by any people, will provoke the Almighty *to cause his soul to depart from them*'.[18] Since God actively intervened in human affairs, it was natural that rebellion against Him should result in chastisement; in the case of nations, this usually came in the form of weak and unstable government, irreligion, economic depression, wars, and so on. God was patient with men, and gave them long warning of impending calamities, but ultimately He would not brook rebellion or disobedience to His laws. 'The hazard of their downfall increases in exact proportion to their vices.'[19]

Thirdly, national repentance in such dark times was not only possible, but necessary, in order to regain God's favour. Humble supplication on behalf of one's country, sincere repentance and amendment were called for, since 'God alone can avert ... those calamities.'[20] Texts such as *Jeremiah 18:8* were quoted: 'If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.'[21]

The first of these principles was generally established through a cursory glance at Old Testament history or New Testament epistles. The second and third were more rigorously supported by appeals to both reason and Scriptural texts, and were developed with practical applications. All three principles, whether or not initially declared, usually formed the mind-set from which the ministers' general political principles and their specific injunctions stemmed. Thus they argued that religion was not in fact separate from politics: since God was at work in society, religion was essential in order to please Him and to obtain His favour for political activities. Human nature was so corrupt that government alone was unable to restrain it.[22] The example of the 'woeful effects' of the irreligion of the philosophers and people of fashion in 'a neighbouring country' was stressed, in order to urge on the British élite the responsibility of setting the good example of observing religious principles both in their own lives and in the government of the country.[23] This view of the general role of religion

18 *Ibid.*, 9.
19 A. Carlyle, *The Love of Our Country, Explained and Enforced in a Sermon from Psalm 137:5,6* (Edinburgh, 1797), 14.
20 J. Erskine, *The Fatal Consequences and the General Sources of Anarchy: a Discourse on Isaiah 24:1–5* (Edinburgh, 1793), 41–2.
21 See T. Hardy, *Fidelity to the British Constitution, the Duty and Interest of the People* (Edinburgh, 1794), 36.
22 Bradley, 'Church, Clergy, and Counter-Revolution', 11.
23 A. Hunter, *A Due Attention to the Public Institutions of Religion Recommended* (Edinburgh, 1793).

in politics seems to have been interpreted by Church of Scotland ministers in such a way that they saw their present role in politics as being to teach a particular political ideology and its practical implications.

In the first place, they defended the British constitution in a typically conservative fashion. This was probably the most common element in the many published sermons, while presbyteries too published declarations of loyalty to the constitution.[24] In reply to Thomas Paine's criticism that the British constitution did not exist because it was not written down, Somerville referred to the many articles and books which had been written about it, often in its praise, and he poured scorn on the idea that these were all written about something which did not exist.[25] He went on to claim, moreover, that it came nearer to perfection than any other constitution, and was certainly the best for Britain. Many ministers repeated the classic justification of a limited monarchy, mixed government and balanced constitution, by arguing that it retained the advantages of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy with none of their attendant evils. It was a false argument to claim that, because some sorts of kingly government were objectionable, such as the absolutism existing in France prior to the Revolution, therefore the British monarchy was also objectionable. The French state had needed reformation, but any precipitate attempt at this in Britain would *de*form the constitution. While it was acknowledged that no humanly conceived constitution could be perfect, one of the virtues of the British constitution was that it allowed for its own reform over time. Furthermore, British prosperity would run the greatest risk of ruin if the constitution was damaged.[26]

Scottish churchmen frequently went to great lengths in order to demonstrate the superiority of the British constitution to any republican constitution, and to the American and French constitutions in particular. All the advantages enjoyed by republics, the Moderate Hugh Blair claimed, were enjoyed to the full in Britain, while their disadvantages were avoided.[27] In republics, only a very few men were

24 See, e.g., the *Edinburgh Herald* (no. 446: 16 January 1793), for the declaration by the Presbytery of Perth. From 2 July to 17 November 1792, the *London Gazette* carried addresses in favour of the May Royal Proclamation against wicked and seditious meetings, including those from the presbyteries of Arbroath, Penpont, Glasgow, Dundee, Fordoun, Hamilton, Dingwall, St. Andrews, all the Scottish universities and the bishops and clergy of the Scottish Episcopal Church. From 28 May to 1 June 1793, the General Assembly and various presbyteries again published declarations of loyalty to the British Constitution in the *Gazette*.

25 T. Paine, *Rights of Man*, ed. E. Foner (Harmondsworth, 1969), 191–4; Somerville, *Observations on Present State*, 1–2.

26 *Ibid.*, 9–10, 36

27 H. Blair, 'On the Love of Our Country' (Edinburgh, 1793), in his *Sermons* (London, 1818), v, 139–42.

distinguished and, in the name of democracy, they tyrannised over the many. In Britain, by contrast, there were no restrictions on the exercise of talent and merit; there was an identity of interest between the chief magistrate and his subjects; government was more stable and less expensive to maintain; and there was greater liberty, since rulers in republics were constantly fearful for their power and stability.[28] Dr James Thomson, minister of Eccles, was very scathing of the notion that the law was the expression of the general will: man was not born independent, 'and the very first thing he is taught in all nations is that his will is not to be his law'. It was right and proper that laws should be made only by a few, for legislation was an art and a skill which only a few could perform well. He did not believe that there could have been enough time for everyone in France to examine the new constitution before it was enacted. The majority must have silently acquiesced in its adoption — and the same could be said of every despotic government in the world.[29]

In defending the constitution, ministers of the Kirk usually employed a negative concept of liberty, stressing the freedom of life and property *from* unjust interference by those in power, rather than the freedom actively *to* participate in the political life of the nation. True freedom, or civil liberty, consisted in living under the rule of law; it did not mean the the right to choose one's governors or to act as one's own law-giver, as the Evangelical John Erskine explained:

> I mean not, by liberty, that licentiousness, which permits any, without dread of punishment, to be as false, injurious, or malicious, as they choose, in their words, writings, and actions. I mean, the liberty, by which everyone enjoys, undisturbed, his just rights and property; is uncontrouled in his lawful pursuits; and entitled boldly, though decently, to present his complaints to his superiors, that they may be examined, and, if well-founded, be redressed.[30]

Liberty and equality, as demanded by the radicals, were frightening concepts to most ministers: as was all too evident from the French example, such ideals spelled riot and destruction. 'True' liberty was in fact banished from France and would not return until order was restored.[31] Ministers ridiculed the statements on liberty in the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. Articles III and IV stated that 'Liberty consists in the power of doing that which does not injure another,' and that liberty of thought, expression, and the press should not be tampered with. These, Thomson pointed out, contradicted one another. Furthermore, they did not prevent crimes against God or the

