

**JOHN ERSKINE (1721-1803):
DISSEMINATOR OF ENLIGHTENED EVANGELICAL CALVINISM**

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Abstract

John Erskine was the leading Evangelical in the Church of Scotland in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Educated in an enlightened setting at Edinburgh University, he learned to appreciate the epistemology of John Locke and other empiricists alongside key Scottish Enlightenment figures such as his ecclesiastical rival, William Robertson. Although groomed to follow in his father's footsteps as a lawyer, Erskine changed career paths in order to become a minister of the Kirk. He was deeply moved by the endemic revivals in the west of Scotland and determined that his contribution to the burgeoning Evangelical movement on both sides of the Atlantic would be much greater as a clergyman than a lawyer. Yet Erskine was no 'enthusiast'. He integrated the style and moral teachings of the Enlightenment into his discourses and posited new theories on traditional views of Calvinism in his theological treatises. Erskine's thought, however, never transgressed the boundaries of orthodoxy. His goal was to update Evangelical Calvinism with the new style and techniques of the Enlightenment without sacrificing the gospel message. While Erskine was widely recognised as an able preacher and theologian, his primary contribution to Evangelicalism was as a disseminator. He sent correspondents like the New England pastor Jonathan Edwards countless religious and philosophical works so that he and others could learn about current ideas, update their writings to conform to the Age of Reason and provide an apologetic against perceived heretical authors. Erskine also was crucial in the publishing of books and pamphlets by some of the best Evangelical theologians in America and Britain. Within his lifetime, Erskine's main contribution to Evangelicalism was as a propagator of an enlightened form of Calvinism.

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To Angela,
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Abbreviations

<i>Church</i>	Richard Sher, <i>Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh</i> (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).
<i>Discourses</i>	John Erskine, <i>Discourses Preached on Several Occasions</i> , 2 vols (Edinburgh: Printed for William Creech and Archibald Constable and C. Dilly, T. Cadell, W. Davies and T. Kay, 1798-1804).
<i>Erskine</i>	Sir Henry Moncreiff Wellwood, <i>Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine, D. D., Late One of the Ministers of Edinburgh</i> (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1818).
ESP	Ezra Stiles Papers, Ms Vault Stiles Correspondence, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University
EUL	Edinburgh University Library
HSP	Historical Society of Pennsylvania
JBL	Joseph Bellamy Letters, Hartford Seminary Library
JDP	John Dickinson Papers, Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson College,
JEL	John Erskine Letterbook, Reel 242, Massachusetts Historical Society
NAS	National Archive of Scotland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
<i>SM</i>	<i>Scots Magazine</i>
SML	Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University
SSPCK	Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge
<i>TD</i>	John Erskine, <i>Theological Dissertations</i> (London: Printed by Edward and Charles Dilly, 1765).
TFP	Thomas Foxcroft Papers, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University
TPC	Thomas Prince Collection, Boston Public Library

Chapter One

Introduction

The colleague of Dr. Robertson ascended the pulpit. His external appearance was not prepossessing. A remarkably fair complexion, strangely contrasted with a black wig without a grain of powder; a narrow chest and a stooping posture; hands which, placed like props on either side of the pulpit, seemed necessary rather to support the person than to assist the gesticulation of the preacher – no gown, not even that of Geneva, a tumbled band, and a gesture which seemed scarce voluntary, were the first circumstances which struck a stranger. ‘The preacher seems a very ungainly person’, whispered Mannerling to his new friend.

‘Never fear; he’s the son of an excellent Scottish lawyer – he’ll show blood, I’ll warrant him.’

The learned counsellor predicted truly. A lecture was delivered, fraught with new, striking, and entertaining views of Scripture history – a sermon, in which the Calvinism of the Kirk of Scotland was ably supported, yet made the basis of a sound system of practical morals, which should neither shelter the sinner under the cloak of speculative faith or of peculiarity of opinion, nor leave him loose to the waves of unbelief and schism. Something there was of an antiquated turn of argument and metaphor, but it only served to give zest and peculiarity to the style of elocution.

Such was the description that Sir Walter Scott gave of his childhood pastor in the novel *Guy Mannering* (1815).¹

But who was this preacher, and more importantly, what was his significance?

The footnote for Scott’s text identifies the speaker as ‘the celebrated Dr. Erskine, a distinguished clergyman, and a most excellent man’.² In terms of his vocation, John Erskine was a leading clergyman in the Church of Scotland in the latter half of the eighteenth century, serving as the parish minister of Kirkintilloch (1744-53), Culross (1753-58), New Greyfriars in Edinburgh (1758-67) and Old Greyfriars in Edinburgh (1767-1803). Among the myriad of eighteenth-century Scottish clergy, Erskine was unusual in that he was high-born, inheriting his father’s and grandfather’s estate of Carnock, yet purposely choosing the office of the pastorate for his profession. It was

¹See the full description of Erskine in Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering* (London: Soho, 1987), 262.

²Scott, *Guy Mannering*, 262.

assumed by Erskine's family that he would follow in his father's footsteps as a lawyer. But Erskine had different plans for his life. His true passion was to contribute to the growth of the Evangelical Revival that was taking place in Britain and America, and it was as a minister that he believed he would have the best opportunity to accomplish this goal. He had witnessed the Cambuslang and Kilsyth Revivals of 1742, two of the most significant spiritual awakenings in Scotland, which were orchestrated by Evangelical preachers. He watched as the Anglican itinerant George Whitefield and the Scottish clergymen Alexander Webster and Thomas Gillespie delivered their discourses to the attentive, and sometimes emotional, crowds. By seeing the repentant people profess a newfound faith in Christ at these gatherings in the west of Scotland, Erskine was inspired to become a preacher himself. More than any other reason, it was this over-arching concern to be a contributor to the Evangelical Revival that fuelled his drive to become a minister.

Erskine has often been portrayed as the leader of the Popular party in Scotland in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The Popular party, sometimes equated with the 'evangelical' party, or pejoratively by their opponents as the 'high-fliers', the 'wild' or 'fanatical' party, regardless of how unified these ministers were in actuality, was the opposing ecclesiastical party to the Moderates in the Kirk.³ Since Erskine co-ministered at Old Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh with William Robertson, the undisputed leader of the Moderate literati, a natural comparison could be made between two amicable, but opposing, ecclesiastical personalities, regardless of Erskine's lack of ambition to be the manager of any religious polity.⁴ 'His colleague and he differ, and head different parties in the Kirk, about particular points of church

³Henry Grey Graham, *Scottish Men of Letters* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1901), 82; Callum G. Brown, 'Religion and Social Change', in T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (eds.), *People and Society in Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1988), 147-8. The term 'Popular party' generally refers to the group of ministers who opposed the law of patronage, wanting instead for ministers of churches to be selected on the basis of a popular vote. There were varying theological views among the Popular ministers, but perhaps the largest segment within the so-called party was made up of clergymen with evangelical inclinations. See John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740-1800* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998).

⁴On the definition and characteristics of the Moderate literati, see *Church*, 13-18.

discipline', was Scott's explanation of Erskine and Robertson, 'but without for a moment losing personal regard or respect for each other, or suffering malignity to interfere in an opposition'.⁵ The common perception then was to view Erskine as the leader of one group of ministers and Robertson of the other.⁶ With the death of other prominent Popular ministers, John Maclaurin in 1754, Robert Walker in 1783 and Alexander Webster in 1784, and the emigration of John Witherspoon to New Jersey in 1768, Erskine, almost by default, became the most recognised leader, especially among his Evangelical peers. Although other notable Popular figures emerged later in the century – Erskine's cousin, the lawyer and politician Henry Erskine, and the Edinburgh University divinity professor Andrew Hunter – John Erskine remained as the most visible character associated with this group of clergymen.

Erskine's long life, status as a Scottish laird, intellectual ability and warm temperament made him a natural model for other Scottish Evangelical ministers. The Church of Scotland divine Thomas Randall dedicated his published sermon, *Christian Benevolence* (1763), to his younger colleague. In the preface, Randall recapitulated Erskine's decision to become a minister from the standpoint of the representative Popular clergy.

It was evident to all, when you first entered upon the ministry of the Lord Jesus, that therein you sought not your own earthly profit, but the profit of others, that they might be saved; and the several flocks of which in divine providence you have been overseer, bear witness, that by not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God, by self-denied labour and watchfulness, you have stedfastly pursued the same end.⁷

⁵Scott, *Guy Mannering*, 263.

⁶See also John Kay, *A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Etchings* (Edinburgh: Hugh Paton, 1837–8), 174; *Autobiography of the Rev. Dr. Alexander Carlyle*, ed. J. H. Burton (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1861), 196; Alexander Haldane, *Memoirs of the Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and of His Brother James Alexander Haldane* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853), 125.

⁷Thomas Randall, *Christian Benevolence, A Sermon Preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge* (Edinburgh: Printed by A. Donaldson and J. Reid, 1763), v.

Sir Henry Moncreiff Wellwood, another rare high-born Scottish minister, eulogised Erskine as a paradigm for subsequent Evangelical clergymen in the Kirk. The final sentence in Moncreiff's *The Life of John Erskine* is indicative of the high regard that he had for his colleague.

The Life of Doctor Erskine, from his birth to his grave; as he was seen, in his early, and in his latest years – in the vigour of his faculties, and in his last decline – in his pastoral functions, and in his literary researches – in his active pursuits, and in his private intercourse – in the friendships of his youth, and of his age – and in every view of his domestic habits; entitles his name to be transmitted to posterity, with the most estimable and venerable characters of his time; and with a distinction, to which no external rank or honour could have added anything.⁸

Though associated with the Moderates, Thomas Somerville, minister of Jedburgh, ranked Erskine above other Popular ministers since his 'speeches were full of substantial, pertinent matter, and more effective than those of most of his party'. According to Somerville, 'the established goodness of his character not only atoned, even in the eyes of the most censorious, for the slighter shades of party spirit, but gave an authority to his opinion signally serviceable to the popular interest'.⁹ Even one of the most bitter opponents of the 'High Flyers' in the Kirk, Alexander Carlyle of the Moderates, counted Erskine as one of the few 'upright and honourable' in his party.¹⁰ Regardless of whether he was in actuality the 'leader' of any ecclesiastical party, Erskine was viewed as such by many of his colleagues.

Though unassuming, Erskine was one of the best known Evangelicals in the eighteenth century. The renowned Anglican preacher, Charles Simeon, wrote in 1796 that while visiting Scotland, he had the opportunity to dine with the Edinburgh minister. Simeon recalled, 'Never was there a more friendly warm-hearted man than Dr. E.', who had a 'perfect freedom from bigotry, and a Christian cheerfulness' about

⁸*Erskine*, 404–5.

⁹Thomas Somerville, *My Own Life and Times, 1741–1814* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1861), 99.

¹⁰Andrew Hunter of Edinburgh being the only other name mentioned. *Autobiography*, 196.

him.¹¹ Andrew Fuller, the most important Baptist theologian at that time, travelled to Scotland in the late 1790s observing that ‘Dr. Erskine is an excellent old man... who is made up of kindness and goodness’.¹² Even Evangelicals whom Erskine opposed respected him. ‘I love your person; I love your character; I love the work wherein you are engaged’, John Wesley wrote to Erskine, even though the two were involved in a sharp dispute over the genuineness of Methodism in Scotland. Despite their differences of opinion, Erskine was still counted by Wesley to be a ‘fellow labourer in the gospel’.¹³

It was not just Erskine’s personality that attracted these favourable comments, for he was known to be a ‘profound theologian’.¹⁴ The former slave trader and Anglican clergyman John Newton reportedly stated that ‘if Dr. Erskine had been born among us, and regarded according to his merit, he might perhaps have been the archbishop of Canterbury long ago’.¹⁵ The English Independent pastor Philip Doddridge wrote an encouraging letter, complimenting the young Scot on his ‘distinguished abilities’. Doddridge was referring to the recent pamphlet that he had received by post, *The Law of Nature Sufficiently Promulgated to the Heathens* (1741), a theological exploration of natural religion written by Erskine at the age of twenty.¹⁶ Among many of the leading eighteenth-century Evangelicals, Erskine was celebrated for his disposition and intellectual aptitude.

¹¹*Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Charles Simeon*, ed. W. Carus (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 69.

¹²John Ryland, *The Works of Faith and Love, and the Patience of Hope, Illustrated; in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (Charlestown: Samuel Etheridge, 1818), 155-6.

¹³John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford, vol. 4 (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 296.

¹⁴Thomas Davidson, *A Sketch of the Character of Dr. John Erskine, One of the Ministers of the Old Gray Friars Church of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: H. Inglis, 1803), 15.

¹⁵Robert Philip, *The Life, Times, and Missionary Enterprises, of the Rev. John Campbell* (London: John Snow, 1841), 266.

¹⁶*Erskine*, 30.

But, as the Scottish caricaturist John Kay pointed out, Erskine was ‘by no means so morose or so studious as to be insensible to the lighter enjoyments of society’. On one occasion he played a joke on his friend Alexander Webster, a fellow Edinburgh Popular minister. Webster was known for his ‘convivial propensities’, which ‘frequently led to social sittings not altogether in accordance with his clerical character’. This was a polite way of saying that Webster was known for his enjoyment of wine and good company. In order to sustain his ‘repeated infringements of domestic regularity’, Webster used to apply the excuse to his wife that he had ‘just been down calling for Dr. Erskine, and the Doctor had insisted on him staying to supper’. When Erskine discovered this ruse, he ‘resolved in a good-humoured way to put a stop to the deception’. One evening when Webster actually was at his colleague’s house, Erskine excused himself to retire to bed, leaving Webster to dine with Mrs. Erskine. Instead of sleeping, however, Erskine quietly slipped out and made his way to Webster’s house. Mrs. Webster, informing Erskine that his friend was not there, offered to feed her guest. ‘Dropping in as if nothing unusual was in the wind’, according to Kay, Erskine ‘consented to remain with Mrs. Webster to supper; and thus the two clergymen supped with each other’s wives, and in each other’s houses, neither of the said wives being aware of the fact, and Webster equally ignorant of the plot laid against his character for verity.’ Once he finished his meal, Erskine made his way back home to find Webster ‘pushing off from the shore of sobriety’. After some time, Webster returned to his own residence to witness the usual interrogation from his wife, to which he again employed the excuse of having dined at Erskine’s house. Kay revealed the anticipated outcome of the story.

The reader may conceive the torrent of indignant reproof which, after having been restrained on a thousand occasions when it was deserved, burst forth upon the head of the unfortunate and for once innocent Doctor [Webster]. When it had at length subsided, the Doctor discovered the hoax which had been played off upon him; and the whole affair was explained satisfactorily to both parties next day, by Dr. Erskine’s confession. But Mrs. Webster declared that, from that time forth, for the security of both parties from such deceptions, she conceived it would be as well, when Dr. Webster happened to be

supping with Dr. Erskine, that he should bring home with him a written affidavit, under the hand of his host, testifying the fact.¹⁷

Erskine was a learned man, but he was not without a sense of humour.

As a minister living in Edinburgh, Erskine had all the advantages of culture and taste that a Scottish gentleman could enjoy in an urban setting. Edinburgh was a city that grew substantially in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Moving to Edinburgh as the minister of New Greyfriars in 1758, Erskine must have witnessed the growth of the population, which was about 57,000 in 1755, to over 80,000 by the end of the century.¹⁸ But despite its growth and prominence as the capital of Scotland, Edinburgh was not the cleanest city in the world. The water supply in particular was a problem. Refuse was usually thrown out of windows at night onto the streets. A commentator observed that ‘One never knew the moment when the warning cry “Gardyloo”... might ring out, following which would come in swift succession an avalanche of unmentionable filth on to the footpath – or the passer-by.’¹⁹ Visitors to the city, such as John Wesley, were appalled at the amount of waste that continuously flowed down the city streets.²⁰ It was not until the last quarter of the eighteenth century that pipes were laid to transport water and improve the notorious stench rising up from the streets.²¹

Changes in Edinburgh – even in the latter half of the century – were immense. In 1763, for instance, there was only one stagecoach that went to London each month. By 1783, however, there were fifteen departing for London every week. From the 1760s to the end of the century, Edinburgh became a truly cosmopolitan city. Many wealthy merchants, physicians and even some ministers and professors had their own

¹⁷Kay, *Portraits*, 175-6.

¹⁸David Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2002), 83.

¹⁹Oliphant Smeaton, *Edinburgh and Its Story* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1904), 131.

²⁰Samuel J. Rogal, ‘John Wesley at Edinburgh: 1751–1790’, *Trinity Journal* 4 (1983), 21.

²¹R. H. Campbell, *Scotland Since 1707: The Rise of an Industrial Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 14.

carriages. Renowned authors such as David Hume and William Robertson sold their literary works for unprecedented amounts of money. A sophisticated Scotsman could be a member in any one of the numerous organisations that were founded in the latter half of the century, including the Speculative Society, the Society of Antiquaries or the Royal Society in Edinburgh.²² Aristocrats, lairds, judges, ministers and lawyers frequented these meetings, enjoying the company of learned men while drinking claret.²³ By the 1780s a guest visiting the city could lodge in a number of hotels that were in operation or purchase various meats, vegetables and fruits imported by the merchant fleets arriving at the city docks at Leith.²⁴ The Edinburgh city limits were changing as well. The establishment of New Town in 1767 allowed for the expansion of the city northward. With the construction of the North and South Bridges in the latter half of the century, wealthy Edinburgh residents could live in an area of the city that had new and elegant buildings, congregate in one of the new squares or walk the fashionable George or Princes Streets.²⁵

For much of Erskine's life, he lived in one of the great cosmopolitan cities of Europe. Being a man of letters, he could visit one of the bookshops that stood along the High Street such as William Creech's in the Luckenbooths, a commercial building near St Giles that was a prime place for the literati to congregate. With the explosion of literary works by luminaries of the Scottish Enlightenment – men like Hugh Blair, Adam Ferguson, David Hume, William Robertson and Adam Smith – there was no shortage of books to read. After a busy day of studying for his upcoming sermon or writing letters to one of his numerous correspondents, Erskine might have enjoyed the convivial company of his friends at a dinner party eating salted beef or boiled fowl

²²William Creech, *Edinburgh Fugitive Pieces: With Letters, Containing a Comparative View of the Modes of Living, Arts, Commerce, Literature, Manners, &c. of Edinburgh, at Different Periods* (Edinburgh: Printed by George Ramsay and Company, 1815), 67-71.

²³Henry Grey Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1906), 115.

²⁴Creech, *Edinburgh Fugitive Pieces*, 92-6.

²⁵Creech, *Edinburgh Fugitive Pieces*, 63.

with some of the city's leading figures such as his distant cousin James Boswell.²⁶ Living and ministering in Edinburgh in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Erskine was able to participate in the intellectual and social culture of the Scottish Enlightenment without sacrificing his evangelical beliefs. He was a man of two worlds, allowing him to hold cordial relationships with conservatives and liberals alike.

As a congenial man and leading minister in Edinburgh, Erskine was one of the best known men in the city. The Scottish laird and judge Henry Cockburn exclaimed, 'But Dr. John Erskine! How everybody revered him! Though able and well read, his reputation rested on the better basis of a fine spirit, operating in all the walks in which liberal religion and active benevolence can be engaged... No Edinburgh figure was better known.'²⁷ People attending the worship services at Old Greyfriars, such as James Boswell, were 'edified' by Erskine's sermons.²⁸ Walter Scott was able to write an account of his childhood pastor in *Guy Mannering* because he and his family were close friends with Erskine. Scott's father was an elder at Old Greyfriars and served at least one term as a director with Erskine of the SSPCK, a bastion for Evangelical ministers in the Kirk.²⁹ Scott's mother was fervent in her allegiance to Erskine. She was described by Scott's early biographer, John Gibson Lockhart, as being 'sincerely religious' and 'liked Dr. Erskine's sermons; but was not fond of Principal [Robertson]'s, however rational, eloquent, and well composed'.³⁰ Lockhart had his own opinion of Erskine's discourses.

²⁶James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. John Wilson Croker, vol 5 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848), 143.

²⁷Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of His Time* (Edinburgh: D. Appleton & Company, 1856), 54–5.

²⁸*Boswell's Edinburgh Journals, 1767-1786*, ed. Hugh M. Milne (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 2001), 275.

²⁹'SSPCK Council Minutes', NAS, GD95/2; 'Old Greyfriars Kirk Session Minutes', NAS, 1775–1814, CH2/128/3. Scott's religious background is briefly discussed in Arthur Melville Clark, *Sir Walter Scott: The Formative Years* (William Blackwood: Edinburgh and London, 1969), 91.

³⁰John Gibson Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1902), 117.

If you look into his Sermons – and I have often seen them in the hands of clergymen of our church – you will have no difficulty in seeing that the grasp of this man’s intellect was of a very uncommon order... You will also see that he had at his command the treasures of an erudition far more extensive, and at the same time far more profound, than is in fashion even among the best theologians of our time.³¹

Despite the acknowledged strength of Erskine’s mind, his physical appearance was not comparable. He was described as having ‘a very slender constitution of a body’.³² John Ramsay of Ochertyre remarked that from an outside observer’s point of view, no one would have ‘imagined that an enlightened mind dwelt in that body’.³³ These sometimes hagiographic comments from contemporaries demonstrate that although an ‘ungainly’ man, as Scott hinted, Erskine was a respected and accomplished eighteenth-century Scottish minister.

Even though he was widely appreciated as a clergyman, Erskine’s primary significance was not as a minister, but as a disseminator of Calvinism, primarily through the sending and propagating of ideas that were often channelled through books. Erskine was a bibliophile. His own library at the time of his death included close to 4,000 titles, not counting the German and Dutch literature that he owned or the thousands of sermons, pamphlets and treatises that he had previously donated to his contacts in America, Britain and Europe.³⁴ Erskine read widely. The Edinburgh minister Thomas Davidson claimed that having a conversation with his older colleague was like having access to ‘an index to books’.³⁵ It was this preoccupation with books that John Kay had in mind when he stated that ‘Dr. Erskine was frequently

³¹John Gibson Lockhart, *Peter’s Letters to His Kinfolk* (New York: A.T. Goodrich & Co., Collins & Hannay, and Elam Bliss, 1820), 410.

³²*Erskine*, 391.

³³‘Ochertyre Manuscripts’, NLS, MS 1636, 301.

³⁴Catalogue of the Library of the Late John Erskine of Carnock, D. D’, 1811, University of Aberdeen, Special Collections, MN.10.208.

³⁵Davidson, *Character*, 16.

very absent'. Kay retold how while walking in a field, Erskine stumbled into a large animal.

With his usual politeness, he took off his hat, made a low bow and a thousand apologies, and then walked on. A friend, who witnessed what had happened, accosted him, and inquired why he had taken off his hat; he replied, that he had accidentally jostled a stranger, and was apologising for his rudeness. His amazement may be conceived when he was informed that he had been offering his excuses to a cow!

A second story depicts a similarly distracted Erskine. 'On another occasion, he met his wife in the Meadows; she stopped, and he did so too – he bowed, hoped she was well, and bowed again, and went on his way. Upon his return home, Mrs. Erskine asked him where he had been; he answered, in the Meadows, and that he had met a lady, but he could not for the world imagine who she was!'³⁶ Often deep in thought, Erskine was sometimes oblivious to his surroundings.

It was his love for the study of divinity in particular that prompted him to strengthen orthodox Calvinism through literary means in order to alert his recipients to the newest philosophical and religious publications. Almost all his letters were accompanied by a parcel of books. On average he sent between four and eight texts with each letter. His correspondence with the Baptist John Ryland Jr serves as an example. In the eighty-six known letters to the younger Ryland, a correspondence which began in the 1780s and lasted until Erskine's death in 1803, at least 400 items were mentioned as being sent.³⁷ This average of about four to eight texts is consistent with the figure for Erskine's other correspondents, including the American ministers Jonathan Edwards, Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, Thomas Foxcroft and Jedidiah Morse. Depending on the longevity of the relationship and the number of letters, a person could have received anywhere from a few dozen to hundreds of gratuitously posted works.

³⁶Kay, *Portraits*, 175.

³⁷See Jonathan Yeager, 'The Letters of John Erskine to the Rylands', *Eusebeia: The Journal of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies* 9 (2008), 183-195.

His role as a disseminator was multifaceted. Erskine not only read widely and distributed current religious literature, but also had a hand in the editing and publishing process for many of the works that he was endorsing. The New England pastor Jonathan Edwards is a case in point. Erskine spearheaded the effort in Britain to publish Edwards's *The Life of David Brainerd* (1765), *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1774), *Practical Sermons* (1788), *Twenty Sermons* (1789), *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects* (1793) and *Remarks on Important Theological Controversies* (1796).³⁸ Jonathan Edwards Jr had confidence in Erskine's ability as an editor and so released his father's manuscripts into the Scot's care. English ministers, such as the Baptists Andrew Fuller, John Collett Ryland and John Ryland Jr and the Anglican James Hervey, were also authors whose writings Erskine propagated, demonstrating that he supported other Christian denominations besides Presbyterianism. But America and Britain were not the geographical limits of his dissemination. He learned German and Dutch at the age of sixty in order to bring over the best philosophical and theological ideas from the continent. Knowing the Dutch language in particular allowed him to nurture relationships in Holland with individual ministers and university professors as well as with societies that were bent on preserving orthodox Calvinism. He utilised these European connections in order to endorse books by the most learned Evangelicals.³⁹

Erskine propagated books not only because he loved ideas, but also because he determined that this was the best way that he could contribute to the vibrancy of orthodox Calvinism. While George Whitefield was busy preaching throughout Britain and America, and Jonathan Edwards and Andrew Fuller were writing influential theological works, Erskine concentrated his efforts in sustaining Evangelicalism by ensuring that the style and content of its writers kept up with the current age. He was a respected minister and theologian, but it was neither his

³⁸See chapter seven and eight for Erskine's relationship with Edwards.

³⁹See chapter eight.

preaching nor his thought that distinguishes him as an important historical figure within Evangelicalism. It was the transmission of ideas in which he made the most significant impact on this movement, serving as a kind of broker of literary information.

It is ironic that eighteenth-century Scotland's most outstanding Evangelical is one of the least studied individuals. It has been almost two hundred years since anything has been published on Erskine alone. Sir Henry Moncreiff Wellwood's *Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine* (1818) offers a wealth of information, but it is by no means complete in its evaluation. One critic complained that the 'Life of Dr. Erskine conveys no adequate idea of either his piety or candour. The champion of Whitefield – the herald of the works of Jonathan Edwards and Andrew Fuller, in Scotland – the patron of missions... the man of God thoroughly furnished for every good word and work, ought to have been exhibited at full length, and not chiefly as a scholar.'⁴⁰ The nineteenth-century Free Church minister William Blaikie judged the biography to be a 'little more than a record of public work' and 'singularly deficient in those touches which give the inner likeness of a man'.⁴¹ These commentaries are much too harsh, however, and do not give adequate credit for this priceless survey of Erskine's life. Compared to similar biographies, especially John Hill's *Account of the Life and Writings of Hugh Blair* (1807), there is much more detail in Moncreiff's narrative, providing a helpful foundation on which to build. So while Moncreiff's contribution is monumental as an eighteenth-century literary tribute, there is an obvious need to bring out Erskine's significance for the twenty-first-century reader.

Since the *Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine*, there have been scant references to Erskine. Blaikie's *Preachers of Scotland from the Sixth to the*

⁴⁰Philip, *Campbell*, 224.

⁴¹William Garden Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland from the Sixth to the Nineteenth Century: Twelfth Series of the Cunningham Lectures* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888), 261.

Nineteenth Century briefly mentions the Edinburgh minister, praising him as ‘a singular godsend to the evangelical party of his day’ due to his erudition and temperament.⁴² A 1949 Edinburgh University PhD thesis by Charles Rodgers McCain provides an interesting comparison of the preaching styles of the Scottish ministers Ralph Erskine, John Erskine and Hugh Blair, but there is very little depth in the account of Erskine’s theology and motivation. McCain admits in the preface that his intent was not to study Erskine or Blair, but instead the preaching of the early Seceders.⁴³ Bits of Erskine’s pastoral ministry are discussed in Stephen Woodruff’s 1965 Edinburgh University PhD thesis, alongside the Scottish clergymen Thomas Boston and John Willison, but again not much insight is given into the driving force of Erskine’s aspirations.⁴⁴

In the last thirty years, an interest in the study of Evangelicalism has produced some weighty pieces that mention Erskine’s role as a leader in this movement. Susan O’Brien in her widely cited article, ‘Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735–1755’, has investigated the connections between ministers in Britain and America who were working together to strengthen the revival.⁴⁵ Michael Crawford continues the discussion of the transatlantic network of Evangelicals in his *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England’s Revival Tradition in Its British Context*.⁴⁶ In both books, Erskine is shown

⁴²Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland*, 261–2.

⁴³Charles Rodgers McCain, ‘Preaching in Eighteenth Century Scotland: A Comparative Study of the Extant Sermons of Ralph Erskine (1685–1752), John Erskine (1721–1803), and Hugh Blair (1718–1800)’, PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1949, i.

⁴⁴Stephen Albert Woodruff, ‘The Pastoral Ministry in the Church of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century, with Special Reference to Thomas Boston, John Willison and John Erskine’, PhD Dissertation, Edinburgh University, New College, 1965.

⁴⁵Susan O’Brien, ‘A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735–1755’, *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986), 811–32. See also her ‘Transatlantic Communications and Literature in the Religious Revivals, 1735–1745’, PhD Dissertation, University of Hull, 1978 and ‘A Study of the First Evangelical Magazines, 1740–1748’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976), 255–75.

⁴⁶Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England’s Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also his ‘New England and the Scottish Religious Revivals in 1742’, *American Presbyterian* 69 (1991), 23–32.

to be a key supporter of the transatlantic revival. Harold Simonson and Christopher Wayne Mitchell have written on Jonathan Edwards's connections with his Scottish correspondents including Erskine.⁴⁷ The most extensive research on Evangelicalism is by David Bebbington and Mark Noll.⁴⁸ They have brought fresh scholarship to the study of Erskine, identifying him as an enlightened Calvinist and the leading Scottish Evangelical in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Their analysis of him, however, is only in relation to the wider Evangelical movement in Britain and America and its other key participants. In their sections on influential Scottish Evangelicals, Erskine is highlighted, but only alongside Thomas Gillespie, John MacLaurin, John Witherspoon, and later, Thomas Chalmers. Further, Bebbington's evaluation of Erskine as a forward-looking enlightened figure appears to be in contradiction with G. D. Henderson's assessment in *The Burning Bush*, which suggests Erskine to be an eighteenth-century throwback to the former Puritans.⁴⁹

Some much-needed work has been written on the Popular party in the last few decades. Ned Landsman has produced two fine essays on this group of ministers

⁴⁷Harold P. Simonson, 'Jonathan Edwards and His Scottish Connections', *Journal of American Studies* 21 (1987), 353-76; Christopher Wayne Mitchell, 'Jonathan Edwards's Scottish Connection and the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Evangelical Revival, 1735-1750', PhD Dissertation, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, 1997; Christopher W. Mitchell, 'Jonathan Edwards's Scottish Connection', in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 222-47.

⁴⁸For Bebbington, see *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005); 'Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America', in George A Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds.), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 183-212; 'Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment', *Crux* 25 (1989), 29-36; 'Revival and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England', in Andrew Walker and Kristin Aune (eds.), *On Revival: A Critical Examination* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 71-86; 'Evangelicalism in Modern Scotland', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9 (1991), 4-12. For Noll, see for example his *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); 'Revival, Enlightenment, Civic Humanism, and the Evolution of Calvinism in Scotland and America, 1735-1843', in George A Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds.), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 73-107; 'Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought', *American Quarterly* 37 (1985), 216-38; 'The American Revolution and Protestant Evangelicalism', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1993), 615-38.

⁴⁹G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1957).

which places Erskine within his historical and religious context. In 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740-1775', Landsman argues that Erskine and Witherspoon were the 'two most renowned figures in the Popular party' who were sympathetic to the Enlightenment culture which touted reason and moral philosophy.⁵⁰ John McIntosh's *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland* features Erskine's theology along with that of several other eighteenth-century Scottish divines and is the first attempt to systematise the thought of the Popular party.⁵¹ McIntosh's chief points, however, are that the Popular party was not an organised entity in the way that the Moderate literati in Scotland were and that the theology of the Popular ministers ranged from orthodoxy to near heterodoxy. So while the academy has benefited from Landsman's and McIntosh's work on the Popular party, it only whets the appetite for determining Erskine's significance.

There are several publications that deal with peripheral subjects pertaining to Erskine. The Moderate literati in Scotland have received their due attention in recent years largely because of the efforts of Richard Sher and his masterpiece, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, which focuses on the five key leaders in the Moderate party: Hugh Blair, Alexander Carlyle, Adam Ferguson, John Home and William Robertson.⁵² Since Erskine often opposed these men in the ecclesiastical courts and in print on the topics of the American Revolution and Catholic relief, his name occasionally surfaces in these discussions. Dalphy Fagerstrom's article, 'Scottish Opinion and the American Revolution', describes Erskine as the 'best-known' of the American sympathizers.⁵³ But there is still some confusion on

⁵⁰Ned C. Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740-1775', in John Dwyer and Richard B. Sher (eds.), *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1993), 196. See also his 'Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity in Scottish Evangelical Culture', in Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (eds.), *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 29-45.

⁵¹McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland*.

⁵²*Church*, 13.

⁵³Dalphy I. Fagerstrom, 'Scottish Opinion and the American Revolution', *William and Mary Quarterly* 11 (1954), 265.

Erskine's role in Scotland. Henry May, in his incomparable *Enlightenment in America*, introduces Erskine as 'the leading Moderate in the Church of Scotland'.⁵⁴ Whitfield Bell, in his article on Scottish emigration to America, makes a similar mistake, claiming that Erskine and Robertson were Moderates and that Witherspoon was of the orthodox party.⁵⁵ Erskine's name pops up in Robert Kent Donovan's exceptional essay, 'The Popular Party of the Church of Scotland and the American Revolution', which gives greater attention to some of the Evangelicals within the Kirk and their support of the colonists.⁵⁶ Due to Erskine's consistent literary donations to colonial American colleges, he is listed in several books on this subject, including Douglas Sloan's *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*, Louis Shores's *Origins of the American College Library* and Andrew Hook's *Scotland and America*. Hook, for example, designates Erskine as 'an indefatigable donor of books to America'.⁵⁷

Catholic relief in Scotland is the focus of Donovan's earlier book, *No Popery and Radicalism*, and this subject is also examined in Clotilde Prunier's *Anti-Catholic Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*. The two authors, however, offer strikingly different depictions of Erskine. Donovan identifies him as a pacifist who sought 'quiet diplomacy' and was 'level-headed' in his opposition to the 1778 Catholic Relief Act.⁵⁸ Prunier, on the other hand, stresses that Erskine was the

⁵⁴Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 261.

⁵⁵Whitfield J. Bell, 'Scottish Emigration to America: A Letter of Dr. Charles Nisbet to John Witherspoon, 1784', *William and Mary Quarterly* 11 (1954), 285.

⁵⁶Robert Kent Donovan, 'The Popular Party of the Church of Scotland and the American Revolution', in Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (eds.), *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 81-99.

⁵⁷Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971); Louis Shores, *Origins of the American College Library, 1638-1800* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1935); Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations, 1750-1835* (Glasgow and London: Blackie 1975), 39.

⁵⁸Robert Kent Donovan, *No Popery and Radicalism: Opposition to Roman Catholic Relief in Scotland, 1778-1782* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987), 18, 29.

‘fiercest opponent’ of the bill who ‘poured out his anger’ in his 1778 pamphlet, *Considerations on the Spirit of Popery*.⁵⁹ There is a need to sort through all of this material. Was Erskine a tolerant Evangelical minister who was sympathetic to the Enlightenment or was he a closed-minded religious zealot who had more in common with the divines of the previous century than the current age?

Despite the recent literary references to Erskine, he continues to be an enigma. On the whole, contemporaries and scholars alike point out that he was a leader in the eighteenth-century Kirk, an erudite theologian, a prominent Evangelical, an enlightened figure, a key supporter of the American colonists and a fervent opponent of Catholicism. But besides a brief article by James De Jong in a publication of a small Christian liberal arts college in Iowa and the articles that the present author has published, there have been no modern publications, either books or journal articles, solely dedicated to this important Scotsman.⁶⁰ This scholarly void has led to either the complete ignorance of his contribution to Evangelicalism or a misjudgment of his significance. G. M. Ditchfield’s *The Evangelical Revival*, for example, makes no mention of Erskine.⁶¹ It is the more familiar names of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and especially John Wesley who receive prime placement. Arthur Herman goes so far as to say that in countering the Moderate party, the ‘best the Evangelicals could offer was a minister from East Lothian named John Witherspoon’.⁶²

Erskine’s role as a leading Evangelical alone merits an examination of him, especially given the amount of interest in this movement. Yet the question remains,

⁵⁹Clotilde Prunier, *Anti-Catholic Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 65.

⁶⁰James A. De Jong, ‘John Erskine: A Scottish Footnote to the American Revolution’, *Pro Rege* 5 (1979): 18-28; Jonathan Yeager, ‘Puritan or Enlightened? John Erskine and the Transition of Scottish Evangelical Theology’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 80 (2008): 237-53 and ‘John Erskine (1721-1803): A Scottish Evangelical Minister’, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 38 (2008): 23-44.

⁶¹G. M. Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁶²Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe’s Poorest Nation Created Our World & Everything in It* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), 165.

why has he not received any thorough treatment by scholars? It is not as though there is a dearth of publications by Erskine, for he wrote several pamphlets, two volumes of sermons and five theological treatises, and there are a number of his manuscripts in archives scattered throughout Britain and America. The problem it seems is that much of the focus on eighteenth-century Evangelicalism has gone to individuals like Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, George Whitefield, John Witherspoon, and more recently, John Newton and William Wilberforce. While these men were no doubt influential figures who were vital to the success and prominence of Evangelicalism, there is a need to know more about other eminent characters in this religious movement. If thousands of journal articles, dissertations and books have been dedicated to American and English leaders, then Erskine as the most distinguished eighteenth-century Scottish Evangelical surely deserves equivalent scholarly attention.

In order to understand his role as a disseminator, one must first take into consideration the context of Erskine's life. Like many of his Moderate colleagues, Erskine was educated in an enlightened setting. At Edinburgh University he was taught to appreciate the epistemology of John Locke as opposed to the peripatetic scholasticism that still prevailed in the previous century. This foundation of empirical thought informed his subsequent judgment as a minister. Although there was a difference of opinion among the Scottish ministers on how to interpret the Enlightenment and integrate it within their discourses, this does not negate the fact that the intellectual culture of the eighteenth century had a deep impact, not only on those who espoused liberal interpretations of scripture, but on those with conservative opinions as well. Whereas it has been demonstrated that the Moderate literati were heavily influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment, the same could be said for many of the Evangelical ministers of the Kirk, with Erskine being the best representative of this group.

Changes during the eighteenth century in the thought and practices of the Church of Scotland had to account for the new wave of enlightened intellectualism that made its way to the shore of modernity, headed by men in addition to Locke: Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, Blaise Pascal, Robert Boyle, Baruch Spinoza and Isaac Newton. Academics such as William Hamilton and John Simson, divinity professors at Edinburgh and Glasgow respectively, brought new attention to teachings that deviated from a stricter interpretation of Calvinism.⁶³ The effect of these intellectual ideas led some to deism, some to atheism and some to a less rigid understanding of orthodoxy.⁶⁴ Those who embraced a version of Enlightenment rationalism to the extent of modifying the doctrinal content of faith were known as the Moderates. Evangelicals, on the other hand, were those who championed the gospel message over and above polite, moral discourses. While some scholars have suggested that the Enlightenment as an intellectual movement was hostile to Christianity, this was certainly not the case in Scotland.⁶⁵ As opposed to the anti-Christian attitudes in France under the auspices of *philosophes* like Voltaire and Diderot, the Scottish Enlightenment was joined with the Kirk.⁶⁶ The outcome was that there were varying degrees of acceptance by the ministers within the Scottish Church and their adoption of these new ideas – some more liberally and others more conservatively.

There is no consensus on the definition of the Enlightenment. Peter Gay argues that this intellectual and cultural movement occurred between the Glorious Revolution and the French Revolution, and was the composition of a ‘loose, informal, wholly unorganized coalition of cultural critics, religious skeptics, and political

⁶³Roger L. Emerson, ‘The Context of the Scottish Enlightenment’, in Alexander Broadie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14.

⁶⁴Gordon Donaldson, *The Faith of the Scots* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1990), 106–8.

⁶⁵See chapter three.

⁶⁶Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 118.

reformers from Edinburgh to Naples, Paris to Berlin, Boston to Philadelphia'.⁶⁷

Tolerance and the ability to think for oneself are the characteristics that Alexander Broadie suggests are the crux of the Enlightenment.⁶⁸ Richard Sher offers a more comprehensive working model of the Enlightenment, suggesting that it should be viewed in broad conceptions that encompass geography, intellectualism and society. The common denominator of the Enlightenment, according to Sher, was a set of 'general values'.⁶⁹ These values, however, when transmitted to written form encompass seemingly an almost endless list:

a commitment to bettering the human condition, morally and perhaps spiritually as well as materially, sometimes with a local or national focus and sometimes with an eye on mankind as a whole; humanity and cosmopolitan sensibility, or a sense of sympathy and fellow feeling toward other human beings, and opposition to torture, slavery, and other practices judged to be inhumane; sociability, or an awareness of, and a preference for, the social character of human nature and human society; toleration of those holding different beliefs about religion and other matters, and a corresponding adherence to basic liberties of worship, speech, and written communication...⁷⁰

The end result is that one wonders whether there are any parameters to the Enlightenment. Henry May offers a different perspective. Instead of trying to unify the Enlightenment, he argues that there was a plurality to it that manifested itself in several forms including a Moderate, Sceptical, Revolutionary and Didactic Enlightenment.⁷¹

Even defining the Scottish Enlightenment has been problematic.⁷² Charles Camic characterises it on the basis of two central themes: universalism and

⁶⁷Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977), 3.

⁶⁸Broadie, *Scottish Enlightenment*, 1-2.

⁶⁹Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland & America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

⁷⁰Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 16.

⁷¹May, *Enlightenment*, xvi.

⁷²Donald J. Withrington, 'What Was Distinctive About the Scottish Enlightenment?' in Jennifer J. Carter and Joan H. Pittock (eds.), *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment: Proceedings of a*

independence.⁷³ Sher, on the other hand, takes a broader approach. For him it is ‘the culture of the literati of eighteenth-century Scotland’.⁷⁴ Edinburgh is usually shown to be the hub of the Enlightenment in Scotland, but an emphasis has been rightly placed on the prominence of other Scottish cities like Aberdeen and Glasgow.⁷⁵ Efforts have also been made to show that Protestants were not the only participants in the intellectual culture of the eighteenth century.⁷⁶ Regardless of how the Enlightenment is defined, whether painted with a broad brush or narrowed to Scotland only, by intellectual pursuits – religious or secular – or through culture and the arts, there was a common theme of progress among the enlightened elite.⁷⁷ Religious intellectual participants like Erskine as well as the Moderate literati in Scotland were forward-looking and sought to improve society through their philosophical, theological, rhetoric and political writings.

There were those who resisted the changes in the thought of the age, holding fast to their Puritan heritage. In Scotland, Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine (no relation to John Erskine) were two such men who staunchly opposed the Age of Improvement. They severed themselves from the Established Church of Scotland in order to plant a seedling of Presbyterianism partly because they believed that the Kirk was unhealthy, no longer a mature tree bearing the fruit of the strict principle doctrines of

Conference Held at the University of Aberdeen (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), 9–19; John Robertson, ‘The Scottish Contribution to the Enlightenment’, in Paul Wood (ed.), *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 37–62.

⁷³Charles Camic, *Experience and Enlightenment: Socialization for Cultural Change in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 45.

⁷⁴*Church*, 8.

⁷⁵Paul B. Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1993); *The Glasgow Enlightenment*, eds. Andrew Hook and Richard B. Sher (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1995).

⁷⁶Mark Goldie, ‘The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment’, *Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991), 20–62.

⁷⁷Nicholas Phillipson, ‘The Scottish Enlightenment’, in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 21; Robertson, ‘The Scottish Contribution to the Enlightenment’, 42.

Calvinism.⁷⁸ So concerned were these seceding ministers with continuing the purity of Reformed theology that they excommunicated a founding member, Thomas Mair, for suggesting that Christ died for all instead of simply the elect.⁷⁹ There were others who did not welcome with open arms the spirit of the new age. Noll and May argue that the leading American Puritan, Jonathan Edwards, also opposed the Enlightenment, but conveniently used many of the new era's techniques to attempt to revive Puritan theology.⁸⁰ Edwards's deliberate resistance to the current intellectual culture while still adopting the language of the Enlightenment explains why there are mixed opinions on his status as an enlightened figure.⁸¹ Regardless of whether it was a conscious choice, willingness to adapt to the new intellectual climate was one indicator of an enlightened person.

The apparent discontinuity between the thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries calls for clarification of two terms: Evangelicalism and Puritanism. Although described in several ways, the model of Evangelicalism that is presented by David Bebbington – those who hold a high regard for the authority of scripture, advocate Christ's atoning work on the cross, teach that individuals need to be born again and strongly support missions – continues to hold weight as the

⁷⁸Richard B. Sher, 'Scotland Transformed: The Eighteenth Century', in Jenny Wormald (ed.), *Scotland: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 179–80.

⁷⁹Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688–1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1973), 62.

⁸⁰Noll, 'Revival, Enlightenment', 85; May, *Enlightenment*, 49.

⁸¹See, for instance, Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Josh Moody, *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment: Knowing the Presence of God* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005); John E. Smith, 'Puritanism and Enlightenment: Edwards and Franklin', in William M. Shea and Peter A. Huff (eds.), *Knowledge and Belief in America: Enlightenment Traditions and Modern Religious Thought* (New York and Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1995), 198–9; Harry S. Stout, 'The Puritans and Edwards', in Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 142–59; Douglas A. Sweeney and Brandon G. Withrow, 'Jonathan Edwards: Continuator or Pioneer of Evangelical History?' in Michael A. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (eds.), *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 288.

standard definition.⁸² Bebbington's thesis is that Evangelicalism began in the 1730s, and was different from the thought associated with divines of the previous era. It has been suggested that one of the key features that differentiated seventeenth-century divines from their eighteenth-century counterparts was a lack of 'activism'. By this Bebbington means that Evangelicals of the later era actively strove to engage in cross-cultural missions by comparison to the family-centred missions of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritans.⁸³

Puritanism is meant to depict the thought and practises of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Calvinist divines who sought to reform the Church more extensively than the ecclesiastical restructuring that took place as a result of the Reformation. They were some of the most zealous Calvinists in Britain and America. Like all Calvinists, Puritans claimed that they were following the theological heritage of John Calvin in advocating the divine sovereignty of God and election. But they were a much more fervent brand of Calvinist in that they sought to purify the church in terms of worship and doctrine beyond the aspirations of many other divines.

The problem with the terms Evangelicalism and Puritanism, as John Coffey has recently discussed, is that they are not absolute. There were Christians like Richard Baxter and Philip Doddridge, who although fittingly dressed in Puritan garb, meet the requirements of what it means to be an Evangelical under the four-fold definition. Conversely, some Evangelicals like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards were in many ways no different from the divines of the previous century. Puritanism is especially problematic in that it was not a homogeneous movement and was a pejorative term associated primarily with Anglican clergymen.⁸⁴

⁸²Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2–19; Ditchfield, *Evangelical Revival*, 30; Timothy Larsen, 'Defining and Locating Evangelicalism', in Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–14.

⁸³Bebbington, 'Evangelical Christianity and the Enlightenment', 29–36.

⁸⁴John Coffey, 'Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition', in Michael A. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (eds.), *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 255–61.

While there are valid points that challenge the assumptions of Bebbington's thesis, Puritanism and Evangelicalism continue to be helpful terms. They differentiate between two schools of thought, from that of a largely sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Calvinistic movement, affiliated with men like Stephen Charnock, John Owen and Richard Sibbes, to the eighteenth-century revival known as Evangelicalism which was given new light by luminaries that included John Newton, John Wesley and Erskine. It is right to say that Puritanism as a term cannot be applied uniformly to all sixteenth- and seventeenth-century orthodox Calvinistic clergymen alike. Nevertheless, as Margo Todd has pointed out, there is a definite 'yes' to applying the term Puritan to individuals outside of the Church of England if considering the similarities in doctrinal beliefs and the 'hotness' of their zeal for Calvinism.⁸⁵ The 'brotherhood', as David George Mullan calls it, between English and Scottish divines of the pre-Enlightenment era was different from the Evangelical network established by Protestants in America, Britain and Europe.⁸⁶ The active participation in the transatlantic revival, the willingness to work with others outside their own denominational loyalties and the practical innovations of Evangelicals were distinctive features of this Christian faction.⁸⁷ For the purpose of simplifying this thesis, Puritans and Puritanism as a movement are identified with the individuals and the thought associated with this largely sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed movement, whereas Evangelicals and Evangelicalism are coupled with the proponents of the transdenominational Protestant movement which burgeoned in the early decades of the eighteenth century.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the significance of Erskine as an eighteenth-century Evangelical. Therefore, this study is not a biography, nor is it an

⁸⁵Margo Todd, 'The Problem of Scotland's Puritans', in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 174-88.

⁸⁶David George Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism: 1590-1638* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4-7, 13-44.

⁸⁷Coffey, 'Puritanism', 275-6.

intellectual biography. Erskine's theology is interesting and at times innovative. But it was not his thought that elevated him to the status of a key Evangelical figure – it was his role as a disseminator. In other words, it was the ideas that he propagated that gave Erskine his chief significance. Neither is this thesis a social history. The elements of Erskine's involvement in the social world of his day are included only in so far as they are relevant to the main argument of this thesis.

As previously noted, much ink has been spilt on the subject of the Enlightenment and its localised forms in Scotland, America and other parts of Europe. The present author has no intention of entering into the long-running debate on the time frame and the people who were involved in the wider European, American or Scottish Enlightenment. There is a concern, however, to argue that Erskine was an enlightened figure in the sense that he was a forward-looking man of letters who based his assumptions, not only on the Bible, but on reason drawn from empiricism. In his education, love of literature, epistemology and spirit of temperance, Erskine was no different from the Moderate literati of Scotland. The key indication that a person accepted enlightened values was an intention to embrace current thought and culture and to integrate it into one's beliefs and lifestyle.

The cultural environment of the eighteenth century that is connected with Erskine's thought has led this study to incorporate a wide variety of intellectual and social themes, many of which could constitute a thesis in themselves. He was a man of many pursuits and so it is helpful to explore these interests. The chapters have been designed to examine the primary strands in Erskine's life which explain the background, content, motives and extent of his role as a propagator of enlightened orthodox Calvinism. Erskine's decision to become a minister and his involvement in the Cambuslang and Kilsyth Revivals of 1742, the style and content of his preaching, his theological treatises, his opposition to John Wesley and Catholicism, his patronage of America and the extensiveness of his literary distribution are the themes examined.