28 R. Thomas, *The Cause of Truth* (Dundee, 1797), 420–7.
29 Thomson, *Rise, Progress, and Consequences of the New Opinions*, 166–8, 174–80.
30 Erskine, *Fatal Consequences of Anarchy*, 12; see also *A Few Plain Questions to the Working People of Scotland, by A Friend of Order* (Edinburgh, 1792), 8.
31 Hardy, *Patriot*, 48, 56.

individual person, and in fact the French Directory exercised strenuous press censorship, so that it could proclaim victories in war which were really defeats.[32]

Ministers tended to stress the duties of subjects rather than their rights. These duties fell into two categories. The first was a duty to be loyal and submissive subjects of the realm. Scriptural passages encouraging this, such as *Romans 13* and *1 Peter 2*, were frequently cited and congregations were exhorted to support government measures, since these were taken to improve public welfare and to secure adequate defence. In return for the protection of their lives and property, men owed submission and obedience to the government. They ought not to grumble about government measures but to be grateful for their rulers.[33] Secondly, men had a duty to practise the private virtues which would lead to national prosperity: observance of religious duties, piety, industry, sobriety, justice and the faithful discharge of public duties and offices. Only a few could help their country by fighting for it or by advising its rulers; everyone, however, could contribute to its well-being by exercising these virtues. They must continually prefer public safety and the public good to personal and private considerations. 'Anarchy, or something worse, is approaching, when men forget that their own interest is inseparably connected with that of their country', wrote John Erskine, insisting that he included both princes and the general populace in that stricture.[34]

In advising people of their duties as subjects, these Church of Scotland ministers also warned them against the notion of the 'rights of man' as promulgated by the radicals. They were not averse to talking about such natural rights as the right to protection of life and property — that is, the right to negative civil liberties — but whenever they acknowledged that active political rights had ever been possessed by ordinary people, they insisted that these original natural rights had now been surrendered to the state in return for its protection. In civil society men possessed civil liberties, but no longer possessed natural rights. If men wanted to retain the 'rights of nature', they should retreat to an uninhabited island, mountain, or forest; the blessings of society entailed accepting the rule of law as embodied in the British constitution.[35] The so-called 'rights of man' had not done

32 Thomson, *Rise, Progress, and Consequences of the New Opinions*, 64–8.

33 Blair, 'Love of Our Country', 146–7; Carlyle, *Love of Our Country*, 12–13, 16–19; 'Answer to the King's Letter', in *The Acts of the General Assembly [AGA], 1802* .

34 Blair, 'Love of Our Country', 143–6; Carlyle, *Love of Our Country*, 15, 21–2; Erskine, *Fatal Consequences of Anarchy*, 14.

35 Carlyle, *Love of Our Country*, 13; *Facts, Reflections, and Queries, Submitted to the Consideration of the Associated Friends of the People* (Edinburgh, 1792), 20; Hardy, *Patriot*, 9–10.

the French much good — in leading them to reject Christianity, they had promoted evil. In any case, there was no universal suffrage even in France, for the new constitution excluded beggars, servants, and all who did not pay direct taxes. Governments everywhere had always been dominated by men of property; by obtaining the vote, the poor would simply open themselves to more manipulation by the rich than some claimed was the case already. It was a mistake to think that the unenfranchised of Britain had no political liberties, for the liberty of the press was a very powerful one which could be enjoyed by all.[36]

Most ministers of the Church of Scotland found it incomprehensible that a democracy could exist alongside social and economic inequalities; and the notion of economic equality was derided as being impossible to attain or to maintain, for it was impossible to reduce all men to the same level of industry, ability, and good fortune. Justice was maintained by the rule of law, proportionate taxes, and equal opportunities, which they insisted the British constitution provided. In fact, the rich were 'condemned' to stagnation at the top of society, while humble men enjoyed the hope and inspiration of the opportunity to rise![37] God had made men unequal in their talents and abilities, and so inequality was essentially a law of nature; to attempt to reverse it was to rebel against God and would produce nothing but misery. Equality was thus depicted as a burdensome yoke which would weaken the country by removing all ambition and motivation to greatness and merit. Nineteen out of twenty of those whom the radicals dubbed 'oppressors' did not have the vote themselves; in fact, trade and manufactures throve *better* in places where there was no vote (for instance, Paisley, Greenock and Hawick, as opposed to places such as Jedburgh, Kintore and Inverurie, where the franchise was wider).[38] It was false to claim that the ordinary people of Britain were oppressed. There might be some real individual grievances, but these did not constitute a system of oppression, and redress should be sought by legal means which did not threaten the constitution. 'Though convinced that spots and blemishes diminish beauty, and ought to be removed, when it can be done with safety; I will not get rid of them, by diet or medicine hazardous to life or health.'[39]

There was no possible justification for mob violence, and ministers took every opportunity to condemn it. Erskine wrote *The Fatal Consequences and the General Sources of Anarchy* for this purpose. In preaching on the text 'when the host goest forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing' (*Deut. 23:9*),

36 Blair, 'Love of Our Country', 134; Somerville, *Observations on Present State*, 68–9; Thomas, *Cause of Truth*, 175–8, 210, 237.
37 Somerville, *Observations on Present State*, 5–6.
38 Thomas, *Cause of Truth*, 101–9; *A Few Plain Questions*, 5–9.
39 Erskine, *Fatal Consequences*, 18, 34–5.

George Hill, the Moderate Principal of St Andrews University, paraphrased 'every wicked thing' as 'every approach to tumult, sedition, and disaffection', without explanation.[40] Mobs usurped powers that were not their own, ignored the proper duties of subjects and had no restraint on their actions, so that both right and wrong measures were implemented without due consideration. Violence ruined what might have been a good cause; and if the property of the great was attacked, what little property the poor had would not be safe for very long, as the nation plunged into anarchy and chaos.

Churchmen therefore made a vigorous effort to quell radical thinking and to inculcate conservatism in their readers and hearers. Any attempt at revolution in Britain, they warned, would be fruitless; only misery could result. Sermons frequently used examples from the Cromwellian Republic in England and the violence in France to try to frighten their hearers and readers from revolutionary thoughts. As people valued their religion, their liberty, their families, and their country, so they must shun thoughts of revolution, 'as the gates of hell'.[41] The French Republic was 'suckled with blood, and in its cradle was delighted with no sound but the voice of murder'.[42] Even America was beginning to show signs of tension, with North–South rivalry threatening national harmony. British radicals were evil men, using deceptive arguments to lure the simple to their cause and, while they avoided direct personal involvement in mob violence, they incited such violence for their own ends.

Thomas Paine was especially vilified and ridiculed; numerous sermons and books were written solely to refute his claims and arguments, and many more included a condemnation of his name and cause. His public welfare schemes, it was contended, were impractical, and inserted solely for popularity's sake. 'Politicians the size of Tom Paine, who are able to look only at the surface of state arrangements' should not be trusted; it was 'unlucky' for him that, after writing two volumes in praise of the National Assembly, it should have fallen so soon, and that after he had insisted that France would not go to war any more now that she was a republic, he should again be proved so ignominiously wrong. Paine, in fact, 'introduces his reader into Fairyland'.[43]

The Societies of the Friends of the People and their conventions in Edinburgh were also attacked. Their leaders, it was said, were conceited and self-interested. To drunkards, schoolboys, apprentices and journeymen, they talked of equality; while to 'sober and well-

40 G. Hill, *Instructions Afforded by the Present War, to the People of Great Britain* (Edinburgh, 1793), 3.
41 Carlyle, *National Depravity*, 33.
42 Hardy, *Patriot*, 48.
43 *Ibid.*, 31–4, 40, 66; Thomas, *Cause of Truth*, 19.

meaning citizens' they talked of abuses and reform. Their demands were vague and meaningless, and therefore deceitful.[44] Many ministers believed that political reform and religious free-thinking went hand-in-hand; overt worship of reason in Paris and Paine's blasphemous attacks on Christianity drew the cry of 'the Church in danger', rallying even the Popular party. Others were genuinely afraid of the unrest, and clearly felt that it was better to err on the side of caution. They wished to repress anything which might lead to the subversion of lawful authority and they clung to the emblems and products of civilisation as they knew it.[45]

Furthermore, Church of Scotland ministers seem to have been at pains to suppress anything they perceived to be radical in Scottish religion. Great religious interest had been stimulated by an event of such magnitude as the French Revolution, and the rise of enthusiasm for missions, both foreign and domestic, was one effect. The decline of papal power in Europe, together with the collapse of French power overseas, presented a great opportunity for Protestant missionary enterprise,[46] and there was a zealous response in Scotland as well as in England. In 1793 the Baptist Missionary Society was formed and in 1795 the London Missionary Society. The LMS drew great support from English Independents, Methodists and Anglicans alike, as well as from different denominations in Scotland; it thus transcended denominational *and* national barriers, and constituted a threat to the more narrow-minded ministers of the Kirk. In 1798 and 1801, respectively, the Glasgow and Scottish Missionary Societies were founded. The inter-denominational *Missionary Magazine*, published in Edinburgh by Greville Ewing and Charles Stuart from July 1796, had a circulation of five or six thousand. Scottish domestic missions were also sponsored by the Relief Church and by the Haldane brothers, who established the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home in 1797; and evangelical revival activity was recorded in parts of the Highlands.[47]

William Kirkland has suggested that the development of mission was stimulated in part by the currently fashionable ideas of political freedom and the universal rights of man.[48] As has been mentioned, the

44 *Facts, Reflections, and Queries*, 26–9, 33; A. Dalrymple, *The Poor Man's Friend: An Address to the Industrious and Manufacturing Part of Great Britain* (Edinburgh, 1793), 27–9.

45 See Somerville, *Observations on Present State*, 75–7.

46 W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England*, 1790–1850 (London, 1972), 44.

47 H. Escott, *A History of Scottish Congregationalism* (Aberdeen, 1960), 55; see, e.g., A. Stewart, *Account of a Late Revival in a Part of the Highlands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1800).

48 W. M. Kirkland, 'The Impact of the French Revolution on Scottish Religious Life and Thought, with special reference to Thomas Chalmers, Robert Haldane, and Neil Douglas' (Edinburgh University Ph.D. Thesis, 1951), 14–15, 24, 27.

campaign for ecclesiastical democracy (that is, the abolition of patronage in the choice of parish ministers) had, together with the struggle for burgh reform, helped to politicise the ordinary folk of Scotland. The large amount of polemical literature in circulation encouraged men to think for themselves, rather than simply accept what they were told. Furthermore, the occasional religious disturbances in this period generally had a political aspect. These were mostly direct popular actions to prevent the settlement of an unpopular minister who had been presented by the local patron; between 1780 and 1815 there were at least twenty-one instances of violent intrusion in Scotland, when a minister had to be settled in the face of popular hostility. Whether or not religious and political radicalism were actually combined in these disputes, the United Scotsmen certainly equated them by including church patronage among the grievances which they claimed could only be redressed by the radical reform of the House of Commons.[49] The Church authorities also readily lumped the two together in their anti-revolutionary panic, and they were deeply concerned over the fact that significant numbers of people, even whole congregations, were seceding to the dissenting churches. The Moderate party in the Church of Scotland, dominant for much of the eighteenth century over its rival, the Evangelical or 'Popular' party, was increasingly feeling the heat of attack.

Ian Clark has demonstrated that the traditional picture of a large and firmly established Moderate majority had never been an accurate picture, and that Moderate management of the General Assembly was more due to tactics than to weight of numbers. Although they did not actually lose their majority in the Assembly until 1834, they were increasingly insecure from the 1780s onwards, and they believed themselves to be under assault from 'irrational' forces beyond their control (such as the wave of evangelical 'enthusiasm' in the 1790s, or dissenting denominations who attacked their stance on patronage and the principle of establishment). They also complained of government indifference.[50] In 1796 the Assembly refused to support foreign missions, and in 1799 it condemned itinerant lay preachers and evangelists and Sunday Schools. To the anxious Moderates, such activities bore a striking resemblance to those of radical political societies — speechmaking, corresponding, building up a network and having regular meetings — and they seemed to compete with the ministry of the Kirk. In 1799 the Assembly's *Pastoral Admonition*

49 K. J. Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland, 1780–1815* (Edinburgh, 1979), 168, 176.

50 I. D. L. Clark, 'From Protest to Reaction: the Moderate Regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752–1805', in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement*, ed. N. T. Phillipson and R. Mitchison (Edinburgh, 1970), 213–4, 222.

warned their members against false teachers, revolutionary principles, seditious books, pamphlets and tracts, and, specifically, against the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home (SPGH) and its Sunday Schools, as well as against shaking their attachment to the Church of Scotland 'in these giddy times'.[51]