There is sparse information on Erskine's childhood. Moncrieff's biography and Walter Macleod's introduction to Colonel John Erskine's journal remain the best sources for learning about Erskine's upbringing and ancestry. This limitation is why the second chapter begins with Erskine's education and desire to become a minister. The earliest records that relate to him begin here, which is a suitable entry point for this thesis. Conveniently, Erskine's education and aspirations to become a minister correlate with his role as a disseminator for it was in these early years as a student that he became involved with other religious figures in Britain, America and on the continent. It was on the foundation of his enlightened education that he built his ministry and theological convictions. The question addressed in this chapter is why a future Scottish laird, who was destined for a lucrative career at the bar, should choose the more modest office of a clergyman.

Chapters three and four examine the style and content of Erskine's sermons in order to understand how far he adopted Enlightenment tenets. Was he a polite preacher like the Moderate literati or was he following the ministerial tradition of the previous century? There is evidence that Erskine appreciated both the new rhetoric of the age and the theology of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divines. So how did he resolve the tension that existed between the teachings and style of the former era on the one hand and the emergence of the Scottish Enlightenment on the other? One brief note should be made on a section of material in chapter three. The acceptance of Stoicism, as a moral system with social implications, has been identified as one of the marks of enlightened mind and so Erskine's adherence to this ancient philosophy provides further evidence that he was a progressive thinker. A number of modern philosophers have written on the subject of Stoicism, and in more recent years, scholars have studied the implications of this system of thought on the general Enlightenment as well as its endemic manifestation in Scotland.⁸⁸ The

⁸⁸See, for example, David Allan's *Philosophy and Politics in Later Stuart Scotland: Neo-Stoicism, Culture and Ideology in an Age of Crisis, 1540–1690* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000) and his 'Reconciliation and Retirement in the Restoration Scottish Church: The Neo-Stoicism of Robert Leighton', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50 (1999), 251-78 and *Virtue, Learning and the*

argument that is presented in chapter three with respect to Stoic beliefs is in no way an exhaustive study of this classical philosophy, but rather is meant to place Erskine within his intellectual context as an enlightened thinker.

Erskine's five independent theological treatises are the subject of chapter five. Here, Erskine was willing to experiment with different ideas on the nature of the Mosaic and New Testament covenants, what it means to have faith, the reliability of natural religion as the means of determining the existence of God and how frequently one should practise communion. In these separate essays, Erskine demonstrated his logic as well as his philosophical and theological acumen. He was not simply repeating the ideas of other authors. Instead, he was interacting with the thought of some influential divines in order to put forth his own conclusions. The inclusion of Erskine's theology is meant to show his willingness to experiment with ideas and test his assumptions.

Chapter six explains the limits of Erskine's religious charity as an eighteenth-century Evangelical. The first part of the chapter looks at his involvement with John Wesley's ministry in Scotland and the latter half focuses on Erskine's view of Catholicism. The subject of John Wesley continues to inspire countless biographies, books and articles on his theology and social connections. Surprisingly, though, there is a paucity of work on his mission in Scotland. Furthermore, there has yet to be a satisfactory explanation of why Wesley's ministry was so weak in Scotland. Scholars have assumed that it was his Arminianism which was in conflict with Reformed Presbyterian beliefs which stalled Methodist growth, but as it has been argued here and more thoroughly in a forthcoming article in the *Journal of Religious History*, this

Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 185-216. See also John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1987); Gay, *The Enlightenment*; Ingrid Ann Merikoski, 'Christian Stoicism and Politeness: The Making of the Social Ethics of the Scottish Enlightenment', PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1999; Richard B. Sher, 'Professors of Virtue: The Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century', in M. A. Stewart (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 87-126; and M. A. Stewart, 'The Stoic Legacy in the Early Scottish Enlightenment', in Margaret Osler (ed.), *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 273-96.

was not the primary reason why Wesley was not successful in Scotland.⁸⁹ Erskine played a leading role in the tragedy that cast Wesley as the antagonist of Presbyterianism whose Methodist ministry in Scotland ended with stagnation in its final act. The anti-Wesleyan response by Erskine demonstrates the limits of his tolerance towards other belief systems.

The same ecumenical restraints and fears were present in Erskine's perception of Catholicism. But for Erskine his anti-Catholicism blended into the jaundiced general sentiments of 'papists' by other eighteenth-century British subjects. Erskine, however, distinguished himself in his anti-Catholic opinions because instead of basing his judgments on myths and hearsay, he had read profusely books in Britain, and especially from Europe, in order to justify his conclusions. Whereas other Scots held suspicions of Catholics that were based almost entirely on their Protestant heritage and superstitions, Erskine did research on this religious body and its 'secret emissaries', even though his conclusions were faulty.

Chapter seven displays his sympathy for America, viewed by him as a burgeoning godly territory for the growth of Evangelicalism. In the wake of the revivals in America and Britain in the 1730s and 1740s, he had established correspondences with numerous Americans, mostly other ministers. He encouraged theologians like Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins to write polemical works against perceived heretics and Erskine was a key propagator of Edwardseanism. The love that Erskine had for America was displayed in three pamphlets. Because he had already been corresponding for years with a number of American ministers who were connected with the transatlantic revival, he was sympathetic to the colonists' grievances against their mother country.

Chapter eight shows the breadth of Erskine's role as a propagator of Calvinism through literature that was sent to America, Britain and Europe. The subject of the

⁸⁹Jonathan Yeager, 'John Wesley's Conflict with James Hervey and Its Effects in Scotland', *Journal of Religious History* (forthcoming).

book trade in Scotland has led to some much needed articles and monographs in the past few years.⁹⁰ Although Richard Sher has written a massive work on the publishing world during the Scottish Enlightenment, there is more to be learned on this elusive subject, particularly on the involvement of Evangelicals in this enterprise. Part of the reason for this gap in historiography is that Evangelicals were mostly interested in producing religious tracts and books for the purpose of spreading the gospel message and so did not usually have the same drive as a David Hume or an Edward Gibbon to amass a fortune through literary sales. One of the difficulties with this chapter is that William and Mary Gray, the bookseller and publishing team that Erskine dealt with the most, do not have comparable manuscripts to those of other more prominent publishers and so this mother-and-father firm remains mysterious. There is a considerable collection of papers by William Creech, a leading Scottish Enlightenment publisher, but there is little to be found on Erskine's connections with him. The same is true for Archibald Constable, who became a chief publisher for Erskine at the end of the eighteenth century and into the initial years of the next century. The bulk of Constable's manuscripts relate to the authors that he dealt with in the years that followed Erskine's death and so there is not much documentation related to Erskine.⁹¹

Besides Erskine's published writings – pamphlets, sermons and theological dissertations – the primary sources for this study are his manuscripts, an assorted collection of writings catalogued in archives mostly in Scotland and America. 'He

⁹⁰See, for example, Alastair J. Mann, *The Scottish Book Trade, 1500 - 1720: Print Commerce and Print Control in Early Modern Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000); Alastair J. Mann, 'Embroidery to Enterprise: The Role of Women in the Book Trade of Early Modern Scotland', in Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle (eds.), *Women in Scotland, c. 1100 - c.1750* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999), 136-151; Richard B. Sher, 'Corporatism and Consensus in the Late Eighteenth-Century Book Trade: The Edinburgh Bookseller's Society in Comparative Perspective', *Book History* 1 (1998), 32-93; Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book*; Richard Sher, 'The Book in the Scottish Enlightenment', in Paul Wood (ed.), *The Culture of the Book in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Toronto: Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, 2000), 40-60; Warren McDougall, 'Scottish Books for America in the Mid-18th Century', in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds.), *Spreading the Word: The Distribution Networks of Print, 1550-1850* (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1990), 21-46.

⁹¹See the Creech and Constable Papers at NLS and Creech's papers at the Edinburgh Central Library.

never wrote well', was Moncreiff's assessment of Erskine's handwriting.⁹² This judgment can be verified for anyone who wishes to study Erskine's manuscripts. His penmanship was sloppy and his words in some cases are indistinguishable from what follows. A nineteenth-century biographer of one of Erskine's correspondents theorised that the Scottish minister wrote 'seemingly, with a trembling hand'.⁹³ Erskine himself admitted to having poor handwriting, which affected his later publications. He told William Creech that ever since the death of the Edinburgh printer Alexander Murray in 1781, 'none was so able to read my very bad hand'.⁹⁴ The general rule is that the older the manuscript, the more difficult it is to interpret Erskine's handwriting. I have done my best in transcribing over two hundred of his letters, incorporating key phrases and sentences in quotations that can be clearly determined and which contribute towards the main argument of the thesis. For the purposes of clarification, I have in most cases chosen to emend Erskine's spelling to modern usages, replacing words like 'severals' with several or 'afection' with affection. The flow of the text may now be read more easily than the alternative option of the frequent use of [sic].

The most significant collection of Erskine manuscripts is the John Ryland correspondence housed at Edinburgh University Library. The extremely fragile nature of these letters makes them challenging to decipher. Nonetheless, the wealth of the material in this resource is largely what made this thesis possible. A person studying Erskine's letters for personal information will be disappointed. George Marsden has commented in his biography of Jonathan Edwards, that the subjects of the Northampton minister's correspondence were not personal.⁹⁵ The same is true

⁹²*Erskine*, 17.

⁹³Alexander Gunn, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Henry Livingston, D.D., First Professor of Theology in the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North-America* (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1856), 169.

⁹⁴Erskine to William Creech, 12 February 1801, NLS, 682, ff. 46.

⁹⁵George M. Marsden, 'The Quest for the Historical Edwards: The Challenge of Biography', in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad*:

with Erskine. The Ryland letters are, however, useful in that they reveal some of the books that he sent and his reason for sending them. There are a few letters at the National Archives of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and New College Library in Edinburgh. But besides the Ryland letters, the best sources of manuscripts can be found in various university libraries and historical societies throughout New England.⁹⁶ In these letters as well, the overwhelming evidence points to Erskine's significance as being a disseminator of enlightened Evangelicalism.

Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 4.

⁹⁶See the bibliography.

Chapter Two

The Prospective Pastor

Before becoming the eminent doctor of divinity, minister of Old Greyfriars and leading figure in the Popular party in the Church of Scotland, Erskine was simply a young prospective laird who was destined for a lucrative career at the bar. According to a February 1803 article in the *Scots Magazine*, Erskine was born on 2 June 1721.¹ He resided at a house at Merlin's Wynd in Edinburgh, near the Tron Church. This was the primary residence of his father, John Erskine, the distinguished Professor of Municipal Law at Edinburgh University. When the professor married Margaret Melville, daughter of James Melville, second son of George, fourth Lord Melville in 1719, he and his family retreated to their country estate at Newbigging House in Carnock, Fife, for the summer months.² From the beginning of the eighteenth century, the principal heritor of Carnock was Colonel John Erskine, the professor's father and Dr Erskine's grandfather. The bulk of the estate of Kincardine, afterwards Carnock, was purchased by the colonel from his relatives, the Earls of Kincardine.³ Once the professor died in 1768, Erskine inherited the lands of Carnock, becoming the laird of this estate until the time of his death.

He received his education at Edinburgh University in the mid-1730s and, after taking the normal arts degree courses, matriculated into the school's law programme.

¹'Account of the Public Life and Character of the Late Dr Erskine of Edinburgh', *SM* 65 (February 1803), 75. There is some discrepancy on this date since Erskine did not even know the precise year in which he was born, believing it to be in June of 1720 or 1721. See *Erskine*, 13, and Ezra Stiles Diary Entry, 26 September 1785, ESP, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Ms Vault Stiles Itineraries, IV: 254m. In the parish records there is no account of Erskine's birth, but there is a listing for the birth and immediate death of an unnamed male baby who was born to John Erskine's father, the advocate, and buried on 24 January 1720. O.P.R. Births 685/001 0880 0092. With the birth and death of this child in January of 1720 it would have been impossible for Erskine to have been born in June of that same year, providing evidence that 1721 was his true birth date.

²J. M. Webster, *History of Carnock* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1938), 233.

³*Journal of the Hon. John Erskine of Carnock, 1683–1687*, ed. Walter Macleod (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1893), xxxi-xxxii.

At some point while he was studying law, he convinced his family to allow him to enrol in classes at the divinity hall with the intent of becoming a clergyman. This decision was unusual, since in eighteenth-century Scotland the office of the pastorate was normally occupied by those who did not have the means to pursue a career in law, medicine or the armed forces.⁴ The events of the early 1740s convinced him that the clerical profession would be far more rewarding than continuing along the road towards being a lawyer. This chapter examines the impetus for his decision to change career paths while considering the influence that his education had on his outlook as a future clergyman.

From a young age, Erskine was groomed by his family to become a polite, well educated landowner whose profession would be a barrister, not a minister.⁵ The two leading influences in this regard were his father and his grandfather. Although the professor and colonel had studied law, the father at Edinburgh for his undergraduate degree and possibly at Leiden for law, and the grandfather under Professor Johannes van Muyden at Utrecht, they were entirely different types of people.⁶ Moncreiff described the colonel as having an irritable temper, ‘easily excited by common occurrences, but so quickly subsiding, as to be equally removed from ungenerous hostility, and vindicative [sic] resentments’.⁷ On one occasion, the colonel, who suffered from asthma later in his life, blamed the magistrates of Culross where he resided, for the irritating smoke billowing from the nearby kelp burning. He sent orders to have the fire put out, but the magistrates refused. The colonel then decided to put out the fire himself, marshalling his grandson (the later Rev. John Erskine) at age fourteen to rush forward with the colonel’s sword in hand. The

⁴See, for instance, Alexander Carlyle’s experience in choosing his profession. Alexander Carlyle, *Anecdotes and Characters of the Times*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 26–8.

⁵*Erskine*, 27.

⁶*John Erskine of Carnock, 1683*, xxiii.

⁷*Erskine*, 5.

magistrates proceeded to capture the older gentleman and his grandson when the colonel changed sentiments and replied, ‘This is all nonsense, gentlemen, and we are all in the wrong. Come along to the inn, and we shall all dine together, and forget this.’ The conclusion to the story was that the colonel treated them to ‘the best dinner which the inn afforded’, easily mending the previous insult.⁸

Erskine’s grandfather seemed to enjoy a good fight. He was constantly involved in litigation due to the debts that were previously attached to the Carnock estate of which, ‘from long habit, he became at last very fond’, since it was a means of ‘amusement’ for him.⁹ The colonel’s son, on the other hand, did his best to avoid conflict. ‘Though a sound lawyer’, John Ramsay of Ochertyre remarked, ‘no man was more averse to lawsuits or at greater pains to recommend peace and conciliation to those that sought his counsel.’¹⁰ As opposed to the colonel, the professor was a man of the ‘sweetest, most inoffensive disposition, peace and quiet were his darling luxuries’.¹¹ Since Erskine’s father was one of Edinburgh’s leading advocates, and his grandfather had been trained in law, it was presumed that Erskine would follow a similar path that led to the study of law.

To prepare him for this predetermined profession, Erskine entered Edinburgh University, where he enjoyed one of the finest enlightened educations in the country at that time. There is some discrepancy on the precise year that he began his studies, and when exactly he transferred from the arts degree to the divinity programme. Moncreiff acknowledged this dilemma, but offered no solution.¹² The author of the *Scots Magazine* article on Erskine’s life stated that his subject matriculated at Edinburgh in 1734, as a thirteen-year-old, which would have been the customary age

⁸*Erskine*, 488-9.

⁹John Ramsay, *Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Alexander Allardyce, vol. 1 (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1888), 144–5.

¹⁰Ramsay, *Scotland*, vol. 2, 130.

¹¹Ramsay, *Scotland*, vol. 1, 145.

¹²*Erskine*, 14–17.

to enter college at that time.¹³ Erskine, however, wrote that he first became acquainted with Robertson in John Ker's humanities class in 1737, which was traditionally one of the first courses in the arts degree.¹⁴ To complicate matters, Dugald Stewart, William Robertson's biographer, wrote that the Moderate leader began his university education at the end of 1733.¹⁵ In the matriculation records there is evidence that a 'Johannis Erskine' attended Ker's course in 1735 with William Robertson, which implies that Erskine might have been mistaken when he said that he first met Robertson in the 1737 humanities class.¹⁶

The traditional schedule for students to follow was to take the humanities class in the first year, followed by Greek, logic, natural philosophy and moral philosophy in the subsequent years. But it was common at that time for brighter students to pass over individual classes, such as Greek, and to bypass graduating from the arts degree altogether before going on to study divinity or law.¹⁷ Erskine generally followed the normal sequence of classes, but he also took electives such as Charles Mackie's courses on Roman antiquities and history between the years of 1735 and 1737.¹⁸ Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing if Erskine ever graduated from the arts degree or when he began studying law since the university records at this time were

¹³'Account', 75–6.

¹⁴John Erskine, 'The Agency of God in Human Greatness', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 262.

¹⁵Dugald Stewart, *Biographical Memoirs, of Adam Smith, LL. D. of William Robertson, D. D. and of Thomas Reid, D. D. Read Before the Royal Society of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: W. Creech, Bell and Bradfute, 1811), 156.

¹⁶Alexander Morgan, *Edinburgh University Matriculation Roll: Arts, Law, Divinity*, vol. 1, unpublished records, EUL, 1933–4, 204; 'A Short Account of the University of Edinburgh, the Present Professors in It, and the Several Parts of Learning Taught by Them', *SM* 3 (1741), 373–4. Ker offered two courses, his 'usual college', which commenced on the first of October and ended in July or August, and his private class, which started on the first of November and finished the first of June.

¹⁷Alexander Grant, *The Story of the University of Edinburgh*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1884), 263–79.

¹⁸Charles Mackie, 'Alphabetical List of Those Who Attended the Prelections on History and Roman Antiquities, from 1719–1744', EUL, Dc.5.24:203. See also L.W. Sharp, 'Charles Mackie, the First Professor of History at Edinburgh University', *Scottish Historical Review* 41 (1962), 23–45.

not entirely accurate, nor complete.¹⁹ A detailed account of Erskine's programme at Edinburgh University is not important other than to note that his studies commenced at a time when the curriculum had changed to one that was grounded on the teachings of the leading proponents of the Age of Reason, as opposed to the previous foundation laid by scholasticism.

The university underwent a profound transformation between the end of the seventeenth century and the early decades of the eighteenth century. The beginning of this reconstruction was marked by the removal in 1708 of the regent system, which placed a group of students in the care of a single teacher who taught his pupils a range of subjects. The catalyst of this change was the new principal, William Carstares, and his admiration for the Dutch university system. With the regent system gone, individual specialists, as full-time professors of their respective disciplines, were implemented, beginning with a chair of mathematics and a full-time Greek professor.²⁰ Throughout the eighteenth century, there was pressure by the social elite on the Scottish universities to adapt to the pervasive thought of the Enlightenment, possibly to counteract the perception of Scotland by its English neighbours as an inferior and backward country.²¹ Only those professors who were willing to keep abreast of this new wave of thinking were recipients of these coveted faculty posts.²² Because of this reform, there was a marked difference in the curriculum, even from

¹⁹Alexander Bower, *A History of the University of Edinburgh*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, 1830), 26. See also the *Catalogue of the Graduates in the Faculties of Arts, Divinity, and Law, of the University of Edinburgh, Since Its Foundation* (Edinburgh: Neill and Company, 1858) and Morgan, *Edinburgh University Matriculation Roll*.

²⁰D. B. Horn, *A Short History of the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), 40–1; Peter Jones, 'The Scottish Professoriate and the Polite Academy, 1720–46', in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 91.

²¹Roger L. Emerson, 'Scottish Universities in the Eighteenth Century, 1690–1800', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 168 (1977), 465–6.

²²Emerson, 'Scottish Universities', 454.

the 1720s to the 1730s, in that the latter years had in place many professors who were more sympathetic to the epistemology of the new age.²³

These new, progressive instructors indoctrinated Edinburgh students into the ways of polite cultural and moral responsibility for the benefit of society.²⁴ An example was the school's professor of logic and rhetoric, John Stevenson, who replaced Aristotle's teachings with Locke's.²⁵ Stevenson, though assessed as an 'intellectual lightweight' by one scholar, was admired by many of his students, including Robertson and Erskine.²⁶ Besides Stevenson, John Pringle, who occupied the chair of moral philosophy from 1734-45, was an important facilitator of Enlightenment thought at the university.²⁷ In an article in the *Scots Magazine* for February 1803, the author wrote that the content of Pringle's lectures 'was not that scholastic jargon, which for ages had usurped the name and place of logic, but the philosophy of Bacon and Locke'.²⁸ This teacher also employed the texts of Cicero, Marcus Aurelius and Pufendorf because they were authors sympathetic to Stoicism, and useful for teaching young learned minds to be content with their lot in life, to work hard in practical measures for the greater good of society and to become loyal subjects of the current political regime.²⁹ Erskine explained that Pringle's lectures

²³Roger L. Emerson, 'The Context of the Scottish Enlightenment', in Alexander Broadie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19.

²⁴Jones, 'Scottish Professoriate', 99.

²⁵Horn, *University of Edinburgh*, 48; Wilbur S. Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 273; *SM* 3 (1741), 373.

²⁶Jones, 'Scottish Professoriate', 91-2; Erskine, 'Agency', 268; Stewart, *Biographical Memoirs*, 157-8.

²⁷Richard B. Sher, 'Professors of Virtue: The Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century', in M. A. Stewart (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 88.

²⁸'Account', 76.

²⁹Sher, 'Virtue', 101; *SM* 3 (1741), 373; Kari Saastamoinen, 'Pufendorf and the Stoic Model of Natural Law', in Hans W. Blom and Laurens C. Winkel (eds.), *Grotius and the Stoa* (Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 257-69. See also John Pringle, 'Lectures from Cicero', 1741, EUL, MSS 74D.

‘taught what dispositions and conduct were good and just, wise and honourable’.³⁰ At its basic level, the moral philosophy class was meant to mould students into polite, enlightened, gentlemen who would adopt moral and religious principles that were conducive to Whig-Presbyterianism.³¹ Even though in 1690 the Scottish universities were teaching scholasticism in Latin, by the end of the eighteenth century, English lectures on empiricism and inductive reasoning were the standard.³²

The influence of this education on Erskine can be seen in an essay written in 1737 for John Stevenson’s logic class. This professor kept a bound volume of the best student essays, thirty-seven in total, from 1737 to 1750, which demonstrated the acumen of these impressionable young men. These papers were read before the class, and included contributions made by some of the foremost aspiring minds of the Scottish Enlightenment, including William Robertson; the judge and historian David Dalrymple, later Lord Hailes; the politician Gilbert Elliot of Minto and John Erskine.³³ Erskine’s thesis was entitled, *De recta rationis usa legitimo, sive de libertate cogitandi* (On the legitimate use of right reason, or on liberty of thinking), which demonstrates the extent to which his education led him to adopt the tenets of Enlightenment thought.³⁴

He began the thesis by observing that although ‘there is nothing which inspires the human mind with greater pleasure and joy, than the enquiry into and contemplation of truth’, in reality ‘only very few... have completely given themselves over to learning, and turned their enthusiasms genuinely to the investigation of truth’.³⁵ His basic grievance was that too many people had accepted opinions given to

³⁰Erskine, ‘Agency’, 267.

³¹Sher, ‘Virtue’, 88.

³²Emerson, ‘Scottish Universities’, 453.

³³Jones, ‘Scottish Professoriate’, 99.

³⁴‘Account’, 76.

³⁵For this section, see ‘Notes from Lectures’, John Erskine’s Essay for John Stevenson, 30 April 1737, EUL, Dc.4.54. I am indebted to Dr Robin Sowerby, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English Studies at the University of Stirling, for translating Erskine’s Latin essay into English.

them without examining their reliability. He proposed examining truth using what he called ‘free thinking’, which he defined as the ‘legitimate use of right reason’. By this he meant the freedom of the mind from preconceived ideas and from ‘vicious emotions’ so that one ‘may judge the proposition true or false according to the strength or weakness of the evidence’.³⁶ On this issue of the freedom of the mind, Erskine was no different from many other enlightened literati by advocating what Alexander Broadie judges to be an essential feature of the Enlightenment, namely, the demand that individuals should think for themselves.³⁷ Borrowing from the philosophy of Locke, Erskine encouraged weighing out information ‘without any favour of authority or pre-judgments’ so that nothing but ‘proofs’ should determine what is reasonable. Even though the more ‘weak-minded’ might think that individuals ‘ought not to rely upon our senses and our judgment in the enquiry and the weighing of truth’, Erskine’s thesis sought to demonstrate the necessity of reason in religion, while at the same time undermining the effects of emotions and simple testimony as reliable evidence.³⁸

It was God’s will when he created mankind, Erskine contended, that reason should be employed for epistemological purposes. He asked, ‘For what reason, then, has God dignified us with an extraordinary and pre-eminent faculty? Certainly not so that we may perceive things through the eyes of others and in a blind impulse greedily seize upon whatever pleases us with some show of authority; but so that we may use it so to speak with a more certain and better light’ in order to ‘distinguish the true from

³⁶‘Notes from Lectures’, John Erskine’s Essay for John Stevenson, 30 April 1737, EUL, Dc.4.54. See also Michael Heyd, *‘Be Sober and Reasonable’: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Brill: Leiden, 1995), 177-8. Erskine’s view of enthusiasm was in many ways no different than Locke’s.

³⁷Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 1, 14-20.

³⁸‘Notes from Lectures’, John Erskine’s Essay for John Stevenson, 30 April 1737, EUL, Dc.4.54.

the false'.³⁹ In his infinite wisdom, God has entrusted each person with the ability to wield reason, from the greatest to the least.

God has shared the distinction of reason not with the fathers of the church, not with the Roman Popes, not with civil magistrates, alone... But he has dignified all with the same endowments and faculties and has arranged it that each man should use his own judgment and from the light of nature and experience draw a notion of what is eternal.⁴⁰

In his paper, Erskine was advocating an enlightened form of orthodoxy, whereby God supernaturally inspired one's ability to use reason in order to test the truth of religion.

If there was any doubt that Erskine was a child of the Enlightenment who favoured the empiricism of Locke over and against his scholastic predecessors, this uncertainty is laid to rest in this essay. The young scholar depicted Aristotle as the 'oppressor' of 'liberty of judgment' who lorded over the sciences 'with almost dictatorial power' and who fed men 'scholastic fodder' so that the 'most absurd and ridiculous opinions were received throughout the whole world'. There was no hesitation in naming who should be venerated for improving the study of knowledge. Pierre Gassendi, Francis Bacon, René Descartes and John Locke were those who had 'shaken off the Aristotelian yoke' and inaugurated 'liberty of thinking' so that 'the sciences gradually moved forward and the mysteries of philosophy' were 'more penetrated'.⁴¹ It was, therefore, one's duty to pick up where these great men had left off and to continue to advance religious truth using enlightened means.

Key to Erskine's thesis was that emotionalism or opinions alone were not suitable proofs for demonstrating knowledge. This was because 'vicious emotions...depress the spirit and weigh it down and impede our reasoning from exercising its full force and potential'. These unrestrained passions were believed to

³⁹'Notes from Lectures', John Erskine's Essay for John Stevenson, 30 April 1737, EUL, Dc.4.54.

⁴⁰'Notes from Lectures', John Erskine's Essay for John Stevenson, 30 April 1737, EUL, Dc.4.54.

⁴¹'Notes from Lectures', John Erskine's Essay for John Stevenson, 30 April 1737, EUL, Dc.4.54.

impair one's senses due to the pollution of sin. Because 'men come to the examination of the Christian religion given over to pleasures and subject to the power and domination of their own lusts', they elevate their own sinful desires over rational judgment in order to refute orthodoxy. The solution was that opinions needed to be weighed by reason and should not be accepted otherwise. For, 'in all our investigations into truth an examination must be made with a mind free from prejudice and preconceived opinions. We ought to consider what is said not who says it, and all received opinions which very often hold a prominent place in our minds must be eradicated.' Care must also be taken to avoid being captivated by eloquent speech or 'ridiculing satire'. Known offenders of this rule 'handle matters that are most sacred and serious in a light and jocular manner, they expound them with mockery, intersperse them with audacious jokes and are keen to confute arguments', not with sound logic, 'but with light sallies of wit'.⁴² It is clear from this essay that Erskine was influenced by the Enlightenment, using reason to protect Christianity from being dependent on emotionalism or simple opinion alone.

If Erskine was training to be a polite, enlightened lawyer, the question remains: why did he become a minister? The answer seems to be that he had wanted to study theology for a number of years, possibly before entering college, but was apprehensive of disappointing his father and grandfather. As Moncreiff stated, for Erskine, 'theology and practical religion had always interested him more than any other subjects' so that 'the farther he advanced, his inclination became stronger to devote his life to the service of the church'. But, his 'respect' for his father and grandfather and 'his wish to gratify them' led him to study law prior to divinity.⁴³ With his father being appointed in 1737 as the new Professor of Municipal Law,

⁴²'Notes from Lectures', John Erskine's Essay for John Stevenson, 30 April 1737, EUL, Dc.4.54.

⁴³*Erskine*, 28, 27.

Erskine would have been obliged to continue his education under him, making it more difficult to go against his family's wishes.⁴⁴

The events that convinced this wary young man finally to have the courage to become a pastor were the Cambuslang and Kilsyth Revivals of 1742. Since 1731, William McCulloch had been the parish minister for Cambuslang, a town just outside Glasgow.⁴⁵ From the encouraging reports that he had been reading of the Great Awakening of 1734-5, under Jonathan Edwards's ministry in Northampton, Massachusetts, McCulloch began praying for a similar revival to take place in Scotland. By February 1741, he began speaking for a year on the subject of regeneration.⁴⁶ In the summer of that same year, the famous Anglican itinerant, George Whitefield, came to Scotland and entered upon a thirteen-week preaching tour, where he spoke to vast crowds.⁴⁷ When Whitefield preached in Glasgow, fourteen of McCulloch's parishioners travelled there to hear him. The shoemaker, Ingram More, and the weaver, Robert Bowman, heard Whitefield and returned to Cambuslang. In January 1742 they went door-to-door, collecting names for a petition to have McCulloch give an additional weekly lecture. Some ninety heads of families, over half the total households in the parish, signed this petition and so McCulloch added a Thursday lecture to his weekly schedule.⁴⁸ On 18 February 1742, when McCulloch was preaching from Jeremiah 23:6, many men and women in the service

⁴⁴Bower, *History of the University of Edinburgh*, vol. 2, 197.

⁴⁵Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival: The Scottish Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 29.

⁴⁶James Robe, *Narratives of the Extraordinary Work of the Spirit of God, at Cambuslang, Kilsyth, &c. Begun 1742* (Glasgow: Printed by David Niven, 1790), 2.

⁴⁷Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 101.

⁴⁸Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 101-5; Robe, *Narratives*, 3; Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1973), 54.

began to weep, with over fifty people crowding into the manse after the service for spiritual counselling.⁴⁹ This was the start of the famous ‘Cambuslang Wark’.

The revival peaked during the summer of 1742, when the Cambuslang parish offered an unprecedented two communion services within the span of only two months, the first in July and the second in August.⁵⁰ With the rapid growth of the revival in the west of Scotland underway, McCulloch wrote to Whitefield on 28 April 1742, begging him for assistance. At this time, the estimate was that some 300 people were now awakened.⁵¹ After preaching in London in May, Whitefield returned to Scotland on 3 June, and on 6 July 1742 he entered Cambuslang and began preaching. The Anglican spoke again on Saturday 10 July to several thousand people. Erskine was there and offered his own perspective of the scene: ‘I went to Cambuslang on Saturday. The place where their tent was, the most commodious for hearing ever I saw. Tis much in the form of an Amphitheatre. It was reckoned there were 20,000 there that day, but I’m certain a voice near as good as Mr Whitefield’s could have reached a greater number had they been there.’⁵² The next day, communion Sunday, people sat tirelessly for a seventeen-hour session of sermons on a local ‘brae’ by preachers that included Whitefield and the Edinburgh minister Alexander Webster, whom Erskine and his friend James Hall compared in ability to Martin Luther.⁵³

The communicants in particular were deeply affected, as Erskine reported, with ‘several of them melted into tears’. The report from Erskine was that Whitefield

⁴⁹Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 110.

⁵⁰For the history of such Scottish sacramental seasons, see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

⁵¹Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 112; Robe, *Narratives*, 4.

⁵²Erskine to Thomas Prince?, 17 July 1742, JEL.

⁵³Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, 112; Erskine to James Hall, 15 July 1743, JEL. For Hall’s admiration of Webster, see James Hall, *Meditations and Letters of a Pious Youth Lately Deceas’d, to Which Are Prefix’d, Reflections on His Death and Character, by a Friend in the Country* (Edinburgh: Printed by T. Lumisden and J. Robertson, 1746), 18.

preached from Phil. 2:5 on Monday ‘and when he was insisting on the devotion, humility, resignation &c. of Christ... pressing his hearers to examine their own hearts... about 30 were so much affected that they could not restrain themselves from loud outcries’. Webster then preached from Phil. 4:19, which by then ‘the crying pretty much ceased’. Later that evening, Erskine entered McCulloch’s dining room where ‘ere I was a quarter of an hour there’ when ‘about 20 were brought in under the deepest distress’. From the young observer’s perspective, ‘It was impossible for any that saw them to doubt the reality of their concern... What they seemed most affected with was the sin of unbelief, and a sense of the hardness and perverseness of their hearts. Some of them were so over poured with grief that they could not speak.’⁵⁴ At the end of this initial communion celebration, McCulloch tallied that around 1,700 people had taken the sacrament and that between 20,000 and 30,000 people had attended.⁵⁵

From the success of this first service, a second was proposed for the same summer by Webster. Despite the ‘extraordinary’ request for two communion seasons to be held in one summer, on 15 August of the same year another celebration was held at Cambuslang.⁵⁶ The crowds at this service seemed to surpass those of the previous service. Estimates were in the range of 30,000 to 50,000 people, a significant gathering given that the population of nearby Glasgow was only about 17,000 in 1740.⁵⁷ Many of those awakened at these services were females. Of the 110 converts interviewed by McCulloch, seventy-five were women compared to only thirty-five

⁵⁴Erskine to Thomas Prince?, 17 July 1742, JEL.

⁵⁵Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 114–15.

⁵⁶Robe, *Narratives*, 33.

⁵⁷Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 119. For population figures of Glasgow and the surrounding areas, see also Ian D. Whyte, ‘Urbanisation in Eighteenth-Century Scotland’, in T. M. Devine and J. R. Young (eds.), *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999), 181; T. M. Devine, ‘Urbanisation’, in T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (eds.), *People and Society in Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1988), 35; David Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2002), 83.

men.⁵⁸ People flocked to Cambuslang from miles around – Edinburgh, Kilmarnock, Glasgow and Irvine – and some even journeyed from England and Ireland.⁵⁹

Whitefield was perhaps the best known of the preachers at Cambuslang, but he should not be given sole credit for the success of the revival, for he was only one of a handful of others who served the masses there.⁶⁰ John Maclaurin and John Gillies of Glasgow, James Robe of Kilsyth and Alexander Webster of Edinburgh, were included among the speakers.⁶¹ Further, from Ned Landsman's research on those interviewed as undergoing a conversion experience, most did not even mention the influence of any one particular minister. Scripture references, especially those in the Psalms, were reported as having the greatest effect on them.⁶² Nonetheless, Whitefield had a commanding presence wherever he preached, and of all the clergymen who delivered sermons on the brae, he was certainly the most controversial.

Like many other Evangelicals in Britain and America, Erskine championed the ministry of the 'Grand Itinerant'.⁶³ In his support, Erskine represented a typical Evangelical at this time – someone who pressed for religious unity in order to ensure that the transatlantic revival of the 1730s and 1740s would continue to thrive.⁶⁴ He

⁵⁸T. C. Smout, 'Born Again at Cambuslang: New Evidence on Popular Religion and Literacy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Past and Present* 97 (1982), 115–16. Smout insists that there were 110 rather than Fawcett's 106.

⁵⁹Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 119–20.

⁶⁰Alexander Webster, *Divine Influence: The True Spring of the Extraordinary Work at Cambuslang and Other Places in the West of Scotland*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Printed by T. Lumisden and J. Robertson, 1742), 14.

⁶¹Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 120.

⁶²Ned Landsman, 'Evangelists and Their Hearers: Popular Interpretation of Revivalist Preaching in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Journal of British Studies* 28 (1989), 128–49.

⁶³*The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon*, vol. 1 (London: William Edward Painter, Strand, 1844), 183–4.

⁶⁴For the common bond among Evangelicals, see Ned C. Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740–1775', in John Dwyer and Richard B. Sher (eds.), *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1993), 194–209; David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005); Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*; and Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

rejoiced that the advocates of the Revival ‘all... discover the sincerest Love to all others who bear the Image of Christ, notwithstanding Difference in Opinion in lesser Matters’. This was evident to him in places like New England, where Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Independents and other denominations had ‘joined Hand in Hand for promoting Religion’.⁶⁵ Since Whitefield’s transatlantic ministry formed a bridge between the revivals in Britain and America, and was endorsed by many of the Evangelical clergymen in the colonies, Erskine joined the others in vindicating the Anglican’s ministry against the attacks of the anti-revivalists.⁶⁶ A letter reached the hands of William Cooper of Boston, saying that Erskine had been corresponding for months ‘with several of those who are called by way of reproach Whitefield’s Converts’. Erskine concluded that, regarding these people, ‘there is no evidence of pure and undefiled religion’. Instead of lapsing into old vices, their former ‘pursuits are quitted, the most violent passions subdued, and every imagination of the heart brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ... Sin and a want of the sense of God’s favour are the evils about which they are most concerned, and the flourishing of religion in their own hearts and in all around them the chief springs of their pleasure’.⁶⁷ To some, Whitefield was a blessing to the spread of the gospel, not a bane.

But while the Anglican was perceived by Erskine as a spiritual hero, William Robertson, and many of the other young Moderate literati were not convinced of the integrity of the southern preacher.⁶⁸ When Erskine and Robertson were in their final years at Edinburgh University, Moncreiff claimed that Erskine ‘zealously defended

⁶⁵Erskine, *Signs of the Times Consider’d* (Edinburgh: Printed by T. Lumisden and J. Robertson, 1742), 15.

⁶⁶Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England’s Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 151; Susan Durden, ‘Transatlantic Communications and Literature in the Religious Revivals, 1735–1745’, PhD Dissertation, University of Hull, 1978, 78.

⁶⁷Erskine to William Cooper, 28 Jan 1743, JEL.

⁶⁸*Church*, 31.

the character of Mr Whitefield' against Robertson's sceptical opinion of the so-called 'enthusiastic' minister.⁶⁹ 'You know there is a set at the divinity hall who are very free in passing forth jokes on whatever looks like serious religion', Erskine wrote to another fellow Edinburgh student, 'even tho' it should be recommended by the Professor himself.'⁷⁰ The debate between Erskine and Robertson on this subject was so fierce that it caused the dissolution of the literary society of which they were members, and created personal tensions between these two normally amicable personalities.⁷¹ Erskine's support for Whitfield was for life and the former even went as far as to invite the Anglican to preach in his parish church at Kirkintilloch, which led to admonition from the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr.⁷²

Whitefield's style of preaching bordered on the dramatic and so tended to cater to the more impressionable listeners in the audience.⁷³ As a result, the Scottish clergymen were not entirely comfortable with the emotional outbursts of a type that the Anglican had grown accustomed to seeing when people were awakened. But at the same time, the Presbyterian clergy maintained that many of these public manifestations were from the Lord, and not simply unrestrained enthusiasm. The Scottish minister Alexander Webster upheld the authenticity of the conversions in his 1742 *Divine Influence*, which was considered by Erskine to be the definitive answer to the opponents of the revival.⁷⁴ The bodily outbursts at the revival paled by comparison to the lives that were changed. 'When Opposers ascribe this Work to Fancy and Whim', Webster proclaimed, 'they consider it as consisting wholly in

⁶⁹Erskine, 99.

⁷⁰Erskine to James Hall, 15 July 1743, JEL.

⁷¹Erskine, 99–101.

⁷²See *A Fair and Impartial Account of the Debate in the Synod of Glasgow and Air* (Edinburgh: Printed by Thomas Lumisden, 1748) and Erskine to Thomas Foxcroft, 14 February 1749, TFP.

⁷³On Whitefield, see Harry S. T. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991).

⁷⁴Erskine, *Signs of the Times*, 3.

Impressions, irrational Fears, and delusive Joy.’ Critics ‘have forgot its certain Fruits and Effects, Change of Nature, and Renovation of Life’.⁷⁵ Some of the ‘Crying, Faintings, Tremblings, and other such like bodily Agitations’ that reportedly went on at Cambuslang were also justified by Erskine. He asked, ‘what is more ordinary than to see Concern about worldly Things, when sudden or violent, produce the same Effects’? ‘And is there any Absurdity in supposing that the inward Concern about Religion may be so deep, that in some it must needs have a Vent by Cries, Groans, or Tremblings’?⁷⁶ It seemed only natural for those who had been touched by God’s Spirit to vocalise their feelings.

The emotionalism present, however, was not deemed to be evidence that a person had been spiritually born again. This view was consistent with Erskine’s earlier Latin thesis for Stevenson’s class in which the young student had argued against unreasonable ‘vicious emotions’. Those who ‘pretend to assert’ that they are ‘persevering in religion’ are not necessarily ‘real converts’.⁷⁷ It was believed that ‘there may be foolish virgins, mixed with the wise... Tares may so nearly resemble the wheat, that it may be impossible to know the one from the other, till the Lord of the harvest make the distinction.’⁷⁸ Despite these suspicions, however, Erskine spoke against ‘entertaining harsh sentiments of particular persons, whose experience seems scriptural’. Erskine had no problem concluding that the revival was ‘the Lord’s doing’.⁷⁹ The challenge for him and the other ministers was to ensure that the consensus from outsiders would be that the ‘Cambuslang Wark’ was orderly and rational, rather than chaotic and ‘enthusiastic’.

⁷⁵Webster, *Divine Influence*, 20.

⁷⁶Erskine, *Signs of the Times*, 28.

⁷⁷Erskine to Robe, 25 April 1748 in Robe, *Narratives*, 282.

⁷⁸Erskine to Robe, 25 April 1748 in Robe, *Narratives*, 282.

⁷⁹Erskine to Robe, 25 April 1748 in Robe, *Narratives*, 283.

News of the awakening in McCulloch's parish church led to other subsequent revivals in Scotland. John Hamilton, a pastor of the Barony in Glasgow, wrote to Thomas Prince of Boston on 13 September 1742 with news on the revival, which was included in the New Englander's *Christian History* magazine for 1743. The article reported that 'upwards of two Thousand Persons [were] awakened' in the towns of Calder, Kilsyth and Cumbernauld. Maclaurin's account was also included in Prince's magazine for 1744. The former wrote on 9 August 1743 that the areas around Cambuslang, Kilsyth, St Ninians, Gargunnoch and Muthil were the most affected. Besides the places mentioned, Maclaurin spoke of the spiritual renewal taking place at Torryburn and Carnock, parishes that were included in the Erskine family patronage.⁸⁰

The revival at Kilsyth was second only to that at Cambuslang in terms of the number of people attending. James Robe went to Cambuslang to preach on 12 May and when he returned to Kilsyth on 16 May, he pleaded for his parishioners to turn to Christ, which resulted in 'An extraordinary power of the Spirit from on high'. The effect was that 'Many cried out, and 'not only women; but some strong and stout hearted young men, and some betwixt forty and fifty'.⁸¹ Whitefield also preached there and wrote in a letter on 15 June 1742 that some 10,000 people had heard him. Even though Robe spearheaded this movement as the parish minister of Kilsyth, other clergymen assisted him, including Thomas Gillespie, John Maclaurin and William McCulloch. Just as Cambuslang had arranged for two communions to be held within a few months, Kilsyth made preparations for the Lord's Supper to be held on 11 July (the same day as the first communion at Cambuslang) and on the first Sunday of October. There were some 1,500 communicants at this second service alone.⁸²

⁸⁰Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 124–5.

⁸¹Robe, *Narratives*, 75.

⁸²Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 130–1.

Speaking of the first communion season at Kilsyth, Arthur Fawcett states that ‘there is no record of anything unusual at this time’.⁸³ But there was an unusual awakening at Kilsyth in July; Erskine was there and left a fairly detailed record of this event. On 9 July, Robe had told his young friend that already some 200 people had been awakened and of those ‘30 had been touched the week before, and 25 that week’. Thomas Gillespie, ‘our minister at Carnock’, as Erskine referred to his grandfather’s parish minister, went to Kilsyth on Monday 5 July with the intention of staying only a couple of days, before travelling on to Cambuslang. Due to the ‘uncommon melting among the people’ during his Monday sermon, however, Gillespie ‘thought it his duty to stay still and assist Mr Robe in dealing with the people’. According to Erskine, five people from the Kilsyth parish were awakened by that sermon, and eight more the following day. Gillespie preached again the next day on Tuesday from Matt. 22:4, exhorting the audience ‘on the dreadful condition of such as were not espoused to Christ’.⁸⁴ Although at first ‘there was little commotion’, when Gillespie explained how Christ was willing to accept even the ‘vilest soul there present’, a dramatic change in the crowd occurred: ‘Numbers were melted in tears, and an unusual concern appeared on almost every face in the congregation.’⁸⁵ Seeing the minister of the colonel’s parish church preach with such vigour must have made a lasting impression on this future Scottish Evangelical leader, whose consistent summer residence was Carnock.⁸⁶

After travelling to Cambuslang, Erskine returned to Kilsyth on Tuesday 13 July, this time with Alexander Webster and Robert Traill, probably the later Church of Scotland minister and professor at Glasgow University. When they arrived at the

⁸³Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 131.

⁸⁴Erskine to Thomas Prince ?, 17 July 1742, JEL.

⁸⁵Erskine to Thomas Prince ?, 17 July 1742, JEL.

⁸⁶J. M. Webster, *History of Carnock* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1938), 233.

parish church, Maclaurin had just finished preaching and the congregation was now singing its final Psalm. According to Erskine, ‘the Reader’s voice was almost drowned with the cries of those in distress’.⁸⁷ The following day, Gillespie preached on Mal. 4:2 and Webster from Eph. 1:7. The result was that there was another ‘uncommon melting in the congregation’. Erskine was so dumbfounded by what he saw there that he claimed that it would be ‘impossible to any but an eye witness to frame a notion of what I saw in that blessed place’. ‘The best direction I can give’, he advised, was to ‘read over those prophecies, that relate to the plentiful effusion of the spirit in the latter days, and from them attempt to frame some idea of it.’ What particularly impressed him was the role of the parish ministers in the Kilsyth Revival, especially the ‘affection the people discovered’ for Thomas Gillespie. When the Carnock minister left Robe’s house, Erskine exclaimed, ‘I believe a hundred had him by the hand; and as he was riding home with us, he was frequently stopped by those to whom his labours had been blessed.’⁸⁸ Rather than viewing the pastorate as a lowly position, Erskine was amazed at the influence that such a person could have in people’s lives. These scenes must have left more than a ephemeral impression on the young student since he wrote his 1742 pamphlet, *The Signs of the Times*, suggesting that the revivals in New England and the west of Scotland were ‘a prelude of the glorious things promised to the church in the latter ages’.⁸⁹ This postmillennial optimism, or confidence in a future Golden Age of Christian prosperity that would lead to Christ’s return, however, was simply a response to the events that he had seen, rather than a reflection of his interest in eschatology.

The revivals in Scotland were connected with a series of spiritual awakenings in the Netherlands in the 1740s and 1750s. Hugh Kennedy, a minister at the Scots Church at Rotterdam, joyfully received a copy of Robe’s *Narrative of the Work at*

⁸⁷Erskine to Thomas Prince ?, 17 July 1742, JEL.

⁸⁸Erskine to Thomas Prince?, 17 July 1742, JEL.

⁸⁹The subtitle for Erskine’s *Signs of the Times*.

Cambuslang, had it reprinted in Dutch, and wrote a preface for this new edition on 26 July 1742.⁹⁰ This version of the *Narrative* went through six editions and contributed to the success of the spiritual renewal in the Netherlands which by 1744 had spread to Zeeland.⁹¹ By 1750 Kennedy was reporting that an awakening had begun under the leadership of Gerardus Kuypers, a Dutch theologian, in the town of Nijkerk in the province of Gelderland, which was ‘about ten English Miles above Amersfoort’. From there it spread to nearby villages such as Putten, Lunteren and Nunspeet.⁹² In Nijkerk alone, where the congregation was said to have consisted of ‘at least two thousand Souls’, Kennedy claimed that ‘above two thirds have been or are under deep Conviction of their miserable lost State by Nature’.⁹³ The revivals in the Netherlands were known as far away as New England, as evidenced by the fact that Jonathan Edwards had referred to them in a letter to Erskine on 28 June 1751.⁹⁴ Since by the 1750s Erskine had established links with several correspondents in the Netherlands, including Hugh Kennedy, these connections were probably first established shortly after the *Cambuslang* and *Kilsyth* Revivals.⁹⁵

Once he had witnessed the ‘uncommon melting’ of the people at *Cambuslang* and *Kilsyth*, Erskine was now convinced that his calling was to become a clergyman. He became certain that ‘the meanest office of usefulness in the church of God is in itself highly honourable; and that, in respect of dignity, of utility, and of personal

⁹⁰Robe, *Narratives*, iii; Andrew L. Drummond, *The Kirk and the Continent* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1956), 156.

⁹¹Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 139–40.

⁹²Hugh Kennedy, *A Short Account of the Rise and Continuing Progress of a Remarkable Work of Grace in the United Netherlands* (London: Printed for John Lewis, 1752), 9–10. Fred van Lieburg’s article, ‘Interpreting the Dutch Great Awakening (1749-1755)’, *Church History* 77 (2008), 318-36, provides a clearer picture of the circumstances surrounding the Dutch revivals in the mid-eighteenth century.

⁹³Kennedy, *Short Account*, 18.

⁹⁴George S. Claghorn (ed.), *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, vol. 16 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 376–7.

⁹⁵On Kennedy, see Erskine’s letter to Thomas Foxcroft, 14 February 1749, TFP.

satisfaction, the ministerial function' was 'to be placed above the most splendid secular employments'.⁹⁶ In October 1742 he wrote a preface for his *Signs of the Times*, which solidified his interest in the Evangelical Revival. He then subsequently changed his field of study from law to divinity and enrolled in his first classes in the autumn of that year. Normally, it took six years to complete the Edinburgh divinity programme, which commenced after finishing the arts degree.⁹⁷ Erskine, however, studied for only one academic year before obtaining a licence as a minister of the Church of Scotland. He explained to Charles Lorimer, his friend and fellow Edinburgh University student, that 'Means may be used to get passed trials without spending 6 years at the divinity hall'. Since Edinburgh's divinity classes were 'gratis', Erskine studied until he felt that he was prepared to take the licensing examination that was required prior to public preaching. In his own situation, the Presbytery of Dunblane had agreed to allow Erskine to be tested even though he had 'been scarce a year studying divinity'. This provision would have been a rare concession by the Established Church and so the cautious man told his friend of 'the greatest need of secrecy' in this case since 'there's a danger that in case it were known others had the same views with me, my passing trials might be opposed for fear of making a precedent'.⁹⁸ Erskine's comment about barely studying for one year places his matriculation into the divinity programme in early November 1742, a time shortly after the Cambuslang and Kilsyth Revivals.⁹⁹ Although passing his ordination examination after only one year of study would have been unusual, this prodigious student was clearly extremely capable, which is evident in the fact that he had already

⁹⁶Thomas Davidson, *A Sketch of the Character of Dr. John Erskine, One of the Ministers of the Old Gray Friars Church of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: H. Inglis, 1803), 7–8.