The assault on the forces of radicalism was one side of the coin; the other was the Kirk's encouragement of loyalty to the Pitt administration. Despite Moderate anxieties, the General Assembly made a show of confidence through the letters which it sent to the King, assuring him that there was little or no radicalism in Scotland and that it would stand firmly against all domestic enemies:

> ... from what we know of the general spirit of the Country, it affords us the greatest satisfaction to be able to assure Your Majesty, that the sound principles of loyalty, and of attachment to the Constitution in Church and State, are fixed in the hearts of the great body of Your Majesty's subjects in Scotland. These principles it shall be our most zealous care to cherish and to promote.[52]

Ministers of the Church defended the current administration and its policies. Hugh Blair insisted that they lived under 'a mild, wise, and happy government'. Alexander Carlyle denied that their governors were motivated by a sordid self-interest: the King's present ministers could not have been in office for so long had they been weak or wicked. Even Henry Dundas, Pitt's unpopular manager in Scotland, was defended: it was a good thing for the Scots that one of their compatriots was so powerful, and he could never have achieved such eminence without possessing great ability.[53] It was argued that some degree of reform might be possible later, at a more opportune time.

Many now seized upon Burke's arguments and adulated his name ('this well-informed and sagacious statesman ... whose knowledge of futurity resembled the spirit of prophecy').[54] Resolutions and addresses were passed at the General Assembly, synod, presbytery,[55] and parish levels. Loyalist societies, although less common than in England, were welcomed and commended. Pamphlets and sermons were directed to the lower classes, such as Alexander Dalrymple's *The Poor Man's Friend* (Edinburgh, 1793), the *Few Plain Questions to the Working People of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1792), and the General

51 *AGA, 1799*, 12–14, 42–5, 38–42.

52 'The General Assembly's dutiful Address to His Majesty, on the subject of the present War', in *AGA, 1794*.

53 Blair, 'Love of Our Country', 136; Carlyle, *Love of Our Country*, 11–12; *Facts, Reflections, and Queries*, 19.

54 Thomson, *Rise, Progress, and Consequences*, 197.

55 See, for instance, Fordyce Presbytery's declaration in the *Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, 16 May 1793). In November and December 1795, the *London Gazette* printed the addresses of support for the King sent by the Scottish universities and many presbyteries after the attack made on his life on 29 October.

Assembly's 1799 *Pastoral Admonition ... to all the People under their Charge*. The General Assembly showed consistent loyalty to the King, who was acknowledged as 'the faithful Guardian of our rights' and 'a Patriot King'; as for Pitt, 'the veneration and gratitude of every patriotic citizen' was due to him.[56] The repressive measures of the 1790s were, it was claimed, necessary to combat the threat of anarchy. Heavy taxation was a necessary investment for national prosperity and for the successful defence of the country against France. Although Somerville acknowledged that the national debt had been 'wantonly contracted' and 'conducted with enormous extravagance', he praised Pitt's plan to reduce it.[57]

Finally, most Church of Scotland ministers gave wholehearted support to the war against France and called for national unity. The French were accused of already having trodden several Italian states underfoot, and of now turning a greedy and 'scowling' eye towards Britain, 'muttering their purpose of evil'. Ministers were ready to exhort people to fight and die for their country. Heaven's highest places, enthused Carlyle, were reserved for those 'who have deserved well, or have died in the service of their country'. The General Assembly declared to the King its 'full approbation of this necessary exertion of public force' and their congratulations on 'the brilliant success with which it has pleased the Almighty ... to bless Your arms in various quarters'.[58]

The response of most Church of Scotland ministers to the French Revolution was therefore fundamentally conservative. However, there were also more liberal voices: some ministers acknowledged that moderate political reform was in fact needed in Britain, and should be carried through at a more opportune time. While certain Moderates, such as Hardy, espoused liberal views, the liberal case was more likely to be put by Evangelicals, such as Erskine, Moncrieff Wellwood, and Hunter. The Evangelicals, as William Ferguson and Ian Clark suggest, seemed less 'high-flying' than previously, but they continued to press for reforms such as the abolition of the slave trade and the augmentation of parish schoolmasters' salaries.[59] Nevertheless, Kirk ministers were united in their appeals to patriotism. Several sermons were headed *On the Love of our Country*, taking the title of

56 'An Address by the General Assembly to the King', in *AGA, 1789*, and 'Address to his Majesty, on his late Providential Escape from Assassination', in *AGA, 1800*.

57 Somerville, *Observations on Present State*, 16–17.

58 Hardy, *Patriot*, 58; Carlyle, *Love of Our Country*, 33; 'Address to His Majesty, on the Subject of the Present War', in *AGA, 1794*, and 'Address to His Majesty on the Present Situation of Public Affairs', in *AGA, 1798*.

59 W. Ferguson, *Scotland: 1689 to the Present* (Edinburgh, 1968), 228; Clark, 'From Protest to Reaction', 211. See also, e.g., T. Hardy, *The Importance of Religion to National Prosperity* (Edinburgh, 1794), 47; Erskine, *Fatal Consequences*, 18; Hunter, *Duties of Subjects*, 3–5, 7–8.

Richard Price's famous discourse of 1789, but rejecting Price's exhortation to world citizenship. To love the French as much as the British, observed Hugh Blair, would be like loving strangers as much as one's own wife and children. British subjects had excellent cause to be proud of their country. 'It is a fact ... that the measure of happiness, which, through the favour of heaven, we, as a nation, enjoy, is at this day unexampled,' enthused George Hill. 'The British sword is drawn in the cause of God, and of our country, and in defence of our lives, our families, and our all,' Thomas Hardy declaimed.[60] In stating their case, the ministers appealed to emotion as well as to reason. The miseries of revolutionary France were painted vividly and appeals were made to all that might tug at men's heart-strings — family, tradition, religion, personal pride and patriotism. Negative emotions, too, were stirred, such as the traditional British xenophobia and anti-Catholicism (despite the Assembly's support for Catholic relief measures). Scripture was appealed to as the greatest authority, however, and many sermons ended with *Proverbs 24:21*: 'Fear thou the Lord, and honour the King, and meddle not with them that are given to change.'

Although no less struck by the immediacy of the French Revolution than ministers of the Church of Scotland, Seceding and Dissenting churchmen had their own particular concerns with the questions of secular and religious liberty and authority.[61] They all experienced political restrictions in British state service as a result of the English Test and Corporation Acts, while Presbyterian Seceders argued over the balance of Church and State authority to which they were bound by the Covenants of 1638 and 1644. Indeed, the Burghers and Anti-Burghers both split into New and Auld Licht factions over this vexed issue, in 1799 and 1806 respectively.