⁹⁷Bower, *History of the University of Edinburgh*, 30. See, for example, Charles Nisbet's experience as a divinity student at Edinburgh. Samuel Miller, *Memoir of the Rev. Charles Nisbet, D.D., Late President of Dickinson College, Carlisle* (New York: Robert Carter, 1840), 16.

⁹⁸See Erskine to Charles Lorimer, 29 March 1743, JEL.

⁹⁹See also Erskine's letter to William Cooper, 28 January 1743, JEL, where the former asked Cooper to pray for him as he studies to become a minister.

published his first theological work in 1741, *The Law of Nature Sufficiently Promulgated to the Heathens*.¹⁰⁰

Instead of enrolling at the divinity hall at Edinburgh, Erskine had originally hoped to study at Philip Doddridge's Dissenting academy at Northampton, which offered comprehensive instruction in mathematics, science and natural and moral philosophy in addition to divinity.¹⁰¹ This desire might have been inspired by the example of Thomas Gillespie, who had previously been one of the Northampton minister's students.¹⁰² Erskine first wrote to Doddridge sometime in 1742 or 1743, proposing the possibility of theological study at the Nonconformist's academy.¹⁰³ Doddridge described this eager young man as 'a Gentleman who is Heir apparent to a Thousand a year', who, having 'studied to qualify himself to be a Counsellor', chose instead 'to plead the Cause of Jesus Christ'. More important, Doddridge wrote that Erskine 'would fain have come hither but his Parents forbid it'.¹⁰⁴ Based on the circumstances and the comments by Doddridge, in order for his family to allow him to study divinity instead of law, Erskine was probably obliged by his father to submit to a theological education that was under the auspices of the Scottish Church at Edinburgh. Allowing Erskine to study at a Dissenting academy would have no doubt brought undesired attention to his father, who was one of Edinburgh University's newest law professors.

¹⁰⁰John Erskine, 'The Law of Nature Sufficiently Promulgated to the Heathens', in *TD*, 200–41. For this treatise and Erskine's other theological discourses, see chapter five.

¹⁰¹On Doddridge's Academy, see David L. Wykes, 'The Contribution of the Dissenting Academy to the Emergence of Rational Dissent', in Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 99–139.

¹⁰²See Kenneth B. E. Roxburgh, *Thomas Gillespie and the Origins of the Relief Church in 18th Century Scotland* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 10–22.

¹⁰³See for instance, Erskine's letter to Doddridge, 16 July 1743, JEL.

¹⁰⁴Philip Doddridge to Mercy Doddridge, 19 February 1742/3 in Geoffrey Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge DD (1702–1751)* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1979), 172. See also Erskine's letter to James Hall, 15 July 1743, JEL.

Although Erskine was not permitted to study at Northampton, Doddridge continued to serve as a means of encouragement for this young Scot, who remained fearful of disappointing his father and grandfather even once he was enrolled as a divinity student at Edinburgh. Erskine had previously written to his father outlining his reasons for wanting to enter the ministry. The content of this letter was then forwarded to Doddridge. Responding to Erskine on 11 June 1743, Doddridge wrote that the ‘account which you gave to your worthy father of the motives that determined your resolution to enter on the ministry, in that excellent letter which you favoured me with a copy of, abundantly convinces me that you were indeed under a divine guidance in that resolution’. The Nonconformist was impressed that the high-born Erskine would volunteer for such a humble employment. ‘And I cannot but look on it as a great token for good to the church’, Doddridge affirmed, ‘that a gentlemen of your distinguished abilities... and of your elevated circumstances in human life, should be willing to engage in so laborious a work as the ministry, in the midst of the various discouragements which attend it.’ The seasoned pastor concluded his letter by wishing that Erskine’s ministry would be blessed by God. ‘I will venture to tell you, from my own experience, that if he does so, instead of repenting of your choice, you will rejoice in it through the course of your life, and in the nearest prospects of death and eternity.’¹⁰⁵ This prophecy was realised, for in Erskine’s first sermon at New Greyfriars in Edinburgh in 1758, he affirmed that he had ‘no cause to repent’ of his ‘choice of a profession’.¹⁰⁶

The end result of Erskine’s education and experiences at Cambuslang and Kilsyth was that he became Scotland’s foremost enlightened Evangelical minister. His training at Edinburgh University grounded him in the Enlightenment tenets of reason and empiricism, which he embraced without compromising his beliefs. Rather than use his education for the profession of a barrister, however, he decided to

¹⁰⁵*Erskine*, 30–1.

¹⁰⁶John Erskine, ‘Difficulties of the Pastoral Office’, in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 136.

become a pastor instead. He recognised that America had a number of enlightened ministers who could counter the adverse teachings of Arminianism and Socinianism. In Britain, he later complained to the Connecticut pastor Joseph Bellamy, ‘we want an advantage which you have... Men of genius and literature to oppose these errors’.¹⁰⁷ In order to assist filling this void of much needed erudite Evangelical clergymen in Scotland, he changed from the field of law to divinity. It was his exposure to the Cambuslang and Kilsyth Revivals of 1742 that ultimately convinced Erskine to transfer to the divinity hall. Observing Scottish clergymen preach who were under the patronage of the Erskine family, such as Alexander Webster, who was formerly the pastor of Culross, and Thomas Gillespie, minister at Carnock, made a lasting impression on this young Edinburgh student. He wanted to emulate them since he viewed their profession as instrumental for the spread of the gospel and indispensable for guiding people to Christ. His devotion to serve as a minister was demonstrated in his first public sermon, which was given sometime in the latter half of 1743. He preached at the parish church of Torryburn on Psalm 84:10, ‘A day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness’, an appropriate text considering his new commitment as a clergyman.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 24 March 1755, JBL, 188:2932:81234.

¹⁰⁸*Erskine*, 65.

Chapter Three

The Enlightened Preacher

The idea that an Evangelical's thinking could be compatible with the progressive thought associated with the Enlightenment is a foreign concept to many scholars. Leslie Stephen, the nineteenth-century editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, wrote in his section on Evangelicals that 'We can admire their energy, though we cannot read their books' since they possess a 'form of faith which has no charms for thinkers'.¹ Evangelicals were depicted as anti-intellectual enthusiasts who used hell-fire and brimstone sermons to incite the emotions of their audiences so that they would avoid living a life of pleasure. After Stephen, the common perception was that Christianity and the thought of the Enlightenment were not 'natural allies', and that the Church was 'systematically intolerant' to this intellectual movement.² Peter Gay is typical of this mindset by arguing that the period known as the Enlightenment was largely secular in nature, a reawakening of paganism.³ Even some Evangelicals assume that the Age of Reason was not congruent with Protestantism in Scotland. A. T. B. McGowan goes so far as to say that the Enlightenment was 'a period of darkness, leading the church into its greatest departure from its orthodox roots and received theology'.⁴ This would not be such a remarkable interpretation of this time had he been referring to France, but speaking of Presbyterian Scotland in this way

¹Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 (New York: Harbinger, 1962), 364, 366.

²Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 113-14.

³Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977).

⁴A.T.B. McGowan, 'Evangelicalism in Scotland from Knox to Cunningham', in Michael A. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (eds.), *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 79.

makes it seem as though the majority of the country was following David Hume's assessment of religion.

Due to recent contributions on the Scottish Enlightenment, historians, philosophers and sociologists now acknowledge the integration of the new intellectual ideas in the Kirk, but generally give all the credit to the Moderate party. Alexander Broadie argues that the Church was the instrument that tried to stifle enlightened views because of its supremacy over the Scottish people. It was not until the Moderate literati came to power that the Scottish Enlightenment arrived in the Kirk.⁵ Charles Camic goes even farther by claiming that with regard to the Moderate party, 'No other intellectual community in the mid-eighteenth century came nearly so close to the outlook of the Scottish Enlightenment.'⁶ Almost the entirety of Anand Chitnis's third chapter on the Kirk is a veneration of the Moderates as the epitome of the Scottish Enlightenment by comparison to the sparse references to Evangelicals as the counter-movement to cultural and intellectual progression.⁷ Was the thought of the Age of Reason incompatible with conservative forms of Christianity?

Despite Stephen's legacy, the belief that Erskine was influenced by the prevailing ideas and culture of the Enlightenment and so was able to advance the cause of Evangelicalism is entirely plausible especially considering some of the more recent publications. Roy Porter and Dorinda Outram show that this intellectual and cultural movement was much more compatible with Christianity than has been

⁵Broadie, *Scottish Enlightenment*, 113-14.

⁶Charles Camic, *Experience and Enlightenment: Socialization for Cultural Change in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 88.

⁷Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London: Croom Helm, 1976) 43-70.

previously thought.⁸ Knud Haakonssen suggests that there were two kinds of Enlightenment, a conservative version that was largely prevalent in Britain and allowed religion to exist alongside progressive ideas, and a more radical version which developed in France, where religion was divorced from such thought.⁹ John McIntosh, in his book on *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland*, demonstrates that many of the ministers associated with the Popular party adopted Enlightenment ideas as long as they conformed to divine revelation.¹⁰ Mark Noll makes a similar assessment. He argues that unlike America, which turned to liberalism as a result of the pressure of the new wave of thinking, Scotland, which was equally pressured, remained fundamentally grounded in its orthodox Calvinistic roots.¹¹ Noll's view is complemented by the research of Ned Landsman, who posits that the younger generation of the Popular party, who were educated in an enlightened setting, were able to take what they learned while remaining orthodox and Evangelical.¹² Even more devoted to the subject of Evangelicalism and the integration of the epistemology of the Enlightenment is David Bebbington and his

⁸Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 29–37 and Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 109–25.

⁹Knud Haakonssen, 'Enlightenment Dissent: An Introduction', in Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–4.

¹⁰John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740–1800* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 35–7.

¹¹Mark A. Noll, 'Revival, Enlightenment, Civic Humanism, and the Evolution of Calvinism in Scotland and America, 1735–1843', in George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds.), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 93.

¹²See Ned C. Landsman, 'Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity in Scottish Evangelical Culture', in Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (eds.), *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 32–3 and his 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740–1775', in John Dwyer and Richard B. Sher (eds.), *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1993), 194–209.

essay, 'Revival and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England'. According to this historian, the Age of Enlightenment was the catalyst for the newly emerging Evangelical movement.¹³ Based on these scholars' research, it seems that the intellectualism associated with the Enlightenment was not as hostile to Evangelicalism as once believed. Indeed, Erskine is a prime example of an eighteenth-century Evangelical minister who adopted Enlightenment ideas without compromising his orthodoxy. In this chapter, the style and moral content of Erskine's discourses are examined in order to determine the extent of his adherence to the epistemology of the Enlightenment from the pulpit.

In eighteenth-century Scotland, William Robertson and Hugh Blair were seen as the most prominent orators of their time. Alexander Carlyle, the minister at Inveresk, observed that Robertson was 'truly a very great master of conversation', a talent which also found an outlet in the pulpit.¹⁴ Erskine eulogised the preaching ability of his Old Greyfriars colleague. Robertson's sermons 'were so plain, that the most illiterate might easily understand them', Erskine commended, 'and yet, so correct, that they could not incur their censure, whose taste was more refined'.¹⁵ Blair was perhaps the best example of a modern preacher. His flair for linguistics was rewarded in 1762 by Edinburgh University, which created a special position for him as the Regius Chair of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres. He published his lectures on rhetoric in 1783 in which he carefully delineated the necessity of style and eloquence

¹³David W. Bebbington, 'Revival and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England', in Andrew Walker and Kristin Aune (eds.), *On Revival: A Critical Examination* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 71-86. See also his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005), 48-65.

¹⁴Alexander Carlyle, *Anecdotes and Characters of the Times*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 144; Stewart J. Brown, 'William Robertson (1721-1793) and the Scottish Enlightenment', in Stewart J. Brown (ed.), *William Robertson and the Expansion of the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27.

¹⁵John Erskine, 'The Agency of God in Human Greatness', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 274.

in speech and writings.¹⁶ Most students of eighteenth-century Scotland would agree that Robertson and Blair were two of the leading proponents of polite discourse.

As a preacher, Erskine's talent was no less admired than that of these great speakers, even if his manner of delivery lacked panache. Although Robertson's sermons were 'sensible and useful' and easily followed because of their 'logical precision', Thomas Somerville had 'no hesitation' in stating his preference for Erskine over 'any preacher I ever heard'.¹⁷ Comparing the sermons of Ralph Erskine, John Erskine and Hugh Blair, Charles Rodgers McCain's PhD thesis declared John Erskine to be the most appealing of the three ministers.¹⁸ Even the sceptic David Hume, who was sometimes the target of Erskine's wrath, was reportedly 'not averse' to his sermons.¹⁹ Despite these endorsements, Erskine was sometimes awkward in his presentation. Somerville, the same person who had championed Erskine as an able preacher, reflected that his favourite minister's 'aspect was austere, his pronunciation harsh and monotonous, his composition defective in elegance and correctness'. Somerville, however, qualified his remarks by saying that 'the solidity of his matter, the weight of his arguments, the perspicuity of his expression, the fervour and earnestness of his address, much more than atoned for these minor imperfections'.²⁰ Sir Walter Scott also noticed the finer and weaker points of the preaching by the Evangelical minister at Old Greyfriars. When describing the delivery of one of

¹⁶Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric* (New York: Grenville Kleiser, 1911), 30–1.

¹⁷ Thomas Somerville, *My Own Life and Times, 1741–1814* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1861), 61–2.

¹⁸ Charles Rodgers McCain, 'Preaching in Eighteenth Century Scotland: A Comparative Study of the Extant Sermons of Ralph Erskine (1685–1752), John Erskine (1721–1803), and Hugh Blair (1718–1800)', PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh 1949, 310.

¹⁹ John Hill Burton, *The Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: W. Tair, 1846), 453.

²⁰Somerville, *My Own Life and Times*, 61.

Erskine's sermons, Scott wrote that the 'enunciation, which at first seemed imperfect and embarrassed became, as the preacher warmed in his progress, animated and distinct'.²¹

Although not a perfect specimen of eighteenth-century polite preaching, Erskine's rhetoric was a marked improvement from that of the previous centuries.²² Evaluating his published discourses, Moncreiff submitted that 'if the simplicity of his style excludes the ornaments of an artificial structure, it is always clear, and never intricate. If his sentences are not anxiously or exactly measured, they are uniformly forcible, and never slovenly.'²³ Erskine's style and execution were far more advanced than those of most seventeenth-century divines. For instance, J. I. Packer, while consistently praising the English Puritan John Owen and his works, describes the 'labour' of 'plodding through' his 'ill-arranged and tediously-written treatises'.²⁴ Jonathan Edwards, though willing to engage rational thinkers like Francis Hutcheson and enhance traditional Calvinistic doctrines, continued to use the scholastic method of repetition in his theological works. This was a very different technique from that of Erskine, whose sermons were simplified into only a few subordinate points that supported one main argument. Even compared with many of the late seventeenth-century early eighteenth-century Marrow Men, Erskine stood head and shoulders above them in terms of style and eloquence. The nineteenth-century Evangelical William Blaikie recognised that the 'sermons of Dr. John Erskine show much more

²¹Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering* (London: Soho, 1987), 262.

²²The scholasticism of post-Reformation continues to be redefined, but it should be seen as a methodology as opposed to a particular theology. See Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27-33.

²³*Erskine*, 378-80.

²⁴J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 84.

grace and finish in plan and expression than those of his namesakes, Ebenezer and Ralph, and especially those of the seventeenth century'.²⁵ As opposed to many former Calvinist divines, Erskine did not ramble on in his discourses using intricate and hard-to-follow metaphysical assumptions. He offered short, simple and structured homilies that were practical in nature, demonstrating that he was a forward-looking enlightened preacher.²⁶

Regardless of his own deficiencies, Erskine understood the need for proper pulpit etiquette and recommended to other aspiring clergymen to adopt the style and elocution of the current age. In his sermon 'The Qualifications Necessary for Teachers of Christianity', he posited a concept of taste that was no different than what Blair was teaching to his students. The Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres would have applauded Erskine's explanation that there is 'a taste in painting and music, which enables some, with great exactness, to perceive the beauties or blemishes of a picture or musical composition'.²⁷ Erskine was thoroughly convinced that a sermon could employ the techniques of 'perspicuity' that Blair was known for without compromising the effectiveness of the gospel message.²⁸ 'Good sense, expressed so perspicuously, and ranged in such an order, as to be easily understood and remembered', Erskine pronounced, 'is the very soul of composition.'²⁹ There was a realisation, however, that designing an eloquent sermon that appealed to the

²⁵William Garden Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland from the Sixth to the Nineteenth Century: Twelfth Series of the Cunningham Lectures* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888), 238.

²⁶See Jonathan Yeager, 'Puritan or Enlightened? John Erskine and the Transition of Scottish Evangelical Theology', *Evangelical Quarterly* 80 (2008): 237-53.

²⁷John Erskine, 'The Qualifications Necessary for Teachers of Christianity', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 12. Compare with Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, 2-24.

²⁸Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, 32.

²⁹Erskine, 'Qualifications', 23.

learned and simple-minded was not easy to do. As Erskine was well aware, it was an arduous task ‘to compose a popular discourse in a style plain, elegant, nervous, grave and animated; neither bombast nor grovelling; neither scrupulously exact, nor sordidly negligent’. Much prayer and preparation are needed

for that edifying strain of preaching, where the sentiments natively flow from the subject, and are all solid, useful, and calculated to strike; where every head, and every thing said by way of enlargement, is ranged in its proper order; and where the turn of thought and expression is scriptural and devout, natural and unaffected, sweet and insinuating, tender and affectionate.³⁰

The essential feature in a sermon was argued to be clarity of expression. For ‘we must clearly open and explain the truth, confirm it by arguments level to the capacities of our hearers, and do all this in plain familiar language’ so that ‘even those in low life may easily understand’. This was so because ‘Christianity was designed for the peasant, as well as the philosopher’, and since the lower ranks made up the greater proportion in the congregation, they should be specifically targeted by the pastor when designing a sermon.³¹ Although he sometimes struggled in his own method of delivery, Erskine advocated that among the ‘qualifications necessary for teachers of Christianity’ was the need to incorporate the taste and style of the day.

Like many of the enlightened preachers at that time, Erskine wove moral teachings into many of his sermons. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, the long sermons typical of the Puritan style were phased out and replaced with simple and short discourses that appealed to one’s reason. The new emphasis was on morality and charity, rather than doctrine and confessions.³² Whereas Sher points out

³⁰John Erskine, ‘Difficulties of the Pastoral Office’, in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 121.

³¹John Erskine, ‘Ministers of the Gospel Cautioned Against Giving Offence’, in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 57.

³²Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Watts and Wesley to Martineau, 1690–1900* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 66-7.

that Blair's sermons were a 'carefully structured commentary on a specific moral theme suggested by a relevant scriptural text' in such titles as, 'The Duties of the Young', 'The Duties and Consolations of the Aged', 'The Importance of Order in Conduct', 'The Compassion of Christ', 'Gentleness' and 'Death', the same was the case with Erskine's homilies.³³ Some of Erskine's titles were: 'On the Riches of the Poor', 'On Self-Denial', 'On Lukewarmness in Religion', 'On Public Spirit', 'On Goodness and Fidelity', 'On the Ostentation of False Goodness', 'On the Want of Love to God', 'On the Unprincipled Contempt of Religion', 'On the Views of the Glory of Christ which Produce Humiliation and Penitence', 'On an Open and Intrepid Adherence to Vital Christianity', 'On Fidelity in Personal Duties' and 'On Death'. Many of these moral discourses were written in the same vein as Blair's, but with a greater emphasis on salvation brought about by Jesus' death, a theme at the heart of Evangelicalism.³⁴ For 'Without regard to Christ in principle... the brightest speculations and the strongest arguments... would be to preach Seneca, rather than Christ'. Erskine hoped to pattern his sermons after those preached by the Apostle Paul, who taught morality, but 'he ever christianiseth it'.³⁵ So, moral teachings were appropriate provided that they were buttressed by the gospel message.

The resemblance in preaching between Erskine, Blair and Robertson can be seen in a brief examination of the sermons that each minister delivered before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge. In Blair's 1750 discourse, 'The Importance of Religious Knowledge to the Happiness of Mankind', he argued that religious knowledge was progressing and would ultimately lead to the world's

³³Church, 171.

³⁴Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2-19.

³⁵Erskine, 'Qualifications', 29.

happiness. ‘Society reaps the Fruits of the Virtue of all its Members; and as each, apart, is made better, the whole must proportionably flourish. Further, religious Knowledge has a direct Tendency to improve the social Intercourses of Men, and... assist them in co-operating for common Good.’ Religion had a powerful effect on society. According to Blair, it ‘civilizes Mankind. It takes the Fierceness of their Passions, and wears off the Barbarity of their Manners.’³⁶ The end result was that the world was better off with religion of the Protestant variety flourishing in it. In Robertson’s sermon, ‘The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ’s Appearance’, delivered in 1755, he claimed that the spread of Protestant Christianity was evidence of God’s providential hand in the world. ‘Rational and sublime in its doctrines, humane and beneficent in its precepts, pure and simple in its worship’, he preached, ‘no religion was ever so well calculated as Christianity, to repress the inroads of superstition, and to establish an acceptable and manly devotion, consisting in spirit and in truth.’³⁷ Erskine’s 1756 SSPCK sermon, ‘The Influence of Religion on National Happiness’, had the same general thrust as those preached by his clerical associates. Complementing Blair’s sermon, Erskine held that prior to the spread of Christianity, nations were ‘fierce and savage, rough and barbarous, malicious and revengeful’, but now they were ‘kind and gentle, courteous and humane, meek and forgiving’.³⁸ Mirroring both sermons, Erskine argued that Protestantism led to happiness and prosperity for those nations which remained committed to this form of religion. For Blair, Robertson and Erskine, the spread of Protestantism was the means

³⁶Hugh Blair, *The Importance of Religious Knowledge to the Happiness of Mankind* (Edinburgh: Printed by R. Fleming and A. Kincaid, 1750), 23.

³⁷William Robertson, *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ’s Appearance* (Edinburgh: Printed by Hamilton, Balfour and Neill, 1755), 26.

³⁸John Erskine, ‘The Influence of Religion on National Happiness’, in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 326.

for a nation to be enlightened with knowledge, marking the departure from superstition and ignorance and leading to happiness within society as a whole. Erskine's 'sensible discourse' that 'breathes an excellent spirit', which the *Monthly Review* judged it to be, was in many ways no different from the messages delivered by Robertson and Blair.³⁹

The moral content of the sermons that Erskine and his Moderate colleagues developed was heavily influenced by Stoicism. As Peter Gay shows, this was a favourite philosophy in eighteenth-century Europe and especially among the *philosophes* of France. Denis Diderot, for instance, questioned himself after reading Seneca, 'am I the same man I was before I read him? That's not so – it can't be so', and Montesquieu was so pleased with one Stoic that he stated, 'I should have liked to make a saint of Marcus Aurelius'.⁴⁰ Gay's analysis, however, is incomplete in that he credits primarily the secular eighteenth-century thinkers with being influenced by this philosophy. He makes no mention of influential figures like Erskine, or his cousin, the Earl of Buchan, who, in a letter to Charles Nisbet, the President of Dickinson College, advised his correspondent to 'Hold Seneca in one hand, and Saint Paul in the other; and look up to Heaven for direction and for happiness.'⁴¹ Stoicism should not be solely associated with secular interests since there are ample reasons to see why this philosophy was also accepted in eighteenth-century Presbyterian Scotland.

The Stoic tenet of fate, for instance, is not far from the Christian understanding of divine providence. In the same way that Zeus orders all of life for the sake of the greater good, Christianity is based on God upholding the universe by

³⁹*The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* 16 (1757), 190.

⁴⁰Quoted by Gay, *Enlightenment*, 49, 51.

⁴¹Buchan to Charles Nisbet, 21 December 1790 in Samuel Miller, *Memoir of the Rev. Charles Nisbet, D.D., Late President of Dickinson College, Carlisle* (New York: Robert Carter, 1840), 191.

his will. Maintaining the balance of freewill in humanity and God's providence has been discussed by Stoics and Christians alike. Just as Calvinists and Arminians debate how God dictates commands, while at the same time humans appear capable of exercising freewill, the Stoics equally sought to explain how the concept of fate could be reconciled with mankind's freewill. Further, although Stoicism is pantheistic, illustrating that all of nature contains a portion of the pneuma, the Christian teaching that the Holy Spirit lives within each believer in some ways mirrors the teachings of the Stoics. Christians, unlike many classical pagans, however, do not believe in pantheism. Individual Christians, though often certain that they have the Holy Spirit residing in their heart, do not consider themselves divine in any way. But the Stoic teaching that humans, because they are indwelt by the pneuma, are favourably disposed towards doing what is good since they are created in the image of Zeus, does somewhat conform to Christian teachings on the same subject.⁴² These are just a few ways in which Stoicism parallels Protestant theology.

When combined with the fact that both Stoicism and Christianity teach that all sins are equally grave, it is easy to see why this pagan thought could be so seamlessly sewn into the fabric of eighteenth-century Scottish religion.⁴³ Presbyterians, descending from the Reformed branch of orthodoxy, were strongly committed to the idea of divine providence, teaching individuals to accept whatever fortune, or misfortune, that was faced in life.⁴⁴ As Margo Todd demonstrates, Calvin, along with

⁴²John M. Cooper, *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good: Essays on Ancient Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 219-28.

⁴³J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 81.

⁴⁴David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 212.

the early Protestants, Zwingli and Bucer, were indebted to Stoicism.⁴⁵ Later, men like Hugo Grotius, Samuel von Pufendorf and Justus Lipsius became champions of Stoicism, while at the same time remaining committed to their Christian beliefs.⁴⁶ This tradition of integrating Stoicism within the Protestant tradition, or Neo-Stoicism, was carried on in Scotland by Robert Leighton and Gilbert Burnet, men whose theological works Erskine often cited and recommended, and later by the Moderate literati and even some Popular party figures.⁴⁷ George Anderson, the chaplain at Watson's Hospital in Edinburgh, referred to Cicero's moral teachings a dozen times in order to refute the perceived infidelity of David Hume and Lord Kames.⁴⁸ The famous Popular preacher Alexander Webster echoed the sentiments of the Stoics on public duty when he wrote that 'private happiness is not to be enjoyed on any sure and lasting foundation', but only through 'subordination to the public good'.⁴⁹ Since Protestantism had a long history of men who were favourable to Stoicism, it is no wonder that this philosophy was adopted by Erskine.

Only in the last twenty years has research demonstrated the influence of the Stoics on the Scottish Enlightenment and more specifically, on the Moderates. Sher's

⁴⁵Margo Todd, 'Seneca and the Protestant Mind: The Influence of Stoicism on Puritan Ethics', *Archiv Fur Reformationsgeschichte* 74 (1983), 184–5.

⁴⁶J. L. Saunders, *Justus Lipsius: The Philosophy of Renaissance Stoicism* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955); Hans W. Blom and Laurens C. Winkel (eds.), *Grotius and the Stoa* (Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 3; Kari Saastamoinen, 'Pufendorf and the Stoic Model of Natural Law', in Hans W. Blom and Laurens C. Winkel (eds.), *Grotius and the Stoa* (Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 257–69.

⁴⁷David Allan, 'Reconciliation and Retirement in the Restoration Scottish Church: The Neo-Stoicism of Robert Leighton', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50 (1999), 251–78 and *Philosophy and Politics in Later Stuart Scotland: Neo-Stoicism, Culture and Ideology in an Age of Crisis, 1540–1690* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 218.

⁴⁸George Anderson, *Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion* (Edinburgh: Printed and sold, 1753).

⁴⁹Alexander Webster, *Zeal for the Civil and Religious Interests of Mankind Recommended* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Gray and W. Peter, 1754), 23.

Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment brought fresh scholarship on this group of ministers and briefly diagnosed their affinity for Stoicism. He argued that it was Francis Hutcheson who led the way for the Moderates by teaching that happiness was obtained by virtuous living and that Stoic principles could easily be integrated with fundamental Christian truths.⁵⁰ While this may be an exciting development in the history of the Scottish Enlightenment, there are two regrettable problems that this contribution to scholarship brought: first, the argument that the Moderates were primarily concerned with Stoicism as a way to teach civic virtue, and, second, an absence of consideration of the influence of Stoicism on comparable Scottish Evangelicals. This has resulted in an insufficient understanding of the impact of Stoicism in the Scottish Enlightenment as well as the view that such philosophy was reserved only for theologically liberal enlightened thinkers.

Sher's enticing argument is that the Moderates adopted Stoicism largely to teach the masses how to be good citizens in the midst of cultural and economic changes that were repercussions of the Union of 1707.⁵¹ From this perspective it appears as though these ministers used Stoicism to teach their students and parishioners to conform to the Hanoverian government and, as a result, advanced their careers by such a service to the current administration. According to Sher, the 'primary concern' of the Moderates was 'the moral and social ramifications of economic development' in the eighteenth century. Materialism that had the potential of corrupting society was perceived as the greatest challenge for the advancement of British culture. As Sher sees it, the Moderates longed

⁵⁰*Church*, 176–9.

⁵¹*Church*, 175–212.

for a moral society in which all individuals not only would live up to their ideals of ‘private’ virtue by practicing benevolence in their personal relations with others but also would extend that principle into the social and political world by practicing ‘public’ virtue – in the civic humanist sense of selfless patriotism and identification of the private and civic personality.⁵²

This ideology, labelled as ‘Whig-Presbyterian conservatism’, was the driving force of the Moderates’ defence of the Hanoverian government through teaching a form of Christian Stoicism.⁵³ The leading architects for this strategy were Adam Ferguson, with his political teachings, as well as Hugh Blair, with his sermons.⁵⁴ Although Sher demonstrates thoroughly the various aspects of Stoicism which the Moderates adopted, his basic argument is that encouraging public service was the primary role of Stoicism within enlightened Scotland.

Sher is undoubtedly correct that civic duty was a driving force behind the Moderates’ teaching of Stoicism, but it seems unlikely that this was the only reason, given the similarities between this philosophy and Reformed doctrine. Most historians since Sher, however, have simply taken his argument as conclusive. John Dwyer’s book, published two years later, seems to argue the same point: that civic humanism was used as a polemic against greed and materialism as well as bolstering community ethics and military power.⁵⁵ David Allan’s scholarship is in the same vein. He states that ‘it is clear that no traditional humanist virtue was held in higher esteem in eighteenth-century Scotland than what was still widely called “public

⁵²Church, 188–9.

⁵³Church, 189.

⁵⁴Church, 192–212.

⁵⁵John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1987), 38.

spirit”⁵⁶ He reinforces his argument by numerous quotations from Scots who viewed virtue as tied up with duty towards society. Most recently, Ingrid Merikoski’s thesis provided an analysis which was exclusively devoted to Christian Stoicism in eighteenth-century Scotland. Her research, however, is simply an expansion of what Sher put forth: that the Moderates embraced a Christian form of Stoicism to ensure that there would be order and morality in society.⁵⁷ It seems as though scholars have taken Sher’s argument on the subject of Christian Stoicism in Scotland as axiomatic.

The Stoicism that is portrayed by Sher and other scholars in the teachings of the Moderates is also displayed by Erskine. One of the reasons why he and the Moderates were favourable to this philosophy can be traced back to the days of their college education at Edinburgh University. The newer professors installed in the early decades of the eighteenth century indoctrinated their students into the ways of polite cultural and moral responsibility for the benefit of society.⁵⁸ An example was John Pringle, the professor of moral philosophy. Reminiscing about his time in Pringle’s class, Erskine stated that his lectures urged students to ‘preserve prosperity’ and ‘warned against the dangers to which human virtue and happiness are exposed’.⁵⁹ More specifically, it is known that Pringle’s readings were chiefly from Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, Pufendorf and Bacon.⁶⁰ From notes taken on Pringle’s lectures on Cicero, many Stoic references can be seen: ‘Every thing is endowed with a natural

⁵⁶Allan, *Virtue*, 199.

⁵⁷Ingrid Ann Merikoski, ‘Christian Stoicism and Politeness: The Making of the Social Ethics of the Scottish Enlightenment’, PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1999, 2–3.

⁵⁸Peter Jones, ‘The Scottish Professoriate and the Polite Academy, 1720–46’, in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 99.

⁵⁹Erskine, ‘Agency’, 267.

⁶⁰A Short Account of the University of Edinburgh, the Present Professors in It, and the Several Parts of Learning Taught by Them’, *SM* 3 (1741), 373.

principle... to promote to peculiar and proper good'; 'That which hath a fitness to promote this end is called good and vice versa'; 'Good is to be chosen and evil avoided'; and 'the greater good is to be preferred, the lesser evil endured'. Even more telling, in another lecture Pringle told his students that 'the Stoicks' in their 'sentiments' were 'far from being a disgrace to Christianity'.⁶¹ Combined with his references to Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, these statements demonstrate a certain Stoic bias. Stoicism, it seems, was an important part of the curriculum of Edinburgh University.

Because Stoicism was taught in some of the earliest courses of the arts degree, Erskine and many of the Moderates were well versed in this ancient philosophy by the time they concluded their university education. Part of the curriculum for Erskine and Robertson in John Ker's humanity class was to read from Cicero as well as other ancient stalwarts, including Horace, Lucan, Tacitus and Virgil.⁶² Ker was not always the best teacher, but this did not stop Erskine from praising his former instructor. Erskine explained that 'great was his merit, in gaining the affection of his scholars; and great his success, in exciting and directing their study of the Latin classics'. It is significant that Erskine stated that he and Robertson shared a 'fondness for the same studies', which 'soon produced intimate familiarity, and impressions of mutual regard'. Because of their mutual interests at college, Erskine believed that this 'was one circumstance which prevented [them] from degenerating into personal rancor and animosity' including 'the opposite sides we afterwards took in debates about church

⁶¹John Pringle, 'Lectures from Cicero', 1741, EUL, MSS 74D.

⁶²SM 3 (1741), 374.

government, in the political questions of the American war, and Popish bill: and even our different sentiments, as to some points of religion and morals'.⁶³

What subjects did Erskine and Robertson both enjoy? Although it is difficult to know for certain what literature these two men shared in common, Erskine recalled that Robertson had an 'Intimate acquaintance with the Greek and Latin classics' which 'furnished him with a rich fund of instruction and entertainment'.⁶⁴

Robertson's eldest son was more specific, reporting that his father was a 'great admirer' of Stoic philosophy prior to his interests in history.⁶⁵ Those who knew Erskine, such as his friend and fellow minister at Edinburgh, Thomas Davidson, stated at the Edinburgh divine's funeral service that Erskine's 'erudition, particularly in whatever related either directly or remotely to the business of his profession, was singularly extensive'. More importantly, Davidson described Erskine as 'a classical scholar of the first order'.⁶⁶ Moncreiff, Erskine's biographer, wrote something similar: that 'Dr Erskine had been a most industrious student at the University, was sufficiently attested by his classical knowledge, which was unquestionably of the first order'.⁶⁷ Most likely then, this 'fondness' for the same studies that Robertson and his Evangelical colleague shared included an interest in Stoic teaching, which seemed to prevent two unlikely friends from dissolving their relationship.

Where Erskine deviated from the Moderates was in how he interpreted the teachings of Stoicism. From his days of education, Erskine told how the 'steps were

⁶³Erskine, 'Agency', 262-3.

⁶⁴Erskine, 'Agency', 265.

⁶⁵Quoted in *Church*, 181.

⁶⁶Thomas Davidson, *A Sketch of the Character of Dr. John Erskine, One of the Ministers of the Old Gray Friars Church of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: H. Inglis, 1803), 15.

⁶⁷*Erskine*, 17.

traced' in these classes 'by which some had investigated truth, and by which others had been betrayed into error. Youth were excited to observe and imitate the excellencies, and warned to avoid the blemishes, of celebrated writers.'⁶⁸ The Moderates and Erskine were taught the same form of Christian Stoicism, but 'truth' was understood differently. An example of this variance can be seen in an anecdote of one particular Sunday at Old Greyfriars Church. A story was told of how William Robertson preached in the morning service on how virtue was 'so exquisitely beautiful that if its ideal ever could become incarnate on earth every one would fall down and worship it'. In his afternoon sermon, however, Erskine took the opportunity to explain that 'virtue had become incarnate upon earth in the person of Jesus Christ, but that instead of falling down to worship Him the people cried "Crucify Him, Crucify Him"'.⁶⁹ Erskine and other Evangelicals were not against the teachings of Stoicism per se. Rather, as Moncreiff later reflected, the problem with many of the polite preachers of the day was their 'absurd affectation of bringing their public instructions' from Socrates, Plato or Seneca alone instead of first drawing their morality from the gospel.⁷⁰

Hugh Blair is widely seen as the 'greatest Moderate preacher of Christian Stoicism'.⁷¹ Blair used the language of Stoicism in many of his sermons. He spoke of the difference between a 'good man' and a 'bad man' in his sermon 'On the Influence of Religion upon Prosperity';⁷² chastised Haman in the biblical story of

⁶⁸Erskine, 'Agency', 266.

⁶⁹Wilmot Harrison, *Memorable Edinburgh Houses* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1898), 81.

⁷⁰*Erskine*, 59.

⁷¹*Church*, 182.

⁷²Hugh Blair, 'On the Influence of Religion Upon Prosperity', in *Sermons* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell and W. Creech, 1777), 58–84.

Esther for being ruled by his 'passions' in 'On the Disorders of the Passions';⁷³ and exhorted his hearers to the virtuous life based on his interpretation of Stoicism in 'On the Motives to Constancy in Virtue'.⁷⁴ But if Blair is credited with being the quintessential Stoic preacher of the day, the content of Erskine's sermons demonstrates that he was also incorporating the moral teachings of this ancient philosophy. The difference was that the Old Greyfriars minister was more Evangelical than the Moderates, meaning that he formulated his Stoicism entirely on the orthodoxy of Reformed theology and grounded it on a penal substitutionary view of the atonement, while at the same time embracing the activism of mission work to save souls. This was more than the 'theological sophistication' that Merikoski assumes Blair and the Moderates lacked by comparison to the Evangelicals.⁷⁵ It was a determination to remain committed to the orthodoxy of the past while at the same time addressing the current epistemology of the age. In other words, polite discourse and articulate rhetoric were not Erskine's primary motivation for serving as a pastor; he was first an Evangelical Christian, and only second a theologian interested in Stoicism.⁷⁶

As in Blair's discourses, many Stoic themes were present in Erskine's sermons, which were used to teach basic Christian morality. For instance, Erskine showed that Christianity was compatible with the Stoic understanding of happiness. His basic argument was that riches were not the source of happiness, and were more

⁷³Hugh Blair, 'On the Disorders of the Passions', in *Sermons* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell and W. Creech, 1777), 173–203.

⁷⁴Hugh Blair, 'On the Motives to Constancy in Virtue', in *Sermons* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell and W. Creech, 1777), 439–71.

⁷⁵Merikoski, 'Christian Stoicism', 166.

⁷⁶See Jonathan Yeager, 'John Erskine (1721-1803): A Scottish Evangelical Minister', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 38 (2008): 23-44.

of a bane than an aid to obtaining true wealth. The ideal person was one who was ‘not enticed from the paths of virtue by the allurements of honour, of riches, of ease, of pleasure, or of power’.⁷⁷ The topic of riches and poverty, and of how they affected happiness, was a central theme in Stoicism. In his Stoic paradoxes, Cicero had illustrated that wealth and materialism had nothing to do with happiness.⁷⁸ Indeed his sixth paradox was entitled, ‘Only the Wise Man is Rich’. Here, the Roman statesman argued that ‘to be content with what one has is the greatest and most secure wealth’. His conclusion was that ‘Those endowed with virtue are the only ones who are rich. For they alone own what is profitable and permanent, they alone are content with what they have – the mark of true wealth’.⁷⁹ Along with Cicero was Seneca, who argued ‘how far from burdensome it is to be poor’.⁸⁰ The Stoics were not ascetics, however, for they believed that some pleasure was acceptable provided that it was taken in ‘proportion’.⁸¹ Following the Stoics, Erskine stated in his sermon ‘On Fidelity in Personal Duties’ that he was not against the pleasures of life either so long that they were ‘moderate’ and would not inhibit the more important goal of virtue. The way to tell the difference was through an ‘enlightened conscience’, which ‘easily decided what is excess, and what is necessary or useful relaxation’.⁸² It would not have been surprising for Erskine to have drawn inspiration for this topic from reading Cicero or Seneca.

⁷⁷Erskine, ‘Agency’, 248–9.

⁷⁸Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Stoic Good and Evil*, trans. M. R. Wright (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1991), 1.6–3.15.

⁷⁹Cicero, *On Stoic Good and Evil*, 6.3.51–52.

⁸⁰Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. Robin Campbell (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 68.

⁸¹Marcus Tullius Cicero, ‘On Duties’, eds. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1.106.

⁸²John Erskine, ‘On Fidelity in Personal Duties’, in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 309–10.

The twist in Erskine's overall argument on contentment and happiness was detailed in his sermon 'On the Riches of the Poor'. He claimed that the poorest of society were in a better position to find true happiness than the rich. This was asserted on the basis that wealth was not measured by possessions, but by happiness. One advantage to the poor was the relative ease which they had in securing friendships. The complex society of the rich, full of politics and deception, was absent in the life of the poor. Compared to the opulence of the elite of society, the poor appreciated the simple benefits of nature and food that the wealthy often took for granted. In Christian terms, the poor could look forward to the hope of God's providence that his blessings of 'talents, genius, vigour, activity, and perseverance' would sustain them against any temptation to envy the materialism of the higher ranks. Further, if the poor were Christians, saved by faith, they were already rich. Since Jesus had inherited all things, Christians by their relation to Christ, shared in this bounty, which was the source of happiness. Like the Stoics before him, Erskine argued that 'When the passions are under the control of reason and religion, and proportioned to the worth of their objects, comfort dwells in the heart.' The Stoic pull of the pneuma to live according to nature was present in Erskine's thought, but it was replaced by faith, which in a Christian steered one toward what was truly valuable and convinced the mind to discard what was not valuable. All of this was possible through God, who imparted such aid by the power of the Holy Spirit. The virtuous characteristics given by the Holy Spirit, 'faith and hope, sobriety, temperance, and self-denial, gird up the loins of the mind' to meet the adversities of life with contentment.⁸³ The Stoics, though not in any way Christians, had a similar conception of wealth and poverty, but Erskine put a Christian spin on his argument.

⁸³John Erskine, 'On the Riches of the Poor', in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 5-14.

This theme of God's providence and accepting one's lot in life was carried over by Erskine in his 1793 funeral sermon delivered on the Sunday after William Robertson's death. The title, 'The Agency of God in Human Greatness', was not meant to draw attention to the merits of Robertson's character, but to demonstrate that God had designed the world so that different ranks in society were essential for stability and order. 'If the talents of none were great, or if the talents of all were equally so', Erskine declared, then 'many departments, necessary, or highly important to society would remain unoccupied.'⁸⁴ He agreed with the Stoics that endowments from the Almighty 'distinguish the human race in general from the brute creation'.⁸⁵ Therefore, a high rank in society was not the mark of honour since any fool could be born into nobility. Instead, God had designed the world to have a variety of respectable positions, all of which were crucial for an ordered and stable society. One man laboured while another supervised, both of which occupations were needed. A certain type of person was called to administer justice in the nation through laws at the same time as others were teaching in educational institutions. 'Society could not subsist', it was assumed, 'unless the lower departments of life were filled, as well as the higher.'⁸⁶ Erskine's Christian Stoic mind believed that God alone was the reason that people had any talent or ability: 'No advantages of education, no favourable combination of circumstances, produce talents, where the Father of spirits dropped not the seeds of them, in the souls which he made.'⁸⁷ Rather, it was God who moved individuals to work hard in their education so that they could nurture their talents.

⁸⁴Erskine, 'Agency', 241.

⁸⁵Erskine, 'Agency', 243.

⁸⁶Erskine, 'Agency', 241.

⁸⁷Erskine, 'Agency', 242.

A second Stoic theme in Erskine's sermons was teaching his parishioners to work for the benefit of society, a form of selfless civic duty that the Moderate literati were known to teach. 'On Self-Denial', for instance, was thoroughly imbued with the Stoic concept of enduring hardships and striving for the greater good of society. The very fact that the sermon was titled 'On Self-Denial' signals an affinity for Stoicism. The difference was that Erskine portrayed Jesus Christ as the infallible Stoic sage. Jesus was the best example of someone who practised self-denial. This self-sacrifice was not for his glory, but for the sake of God's love and for the wellbeing of the human race.⁸⁸ The self-denial of Jesus did not allow him 'to neglect his duties as a man, as a son, as a friend, as a citizen, or as an instructor of mankind'. 'If he restrained the innocent desires of nature or endured what was painful, or renounced what was agreeable', Erskine surmised, 'it was for ends noble and generous.'⁸⁹ Even more impressive, was that Christ gave his best effort in his mission on earth. He knew full well the future sufferings that awaited him, but chose to endure them nonetheless. His self-denial was wise and rational, which meant that, like the Stoics, Erskine demonstrated that Christ assented to the rational choice that would be the best decision for the whole. In the same way, followers of Jesus Christ must practise self-denial that is based on wise decisions, 'founded on important motives, and flowing from mature deliberation'.⁹⁰ A parallel could be made between the Stoic sage and Jesus.

Erskine devoted more time to civic responsibilities in his sermon 'On Fidelity in Personal Duties'. He explained that 'duty' was 'the fidelity which we owe to God',

⁸⁸John Erskine, 'On Self-Denial', in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 24-9.

⁸⁹Erskine, 'Self-Denial', 26-7.

⁹⁰Erskine, 'Self-Denial', 29.

who blesses humanity with certain ‘capacities’ through his providence. Out of obligation, it was one’s duty to employ those gifts ‘from our peculiar talents, or situations, or personal connections’ to be active in this world. The goal was to serve the ‘public welfare’ out of duty to God, which was displayed in service to oneself, one’s family and human society. By God’s providence, individuals were placed in positions where they were obliged to serve the will of the Father out of ‘duty’. Erskine argued that when one served God, not for selfish purposes, but for the greater good, these acts constituted proper religion.⁹¹

A third dominant theme was on the subject of true virtue. According to Erskine, a person should always be looking for ways to nurture the good characteristics while restraining sinful urges. ‘He is truly great’, he taught, ‘who carefully suppresses angry, envious, and resentful passions; habitually resists every impure, intemperate, or unjust inclination; watchfully attends to the state of his soul; suffers not his tenderest feelings, and keenest wishes, to allure him from the path of honour and duty.’⁹² Seneca had come to the same conclusion in his treatise ‘On Anger’, where he mentored his elder brother on the worthlessness of anger.⁹³ Erskine understood goodness in scripture to mean good affections. Goodness, from Erskine’s exegetical analysis of Proverbs 20:6, was the same as kindness, and a faithful man was one who persisted in goodness and was always seeking to exercise such practical benevolence. In the same way that Stoics required actions to prove sincerity, Erskine posited that the good and faithful would be recognised by their fruits, or practical benevolence. Action, not talk of benevolence, was Erskine’s main point. A good

⁹¹Erskine, ‘Fidelity’, 302-5.

⁹²Erskine, ‘Agency’, 247–8.

⁹³Lucius Annaeus Seneca, ‘On Anger’, in John M. Cooper and J. F. Procope (ed and trans), *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 17–116.

man will clothe the poor and feed the destitute, just as the Good Samaritan did. He would not limit his actions only to those in his family or those he expected to be repaid for his kindness.⁹⁴ The self-absorbed person was one who pillaged relationships for personal benefit. This same person was described by Cicero: ‘That is no true friendship which is concerned with our own advantage and not with the well-being of our friend: that is merely a sort of trading for our own profit, in which we love our friends only to the same extent as we love our lands and fields and flocks, because we derive profit from them!’⁹⁵ Wishing for the well being of one’s neighbour without extending services in a practical way was no benevolence at all.⁹⁶

If goodness and faithfulness were the virtuous qualities of the good, who were the bad? These types of people were revealed to be the hypocrites in society who claimed to be virtuous and engaged in social benevolence, but in reality were only interested in themselves. They were ‘busy bodies’, who talk about religion but ‘neglect’ their ‘social and relative duties’.⁹⁷ They happily profess ‘generosity, compassion, and in some countries, patriotism and public spirit’, since these traits were ‘highly popular’.⁹⁸ These virtues were far from their true character, but they represented themselves as such in order to be looked upon with esteem. Seneca had warned that one should ‘refrain from following the example of those whose craving is for attention... by doing certain things’ which were ‘calculated to give rise to

⁹⁴John Erskine, ‘On Goodness and Fidelity’, in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 128-30.

⁹⁵Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. Horace C. McGregor (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), 119.

⁹⁶Erskine, ‘Goodness’, 141.

⁹⁷John Erskine, ‘On the Unprincipled Contempt of Religion’, in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 207.

⁹⁸John Erskine, ‘On the Ostentation of False Goodness’, in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 153.

comment' on one's 'appearance or way of living generally'.⁹⁹ These hypocrites 'delight to talk about goodness', Erskine commented, 'for talking is easy and cheap'. But 'they hate to practice it; for practice, contrary to the ruling inclination of the mind, is severe and difficult'. Their benevolence 'is in their tongues', with 'little, or almost none of it' in their hearts, or in their actions so that their 'promises vanish into thin air'.¹⁰⁰ Both the Stoics' and Erskine's analysis was that very often the worst members of society would not openly engage in vices, because they would be despised by the whole community. Instead, they proclaimed in the preferred language of the day that they were also interested in virtue, to gain the applause of society.

Other 'bad' characters were those who were indifferent to society and purposely avoided contributing to its wellbeing. Cicero explained that these people 'claim to be attending to their own business, and appear to do no one any injustice', yet they are no friends of virtue. Even though 'they are free from one type of injustice, they run into another' in that they 'abandon the fellowship of life, because they contribute to it nothing of their devotion, nothing of their effort, nothing of their means'.¹⁰¹ Paralleling Cicero, Erskine argued that there were those who offered no service to the wider community and who felt no remorse for evil that was committed in society. Their virtue was simply in avoiding blatant crimes. 'If they can live at their ease, gratify their passions and appetites, and walk without restraint, wherever their fancy or their humour point out the way', he reasoned, there would be little interest 'whether others around them are happy or are miserable'.¹⁰² These imposters

⁹⁹Seneca, *Letters*, 36–7.

¹⁰⁰Erskine, 'Ostentation', 153.

¹⁰¹Cicero, 'On Duties', 1.29.

¹⁰²John Erskine, 'On Public Spirit', in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 103.

of virtue were those who lived entirely to their selfish pursuits and could not care less what happened to the greater society in which they lived.

Erskine showed the fallacy of this mindset and how it was contrary to the Lord's plan for humanity. God endowed mankind with certain talents that were not to be used simply for self-interest.¹⁰³ Cicero had taught the same idea in that 'men are born for the sake of men, so that they may be able to assist one another'. The Roman statesman and philosopher proclaimed that one should 'follow nature as our leader' and contribute toward the good of all society for the benefit of all mankind.¹⁰⁴ It was not just coincidental that Erskine described providence as 'the voice of nature, or rather of nature's God', who was 'calling us to an active benevolence'. This was the way that society was meant to be formulated. Civil government existed for the sake of its people and each country's citizens must 'share in its prosperity or ruin'. 'The leaky ship must sink', was Erskine's analogy, 'when those who should be at work to empty and repair her, lie asleep, every one in his own cabin, as if no individual were concerned in the event.'¹⁰⁵ The Evangelical minister revisited the example of David and his band of men on the run from Saul as those who worked together for the good of their community. The opposing example was that of Cain, who was self-absorbed and blindly committed murder without considering the consequences of his actions.¹⁰⁶ It was shown that every individual must contribute for the benefit of the whole.

One of the reasons why Erskine adopted the progressive style of preaching that included Stoicism was that he realised that the times had changed and the more

¹⁰³Erskine, 'Public Spirit', 103-4.

¹⁰⁴Cicero, 'On Duties', 1.22.

¹⁰⁵Erskine, 'Public Spirit', 104-5.

¹⁰⁶Erskine, 'Public Spirit', 105.

polite culture of eighteenth-century Scotland demanded less rigid teachings than those from the former divines.¹⁰⁷ The transition of preaching style from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century was elaborated in Erskine's funeral sermon on behalf of William Robertson in 1793. In this 'masterpiece', as the Countess of Leven and Melville called it,¹⁰⁸ Erskine retold the story of how after the Restoration, many ministers preached 'with little study, and with little accuracy' so that 'they often crowded a vast variety of matter into one discourse'. He commented on the 'multitude... of their divisions and subdivisions', which 'would have blunted the force of truth, had not an uncommon measure of divine influence accompanied and blessed their honest and hazardous labours'. After the Glorious Revolution, preachers 'often retained a manner of preaching, which had no longer the apology of necessity'. Around 1730, some of the younger ministers were 'betrayed, by a blind admiration of Lord Shaftesbury, into the opposite extreme, of pompous, florid, and ill connected harangues'. About this time a group of ministers rose up 'to gain the attention and esteem of their hearers', but Erskine interjected, not for their own benefit, but to draw attention to 'the glorious truths and duties which they taught'. Patrick Cumming, for instance, displayed 'an extensive historical and critical knowledge', Alexander Webster was another noted divine who had 'a tender, pathetic address' and George Wallace and William Wishart had 'a depth of thought, originality of genius, and the art of gaining attention to the most common and necessary subjects' through the use of 'new reflections, illustrations and arrangements'.¹⁰⁹ Many of these names were affiliated with the 'Neu-lights' or 'Preachers Legall', the first wave of enlightened

¹⁰⁷See Yeager, 'Puritan or Enlightened?', 237-53

¹⁰⁸Countess of Leven and Melville to Charles Nisbet, 22 August 1793 in Miller, *Memoir of Charles Nisbet*, 221.

¹⁰⁹Erskine, 'Agency', 268-70.

ministers who blazed a trail for the later, more established, Moderate literati under Robertson's leadership.¹¹⁰ Erskine very much admired these innovators for the way in which they preached. Even though there were ministers who had gone too far in Erskine's mind by sacrificing content for style, some of the contributions that they made during the Age of Reason were to be approved.

The more traditional discourses of the Scottish ministers of the past were now viewed as outdated by many who embraced the changing tempo that the current age demanded. Erskine lamented how some 'from unwearied study' and 'acquaintance with the human heart, and Christian experience', were less admired than the popular polite preachers of the day, yet 'kept back from their hearers nothing profitable'. He listed William Crawford's *Dying Thoughts* (1738) and *Zion's Traveller* (1729), James Bannatyne's *Mistakes about Religion* (1737) and John Maclaurin's posthumous *Sermons and Essays* (1755) as 'almost the only larger publications of divines of those times' of whom he had been talking. The reason why they did not receive as much attention as many other Scottish ministers was attributed to modesty. Even more telling is what Erskine mentioned about Thomas Boston. He suggested that this Scottish divine, although 'justly valued by many serious Christians of almost all denominations', would have received greater attention had his works 'avoided blemishes of style'.¹¹¹ Here was a hint to why adopting the latest style of the age was so important to Erskine. He had witnessed the theological decay of Calvinism largely because the style of the former orthodox divines had been judged obsolete.

¹¹⁰See Henry R. Sefton, 'The Early Development of Moderatism in the Church of Scotland', PhD Dissertation, University of Glasgow, 1962 and his 'Neu-Lights and Preachers Legall': Some Observations on the Beginnings of Moderatism in the Church of Scotland', in Norman MacDougall (ed.), *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1408–1929* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1983), 186–96.

¹¹¹Erskine, 'Agency', 270-1.

Erskine's attitude was that traditional orthodoxy was not to be altered – only technique and delivery. One pioneer of this delicate, but necessary, balance was Jonathan Edwards, who had gained acclaim among Scottish Evangelicals for his innovative explanations of key Reformed doctrines on such topics as freewill and original sin. In the preface to Edwards's *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects* (1793), which was edited by Erskine, Edwards was commended for referencing John Tillotson, Hugo Grotius, Isaac Newton and others in his diatribe against deism. Erskine approved that the 'President's originality of genius, and attachment to Calvinist principles, did not hinder his seeking and finding instruction in their writings, whose system of theology was very opposite to his. It were well', Erskine advised, 'if in this he was imitated by all who possess distinguished talents, and who boast of liberality of sentiment.'¹¹² By citing such authors, Edwards was not endorsing them. Rather, as Doug Sweeney and Brandon Withrow argue, the Northampton pastor's intent was to 'plunder the Egyptians', while at the same time to protect Calvinism from 'Enlightenment extremes'.¹¹³ Edwards had determined to engage other emerging rational thinkers while still remaining committed to orthodox Calvinism. This was the reason why Erskine read so many books and propagated them to other Evangelical Calvinists. His objective was to educate and enlighten his friends, who were leaders in the transatlantic revival, so that they would be able to offer an attractive version of the gospel.

Using his adoption of the latest techniques, Erskine could present an effective discourse that was also applicable to current society. Without the adoption of the

¹¹²Jonathan Edwards, *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects* (Edinburgh and London: Printed for W. Gray and Vernor & Hood and Ogilvie & Speare, 1793), iii.

¹¹³Douglas A. Sweeney and Brandon G. Withrow, 'Jonathan Edwards: Continuator or Pioneer of Evangelical History?' in Michael A. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (eds.), *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 288.

newer style of preaching, there would be little chance that Evangelicals could compete with the ornate language of the more polite preachers of the day. This was the real difference between Erskine and Robertson, Blair and Carlyle. Whereas many of the Moderates concentrated their efforts first on polite speech and ‘perspicuity’ of expression, Erskine was primarily concerned with expounding the gospel message and only as a secondary feature considered the merits of eloquent speech.

The ‘flowery’ language that John Hill describes in Blair’s sermons was Erskine’s least concern.¹¹⁴ ‘When the spiritual Physician points out the only method of escaping a speedy or a painful death’, the Evangelical minister exhorted, ‘can you find leisure and inclination to count words and syllables, to examine if his discourse is agreeably delivered, his imagery striking, and the cadence of his periods proper?’¹¹⁵ Ornate language was a tertiary requirement for the pastorate. ‘Bombast descriptions, glittering flowers of eloquence, and luxuriant flights of wit’ should remain with ‘the heroes of romance’.¹¹⁶ Scripture should instead be the supreme source for an evangelist’s sermons. ‘Let the writings of philosophers, of historians, and of politicians, be their study whose business it is to unfold the secrets of nature, to transmit to posterity the memorable deeds of heroes, or to give counsel to their Sovereign in matters of state. These branches of knowledge are at best ornamental, not essential, to a teacher of Christianity.’¹¹⁷ Taste and manners were not as critical to a minister as knowledge of the Word of God.

¹¹⁴John Hill, *An Account of the Life and Writings of Hugh Blair, D. D.* (Edinburgh: J. Ballantyne and Co., 1807), 16.

¹¹⁵John Erskine, ‘Directions for Hearing Sermons’, in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 174.

¹¹⁶Erskine, ‘Offence’, 58.

¹¹⁷Erskine, ‘Offence’, 56.

A true spiritual physician was interested first in saving souls. ‘Unless one’s gifts are uncommonly mean, a warm concern for souls will animate and inflame’ a cleric’s language, ‘dictate to him the most moving and pathetic addresses’ and ‘inspire him with a divine, and, almost, irresistible eloquence, which, with amazing force, will pierce the conscience, ravish the affections, and strike conviction into the most obdurate offender’.¹¹⁸ Time was never wasted in advising individuals for the sake of their eternal security. For a pastor, the ‘whole of his time and strength, he thinks too little to spend, in endeavouring to save, even one soul, from death’.¹¹⁹ The Evangelical divine urged his audience to look for a minister who could offer them what was truly satisfying, rather than simply a polished discourse. ‘When your life is in danger’, Erskine stated, ‘you regard not so much the polite address, or agreeable conversation of a physician, as his sagacity in finding out a disease, and in prescribing the proper remedy’.¹²⁰ The important aspect of a sermon was that the gospel message was presented in a clear manner since Erskine determined that it was not the minister’s speech or talent that led people to Christ; it was only by the power of God.¹²¹

After reviewing the content and style of Erskine’s sermons, there can be no doubt that he was an enlightened Evangelical minister. He was judged by his peers to be a good preacher, and possibly even better than some of the more prominent speakers of the Moderate party. Erskine advocated the style of the emerging Age of Reason and incorporated some of its most current techniques into his messages from the pulpit without giving up his orthodox beliefs. He adhered to Stoicism, which Gay

¹¹⁸Erskine, ‘Qualifications’, 15.

¹¹⁹Erskine, ‘Qualifications’, 6.

¹²⁰Erskine, ‘Directions’, 173–4.

¹²¹Erskine, ‘Directions’, 176.

demonstrates was a mark of an enlightened mindset. But such conformity to pagan philosophy, as Erskine showed, need not undermine a traditional understanding of Christianity. The subjects of fate and pantheism could be moulded into more Christian terms as God's providence and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Moderates proved that Stoicism could easily fit within the grid of Scottish Presbyterianism, advocating the idea of civic virtue and training the masses to be model citizens. While this might have been the primary motivation for them, this was not the case with Erskine. He, like the Moderates, was trained in his educational circumstances to adopt the classical philosophy founded by Zeno, but he carefully avoided compromising his traditional orthodoxy for popular preaching methods. Although the most fundamental beliefs of Stoic philosophy were present in many of his sermons, his primary motivation was to teach Evangelical Christianity rather than to deliver a polite discourse.

Chapter Four

The Orthodox Preacher

If Erskine was an enlightened preacher, incorporating much of the same style and moral content that the Moderate literati were known to exhibit in the pulpit, then why was he sometimes associated with the Reformed ministers of the past? Sir Walter Scott, after describing a typical sermon by his childhood pastor in *Guy Mannering*, concluded by saying, ‘Such... must have been the preachers to whose unfearing minds, and acute, though sometimes rudely exercised talents, we owe the Reformation.’ The implication was that Erskine’s discourses were in line with those of his forbearers, even if Scott qualified his previous statement with the concession that the ‘reverend gentleman... has nothing of the sour or pharisaical pride which has been imputed to some of the early fathers of the Calvinistic Kirk of Scotland’.¹ G. D. Henderson offers the same opinion about Erskine and other Scottish Evangelicals of the eighteenth century: that they continued to display ‘very clearly the main characteristics of puritanism’.² What were these characteristics of Puritanism that Erskine supposedly displayed?

Henderson and others are right to point out the affinity between the former English and Scottish divines and many of the eighteenth-century Scottish clergymen.³ Although the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment was a powerful force in Scotland during this time, it did not completely displace the Puritanism – the ‘hotter sort of Protestantism’ – that was so prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Especially among the Evangelicals of the Kirk, men like John Owen,

¹Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering* (London: Soho, 1987), 263.

²G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press 1957), 139.

³See, for instance, Margo Todd, ‘The Problem of Scotland’s Puritans’, in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 174-88.

Samuel Rutherford, George Gillespie, David Dickson and Thomas Boston were often viewed as heroes of the faith, whose works were emulated.⁴ Thomas Boston, for example, was the premier Scottish divine in his day. His *Fourfold State* was extremely influential to ministers, such as Erskine, and adorned the bookshelves of many Scottish families.⁵ It was clearly not the scholastic and repetitive method of the former divines that Erskine appreciated since in the previous chapter it was shown that, in order to make the gospel message attractive in the Age of Reason, Erskine believed that the style and technique of a sermon should be current. What about the substance of a sermon? How much of Calvinism should be nuanced for the sake of conforming to the spirit of the new age? This is the question examined in the following chapter on the content of Erskine's discourses.

The preaching of the Word of God was viewed as the centrepiece for doctrinal inspiration and piety for many of the zealous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divines, and for Erskine as well.⁶ Edward Hindson's comment that the 'genius of Puritan theologians was that they were preachers first and theological writers secondly' could easily have been Erskine's motto.⁷ Much of the content of his sermons conformed to traditional Reformed orthodoxy instead of the new optimistic beliefs of many of the modern preachers, who saw mankind's moral state as generally healthy and even improving. The total depravity of Calvinism, for instance, was a prevalent theme taught by Erskine from the pulpit. 'The throne of the heart is filled with empty vanities', he complained, 'and the worst and lowest room in the soul is thought sufficient for the Lord of glory.'⁸ 'If you ask, Why is God so little loved', it

⁴James Walker, *Theology and Theologians of Scotland, 1560–1750*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1982), 7.

⁵Henderson, *Burning Bush*, 141-2.

⁶Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 24. See also David George Mullan's chapter on 'A Ministry of the Word' in *Scottish Puritanism: 1590-1638* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45-84.

⁷Edward Hindson, 'Introduction to the Puritans', in Edward Hindson (ed.), *Introduction to Puritan Theology: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), 20.

⁸John Erskine, 'On the Unprincipled Contempt of Religion', in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 199.

was because ‘Human nature has degenerated; sense is exalted; the intellectual powers are woefully depressed.’⁹ He rejected the current teachings that individuals need only to put forth an effort, in terms of morality, in order to be praised as good person.

Even more disturbing than the moralists were those who were blatantly hostile to traditional orthodoxy. David Hume was a prime example of this new type of critic. Speaking of the ‘Great Infidel’, Erskine proclaimed that in previous generations, ‘the most celebrated sceptics retained so much modesty as only to plead that atheism was innocent, and religion unnecessary. But our modern sceptics, with a more hardy boldness, pronounce the religious principle malignant and hurtful.’ From Hume’s perspective, the religion of the past led to ‘Protestant fanaticism’, which was a cause for offence. The Edinburgh minister countered this philosopher by making a case that since there was happiness during the time of the Puritans, religion worked in tandem with the wellbeing of the nation.¹⁰ Such ‘fanaticism’, as Hume called it, was shown to be a primary source for the prosperity of the country. From Erskine’s point of view, and contrary to Hume, traditional Christianity was the lifeblood of society.

Like all of the Puritans, Erskine denied a work-orientated righteousness and held firmly to the belief that Christ’s death alone was the source of one’s salvation. He argued that there is nothing in mankind, in terms of ability, which merits pardon from sin and acceptance by God. By committing even one offence, humanity is rendered unqualified to receive leniency from the Lord. ‘Vain, then, and presumptuous are those hopes, which are built upon no better foundation than our own righteousness.’ Our best efforts to justify ourselves through good works have only ‘a finite value’ and thus cannot satisfy the demands that God requires.¹¹ Erskine asked, ‘But, upon whose account, is the Lord thus well pleased? Is it on account of

⁹John Erskine, ‘On the Want of Love to God’, in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 169–70.

¹⁰John Erskine, ‘The Influence of Religion on National Happiness’, in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 345-8.

¹¹John Erskine, ‘The People of God Considered as All Righteous’, in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 285-9

their dispositions and performances? No; it is for Christ's righteousness' sake.'¹² Because Jesus had died, but conquered death by rising again, he alone was capable of freeing mankind from the sting of death.¹³ 'Surely, this implies more than purchasing a possibility of salvation for mankind, upon conditions, whose performance depended on their own precarious choice.'¹⁴ The Arminian understanding of election, therefore, was ruled out entirely. For the

opposite opinion, which represents God as equally designing the happiness of all mankind, on the uncertain condition of their repentance, faith and perseverance, supposes that God's gracious designs are either accomplished or baffled, as the sovereign choice of man decides; so that God can extend his love and mercy, no farther than man thinks fit to allow.¹⁵

Erskine saw this approach as contradicting scripture, which proclaimed that God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. A denial of works, and complete credit to God for salvation, were standard orthodox beliefs espoused by Erskine as well as the Puritans.

A more robust form of Puritanism was exhibited in his soteriology. Specifically, Erskine believed that Christ died only for the elect. 'The persons thus given to Christ, were a select, determined number', he argued, and 'not the whole of mankind.'¹⁶ He justified his view of limited atonement using the words of the Apostle John, who wrote that salvation was given to 'as many as were given him' as opposed to writing that 'all' were given to Christ by the Father.¹⁷ Here, Erskine was following one of his favourite theologians, Thomas Boston, who had stated that there

¹²John Erskine, 'On Death', in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 482.

¹³Erskine, 'On death', 481.

¹⁴John Erskine, 'Power Given to Christ for Blessing the Elect', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 450.

¹⁵Erskine, 'Blessing the Elect', 452.

¹⁶Erskine, 'Blessing the Elect', 450.

¹⁷Erskine, 'Blessing the Elect', 451.

was ‘no universal redemption, nor universal atonement’.¹⁸ More precisely, Boston asserted that ‘Jesus Christ died not for all and every individual person of mankind; but for the elect only.’¹⁹ Erskine was not as dogmatic as Theodore Beza, who championed the doctrine of double election, whereby God decreed some to heaven and others to hell.²⁰ But the Popular minister was insistent that freewill played no role in deciding one’s eternal state. Salvation, he said, was ‘obtained for a chosen number; not, as some say, conditionally for all... A matter, wherein the glory of God and the happiness of mankind was so deeply concerned, was of too great consequence, to be left to the precarious determination of man’s free will.’²¹ By rejecting the view that Christ had died for all, and instead maintaining that the death of Jesus was meant for the elect only, Erskine’s soteriology was closer to that of the Puritans than that of contemporary thinkers like Francis Hutcheson, who hypothesised that individuals need only tap into their internal moral sense to be judged good.²² Even though Erskine adopted many of the tenets of Enlightenment teachings, he was not so progressive in his thought that he would abandon the orthodox teachings of former divines.

¹⁸Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace from the Sacred Records* (Lewes: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1990), 32.

¹⁹Boston, *Grace*, 32.

²⁰Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640–1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 69-70; G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus, 1536–1675* (Carlisle, PA: Paternoster, 1997), 43-8.

²¹Erskine, ‘On death’, 499.

²²On Hutcheson’s view of morality, see David Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2002), 137-8; Ingrid Ann Merikoski, ‘Christian Stoicism and Politeness: The Making of the Social Ethics of the Scottish Enlightenment’, PhD Dissertation, The University of Edinburgh, 1999, 129-33; Mark A. Noll, ‘The Rise and Long Life of the Protestant Enlightenment in America’, in William M. Shea and Peter A. Huff (eds.), *Knowledge and Belief in America: Enlightenment Traditions and Modern Religious Thought* (New York and Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1995), 102-4; Mark A. Noll, ‘Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought’, *American Quarterly* 37 (1985), 221-2; Jane Rendall, *The Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1978), 75-7.

Erskine instructed his parishioners that the numbering of the elect was decided by God in eternity. ‘The foundation of redemption’, according to Erskine, was ‘laid before the world was’ and ‘for the benefit of the elect’. He based his reasoning on the fact that God was said in scripture not to have had a beginning and to be immutable. If this was so then God must have eternally decreed his choice of election, which would have been prior to time, before the dawn of creation.²³ The decision to save some was not random, but beyond human understanding, which meant that ‘the gift of a certain number of mankind to Christ’ was ‘an act of sovereignty’, since ‘it is founded on no merit in the creature’; nevertheless, ‘it flowed not from mere arbitrary will, but from motives transcendently wise and excellent, though motives to us unsearchable’.²⁴ By upholding the mystery of election, Erskine was following the teachings of Calvin and former Puritan stalwarts like John Owen.²⁵ The Edinburgh minister probably advocated God’s election from eternity for the same reasons that Calvin did, as an anti-Catholic polemical device so that the Almighty’s choice of saving some for eternity would not depend on human merit.²⁶ If God made his decision on election after one was born, an argument might be made that one’s virtues influenced his decision.

By adopting the stance that the gospel was sufficient for everyone, even though not all would be blessed with final salvation, Erskine showed that he was a progressive Evangelical. This more moderate form of Calvinism was a change in thinking from the many Presbyterians of the previous era who believed in double election and is attributed, at least in part, to the impact of the Enlightenment culture.²⁷

²³Erskine, ‘Blessing the Elect’, 445-8.

²⁴Erskine, ‘Blessing the Elect’, 455–6.

²⁵J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 82.

²⁶Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 57-8.

²⁷David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005), 63–4.

The catalyst to this view in Scotland can be traced to a book entitled, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, which was originally published in 1646, but was resurrected by Thomas Boston and republished in 1718. The book was condemned by the General Assembly in Scotland on 20 May 1720 because of the influence of Principal Hadow of St Andrews, who believed that it was conveying the message that grace was offered to all freely through faith, as opposed to a strict predestinarian understanding of salvation.²⁸ The Marrow Men, those who accepted the principles of this book, vehemently opposed the ruling of the General Assembly although they themselves believed in particular redemption. The difference, however, was that the Marrow Men advocated that the gospel should be offered to all, even though not everyone would accept it.²⁹ This teaching continued to be consistent with limited atonement since only the elect would accept the gospel call and receive saving faith. This subtle difference between the double election of high Calvinism and the more moderate beliefs of the Marrow Men separated the more enlightened Evangelicals, who wanted the gospel message to be preached to everyone, from those who believed that missions were not important since God alone would effectually call those who were elect.

Erskine, though advocating divine election, sympathised with the teachings of the Marrow Men. In almost all of his sermons, he concluded with a call to receive the gospel message, which was the invitation to repent of one's sins, turn to God and receive his offer of salvation through faith in Christ. Erskine painted the picture of a Saviour whose 'kind and benevolent affections' were the same today as they were yesterday so that Christ was always ready to forgive and accept the very worst of

²⁸Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688–1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1973), 35–7. See also David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988) and Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 223–6.

²⁹Walker, *Theology*, 87–8.

sinner.³⁰ Since no one was denied the gospel message from the lips of Jesus and the apostles, everyone should be given a clear and convincing explanation of Christ's atonement.³¹ Erskine was optimistic that if presented with the gospel message, many would respond. 'If multitudes of blinded Heathens, and profligate Jews, became eminent and exemplary for holiness of heart and life', exclaimed Erskine, 'that grace and power, which produced in them so happy a change, is still the same, and shall be bestowed on every one, who applies to Christ for it, with a humble confidence.'³² Even in his message on election, in which he argued that only a certain number of individuals would be saved, he still made an offer of the gospel to his listeners, which he hoped his audience would accept.³³

Although Erskine fully endorsed that 'the gospel is properly the glad tidings that Jesus is able and willing to save, and that even the chief of sinners are warranted to come to him for salvation', he was not compelled to assume that all would be saved.³⁴ This was because he believed that the 'gospel call doth not declare, that every individual to whom it is addressed shall finally be saved' even though 'it invites and commands him to come to Christ for salvation, and assures him, that if he thus comes, Christ will in no way cast him out'.³⁵ Since every person had the chance to accept or reject such an offer, all would be held responsible for their decisions. The example he used was of the bronze snake that Moses made in the wilderness for the Israelites to look upon and be healed. Surprisingly, although God's chosen people were given such a simple instruction, some chose not to listen and faced God's

³⁰John Erskine, 'Instructions and Consolations from the Unchangeableness of Christ', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 229–30.

³¹John Erskine, 'Jesus Preached Unto the Gentiles', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 407.

³²Erskine, 'Instructions', 231.

³³Erskine, 'Righteous', 307–8.

³⁴Erskine, 'Gentiles', 407.

³⁵Erskine, 'Blessing the Elect', 457.

wrath.³⁶ This way of thinking was congruous with other Evangelicals who were influenced by the intellectual culture of the Age of Reason. The eighteenth-century Baptist preacher Robert Hall, for example, exchanged the high Calvinistic tenet of double election with the understanding that God simply passed over some for salvation. In his book, *Help to Zion's Travellers* (1781), he explained that 'What is opposite to election, is a mere negation, or a leaving others in that state in which all men are viewed by the great Eternal when he chose his people.'³⁷ Hall's work, which Erskine respected,³⁸ was consistent with the soteriological beliefs of other British Evangelicals. Evangelicals were not obliged to abandon the doctrine of limited atonement since God's special grace for some meant that sinners continued to be accountable for rejecting his offer of salvation.

Erskine's confidence in the doctrine of election was based on his understanding of justice and mercy. He acknowledged that this plan of limited atonement might seem harsh, but it was for the good of mankind overall and conformed with God's good nature. 'Justice doth not require', he argued, 'that the highest manifestations of divine bounty should be granted to every transgressor; and therefore, doth not require, that every transgressor should be chosen to salvation.'³⁹ Since every one is sinful, and deserving of eternal punishment, it is no crime to deny salvation to any person. This was the same view that the Scottish divine John Brown, minister of Wamphray, detailed when he argued that since God created the world, including mankind, he may do whatever he wishes and is not required to save all from punishment.⁴⁰ The same opinion was also held by Samuel Rutherford, who

³⁶Erskine, 'Gentiles', 408-9.

³⁷Robert Hall, *Help to Zion's Travellers: Being an Attempt to Remove Various Stumbling Blocks Out of the Way, Relating to Doctrinal, Experimental and Practical Religion*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 68.

³⁸Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 12 August 1789, EUL, E.99.14.

³⁹Erskine, 'Blessing the Elect', 454.

⁴⁰Walker, *Theology*, 52.

determined that God was not obliged to save mankind, but did so by his own freewill.⁴¹ Erskine stated it in his own way: ‘Pardon, to those to whom it was granted, was a favour, not a debt.’ The difference hinged on the definition of justice and mercy, in which justice is the penalty of everlasting punishment that is deserved by all, while mercy is the act whereby God rescues some from the fire. God always does what is right and best in ‘his infinite wisdom’ and it would be wrong to try to determine his will.⁴² Election, therefore, was judged to be based on mercy, whereas God passing over some was a matter of justice. Erskine was following the teachings of many of the previous divines, but without advocating a stringent, high Calvinistic view of double election.

Whereas Alister McGrath, Isabel Rivers and C. F. Allison write that many British divines, such as Henry Hammond, George Bull and Jeremy Taylor, were moving away from the Puritan belief of imputed righteousness in favour of a more Pelagian understanding of justification by faith, this was not true of Erskine.⁴³ G. R. Cragg argues that the Puritan form of Calvinism in its ‘reckless lack of moderation’ ultimately led to the shift from a dominance of Calvinism to Arminianism, which turned into English Deism.⁴⁴ Even among Evangelicals like John Wesley, imputed righteousness was becoming less in vogue with the new intellectual spirit, which gave greater weight to human ability than previously taught.⁴⁵ Erskine, however, believed

⁴¹Walker, *Theology*, 68.

⁴²Erskine, ‘Blessing the Elect’, 455-6.

⁴³Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification: Volume II: From 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 109, 116; Alister E. McGrath, ‘The Emergence of the Anglican Tradition on Justification, 1600–1700’, *Churchman* 98 (1984), 28-43; Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780: Volume I: Whichcote to Wesley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 73; C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (Vancouver, B. C.: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 184.

⁴⁴G. R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of Changes in Religious Thought Within the Church of England, 1660 to 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 30-1.

⁴⁵Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688–1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 417.

that Christ's death alone was the reason why salvation was possible; there was nothing in humanity that could aid this process.

In his sermon, 'The People of God Considered as All Righteous', he explained that the 'righteous' were those who have 'imputed righteousness', which 'qualifies' them for heaven and was demonstrated by the 'evidence' of their true character as Christians.⁴⁶ As a response to those who, when speaking of imputed righteousness, 'ask with a sneer' how Christ's justification, which we never performed, can be counted to us, Erskine showed that Christ's actual righteousness was not taken from the Saviour and 'transfer[red] to us'. Rather, God simply 'places' Christ's righteousness 'to our account, deals well with us for the sake of it, and graciously accepts it for our pardon and justification'.⁴⁷ Erskine argued that the forgiveness of debts was a perfectly legitimate custom in modern society. Debts are often paid by another so that creditors are not harassed. The difference was in the amount of debt that God forgave, which was based entirely upon Christ's work on the cross. God could not simply forgive sins without atonement because such a decision would 'eclipse the glory of the law, and cast a cloud upon his spotless purity and awful justice'.⁴⁸ Because Adam and Eve sinned and failed in their covenant with God, access to heaven was now impossible through human means.⁴⁹

Here again, Erskine was following the typical Calvinistic understanding of imputed righteousness that seventeenth-century divines like John Owen had championed.⁵⁰ Erskine credited Owen's work on justification in a footnote, but he gave even greater praise to the contributions on the same subject made by more recent

⁴⁶Erskine, 'Righteous', 280.

⁴⁷Erskine, 'Righteous', 291.

⁴⁸Erskine, 'Righteous', 284.

⁴⁹Erskine, 'Righteous', 281.

⁵⁰John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960), 725–53; John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated* (Coventry: Printed by Luckman and Suffield, 1797).

authors such as Jonathan Edwards and John Maclaurin, showing that he was not alone in adhering to this classical view of justification.⁵¹ Erskine promoted Jonathan Edwards's thesis in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), that true saving faith should be tested for sincerity, which drew inspiration from Locke's empirical method.⁵² On the subject of testing whether a person was a true believer or not, Erskine confidently wrote, 'I know no writer who... has proceeded with such cautious regard to the infallible touchstone of truth, as Mr Jonathan Edwards of Northampton, in his judicious treatise concerning religious affections... I scarcely think this age has produced any book on practical divinity, which will so well reward a careful perusal.'⁵³ Because evidence of works was important to demonstrate that one was a true follower of Jesus, Erskine argued that the doctrine of justification by an imputed righteousness was 'by no means a pillow for sloth and security'.⁵⁴ Thus even his classical belief in imputed righteousness had an enlightened aspect to it, for knowledge alone was not what the gospel required; there was further need of testing one's sincerity.

One of the trademarks of Puritanism was a wrestling with one's assurance of faith.⁵⁵ McGrath explains that when the Bezan school suggested that one may appear to have saving faith, but not be in reality one of the elect, this resulted in the typical Puritan anxiety about election.⁵⁶ Although David Bebbington shows a shift in belief toward assurance of salvation among Evangelicals, there were many notable

⁵¹Erskine, 'Righteous', 293.

⁵²John E. Smith, 'Puritanism and Enlightenment: Edwards and Franklin', in William M. Shea and Peter A. Huff (eds.), *Knowledge and Belief in America: Enlightenment Traditions and Modern Religious Thought* (New York and Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1995), 201–03.

⁵³John Erskine, 'The Qualifications Necessary for Teachers of Christianity', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 28.

⁵⁴Erskine, 'Righteous', 313.

⁵⁵Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, 98-100.

⁵⁶McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 112-14.

Christians in the eighteenth century who underwent tremendous spiritual torture before receiving final confidence in their election.⁵⁷ The American colonist Samuel Hopkins struggled with this in his days at Yale and even in the subsequent years after his graduation.⁵⁸ In typical Puritan fashion, the Scottish Relief Presbytery minister Thomas Gillespie believed that it would be rare for individuals to be assured of salvation within their lifetime.⁵⁹ The Anglican hymn writer and divine John Newton wrestled with the assurance of his own salvation before settling on a humble security of it.⁶⁰ Many of the Scottish Seceders, under the auspices of Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, reverted to the older teachings of the Puritans on intense self-scrutiny for assurance of salvation so that they were often overwhelmed with doubts as their salvation.⁶¹ Therefore, it cannot be said that the restless piety associated with the Puritan was completely shunned by eighteenth-century Evangelicals in Britain.⁶²

Erskine, perhaps gaining his own assurance years before, never hinted at a struggle with his own election in any of his published works or letters, but he did continue to teach in his sermons that a certain amount of soul-searching was advisable. It is necessary to ‘search and try our ways’, Erskine remarked, ‘to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith, to prove ourselves in earnest, whether Christ be in us, or whether we are yet reprobates.’⁶³ Drawing again from Jonathan Edwards’s

⁵⁷Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 42.

⁵⁸Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1981), 27–30.

⁵⁹Kenneth B. E. Roxburgh, *Thomas Gillespie and the Origins of the Relief Church in 18th Century Scotland* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 148.

⁶⁰D. Bruce Hindmarsh, ‘I Am a Sort of Middle-Man’: The Politically Correct Evangelicalism of John Newton’, in George A Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds.), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 32, 41–2.

⁶¹Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 55.

⁶²A more thorough critique of Bebbington’s thesis with regard to Puritanism is displayed in John Coffey, ‘Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition’, in Michael A. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (eds.), *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 252–77.

⁶³John Erskine, ‘On the Views of the Glory of Christ Which Produce Humiliation and Penitence’, in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 228.

Religious Affections, he warned his parishioners of a feeling whereby one believed that salvation was secure, but in reality had the potential to bring ‘you to the grave with a lie in your right hands’. These feelings were ‘certain religious impressions made upon their minds’ as well as ‘a certain train of experiences, carrying in them a great resemblance to a work of conversion’.⁶⁴ Erskine was simply affirming Edwards’s warning that ‘Persons may seem to have love to God and Christ’, but in reality, ‘have no grace’.⁶⁵ The possibility of this kind of deception was attributed by Erskine to ‘a natural sweetness of temper’ of which ‘the passions of some are easily wrought upon, by lively representations, whether of a pleasant or terrible nature’. Even ‘the eloquence of the preacher, and the affectionate way in which he paints objects, moving their minds, just as an interesting story is apt to do’ might convince one temporarily of assurance of salvation. Such an individual was likened to the seed that fell on stony ground, but which had no root to sustain its growth. ‘Their joy’ had not the root of grace that is necessary for salvation, ‘but only a series of beautiful images, striking their imagination with pleasure and delight’, convincing them that their conduct was sufficient for their own means of grace.⁶⁶ Though not evident in his own life, the Puritan practice of wrestling with one’s confidence of salvation continued to be taught by Erskine.

It was argued that only true Christians have knowledge of the Lord. The natural man ‘receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God’. Such matters are ‘foolishness’ to the world. Although the unregenerate may learn ‘from theory’ about Christ, they have no understanding of who he is or what role he plays. ‘It is true, natural or unregenerated men may have a strong persuasion of the same things, arising from their habits or their education... they may even yield an assent to them founded

⁶⁴Erskine, ‘Righteous’, 303.

⁶⁵Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 74.

⁶⁶Erskine, ‘Righteous’, 304.

on rational arguments', Erskine submitted, but they will not be saved. True believers, on the other hand, accept orthodox principles by faith, even though others assert that such teachings are 'doubtful speculation'. A true Christian recognises that saving faith is brought by God alone who convinces the senses to believe what may not naturally conform to reason. It is 'by opening the eyes of the soul to perceive the true glory of the Son of God, and of the Gospel published in his name, that the Spirit of God produces, or enables the saints to exercise all saving faith'. This is a supernatural enlightenment by the Almighty, who 'unveils his glory to the men whom the Father gave [Christ] out of the world'.⁶⁷ Only true believers receive the light that emanates from the Spirit.

Throughout his discourses homage was given to the traditional teachings of the gospel that were resistant to some of the tenets of the Enlightenment. In his 1783 sermon, 'Instructions and Consolations on the Unchangeableness of Christ', Erskine argued for the consistency of Christian theology. He stated that the teachings of Jesus and his apostles 'have been, are, and ever shall be, the only rule of faith and manners'. Advancements 'by the aid of various experiments and observations' improved society but were not as constant as the gospel. The simplicity of the gospel message is timeless and should not be tampered with. 'Men must think of themselves more highly, and of the word of God more meanly, than they ought to think', Erskine surmised, 'who imagine, that they can make Christianity better, than the plain, natural, obvious sense of the sacred oracles, has made it.' There was an acknowledgement that the current enlightened age had recommended a different, more liberal understanding of the Bible, which Erskine strongly opposed. He asked, 'Have the words, faith, salvation, justification, conversion, and others which often occur in the New Testament, acquired another sense in the 18th century, than they had in the first?' 'Are we saved by another faith, than that which saved the immediate

⁶⁷Erskine, 'Glory of Christ', 222-5.

disciples of Christ?’⁶⁸ The Edinburgh Evangelical was opposed to allowing the liberal teachings of the current age to contaminate the purity of orthodox Calvinism.

Erskine was especially traditional in his Christology. In fact, he published six consecutive sermons on aspects of Christ that were based on only two verses in scripture, 1 Tim. 3:15-16, of which five out of the six dealt specifically with verse sixteen.⁶⁹ He affirmed that Jesus was fully God and man. Christ in his incarnation was only one person ‘for his human nature had no separate subsistence of its own’. This meant that as a human, ‘He assumed a true body, subject to hunger, thirst, weariness, and other common sinless infirmities; and a reasonable soul, susceptible of fear, anger, sorrow, compassion, and every other innocent affection and passion of humanity.’ Despite his sinless life, Jesus lived in Palestine undetected as the Son of God.⁷⁰ Only through the Holy Spirit may one be awakened to see Jesus for who he truly is, the Messiah and God’s Son. Natural religion alone was deemed insufficient for realising this discovery. ‘To men, who had no other guide than nature’s light’, Erskine judged, ‘the wonders of redeeming love were wholly unknown: and unknown they must have for ever remained, had not the first stewards of the mysteries of God learned them by inspiration, and been authorised to teach them.’⁷¹ Erskine’s view of Christ’s work was described in typical Calvinistic language. He portrayed Christ as having ‘paid the punishment’ which humans owed to God ‘and purchased for us the heavenly bliss’ as ‘our representative’.⁷² Erskine’s Christology was consistent with that of the early Reformers and not open to any of the liberal changes in theology that

⁶⁸Erskine, ‘Instructions’, 225-7.

⁶⁹In order: ‘The Important Mystery of the Incarnation’, ‘Jesus Justified in the Spirit’, ‘Jesus Seen of Angels’, ‘Jesus Preached unto the Gentiles’, ‘Jesus Believed on in the World’ and ‘Jesus Received up into Glory’.

⁷⁰John Erskine, ‘The Important Mystery of the Incarnation’, in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 331-5.

⁷¹Erskine, ‘Incarnation’, 344.

⁷²John Erskine, ‘Jesus Received up Into Glory’, in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 438.

reduced Jesus to a good man. Thus, the theological content in Erskine's discourses remained thoroughly orthodox.

Erskine, while safeguarding much of the doctrines of former orthodox divines, purposely integrated contemporary epistemological and rhetorical techniques in his discourses. Most of his sermons were a powerful exposition of reasonable arguments that would have been appealing, if not convincing on intellectual grounds, to his hearers. In his sermon 'On the Want of Love', he tactically produced an argument for why believing in an invisible God was entirely congruent with one's reason. First, he showed that one did not need to rely on individual experiences alone to form an opinion. Decisions were constantly being made that were based on the reports of others and their experiences of history. He asserted that 'Whenever we are ascertained of the existence of objects, of their excellency, of our concern in them, or of our capacity to enjoy them, whether by our own senses, by credible testimony, or by the conclusions of reason, there is, in all cases, a sufficient foundation laid for esteem and love.'⁷³ Here, he was affirming Locke's thesis that one's experience contributed to the determination of truth.⁷⁴ Next, Erskine reasoned that since God is love, one's nature was compelled 'to love objects in proportion to their apprehended goodness and excellency', which naturally led one to the Almighty. One cannot admire attributes, such as goodness and love, which are rooted in God, and deny their source. Therefore, it was 'absurd' to suppose that 'men cannot love God because he is invisible'.⁷⁵ Through reason, Erskine provided a logical stance for believing in that which was not seen.

On another occasion, in his sermon 'The People of God Considered as All Righteous', Erskine employed reason to construct a polemic against those who

⁷³Erskine, 'Want', 173-4.

⁷⁴John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1998), 25; John Erskine, 'The Law of Nature Sufficiently Promulgated to the Heathens', in *TD*, 200-41.

⁷⁵Erskine, 'Want', 177-8.

assumed that a person was rewarded by God with Christ's righteousness on account of one's good works. His first point was concise and cogent. He claimed that if salvation was obtained by good works it would have been more convenient for God to honour one's efforts for salvation without the need for Christ's death. Second, he proved that imputed righteousness was necessary for true happiness, which in heaven meant eternal service to God. 'A soul immersed in sensual enjoyments would not be happy in heaven, were it admitted there', reasoned Erskine, because 'amidst the delights of those blessed mansions' that individual 'would find nothing to gratify its unruly desires.' This was his third point, that without true righteousness, one would not be happy serving the Almighty. Such a carnal person would be bored and grow weary of serving the Lord. If people were allowed entrance into heaven without Christ's imputed righteousness they would 'soon fall into confusion and disorder' since heaven would be a society composed of those whose 'principles and tempers were so highly opposite'. Only by receiving Christ's imputed righteousness could there be joy in service to the Lord; without it one was lost and not equipped to worship in heaven. This was due to the 'ocean of corruption within us'. Unregenerate sinners 'cannot please God' because they have 'no capacity' to serve or enjoy him. 'They may indeed declaim handsomely on the natural beauty of virtue, and the hatefulness of vice, and even find a delight in reflecting on these things', but 'to talk is one thing, and to act another' making it 'easier to approve a virtuous character, than to imitate it'.⁷⁶ This was a highly persuasive series of points that completed a sound argument, which was not dependent on the *a priori* knowledge of Christian doctrine that the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divines were known to utilise.

In 'The Important Mystery of the Incarnation', he orchestrated a rational proof for the necessity of the mystery of Christ to be fully God and man. Erskine's underlying point was that since there were many mysteries in nature, including the

⁷⁶Erskine, 'Righteous', 295-9.

birth of children, there should be a certain amount of respect given to other mysteries, such as the incarnation. Not only was some mystery logical, it was also therapeutic to the soul since it ‘abates the pride of knowledge, humbles man in his own eyes, excites his prayers for the spirit of wisdom and revelation, and inflames his longings for that state’. The incarnation was often rejected, asserted Erskine, because of pride, ‘not from soundness of judgment’. Man believed that he could ‘express himself with greater clearness and accuracy, and better explain the mind of Jesus, than it was explained by his first disciples’.⁷⁷ But even Jesus’ closest followers, Erskine held, did not abandon the evidence of reason altogether when it came to teaching Christ’s words. They often incorporated the principles of natural religion by showing through prophecy and miracles that Jesus fulfilled the scriptures. It is no coincidence that Erskine described Christ as the great ‘enlightener’, whose purpose was to ‘enlighten and reform mankind’.⁷⁸ In his discourses, Erskine did not rely entirely on the Bible when preaching; he was fully prepared to offer a reasonable explanation for aspects of Christian doctrine that was both logical and appealing to an enlightened mind.

There is other evidence of his use of reason while preaching. His sermon, ‘Jesus Justified in the Spirit’, was an attempt to authenticate Christ as the Son of God by logical means. He cleverly showed that since the disciples were given extraordinary power through the Holy Spirit that was based on the promise of Christ, the man called Jesus must have been the Son of God. ‘An impostor, who had promised that he would rise from the dead, on the third day, but who had not in truth risen’, Erskine declared, ‘could not have endued his disciples with miraculous powers, and could not have cured the deep-rooted disorders of their understandings and hearts.’ Another point was equally rational. Against the more liberal view, he judged that if being a good teacher was Christ’s only achievement, the disciples would have been similarly justified in receiving this admiration since they had successfully

⁷⁷Erskine, ‘Incarnation’, 352-4.

⁷⁸Erskine, ‘Incarnation’, 362-4.

propagated Christianity throughout the land. In fact, the disciples were more successful at gaining converts than Jesus while living on the earth. It was only after his resurrection that his ministry flourished.⁷⁹

In his sermons, 'Jesus Believed on in the World' and 'Jesus Preached unto the Gentiles', he continued his train of thought on the amazing spread of the gospel, which occurred not during Christ's ministry on earth, but after his death and resurrection. Though Jesus, who was the greatest preacher, spoke to multitudes, 'yet no man received his testimony. He came to his own, and his own received him not.' Even though 'in his own name, and by his own power, he did among them such works as no other man did', Christ was 'despised and rejected of men'. Since the gospel spread so rapidly after Jesus' death and resurrection, did that not authenticate the gospel as sanctioned by an Almighty God? 'The busy, the idle, the profligate, the civilized, the court, the camp, the schools of philosophy, all afforded trophies to the cross.' Further, Christianity faced many critics, especially in its earliest days after Pentecost, 'Yet, fines, banishment, torture, death, inflicted with every circumstance of cruelty, could not deter multitudes, of the tenderest age and sex, from boldly and openly professing a religion, against which, a little before, they had been deeply prejudiced.'⁸⁰ The success of the gospel was solely attributed by Erskine to God's providence and power.

Even the most wicked men fell victim to the power of the Lord and in turn pledged their allegiance to him. The advancement of the gospel had to be the supernatural working of God since the Gentiles of the Roman Empire were the most unlikely and impious people ever to embrace such a religion. The cities of Rome, Corinth and Ephesus or the island of Crete were not strongholds of righteous people. Indeed, 'Many of them were the most abandoned profligates, fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, drunkards, revilers,

⁷⁹John Erskine, 'Jesus Justified in the Spirit', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 380-2.

⁸⁰John Erskine, 'Jesus Believed on in the World', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 422-5.

extortioners'. 'Consult impartially the history of the Roman empire in the apostolic age', urged Erskine 'and perhaps you will find, that no period was every sunk deeper in cruelty, treachery, and the most unnatural pollutions.'⁸¹ This must prove that Jesus was the Son of God for only by God's power could this message have spread throughout the world for close to two millennia. By his promises, the diffusion of the gospel and some of the most hostile conversions to Christianity, Jesus was shown by Erskine to be conclusively divine.

Erskine's persuasiveness and use of logic was perhaps nowhere better displayed than in his sermon, 'On Infant Baptism', which was his last public sermon. There can be no doubt that his background as a trained lawyer, prior to abandoning this career path for the ministry, served him well in formulating a series of points that provided seemingly conclusive data for his main argument. The central point was that infant baptism was called for and consistent with the Old Testament practice of circumcision, a theological comparison which was made by many other Scottish Presbyterians.⁸² In his argument, he first established that Christians were the 'seed' of Abraham. In the Old Testament, circumcision was the outward seal of an allegiance with Abraham as God's people. But as the New Testament demonstrated, this practice was only valid if it also accompanied 'a seal of the righteousness of faith', which was why Ishmael, though he was circumcised, was not included in that covenant.

What occurred in the Old Testament was argued to have relevance and to be rational for today. Erskine stated that 'before such infants arrive at the use of reason', they are 'treated by God, as if they were a part of their believing parents' so that 'if they die in their infancy, they are fitted for, and are put into possession of the happiness of heaven'. This shows that Erskine believed that infant baptism was essential for those children who died prior to making a personal commitment to

⁸¹Erskine, 'Gentiles', 411.

⁸²G. D. Henderson, *The Claims of the Church of Scotland* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), 75.

Christianity. For if infants were not under the covenant of grace then 'we must conceive all of them to perish'. The treaty between God and Abraham was sealed in the Old Testament, and pre-dated Christ and the New Testament, but its underlying principles were carried forward to subsequent generations of those who expressed faith in the same way. This was conclusive to Erskine because 'Christ is the same, yesterday to them that were under the law; to-day to us who are under the Gospel; and for ever to those who shall come after us', which meant that 'if children had originally an interest in the covenant of God, they must have it still'. The main point was that circumcision, though an Old Testament ritual, was applicable today in the practice of infant baptism.

Erskine was using reason to construct his arguments, but he did not abandon scripture in any of his particular theological inquiries. In fact, it was primarily through reason and the Bible that his logic flowed. For instance, he argued that since Romans 2:16-26 described the Gentiles as being 'grafted' into the tree to which the Jews belonged, there should be confidence that what applied in the Old Testament was to be carried forward to those who believed. After reading Acts 2:38-9, Erskine was convinced that baptism was designated for everyone who was committed to faith in Jesus Christ, which included adults and children. 'If all who are in covenant with God, and who received the Spirit of God, ought to be baptized', Erskine contended, 'then it must be impossible that baptism ought to be denied to infants in the church of Christ.' In Matthew 28:19, where Christ told his disciples to teach and baptize all nations, Erskine indicated that there were no restrictions made on this sacrament. In other words, the Apostles were 'appointed to baptize all nations, of which infants are a considerable part'. A final example of defence was in the many passages in the New Testament which spoke of whole households being baptised. Acting again as a biblical scholar, Erskine revealed that never did scripture refer only to part of a family being baptised, 'Much less are we told in any instance, that one part of a family was baptized because it consisted of adult persons, while other members of the same

family were left without baptism, because they were infants.⁸³ There was no shortage of scripture or logic when Erskine gauged the importance of infant baptism. He was defending the Reformed view of infant baptism using reason and the Bible to convince his audience.

In the final portion of this sermon, Erskine sought to dispel the notion that one must not be baptised who had not made a personal confession of Christ. Erskine demonstrated that many of the biblical patriarchs were grafted on to Abraham's promise without the exercise of their own judgment. The example he gave was of Isaac, who was circumcised at the age of eight. One's adherence to the covenant, according to Erskine, had nothing to do with the abilities of those who followed it. He insisted that in the area of law, many contracts bound the rights of children, by the signature of the parents, even though the child might have had no understanding of judicial matters. But it should be stated that Erskine did not believe that baptism was a means of grace for rational adults. The key to his exposition of infant baptism was the idea that children later ratified the covenant that was made on their behalf.⁸⁴ After examining Erskine's logic and use of scripture, it seems obvious that he placed great importance on the use of reason, which was why Moncreiff could write that Erskine's 'readers will not find in his sermons, either the splendour of imagery, or the eloquence of passion. But he will uniformly find plain good sense, and sound argument, enforcing Christian morality, from an extensive and enlightened acquaintance, both with scriptural doctrine, and with the conduct of human life.'⁸⁵ Erskine's sermons were thus rational, but grounded in orthodox Calvinism.

Erskine's discourses were organised logically because he was confident that scripture went hand-in-hand with reason. Like other early enlightened figures, Erskine believed that Christianity was a rational religion. Thus, a person need not

⁸³John Erskine, 'On Infant-Baptism', in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 254-78.

⁸⁴Erskine, 'Infant Baptism', 264-5.

⁸⁵*Account*, 381.