In common with the ministers of the Kirk, the Seceding and Dissenting ministers in Scotland deplored the violent excesses of the French Revolution. They had generally welcomed the 1791 constitution drawn up by the French King and people without the intrusion of violence, but were deeply disappointed by the subsequent

60 Blair, 'Love of Our Country', 129; G. Hill, *The Present Happiness of Great Britain* (Edinburgh, 1792), 15; Hardy, *Fidelity to the British Constitution*, 34.

61 The Associate Synod had seceded from the Church of Scotland in 1733, splitting itself in 1747 over the taking of the Burgess Oath into the Burgher and Anti-Burgher Synods; the Relief Church withdrew from the Kirk in 1761, and there was also still a small remnant of the Cameronians (the Reformed Presbyterian Church). Together the Seceders may have accounted for nearly 10% of the Scottish population. Dissenters included Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, and tiny numbers of Quakers, Methodists, Independents and Baptists. This period also saw the birth of Unitarianism in Scotland, with the first group forming in Montrose in 1792. See G. Struthers, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Principles of the Relief Church* (Glasgow, 1843), 408.

degeneration of events. They denounced the philosophy upon which the Revolution was founded, particularly after September 1792, as Christianity was increasingly persecuted by the revolutionary government. Congregations and readers were warned in particular against Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. Several Seceding ministers, such as the Anti-Burgher John Young, shared the Church of Scotland fears that there was an international conspiracy on the part of a sect claiming to be 'illuminated', and aiming ultimately at the total abolition of the Christian religion and the subversion of the social, political and moral order. Some were hostile to religious enthusiasm — the Anti-Burghers expressed their disapproval of lay preaching in 1796 and 1798, and the Glasgow Cameronians excommunicated some who had gone to hear another pastor at a mission service.[62] In 1798 even the Relief Synod passed a decree against preachers who were not licensed and university-educated, in response to the first activities of the SPGH and after one of its foremost ministers, Niel Douglas, had acquired a reputation for seditious activities.

Episcopalians, after their Relief Act of 1792, could be relied upon to support the State; but there were also Seceders who defended the constitution. John Young pointed out that Seceders had to defend the binding nature of the original contract between rulers and subjects, because of their loyalty to the Solemn League and Covenant of 1638, which obliged them to preserve the rights and privileges of Parliament and the King.[63] Submission was particularly urged because they *were* Dissenters; since some Dissenters were political radicals, all were suspected of it.[64] Archibald Bruce, the Anti-Burgher minister of Whitburn, emphasised that Seceders quarrelled with the abuses of civil government, and not with its form or constitution. Because they spoke out against abuses in the Church of Scotland such as patronage, it should not be assumed that they were political radicals as well.[65] Thus, their sermons urging submission had a two-fold purpose: to persuade their Seceding hearers and readers to be peaceful, blameless subjects in order to improve the reputation of the Churches; and to convince anyone else who might read them, particularly anyone in authority, that Seceders were neither seditious nor even worthy of suspicion. 'Give none occasion to the world, who observe you,'

62 H. W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution* (Glasgow, 1912), 210–11.

63 Young in fact was attacked by his own congregation, and at presbytery and Assembly level, for his conservative political views, and other Anti-Burghers, notably Archibald Bruce, used the Covenant to support much more libertarian views. See J. Brims, 'The Covenanting Tradition and Scottish Radicalism in the 1790s', in *Covenant, Charter, and Party: Traditions of Revolt and Protest in Modern Scottish History*, ed. T. Brotherstone (Aberdeen, 1989), 52, 54–7.

64 *Ibid.*, 51, clearly shows that they were justified in these fears.

65 Young, *Essays on the Following Interesting Subjects*, 3, 15–17; [A. Bruce], *A Serious View of the Remarkable Providences of the Times* (Glasgow, 1795), 65–71.

admonished Alexander Shanks, Burgher minister of Jedburgh, 'to call you an ill-humoured and ill-principled sectary, disaffected to the welfare and prosperity of that country in which you are fed and protected'.[66] Many urged support for the war, as a necessary and just conflict.[67]

Nevertheless, despite this fundamental consensus with the Church of Scotland, there were some clear differences, reflecting an underlying hostility towards their established rival. Seceders believed that the Moderate party in the Kirk was corrupt, too much involved in the culture of the world, ambitious, and insincere; and, while they often respected individual Evangelical ministers, they also criticised them for compromising their principles and remaining in the Church of Scotland. Bruce claimed to see God's hand at work in the war, punishing Britain in general, but the Scottish Church in particular, for its sinfulness. Seceders were much more enthusiastic about foreign missions and missionary societies than was the Church of Scotland, few of them sharing the Moderate view that civilisation must precede evangelism. Robert Haldane argued that Christians should not become involved in politics at all, and that the pulpit was not a legitimate place from which to air political theory and opinion;[68] but, in general, these ministers did have opinions to air and, though basically following the conservative line of the Church of Scotland,[69] the Seceders' responses to the French Revolution were more liberal on certain points.

The ministers of the Relief Church, for instance, while continuing to preach submission and humility, did not lose their enthusiasm for the French Revolution. Patrick Hutchison of Paisley, indeed, became an object of attack in the Glasgow *Courier* for his continued enthusiasm for the liberties of France and his hostility to the war; some of his congregation left his Church, after first publishing a pamphlet directed against him.[70] Not all of the Seceders, therefore, supported the war. 'We have wantonly cast away peace, and rushed like the horse into battle,' scolded Archibald Bruce. War, to him, was 'one of the leading causes of divine displeasure' with Britain, and he lamented the support given to the British war effort by most Scottish

66 A. Shanks, *Peace and Order Recommended to Society* (Edinburgh,1793), 8.

67 *Ibid.*, 25; J. Walker, *A Sermon, Preached in an Episcopal Chapel, Edinburgh ... on account of the War with France* (Edinburgh, 1804), 116–23; Young, *Essays on the Following Interesting Subjects*, 130–47.

68 R. Haldane, *Address to the Public, Concerning Political Opinions and Plans Lately Adopted to Promote Religion in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1800), 110, 138. For Haldane and his brother James, see pp. 211–14, below.

69 They too were offered bribes to preach conservatism: offers of royal chaplaincies, government pensions, etc. See Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 196–7; Brims, 'Scottish Democratic Movement', 355; and Bradley, *Church, Clergy, and Counter-Revolution*, 14–15 for the English equivalents.