‘blindly follow’ other people’s opinions on doctrine. Rather, a parishioner should weigh the sermon message with an open mind, ‘unbiased by prejudice or prepossession, and ready to embrace the truth as soon as sufficient evidence of it shall appear to him’.⁸⁶ God had endowed his creatures with the ability to think and formulate their convictions based on evidence. Since ‘Men are rational creatures’, he argued, they should be addressed as such by a preacher who offers a clear and cogent message from the Bible.⁸⁷

The fact that Erskine held fast to traditional orthodox doctrine earned him the reputation of being a ‘primitive saint’ by his relative James Boswell.⁸⁸ But, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, he was not averse to the style and techniques of the progressive age, and even in the Calvinistic doctrines that he held, he made some slight modifications that conformed with the new age. Erskine was an adherent to Reformed beliefs, but ‘not the vulgar Calvinism’, as Moncreiff put it, ‘which exhausts itself on intricate and mysterious dogmas’.⁸⁹ Erskine was a forward-looking, optimistic Evangelical Calvinist. As John Ramsay of Ochertyre reiterated, if Erskine’s ‘system of divinity and ecclesiastic polity be nearly that of his brethren in the middle and end of the 17th century; he surely has none of their harshness, gloom, or entangled scrupulosity and craft’.⁹⁰ Erskine’s thought, then, can be said to be traditional in one sense, but progressive in another. In terms of the content of his teachings in the pulpit, Erskine was rightly called a primitive saint, but pertaining to style and delivery, he was consistent with other eighteenth-century preachers by presenting a simple message that was buttressed by reason.

⁸⁶Erskine, ‘Qualifications’, 11-12.

⁸⁷John Erskine, ‘Ministers of the Gospel Cautioned Against Giving Offence’, in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 57.

⁸⁸James Boswell, *Boswell: The Ominous Years, 1774–1776*, eds. Charles Ryskamp and Frederick A. Pottle (Melbourne, London and Toronto: William Heinemann, 1963), 169.

⁸⁹*Account*, 380.

⁹⁰Ochertyre Manuscripts, NLS, MS 1636, 298.

Chapter Five

The Enlightened Theologian

As was previously argued, most eighteenth-century Protestants were not opposed to the intellectual culture of the Age of Reason. Even if there was an emphasis on reason over and above divine revelation and the miraculous stories in the Bible, very few eighteenth-century figures were as anti-religious as Voltaire or Baron d'Holbach. Only when Christianity was deemed as superstitious and bent on suppressing the truth of reason were the leading figures of the Enlightenment opposed to Christian doctrine. Erskine, although going farther in defending orthodox Protestantism than most of the philosophers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, was a proponent of the 'reasonableness of Christianity' that John Locke had taught. The *Theological Dissertations* (1765) is where Erskine's acumen as a theologian and an enlightened eighteenth-century Scot is best displayed. John McIntosh's statement that Erskine was 'arguably the greatest theologian produced by the late eighteenth-century Church' is validated in this collection of essays.¹

These five treatises, three of which were never before published, illustrate outstanding original thought that is grounded on reason. Compared with his two-volume sermons, this work was much more theologically innovative and purposely so. In the preface to his *Dissertations*, Erskine explained that his intention was 'to explain and defend certain Scriptural Truths... which could not have been sufficiently unfolded from the Pulpit, without usurping the place of what was more necessary'.² Here, he was willing to speculate with theological ideas that were meant to enhance orthodox Calvinism without usurping the primacy of the gospel message.³ He believed that secular philosophy and novel theological schemes should not be taught

¹John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740–1800* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 166.

²*TD*, v-vi.

³John Erskine, 'The Nature of the Sinai Covenant', in *TD*, 62.

by a minister from the pulpit, even if there were important truths to be grasped. Erskine reserved his theological genius for his separate publications where one could voluntarily listen to his arguments. One of his main purposes in publishing these five treatises was to demonstrate that traditional Calvinism could be reconciled with Enlightenment epistemology.

The first dissertation, ‘The Nature of the Sinai Covenant’, which was previously delivered before the Presbytery of Glasgow in 1751, offered one of the boldest and most creative theories on the differences between the Old and New Testament ever written by an Evangelical of this period. Although the main thrust of Erskine’s argument should be entirely attributed to him, he acknowledged the insight that he gained from reading Bishop William Warburton’s *Divine Legation of Moses* (1738-41) and the *Dissertations* (Harlingen, 1731) of Professor Herman Venema, the Dutch Reformed Professor of Theology at the University of Franeker in Friesland.⁴ Erskine credited these authors as the inspiration for his work, but insisted that he differed from them in his overall argument. Whereas Warburton, for instance, concentrated his efforts on proving the divine guidance of the Israelites by Yahweh, Erskine’s work was dedicated specifically to the New Testament covenant as a decisive break from the Sinai or Mosaic Covenant.⁵ Within this treatise, Erskine sought to write something new that would be based on reason and scripture, which he argued were the means to determine ‘what is Truth’.⁶ While appealing to reason throughout the piece, Erskine reinforced his points by numerous biblical references. In this sixty-six page treatise, he referenced approximately 300 passages from the Old and New Testament. So even though he produced an enlightened theological work,

⁴*TD*, ix.

⁵William Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated, on the Principles of a Religious Deist*, vol. 2 (London: Printed for the Executor of the late Mr. Fletcher Gyles, 1742–58). On Warburton’s influential work, see Roland N. Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 80 and Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 1 (New York: Harbinger, 1962), 302–3.

⁶*TD*, ix.

he was not willing to formulate his reasonable theory without an extensive use of scripture.

The chief argument in this first essay was that the covenant, given to Moses on Mount Sinai, was entirely an external agreement between God and the Israelites so that if they obeyed the law, God was obliged to bless them with material wealth, health and prosperity. Included in Erskine's treatise was the claim that there were no spiritual blessings attached to this covenant. Instead, it was simply a contract between an employer and an employee where wages were paid for services rendered. The spiritual blessings of the Holy Spirit were reserved solely for the beneficiaries of the covenant established by Jesus in the New Testament.

His thesis hinged on the premise that when God gave Moses the law, all of Israel was bound by a covenant under Yahweh's authority as ruler. From his analysis of the Old Testament, Erskine envisioned that Israel entered into a binding agreement with God as king.⁷ The acting monarch intended to

strike his subjects with awe and reverence [and was evident by the] magnificence of his palace, and all its utensils; his numerous train of attendants; the splendid robes of the high priest... the solemn rites, with which the priests were consecrated; the strictness with which all impurities and indecencies were forbidden... all these tended to promote and secure the respect due to their glorious sovereign.⁸

As ruler over his people, he established and removed individuals from offices, declared war and entered into peace treaties, claimed certain tributes, passed laws, punished disloyalty and defended his subjects from opposition. The Israelites as subjects were expected to keep the Sabbath holy, observe the Passover feast, consecrate their first-born son and deliver regular tithes as a tribute to their king.⁹ This covenant, however, was one of bondage and was sealed 'not by bestowing the influences of the Spirit necessary to produce faith and love', as was the case in the

⁷Erskine, 'Sinai', 3-4.

⁸Erskine, 'Sinai', 5.

⁹Erskine, 'Sinai', 4-6.

New Testament, but ‘by external displays of majesty and greatness’ which were designed to promote ‘a slavish subjection, rather than a cheerful filial obedience’. Whereas in the New Testament God was to be known as a ‘husband’, under the Mosaic Covenant his role was as ‘master’.¹⁰ Erskine had rejected the notion of a ‘Holy Commonwealth’ that was so prevalent among American and British divines in which a Protestant country was in national covenant with the Lord in the same way as Israel, arguing instead that the Mosaic Covenant was a treaty of enslavement rather than blessing.¹¹

Erskine’s ecclesiology surfaced in his discussion of covenant blessings. He believed that those who claimed to be Christians should be treated as such without any reservation.¹² This understanding of the nature of the Church coloured his interpretation of the Sinai Covenant in which even ‘unregenerate Israelites’, who were circumcised on the eighth day according to the law, were accepted as Jews. Those married into Jewish families or purchased as slaves underwent this painful ritual, but once completed, were welcomed as fully participating members of society. Erskine’s inclusive view of ecclesiology resembled the so-called Half-Way covenant practised in colonial New England whereby children of the members of a congregation were allowed baptism and partial membership without a confession of faith. Like the proponents of the Half-Way covenant, Erskine made it clear that eternal salvation and receiving spiritual blessings, however, were dependent upon a personal decision to follow Christ.

Erskine argued that circumcision, as the distinguishing mark of those who were called God’s people in the Old Testament, did not entitle the Jews of the Old Testament to spiritual blessings. Only those who ‘imitated’ Abraham’s faith were

¹⁰Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 6.

¹¹Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press 2004), 280.

¹²*TD*, viii.

tioned to the covenant of grace in addition to the Mosaic Covenant. From the time of Moses until the New Testament, Erskine showed that it was possible to be in an agreement with God and yet be spiritually deprived.¹³ Asa, king of Israel, was an example of someone who was said to have done what was right in the eyes of the Lord all of his days, as his father David did, even though he imprisoned a prophet of God for admonishing him and was never recorded as repenting for this sin. When he was sick at the end of his life, the Bible says that he sought the physicians and not God.¹⁴ But this type of hypocrisy was equally possible under the New Testament covenant in which someone could profess to be a follower of Jesus, but not truly know the Lord. Judas, for instance, was with Christ as one of his disciples, yet a ‘devil’ in disguise.¹⁵ Obeying the law in the Old Testament and professing faith in the New Testament meant that one could be an Israelite or a member of the visible Church in appearance only.

Erskine’s argument on ecclesiology took a more provocative turn when he argued that in the Old Testament no one was excluded as an Israelite on moral grounds. Participation in the various festivals or celebrations honouring the Lord did not require virtuous behaviour, according to Erskine, since such activities were based strictly on external purity.¹⁶ The Israelite king Jehu, whose actions were rewarded by God despite his ‘bad motives’, served as a paradigm.¹⁷ The Sadducees also ‘were of the most dangerous principles and abandoned lives’, yet they were allowed to participate in the Passover. Some of them even performed this service as priests. Whereas the stench of the ceremonially unclean was strong enough to exclude them from the temple, those who were saturated internally with moral filth were granted

¹³Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 8-11.

¹⁴Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 47.

¹⁵Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 11.

¹⁶Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 11-12.

¹⁷Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 16.

full access to all of the worship festivals without hesitation. Jesus and his disciples were another example. They were regarded by the Pharisees and Sadducees ‘as the vilest of men, the filth of the earth, and the off-scourings of all things’; however, no attempt was made to prohibit them from the sacrifices or sacraments of the Old Testament. If there were sufficient grounds in the law to exclude them from the temple, Jesus’ enemies would have done so.¹⁸ The external nature of this covenant explained why ‘a God of spotless purity, can enter into a friendly treaty with men’ despite their sins, which ‘he utterly abhors’.¹⁹ The Mosaic Covenant was the means by which God bestowed on the Israelites a certain measure of blessing regardless of their morality.

Erskine averred that it was only coincidental that nations prospered or fell: it was not due to their moral behaviour. As opposed to the current dispensation, which is subservient to the new covenant in Christ, it was ‘peculiar to the Jews that their prosperity or misery, as a nation, wholly depended on their observance or neglect of the Mosaic Law’.²⁰ This idea was the antithesis to the mainstream view held by most of the former Scottish divines, and even a deviation from the typically more progressive Moderates.²¹ Many of the sermons of Adam Ferguson and Hugh Blair were intended to foster repentance by the whole of Scotland. These ministers had the opinion that the nation was under a covenant with God as his people and were susceptible to his wrath and punishment, which could be administered by other countries.²² For example, Blair instituted a jeremiad understanding of the Battle of Culloden in 1745 where the brutal slaying of the Scots was God’s judgment for the

¹⁸Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 12-13.

¹⁹Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 15.

²⁰Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 27.

²¹ G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1957), 61-5; William Storrar, *Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1990), 30-40.

²²*Church*, 43.

country's turpitude.²³ The position that Richard Sher argues for the Moderates, that their preaching is 'at least partially attributable to a steadfast belief that moral transgressions are to blame for national misfortunes and that moral regeneration is necessary for national well being', contrasted with Erskine's opinion in his treatise on the Sinai Covenant.²⁴

Many of those belonging to the Popular party preached these jeremiad-type sermons in which the nation's prosperity depended on its virtuous state. John Bonar's unpublished 'History of Tyre' (1758) showed that God's punishment awaited those nations which were under covenant with him, but failed morally.²⁵ Sher also shows that the former Popular minister John Witherspoon and his fast day sermon at the College of New Jersey (Princeton) on 17 May 1776 depicted the British as unknowingly acting against God's will and bears all of the marks of a typical jeremiad sermon: the sovereignty of God, the sinful nature of mankind, the intelligibility of providence and implicitly the existence of a covenant between God and his 'chosen' people.²⁶ As opposed to the corporate covenant theology characteristic of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divines and early Reformers, Erskine's didactic composition on the subject of a country's morality reflected the individualism that was symptomatic of the Age of Enlightenment.

Using Erskine's formula for covenant blessings, holiness in the Old Testament had an entirely different meaning from being morally pure. Observing the Sabbath, being ceremonially clean, sacrificing animals according to the law, looking to God for victory in battles and avoiding alliances with idolatrous nations were deemed to be the

²³Ingrid Ann Merikoski, 'Christian Stoicism and Politeness: The Making of the Social Ethics of the Scottish Enlightenment', PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1999, 165.

²⁴*Church*, 44.

²⁵*Church*, 43.

²⁶Richard B. Sher, 'Witherspoon's Dominion of Providence and the Scottish Jeremiad Tradition', in Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (eds.), *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 46-50.

ways in which God's people were to be faithful to the covenant.²⁷ Under such an external contract, the Israelites could be labelled as a holy nation since they were judged only according to their obedience to the law. The 'unconverted Jews had not that holiness, which results from moral excellency, or from the graces of the spirit', Erskine explained. Instead, 'they had a holiness, consisting in separation from other nations' through 'legal washings and purifications, and abstinence from whatever ceremonially defiled' as well as 'in freedom from idolatry, and other gross vices, absolutely destructive to a society, of which God was king'.²⁸ This understanding of righteousness was why Erskine concurred with Bishop Warburton that David's title as a 'man after God's own heart' was not on account of his morality, but because he 'steadily' maintained a purity of worshipping God.²⁹ By being sanctified in this way, the Israelites could be pronounced as externally righteous, enabling them to be called a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

The Mosaic Covenant was not without benefits, however, and a confident Erskine maintained that if the Jews obeyed these laws, the Lord was obliged to distribute external blessings to them. He urged one to

read attentively, and without prejudice, Moses' account of the Sinai covenant. There you will find, that the chief promises of it were, that the Israelites should, with little difficulty, subdue the mighty nations of Canaan; that they should enjoy a long, quiet, and peaceable possession of that country, under the divine protection; that their land should abound with corn and wine, milk and honey, and every thing else necessary for their outward prosperity; that they should be preserved from famine, pestilence, and the other plagues and diseases, that God had inflicted on Egypt; that God would multiply them as the sands of the sea, and as the stars of heaven; that he would give them victory over their enemies; and place among them the external symbols of his presence.³⁰

²⁷Erskine, 'Sinai', 37.

²⁸Erskine, 'Sinai', 17.

²⁹Erskine, 'Sinai', 47; Warburton, *Divine Legation*, 318.

³⁰Erskine, 'Sinai', 24–5.

Under the terms of this contract, the Israelites of the Old Testament were treated as ‘children and slaves’ or ‘hired servants’, who were purchased to ‘perform a variety of slavish, burdensome services’. Nevertheless, if ‘they did the work’, Erskine argued, they should ‘expect the wages’.³¹ This was a purely temporal agreement between the children of Israel and their king.

Spiritual blessings therefore commenced only with the institution of the New Testament covenant. The ‘external temporal covenant’, although securing the Jews outward prosperity, ‘gave them no claim to God’s special favour’.³² Due to their carnality, Erskine argued that the Jews were blinded from seeing the genuine benefit and underlying principle of the law. The truth about grace was ‘industriously secreted from them by types and obscure prophecies, till the Christian dispensation should remove that veil, and bring it into open light’. The scripture references of Jeremiah 31:31-4 and Hebrews 8:8-12 indicated that the forgiveness of sins and the ‘enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Spirit’ differentiated the former ways from the covenant established by Jesus.³³ Only after Christ’s resurrection did God see fit to allow ‘divine illumination’ as ‘one of the most important spiritual blessings’. The Israelites were given no such divine vision, which ‘may be one reason why the Old Testament dispensation is termed darkness and a dark place’.³⁴ Under the arrangements of the new covenant, true believers were enlightened, enjoying the blessings given by the Holy Spirit. Erskine had presented a theory which was contrary to the national covenant with God that the Puritans had in mind.

Erskine’s interesting and ingenious treatise on the Sinai Covenant was at least partially intended to defend the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and at the same time argue that losing one’s salvation was inconsistent with scripture. As

³¹Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 22–3.

³²Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 15.

³³Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 34-5.

³⁴Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 33.

opposed to the external nature of the older covenant, the just, ‘in an evangelical sense’, have the right to eternal life based on the righteousness of Christ through faith.³⁵ Erskine discredited the use of Ezekiel 18:24-6 as a proof text that salvation may be lost for those who did not keep God’s commands.³⁶ His view was that the Ezekiel passage was referring to the older covenant in which a person was rewarded for external obedience to the law. ‘All therefore that this passage proves, is, that a man, who, for a time, fulfilled the condition, and was entitled to the benefits of the Sinai covenant, may at last commit such wickedness and abomination, as will forfeit all these benefits.’³⁷ Whereas the ‘righteousness of the Sinai covenant, could be, and often was lost... Christ’s salvation is for ever, and his righteousness shall not be abolished’.³⁸ The purpose of Erskine’s treatise was not simply to write a speculative theological piece, but to bolster Calvinism in an innovative way.

But despite his pure intent in writing this essay, not all conservative Protestants in Scotland appreciated his theory on the Old and New Testament covenants. Alexander Pirie, a controversial minister who was at one time a member of the Secession Church, spoke of some of the tensions that were caused by Erskine’s treatise. In his *Review of the Principles and Conduct of the Seceders* (1769), Pirie wrote that ‘In October 1767, I attended a meeting of [the] Presbytery, where the dissertation on the Sinai covenant, published by Dr John Erskine in Edinburgh, was declared erroneous, and the author an infidel.’ One minister, ‘with whom the rest all agreed’, stated that ‘If Mr Erskine really believes what he has asserted in that dissertation, I am sure he cannot be a Christian!!!’ Because of his divergence from the prevailing covenant theology that linked a nation’s prosperity with its moral character, Erskine was branded a heretic by some staunch believers. It was

³⁵Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 58.

³⁶Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 56–8.

³⁷Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 58.

³⁸Erskine, ‘Sinai’, 59.

inconceivable to the Seceders that God's dealings with the current Church would be any different from the covenant that he made with the Israelites in the Old Testament. Pirie speculated that the Seceders were outraged with the treatise due to the 'liberty' which the Popular party minister exhibited in his work.³⁹ The complaints of the Seceders against Erskine highlight the differences in outlook among some of the conservative Presbyterians in Scotland. Whereas an experimental Erskine was willing to temper his Calvinism in order to adapt Enlightenment tenets, there were still other Scots who were averse to this type of theoretical Calvinism.⁴⁰

Erskine's second theological dissertation, 'The Character and Privileges of the Christian Church', was a more focused discussion of the blessings associated with the New Testament covenant. The purpose of the treatise was to refute the English Presbyterian minister John Taylor and his 'Key to the Apostolic Writings' (1745), in which he had argued that a simple profession of faith entitled one to receive the spiritual blessings that God intended for true Christians. By 1755 Erskine had already jotted down some preliminary thoughts against Taylor's work, and was now considering having them published. Instead of quickly going to the press with his ideas, however, he delayed its publication, hoping that another able theologian would critique Taylor. Writing to Joseph Bellamy on 24 March 1755, Erskine commented

It is amazing, that none of the dissenters have wrote any thing of value in opposition to Taylor's key to the Apostolick writings, which I take it has done more harm in perverting many from the true gospel, than any book published these many years. I wrote several years ago some cursory remarks in confution of the two grand principles of his system. But they were too concise and inaccurate for publick view. However as nothing else has been published on that plan, I am not without thoughts of publishing them.⁴¹

³⁹Alexander Pirie, *A Review of the Principles and Conduct of the Seceders* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Gray, 1769), 20.

⁴⁰See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005), 55.

⁴¹Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 24 March 1755, JBL, 188:2932:81234.

In August 1748 Jonathan Edwards had received Taylor's *Original Sin* (1740) and his *Key to the Apostolic Writings* from Erskine.⁴² Edwards was aware of the English Presbyterian's work, but did not possess a personal copy of it.⁴³ Rather than addressing Taylor's view of faith, as was displayed in the *Key to the Apostolic Writings*, however, Edwards chose to write against the Presbyterian's view of original sin. With Edwards writing on the depravity of mankind, Erskine flanked the Northampton pastor's position by launching an assault on Taylor's views on the nature of the Church as it pertained to the Old and New Testament covenants. It was only when no other able Calvinist was willing to defend traditional orthodoxy that Erskine ventured to print this polemical treatise.

In order to refute Taylor, Erskine had to prove that there were two distinct covenants in the Old and New Testament. The first point in his argument then was that the material blessings that the Israelites received as compensation for obeying the law were not carried forward into the next dispensation. 'Every outward blessing' that is currently enjoyed by a person, he argued, 'is only an appendage to his inheritance, dispensed to him in a sovereign manner, in so far as is for God's glory' and is 'not claimable by any absolute promise'. Instead, the real 'treasure' for a Christian was reserved for those who entered heaven.⁴⁴ The old covenant allowed the children of Israel to be inwardly corrupt, but now only those 'who have the spirit and temper of Christ, are true members of his church'.⁴⁵ Erskine's view on the Old and New covenants was different from the argument of Taylor, who stated that the 'Gospel is the Jewish Scheme' only 'enlarged and improved'.⁴⁶

⁴²George S. Claghorn (ed.), *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, vol. 16 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 248.

⁴³Philip F. Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 203.

⁴⁴John Erskine, 'The Character and Privileges of the Christian Church, with a Review of Dr. Taylor's Key to the Apostolic Writings', in *TD*, 83.

⁴⁵Erskine, 'Character', 70.

⁴⁶John Taylor, 'Key to the Apostolic Writings', in *A Paraphrase with Notes on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Printed and sold by J. Waugh, 1747), 25.

The Church was defined by Erskine as the collection of true believers. Although by a simple profession of faith one could be included as a member of the visible Church, there were those admitted into congregations who were indeed false Christians, a problem which was similarly addressed by Jonathan Edwards in his *Humble Inquiry* (1749).⁴⁷ Unregenerate parishioners were counted as members of the Church only ‘from our ignorance of their hypocrisy’ in their profession of faith.⁴⁸ Although accepted by other believers, Erskine argued that hypocrites would not receive the bountiful harvest of the new covenant blessings promised to true Christians.⁴⁹ Only those who are chosen by God and who ‘are called by that inward call of the spirit, which renders the outward call of the gospel effectual’ are Christians under the new covenant.⁵⁰ Erskine compared the Church to the parable of the field where the wheat and tares grow together. The tares were those who were ‘fraudulently sown in God’s field by the devil’. Similarly, the parable of the wedding feast, where men turn up as uninvited guests, represented ‘the folly of those who not only pass for good men in the eyes of the world, but fancy themselves entitled to the blessings of grace and glory’.⁵¹ Though unregenerate sinners may be outwardly acknowledged as members of the Church, they are known by God and separated from true believers in the afterlife.

Erskine’s position on the nature of the true Church was ‘diametrically opposite’ to the views expressed by Taylor.⁵² In his earlier treatise, Taylor had posited that a simple profession of faith enabled one to receive all the spiritual

⁴⁷Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: Printed for William Coke, 1790).

⁴⁸Erskine, ‘Character’, 72.

⁴⁹Erskine, ‘Character’, 77.

⁵⁰Erskine, ‘Character’, 70.

⁵¹Erskine, ‘Character’, 90-1.

⁵²Erskine, ‘Character’, 105.

blessings that were entitled to true believers, including election, justification, adoption and sanctification. It was only by living according to the ‘flesh’ that a professing saint was disqualified from eternal salvation.⁵³ Taylor wrote that this covenant was first initiated in the Old Testament and then continued in the New Testament. Whereas Erskine had argued that the Jews enjoyed only temporal blessings and not spiritual, Taylor had said that the Israelites were ‘happy and highly exalted in Civil, but especially in Spiritual Privileges’.⁵⁴ Erskine and Taylor clearly had contrary opinions on the nature of the Church and covenant blessings.

In order to reinforce his argument, Erskine showed that the sacraments were not a means to spiritual blessings for false Christians.⁵⁵ ‘If the symbols of Christ’s body and blood so affect the eye and heart, as to issue in a saving change’, Erskine asserted, this was an ‘accidental benefit’ that ‘rarely happens’.⁵⁶ The Lord’s Supper is a ‘seal’ and ‘symbol’ given by Christ which allows a believer the right to all the spiritual rewards which Jesus’ death purchased. It is not an act by which one is saved; it is simply a ‘pledge’ that one believes in Christ’s merits.⁵⁷ The same symbolic understanding applied to baptism. The unregenerate, though they may technically participate in this sacrament would not be spiritually blessed as a result.⁵⁸ Being baptised was no indication that a person was a follower of Jesus. A ‘profession and suitable practice’, and not baptism alone, instead constitute the mark of a true Christian.⁵⁹ Outward actions, in other words, are the validation of a genuine believer just as they were in the days of Jesus and his Apostles. Paul and Peter, for instance,

⁵³Taylor, ‘Key’, 65–8.

⁵⁴Taylor, ‘Key’, 15.

⁵⁵Erskine, ‘Character’, 77.

⁵⁶Erskine, ‘Character’, 85.

⁵⁷Erskine, ‘Character’, 80.

⁵⁸Erskine, ‘Character’, 78.

⁵⁹Erskine, ‘Character’, 79. See also Anthony R. Cross, ‘The Evangelical Sacrament: *baptisma semper reformatum*’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 80 (2008), 195-217.

attested that baptism was ‘of no avail’ if it was not ‘a sincere and cordial acceptance of the offers of the gospel’.⁶⁰ Although clergymen may unwittingly administer the sacraments to non-Christians, lawfully speaking, they have no right to partake of these emblems.⁶¹

In this second treatise, Erskine had continued his argument on the nature of the Old and New Testament covenants in order to undermine John Taylor’s view that a simple profession of faith would give a person rights to spiritual blessings. Had another Evangelical written against Taylor on the nature of the Church, it is doubtful whether Erskine would have published these first two essays. The treatise was necessary from Erskine’s standpoint, not only to refute the liberal interpretations of the Bible espoused by Taylor, but also as a reinterpretation of the language of covenant. As opposed to the widely accepted view that the treaty established between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai continued on into the present age, Erskine suggested an alternative interpretation. It was his contention that the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites of the Old Testament was not a paradigm for the New Testament people of God. Only Christians of the new covenant were spiritually blessed, and, further, such grace was not dependent upon the morality of a nation as a whole. Instead, spiritual blessings were individual and reserved only for those who were truly regenerate, a decided break from the federal theology of former Reformed interpretations of the Old Testament.

In Erskine’s third dissertation on *The Nature of Christian Faith*, which was originally preached as a sermon around 1748, he sought to defend orthodox Calvinism while at the same time demonstrate that faith was rational and empirically based. Erskine believed that in their zeal to respond to Arminians, sceptics and deists, some Evangelical theologians had inadvertently done harm to the Calvinistic understanding of soteriology by making faith dependent on human freewill. Jonathan Edwards and

⁶⁰Erskine, ‘Character’, 79–80.

⁶¹Erskine, ‘Character’, 81.

Jonathan Dickinson were two of the leading culprits despite their evangelical affiliation. Edwards, though a ‘great man’, in his sermons on justification ‘seems to have placed saving faith in the choice of the will’, which ‘is not the only instance in which writers of such distinguished abilities in proving one thing, lay the foundation for proving another, not only foreign to their thoughts, but opposite to their sentiments’.⁶² The ‘aesthetic vision’, as Gerald McDermott calls it, of Edwards’s description of the light that is cast upon the affections was rejected by Erskine since the affections itself consisted of not only the mind, but also the will.⁶³ Erskine wanted to distance himself from such a view of faith.⁶⁴ He admitted that mainstream ‘Calvinists have considered the consent of the will as included in receiving Christ’, and even conceded that he could not ‘peremptorily deny’ that in some scripture references receiving Christ seems to show the heart choosing or the ‘affections embracing’ Jesus as Saviour. But he insisted that these biblical passages signified ‘something different from faith’.⁶⁵

Jonathan Dickinson was another Calvinist who had overextended himself by arguing that the powers of the mind were made up of the will and the intellect.⁶⁶ Next to Edwards, this American Presbyterian leader was looked upon by Erskine as a theological titan, comparable to no one in all of Great Britain.⁶⁷ In Dickinson, as well as Erskine, one could find aspects of Puritanism intermixed with Enlightenment epistemology.⁶⁸ As Leigh Eric Schmidt states, in Dickinson’s writings ‘one finds a

⁶²John Erskine, ‘The Nature of Christian Faith’, in *TD*, 178.

⁶³Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 61-3.

⁶⁴*TD*, x.

⁶⁵Erskine, ‘Faith’, 170.

⁶⁶Bryan F. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Formative Years of American Presbyterianism* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 85–7.

⁶⁷Edwin F. Hatfield, *History of Elizabeth, New Jersey* (New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1868), 352.

⁶⁸David C. Harlan, ‘The Travail of Religious Moderation: Jonathan Dickinson and the Great Awakening’, *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61 (1983), 412.

convergence of tension – the crossroads of Puritanism and the Enlightenment’.⁶⁹ But Dickinson in his *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1732) and *Familiar Letters to a Gentleman* (1745) had made himself vulnerable by attempting to define Christianity in a way that seemed to promote mankind’s abilities, an Achilles’ heel to an otherwise impressive theological champion.⁷⁰ Erskine too believed that the Calvinistic teaching on faith was rational, but he argued that it need not be dependent on human volition.

To correct the apparent errors of Edwards and Dickinson, Erskine presented a solution that came suspiciously close to the views held by the Scottish minister John Glas and his son-in-law Robert Sandeman, who had proposed that faith was strictly an intellectual assent.⁷¹ Erskine denied plagiarising their ideas, saying that it was through an ‘Attention to scripture’ from which he derived his theory on faith so that he could ‘cite no uninspired book’.⁷² But even if there were obvious similarities between his position and that of these two Scottish separatists, Erskine’s definition of faith was decidedly more complex than Robert Sandeman’s hypothesis that it was simply a ‘bare persuasion of the truth’.⁷³

Erskine’s entire thesis was based on the assumption that saving faith is the revelation that Jesus is the Son of God and Saviour of the elect. To authenticate this claim, Erskine referred his readers to John Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), which ‘largely and unanswerably proved, that this proposition, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God’, was the fundamental truth held by Christians and

⁶⁹Leigh Eric Schmidt, ‘Jonathan Dickinson and the Making of the Moderate Awakening’, *American Presbyterians* 63 (1985), 347.

⁷⁰Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson*, 95.

⁷¹John Macleod, *Scottish Theology: In Relation to Church History Since the Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1974), 187–8.

⁷²*TD*, ix-x.

⁷³See Robert Sandeman’s continual assertion of faith in his *Letters on Theron and Aspasio*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Published by printed by E. Farley, 1757). For a helpful assessment of the theology of Glas and Sandeman, see John Howard Smith, *The Perfect Rule of the Christian Religion: A History of Sandemanianism in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

was the central message preached by the Apostles.⁷⁴ Erskine suggested that faith was not a choice, affection, temper, or behaviour, ‘but meerly [sic] persuasion or assent’.⁷⁵ More specifically, it is ‘a persuasion of something testified in the word of God, which was true in itself’ and ‘which would have remained true’ even if one rejected the Bible.⁷⁶ Faith is the revelation of something that is invisible to the naked eye, but nevertheless real. To explain this notion, Erskine gave the example of Stephen, the first recorded Christian martyr, who saw the heavens open up just before he was stoned to death, even though his murderers were blinded to this vision. Expressed in another way, faith is like a pair of glasses which helps one to see objects that would otherwise be unseen.⁷⁷ There was no reason to be proud of faith since it was passive, and when discovered, simply the awareness of known truths.

Faith, however, was not so passive that a person need not have an understanding of it. Locke had already established that people could not assent to any propositions until they truly understood what was being said. ‘For a Man cannot possibly give his Assent to any Affirmation or Negation, unless he understand the Terms as they are join’d in that Proposition, and has a Conception of the Thing affirm’d or deny’d.’⁷⁸ Additionally, Erskine argued that passages like Isaiah 53:2 and John 17:3 equated faith with knowledge.⁷⁹ So this was not a blind assent; it was ‘knowing what and in whom’ to believe.⁸⁰ Accordingly, it was a revelation of

⁷⁴Erskine, ‘Faith’, 152; John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity with a Discourse of Miracles and Part of a Third Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 32–44.

⁷⁵Erskine, ‘Faith’, 139.

⁷⁶Erskine, ‘Faith’, 144.

⁷⁷Erskine, ‘Faith’, 142–3.

⁷⁸John Locke, *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, 5th ed. (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, 1736), 82; Erskine, ‘Faith’, 152

⁷⁹Erskine, ‘Faith’, 139.

⁸⁰Erskine, ‘Faith’, 145. See also John Y. May, ‘Faith and Knowledge’, *Evangelical Journal* 8 (1990), 84.

knowledge that cannot be separated from the intellect.⁸¹ But in order to believe, Erskine taught, one must first ‘see’ Christ.⁸² Once Jesus’ true identity is revealed and understood, the intellect accepts this truth as a logical conclusion. ‘When we are firmly persuaded of any thing... the mind is naturally led to contemplate it so steadily, that it impresses us, in some measure, as if it were already existing, present with us, and visible to our bodily eye.’⁸³ By following the trail blazed by Locke, Erskine was no different from many other confident Christians who were optimistic that the kind of Christianity that they were advocating could be Bible-based and affirmed through reason and science.⁸⁴ As Helena Rosenblatt explains, enlightened Protestants ‘came to believe that reason could and should be adopted as an indispensable aid to religion in its fight against “enthusiasm” and superstition on the one hand, and deism or atheism on the other. To them, Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) provided invaluable tools, in fact often serving as a kind of unofficial lexicon of the Christian Enlightenment.’⁸⁵ Faith to them was not irrational; it was believing something that already existed, which could be verified by one’s reason.

How is such knowledge obtained? Here, Erskine differentiated himself from other rationally-minded thinkers by advocating that it was not the voluntary exercise of the will which led to this knowledge, but the supernatural impressions made on the mind by God’s Spirit. Christians see what others do not because they have minds

⁸¹Geddes MacGregor, ‘Is There an Intellectual Element in Christian Faith?’, *Anglican-Theological Review* 52 (1970), 23.

⁸²Erskine, ‘Faith’, 145.

⁸³Erskine, ‘Faith’, 143.

⁸⁴On Locke, see Kim Ian Parker, ‘John Locke and the Enlightenment Metanarrative: A Biblical Corrective to a Reasoned World’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996), 57-73 and Dewey D. Wallace, ‘Socinianism, Justification by Faith, and the Sources of John Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity*’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984), 49-66.

⁸⁵Helena Rosenblatt, ‘The Christian Enlightenment’, in Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Volume VII: Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution, 1660–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 285. Erskine and Locke saw reason and scripture as working together to counteract enthusiasm. See Michael Heyd, ‘Be Sober and Reasonable’: *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Brill: Leiden, 1995), 177-8

‘enlightened by the spirit’.⁸⁶ The Holy Spirit gathers from scripture ‘the grand evidence of faith which he had lodged there, and carries it to the hearts of the elect’.⁸⁷ In this illuminating process, one was compelled to believe in the same way that was described by the Calvinistic doctrine of irresistible grace: ‘The word of God’s grace falls with such power and evidence on the soul of the enlightened sinner, that he can no more withhold his assent, than one who has his eyes open and found, can hinder himself from seeing light at noon day, or than a philosopher can refrain his assent from a mathematical theorem, when his understanding is overpowered by demonstration.’⁸⁸ This was not the ‘enthusiasm’ that John Locke had spoken about in which a person was guided by the ‘ungrounded fancies’ of one’s own ‘brain’; it was the mind’s acceptance of overwhelming evidence that could not be denied.⁸⁹ But unlike the voluntary action diagnosed by the will that Locke believed intellectual assent to be, the kind of faith that Erskine was describing was contained within the mind.⁹⁰ By denying that faith was dependent on the will, Erskine believed that he had safeguarded the sovereignty of God and evaded any possible conclusions that human ability was a necessary piece in the soteriological puzzle.

The enlightening power of the Spirit of God was a key distinction in Erskine’s argument since many people could believe that God exists or that Jesus was the Messiah without having saving faith. Posing Christians ‘may have orthodox sentiments of religion’, they ‘may understand all mysteries and all knowledge’ and ‘may also believe, being convinced by miracles and other external evidences, that

⁸⁶Erskine, ‘Faith’, 182.

⁸⁷Erskine, ‘Faith’, 177.

⁸⁸Erskine, ‘Faith’, 182.

⁸⁹John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1998), 413. See also Stephen N. Williams, ‘John Locke on the Status of Faith’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987), 594.

⁹⁰Michael Losonsky, *Enlightenment and Action from Descartes to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72–104.

these mysteries are indeed a divine revelation'.⁹¹ Erskine was arguing that saving faith was not grounded solely on these particulars and was prepared to offer some biblical examples as evidence of his thesis. Nicodemus, for instance, thought of Christ as a good teacher sent by God, yet was not a believer because he never truly heard what the 'Rabbi' was saying.⁹² In John 5:47 Jesus chastened the Jews for not believing the essential truths in the writings of Moses. It was not that they doubted the instructive words of the great Israelite leader, but that they were not enlightened by the Spirit on what was really being said in the Old Testament about the future Messiah.⁹³ So it was proposed that one could have a general knowledge of Christianity and the Bible without acquiring saving faith.

Even though he denied human agency as an active ingredient in salvation, Erskine's view of election was not so rigid that he was willing to abscise all individual choices from God's soteriological plan. He argued that when unregenerate sinners believe in Jesus, they are qualified, because of the Son's righteousness, 'to the pardon of sin, to the influences of the spirit, and to eternal glory' by God's promise, but 'this does not hinder their being put in actual possession of them gradually, and in the use of the prayer of faith, and other means'.⁹⁴ This statement indicates that Erskine was certain that salvation was assured as a final product for the elect, but the means and the timeline were subject to prevailing circumstances. Erskine, like other Evangelical Calvinists, was not a fatalist.⁹⁵ Therefore, while he did not agree with Edwards that freedom was tied to the will, he believed that there was a certain amount of independence in choices which rendered a person responsible for his or her actions. Although his view of faith was very close to that of John Glas and Robert Sandeman,

⁹¹Erskine, 'Faith', 177.

⁹²Erskine, 'Faith', 153.

⁹³Erskine, 'Faith', 146.

⁹⁴Erskine, 'Faith', 176.

⁹⁵Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 64.

who made faith strictly an intellectual exercise, Erskine deviated from them by insisting that means of grace should be utilised for one's conversion to Christianity, and that once enlightened by the Spirit, the mind was active in developing this knowledge of the Lord.⁹⁶ In this regard, he came closer to Leibniz, who had denied that judgments were a product of the will, but allowed for preparatory means to aid the formation of beliefs, making a person responsible for any delays in finding truth.⁹⁷

The final aspect in Erskine's treatise on faith was the requirement of godly activity as a confirmation of sincere faith, in which he appropriated the Enlightenment principle of testing the reliability of information. Erskine believed that when people's spiritual eyes were opened, they would know instinctively that they were one of God's elect. There is a knowledge of the Lord, he taught, that is 'posterior to our spiritual espousals', whereby a person knows by 'feeling' that one possesses saving faith.⁹⁸ It is 'an assurance of sense, not of faith'.⁹⁹ Erskine proposed that faith is the revelation of truth in the mind, but assurance of it stems from a different source. Sanctification is the process that takes place over time in which one learns from 'divine revelation, rather than the precepts' about the nature of God. In other words, it is the testing ground by which a person experiences first-hand knowledge of what one now believes. The command to love the Lord, as an example, is not followed because God requires it, but through personally discovering his affection. Only by sustaining the virtues of justice, long-suffering and mercy does one know that God possesses all those characteristics and more.¹⁰⁰ 'None rightly believe that Christ is a Saviour', Erskine reasoned, 'who have not suitable conceptions from what he saves. And none can have such conceptions, without perceiving the goodness and excellency

⁹⁶Smith, *Perfect Rule*, 71-4; Andrew Fuller, *Strictures on Sandemanianism, in Twelve Letters to a Friend* (Nottingham: C.Sutton, 1810), 17; Erskine, *TD*, x.

⁹⁷Losonsky, *Enlightenment and Action*, 158-9.

⁹⁸Erskine, 'Faith', 185.

⁹⁹Erskine, 'Faith', 186.

¹⁰⁰Erskine, 'Faith', 187-9.

of the gospel salvation.’¹⁰¹ The heartfelt feeling confirms the faith that the mind assents to, and godly actions are the proof of this belief. In this treatise, Erskine had purposely defined faith in a way that conformed to Locke’s epistemology and demanded empirical evidence while at the same time including classical Reformed doctrines like election, irresistible grace and the maturity of a Christian through sanctification.

One of the earliest publications that introduced Erskine’s ability as a rational theologian was his fourth dissertation, ‘The Law of Nature Sufficiently Promulgated to the Heathen World’. This work was first published in 1741 during his days as a university student at Edinburgh, but prior to the Cambuslang and Kilsyth Revivals of 1742. His objective was to challenge the assumptions made by Archibald Campbell, Professor of Divinity and Ecclesiastical History at the University of St Andrews, in his book, *The Necessity of Revelation* (1739), which posited that divine revelation was necessary for discovering God’s existence. Written at such a young age, Erskine’s polemic revealed his extraordinary intellectual ability. Moncreiff told his readers that the ‘number and exactness of his quotations’ of books of the past and present and the ‘quick discernment with which they are applied to support his argument, are lasting monuments of an extent of information, a maturity of judgment, and powers of discrimination, of which few equal examples can be produced, from the pen of any individual, at the same early age’.¹⁰² Indeed, Bishop Warburton was so impressed with this pamphlet that he told Erskine, in a letter dated 20 February 1744, that ‘One who can write with that learning, precision, and force of reason, with which you confuted Campbell, ought never to have his pen out of his hand.’¹⁰³ Although he was not quite twenty years old when he originally composed this work, and had not even

¹⁰¹Erskine, ‘Faith’, 190.

¹⁰²Erskine, 41.

¹⁰³Erskine, 54.

begun his divinity education at Edinburgh University, Erskine demonstrated that he was a very capable theologian.

In his previous dissertation, Erskine asserted that only by the enlightening powers of the Holy Spirit could a person realise saving faith. In this treatise, however, he intended to prove that through reason alone mankind has at least a basic understanding of God. Included in his thesis was the additional proposition that the majority of ancient philosophers had discovered the immortality of the soul and believed in future rewards and punishments in the afterlife. But when he wrote the preface to his *Theological Dissertations* in September 1764 he admitted that since the time of its original publication in 1741 he had become ‘fully convinced’ that most early philosophers did not have such knowledge of the immortality of the soul and divine rewards and punishments. Despite this caveat, he reaffirmed that the ‘general argument’ of this work, which was that God may be known from natural religion, ‘appears to me in the same light’.¹⁰⁴ He was not trying to prove that saving faith could be found by reason, but rather that a general knowledge of a supreme being who created the world and sovereignly governed it could be easily known. Similar to the debate between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner in the twentieth century, the heart of the dispute between Campbell and Erskine related to natural theology.

From Erskine’s perspective, the St Andrews professor, in his noble attempt to refute the deism of Matthew Tindal in his *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1731), had gone too far by rejecting natural religion altogether.¹⁰⁵ Campbell’s arguments ‘are stretched further than their nature allows’, Erskine contended, which had the potential to discredit Christianity as an intelligent and sensible religion.¹⁰⁶ Even the General Assembly of Scotland thought that the professor had propounded ‘doubtful, if

¹⁰⁴*TD*, x-xi.

¹⁰⁵Archibald Campbell, *The Necessity of Revelation: Or an Enquiry Into the Extent of Human Powers with Respect to Matters of Religion* (London: Printed by William Bowyer at the Expence of the Society for the Encouragement of Learning, 1739), 21–3.

¹⁰⁶John Erskine, ‘The Law of Nature Sufficiently Promulgated to the Heathens’, in *TD*, 201.

not heretical, tenets'.¹⁰⁷ Like other Evangelicals, Erskine believed that the deists were unfaithful to traditional Protestantism by insisting that the miraculous accounts in the Bible and divine revelation were contrary to reason.¹⁰⁸ To argue the extreme opposite opinion, that there could be no knowledge of God except by divine revelation, however, was also an adulteration of orthodox Calvinism.

The outstanding feature of this treatise is Erskine's confidence in mankind's ability to use logic. He was sure that he could establish that heathens, 'by bare unassisted reason', were able to discover God through observation of the natural world.¹⁰⁹ Reason alone, it was shown, was the cause of many new discoveries made through experimentations in science and mathematics. Thus, 'if reason can discover what is more difficult', Erskine asked, 'why may it not discover what is more easy also'?¹¹⁰ Nature revealed certain knowledge of God and his sovereignty so that mankind was without any excuse for learning about the Creator. 'God has afforded the Heathen world such advantages for the discovering and receiving these truths', Erskine proclaimed, 'that their ignorance or disbelief... could be owing to nothing but their own negligence or perverseness.'¹¹¹ Sin, therefore, was no viable excuse for ignorance of the truth since God has revealed himself through natural means.¹¹² And if God enacted a universal natural law that was compulsory, mankind must be capable of discovering it since no statute can be binding without knowledge of its existence.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷Erskine, 35.

¹⁰⁸On the Deists, see Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 243-52; Stromberg, *Liberalism*, 50-81; Mark I. Wallace, 'The European Enlightenment', in Peter H. Van Ness (ed.), *Spirituality and the Secular Quest* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 81-4; Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Watts and Wesley to Martineau, 1690-1900* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 95-6; Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1973), 47.

¹⁰⁹Erskine, 'Heathens', 212.

¹¹⁰Erskine, 'Heathens', 213.

¹¹¹Erskine, 'Heathens', 207.

¹¹²Erskine, 'Heathens', 213.

¹¹³Erskine, 'Heathens', 207.

Erskine claimed that ‘the only reason why wicked men are averse to believe the existence of a God... and other important articles of natural religion, is, that they see plainly, if these doctrines are true, they must either forsake their beloved vices, or expose themselves to certain ruin; and as they have no mind to do either... they attempt to persuade themselves that religion is nothing but a cheat’.¹¹⁴ Thus, in order for them to reject the notion of an almighty God, they must have been first aware of this being’s existence.

There were a number of ancient philosophers that both men eagerly referenced to prove their point. Erskine cited Aristotle, Cicero, Plato, Pythagoras and Thales as examples of those who had knowledge of God through natural religion.¹¹⁵ Campbell, on the other hand, had the opposite opinion, saying that ‘None of the ancient philosophers, in searching out and explaining the first cause and origin of things, ever were led to apprehend the being and perfections of the deity.’¹¹⁶ The ancients believed that the ‘first principle of the universe’ was either matter, earth, water, air or fire.¹¹⁷ Erskine admitted that ‘these philosophers foolishly reckoned God a material being’. But in their inaccuracy in defining God, they nevertheless recognised ‘a first cause of all things’, and by doing so, ‘they ascribed to it most of the properties we do to the true God’.¹¹⁸ So Campbell and Erskine agreed that some of the earliest known philosophers acknowledged a first principle or cause, but the two Scots interpreted this piece of evidence differently.

In defying Campbell’s argument, Erskine was not so dependent on reason that he sidestepped scripture. Psalm 19:1, ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork’, was seen as offering a powerful proof of God’s

¹¹⁴Erskine, ‘Heathens’, 213–14.

¹¹⁵Erskine, ‘Heathens’, 229–41.

¹¹⁶Campbell, *Necessity*, 213.

¹¹⁷Campbell, *Necessity*, 214–18.

¹¹⁸Erskine, ‘Heathens’, 239.

existence. For ‘such marks of a wise and powerful efficient cause appear in the celestial bodies, as declare aloud to every person who does not shut his ears against their voice, that God is their creator’.¹¹⁹ The fact that the psalmist wrote that the heavens ‘declare’ the glory of God, rather than simply ‘illustrate’ it, was viewed as conclusive that God’s work is known by those who observe the sky. Verses three and four of the same chapter elucidated that no one was so ignorant that they could not properly interpret the celestial sphere: ‘There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard’; it ‘goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world’. In these verses, nature teaches mankind ‘not only the existence of a deity’, but also that ‘his providence rules over, and disposes of all persons and things, so that nothing happens in this world without his direction’.¹²⁰

The Apostle Paul’s words in Romans 1:18-20 affirmed what the psalmist had said. Verse eighteen, ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness’, answered the question why God was justified in punishing some individuals – because they purposely ‘suppress’ the truth. Erskine believed that verse nineteen, which stated that ‘which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them’, proved that ‘the natural and moral perfections of God... were known among the heathens’. After reviewing verse twenty, ‘For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse’, Erskine pronounced that it had ‘plainly asserted, that the divine perfections are clearly seen from the works of creation, and that they have been so ever since the world was made’.¹²¹ From his examination of the scriptures and his knowledge of the classics, Erskine concluded that ‘the heathens were not only capable of discovering the truths

¹¹⁹Erskine, ‘Heathens’, 219.

¹²⁰Erskine, ‘Heathens’, 220.

¹²¹Erskine, ‘Heathens’, 221.

of religion... they actually knew them'.¹²² Despite Campbell's attempts to prove otherwise, Erskine had proposed a thorough argument that natural religion was one of the means for establishing the existence of God.

Within this dissertation, there was a notable display of Locke's principal beliefs on forming knowledge. Erskine's reference to Psalm 19:1 was the identical biblical passage that one of his theological heroes, the Dutch Reformed professor Hermann Venema, had used to endorse natural religion as the means of knowing God. Venema, whose works Erskine owned, stated that an individual 'cannot learn that there is a God from innate knowledge; yet, if he will use his reason aright, he will assuredly come to such a conclusion'.¹²³ Like Erskine, Venema was drawing on Locke, who had posited that reason was implanted by God into the minds of humans so that their impressions could be formulated by one's experience.¹²⁴ From Erskine's standpoint, one could know God because he was evident in the world. By observing the universe and the created order, a determination could be made that there was a supreme deity who sovereignly ruled the earth. This *a posteriori* method of arguing was one mark of an enlightened mind, at least among Evangelicals,¹²⁵ and represented a break from the *a priori* scholastic methodology of former divines such as John Owen.¹²⁶ 'The Law of Nature Sufficiently Promulgated to the Heathen World' conformed to Locke's thesis since 'heathen' awareness of God was evaluated by reason and empirical knowledge of the natural world. Once again Erskine had defended orthodox Calvinism by using Enlightenment epistemology. Further, in these

¹²²Erskine, 'Heathens', 222.

¹²³Hermann Venema, *Institutes of Theology*, trans. Alex W. Brown (London: T & T Clark, 1850), 11.

¹²⁴Locke, *Essay*, 19–42.

¹²⁵David W. Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America', in George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds.), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 187.

¹²⁶Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640–1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 96.

first four treatises, he had shown himself to be a capable biblical scholar, theologian and philosopher.

Although not a theologically unique specimen in terms of its thesis, Erskine's last dissertation, 'An Attempt to Promote the Frequent Dispensing of the Lord's Supper', originally published in 1749, presented a rational and scripturally cogent argument for administering this sacrament in churches regularly throughout the year. This was the same stance that the Scottish Evangelical and friend of Erskine Thomas Randall took in his *A Letter to a Minister from his Friend, Concerning Frequent Communicating* (1749). Apparently, Randall's manuscript was written after Erskine's essay, even though it was published first.¹²⁷ These were 'bellwether' texts for reform on this topic.¹²⁸ The occasion for these pamphlets was that the synod of Glasgow and Ayr, on 5 October 1748, had reviewed a proposal from the presbytery of Glasgow which suggested more frequent celebration of communion in the Kirk.¹²⁹ The synod was unanimous in agreeing that the Lord's Supper should be offered more than the current practice of once or twice a year in each parish and had advised that many of the existing problems would be solved if communion was celebrated four times per year in each of the parishes of a presbytery on the same Sunday.¹³⁰ This proposal was to be subsequently ratified by the General Assembly, with the discussion by the ministers of the Kirk centring on two questions: was the idea of the Lord's Supper being administered at a minimum of four times per year a prudent scheme and were the 'means' for this end 'the most proper, the least exceptionable'?'¹³¹

¹²⁷Erskine, 151.

¹²⁸Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 187.

¹²⁹One of the reasons for the infrequency of communion services was the lengthy process required of the parish ministers to catechise and examine each individual before they could participate. G. D. Henderson, *The Scottish Ruling Elder* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1935), 44-5. John Erskine, 'An Attempt to Promote the Frequent Dispensing of the Lord's Supper', in *TD*, 242.

¹³⁰Erskine, 'Frequent', 242-3.

¹³¹Erskine, 'Frequent', 244.

Not all of the Evangelicals were united in this debate. Erskine told the Boston pastor Thomas Foxcroft in a letter on 14 February 1749 that the Scottish clergyman James Robe and ‘four or five other worthy Ministers keenly oppose’ the synod of Glasgow’s proposal. Part of the problem, according to Erskine, was that there were many people at this time who were ‘against any thing however scriptural which has the appearance of an innovation’. He gave the example of the attempt in John Gillies’s Glasgow congregation to ‘introduce a quicker way of singing the Psalms, without dwelling so long on every note, that so eight or ten verses might be sung in the time taken up by four’. But rather than appreciate the introduction of this faster paced beat, Erskine stated that since ‘the people [were] crying out against it as high Church and Popery, it was forced to be dropped’.¹³² There was at first hesitation of writing on this subject, but ‘some circumstances’ persuaded Erskine that silence on this matter was a greater disservice to the Kirk.¹³³ He concluded that frequent communicating was important to the vibrancy of the Established Church and a privilege for Christians which was established by Jesus.

According to Erskine, communion was instituted by Christ as a symbolic act to remember his sufferings and death on the cross. The Lord’s Supper provides an atmosphere where one can better be reminded of the brutal death and humiliation of Jesus’ death, which was a propitiation for mankind’s sins. In this memorial act, ‘we see the loving and lovely Jesus laying down his life as a sacrifice and atonement for our sins; and shedding his precious blood to purchase for us a happiness large as our wishes, and lasting as eternity’.¹³⁴ Since mankind’s wellbeing and salvation cost Christ so much, the Lord’s Supper should be repeatedly and reverently administered. For, if a close friend, who just before dying, asked those dearest to remember him by communicating, ‘Would we cast it into some by-corner out of sight? Would we suffer

¹³²Erskine to Thomas Foxcroft, 14 February 1749, TFP.

¹³³Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 244.

¹³⁴Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 245.

it to be sullied with dust? or buried under lumber, neglected and forgotten?' No, such a commemorative meal would most likely be cherished, 'not only by care to preserve it from abuse, but by frequent looks, thereby to renew, and, if possible, to increase an affectionate remembrance'.¹³⁵ It was not as though Jesus asked his followers to participate in a number of rituals on his behalf. For Christ knew 'how loath we are to undertake any thing difficult' and so avoided burdening those who believed on him 'with any number of troublesome ceremonies' by only requiring 'this one ordinance, by which we should openly declare ourselves on Christ's side, and proclaim to the world our grateful, affectionate sense of his unparalleled love'.¹³⁶ Unless the Church believes that it has greater insight than the Lord, it is not at liberty to adjust a command from Jesus for any reason.¹³⁷

Communion was not simply a symbolic rite; it was also a seal and aid to one's faith. 'Does it not greatly tend', Erskine asked, 'through the divine blessing, to strengthen the communion of the mystical body of Christ, and to warm and enlarge our affection to all who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity? Does it not often prove meat indeed, and drink indeed to the fainting soul?'¹³⁸ The repeated administration of communion would not lessen its significance as a spiritual blessing. Other religious acts when practised habitually, like prayer and the hearing of the Word of God preached, were no less reverent when consistently utilised as a means of grace. On the contrary, 'Those who abound in them most, find most benefit in them.'¹³⁹ Neither was this sacrament relevant only for the early Church. The Corinthians of Paul's day, for instance, were hardly the archetype of those who were living godly lives. Even if these were 'degenerate times', Erskine assessed, the situation in the world would only

¹³⁵Erskine, 'Frequent', 246.

¹³⁶Erskine, 'Frequent', 248.

¹³⁷Erskine, 'Frequent', 290.

¹³⁸Erskine, 'Frequent', 248.

¹³⁹Erskine, 'Frequent', 292.

improve by administering the Lord's Supper more frequently. As Calvin had said, the weaker one's grace is, the more that the ordinances are needed to revive spirituality.¹⁴⁰ Thus, by partaking of communion consistently, spiritual blessings were more likely to be bestowed upon followers of Christ.

In his argument, Erskine appealed to reason and scripture. There were a number of biblical passages that confirmed his belief that communion may be given on any day of the week, including Sunday. Those converted under Peter's ministry in Acts 2:4 were said to have 'stedfastly' broken bread with each other, alluding to a certain 'constancy' or 'perseverance in an exercise'. Other passages in the New Testament like Acts 1:14; 6:4; 8:13; 10:7 and Romans 12:12 and 13:6 implied that communion was performed as regularly as public prayer.¹⁴¹ Paul's use of 'this bread' and 'this cup' in 1 Cor. 11:26, according to Erskine, signified 'some particular bread and cup', which would have been 'well known among the Jews'.¹⁴² Even if one argued that since the Jewish Passover was celebrated only once a year and that communion should also be given only as an annual memorial service, Erskine demonstrated, through the research of the Nonconformist minister Robert Charnock, that although the Passover was only an annual event, sacrifices occurred daily in the temple, 'which were types of Christ'.¹⁴³ Far from denying frequent communion, the New Testament seemed to suggest that the early Church often broke bread together.

The precedent for observing regular communion was established by Christ. After Jesus was resurrected, and less than a week from the time he first celebrated communion, he feasted at an additional time with some of his closest friends. This was when he walked alongside two of his followers on the road to Emmaus, travelling and later eating with them. Why would Christ have chosen that particular time to

¹⁴⁰Erskine, 'Frequent', 287–8.

¹⁴¹Erskine, 'Frequent', 257.

¹⁴²Erskine, 'Frequent', 251.

¹⁴³Erskine, 'Frequent', 288.

reveal himself to these disciples and break bread with them, if he did not intend to communicate again so soon from the time he originally instituted this sacrament? Why else would Luke have ‘so punctually’ recorded the manner of their sharing this meal with Jesus?¹⁴⁴ Since ‘the expressions’ employed by Luke in this passage are equivalent to his record of the Last Supper, Erskine was ‘persuaded’ that ‘few would have mistaken his meaning’.¹⁴⁵ Jesus’ breaking bread with his followers after his resurrection and Luke’s account of this story was not ‘mere chance’; these examples signalled that partaking the Lord’s Supper should be a regular occurrence for Christians¹⁴⁶

Even though Erskine proposed that communion may be taken on any day of the week, he argued that it was on the first day of the week that the early Church typically met together for this purpose. The context of Acts 20:7, ‘And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them’, suggested that he delayed his journey to Troas in order to partake communion with other Christians. Since this trip transpired on the first day of the week, there must have been a regular occurring schedule of celebrating the body and blood of Jesus, on which Paul could depend. If the early Christians consistently designated the first day of the week for this type of fellowship, it is probable that this is why Sunday became known as ‘the Lord’s day’.¹⁴⁷

Since the early Church was well acquainted with the Apostles, Erskine suggested that they executed this sacrament in the prescribed manner given to them by Jesus. Pliny the Younger verified in his letter to Trajan in 110 AD that early believers met together on a particular day to partake of the Lord’s Supper. Justin Martyr in 155 AD presented Christians as meeting on Sunday and practising

¹⁴⁴Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 255.

¹⁴⁵Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 256.

¹⁴⁶Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 255–6.

¹⁴⁷Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 261.

communion. Tertullian in 200 AD wrote that Christians communicated on Wednesdays and Fridays, testifying that this sacrament occurred regularly and on days other than Sunday. Cyprian, around 250 AD, stated that ‘daily communions’ were normative. In the year 372, the Cappadocian Father, Basil, recommended that Christians should communicate ‘every day’ and disclosed that his congregation in Caesarea celebrated the Lord’s Supper four times per week: Sunday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The contemporary of Basil, Ambrose of Milan, mentioned that communion was distributed daily in his town. Augustine, around 410, recorded that the Lord’s Supper was received on Saturday and Sunday of each week, and sometimes daily. Erskine’s meticulous historical details were ‘more than sufficient to prove’ to him that in the first four centuries communion was ‘dispensed even oftner than once a week, and that it was a constant branch of the sanctification of the sabbath’.¹⁴⁸ The early Church, which frequently met to break bread together, was seen as the ideal model for this commemorative feast.

If communion was given each week on Sunday soon after Christ’s death and resurrection, when did this event become less frequent? The modification of this standard seems to have taken place when Christianity became the favoured religion of the Roman Empire. Erskine employed the research of the English theologian, Daniel Waterland, to show that in the first three centuries there were no ecclesiastical laws set in motion to impose frequent administration of the Lord’s Supper.¹⁴⁹ Without such rules set in place, regular communion was not viewed as necessary. Augustine, after being questioned in 410 on whether the Church should partake of this sacrament daily, responded that ‘Neither he who communicates daily, nor he who does not, really dishonours the Lord’s body and blood’. The Church Father based his argument on the fact that both Zaccheus and the centurion, though a Jew and a Gentile

¹⁴⁸Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 263-6.

¹⁴⁹Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 266.

respectively, honoured the Lord in distinct ways and were received by God.¹⁵⁰ In the fourth century, Erskine testified that ‘defection from the primitive purity of the church began more and more to appear’. He estimated that this happened because there was a marked difference in sentiments between the early Christians of the first centuries and those of the subsequent generations. In the first three centuries, ‘few professed [Christianity] who had not felt the power of it on their hearts’. However, when Christianity was sanctioned as the leading religion of the Roman Empire, ‘a greater number of hypocrites from views of worldly interest, intermingled themselves with the true disciples of Christ’, and within a few centuries, ‘this little leaven leavened the whole lump’.¹⁵¹ After the first three hundred years of the early Church, the ‘multitude of the most terrible mischiefs’ and ‘general decay of the power of godliness’ were at least partially attributed to lessening the importance of communicating.¹⁵² The expansion of Christendom was perhaps one reason why communion became less frequent.

These ‘nominal Christians’ of the newly de-paganised Roman Empire were not as dedicated to the sacredness of Lord’s Supper as the earlier followers of Jesus. ‘Their example would soon be followed by lukewarm Christians’, Erskine surmised, ‘who had fallen from their first love.’¹⁵³ There was evidence for his claim. In 324 AD at a council in Elibiris in Spain, offerings were directed to be received only by those churches which practised the Lord’s Supper, which meant that some churches abandoned communion altogether. In 341 at a council in Antioch, it was settled that all churches which read aloud from scripture, but failed to pray and partake of the elements, were to be excommunicated until which time they repented. Once the popularity of Christianity exploded in the Roman Empire, the Lord’s Supper might

¹⁵⁰Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 269.

¹⁵¹Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 267.

¹⁵²Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 290.

¹⁵³Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 267.

have been exercised regularly by some Christians, but others were guilty of lapsing from the instituted administration of regular communicating.¹⁵⁴ Through reason, scripture and history, Erskine made a compelling case for the administration of weekly communion, which was consistent with the practices of the early Church.

After reviewing these five treatises, it becomes apparent that Erskine was not just a preacher and theologian; he was an eighteenth-century polymath. As the nineteenth-century writer John Gibson Lockhart reflected, ‘Dr. Erskine... was skilled not only in the branches of what is commonly called theological reading, but in many things beside, which must have enabled him to throw new lights upon the deeper parts of his theology.’¹⁵⁵ Like many of the other Scottish literati, Erskine excelled in a number of disciplines.¹⁵⁶ Theology, philosophy, biblical studies and history were at his disposal as tools of his pedagogical trade. His most inventive theories were expounded in his *Theological Dissertations*, because the pulpit was not the appropriate venue for any presentations that were not gospel-orientated. Much of the content of his essays consisted of unmatched explorations into doctrinal issues that were often contrary to mainstream theological positions. Erskine’s interesting perspective on the Mosaic and New Testament Covenants, for example, although rational and biblically lucid, drew heat from some of the Seceders and contrasted with the prevailing jeremiad sermons of other eighteenth-century ministers. Yet unlike Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza, Erskine did not question the authenticity of the Old Testament narratives.¹⁵⁷ He was simply positing a new perspective which was orthodox, but deviated from the language of covenant theology. His exposition on faith was close to that of John Glas and Robert Sandeman, but differed from them

¹⁵⁴Erskine, ‘Frequent’, 267-9.

¹⁵⁵John Gibson Lockhart, *Peter’s Letters to His Kinsfolk* (New York: W.B. Gilley, L. & F. Lockwood, A.T. Goodrich & Co., Collins & Hannay, and Elam Bliss, 1820) 411.

¹⁵⁶Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 30.

¹⁵⁷See John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London: Fortress Press, 1984), 147-59 and Dupré, *Enlightenment*, 231-42.

since Erskine held that it was a supernatural revelation of knowledge that should be more pragmatic than theoretical. As opposed to the proposed administering of the Lord's Supper quarterly, Erskine resurrected the early Church tradition of weekly communion. Not chary of engaging with controversial subjects, Erskine often provided a fresh perspective to understanding orthodox Calvinism.

The novelty of his thought was filtered through an intellectual sieve. Faith, he argued, was to be tested by one's 'affections' and virtuous behaviour. His work on natural religion was a testament to Locke's theory of empiricism since Erskine contended that knowledge of the Almighty was formulated through one's personal experience and observations of nature. But he was not willing to go as far as the deists in claiming that divine revelation was unnecessary for one's eternal salvation. There was no shortage of the use of reason in Erskine's theological essays. Every argument was buttressed by logic to gain the ears of the intelligent minds of the day. He continued to uphold orthodox tenets, but he moulded them into cogent proofs, which afforded no embarrassment to those who were convinced of their vitality. His theological treatises were bold, innovative, rational and consistent with Enlightenment epistemology. But they were also scriptural and loyal to traditional Calvinism.

Chapter Six

The Controversialist

At this point it can be said that Erskine was an advocate of a conservative form of Enlightenment ideas in which the Calvinistic doctrines of the past were mixed with the style, technique and epistemology of the new age to form a new, theoretically stronger, compound. Reason and scripture were the foundations for his thought, and like Locke and other early figures associated with Enlightenment, Erskine defended Christianity as a rational belief system. In order to promote Evangelicalism as an enlightened form of faith, the normally tolerant Erskine suppressed his charitable inclinations at certain times in order to embrace his more unnatural role as a controversialist. It seems that the belligerent grandfather in Erskine sometimes displaced the affable father. If anti-Calvinists like David Hume or John Taylor of Norwich appeared on the scene, the grandfather in Erskine took over, ready to lambast such men in order to preserve the integrity of true religion. Where Erskine's role as a controversialist is best observed is in his polemic against Wesleyan Methodism and Catholicism.

Since Erskine was an upholder of Calvinism, Wesleyan Arminianism and the Church of Rome were not supported by him. He viewed these forms of faith as harmful to the spread of Evangelicalism and to the vitality of Britain as a whole. Catholicism especially was perceived as an anti-intellectual religion, leaven that if worked into the dough of Britain, would change its substance for the worse. Once he determined that these faiths were harmful to the wellbeing of Britain and Protestantism, there was little chance that he would change his mind. Although in reality Wesley and Catholics were benevolent in their mission to Scotland, to this Presbyterian minister they showed the signs of a cunning nature that seemed bent on deceiving the good Christians of northern Britain. Thus there was a limit to the kind of Christianity that Erskine was willing to propagate. This chapter traces the origin

and nature of Erskine's perception of Wesleyan Methodism and Catholicism in order to understand why this normally amiable minister became a controversialist.

John Wesley's ministry in Scotland is a forgettable chapter in the story of Methodist growth in the eighteenth century. Indeed, Charles Wesley had warned his brother in 1751 not to minister in Scotland, saying that 'You may just as well preach to the stones'.¹ Scholars like James Dixon and Dugald Butler believe that the reason for the paltry numbers of society members was Wesley's theology, which was incongruent with the doctrines held by most Presbyterians.² But, contrary to their opinions, Wesley's ministry north of the border was relatively successful, from the time he first visited in 1751, until 1765, when Methodist societies in Scotland waned. The person most responsible for this indefatigable preacher's failure there was John Erskine. He convinced the Scottish people that Wesley's intentions were less than honourable, which led to the decline of Methodism in northern Britain.

Wesley's later problems in Scotland were rooted in a controversy with another Anglican clergyman. James Hervey had attended Lincoln College, Oxford, where he became acquainted with George Whitefield and was unofficially taught Hebrew by John Wesley.³ While his Methodist friends from Oxford were travelling throughout Great Britain and America preaching, Hervey was content to spend his leisure hours reading poetry and developing his creative writing. By the time he had finished his 1755 masterpiece, *Theron and Aspasio*, Hervey had established himself as the premier Evangelical writer for the Christian elite who could compete with the ornate style of

¹Charles Wesley, *The Journal of Charles Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, vol 2 (London: John Mason, 1849), 91-2.

²James Dixon, 'Methodism in the Scottish Capital', *Methodist Review* 89 (1907), 195; D. Butler, *John Wesley and George Whitefield in Scotland* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1898), 111-12. See also Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1989), 230.

³W. E. M. Brown, 'Hervey: A Study of an Eighteenth-Century Ideal', in *The Polished Shaft: Studies in the Purpose and Influence of the Christian Writer in the Eighteenth Century* (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), 5.

Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury.⁴ Hervey's immensely popular work was a series of dialogues between Theron, 'A Gentleman of fine Taste; of accurate, rather than extensive Reading; and particularly charmed with the Study of Nature', and Aspasio, who 'was not without his Share of polite Literature, and philosophical Knowledge', but who had now 'devoted his final Attention to the inspired Writings'.⁵ The book's focus on the Reformed doctrine of imputed righteousness, however, induced Wesley to censure the work, ultimately ending his longstanding friendship with Hervey.

Wesley argued that Hervey had begged him to offer constructive criticism on this piece. When Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs* (1746) was published, Wesley had mentioned that there were a few changes that he would have made. Responding to this comment, Hervey had promised to send his former tutor any future manuscripts for editing. When Wesley received the first few dialogues of *Theron and Aspasio*, he recalled that he made a 'few inconsiderable corrections' before returning it.⁶ But, according to the Methodist leader, Hervey complained, saying 'You are not my Friend, if you do not take more Liberty with me', and so, in Wesley's second attempt, 'some more important alterations' were made.⁷ Although there is no record of the changes that Wesley had made, his comments must have deeply offended his younger correspondent, for Hervey severed his ties with his former mentor for the remainder of his life.

⁴Luke Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists: Memoirs of the Rev. Messrs. Clayton, Ingham, Gambold, Hervey, and Broughton, with Biographical Notices of Others* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1873), 327; See especially Isabel Rivers, 'Shaftesburian Enthusiasm and the Evangelical Revival', in Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew (eds.), *Revival and Religion Since 1700: Essays for John Walsh* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1993), 37.

⁵James Hervey, *Theron and Aspasio*, 3rd edition (London: Published by printed by E. Farley, 1755), 1-2.

⁶John Wesley, *An Answer to All That is Material in Letters Just Published, Under the Name of the Reverend Mr. Hervey* (Bristol: Printed by William Pine, 1765), 4.

⁷Wesley, *Answer*, 4.

Was Hervey too sensitive or was Wesley too critical? As Luke Tyerman rightly evaluates, it is impossible to know for sure.⁸ It seems probable that Hervey was hoping to receive only stylistic comments and was not prepared to be challenged on doctrinal matters. In a letter to Lady Frances Shirley on 9 January 1755, the frustrated Hervey stated that Wesley ‘takes me very roundly to Task, on the Score of Predestination. At which I am much surprised. Because a reader, ten Times less penetrating than He is, may easily see, that, this Doctrine (be it true or false) makes no Part of my Scheme; never comes under Consideration [and] is purposely and carefully avoided. I cannot but fear, He has some sinister Design.’⁹ Hervey’s plan was simple: ignore Wesley and his observations.¹⁰ Even though he did not respond to Wesley’s repeated attempts to communicate, his older mentor sent one final letter on 15 October 1756 with substantial corrections to *Theron and Aspasio*. If Hervey was incensed by Wesley’s liberty at advising him on doctrine, this final letter ensured that there would be no reconciliation within Hervey’s lifetime.

Whereas Wesley believed that he was helping to correct a friend’s theological errors, Hervey viewed this lengthy document as a challenge to enter into a debate. Rather than asserting plainly where Hervey had deviated from sound exegesis, Wesley had included innumerable quips, often displaying little or no tact. For instance, after reviewing the second dialogue, Wesley asked, ‘is not the description often too laboured, the language too stiff and affected?’¹¹ ‘There are many other expressions in this Dialogue to which I have the same objection’, Wesley admonished, ‘namely that they are unscriptural’ and that ‘they directly lead to

⁸Tyerman, *Oxford Methodists*, 317.

⁹James Hervey, *Letters from the Late Reverend James Hervey to the Right Honourable Lady Frances Shirley* (London: Printed by John Rivington, Jun. for John Francis and Charles Rivington, 1782), 222–3.

¹⁰Tyerman, *Oxford Methodists*, 316.

¹¹John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 3:371.

Antinomianism'.¹² Wesley callously added, 'We swarm with Antinomians on every side. Why are you at such pains to increase their number?'¹³ At first, Hervey had no intention of wrangling with Wesley on doctrinal issues, but this letter spurred the young writer into action. Hervey had picked up the gauntlet.

But Hervey did not live long enough to engage his critic, at least directly. 1758 was his last year on earth; he was dying, and spent the bulk of his remaining months writing to friends preparing his response to Wesley's untimely final letter. For over a year the two men had no contact, but Hervey's anger did not subside. In a letter to the Baptist minister John Collett Ryland in January 1758, the exasperated man stated, 'You enquire after my intended answer to Mr. Wesley: I am transcribing it for the press, but find it difficult to preserve the decency of the gentleman, and the meekness of the Christian: there is so much unfair dealing running through my opponent's objections, and the most magisterial air all along supplying the place of argument.'¹⁴ Adding insult to injury and to Hervey's surprise, Wesley decided that same year to publish the 15 October letter in his *A Preservative against Unsettled Notions in Religion*.¹⁵ Wesley believed that he was completely justified in his decision.

After waiting near two Years, and receiving no Answer to the Second, any more than the First Letter, in 1758 I printed 'A Preservative against Unsettled Notions in Religion.' I designed this at first only for the Preachers who were in Connexion [sic] with me. But I was afterwards induced to think, it might be of Use to others that were under my Care. I designed it for these, and these alone, tho' I could not help its falling into other Hands.¹⁶

¹²Wesley, *Letters*, 3:381.

¹³Wesley, *Letters*, 3:385.

¹⁴John Ryland, *The Character of the Rev. James Hervey* (London: W. Justins, 1790), 53.

¹⁵John Wesley, *A Preservative Against Unsettled Religions Notions* (Bristol: Printed by E. Farley, 1758).

¹⁶Wesley, *Answer*, 31–2.

Wesley's intent, or so he claimed, was to explain to his followers the theological differences between him and Hervey so that there would be no misconceptions. 'I never intended them for a Confutation', Wesley pleaded, 'And even when I sent them to the Press, I designed them merely as a Caveat to my Friends against imbibing Truth and Error together.'¹⁷ Regardless of his sincerity in publishing this letter, it proved later to be the source utilised to blockade his efforts in Scotland. As the year drew to a close, Hervey died on Christmas day, 1758, having failed to complete his reply to Wesley.

For close to six years thereafter, nothing was printed bearing the dead author's name. It was not until 1764 that a 'stealthy' publication slithered its way into print under the pseudonym of 'Philolethes' and entitled, *Aspasio Vindicated, and the Scripture Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness Defended against the Objections and Animadversions of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley: In Eleven Letters, Written and Prepared for the Press, by the Late Rev. Mr. J---s H---y, A. B.*¹⁸ The following year, the London wine merchant William Hervey produced another version of his brother's work, *Eleven Letters from the Late Rev. Mr. Hervey to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley*, which brought even more attention to the ensuing debate. In the preface written on 5 December 1764, William explained his reasons for breathing life into this all but dead work. He disclosed that on the evening prior to his brother's death an inquiry was made whether the response to Wesley should be published. 'By no means', Hervey answered, 'because he had only transcribed about half of them fair for the Press'. Since the 'Corrections and Alterations of the latter Part were mostly in Short-Hand, it would be difficult to understand them'. Hervey's final instructions to his brother could not be any clearer: 'it is not a finished Piece, I desire you will think no more about it'.¹⁹ This begs the question: why was it printed then? According to William,

¹⁷Wesley, *Answer*, 32.

¹⁸Tyerman, *Oxford Methodists*, 329.

¹⁹James Hervey, *Eleven Letters from the Late Rev. Mr. Hervey to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley* (London: Printed by Charles Rivington for John Rivington, 1765), v.

the 1764 clandestine edition was the catalyst that provoked him to disobey his brother's dying wishes. 'I could not be persuaded to print the Letters' and they would never been published 'with my Consent, had not a surreptitious Edition of them lately made its Way from the Press'.²⁰ William's excuse was that further unauthorised printings of the letters would soon appear, justifying the need for an accurate reproduction of it.²¹ In his conclusion, William blamed Wesley for 'daily and hourly' keeping alive the controversy with his provocative *Preservative against Unsettled Notions in Religion*.²² Unable to be put to rest, the grudge between Wesley and Hervey continued, even after the latter's death.

The controversy might have soon ended had it not been for an Edinburgh edition of *Aspasio Vindicated* that was published in the same year. Contained within it was a scolding preface written by Erskine that proved to be more harmful to Wesley than the earlier London edition. The Scottish Evangelical had it anonymously printed for reasons altogether different from those moving William Hervey. Erskine was known for his tolerance and modesty, especially towards ministers, making his assault on Wesley particularly puzzling. Speaking of pastors, Erskine had commanded his parishioners to 'Judge not our cause, till you have given it a fair impartial hearing. Pass no sentence against us, till you know we have done what is alleged, and till you also know we had no good reason for doing it.'²³ But in the case of Wesley, Erskine believed that he had sufficient reason to indict him.

Erskine's devastating preface was a response to the poorly-worded *Preservative against Unsettled Notions in Religion*. By his own admission, Wesley had intended this work to convey his views on doctrine which could be studied and

²⁰Hervey, *Eleven Letters*, vi.

²¹Hervey, *Eleven Letters*, vii.

²²Hervey, *Eleven Letters*, xxxviii.

²³John Erskine, 'Ministers of the Gospel Cautioned Against Giving Offence', in *Discourses*, vol. 1, 72.

propagated by his itinerant preachers.²⁴ But the Anglican had made the mistake of writing against many of the orthodox teachings that Presbyterians cherished, convincing Erskine that this travelling preacher was not a genuine friend of the Scottish people. The goal for Erskine was to alert the people of his country to Wesley's tenets, which he believed that Hervey's work had clearly outlined. The sincerity of many of the Scottish Methodists was not questioned since they were being purposely deceived by their leader as to the doctrines that he maintained and the aspirations that he had for founding Methodist societies. 'Possibly the following sheets may convince some of them', Erskine hoped, 'that Mr Wesley is by no means so orthodox as they have hitherto imagined, in that doctrine of justification through the righteousness of Christ.'²⁵ Erskine felt it his duty to inform the people of Scotland of Wesley's theological assertions.

His main weapon was to use key phrases in Wesley's *Preservative* to prove his foe's hostility towards Presbyterianism. Wesley was quoted as saying that 'Men are not elected till the day of their conversion to God' and that 'Predestination is God's fore-appointing obedient believers to salvation, not without, but according to his foreknowledge of all their works, from the foundation of the world.'²⁶ Erskine's most effective point, however, was when he revealed Wesley's blundering reference to certain Reformed doctrines as toxic. Wesley had said that Methodist leaders who had been raised to believe predestination and final perseverance had been taught doctrines that were 'not wholesome Food: Rather to them it has the Effect of deadly Poison'.²⁷ This phrase was indeed a mistake, for Erskine capitalised on it to demonstrate that Wesley was not favourable to the Calvinism maintained by the

²⁴Wesley, *Answer*, 31–2.

²⁵James Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated, and the Scripture Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness Defended, Against the Objections and Animadversions of the Rev. Mr John Wesley* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Gray, 1765), iii–iv.

²⁶Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated*, v; Wesley, *Preservative*, 179–80.

²⁷Wesley, *Preservative*, 244.

Scottish Church. ‘Mr Wesley, by his profound skill in medicine, has found out, that poison may possibly prove harmless, where men have been early enough, and long enough accustomed to swallow it; which fortunes to be the case with the good people of Scotland, as to the poisonous doctrines of Calvinism!’²⁸ No doubt Wesley wished he could rescind this one sentence.

Erskine also suggested that Wesley was a dictator, reigning over his societies and requiring his Methodist leaders to indoctrinate members using only his teachings.

Is it less difficult to form the plan of a church within a church, whose members in South Britain profess to belong to the Church of England, and those in North Britain to the Church of Scotland, while yet their most important spiritual concerns are inspected and governed by teachers, who, in that capacity, have no dependence on either of these churches, but are sent, continued, or removed, at the pleasure of Mr Wesley?²⁹

In Erskine’s unrelenting attack on Wesley, however, the people within the Methodist societies were deemed innocent. ‘The publisher never received the least provocation from any of the Methodists; nay, has been treated by them with unmerited respect: many of them he esteems and loves for the truth’s sake which is in them... Of the sincere piety of some of their teachers, nay even of their sound principles, he would think favourably.’ Nevertheless, when it is certain ‘that one is at the head of their societies, who has blended with some precious gospel-truths, a medley of Arminian, Antinomian, and enthusiastic errors’, it is ‘high time to sound an alarm to all who would wish to transmit to posterity the pure faith once delivered to the saints’.³⁰ The enemy of Evangelical Calvinism was pronounced to be John Wesley.

The finishing blow in Erskine’s attack was his paraphrase of the concluding words in the *Preservative*. Wesley had suggested that his followers should carefully read his opinions on predestination and perseverance, recommending and explaining

²⁸Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated*, vii-viii.

²⁹Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated*, vi.

³⁰Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated*, ix.

them in the Methodist societies so that members would not be tossed ‘to and fro by every Wind of Doctrine; but being settled in one Mind and one Judgment, by solid scriptural and rational Arguments’.³¹ It seemed as though Wesley’s teachings in this document were ‘carefully secreted’ from the members of the societies in Scotland in order to attract more people to Methodism.³² Erskine likened this apparent deception to being a ‘thief and a robber’ and to displaying the ‘wisdom of the serpent’ more than ‘the harmlessness of the dove’.³³ By publishing his *Preservative* in 1758, Wesley had not only infuriated Hervey’s family and friends, but he had also miscalculated his readership and inadvertently positioned himself as holding doctrines that were contrary to a northern people whom he had desired to serve.

In order to suppress the influence of Erskine’s preface, one of Wesley’s peripatetic preachers in Scotland, James Kershaw, wrote his *Earnest Appeal* in 1765 to answer the objections that were raised against his leader. The work, according to its author, was ‘necessary’ and ‘purely defensive’.³⁴ The principal intention of Kershaw was to defend Wesley’s theology and his intentions in Scotland as benevolent. Kershaw wanted to demonstrate that Erskine had misjudged the Methodist leader as an enemy instead of a friend to Evangelicalism.³⁵ ‘Are no sinners converted by means of the Methodists in Great Britain or Ireland’, Kershaw asked, ‘Are you sure of that?’³⁶ Kershaw was insistent that Wesley was not an advocate of a works-orientated righteousness; he fully submitted to Christ’s merits alone as the means for saving mankind.³⁷ But where this Methodist champion struggled was in his

³¹Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated*, viii; Wesley, *Preservative*, 245–6.

³²Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated*, viii.

³³Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated*, ix.

³⁴James Kershaw, *An Earnest Appeal to the Public in an Honest, Amicable, and Affectionate Reply to the Preface of Aspasio Vindicated, Dated at Edinburgh, January 7 1765* (Edinburgh: Printed by Auld and Smellie, 1765), 25.

³⁵Kershaw, *Earnest Appeal*, 114–15.

³⁶Kershaw, *Earnest Appeal*, 118.

³⁷Kershaw, *Earnest Appeal*, 43.

campaign to depict Wesley as a friend to Presbyterians. Instead of providing an antidote for Wesley's poisonous comment, Kershaw's impotent reply was that his leader had not said that Presbyterianism is 'naturally deadly poison, only, that upon some it has that deadly effect'.³⁸ The *Earnest Appeal* was at the very least an admirable effort at vindicating the honour of a stumbling hero, but it was insufficient at explaining why Wesley had chosen to use divisive language to describe certain Reformed doctrines.

When it surfaced that Erskine was the author of the preface to the Edinburgh edition of *Aspasio Vindicated*, the stunned Wesley sent him a letter dated 24 April 1765 with the hope that he could convince the Presbyterian minister that his own motives in Scotland were pure. Wesley could boast that men with different doctrinal beliefs, like Philip Doddridge and Isaac Watts, could be counted as his friends. 'How, then, was I surprised as well as concerned that a child of the same Father, a servant of the same Lord, a member of the same family, and (as to the essence of it) a preacher of the same gospel, should, without any provocation that I know of, declare open war against me!' From Wesley's perspective, Erskine had 'ushered into this part of the world one of the most bitter libels that was ever written'.³⁹ For his defence, Wesley claimed that he purposely avoided espousing controversial doctrine in Scotland, not to be deceptive, but to concentrate his efforts on promoting 'religion of the heart'.⁴⁰ Further, it was argued that subscribing to predestination was not essential to one's salvation. Wesley's chief point, however, was that Erskine had wrongly considered him to be an enemy instead of an ally. He questioned his persecutor: 'have you not Arians, Socinians, Seceders, infidels to contend with; to say nothing of whore-mongers, adulterers, Sabbath-breakers, drunkards, common swearers... And will you

³⁸Kershaw, *Earnest Appeal*, 100–01.

³⁹Wesley, *Letters*, 4:294.

⁴⁰Wesley, *Letters*, 4:295.

pass by all these, and single out me to fight with?’⁴¹ His endeavour to appease the respected Scottish minister was not rewarded, however, for Erskine remained convinced that Wesley was not the friend that he portrayed himself to be.

After reviewing Kershaw’s contribution as well as the former letter from Wesley, Erskine felt compelled once again to counter the ‘tedious defence’ offered in Kershaw’s *Earnest Appeal* and his leader’s pacifying letter.⁴² In his diatribe, *Mr Wesley’s Principles Detected*, which Erskine produced in the summer of 1765, there was no hiding the identity or intentions of the author.⁴³ Erskine at one time said that he had originally hoped to settle his differences with Wesley through correspondence, but, ‘upon mature reflection, I saw no cause to flatter myself, either that I could procure from him satisfaction as to what offended me in his writings and conduct, or that I could convince him he was in the wrong. He had, in my apprehension, discovered himself no novice in the arts of subtilty [sic] and disguise.’⁴⁴ Erskine had previously met Wesley on an unknown date and had become convinced that the Methodist leader was less than genuine.

Within *Mr Wesley’s Principles Detected* was a thorough analysis of Wesley’s apparent inconsistencies, providing further evidence that he was averse to Presbyterian theology. Acting as a prosecuting attorney, Erskine cross-examined Kershaw’s tenuous defence of Wesley as favourable to the doctrines taught by the ministers of the Church of Scotland. Erskine reminded Kershaw that in 1745, Wesley had published an extract of Richard Baxter’s view of justification, where Wesley’s aim was to ‘confute the opinion that Christ did as properly obey as suffer in our stead; and that his active obedience is imputed to us for the making of us righteous, and

⁴¹Wesley, *Letters*, 4:296.

⁴²John Erskine, *Mr Wesley’s Principles Detected: Or, a Defence of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of Aspasio Vindicated* (Edinburgh: Printed for William Gray, 1765), 32.

⁴³Erskine, *Wesley’s Principles Detected*, 37.

⁴⁴Erskine, *Wesley’s Principles Detected*, 24.

giving us a title to the kingdom'.⁴⁵ Wesley was further shown to believe that 'it is faith in a proper sense that is said to justify and not Christ's righteousness only' and that 'repentance, forgiveness of injuries, new obedience, &c. are conditions of pardon and eternal life'.⁴⁶ Erskine was not finished building a case for Wesley's opposition to Presbyterian doctrines. Exhibit A for the prosecution was Wesley's *Treatise on Justification*, published earlier that year, which included extracts from the Puritan John Goodwin. According to Erskine, 'The great design of that treatise is to prove, that [the act of] faith is imputed to men for righteousness; and that the active obedience of Christ, or his fulfilling the moral law, was never intended by God to be that righteousness where with we are justified.'⁴⁷ Kershaw was left with the arduous task of reconciling Wesley's anti-Reformed statements with Presbyterianism.

Erskine was equally critical of Wesley's teachings on predestination and used the Methodist's own words against him. Wesley was quoted in his *Free Grace* (1739) as saying that the doctrine of predestination was a teaching 'full of blasphemy' and represented Christ as a 'hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity'.⁴⁸ At the end of Wesley's *Dialogue between a Predestinarian and His Friend* (1741), Erskine cited the 'friend' as asserting that unconditional election 'is a Plant which bears dismal Fruit'.⁴⁹ In *Scripture Doctrine Concerning Predestination, Election and Reprobation* (1741), Wesley had said, 'as Christ was called The Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World, and yet not slain till several thousand Years after, till the Day of his Death; so also Men are called Elect from the Foundation of the World, and yet are not elected perhaps till several thousand Years after, till the

⁴⁵Erskine, *Wesley's Principles Detected*, 11.

⁴⁶Erskine, *Wesley's Principles Detected*, 11.

⁴⁷Erskine, *Wesley's Principles Detected*, 12.

⁴⁸Erskine, *Wesley's Principles Detected*, 18; John Wesley, *Free Grace: A Sermon Preach'd at Bristol* (Bristol: Printed by S. and F. Farley, 1739), 22–3.

⁴⁹John Wesley, *A Dialogue Between a Predestinarian and His Friend*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed by W. Strahan, 1741), 12; Erskine, *Wesley's Principles Detected*, 16.

Day of their Conversion to God'.⁵⁰ After a barrage of similar convicting statements, the defence finally rested, believing that the jury of the Scottish people would have no choice but to deliver the verdict that Wesley was guilty of purposely hiding his Arminian sentiments in order to advance Methodism.

Although Wesley had told his itinerant preachers to support the Church of Scotland, Erskine believed that this was simply a tactical manoeuvre and did not represent his true feelings. 'The danger of giving offence, exciting controversy, and preventing thousands from either hearing [Methodist preachers] or continuing with them, may be as good a political motive for seeming to favour the establishment of Calvinism and Presbytery in one country, as that of Episcopacy in another.'⁵¹ For a number of years he had suspected the 'shifting' nature of Wesley, who he believed was 'singularly expert' at positioning himself in whatever way suited his purposes.⁵² Erskine told the Connecticut minister Joseph Bellamy that when Wesley was in Glasgow in 1753 preaching, 'He artfully avoided introducing any of his Arminian or Perfectionist Tenets.' Wesley's inconsistent stance on Reformed doctrines led to doubts about his sincerity with the Scottish people. 'It gives me some suspicion of his integrity', Erskine told Bellamy, 'that when Mr [John] Gillies objected to him the odd things he said against predestination in a sermon printed 10 years ago, he said in apology, that it was writ in a rage against Mr Whitefield. And yet he has said as harsh things against these doctrines about 2 years ago in a piece against Dr Gill.'⁵³ Erskine's distrust of Wesley seemed to affect the views of other Scots like Charles Nisbet, the Evangelical minister of Montrose. Nisbet reported to Selena, Countess of Huntingdon, in a letter on 26 July 1770, that 'by his preaching and conferences'

⁵⁰John Wesley, *The Scripture Doctrine Concerning Predestination, Election and Reprobation* (London: Printed by W. Strahan, 1741), 4; Erskine, *Wesley's Principles Detected*, 16–17.

⁵¹Erskine, *Wesley's Principles Detected*, 29.

⁵²Erskine, *Wesley's Principles Detected*, 30–1.

⁵³Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 2 March 1754, JBL, 187:2931:81212.

Wesley ‘has been too successful in seducing many of the ignorant and unwary into his notions’. According to Nisbet, Wesley ‘has been long suspected of teaching doctrines inconsistent with the gospel of Christ, and tending to encourage fallen sinners in a reliance on their own works and merit for justification’.⁵⁴ It is likely that Nisbet received his information from Erskine, a regular correspondent of his, who had permanently tainted Wesley’s reputation.

Wesley continued to present himself publicly as subscribing to the same core doctrines as Presbyterians in Scotland, but by 1768 he was at least willing to admit privately to another Scottish minister in a letter on 23 May that he was not partial to predestination. After stating that Erskine ‘objects, first, that I attack predestination as subversive of all religion, and yet suffer my followers in Scotland to remain in that opinion’, he responded that ‘Much of this is true’.⁵⁵ Erskine felt that if Wesley had been candid about his beliefs when ministering in Scotland, there would have been no occasion for his public denunciation. There can be no doubt that Erskine was blind to Wesley’s immense contribution to Evangelicalism. Erskine’s poor sight, however, was the result of a grander vision of safeguarding the Scottish people from what he perceived to be a threat to his country’s religious stability.

According to Moncreiff, Erskine’s unfavourable opinion of Wesley never changed.⁵⁶ Almost ten years after the conflict, Erskine was telling the Connecticut minister Joseph Fish that Wesley continued to ‘conceal’ his beliefs from his followers in Scotland so that they had no idea that their leader held contrary theological views.⁵⁷ The dispute, however, came to a close with Erskine’s *Mr Wesley’s Principles Detected* in 1765. His definitive criticism did not occasion any direct response from

⁵⁴Quoted in Samuel Miller, *Memoir of the Rev. Charles Nisbet, D.D., Late President of Dickinson College, Carlisle* (New York: Robert Carter, 1840), 71.

⁵⁵Wesley, *Letters*, 5:90.

⁵⁶*Account*, 264.

⁵⁷John Erskine to Joseph Fish, 11 February 1773, Connecticut Historical Society, MS 65282.

either Kershaw or Wesley. But, in an effort to save his reputation among the Scottish Methodists, Wesley published *Some Remarks on a Defence of the Preface of the Edinburgh Edition of A. V.* in 1766, as a pamphlet intended to be distributed among the societies.⁵⁸ ‘My hope of convincing [Erskine] is lost’, Wesley lamented. He has drunk all the spirit of the book he has published. But I owe it to God and his children, to say something for myself, when I am attacked in so violent manner.’⁵⁹ Although the controversy had finally faded away, its repercussions for Methodism had only just begun.

The effects of Erskine’s publications were devastating to Wesley’s reputation in Scotland. Wesley Swift estimates that Methodist growth in Scotland was stunted for upwards of twenty years from the time of Erskine’s involvement.⁶⁰ Many of Wesley’s preachers recorded that their ministry dried up once Erskine’s works circulated in Scotland. In 1763 Thomas Hanby spent a considerable amount of his time in Dundee where he rejoiced that when he left there was ‘near a hundred joined in our society’. But once *Aspasio Vindicated* was published, the situation changed dramatically. By 1768 only forty-six members were counted in Dundee.⁶¹ Hanby bemoaned

O the precious convictions those letters destroyed! They made me mourn in secret places. Mr. Erskine being much esteemed in the religious world, and recommending them through the whole kingdom, our enemies made their advantage of them. These made the late Lady Gardiner leave us, after expressing a thousand times, in my hearing, the great profit she received by hearing our preaching. Men were then

⁵⁸See Samuel Martin, *A Few Thoughts and Matters of Fact Concerning Methodism* (Edinburgh: Sold by W. Gray, 1766), 13–14 and James Kershaw, *A Second Letter to the Author, &c. Being a Reply to the Answer of a Late Pamphlet of Mr. Wesley Against Mr. Erskine* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Printed by J. White and T. Saint, 1767), 5. Some scholars are not even aware that this publication exists. See Butler, *Scotland*, 153.

⁵⁹John Wesley, *Some Remarks on a Defence of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of Aspasio Vindicated* (Edinburgh: Printed by Auld and Smellie, 1766), 2.

⁶⁰Wesley F. Swift, *Methodism in Scotland: The First Hundred Years* (London: Epworth Press, 1947), 25.

⁶¹*Methodist Minutes* (1768), 6.

brought to the birth, but by those letters their convictions were stifled. What a pity good men should help to destroy the real work of God in the hearts of men!⁶²

Thomas Lee, who was a part of the Newcastle circuit, which included Edinburgh, wrote that he and his wife had travelled to Scotland's capital city around the time that Erksine published his works, noting that 'This occasioned a good deal of reproach for a time.'⁶³

Thomas Taylor's journals were particularly telling. In 1765 Taylor recorded that he arrived in Scotland and tried preaching in Glasgow, but had difficulty attracting an audience. After giving out notice that he would be speaking, he stated that

A table was carried to the place, and at the appointed time I went, and found two bakers' boys and two old women waiting. My very soul sunk within me. I had travelled by land and by water near six hundred miles to this place; and behold my congregation! I turned upon my heel to go away. No one can tell but they who have experienced it, what a task it is to stand in the open air to preach to nobody! more especially in such a place as Glasgow.⁶⁴

Why were the people of Glasgow so reluctant to hear his message? Taylor explained the cause of his troubles.

One great obstacle in my way was a new edition of the 'Eleven Letters,' ascribed to Mr. Hervey, had just come out, prefaced by a minister in Edinburgh, a man much esteemed in Scotland. These Letters fully answered their design. They carried gall and wormwood wherever they came. So that it was a sufficient reason for everyone to keep his distance, because I was connected with Mr. Wesley.⁶⁵

He then journeyed to join his associates in Edinburgh, where the situation was equally bleak. The Methodist society building there 'was not quite finished, but the congregation was miserably small'. According to Taylor, 'Several things had

⁶²Thomas Jackson (ed.), *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers, Chiefly Written by Themselves*, vol. 2 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1865-66), 2:145.

⁶³*Lives*, 4:163.

⁶⁴*Lives*, 5:28.

⁶⁵*Lives*, 5:29.

concluded to reduce both the society and congregation, particularly Mr. Hervey's Letters.'⁶⁶ Taylor stayed in Scotland until September 1767. Prior to leaving, he reflected that 'During my stay in Edinburgh this season, my time went on but heavily. I saw little good done; the congregations were small, and the society was very cold, and did not increase. It is really very heavy with me when I see God's work at a stand; everything has but a gloomy aspect; my spirit sinks, and my soul is pained within me.'⁶⁷

Wesley's journal is one of the best methods to chronicle the changes in reception that he received before and after 1765. He first stepped foot in Scotland in 1751 and had grand aspirations for the spread of Methodism north of the English border. When he returned to Edinburgh in 1753, the exuberant Wesley announced that 'Here was now an open and effectual door, and not many adversaries.' He preached on Sunday 22 April at Edinburgh, jotting down that 'It rained much: nevertheless, upwards (I suppose) of a thousand people stayed with all willingness.'⁶⁸ Scotland seemed fertile soil for Methodism.

Even as late as 1764, Wesley could claim success in Edinburgh.⁶⁹ He preached on Saturday 26 May saying that the wind was 'high and sharp', but 'most of the congregation did not stir till I had concluded'.⁷⁰ The following day, he taught at the High School yard to a huge gathering and observed how unpleasant the weather was, but how agreeable the people were. 'The morning was extremely cold. In the evening it blew a storm... At first the wind was a little troublesome; but I soon forgot

⁶⁶*Lives*, 5:33.

⁶⁷*Lives*, 5:36.

⁶⁸John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 4:63.

⁶⁹Butler, *Scotland*, 137.

⁷⁰Wesley, *Journal*, 5:71.

it. And so did the people for an hour and a half, in which I fully delivered my own soul.’⁷¹

But after 1765, there was a reversal of fortune for Wesley, and most of what he had earlier achieved evaporated despite having laboured in Scotland over a period of nearly fourteen years. Wesley wrote on Tuesday 23 April 1765 that ‘I preached at Dunbar about noon, and in the evening at Edinburgh. My coming was quite seasonable (though unexpected), as those bad letters, published in the name of Mr. Hervey, and reprinted here by Mr. John Erskine, had made a great deal of noise.’⁷² Returning to Scotland in May 1766, Wesley made his way to the rural village of Cockburnspath. ‘I spoke as plain as I possibly could’, he complained, ‘but very few appeared to be at all affected.’⁷³ After having sent notices a week prior that he would be preaching at Prestonpans, a town just outside Edinburgh, the optimistic traveller arrived on Saturday 24 May 1766. He was disheartened to find that when he went to the room where he was to speak, ‘I had it all to myself, neither man, woman, nor child offered to look me in the face.’ Wesley had a chair placed in the road and ‘forty or fifty crept together’, but the outcome was that these listeners ‘were mere stocks and stones – no more concerned than if [he] had talked Greek’.⁷⁴

The situation did not change for him in the years following. While in Edinburgh in August, 1767, the frustrated Wesley ‘was sorry to find both the society and the congregations smaller than when I was here last’.⁷⁵ He visited the city of Perth on Saturday 23 April 1768, but disparagingly recorded that ‘I had received magnificent accounts of the work of God in this place; so that I expected to find a numerous and lively society. Instead of this, I found not above two believers, and

⁷¹Wesley, *Journal*, 5:71.

⁷²Wesley, *Journal*, 5:111. See also J. Rogal, ‘John Wesley at Edinburgh: 1751–1790’, *Trinity Journal* 4 (1983), 23.

⁷³Wesley, *Journal*, 5:167.

⁷⁴Wesley, *Journal*, 5:168.