70 Struthers, *Relief Church* , 381–3.

ministers, whether by a 'blindness and unfaithful silence', a 'fierce mistaken zeal', or a 'more dangerous spirit of collusion'. To mourn the collapse of the Catholic Church was wrong; the true (Reformed) Church of Christ in France had not been destroyed by the Revolution, which had granted legal rights to the French Protestants. To say that war was necessary for the preservation of religion was 'a prostitution of religion'.[71] The real war was a spiritual battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, and the latter certainly included the Church of Rome. Britain was therefore fighting on the wrong side. It was not legitimate to accuse France of atheism before one's own nation had been cleansed of sin; and even if France was the worst of all nations in this respect, it would not be cured by butchery. Some Church of Scotland sermons had criticised Roman Catholicism and applauded its downfall in France,[72] but the greatest apocalyptic fervour was to be found among Seceders such as Bruce.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Seceders were on the whole less loyal to the administration than were ministers of the Kirk and more likely to say that political reform was desirable. In his *Thoughts on Modern Politics*, Niel Douglas of the Relief Church warned that, although it would be nonsense to demolish an 'ancient and stately fabric' and build a new one rather than make a few slight repairs, yet if those repairs were not made, the ruin of the whole edifice might result.[73] He rejected the argument that the moment was inopportune for political reform. While one would not choose to repair one's house in a hurricane, it might nevertheless be necessary to repair it amid such conditions. It was also false to argue that people would not be content with moderate reform, for people seldom ran to extremes unless their patience was pushed too far. Douglas concluded, therefore, that 'the best Christians and the most loyal subjects may consistently sue for [reformation] by every legal and constitutional means in their power'.[74]

It is arguable that Douglas was unusually reformist, even radical, and, as such, not representative of the Seceders as a whole. Two points may be made in response to this. First, it may be fair to claim, as Kirkland does,[75] that his presence as a delegate at two of the three Edinburgh Conventions in 1792 and 1793 moderated the wild abandon of some of the younger radicals and introduced a temperate religious tone into the Convention proceedings. After 1794, moreover, he dissociated himself from the 'dangerous' radicals and sought to use his influence to dissuade them from antagonising the

71 [Bruce], *A Serious View*, 7–9, 11, 13.
72 E.g., Somerville, *Effects of the French Revolution*, 47.
73 N. Douglas, *Thoughts on Modern Politics* (London, 1793), 10–12.
74 *Ibid.*, 143–52.
75 Kirkland, 'Impact of the French Revolution', 157.

authorities.[76] The second point is that Douglas was not the only Seceding minister to take an active role in the reform movement. James McEwan, the other Dundee delegate to the Conventions, was also a Seceding minister; and the Anti-Burgher ministers of Methven, Kilmarnock, and Montrose were delegates there too.[77] The Seceding minister, Archibald Bruce, sought to promote political and religious liberty simultaneously ('Civil and ecclesiastical liberty are but two great branches of the same expanded tree'), and he publicly supported the cause of the Friends of the People.[78] The Burgher ministers of Selkirk, Shotts and Stow, were on the reformer William Skirving's list of political contacts,[79] and the minister of Shotts was also a delegate to the first Convention. Several Seceding ministers in Perth took a prominent part in the reform movement, and, in both Perth and Paisley, Relief Church buildings were often used as meeting-places for radical reformers. Other Seceding ministers, such as Cross of St Ninians and Anderson of Kilsyth, if not overt supporters of political reform, were known to be sympathetic to its cause.[80]

The Unitarians were also sympathetic to political reform. They were not such a threat in Scotland as they were perceived to be in England, for the movement in Scotland was weak except in Tayside, where there were Unitarian churches in Montrose, Dundee, Forfar and Arbroath by 1795. Nevertheless, Thomas Fysshe Palmer, Unitarian minister of Forfar and then Dundee, was put on trial in Edinburgh in 1793 and subsequently transported for seven years, charged with seditiously writing and distributing *The Address of the Dundee Friends of Liberty*, an intemperate tract accusing the government of repressive, even tyrannical, intentions and advocating democratic elections.[81]

John Brims argues that 'in religious terms, the Scottish radical movement was an alliance of orthodox Calvinist [the Seceders] and rationalist ... The situation in Montrose where Unitarian and Anti-

76 *Ibid.*, 136–7; see also N. Douglas, *Journal of a Mission to part of the Highlands of Scotland in 1797* (Edinburgh, 1799).

77 Kirkland, 'Impact of the French Revolution', 156; Brims, 'Scottish Democratic Movement', 105–6.

78 Quotation from A. Bruce, *Reflections on the Freedom of Writing, and the Impropriety of Attempting to Suppress it By Penal Laws. Occasioned by a Late Proclamation against Seditious Publications, and Measures Consequent Upon it; Viewed Chiefly in the Aspect they bear to Religious Liberty, and Ecclesiastical Reform. By a North British Protestant* (NP, 1794), 170; quoted in Brims, 'Scottish Democratic Movement', 108. For a fuller discussion of Bruce's religious and political opinions, see Brims, 'Covenanting Tradition', 54–7.

79 William Skirving, a Burgher, was the secretary of the Edinburgh Association of the Friends of the People; he was accused with Muir, Palmer and Margarot in the treason trials of 1793.

80 Brims, 'Scottish Democratic Movement', 110–13.

81 The pamphlet, though printed and distributed by Palmer, was in fact written by a Dundee weaver, George Mealmaker.

Burgher worked hand-in-hand for the same political goal represented in extreme form what was happening across Scotland.'[82] However, Brims also acknowledges that, because of denominational tensions, the Edinburgh radicals had decided by 1794 to keep religion out of their meetings. Ministers such as Douglas were not the norm in the Seceding Churches, but they were found in these more often than in the Church of Scotland. Reformist Seceding ministers, however, would not condone violent revolution, and they tried to dissociate themselves from the violent radicals. They were moderate reformers who sympathised with such politicians as Thomas Erskine. The real political radicals among Scottish ministers were more likely to be Unitarians, and this movement, though vigorous, was still in its infancy in Scotland.

It has been claimed that 'the greatest religious change ... produced in Scotland at this era' was the work of the brothers Robert and James Haldane.[83] As a movement whose origins were significantly affected by the French Revolution, and whose work was much criticised by other Scottish ministers because of the climate of suspicion generated by the Revolution, the Haldanes' activities formed an important part of the response of the Scottish churchmen to the French Revolution.

Robert Haldane was converted to evangelical Christianity in late 1794 or early 1795 through a gradual process, prompted in part by discussions with some ministers from his native Stirlingshire concerning the French Revolution and the war. He came to believe that nothing but a revival of evangelical religion could bring about the universal improvement and happiness he had hoped might be achieved through the French Revolution.[84] His brother James, who was converted independently at around the same time, retired from his command of an East India merchant ship,[85] and in 1796 set off on a tour of the Highlands with the Cambridge Church of England minister, Charles Simeon, distributing tracts and preaching in Presbyterian pulpits. This method of religious evangelism was novel in the Highlands at this time and sometimes people refused to accept the tracts, suspecting they had been written by Paine. On a second tour, in the West in 1797, James began to set up independent Sunday Schools, after the pattern of that of John Campbell in Edinburgh. These soon spread to most of the principal towns in Scotland, as well as to many smaller places. He then began to preach on home missions, travelling as far as Shetland. During his tour in the autumn of 1797, at

82 Brims, 'Scottish Democratic Movement', 123.
83 Struthers, *Relief Church*, 387.
84 Kirkland, 'Impact of the French Revolution', 96–7; R. Haldane, *Address to the Public*, 5, 13–14.
85 Noted in W. Westcott to George Manning, 15 October 1794, Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, Admiral Duncan's papers, MS DUN/19.

least 200,000 people may have heard him and his fellow-preachers speak.[86] He formed the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home to organise not only ministers of different denominations, but also a body of lay preachers, to travel and preach all over the country.

Robert Haldane, meanwhile, had had his application to take a mission to Bengal rejected by the East India Company and Henry Dundas, who thought that such activity might threaten Britain's commercial and political interests in India. Instead, Haldane sold his estate of Airthrey in Stirlingshire, leased the Edinburgh Circus as a temporary meeting-place (it had previously been used by a Relief congregation) and had Rowland Hill come up from England for six weeks in the summer of 1798 to open it. Hill preached in Edinburgh on Sundays and was accompanied by James Haldane on tours of mainland Scotland during the weekdays. In Edinburgh, he drew great crowds, sometimes preaching in the open air on Calton Hill to as many as 20,000 people.[87] In January 1799, the Edinburgh Circus church was formally constituted on congregational principles, and in February James Haldane was inducted as its pastor. The Haldanes, together with Greville Ewing and William Innes, had begun this work as members of the Church of Scotland, and had not intended to leave it. The hostility from within the established Church, however, together with the strong congregational convictions of Ewing, resulted in a movement away from the Kirk, as further 'Tabernacles' on congregational lines were established in Glasgow, Dundee, Perth, Elgin and Caithness. By 1807 there were eighty-five Congregational churches in Scotland, while classes were commenced in Edinburgh and Dundee to educate lay missionaries and preachers.[88] In 1808, the Haldanes split with some of their colleagues over the practice of infant baptism, taking sections of the Tabernacle congregations with them into the nascent Baptist movement in Scotland.

The popularity of the Haldane movement may be explained in part by the tension and excitement created by the French Revolution, and in part by the spiritual torpor within the Moderate-dominated Church of Scotland.[89] The Haldanes provided novelty and certainty at a time when there was a widespread craving for both. In this, they may be compared with the Methodist movement in England. Wesley had met with little response in Scotland, where his Arminianism had sat ill with Scottish Calvinism; but the Haldane brothers' combination of

86 A conservative estimate based on numbers given in J. Haldane, *Journal of a Tour through the Northern Counties of Scotland and the Orkney Isles, in Autumn 1797* (Edinburgh, 1798).

87 Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 206–9; R. Hill, *Journal of a Tour through ... parts of Scotland* (London, 1799), 38, 46, 51–2.

88 Escott, *Scottish Congregationalism*, 67.

89 *Ibid.*, 76.

similar methods with Calvinist doctrine resulted in great popular enthusiasm.

The Haldanes constantly tried to dissociate themselves from their reputation for radical politics. Like the Methodists, they insisted that they had been forced out of the Church of Scotland by widespread hostility from within that Church. The Tabernacles, they maintained, brought many to church who would otherwise have attended no church at all. Robert Haldane could not believe 'that the inhabitants of Edinburgh can become less moral, less religious or loyal, because an additional large place of worship is opened, where the strictest doctrines of faith and holiness are uniformly taught'.[90] The Sunday Schools, likewise, did much good in training children up in the way of the Lord and keeping them off the streets on Sundays. As for the criticisms levelled against the lay preachers of the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, the Haldanes observed that Christ Himself had been a lay preacher, and that John Knox had not been licensed to preach.[91]

Nevertheless, the Church of Scotland and other denominations continued in their hostility to the movement. At such a time of tension, its novelty was enough to make the whole movement suspect.[92] In 1799 Greville Ewing's resignation from the Kirk was accepted by the General Assembly, which also prohibited 'all the Ministers of their Church from employing him to Preach or perform any Ministerial offices for them, or from being employed by him, unless some future Assembly shall see cause to take off this prohibition'.[93] The 1799 Declaratory Act against unqualified ministers and preachers and the Report against 'Vagrant Teachers' were renewed in 1802, and the 1799 *Pastoral Admonition* stated that

> It is much to be lamented, that, while we are assaulted by false principles imported to us from abroad, there should of late have arisen among ourselves a set of men, whose proceedings threaten no small disorder to the country. We mean those, who, assuming the name of Missionaries from what they call the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, as if they had some special commission from Heaven are at present going through the land ... [94]

The Haldanes were perhaps a contributing factor in the decline of the Moderate party in the Church of Scotland.[95] By 1794, the more politically liberal Moderate, Thomas Hardy, was calling for the

90 Haldane, *Address to the Public*, 74.
91 *Ibid.*, 86–93: the 'Address of the conductors of the Arbroath Sunday Schools, occasioned by the late Pastoral Admonition of the General Assembly'; Haldane, *Journal of a Tour through the Northern Counties*, 9, 14.
92 Kirkland, 'Impact of the French Revolution', 126.
93 *AGA, 1799*, May 29.
94 *Ibid.*, 39.
95 Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 213.

expansion of religious toleration and for missionary work at home and abroad,[96] and the cause of the older Moderatism was on the wane.