⁷⁵Wesley, *Journal*, 5:224–5; Rogal, ‘John Wesley’, 24–5.

scarce five awakened persons in it.’ In the evening he ‘spoke exceeding plain’ to about one hundred individuals but found that ‘this was doing nothing’.⁷⁶ By 1770 Methodist growth in Scotland was at a low point. Wesley returned to Edinburgh on Friday 11 May and ‘received but a melancholy account of the state of things here. The congregations were nearly as usual; but the society which, when I was here before, consisted of above a hundred and sixty members, was now shrunk to about fifty’.⁷⁷ He preached on the following Sunday at the Methodist society in Edinburgh to a large crowd, but ‘with little effect’ since ‘few seemed to feel what they heard’.⁷⁸ Much of his hard work in Scotland was vanishing before his very eyes.

The statistics for the number of Methodist society members in Scotland verify the lack of growth between 1765 and 1800. By the end of the century, there were only 207 members listed in Edinburgh, 140 in Glasgow, 245 in Aberdeen and 113 in Dundee.⁷⁹ Even if combined, these numbers do not equal the total participants in any one of the English Methodist societies in the cities of Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester and York, which had 1,950, 1,345, 2,520 and 1,126 members respectively. Erskine’s polemic had the effect of halting the growth of Methodism in Scotland, which many travelling preachers confirmed.

1765 was a pivotal year for Scottish Methodism. Although it has been often assumed that Wesley’s meagre numbers in northern Britain were due to incongruities between his teachings and the Reformed beliefs of its inhabitants, that is not entirely the reason for the apparent failure. Wesley and his roving Scottish preachers enjoyed great success prior to 1765. It was not until Erskine entered into the longstanding debate between Wesley and James Hervey that Methodist growth in Scotland came to a standstill. Wesley had unknowingly sealed his doom by printing his 1758 A

⁷⁶Wesley, *Journal*, 5:256.

⁷⁷Wesley, *Journal*, 5:366.

⁷⁸Wesley, *Journal*, 5:367.

⁷⁹*Minutes* (London, 1800), 22-23.

Preservative against Unsettled Religious Notions, which included offensive language to describe some treasured Calvinistic tenets. Erskine utilised this fatal error to champion his cause by depicting the Methodist leader as a crafty carpetbagger whose foremost desire was to disguise his true beliefs from the Scottish people. If Wesley had been forthright about his theology and had tempered some of his remarks on Reformed orthodoxy, Scotland might have become a bastion for Methodism.

Besides Wesley, Erskine was also suspicious of the pope and his followers. Not only was the Church of Rome incompatible with Protestantism, in Erskine's opinion, but it was also a threat to national security. Despite Erskine's and other Presbyterian ministers' insistence that 'Popery' was on the rise, the truth was that after the Glorious Revolution and the scare of the '45, the number of Catholics in Scotland was marginal at best. Once the Scottish Reformation in the sixteenth century was underway, guided by the leadership of John Knox and Andrew Melville, the pope's power in Northern Britain was permanently crippled.⁸⁰ Various restrictions were enacted in Scotland, leading up to the 1700 Act for Preventing the Growth of Popery, which was an all-encompassing law that banned Catholics from inheriting and purchasing property or educating youths in any capacity, and excluded 'trafficking Papists', offering the incentive of a 500-merk reward for citizens who captured known papal missionaries.⁸¹

When the Scottish Parliament forcefully disbanded Catholicism in 1560, Scotland eventually became a mission under the Sacred Congregation for Propagating

⁸⁰See Michael Lynch, 'Calvinism in Scotland, 1559–1638', in Menna Prestwich (ed.), *International Calvinism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 229; William Storrar, *Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1990), 31–3; Walter Roland Foster, *The Church Before the Covenants: The Church of Scotland 1596–1638* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1975), 4; Walter Roland Foster, *Bishop and Presbytery: The Church of Scotland* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958), 155; G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1957), 24; Gordon Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 190; Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation: Church and Society in Sixteenth Century Scotland* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), 105.

⁸¹See *A Short View of the Statutes at Present in Force in Scotland against Popery* (December: n.p., 1778) and *SM 40* (October 1778), 513–17. 500 merks equalled about 28 English pounds.

the Faith, or *Propaganda Fide*, which was established in 1622.⁸² By 1694 Scotland was a Vicariate, eventually governed by two leading bishops, called Vicars Apostolic, who headed the Lowland and Highland districts.⁸³ These men were typically natives of northern Britain, educated in one of the Scots Colleges in Douai, Paris, Rome or Madrid.⁸⁴ Scotland's first Vicar Apostolic, Thomas Nicolson, as well as subsequent bishops, such as John Wallace and George Hay, were raised as Episcopalians, defying the Protestant heritage of their past.⁸⁵

In the eighteenth century, these Catholic leaders and their missionary priests fought drastic odds simply to survive in this Protestant country. The Scottish Mission was severely underfunded, evident by the income that the priests received, which kept them well below the poverty line. Once Scotland ceased to be a Catholic nation, Rome decided in 1653 to invest only the paltry sum of £160 annually to finance its missionary efforts there. This figure was raised to £190 only in 1782, which meant that a priest usually received the minimal income of between ten and twelve pounds to meet yearly expenditures by comparison to the £60 to £130 of a typical Scottish Presbyterian minister.⁸⁶ By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Scottish Mission was a dreary sight indeed. It was poorly funded, lacking resources and clerics. Even the Vicars Apostolic were in and out of prison and constantly on the run from British soldiers.⁸⁷

The dearth of priests and the pitiful wages that they collected corresponded with the stagnant numbers of Catholics in eighteenth-century Scotland. At the time of

⁸²Clotilde Prunier, *Anti-Catholic Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, Scottish Studies International (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 35.

⁸³James Darragh, *The Catholic Hierarchy of Scotland: A Biographical List, 1653–1985* (Glasgow: John S. Burns & Sons, 1986), 9.

⁸⁴Prunier, *Anti-Catholic Strategies*, 43. The Madrid college moved to Valladolid.

⁸⁵Darragh, James, *Catholic Hierarchy*, 6–7, 10.

⁸⁶Prunier, *Anti-Catholic Strategies*, 46.

⁸⁷See Peter F. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland, 1622–1878* (Montrose: Standard Press, 1970), 152.

the Glorious Revolution, there were estimated to be some 50,000 in northern Britain.⁸⁸ But by 1800, this figure had dwindled to about 30,000.⁸⁹ In the middle of the eighteenth century, it was especially rare to spot a Catholic in the more populated areas around Glasgow and Edinburgh. A visitor in all of Fife, for instance, would have had difficulty locating one of the fifty-nine reported Catholics living there. Even in the twenty-mile radius surrounding the nation's capital city of Edinburgh, there were in 1751 a little more than 300 known 'papists' out of the 57,000 souls residing in the area.⁹⁰ In reality Catholicism was a weak threat to the stability of the Hanoverian government.

The nadir for British Catholicism came shortly after the defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden in 1746. Approximately 1,000 Catholics were either killed or banished in the aftermath of the '45.⁹¹ This uprising, led by 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', initiated a bombardment of propaganda in Britain that discredited Catholicism and critiqued the leadership of past rulers such as Bloody Mary and James VII/II.⁹² The pope and his followers were viewed as threats to Protestantism in the the St Bartholomew Day massacre of 1572, gunpowder plot of 1605 and the Irish massacre of 1641.⁹³ Printed sermons that denigrated Catholicism were common in the middle of the century. The Anglican Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge made available small anti-

⁸⁸James Darragh, 'The Catholic Population of Scotland Since the Year 1680', *Innes Review* 4 (1953), 51.

⁸⁹Alphons Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland: From the Introduction of Christianity to the Present Day*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1890), 262.

⁹⁰Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 153–6; Bruce Lenman, *An Economic History of Modern Scotland, 1660–1976* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1977), 72; David Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2002), 83.

⁹¹William Forbes-Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics During the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), 330.

⁹²Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 167.

⁹³Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 20.

Catholic manuals at cheap prices so that commoners in British society could afford them. *A Protestant's Resolution*, for instance, sold for two pence per copy in 1746, the same price as a weekly newspaper.⁹⁴ In addition to anti-Catholic propaganda, Highlanders were depicted as uncultured barbarians who were lazy and ignorant.⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, once the '45 subsided, efforts were made to 'civilise' these northern insurgents.⁹⁶ Catholic priests were to be hunted down and their affiliated buildings demolished. Two of the first structures to be destroyed were a chapel in the Enzie district and the seminary at Scalán, which was burned down in 1746. Catholic quarters at Bochel in Glenlivet and a chapel in Strathaven and Strathbogie were levelled. Troops stationed in the Highlands were given orders, and even rewarded, for capturing Catholic priests until 1756.⁹⁷ The measures taken against the Highlanders were so thorough that the relaxed British government did nothing to hinder the powerless Prince Charles's visit to London in 1750.⁹⁸

Scottish Catholic bishops publicly declared that their religion was benign and tried to convince their Presbyterian countrymen of their sincerity. The Lowland Vicar Apostolic, George Hay, was Rome's leading Scottish advocate for this cause.⁹⁹ Born in 1729, and educated at Edinburgh University in medicine, Hay was fully engrossed in the enlightened age in which he lived.¹⁰⁰ He was influenced by Francis Hutcheson's *System of Moral Philosophy* (1755) and was particularly impressed by

⁹⁴Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714–80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 41.

⁹⁵Prunier, *Anti-Catholic Strategies*, 19–23; Wilson, *Sense of the People*, 169.

⁹⁶John MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland 1688 to 1800* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1951), 14–18.

⁹⁷Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 146–8.

⁹⁸Christine Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, 1789–1829* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1983), 8–9.

⁹⁹Mark Goldie, 'The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment', *Journal of British Studies* 30 (1991), 30–1.

¹⁰⁰Bellesheim, *Catholic Church of Scotland*, 212.

the Scottish Common Sense philosophy of Thomas Reid, George Campbell and James Beattie.¹⁰¹ It was Hay's foremost aspiration to promote the peacefulness of Catholicism by insisting on the 'Innocence of their Doctrines' and firm support of 'their King and happy Constitution'. He 'long wished for an Opportunity of convincing' his Scottish countrymen 'how little' he and others 'deserved the Characters either of bad Subjects, or bad Citizens'.¹⁰² From Hay's perspective, Catholics in Britain were 'looked upon as aliens and out-laws, rather than as subjects and citizens' even though 'their love for their country remained undiminished'.¹⁰³ The Catholic peers in Britain, of whom Lord Linton was the only representative in Scotland, wrote to George III in the late 1770s declaring their 'respectful affection' for him and their 'true attachment to the civil constitution of their country'.¹⁰⁴ They too were concerned with the harsh measures against them in their homeland. Rather than the superstitious, uneducated and ruthless figures that Catholics were believed to be, there was evidence that these people were harmless to society and some were even willing to adopt the most current systems of thought.

If Scottish Catholics were a marginal group with little power and influence, why were Erskine and other ministers so fearful of this form of religion? The answer is that there was contrary information to be found which could override one's good sense. There were rumours of Catholic tyranny in the Highlands towards Protestants that made their way into the General Assembly in the early decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁵ In 1720 two elders from the parish of Gartly attested that they 'were set

¹⁰¹Mark Goldie, 'Common Sense Philosophy and Catholic Theology in the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 302 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundations, 1992), 291–2.

¹⁰²George Hay, *A Memorial to the Public in Behalf of the Roman Catholics of Edinburgh and Glasgow*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed and sold by J. P. Coghlan, 1779), 2.

¹⁰³George Hay, *An Answer to Mr. W.A.D.'s Letter to G. H.* (Edinburgh and Dublin: Reprinted for Wogan, Bean, and Co., 1779), 4.

¹⁰⁴*SM* 40 (May 1778), 264.

¹⁰⁵See Noel Macdonald Wilby, 'The 'Encrease of Popery' in the Highlands, 1714-1747', *Innes Review* 17 (1966): 91-115.

upon by three gentlemen on the Duke [of Gordon]’s ground, and beat in an inhuman manner, one of them to the effusion of blood and danger of life’.¹⁰⁶ In 1722 the General Assembly learned that two boys were ordered to strip and were subsequently publicly whipped. Another account spoke of a school teacher, Walter Scobie, who was supposedly beaten by a Catholic mob.¹⁰⁷

Later in the century, reports like the one from the Presbyterian minister John Walker, who was commissioned by the General Assembly to tour the Highlands and assess the Catholic influence there, provided ammunition for those who were already apprehensive about the pope’s motives in Scotland. In 1765 Walker claimed that ‘Popery’ was not decreasing, but instead significantly increasing in the majority of areas in the Highlands, which he attributed to the zeal of the Catholic priests and the laxity of the penal laws.¹⁰⁸ David Belsches, the secretary for the SSPCK, gave the alarming report that ‘Popery has not only maintained the ground formerly gained, but is still increasing; and will continue to spread its dangerous influence, unless effectual methods be soon taken to check the alarming progress thereof.’¹⁰⁹ Belsches’s distress comes as a surprise given that the number of Catholics he listed was 16,740, less than half of the actual total and only 250 more than Alexander Webster’s estimate back in 1755.¹¹⁰

This slight increase hardly seems a reason to justify a call to arms, especially since Catholics, regardless of who conducted the census, represented approximately two per cent of Scotland’s total population. But since Erskine was one of the

¹⁰⁶*Records of the General Assembly*, quoted by Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 121.

¹⁰⁷Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 121.

¹⁰⁸Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 153.

¹⁰⁹David Belsches, *An Account of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge from Its Commencement in 1709 in Which is Included the Present State of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland with Regard to Religion* (Edinburgh: Printed by A. Murray and J. Cochrane, 1774), 51.

¹¹⁰Robert Kent Donovan, *No Popery and Radicalism: Opposition to Roman Catholic Relief in Scotland, 1778–1782* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987), 178.

ministers serving as a director for the SSPCK, this and other circulating reports probably swayed him along with many of the leading Popular party ministers of this looming national threat.¹¹¹ Erskine referenced Walker's report, along with the SSPCK sermons by John Hyndman and Robert Dick, all showing an increase of Catholicism in the Highlands.¹¹² In the preface to his *Narrative of the Debate in the General Assembly of Scotland* (1780), Erskine referred to the 'late alarming growth of Popery'.¹¹³ It was not just the northern territory of Scotland that was in danger. Erskine believed that 'For some years past, Popery has mightily increased in England' as well.¹¹⁴ Even though he was a personal friend of Webster, and no doubt was aware of the latter's statistics on these marginalised individuals, somehow the truth seemed to be that Popery was rapidly gaining momentum in all of Britain.

The conflict between Scottish Catholics and Protestants came to a head in 1778 and 1779, with a parliamentary proposal to repeal the penal laws in northern Britain. To strengthen the armed forces in their fight against the rebellious Americans, a scheme was formulated, supported by politicians like Edmund Burke, George Germain, Henry Dundas, Edward Thurlow, Alexander Wedderburn and William Murray (Lord Mansfield), whereby Scottish Catholics, and particularly the loyal and fierce Highlanders, could be utilised to bolster British troops.¹¹⁵ With his sights on a prospective earldom, the lawyer turned politician John Dalrymple envisioned that he would be heralded as a national hero if he could successfully

¹¹¹Belsches, *Account of the S.S.P.C.K.*, 69.

¹¹²John Erskine, *Shall I Go to War with My American Brethren?* (London, 1769), 38; John Hyndman, *A Sermon, on Proverbs xiv. 34* (Edinburgh: Printed by W. Sands, A. Murray, and J. Cochran, 1761), 29, 35; Robert Dick, *The Counsel of Gamaliel Considered* (Edinburgh: Printed by W. Sands, A. Murray, and J. Cochran, 1762), 30-3.

¹¹³John Erskine, *A Narrative of the Debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, May 25, 1779: Occasioned by Apprehensions of an Intended Repeal of the Penal Statutes Against Papists* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Gray, 1780), viii.

¹¹⁴Erskine, *American Brethren*, 34-5.

¹¹⁵Donovan, *No Popery*, 117-18; Michael Fry, *The Dundas Despotism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 70.

negotiate with Bishop Hay for the chance to draw Catholics into military service.¹¹⁶ Hay cleverly replied that his flock was eager to enlist, but could not legally do so because of the current penal laws, which forbade followers of the pope from serving their country.¹¹⁷ It was Hay's suggestion that a joint bill be proposed for English and Scottish Catholics, but this later backfired on him when his southern neighbours separated and presented their own plan to parliament first on 3 June 1778.

The repeal of the penal laws for English Catholics passed with ease. Many people at the time, including the author of *Scotland's Opposition to the Popish Bill*, complained that the bill was 'pushed through parliament with uncommon haste and secrecy' towards the end of the session.¹¹⁸ Scottish ministers, such as Erskine, hinted that the repeal was successful due to the 'thin' numbers present in the House of Commons and MPs' ignorance of the gravity of their decision.¹¹⁹ Another Presbyterian minister even surmised that 'England was asleep when the law passed there.'¹²⁰ But as Robert Kent Donovan explains, there was an urgency to pacify volatile Ireland by providing proof that the British government was favourable to Catholics.¹²¹ In order to gain the loyalty of the Irish people and provide new recruits for Britain's war machine, Catholic relief seemed like a reasonable concession.

When Dundas informed the General Assembly on 28 May 1778 that a similar bill was being prepared in Scotland, there was a public outcry that led to rioting in the streets of Glasgow and Edinburgh.¹²² Popular party ministers, John Erskine, William

¹¹⁶Donovan, *No Popery*, 136–7; Anson, *Underground Catholicism*, 177.

¹¹⁷Prunier, *Anti-Catholic Strategies*, 60–1.

¹¹⁸*Scotland's Opposition to the Popish Bill: A Collection of All the Declarations and Resolutions, Published by the Different Counties, Cities, Towns, Parishes, Incorporations, and Societies Throughout Scotland* (Edinburgh: Printed by David Patterson, 1780), iv.

¹¹⁹John Erskine, *Considerations on the Spirit of Popery, and the Intended Bill for the Relief of Papists in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Printed by Murray & Cochran, 1778), 29.

¹²⁰Erskine, *Narrative*, 70.

¹²¹Donovan, *No Popery*, 140–1.

¹²²Donovan, *No Popery*, 10.

Porteous, minister of the Wynd Church in Glasgow, and John Macfarlan, minister of the Canongate in Edinburgh, added fuel to the fire with their 1778 pamphlets which highlighted the danger of repeal in Scotland.¹²³ In Erskine's *Considerations on the Spirit of Popery* he submitted that Catholics in one sense deserved religious freedom, but since the pope and his followers could not be trusted, relief was out of the question. The government was not obliged to give rights to people who were not loyal to their country even though 'humanity, and even justice, forbids the hurting them'.¹²⁴ The general thrust of Erskine's sentiments on this subject was that the penal laws, though harsh, were for the greater good of society. Inappropriately, he likened this necessary sacrifice with that of Jesus Christ, who died as one man for the benefit of humanity.¹²⁵ Such casualties seemed reasonable since 'Restraints on a small part of a nation' were 'necessary for the general safety' and, therefore, were 'not unjust'.¹²⁶

About the same time as the publications by Erskine and other Popular ministers, anti-Catholic societies were founded, whipping the populations of Glasgow and Edinburgh into a frenzy so that the people took to the streets as a rioting mob at the end of 1778 and the beginning of 1779.¹²⁷ According to Hay, at this time 'A Roman Catholic could scarce appear in the Streets without being pointed at, and accosted with this or the like situation, *There is a Papist, a black Papist, knock him down. Shoot him*'.¹²⁸ Hay wrote about the 'Incendiary Letters' which flooded the

¹²³Porteous's *The Doctrine of Toleration, Applied to the Present Times* and Macfarlan's *A Defence of the Clergy of the Church of Scotland, who have Appeared in Opposition to the Intention of an Unlimited Repeal of the Penal Laws against Roman Catholics*; and Erskine's *Considerations on the Spirit of Popery*.

¹²⁴Erskine, *Considerations*, 3.

¹²⁵Erskine, *Considerations*, 25.

¹²⁶Erskine, *Narrative*, viii.

¹²⁷Robert Kent Donovan, 'Voices of Distrust: The Expression of Anti-Catholic Feeling in Scotland, 1778–1781', *Innes Review* 30 (1979), 66.

¹²⁸His italics. Hay, *Memorial*, 16.

streets of Edinburgh in January urging readers to meet at Leith Wynd in Edinburgh to tear down the bishop's new house and chapel.¹²⁹ Erskine apparently was aware of this plot and had cautioned his audience against mob action 'partly occasioned by a report, that it was intended on Christmas Eve to burn Bishop Hay's meeting house'. He admitted that 'I gave little credit to the report, and was persuaded, few, if any of my readers, would engage in such lawless proceedings.'¹³⁰ The significant damage to Hay's house, which doubled as a Catholic chapel, occurred on 2 February 1779, when a crowd proceeded to smash all the windows and pillage it, before burning it completely. Returning from London, Hay estimated that the total cost of the damage to his home and other Catholics in Edinburgh amounted to some £6,000.¹³¹ The violence in Edinburgh and Glasgow continued with the June 1779 Gordon Riots in London, where approximately one hundred houses were destroyed or damaged and over 200 people were killed, an outcome which, although Colin Haydon denies it, seems to be linked to the previous skirmishes in Scotland.¹³²

Erskine and other Popular Party figures were outraged at the riots in Scotland, and called for more peaceful demonstration in the form of petitions to the British government.¹³³ Erskine defended himself and other ministers, saying that they had no idea such disturbances would take place and further that his published opinion was perfectly legitimate since it was within the bounds of reason and the law. From his perspective, 'there is no shadow of evidence that the riots were occasioned by the debates in synods, or by the publications of Scots clergymen. It is improbable, that

¹²⁹Hay, *Memorial*, 15.

¹³⁰Erskine, *Narrative*, ix.

¹³¹Donovan, *No Popery*, 25–6. See also *SM* 41 (March 1779), 132.

¹³²Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, 207–39; Nicholas Rogers, 'Crowd and People in the Gordon Riots', in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 39.

¹³³See Erskine's 2 September 1792 sermon, *The Fatal Consequences and the General Sources of Anarchy* (Edinburgh: Printed for M. Gray, 1793), in which he warned his listeners against the mobbish spirit of neighbouring France.

the greater part of those concerned in the riots knew any thing of these debates.’¹³⁴ Other Popular party ministers, like John Thomson of Sanquhar, Dumfriesshire, and James Blinshall of Dundee, were equally appalled by the tumultuous activity of the crowd.¹³⁵

Despite Erskine’s opposition to the Scottish Catholic Relief Bill, his resistance to this legislation was through peaceful measures. Donovan rightly describes the Old Greyfriars minister as one of the more tempered Protestants during this time, who ‘deplored violence’ and sought ‘quiet diplomacy’.¹³⁶ Erskine had urged those against the repeal to use ‘their constitutional right of petitioning the legislature’ rather than take matters into their own hands.¹³⁷ The general public followed this procedure and mounted large numbers of petitions, voicing their concern about Catholic relief. In January 1779 a petition was signed by the majority of heritors and heads of families in eight out of the nine city parishes whose records survive. In the parish church of Blackfriars and the Tron Church, almost all the heads of families signed the no popery document.¹³⁸ By the close of February 1779 thirty-eight Scottish town councils had passed overtures with this aim.¹³⁹ Erskine counted a total of 356 resolutions against the repeal, seventy-nine of which were from ecclesiastical courts from the synods of Glenelg, Glasgow and Ayr, Perth and Stirling, Angus and the Mearns, Galloway, Lothian and Tweeddale, Ross, Fife and Moray and the Relief and Anti-burgher churches.¹⁴⁰ The strongest opposition to the bill was in the lower ecclesiastical courts as evidenced in the 138 kirk sessions which voiced their opinions.¹⁴¹ When the

¹³⁴Erskine, *Narrative*, xi-xii.

¹³⁵Erskine, *Narrative*, 13, 72. See also Hay, *Memorial*, 34–5.

¹³⁶Donovan, *No Popery*, 29, 18.

¹³⁷Erskine, *Considerations*, 41.

¹³⁸Donovan, *No Popery*, 63–4.

¹³⁹Donovan, *No Popery*, 60.

¹⁴⁰Erskine, *Narrative*, 1.

¹⁴¹Donovan, *No Popery*, 63.

General Assembly met the following May 1779, it was forced to acknowledge these overtures. The end result was that Scottish repeal bill was abandoned; it was not until 1793 that Catholics were given official concessions.¹⁴²

Erskine's aversion to Catholicism was consistent with other eighteenth-century Britons who were brought up to despise the pope and his followers.¹⁴³ From an intellectual perspective, Catholicism was viewed by many as a backward form of Christianity. As opposed to the candid and learned nature of Protestantism, Catholicism, Erskine argued, was a counter-Enlightenment faith that was built on secrecy and dependent on ignorant disciples. 'Other sects more modestly oppose particular truths, and leave you in full possession of the weapons by which you may resist their assaults: but Popery takes away the key of knowledge, leaves not a sword or shield in Israel, and persuades you, that, to see clearly, you must pull out your eyes, and exclude the light.' Catholicism 'soothes the indolent, by teaching them, that truth is best found when least searched after' and 'gratifies the senses and imagination, by substituting pomp and show' for 'spiritual worship'.¹⁴⁴ For Erskine, Catholicism was a religion that was ill-suited for the current age since it seemed to be based on oppression while at the same time curbing one's God-given right to employ reason. He asked his countrymen

Do you prefer the Bible to the Mass-book; a pure and rational devotion to idolatry and superstition... Do you prefer the right of examining doctrines by reason and scripture, to blind submission to a pretended infallible guide; and a religion, which cements the union of princes and people, and enforces the observance of their reciprocal duties, to a religion which absolves subjects from oaths of allegiance to their lawful princes, and obliges princes to destroy subjects whom they have sworn to defend?¹⁴⁵

¹⁴²See also *SM* 41 (May 1779), 225–31; *SM* 41 (June 1779), 309–15; *SM* 41 (July 1779), 362–69; *SM* 41 (August 1779), 409–15; *SM* 41 (September 1779), 468–74.

¹⁴³See Colley, *Britons*, 18–30.

¹⁴⁴Erskine, *Considerations*, 36–7.

¹⁴⁵John Erskine, 'Prayers for Men in Public Office', in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 405–6.

The Church of Rome seemed fanciful and full of superstition, which was contrary to the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment and its insistence on progression and reason.

Undergirding the anti-intellectual stigma of Catholicism was an inherent distrust of the Church of Rome's motives. The value that Erskine placed on truth and honesty helps to explain why he was so suspicious of Wesley and the pope. The guarded man wrote to the Principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, George Campbell, saying that 'Sincerity and candour, where-ever I find, I love.'¹⁴⁶ There was an insistence that one should be open and forthright concerning beliefs. If Erskine sensed that a particular person or religion was secretive in nature, and less than sincere in intention, he would conclude that a devious course was plotted which had the potential to undermine Christianity. This is why he could state that even if Arians and Episcopalians 'contend against us, they contend by arguments, not by fraud or force; and therefore by argument only they ought to be resisted'.¹⁴⁷ The Catholic Church, on the other hand, was believed to be sinister in its approach to gain converts and therefore a menace to the enlightened liberty enjoyed in Scotland. His goal therefore became to rescue his homeland and friends from such a perceived danger, no matter how imaginary or unlikely this threat was in reality.

Erskine was a rational thinker, and one of the more progressive clergymen of the day, but the information that he obtained from reading books fed his imagination and convinced him of a Catholic plot that threatened the whole of Britain and other Protestant countries. From Erskine's point of view, Catholics intended to subdue all Protestant nations, especially Britain. Moncreiff said that Erskine's endeavour to block the penal laws was 'not merely' because it was a 'corrupt and erroneous system of religion', but, more importantly, 'he considered it as a perpetual and wicked conspiracy'.¹⁴⁸ Erskine feared that if Catholics were given the right to purchase and

¹⁴⁶Erskine, *Narrative*, iv.

¹⁴⁷Erskine, *Narrative*, vi.

¹⁴⁸*Erskine*, 287.

inherit property, *Propaganda* would fund such investments in order to ‘expel the Protestant tenants from many corners of our land, and supply their place by sovereign Papists’.¹⁴⁹ He was also wary of the potential French alliance with the American revolutionaries and was appalled at the concessions given to Catholics in Canada, which he believed would have some bearing on nearby America since the colonists would no doubt seek an alliance with France.¹⁵⁰ In his 1769 pamphlet, *Shall I Go to War with my American Brethren?*, he cautioned his American readers against ‘calling in the aid of arbitrary bigoted popish princes’.¹⁵¹ Britain and America were only two of the many Protestant territories that were believed to be targets of a grander scheme by the pope.

The primary threat to Christianity was deemed to be the Jesuits. Popish plots and Jesuit espionage, Moncreiff averred, ‘had an influence on [Erskine’s] conduct, in every thing which was either directly or remotely connected with the subject’.¹⁵² For Erskine, it was the ‘intriguing spirit, immoral sentiments, and dark designs’ of the Jesuits which led to their expulsion from Catholic countries.¹⁵³ He reasoned that an order ‘which, for political purposes, hath denied or concealed the crucifixion of Christ, connived at Heathen idolatry, despised the decrees of the Roman pontiff, and raised a persecution against the more honest Dominicans for publishing them, must be sorry supports of a free and Protestant establishment’.¹⁵⁴ It was entirely possible, however, that some Catholics could be sincere in their faith, yet misled by the pope’s recently disbanded, but most loyal, order. ‘We know that Papists are not unanimous in the doctrines of the dispensing power of the Pope, of his infallibility, and of the

¹⁴⁹Erskine, *Considerations*, 34–5.

¹⁵⁰*Erskine*, 283.

¹⁵¹Erskine, *American Brethren*, 5.

¹⁵²*Erskine*, 284.

¹⁵³Erskine, *Considerations*, 4.

¹⁵⁴Erskine, *Considerations*, 5.

lawfulness of breaking faith with heretics', Erskine admitted. Nonetheless, if the penal laws were rescinded, some 'artful Jesuits' could 'settle among us' and 'disguise these depths of Satan, not from Protestants only, but even from Papists'.¹⁵⁵ In the springs and summers of 1764-5, Erskine claimed that Jesuits were 'particularly active in sending over priests in disguise, and other emissaries, and large cargoes of Popish books, pictures, and other such holy lumber' to Britain.¹⁵⁶ He even hinted at the possibility that it was this loyal order that had engineered the recent riots in Edinburgh and Glasgow. It was possible that

the billets exciting to the mob, might have been dropped, and the stories which so much provoked might have been contrived, by the bribed emissaries of France, or of Jesuits at a distance, who scrupled not doing evil that good might come, and were willing to hazard the ruin of a few innocent Catholics, if the country might thereby be thrown into confusion, or a specious pretext gained for pleading, that the lives and fortunes of Roman-Catholics must be a prey to lawless insult, unless King William's statute were repealed.¹⁵⁷

According to Erskine, 'This dishonest and cruel policy might, to a Jesuit, have appeared meritorious'.¹⁵⁸ Thus the Jesuits were viewed as a very real menace to cautious ministers like Erskine.

From Erskine's personal study, he compiled enough evidence through the books that he had read to formulate his views of the history of Catholicism and its persecution of Protestants. In Poland, for instance, he gauged that even though freedom of religion had been established there, 'yet, on the most frivolous pretext' Protestants have been 'punished as blasphemers, deprived of their churches, and in 1736 declared incapable of public offices'. In one instance, Erskine spoke of a false report in 1724, produced by the Jesuits, which led to the killing of the chief magistrate in the Polish town of Thorn along with nine others. The story recounted how the

¹⁵⁵Erskine, *Narrative*, vi-vii.

¹⁵⁶Erskine, *American Brethren*, 37.

¹⁵⁷Erskine, *Narrative*, xiii. See also Erskine To ?, 15 February 1779, TPC, Ch.A.2.92.

¹⁵⁸Erskine, *Narrative*, xiii.

Protestants had their church and school taken away from them and were not allowed to give a defence. ‘To complete the shocking scene’, it was said that the execution took place eight days prior to the original date that was announced at the sentencing so that there would not be enough time to attempt a pardon.¹⁵⁹ These accounts were based on Erskine’s reading of *An Authentic Narrative of the Late Proceedings and Cruel Execution at Thorn* (1725).

There was a myriad of other grim tales of Catholics that Erskine had collected from the continent. He gave the example of the Independent minister, Philip Forneau (1726-83), who in his *Letters to Mr Justice Blackstone* (1770), wrote that in England in 1753, the Jesuits printed a work stating that the civil authorities had no power over the ecclesiastical; instead, it was the reverse.¹⁶⁰ There was the narrative of a Mr Roger, a French minister in Dauphiné, who was martyred in 1745 at the age of seventy-nine for preaching orthodox doctrine. Another story was about a Mr Desubas, a Protestant preacher in the province of Vivarais, who was taken by soldiers to Vernoux. Two thousand sympathisers followed him there to plead his innocence, but were fired upon by Catholics once they arrived there, killing thirty people, one of whom was a pregnant woman, and wounding a hundred. Desubas was eventually freed and went to Montpellier, but Erskine stated that he was later martyred there. James Serces’s *Popery Always the Same* (London, 1746) and Armand de la Chapelle’s *La Necessité du Culte Public* (1747) were the cited references of these accounts.¹⁶¹ Erskine’s ‘apprehensions of the growth of Popery never subsided’ so that his fear of the danger of Catholicism ‘undoubtedly remained unchanged to the end of his life’.¹⁶² The proof of this is demonstrated in one of his final publications.

¹⁵⁹Erskine, *Considerations*, 14–15.

¹⁶⁰Erskine, *Considerations*, 10.

¹⁶¹Erskine, *Considerations*, 11–14.

¹⁶²Erskine, 285–6, 312.

The apex of Erskine's Catholic fears was displayed in the second volume of his *Sketches and Hints of Church History, and Theological Controversy*. The first volume was printed in 1790 and its subject was largely disputes over doctrinal positions in Britain, America and the continent. The second part, published in 1797, was devoted almost exclusively to the spread of Catholicism in Europe and the persecution that Protestants in these countries were continually facing. As early as 1781, Erskine was organising ideas for this collection of essays, which he commented on in a letter to the Baptist minister John Collett Ryland on 18 August of that year.¹⁶³ Erskine's knowledge of the German and Dutch languages allowed him to gain more knowledge of theology than was available in Britain.¹⁶⁴ He had virtually exhausted his resources for books in his home country and America, and despite how difficult it was to gain access to publications, Europe became a treasure-trove of hidden gems for those who could read languages other than English.

Erskine collected material from European sources, edited it into short excerpts, and included it in the second volume of the *Sketches*. The titles of most of the chapters demonstrate Erskine's agenda: 'Popery and Protestantism in Germany', which includes 'Dangers threatening Protestantism'; 'The Numbers, Circumstances and Characters, of Catholics and Protestants in Switzerland'; 'Grievances of Protestants in Germany, and Measures for their Redress'; 'History of Protestantism and Popery in Poland'; the 'State of the Protestants in France'; 'Grievances of the Protestants in Hungary'; the 'Danger hanging over the Protestant Churches from Popery as Antichristian'; 'Sentiments of Eminent English Churchmen and Dissenters, respecting the Dangers to which Protestant Churches and States are exposed by the Growth of Popery'; and 'Thoughts by the Publisher on the mutual Influence of Popery and Infidelity, and on the Dangers to which Protestants now are, or probably hereafter

¹⁶³John Erskine to John Collett Ryland, 18 August 1781, EUL, E.99.14.

¹⁶⁴*Erskine*, 315–16.

may be Exposed'.¹⁶⁵ The essays were meant to provide evidence of historical Catholic oppression in places like Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Switzerland. From these accounts and his other European sources, Erskine sought to awaken the British public to the historical tyranny of Catholicism outside Britain.

Prior to the *Sketches*, Erskine had already been reading about the sufferings of Protestants in Germany and Austria from John R. Kiesling's *Wahrheit der Lutherischen Religion* ('The Truth of the Lutheran Religion') and *Geschichte der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Religion* ('History of the Evangelical Lutheran Religion') by Christian Wilhelm Walch, a professor at Göttingen.¹⁶⁶ In the second volume of his *Sketches*, however, Erskine chose to highlight the *Latest Narratives of the History of Religion* (1771-83) by Walch, offering snippets of Catholic deviousness in Germany, Poland and France. The most controversial author that Erskine included was Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, the Berlin bookseller, who was linked with the elusive Illuminati of Germany.¹⁶⁷ One Catholic sympathiser expressed his frustration with the editorial decision for including Nicolai.¹⁶⁸ The anonymous author criticised the 'alarm' that Erskine sounded of the supposed 'growth of popery' and the 'dangers' that were imagined 'to espy in every corner', rather than focus on the more pertinent danger of the anti-Catholic masons.¹⁶⁹ Erskine responded to his accuser in a heated printed letter of his own in 1798.¹⁷⁰ But it is significant that Erskine defended his

¹⁶⁵John Erskine (ed.), *Sketches and Hints of Church History, and Theological Controversy*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Printed for Archibald Constable, 1797), 2:xi-xii.

¹⁶⁶Erskine, *Considerations*, 42.

¹⁶⁷On Nicolai, see J. M. Roberts, *The Mythology of the Secret Societies* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), 118–45 and Pamela E. Selwyn, *Everyday Life in the German Book Trade: Friedrich Nicolai as Bookseller and Publisher in the Age of Enlightenment, 1750–1810* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

¹⁶⁸See *A Letter to the Reverend John Erskine, D. D., One of the Ministers of Edinburgh: On the Dangerous Tendency of His Late Sketches of Church-History: By His Countenancing the Authors, and Promoting the Designs, of the Infamous Sect of the Illuminati* (Edinburgh: Printed by J. Moir for Stuart Cheyne, 1798).

¹⁶⁹*Dangerous Tendency*, 12.

¹⁷⁰See John Erskine, *Dr Erskine's Reply to a Printed Letter, Directed to Him by A. C.; in Which the Gross Misrepresentations in Said Letter of His Sketches of Church History, in Promoting the*

inclusion of Nicolai because the German bookseller was an accomplished historian and, more importantly, that he was the ‘keenest and most spirited writer against Popery’.¹⁷¹ So even though Erskine could brag that he ‘put in Professor [John] Robison’s hands, several of the late volumes of [H.M.G.] Koester, which contained the fullest account of [the precursors to the Illuminati] I had seen’, Erskine believed that Catholicism was still a greater threat.¹⁷²

In Erskine’s own essay in the *Sketches*, he again spoke of Catholicism as if it was an anti-intellectual religion. Catholics, he claimed, were taught to follow the pope blindly and not to investigate scripture for themselves: ‘A purchaser thinks not highly of a commodity, which he is not allowed to see before buying it.’ He referenced the prayers

in an unknown tongue, and often addressed to angels, to saints, nay to saints who never existed; rites and ceremonies childish and ridiculous; pilgrimages to the pictures and statues of saints; the veneration of relics; the sale of indulgences; miracles wrought to confirm transubstantiation or the holiness of relics; miracles by which relics are multiplied, so that the napkin with which Mary wiped our Lord’s feet is to be found in eight different places; stories of saints warmly inculcated in sermons, though of such a strain, as must provoke the laughter of the gay, and the indignation of the wise; especially the oppression and persecution of alleged heretics; the forcing men to profess what they are convinced is unworthy of God, and contrary to his will; and the acting thus cruelly in violation of the most solemn oaths and engagements.

Erskine simply could not fathom how such a superstitious and oppressive religion could be an enlightened form of faith. The idea of the pope’s infallibility, for instance, seemed contrary to reason and scripture. ‘He must be a thorough-paced fanatic, who knows the intrigues and cabals, which take place in the election of Popes, and yet believes that after such election, they are under the infallible guidance of the

Designs of the Infamous Sect of the Illuminati, Are Considered (Edinburgh: Printed for Archibald Constable, 1798).

¹⁷¹Erskine, *Sketches*, 2:266.

¹⁷²Erskine, *Erskine’s Reply*, 3. Erskine was referring to the Edinburgh Professor of Natural Philosophy, John Robison, and his *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe* (1797). See also Erskine to Jedidiah Morse, 25 September 1800, HSP, Gratz MSS.

Holy Ghost: or who allows that every individual member of a general council is fallible, and yet imagines, that by uniting together, they acquire infallibility.’ Catholicism was shown to lead to scepticism and infidelity. Even though atheism and blind zeal are opposite extremes, Erskine agreed with the Church of Ireland clergyman Philip Skelton and his *Deism Revealed* (1751), that these two beliefs ‘move in such a circle, as is apt to bring them together again on the opposite side’.¹⁷³ If any form of faith was ‘fanatical’, according to Erskine, it was not Evangelicalism, it was Catholicism.

Since Wesleyan Methodism and Catholicism were seen as devious forms of faith that threatened the progression of enlightened Evangelicalism, and Protestantism as a whole, the normally placid and charitable Evangelical minister at Old Greyfriars became a controversialist. When faced with the inconsistencies of Wesley, the Scottish Evangelical minister chose to see a glass half empty rather than half full. The smooth-talking Methodist seemed more like a disreputable salesman than a genuine friend to Protestant religion. Erskine did not trust Wesley and so the former determined that the latter had less than sincere motives in establishing societies in Scotland. The same type of thinking can be found in his perception of Catholics. Erskine read extensively about the persecutions of Protestants in Europe in order to inform the British public of the historical oppression of the Church of Rome. He was one of the few Evangelicals in Scotland who could read German and Dutch which allowed him to absorb foreign books. Though small in number and led by only a few poor, roving priests, Catholics were perceived as a great threat to Britain’s religious stability and her progression as an enlightened nation. Rumours in circulation, faulty assumptions and speculative theories were taken more seriously than actual data. The books he read convinced this Edinburgh minister that Catholicism was stronger than ever, and even though the Jesuits were a disbanded order by the early 1790s, Erskine

¹⁷³Erskine, *Sketches*, 2:266-9.

believed that Protestantism would greatly suffer if not carefully guarded by the faithful.

Chapter Seven

The Friend to America

Erskine was one of Scotland's leading American advocates. From the time of the 1740 revivals in Scotland, he made contact with a number of Americans – corresponding with them and sending them books – despite having never stepped foot on the soil of the new world. It was these relationships that fostered Erskine's sympathies for America. He knew too many New England Calvinists by the 1770s to abandon them when war was on the horizon. How could he turn his back on Evangelical colleagues like John Witherspoon, who had emigrated from Scotland to America, or Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins, longtime correspondents and disciples of New England's foremost theologian and revivalist, Jonathan Edwards? After having invested so much time in promoting the ideas and works of many of his American friends and fellow Evangelicals, it would have been inconceivable to withdraw allegiance mid-stream and encourage the military suppression of a dawning nation that he had grown to love. Yet when war became imminent, he was left with the difficult choice of whom he should support. His decision was to try to do the impossible: defend the colonists while not being unfaithful to his own country. This diplomatic strategy, however, proved to be futile. There was no stopping the pressing reality of war, and Erskine's three pamphlets, which he hoped would cool the heated dispute between America and Britain, only ignited a fire in many of his countrymen, who now saw the normally placid Scottish minister as a preacher of insurrection. How did Erskine become a friend to America and how did this role manifest itself? These are the questions examined in this chapter. Only after looking at the Protestant connection between America and Britain as well as Erskine's relationships with the colonists, can one see how committed he was to America's prosperity and why he was prompted to write three apparently radical pamphlets.

Since colonial America was grounded on a Puritan-based Calvinism, it had much in common with Presbyterian Scotland.¹ Puritan ethics were an essential part of the way of life during the Revolutionary period.² Sydney Ahlstrom claims that so strong was Puritanism in the American colonies that seventy-five per cent of the colonists could declare this movement as their spiritual heritage at the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and Mark Noll goes so far as to say that, ‘The story of religion in the American colonies is the story of Puritanism.’³ The sermon in particular was a powerful medium through which New England pastors communicated with their congregations. In each of the 720 Congregational churches in New England at this time, Harry Stout estimates that the average parishioner could expect to hear about 7,000 sermons within a lifetime, equalling some 15,000 hours.⁴ The colonial pastor was typically fervent in maintaining a godly example, with only three per cent of the ministers in New England between 1680 and 1740 being involved in scandals of any kind.⁵ The preacher often reminded his parishioners that they were the people of God and would remain so as long as they kept themselves spiritually pure, avoiding the taint of moral depravity and materialism.⁶ Although this Puritan teaching of the covenant relationship between God and a nation was replaced during the Great Awakening with a focus on an individual’s personal relationship and responsibility to God, the Calvinistic theology that underlay America’s religion

¹Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations, 1750–1835* (Glasgow and London: Blackie, 1975), 14.

²Edmund S. Morgan, ‘The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution’, *William and Mary Quarterly* 24 (1967), 7.

³Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 124; Mark A. Noll, *Christians in the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C.: Christian University Press, 1977), 29.

⁴Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 3–4.

⁵William T. Youngs, *God’s Messengers: Religious Leadership in Colonial New England, 1700–1750* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 46–7.

⁶Stout, *New England Soul*, 252–3.

continued to be taught.⁷ The Calvinism that emerged was an amalgamation of Puritan theology and republican principles, which was used to strengthen America's ideology as an independent nation and ward off the military aggression of its mother country, Britain.⁸

Evangelicals in America shared most of the same religious principles with Britain, with both sets of people remaining predominantly loyal to their Puritan heritage; so it was natural for ministers between the two countries to form friendships.⁹ The Great Awakening was the catalyst for a transatlantic connection between many of the ministers in Scotland and America, which can be seen in the publishing of magazines and journals, united prayer efforts and transatlantic correspondence during much of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ It did not matter if correspondents did not know each other in person. They shared a common interest in the Evangelical Revival and wanted to assist each other in helping this movement succeed, which were sufficient reasons to exchange letters over the Atlantic.¹¹ For Erskine, his affinity for America was shaped during his days as a student at Edinburgh University at the time of the Cambuslang and Kilsyth Revivals where he witnessed for himself the effects of spiritual renewal on the eager crowds.¹² Although he later

⁷Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 263; Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32.

⁸See Noll, *America's God*, 48–88 and *Christians*, 50–63.

⁹David W. Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America', in George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds.), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 184–6; G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1957), 139–47.

¹⁰Michael J. Crawford, 'New England and the Scottish Religious Revivals in 1742', *American Presbyterian* 69 (1991), 23; Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 229; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 33–4; Susan Durden, 'A Study of the First Evangelical Magazines, 1740–1748', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976), 255–75.

¹¹Susan O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735–1755', *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986), 813.

¹²See Erskine's letter to Thomas Prince?, 17 July 1742, JEL. See also chapter two.

admitted that his view of the events at Cambuslang as a ‘Prelude of greater Things yet to come’ had changed from his original optimistic vision of the revival as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy, his admiration for leaders of the transatlantic revival, such as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, never faded.¹³

The evidence in his manuscripts indicates that Erskine began writing to American clergymen in the 1740s, and once establishing a relationship, he maintained these friendships for life, and often with his contact’s children and grandchildren. Moncreiff suggested that it was John Maclaurin, a minister in Glasgow, who was responsible for introducing the Old Greyfriars’ minister to many of the American divines, and based on Erskine’s respect for Maclaurin and his early contact with men like Edwards, Moncreiff appears to be correct.¹⁴ Erskine’s contribution for America’s ‘prosperity, and especially for her progress in literature and religion’, Moncreiff wrote, ‘was always expressed with eagerness and affection. He suffered no opportunity to escape him by which he could in any form contribute to it.’¹⁵ The sheer number of American ministers with whom he communicated was astounding and included some of the most influential names in colonial American history. He corresponded with the Boston clergymen, Thomas Prince and his son, Benjamin Colman, Thomas Foxcroft, John Moorhead and William Cooper; the New York ministers, John Henry Livingston and William Linn; the New Jersey pastor, Alexander MacWhorter; the Connecticut divines, Joseph Fish and Jonathan Parsons; the physician and patriot, Benjamin Rush; the statesman, John Dickinson; the presidents of the College of New Jersey, Jonathan Dickinson, Aaron Burr, Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Davies, Samuel Finley and John Witherspoon as well as Samuel

¹³See Erskine’s letter to an unknown correspondent, 15 February 1779, TPC, Ch.A.2.92; John Erskine, *The Signs of the Times Consider’d: Or the High Probability, That the Present Appearances in New-England, and the West of Scotland, Are a Prelude of the Glorious Things Promised to the Church in the Latter Ages* (Edinburgh: Printed by T. Lumisden and J. Robertson, 1742), 3.

¹⁴*Erskine*, 162.

¹⁵*Erskine*, 163.

Miller, one of the school's later professors; two of the presidents of Yale, Ezra Stiles and Timothy Dwight; the president of Dickinson College, Charles Nisbet; the New Divinity men, Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, Jonathan Edwards Jr and Levi Hart; the future father of American geography, Jedidiah Morse; and even American ministers who were staunch opponents of the revival, such as Jonathan Mayhew, Charles Chauncy and Edward Wigglesworth. Erskine also became a corresponding member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, an honorific title bestowed upon a designated number of potentially significant literary donors.¹⁶ He wrote to the association's corresponding secretaries, to Jeremy Belknap, the visionary and pioneer of the historical society, and to Belknap's closest friend and replacement, John Elliot, offering advice on how to organise the society and donating much needed books.¹⁷ It would be difficult to think of a resident Scotsman who maintained contact with as many respectable colonial Americans as Erskine.

Even though many seventeenth-century Scots viewed America as a 'howling Wilderness', droves of North British emigrants were willing to brave the Atlantic Ocean throughout the eighteenth century in order to find a brighter future in business and farming, or to make their mark in the sprouting religious institutions.¹⁸ Charles Nisbet and John Witherspoon, two Scots who were coaxed into becoming the presidents of Dickinson College and the College of New Jersey (Princeton), were prime examples. Once the American War of Independence was over, Nisbet, prior to emigrating to Pennsylvania, often wrote recommendatory letters on behalf of other

¹⁶*Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 5 (Boston: Printed by Samuel Hall, 1798), 293. On the history of the MHS, see Louis Leonard Tucker, *The Massachusetts Historical Society: A Bicentennial History, 1791-1991* (Boston, MA: Published by the Society, 1995).

¹⁷There are three surviving letters from Erskine to the society: Erskine to Jeremy Belknap, 27 February 1793, Massachusetts Historical Society, MHS Archives; Erskine to John Elliot, 6 April 1798, Massachusetts Historical Society, MHS Archives; and Erskine to the Massachusetts Historical Society, 8 June 1799, Massachusetts Historical Society, MHS Archives.

¹⁸Alexander Ross, *Pansea* quoted by Roger L. Emerson, 'The Scottish Literati and America, 1680-1800', in Ned C. Landsman (ed.), *Nation and Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and the Americas, 1600-1800* (Lewisburg and London: Bucknell University Press and Associated University Presses, 2001), 184.

fellow Scots who were desperate enough to leave their homeland in search of a new life in America. David Napier, a linen manufacturer, for example, obtained a letter of introduction to Benjamin Rush from Nisbet on 5 August 1783 for his journey to Philadelphia.¹⁹ After the war, Nisbet joined his friend Witherspoon in America in 1785 and the pair became two of the leading Scots responsible for establishing Scottish Common Sense philosophy in America.²⁰

Erskine played a significant role in securing Witherspoon and Nisbet as the presidents of their respective institutions.²¹ It was Benjamin Rush who spearheaded the project of convincing them to emigrate to America and serve as leaders of these new institutions, but it was Erskine who provided the necessary encouragement to see that the two men were treated fairly and remained committed to their decision.²² Rush knew many of the Scottish clergy because he had travelled to Edinburgh in 1766 to study medicine, before returning to Philadelphia in 1769. Scotland offered the prospect of a prestigious education, especially in medicine, and so it would have been an honour for Rush to study abroad.²³ This physician and patriot was a product of the

¹⁹Whitfield J. Bell, 'Scottish Emigration to America: A Letter of Dr. Charles Nisbet to John Witherspoon, 1784', *William and Mary Quarterly* 11 (1954), 279.