Ministers of all persuasions in Scotland often viewed their pronouncements on the French Revolution almost as Old Testament prophecies — as messages of divine significance, to be ignored only at national peril. Alexander Carlyle, referring to the captivity of Israel, wrote:

> Happy had it been for them if the same passionate love for their country had, in due time, made them listen to the voice of the prophets, who had so long called them to repentance, or had inspired them with zeal and courage, in defence of that constitution in church and state, the overthrow of which they now so pathetically deplore.[97]

But how much did their preaching affect their congregations and the Scottish people as a whole? The combined loyalism of the majority of the clergy in all denominations undoubtedly had some impact. It has been noted that the number of published loyalist sermons was probably only a small proportion of the whole.[98] Sermons were an unusually powerful means of communication, in that they reached the literate and illiterate alike and could claim the highest possible authority. The pulpit was a most effective platform, particularly when the sermons were also published. James Bradley ranks the Anglican clergy with the best of the professional politicians and government pamphleteers,[99] and many of the Scottish churchmen could also be commended for their consistency and force of argument. Attendance was high on national fast days and days of thanksgiving, when two sermons a day (many of which were overtly political) were often preached in the churches. These were regarded as events of great symbolic significance. The printed sermons had a wide circulation — 10,000 'coarse' and 1000 'fine' copies of George Hill's *The Present Happiness of Great Britain* (Edinburgh, 1792) were distributed.[100] Bradley's comment on England is possibly even more true of Scotland: 'Many eighteenth-century Englishmen and women still understood society and politics in predominantly religious terms, and in times of national crisis they looked to the pulpit for a defence and reaffirmation of traditional beliefs.'[101]

96 T. Hardy, *The Progress of the Christian Religion* (Edinburgh, 1794); Hardy, *Importance of Religion*, 35.
97 Carlyle, *Love of Our Country*, 2.
98 See above,p. 192.
99 Bradley, 'Church, Clergy, and Counter-Revolution', 7. See also E. L. de Montluzin, *The Anti-Jacobins 1798–1800: The Early Contributors to the 'Anti-Jacobin Review'* (Basingstoke, 1988); her list of contributors to this influential periodical includes many clergymen.
100 Brims, 'Scottish Democratic Movement', 357.
101 Bradley, 'Church, Clergy, and Counter-Revolution', 16.

Nevertheless, it is open to debate how much success the conservative sermons had in converting those with reformist or radical inclinations to loyalty and submission. Probably the most the sermons achieved was to confirm those who were already conservative in their attitudes (admittedly, probably the majority of the population) by giving their views Scriptural and ecclesiastical sanction. They also assisted the State's suppression of political reformers and radicals by asserting the virtue of a patriotic and obedient attitude and, in the case of the Evangelicals and Seceders, by setting an example of temporarily casting off a reformist stance for a more conservative one. It is possible, however, that one of the effects of the Haldane movement was similar to that which has been attributed to Methodism in England — by its popularity, its intensity and its relatively broad geographic spread, it may have diverted what was potentially radical political energy into religious channels.

The condition of the Established and Relief Churches was probably not greatly affected by their responses to the French Revolution. The Moderates' decline had begun before the Revolution and their reactionary responses were rather the result of their distance from the lower classes than the cause. Moreover, the Evangelicals' conservative stance on the Revolution was incidental to their rising influence in the General Assembly rather than a decisive issue. The Relief Church was likewise quite consistent in its attitudes throughout: ministers constantly disputed the establishment principle. Whereas the Relief Church continued to thrive in this period, the Burghers and Anti-Burghers split in 1799 and 1806 over the question of the relations between Church and State. It is very likely that this process was hastened by the debates over the French Revolution. The Revolution and its consequences, however, ushered in a problem — manifested in dissatisfaction with the Moderates and in the popularity of the Haldane movement and their lay preachers and missionaries — with which all the Churches would have to deal in the coming century: namely, the beginnings of discontent with a clerically-dominated Church in Scotland.

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Notes and Comments

THE DEATH OF MAGNUS BARELEGS

The medieval Norwegian King Magnús Óláfsson, known as Magnus Barelegs, who ruled from 1093 until 1103, is relatively well known in Scotland and the north of Ireland. His main claims to fame are that he plundered the Hebrides and ensured that they were made subject to Norway; and that he met his death in Ireland at the hands of the Ulaid.

Since I published an article in the *Scottish Historical Review* for 1986 that examined the sources for the life and the death of Magnus, some further possible evidence with regard to his death has come to light.[1] The sources are passages in medieval Icelandic works, in particular the latest of them, from which it appears that oral tradition, most probably transmitted by way of the Hebrides, may have been used.

Magnus came to power in Norway at the death of his father in 1093. In 1098 he swept down upon the islands and western seaboard of Scotland, raiding, pillaging and asserting a previously tenuous Norwegian claim to authority in the Shetlands, Orkneys and Hebrides. Leaving only Iona free from his attentions, he ravaged Galloway and Man, and fought a battle off Anglesey with the Norman earls who were then attempting the conquest of Gwynedd. Returning through the Hebrides, he seems to have made a treaty with the king of Scotland, under which his authority in those islands was recognised. He then sailed home to Norway, but came back in 1102, only to be killed the following year in Ireland — somewhere in Ulaid, the area represented, roughly, by the modern counties of Antrim and Down.

According to a major group of sources, the Norse sagas, his death occurred when Magnus was on his way home. His ally, the powerful Munster King Muirchertach Ua Briain, had agreed to provide him with provisions for the journey. Either on St Bartholomew's Day, 24 August 1103, or on the day before, Magnus was on the coast of Ulaid, the inhabitants of which were in alliance with Muirchertach and therefore also with Magnus. The Irish bringing the provisions did not arrive when expected, and Magnus went ashore with a party of his men to seek them. They met up with them, but on their way back to their ships they were attacked by men of the Ulaid, who presumably mistook the party for marauding Hebrideans engaged in cattle-raiding. According to the thirteenth-century *Chronicle of the Kings of Man and the Sudreys*, Magnus was buried near the church of Saint Patrick in Down. It is

1 The original article is 'Magnus Barelegs' Expeditions to the West', *ante*, lxv (1986). There are various errors in the printed text, including the miswriting of *Tadc* throughout. On p. 124, line 15, 'Diarmait' should read 'Domnall'. On p. 129, line 9, 'last' [major Norse source] should read 'other'. On pp. 130–1 it is wrongly stated that a set tribute of ten marks of gold is said to have been paid by each king of the Isles on his succession: this should read 'on the accession of each new king of Norway'. For recent traditions on the death of Magnus, see R. Power, 'Magnus Barelegs, the War Hollow and Downpatrick', *Ulster Local Studies*, xv, no. 2 (winter 1993) (but this does not include the *Morkinskinna*/*Fagrskinna* evidence).