²⁰Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768–1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 38–9; Mark A. Noll, 'Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought', *American Quarterly* 37 (1985); Mark A. Noll, 'The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic', *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (1985), 153–9; Noll, *America's God*, 105; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, 'The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology', *Church History* 24 (1955), 261–2; Hook, *Scotland and America*, 75–9; J. David Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 116–27.

²¹Milton E. Flower, *John Dickinson: Conservative Revolutionary* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 230–1.

²²Samuel Miller, *Memoir of the Rev. Charles Nisbet, D.D., Late President of Dickinson College, Carlisle* (New York: Robert Carter, 1840), 102; Margaret Barton Korty, 'Benjamin Franklin and Eighteenth-Century American Libraries', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 55 (1965), 44.

²³Hook, *Scotland and America*, 18–23. See also Helen M. Dingwall, *A History of Scottish Medicine: Themes and Influences* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 112–21 and Anand C. Chitnis, 'Provost Drummond and the Origins of Edinburgh Medicine', in R. H. Campbell and Andrew S. Skinner (eds.), *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1982), 86–97.

Great Awakening and deeply influenced by George Whitefield's disciple, Gilbert Tennent, as well as the presidents of the College of New Jersey, Samuel Davies and Samuel Finley.²⁴ Due to the beliefs and the connections that he had made with some of the foremost Evangelicals in America, Rush favoured Scottish Evangelicals when he studied at Edinburgh and remained wary of the perceived theologically liberal Moderate party. Rush viewed William Robertson as 'a veritable antichrist', according to Donald D'Elia, but showed the highest respect for Popular ministers like Erskine, Robert Walker and John Witherspoon.²⁵ Rush recorded that while he lived in Edinburgh, the 'Revd. Dr. Erskine honoured me with many acts of attention and friendship. His heart resembled the ancient altar among the Jews. The fire of Christian love burned upon it with a perpetual blaze.'²⁶ Once Rush returned to America and became involved in the efforts to find a new president for the College of New Jersey and Dickinson College, he knew whom to recruit.

Convincing Witherspoon and Nisbet to accept their God-given call was not easy and Rush complicated matters by over-promising and under-delivering. 'All America waits I am sure with trembling impatience for your answer', Rush wrote to Witherspoon on 25 March 1767, 'and should you refuse the call they would look upon the dispensations of Providence towards that college as more gloomy and mysterious than ever they have been.'²⁷ The flatterer told Witherspoon that 'Here your talents have been in some measure buried, but at Princeton they will all be called into action, and the evening of your life will be much more effulgent than your brightest meridian days have been.'²⁸ Rush may have exaggerated the welcome that Witherspoon would

²⁴Donald J. D'Elia, 'Benjamin Rush: Philosopher of the American Revolution', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 64 (1974), 7–15.

²⁵D'Elia, 'Benjamin Rush', 29–30.

²⁶Benjamin Rush, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush: His 'Travels Through Life' Together with His Commonplace Book for 1789–1813*, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), 47.

²⁷Benjamin Rush, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, L.H. Butterfield (ed.), vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 33.

²⁸Rush, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 34.

receive in America, but once established, the Scot built up the College of New Jersey so that his legacy indeed placed him as a godsend in American history.²⁹

Throughout this process of negotiation in recruiting Witherspoon, Erskine was involved by brokering letters between the college trustees and his Scottish friends.³⁰ But this was even more so with Nisbet, who had less confidence than Witherspoon and needed to be constantly assured that the move to America was right for him and his family. This ‘moon-shine project’, as the provost of the University of Pennsylvania dubbed Dickinson College, was less stable in its inception than Rush was willing to admit, calling for more fawning to capture the apprehensive Nisbet as its first president.³¹ The physician-turned-patriot bragged to Nisbet on 1 June 1784 that ‘Our prospects with respect to that Institution brighten daily. Our funds amount to near three thousand pounds; and as to buildings, we expect to purchase some public works built with brick, within half a mile of Carlisle, during the late war’.³² There was little that Rush would not say to secure this man as president. He even claimed that his family had ‘allotted a room in our house for your reception, which goes by the name of “Dr. Nisbet’s room”’ and that his children ‘have been taught to consider you as their future master’.³³ This flattery, however, only went so far in setting Nisbet at ease and so he remained cautious.

Erskine encouraged his suspicious friend to take the position while shielding Nisbet from the bombastic language of Rush. There was a concern for Nisbet, since he had been for a number of years one of Erskine’s ‘dearest and most intimate

²⁹Moses Coit Tyler, ‘President Witherspoon in the American Revolution’, *The American Historical Review* 1 (1896), 671–79; George S. Pryde, *The Scottish Universities and the Colleges of Colonial America* (Glasgow: Jackson, Son & Company, 1957), 25; Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 25–53.

³⁰L.H. Butterfield, *John Witherspoon Comes to America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 17–18.

³¹Charles Coleman Sellers, *Dickinson College: A History* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 56.

³²Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 114.

³³Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 118.

friends'. 'The thoughts of bidding him a long farewell', Erskine wrote to John Dickinson, 'would dispirit me greatly, was it not that... his abilities, integrity and attachment to the American states, will render him much more useful as head of the Colledge founded by your excellency, than he could have been at Montrose.'³⁴ Rush was often forced to negotiate with Erskine to secure his prize. In a letter on 4 May 1784 to the New York minister William Linn, Rush wrote that he had received word from Erskine, who has 'placed the coming of Dr. Nesbit almost beyond a doubt.' The physician reported that Nisbet 'proposes four questions to me through Dr. Erskine', which Rush claimed to have already answered in a letter that was sent to the wary Scot.³⁵ But despite the optimism that paved his way, Nisbet did not have a smooth transition into his new post and within months his whole family became ill and wanted to return to Scotland. Rush declared his innocence in the situation and reported back to Erskine on 25 October 1785 that Nisbet had received the most favourable treatment in Carlisle: 'The friends of liberty entertained him as if he had been an ambassador, and the friends of religion treated him everywhere like an apostle.'³⁶ The truth, however, was that the dream of living in America did not meet Nisbet's expectations and once he had realised this, he found little joy in his new surroundings.

'I have not been in a condition to enjoy life', Nisbet complained to the Earl of Buchan, Erskine's cousin, on 15 December 1785.³⁷ The newly installed president of Dickinson College also began to criticise the school's trustees, saying that they were simply 'clerks for drawing up and signing the diplomas' and he had equally harsh words about the poor quality of the students there.³⁸ Erskine, recognising that his

³⁴Erskine to John Dickinson, 31 March 1785, JDP, MC 2001.13.

³⁵Rush, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 332.

³⁶Rush, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 373.

³⁷Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 139.

³⁸Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 142.

friend's spirits were low, wrote to comfort him in July 1786 as well as chastise him for his melancholy attitude.

I am... of opinion that all your friends in Scotland... think that, although there is room to doubt as to your first success in the Presidentship of Dickinson College; there is none that your staying in America will be more for your honour, your interest, and the general interests of religion, than your returning.³⁹

Nisbet was censured by Erskine for speaking too freely about his grievances with the college. 'As you are in a strange country, remember that you have two ears and but one tongue', Erskine reminded him, 'and therefore, without necessity, and a thorough knowledge of the prudence as well as honesty of your correspondents, write nothing which you would be uneasy if it was published.'⁴⁰ This was candid advice coming from the quill of a distant observer, but the effect seemed to work, for Nisbet stayed in Carlisle and served as the president of Dickinson College for the remainder of his life, apparently without further complaints.

The common trait shared by Nisbet and Erskine was erudition. Nisbet was known as the 'walking library' since he had knowledge of a number of subjects which was 'derived from books that few people read, and that many people never heard of'.⁴¹ Samuel Miller, Nisbet's biographer, boasted that in terms of learning, his subject was 'one of the most remarkable men of his time'. He had a 'thirst for knowledge' that was 'insatiable' and his 'memory was not only excellent, but bordered on the prodigious'.⁴² In one instance, a story was told in which Nisbet came into contact with a boy who was reading from Homer. Nisbet, recognising the text, 'then began, and recited many lines of that book, without the least hesitation'. When he was asked how he could possibly remember such a large section of the book in the

³⁹Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 147.

⁴⁰Erskine to Nisbet, 29 September 1786 in Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 148.

⁴¹Rush, *Autobiography*, 267–8.

⁴²Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 16, 28.

original Greek language, Nisbet replied, 'that he did not well know; that he read them, and they stuck'.⁴³

Erskine's and Nisbet's common interest in learning and books secured their friendship even when the latter emigrated to America. To satisfy his friend's desire for reading, Erskine became the leading supplier of books to the newly settled Pennsylvania resident. Miller declared, 'But of all Dr. Nisbet's correspondents in Great Britain, the most persevering and punctual was the venerable Dr. Erskine, of Edinburgh, who was one of the most pious and public spirited men of his day.' Miller estimated,

That gentleman maintained a more extensive correspondence with American clergymen than any other European Divine. And probably, no private man on the other side of the Atlantic ever sent so many books gratuitously to this country as Dr. Erskine. He probably had twenty or thirty correspondents in different parts of the United States; and it is believed that almost every letter he wrote was accompanied by a package of books; some of them for his correspondents themselves; and others for the public libraries of Colleges and other institutions, to which he was constantly remitting rare and curious books. Of this he never made any parade; as he was one of the most modest, as well as most pious of men.⁴⁴

This is an accurate portrayal of Erskine since it is true that almost all of his letters contained several books.

The best known contact that Erskine had in America was Jonathan Edwards.⁴⁵ The relationship initiated by Edwards's most frequent correspondent began sometime in 1747 and continued until the American preacher's death in 1758.⁴⁶ One might think that Erskine was a disciple of Edwards and dependent on the latter's knowledge for formulating his system of thought. But in many ways, it was the reverse. It was Edwards who depended on Erskine since this Scotsman posted countless works

⁴³Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 326.

⁴⁴Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 194.

⁴⁵See David W. Bebbington, 'The Reputation of Edwards Abroad', in Stephen J. Stein (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 240.

⁴⁶*Erskine*, 196.

gratuitously in order to satisfy the Massachusetts native's 'hunger' for knowledge.⁴⁷

Of the 300 volumes and 536 pamphlets that Edwards owned at the time of his death, Christopher Wayne Mitchell estimates that as high a proportion as one-third were donated by the Scottish Evangelical.⁴⁸ In the fourteen known letters to Erskine, Edwards acknowledged receiving fifty-five separate titles, fourteen other books and a number of unknown sermons and pamphlets from his Edinburgh contact.⁴⁹ Most of

⁴⁷Harold Simonson, 'Jonathan Edwards and His Scottish Connections', *Journal of American Studies* 21 (1987), 356; Thomas H. Johnson, 'Jonathan Edwards's Background Reading', *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* 28 (1931), 200.

⁴⁸Christopher Wayne Mitchell, 'Jonathan Edwards's Scottish Connection and the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Evangelical Revival, 1735–1750', PhD Dissertation, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, 1997, 233; Johnson, 'Background Reading', 199.

⁴⁹Christopher W. Mitchell, 'Jonathan Edwards's Scottish Connection', in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 233. A sample of Erskine's generosity can be seen in two of his letters to Edwards, one received in the spring of 1754 and another in December 1755. In the first letter, Erskine sent Meric Casaubon, *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (London, 1655; 2nd ed., rev. and enl., London, 1656); William Warburton, *The Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion Occasionally Opened and Explained; in a Course of Sermons* (vols. 1-2, 1753-54; vol. 3, 1753); Marshal Merrick, *The Parable of the Vineyard and Christ, the True Vine* (1753); Archibald Campbell, *A Discourse proving that the Apostles were no enthusiasts... With a preface containing some reflections on a late book, entitled, Christianity as Old as the Creation; and on what Mr. Woolston alledges with respect to the resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1730); an unknown 'Discourse on the prevailing Evils of the present Time'; *A letter to Professor Campbell, whereto is subjoin'd remarks on his vindication of the Apostles from enthusiasm* (1731); Alexander Moncreiff, *An Enquiry into the Principle, Rule, and End of Moral Actions, wherein the Scheme of Selfish-love, laid down by Mr. Archibald Campbell... Is Examined, and the Received Doctrine Is Vindicated* (1735); Thomas Gilbert, *A learned and accurate Discourse concerning the Guilt of Sin, pardon of that Guilt, and prayer for that pardon* (London, 1695; rep. Edinburgh, 1720); James Hervey, *The Cross of Christ the Christian's Glory* (1753); *A Brief account of the rise, progress, and management... of the Orphan-School, etc.* (1735); *Memorial concerning the Surgeons Hospital* (1737); Andrew Gairdner, *An historical account of the Old People's hospital, commonly called, the Trinity Hospital in Edinburgh* (1728); Robert Walker, *A short account of the rise... and present state of the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian knowledge* (1748); *Abridgement of the Statutes and Rules of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge* (1732); *A short account of the Town's Hospital in Glasgow; with the regulations and abstracts of the expenses for the first eight years*, 3rd ed. (1742); *Annals of the rise, progress, and persecutions of the famous reformed churches in France: which are at this day groaning under the cruel bondage of popish tyranny*, 2nd ed. (1753) and in the second letter the following books: 'A sermon by a Lay Elder before the Commission'; John Bisset, *A Letter to a Gentleman at Edinburgh, containing remarks upon a late Apology for the Presbyterians in Scotland, who keep communion in the ordinances of the Gospel, with Mr. George Whitefield*, 2nd ed. (1753); *Resolution of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, upon the Report of their Commissioners sent to London to Endeavour the repeal of the act 10mo Annae reimposing patronages* (1736); Samuel Rutherford, *The Power and Prevalency of Faith and Prayer Evidenced, in a practical discourse upon Matth. 9.27-31* (1731); Gordon Thomas, *An enquiry into the method of settling parishes, conform to the acts and practices of the Church of Scotland, through the different periods of her administration and government, from the Reformation to the present time* (1732); [John MacLaurin], *The Nature of Ecclesiastic Government and of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland illustrated* (1754); [James Ballantyne], *An Essay upon Gospel and Legal Preaching* (Edinburgh, 1723); Allen Logan, *The necessity of zeal for the truth; and of restraining error by the*

the works sent were intended to aid Edwards's research for his latest theological works or were heretical in nature so that the American pastor would be inspired to refute such authors. Receiving the most current theological literature was consistent with Edwards's request that he be 'informed' of the latest books on religious subjects since he was living 'in this remote part of the world', which at the time was Northampton, Massachusetts.⁵⁰ By sending such books, Edwards explained, 'you will not only inform me, but I shall industriously communicate any important informations of that kind, and spread them amongst God's people in this part of the world; and shall endeavor to my utmost to make such an use of them as shall tend most to promote the interest of religion'.⁵¹ Based on the sheer volume of works that were sent, there can be no doubt that Erskine was a crucial contact for Edwards and a key source for enlightening the American.

It is no surprise that the two became friends, for they had much in common. Edwards was not high-born in the same way as Erskine, but he could easily be called an aristocrat by the New England standards of the day.⁵² The discipline in his studies that Edwards exhibited was also the norm for Erskine, who was constantly poring over the most recent religious publications.⁵³ Further, these men shared a common fear of the influence of Catholicism, Edwards viewing this threat eschatologically and Erskine politically.⁵⁴ Both were successful at straddling the fence between

exercise of church-discipline (1730); James Hog, *A Vindication of the doctrine of grace, from the charge of antinomianism; contained in a letter to a minister of the gospel* [Ralph Erskine] (1718). See George S. Claghorn (ed.), *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, vol. 16 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 661–2.

⁵⁰Edwards to Erskine, 31 August 1748 in Claghorn (ed.), *Edwards's Letters*, 249.

⁵¹Edwards to Erskine, 14 October 1748 in Claghorn (ed.), *Edwards's Letters*, 260.

⁵²George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 3.

⁵³Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 134–5.

⁵⁴Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 198–200. On Erskine's anti-Catholicism, see chapter six.

Enlightenment thought and Calvinism, and even more important was their shared interest in books. One author commented that

Dr. Erskine was remarkable for qualities peculiarly suited to the taste and the habits of his American friend. To great ardor of piety, and to singular fidelity and diligence in his pastoral charge, he added an unusual thirst for knowledge, and unceasing diligence in the cultivation of his mind, even to old age... he was careful, on his part, to search out and send to Mr. Edwards such new and rare works as, at the distance of the latter from the great libraries of Europe, he might have found it difficult to procure. It is evident, from remaining records, that this correspondence was highly gratifying to both parties, and was deemed by each substantially profitable.⁵⁵

A friendship built on books was enough of a reason that the pair remained in constant contact.

Their personal lives were rarely discussed. Just as Edwards consistently diverted attention away from himself, so was the case with Erskine.⁵⁶ But this aversion for anything other than the latest publications did not keep Edwards from revealing to Erskine some of his deepest concerns. For instance, when the American minister was engaged in the conflict with his Northampton congregation that ended with him being deposed, it was Erskine to whom Edwards turned for a sympathetic ear. Emotionally drained by the situation, Edwards wrote, 'But I am now as it were thrown upon the wide ocean of the world, and know not what will become of me and my numerous and chargeable family; nor have I any particular door in view, that I depend upon to be opened for my future serviceableness.'⁵⁷ Erskine responded to this cry for help by looking into the possibility of securing a pastorate for Edwards in Scotland. Although the American did not act on this offer, this demonstration of

⁵⁵Jared Sparks, *Lives of Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1817), 84.

⁵⁶George M. Marsden, 'The Quest for the Historical Edwards: The Challenge of Biography', in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 4.

⁵⁷Edwards to Erskine, 5 July 1750 in Claghorn (ed.), *Edwards's Letters*, 355.

friendship by his younger correspondent shows the kind of relationship that these two men had.

When Edwards died, it was a devastating blow to the younger Scot. In a letter to the Baptist John Ryland Jr, Erskine wrote that ‘there never was a man of such originality in depth of genius as President Edwards’.⁵⁸ Part of this despair arose from Erskine’s shattered dream of Edwards as a propagator of enlightened Evangelical theology once he was installed as the president of the College of New Jersey.

The loss sustained by his death, not only by the College of New Jersey, but by the church in general is irreparable. I do not think our age has produced a divine of equal genius or judgment; and much did I hope from Prince Town College having such a man at their head; from his living to write on the different branches of the Arminian Controversy; and from his being removed to a place where he had the advantage of books, which Northampton or Stockbridge could not afford him.⁵⁹

Erskine believed that Edwards’s scholarship would only increase with his settlement at Princeton since he would have access to more books. Now that Edwards was dead, Erskine would have to look to others to fill the gap of much needed enlightened Calvinistic scholarship.

The story of Erskine’s friendship with Edwards did not end with the American minister’s passing away; this was only the intermission. In the second half, Erskine took on the role of chief propagator of Edwards’s ideas.⁶⁰ He edited Edwards’s posthumous *Life of David Brainerd* (1765), *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1774), *Practical Sermons* (1788), *Twenty Sermons* (1789), *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects* (1793) and *Remarks on Important Theological Controversies* (1796), and made arrangements for important works like *Freedom of the Will* and the *History of the Work of Redemption* to be published in the

⁵⁸Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 8 November 1788, EUL, E.99.14.

⁵⁹*Erskine*, 224–5.

⁶⁰On Erskine’s propagation of Edwards’s works, see chapter eight.

Netherlands.⁶¹ Further, Erskine was instrumental in the prayer revival among Northamptonshire Baptists by sending many of Edwards's texts, most notably his *Humble Attempt*, to help facilitate the transition of Baptist theology from high to moderate Calvinism.⁶² John Collett Ryland and his son had Erskine to thank as a constant source of Edwardsean material, which they cherished.⁶³

The story continues. After Edwards's death, Erskine exchanged letters with some of the American's family members such as his son, Jonathan Edwards Jr, and his grandson, Timothy Dwight, as well as continuing his relationship with the so-called 'New Divinity' men, Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins and Levi Hart, those who modified Edwards's theology.⁶⁴ Bellamy, for example, received a steady flow of letters from Erskine, beginning in the 1750s. By corresponding with this American pastor, Erskine hoped to use his knowledge of books to help with Bellamy's future theological projects. He assured Bellamy that he could find almost any text that he requested. 'If you would wish to have any of the Books I have mentioned, or any other Scots or English performances', he told the Connecticut pastor, 'I beg you would acquaint me, as catalogues of London and Edinburgh sales are often sent me, where they sell much cheaper than in the shops.'⁶⁵ The exchange of letters and

⁶¹Robert Chambers (ed.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1870), 262–4; David W. Bebbington, 'Remembered Around the World: The International Scope of Edwards's Legacy', in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 181; Andrew L. Drummond, *The Kirk and the Continent* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1956), 157–8.

⁶²Ernest A. Payne, *The Prayer Call of 1784* (Edinburgh: The World Mission of the Church: Scotland's Week of Witness, 1942), 4–5.

⁶³See D. Bruce Hindmarsh, 'The Reception of Jonathan Edwards by Early Evangelicals in England', in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 201–02 and Jonathan Yeager, 'The Letters of John Erskine to the Rylands,' *Eusebeia: The Journal of the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies* 9 (2008), 183–195.

⁶⁴The New Divinity men abandoned the former covenant theology of their Puritan predecessors, instead focusing on themes such as natural law, virtue and benevolence that became so common by the middle of the century. Mark Valeri, 'The New Divinity and the American Revolution', *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (1989), 751. See also Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1981).

⁶⁵Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 26 January 1753, JBL, 187:2930:81199.

packets was always unbalanced, with the Americans receiving the bulk of this benefit in the form of regular books, but Erskine believed that he was contributing to the cause of true religion, and so was happy to oblige.

Although Erskine did not necessarily agree with the theology of the New Divinity men, he continued to maintain these relationships and encouraged Edwards's disciples to persist in developing their ideas.⁶⁶ Erskine used his influence with his cousin, the Earl of Buchan, to secure Bellamy an honorary doctorate from the University of Aberdeen in 1768 and did what he could to encourage the sale of his writings.⁶⁷ In 1788 Erskine convinced the Edinburgh bookseller Margaret Gray to reprint *True Religion Delineated*. Although 'I do not approve every thing in his True religion delineated', Erskine admitted, 'I know few works which I more wish to see republished.'⁶⁸ He would have published even more from Bellamy had his unpublished writings been 'more than harshly broken hints'.⁶⁹ Thus, despite Erskine's criticism of Bellamy's publications, he was convinced that Bellamy's works should be propagated and were significant contributions to Evangelical scholarship.

Erskine was equally harsh on the publications of Samuel Hopkins, another key disciple of Edwards. 'I am rather disappointed in Dr Hopkins's system', Erskine remarked to John Ryland Jr. Although Hopkins's theology offers 'many things truly

⁶⁶On the theology of the New Divinity Men, see Mark A. Noll, 'Revival, Enlightenment, Civic Humanism, and the Evolution of Calvinism in Scotland and America, 1735–1843', in George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds.), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 85; Noll, *America's God*, 134–5; Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement*, 61–71; Joseph A. Conforti, 'Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity: Theology, Ethics, and Social Reform in Eighteenth-Century New England', *William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (1977), 572–89; Valeri, 'The New Divinity and the American Revolution', 746; Robert L. Ferm, *A Colonial Pastor: Jonathan Edwards the Younger: 1745–1801* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 63. Erskine's critique of Hopkins's 'disinterested benevolence', whereby an individual was supposed to be submissive to God to the point of being willing to be damned for the sake of God's glory, may be seen in Erskine's letter to John Ryland Jr, 4 February 1794, EUL, E.99.14 and John Erskine (ed.), *Religious Intelligence from Abroad* (Edinburgh: G. & J. Ross, 1801), ii-iv.

⁶⁷*The Works of Joseph Bellamy*, vol. 1 (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853), xxxv; Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 15 March 1784, EUL, E.99.14.

⁶⁸Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 15 March 1784, EUL, E.99.14.

⁶⁹Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 30 December 1791, EUL, E.99.14.

excellent and original', he was shown to be 'too superficial on some important branches of the Socinian and Arminian controversies, and too diffuse on some less important or clear American disputes'.⁷⁰ In many cases it was not necessary that his friends clung to the same tenets of orthodoxy. What mattered to Erskine was that Calvinism was advancing through enlightened means in order to strengthen a more unified Reformed Evangelical movement.

Jonathan Edwards Jr, a disciple of Bellamy and Hopkins, gave updates to Erskine on the state of religion in New England and worked with the Scot on editing and publishing many of his father's works. In one letter to Erskine on 8 February 1787, the younger Edwards reported, 'With regard to the state of orthodoxy in Connecticut, I believe a majority of the ministers mean to Embrace the system of my father and Dr Bellamy, a few are in Whitby's, Taylor's and Clark's scheme; a number mean to think and preach after the manner of Watts and Doddridge; and a considerable number do not think or study enough to have any distinct scheme at all.' Nonetheless, he believed that 'Most of the young members embrace the sentiments of my father and Dr Bellamy'.⁷¹ Erskine often passed along the status of publication of Edwards's various posthumous manuscripts to John Ryland Jr since he knew that the Baptist was interested in this information. It was Edwards's son, Erskine explained, 'who sent me in manuscript his treatise on redemption [and] was busy in transcribing for the press two volumes of his practical sermons in order to send me, when the unhappy hostilities commenced, which have since interrupted our correspondence'.⁷² Realising that there was a similarity in age and interest between the younger Ryland and Edwards, Erskine brokered a relationship between the two that began in 1785.⁷³

⁷⁰Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 4 February 1794, EUL, E.99.14.

⁷¹Jonathan Edwards Jr to Erskine, 8 February 1787, Jonathan Edwards Jr Papers, 1765–1801, Franklin Trask Library, Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Mss 1983–4.

⁷²Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 30 March 1782, EUL, E.99.14.

⁷³John Ryland, *Pastoral Memorials: Selected from the Manuscripts of the Late Revd. John Ryland, D. D. of Bristol: With a Memoir of the Author in Two Volumes* (London: B. J. Holdsworth 1826–1828), 49.

One of Erskine's chief correspondents in his later years was Jedidiah Morse, the father of American geography. Like Erskine, Morse was said to have 'early exhibited an uncommon fondness for books'.⁷⁴ William Sprague, Morse's biographer, said that the geographer's 'intellectual character was marked by uncommon quickness and clearness of perception, by a retentive memory, a correct and delicate taste, and a habit of wide and close observation'. According to Sprague, 'It was not easy to introduce a subject, within the ordinary range of a cultivated intellect, upon which he was not able to converse intelligently, as well as to suggest thoughts in which was found rich material for subsequent reflection.'⁷⁵ Morse had studied under Jonathan Edwards Jr and became instrumental in the founding of Andover Seminary.⁷⁶ He was also heavily involved in missionary efforts to Christianise the American Indians.⁷⁷ As assistant secretary of the Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Indians and Others in North America, he was in charge of distributing books and tracts to the various regions of the ever-expanding United States of America. In the fall of 1802 copies of some nineteen tracts amounting to 32,806 items were printed under the geographer's supervision. Included were the works of Jonathan Edwards, Philip Doddridge and English tracts which Morse received from the 'venerable Dr. Erskine of Scotland'.⁷⁸ Most of these items were sent to the new territories of Maine, Kentucky and Tennessee.

Since the two had a similar affinity for books, Morse valued the literary recommendations from his Scottish friend. It was Erskine who suggested reading the Edinburgh University Professor of Natural Philosophy, John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all the Religions and Governments of Europe* (1797), which

⁷⁴William B. Sprague, *The Life of Jedidiah Morse, D.D.* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Company, 1874), 2.

⁷⁵Sprague, *Morse*, 257–8.

⁷⁶Sprague, *Morse*, 6, 91–112.

⁷⁷Sprague, *Morse*, 128–37.

⁷⁸Sprague, *Morse*, 152.

Morse perused with ‘great eagerness and interest’ and reiterated these fears of an Illuminati conspiracy in his fast-day sermon on the following May.⁷⁹ Although Robison’s apprehension was denounced by many critics as illusory, Morse wrote to the Boston magazine, the *Massachusetts Mercury*, in the summer of 1798 saying that

I have the best authority to support me in the assertion that not a few of the most distinguished, respectable and worthy men among us, in civil as well as ecclesiastical life, have given credit and approbation to the book in question... Among these Professor [David] Tappan and President [Timothy] Dwight have published their sentiments.⁸⁰

It is interesting to note that Morse, Tappan and Dwight were connected with Erskine and it was this Scottish minister who continually corresponded with Morse and Dwight, defending the integrity of Robison and his research. On 14 July 1801 Erskine wrote to Morse denouncing Christopher Ebeling of Hamburg’s criticism of Robison’s book, saying that he was ‘convinced of the falsehood of these charges’ and that he had never ‘heard either infidels, republicans, or circus people whisper anything against [Robison’s] moral character’.⁸¹ On another occasion, he continued his defence, declaring to Morse that the accusations against Robison that were printed in a number of the American newspapers were ‘false and so notably known to be so here, that they cannot be accounted for without hellish malice’.⁸²

Dwight also received Erskine’s assurance of the integrity of Robison. In his letter on 13 June 1801, Erskine set out to answer any ‘queries’ on the professor ‘with the greatest ease’. The reason why Robison had been discredited, according to Erskine, was that he had many enemies, particularly among the German Illuminati, who were bent on belittling his conspiracy theory. Erskine told Dwight that ‘I have conversed with so many well and ill affected to him, that it is morally impossible I

⁷⁹Sprague, *Morse*, 234.

⁸⁰Sprague, *Morse*, 235–6.

⁸¹Erskine to Jedidiah Morse, 14 July 1801, NLS, ACC 12466. The ‘circus people’ refers to the Haldane brothers and their followers.

⁸²Erskine to Jedidiah Morse, 11 September 1801, HSP, Gratz MSS.

could have been ignorant of such dreadful charges against him, had they ever been whispered here.’⁸³ If Morse and Dwight, who were two of the leading supporters of Christian republicanism, were publicly criticised for their fear of a conspiracy theory, then part of blame must be shouldered by Erskine, who was a pivotal source of their information.⁸⁴

In addition to the relationships that Erskine had with Edwards, the New Divinity men and Morse, there is also evidence that other eminent American ministers were consistent correspondents. John Henry Livingston, a pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in New York, enjoyed the encouragement and packets of books that the Edinburgh minister often sent. Livingston’s biographer communicated to his readers that ‘The letters of this venerable and truly excellent divine, to Dr. L., though short, evince a liberality of Christian feeling, and a desire to promote the spread and preservation of the truth in the Dutch Church, which justly entitle them to a particular notice.’⁸⁵ John Rodgers, a New York minister, exchanged letters with John Gillies of Glasgow, Richard Price of Hackney and John Ryland of Northampton, but singled out Erskine as a ‘constant’ correspondent who was ‘prized’ more than the rest.⁸⁶ So among American Evangelicals, Erskine was a well known name.

But the American sympathiser was not limited to communicating solely with Evangelicals, for he was known to maintain a casual friendship with Jonathan Mayhew and Charles Chauncy, two of the leading opponents of the Revival. Mayhew’s biographer, Alden Bradford, reproduced part of a letter of Erskine’s to Charles Chauncy sometime in 1767 in which the Old Greyfriars’ minister woefully

⁸³Erskine to Timothy Dwight, 13 June 1801, HSP, Gratz MSS, 12:24.

⁸⁴Alan K. Snyder, ‘Foundations of Liberty: The Christian Republicanism of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse’, *The New England Quarterly* 56 (1983), 382.

⁸⁵Alexander Gunn, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Henry Livingston, D.D., First Professor of Theology in the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in North-America* (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1856), 169.

⁸⁶Samuel Miller, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Rodgers, D.D., Late Pastor of the Wall-Street and Brick Churches in the City of New-York* (New York: Whiting and Watson, 1813), 210–11.

wrote of his sincere sorrow on hearing of the death of Mayhew. ‘Your liberties, civil and sacred, have lost an able defender, whose place cannot be easily supplied. The honest boldness and strength and spirit, with which he wrote, greatly pleased me, even when our sentiments were considerably different.’ The explanation for the ecumenical statement is listed by Bradford in the footnote: ‘Dr. Erskine was an orthodox presbyterian, but a lover of all good men’.⁸⁷ One reason Erskine might have corresponded with Mayhew was because the American was a devout Whig who abhorred the Tory view of unlimited submission and nonresistance.⁸⁸ Accordingly, for Mayhew, it was the duty of Americans to oppose ‘Common tyrants, and public oppressors’.⁸⁹ A second possible explanation for Erskine’s connection was that Mayhew was an outspoken anti-Catholic.⁹⁰ In Erskine’s *Considerations on the Spirit of Popery, and the Intended Bill for the Relief of Papists in Scotland* (1778), he cited and recommended to his audience a sermon preached by Mayhew in 1754 in which the American warned of the tragedy of potential French occupation in the colonies.⁹¹ With Chauncy, Erskine shared the same drive for missions, even though the two differed in their soteriology, Erskine being committed to the doctrine of election and Chauncy to universal salvation.⁹² Since Erskine was receiving letters from the younger Jonathan Edwards on a work meant to refute Chauncy’s view that all would

⁸⁷Alden Bradford, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of Rev. Jonathan Mayhew, D.D., Pastor of the West Church and Society in Boston, from June, 1747, to July, 1766* (Boston, MA: C.C. Little & Co., 1838), 443.

⁸⁸See Erskine’s indoctrination on Whig principles on pp. 34-5; an example of his own sentiments in John Erskine, ‘Prayers for Men in Public Office’, in *Discourses*, vol. 2, 402-3; and his family’s support of the Hanoverian government in *Erskine*, 3-6, 12, 487-8 as well as the introduction in *The Journal of the Hon. John Erskine of Carnock, 1683–1687*, ed. Walter Macleod (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable 1893).

⁸⁹Charles W. Akers, *Called Unto Liberty: A Life of Jonathan Mayhew, 1720–1766* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 85.

⁹⁰Akers, *Jonathan Mayhew*, 134.

⁹¹John Erskine, *Considerations on the Spirit of Popery, and the Intended Bill for the Relief of Papists in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Printed by Murray & Cochran, 1778), 38–9.

⁹²*An Account of Some Late Attempts by the Correspondents of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, to Christianize the North American Indians* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1763).

be saved, the Edinburgh minister was kept abreast of the latest theological writings developing in America.

Besides Edwards's works, Erskine edited and arranged for publication many other pieces by Americans. In 1761 Erskine collected nine letters written to him by Joseph Bellamy on the subject of Robert Sandeman's view of faith, as it pertained to James Hervey's *Theron and Aspasio*, and published a treatise anonymously, entitling it *Nymphas to Sosipater* (1761).⁹³ Erskine's fondness for the 'enlightened' pastor,⁹⁴ Thomas Prince, led to the publishing of the Bostonian's *Six Sermons* (1785), *Practical Sermons* (1788), *Twenty Sermons* (1789), as well as the *Dying Exercises of Mrs. Deborah Prince and Devout Meditations of Mrs. Sarah Gill, Daughters of the Late Rev. Mr. Thomas Prince* (1785). Erskine esteemed the reasonable arguments presented by the Boston clergyman William Cooper in his *Reply to the Religious Scruples against Inoculating the Small Pox* (1791) so much that the Scot wrote a preface endorsing the work as well as editing it.⁹⁵ In addition to Edwards's treatises, Erskine published the New England patriarch Solomon Stoddard's *The Safety of Appearing at the Day of Judgment in the Righteousness of Christ* (1687, reprinted by Erskine in 1792). Erskine admitted in the preface, which he transcribed to John Ryland Jr, that he did not entirely support Stoddard's theology since there were 'inaccurate expressions' on faith 'being the condition of the covenant and our evangelical righteousness'. Nonetheless, Erskine justified his publication of the material saying, 'If the Sun hath dark spots, shall I despise its light?'⁹⁶

⁹³Joseph Bellamy, *Nymphas to Sosipater; Occasioned by Mr. Sandiman's Letters Upon Theron and Aspasio*, ed. John Erskine (Edinburgh: Printed for William Gray, 1761). Erskine's donation of this very rare piece to Samuel Hopkins can be found in the New York City Library, with the editor's handwritten comments on the title page.

⁹⁴Thomas Prince, *Six Sermons by the Late Thomas Prince*, ed. John Erskine (Edinburgh: Printed by David Paterson, 1785), iv.

⁹⁵William Cooper, *A Reply to the Religious Scruples Against Inoculating the Small Pox, in a Letter to a Friend*, ed. John Erskine (Edinburgh: Sold by M. Gray, 1791).

⁹⁶Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 11 June 1792, EUL, E.99.14.

The New England Presbyterian leader, Jonathan Dickinson, was also a favourite writer of Erskine, and so the latter edited and published Dickinson's *Sermons and Tracts* (1793) long after the American's death in 1747. In 1796 Erskine edited *Select Discourses from the American Preacher*, which included homilies from some of the leading ministers in America: John Witherspoon; Alexander MacWhorter, John Henry Livingston, Samuel S. Smith, William Linn, John Rodgers, Joseph Eckley, John Devotion, Matthias Burnet, George Faitoute and Uzal Ogden. Many of these names were familiar as regular correspondents.⁹⁷ Excerpts of endemic religious revivals in America were transcribed from the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* and placed in Erskine's 1801 edited *Religious Intelligence from Abroad*, and then further reports of awakenings were included in his 1802 *New Religious Intelligence, Chiefly from the American States*. From this collection, one can see that Erskine was a promoter of American clergymen's publications, especially those works that were out of print or difficult to obtain.

Where Erskine became a more visible American advocate was through the publication of his own tracts which were sympathetic to the cause of liberty for the colonists. The conflict with America divided much of Britain. Many of the MPs were not united on this issue, despite P. D. G. Thomas's opinion that Americans 'received only scant sympathy in Britain'.⁹⁸ There were parliamentarians who were supportive of the Americans, or at least opposed to the aggressive stance that the British government took towards the colonies. George Dempster, MP for Perth Burghs, for instance, voted against the Stamp Act and promoted a more tolerant position towards the rebellious Bostonians. Dempster believed that the American complaint of taxation without representation was 'just and well-founded'. Besides Dempster, there were other politicians, such as Edmund Burke, William Pulteney and

⁹⁷John Erskine (ed.), *Select Discourses from the American Preacher* (Edinburgh: Printed by Adam Neill and Company, 1796).

⁹⁸P.D.G. Thomas, 'George III and the American Revolution', *History* 70 (2002), 18.

John Johnstone, who were vocally opposed to the American war.⁹⁹ Even Lord North as Prime Minister was forced to admit to King George III in 1775 that ‘the cause of Great Britain is not yet sufficiently popular’.¹⁰⁰ Although they did not have representation in parliament, Americans lobbied through the use of agents in London, mainly through merchants, lawyers or ‘backbench’ MPs. There were some 207 MPs on the American side serving in the 1770s alone. Many of these MPs were affiliated with the Marquis of Rockingham and his administration. Further, some of Britain’s leading newspapers, the *Political Register*, the *London Chronicle*, the *London Evening Post*, the *Kentish Gazette*, the *Leeds Mercury*, the *Bath Journal* and the *Birmingham and Stafford Chronicle*, were noted for their pro-American views.¹⁰¹

Just as there was division among politicians in Britain, so the Kirk was divided on the issue of the American war, with the majority of Popular party ministers sympathetic to the colonists while most of the Moderates were vehemently opposed to them.¹⁰² There was an inverse relationship between Popular ministers and the Moderates regarding their views on Roman Catholics and the American Revolution, with one group standing for what Richard Sher calls ‘political liberalism and religious intolerance’ and the other group for ‘enlightened elitism and tolerant conservatism’.¹⁰³

Key leaders in the Moderate party, William Robertson, John Home, Adam Ferguson and Alexander Carlyle, were all firm believers in suppressing the American rebellion by force in order to hold together the fabric of social hierarchy. In a letter

⁹⁹Fagerstrom, ‘Scottish Opinion and the American Revolution’, *William and Mary Quarterly* 11 (1954), 256-7.

¹⁰⁰*Correspondence of King George the Third*, ed. Sir John Fortescue, 6 vols. (London, 1927-8), 3:249, quoted by H.T. Dickinson, ‘‘The Friends of America’: British Sympathy with the American Revolution’, in Michael T. Davis (ed.), *Radicalism and Revolution in Britain, 1775–1848* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁰¹Dickinson, ‘‘The Friends of America’’, 4-7.

¹⁰²Robert Kent Donovan, ‘The Popular Party of the Church of Scotland and the American Revolution’, in Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (eds.), *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 82.

¹⁰³*Church*, 263.

on 6 October 1775 to his publisher William Strahan, Robertson suggested that Britain's political leaders 'exert the power of the British Empire in its full force' since we are 'past the hour of lenitives and half exertions'. John Home agreed with Robertson, which was evident in Home's anonymously printed pamphlet, *A Letter from an Officer Retired, to His Son in Parliament* (1776). Here, Home argued that Rockingham's regime was too lenient in its repeal of the Stamp Act. For Home it was 'vain to think of peace till you have proved your superiority in war'.¹⁰⁴

When George III called for a national day of fasting, the Scottish Moderates were happy to oblige. On 12 December 1776, George Campbell, Principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, preached a fast-day sermon on Proverbs 24:21, 'Meddle not with them that are given to change', calling for Americans to submit to the British government.¹⁰⁵ Alexander Gerard, Professor of Divinity at King's College, Aberdeen, delivered his fast-day sermon on 26 February 1778. His text was 1 Peter 2:16: 'As free and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God'. Gerard argued that

Under the specious cloke of liberty, but really in support of so unjust a demand, our deluded brethren have proceeded to conduct which in every point of view may be termed maliciousness. With liberty in their mouths, they have exercised the cruellest [sic] violence, the most oppressive tyranny over all among themselves, who would not cooperate in their designs.¹⁰⁶

It was Gerard's contention that in relation to her colonies, Britain was 'guiltless' since it was the Americans who 'stirred up war'.¹⁰⁷ Even more outspoken against the Americans was Alexander Carlyle, calling them 'rebellious children'.¹⁰⁸ In his fast-

¹⁰⁴Quoted in *Church*, 263-8.

¹⁰⁵George Campbell, *The Nature, Extent, and Importance, of the Duty of Allegiance* (Aberdeen: Printed by J. Chalmers and Co., 1777).

¹⁰⁶Alexander Gerard, *Liberty the Cloke of Maliciousness, Both in the American Rebellion, and in the Manners of the Times* (Aberdeen: Printed by J. Chalmers & Co., 1778), 12-13.

¹⁰⁷Gerard, *Liberty*, 16, 13.

¹⁰⁸Alexander Carlyle, *A Letter to His Grace the Duke of Buccleugh, on National Defence* (London: J. Murray 1778), 37.

day sermon on 12 December 1776, Carlyle employed the verses in Judges 20:28, ‘Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease’, concluding that these verses justified the necessity of Britain’s subjugation of its colonies. It was ‘those ungrateful colonies’ who, ‘by their foul revolt, have forced us into the most unnatural and dangerous war against themselves’.¹⁰⁹ Carlyle’s asserted that the Americans only ‘pretended’ to have a just right to resist Britain; in truth, they had unlawfully rebelled.¹¹⁰

Even other British Evangelicals, like John Wesley, were not supportive of the Americans. Wesley believed that the colonists did not have the right to oppose British taxation since they were founded by charters which meant that their inhabitants agreed to be subservient to the British government. ‘If there is in the charter of any Colony a clause exempting them from taxes for ever’, he reasoned, ‘then undoubtedly they have a right to be so exempted. But if there is no such clause, then the English Parliament has the same right to tax them, as to tax any other English subjects.’¹¹¹ Wesley was particularly condemnatory of republicanism, which he viewed as a ‘despotic’ form of government which would ‘shew no mercy’.¹¹²

Many of the Dissenting ministers in Britain, however, were proponents of American liberty.¹¹³ Richard Price, a Presbyterian minister in London, likened his nation’s claim of absolute sovereignty over the colonies as following the ancient tradition of trying to ‘justify tyranny’. ‘Have they not helped us to pay our taxes, to support our poor, and to bear the burden of our debts’, Price asked concerning the

¹⁰⁹Alexander Carlyle, *The Justice and Necessity of the War with Our American Colonies Examined* (London and Edinburgh: Printed for J. Murray, 1777), 2.

¹¹⁰Carlyle, *Justice*, 10.

¹¹¹John Wesley, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* (Bristol: Printed by Bonner and Middleton, 1775), 11–12.

¹¹²Wesley, *American Colonies*, 17.

¹¹³James E. Bradley, ‘The British Public and the American Revolution: Ideology, Interest and Opinion’, in H.T. Dickinson (ed.), *Britain and the American Revolution* (London: Longman, 1998), 149.

Americans, ‘by taking from us, at our own price, all the commodities with which we can supply them?’ ‘Has not their exclusive trade with us been for many years one of the chief sources of our national wealth and power? In all our wars have they not fought by our side, and contributed much to our success?’¹¹⁴ Price depicted Britain as a bully who greedily saw the prosperity of the new colonies as an opportunity to exploit her power for financial gain. Caleb Evans, the Particular Baptist from Bristol, was also willing to put into print his condemnation of Britain’s treatment of the Americans. He lambasted Wesley’s tract, saying that the colonists were not really free since they were at the mercy of the British government, which could tax the colonies without any consent. Evans made the point that King George’s power was derived from the people whom he served, which meant that he had the obligation to set up representation for the colonists.¹¹⁵

In Scotland there were also those who were sympathetic to the American cause, despite D. B. Swinfen’s assertion that most Scots were set against the colonists.¹¹⁶ As opposed to the anti-American campaigns that many of the Moderates preached, and the Anglican-based ministry of Wesley, Evangelicals within the Popular party saw Britain as largely at fault in the colonial dispute. Many Popular ministers supported the Americans and no member was vocally against them.¹¹⁷ Charles Nisbet, minister at Montrose during the time of the war, chose for his fast-day sermon the text from Daniel in which the finger of God wrote on the wall, *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, while the conquering Persians were closing in on them. The sermon’s message was that ‘Prosperity intoxicates men’s minds; and even a great

¹¹⁴Richard Price, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1776), 36-9.

¹¹⁵Caleb Evans, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, Occasioned by His Calm Address to the American Colonies* (Bristol: Printed by William Pine, 1775), 4, 11.

¹¹⁶D.B. Swinfen, ‘The American Revolution in the Scottish Press’, in Owen Dudley Edwards and George Shepperson (eds.), *Scotland, Europe and the American Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Student Publications, 1976), 66–74.

¹¹⁷Donovan, ‘The Popular Party of the Church of Scotland and the American Revolution’, 82.

share of adversity is insufficient to open their eyes, and bring them to their senses. They love to be deceived, and hope to the last, till the punishment of their sins actually falls upon them.’¹¹⁸ This was a harsh interpretation from someone who was at the time living in Britain.

The best known American sympathiser linked with the Popular party was Erskine.¹¹⁹ From corresponding with his friends and watching the conflict erupt between America and Britain, Erskine decided to publish his thoughts in three different pamphlets: *Shall I Go To War with My American Brethren?* (1769); *Reflections on the Rise, Progress, and Probable Consequences, of the Present Contentions with the Colonies* (1776); and *The Equity and Wisdom of Administration, in Measures That Have Unhappily Occasioned the American Revolt, Tried by the Sacred Oracles* (1776). All three had the same goal: to convince Britain not to go to war with America. The first work, phrased in the form of a question, was the best known. It seems to have been written as a response to the mounting pressure that was building between Britain and the Americans as a result of the dreaded 1765 Stamp Act and other subsequent taxes that were imposed on the colonists. The anonymous publication of *Shall I Go To War?* in 1769 suggests that, as was the case with Erskine’s hesitantly published diatribe against John Taylor, putting his ideas to print was a last resort.¹²⁰ Only when the situation was spiralling out of control did he venture to voice his opinions in an attempt to promote peaceful reconciliation between two Protestant lands. Erskine’s response to the transatlantic conflict was clearly different from that of the Moderates. As opposed to Alexander Carlyle, who used Judges 20:28 in his 1776 fast-day sermon to argue that Britain should indeed fight the Americans, Erskine utilised these verses to make the opposite point.

¹¹⁸Miller, *Memoir of Nisbet*, 75.

¹¹⁹Fagerstrom, ‘Scottish Opinion and the American Revolution’, 265.

¹²⁰*Shall I Go to War?* was published anonymously in 1769, but reprinted again in 1776, this second time bearing the author’s name and including a preface and an appendix.

Erskine knew that his pamphlets could be labelled seditious material, but he had grown accustomed to criticism, and decided to print them regardless. He had been dubbed an ‘enthusiast’ for supporting the Cambuslang Revival and was sure that some would now see him as promoting rebellion.¹²¹ When he reprinted his *Shall I Go to War?* in 1776 and revealed the authorship, he admitted in the preface that

I know what censure I am like to incur, from many whose characters I esteem, and whose favour I regard. But sense of duty, and the peace of my own mind, constrain me. I submit to the unwelcome talk, that I may be free from the blood that shall be shed on either side, in the unnatural quarrel.¹²²

These were indeed life-threatening pamphlets. Many American sympathisers in Britain were known to be physically assaulted, and, in some cases, even tarred and feathered; so Erskine was justified in clandestinely publishing his words initially.¹²³ In his *Reflections on the Rise, Progress, and Probable Consequences*, he acknowledged that there had been a number of recent pamphlets that had ‘painted in black and hateful colours’ the Americans who had ‘inflamed the resentment of the mother country’. Here he footnoted the 1775 pamphlets by Samuel Johnson and John Dalrymple, *Taxation no Tyranny* and *The Address of the People of Great Britain to the Inhabitants of America*, and the 1776 piece by James Macpherson, *The Rights of Great Britain Asserted against the Claims of America*. As a response to these anti-American polemics, Erskine attempted to ‘soften that resentment’.¹²⁴

The hope was that the British government would lessen their demands, which would prevent the two countries from ruining each other. To illustrate this point, he used the biblical story of Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, and his poor treatment of Israel

¹²¹Erskine to Unknown, 15 February 1779, TPC, Ch.A.2.92; See also Erskine’s reprinted letter to the *Caledonian Mercury* (7 October 1775).

¹²²John Erskine, *Shall I Go to War with My American Brethren* (n.p., 1776), v-vi.

¹²³Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 142.

¹²⁴John Erskine, *Reflections on the Rise, Progress, and Probable Consequences, of the Present Contentions with the Colonies* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1776), iii.

once his father died. ‘The ten tribes would have remained faithful to the house of David’, Erskine confidently proclaimed, ‘had Rehoboam hearkened to the counsel of the old men, to be a servant unto the people that day, and speak good words unto them that they might be his servants for ever, and to ease the heavy yoke his father had put upon them.’¹²⁵ He also paralleled the British treatment of the Bostonians in the aftermath of the city’s ‘Tea Party’ with the story of Esther, where Haman tried to destroy the Jewish race simply because of his hatred of Mordecai. He asked, ‘is it the law of Britons, or shall it be their manner, to condemn and punish, not a single individual, but large cities or provinces, untried and unheard?’¹²⁶ The British government’s extreme measures in Boston were likened to the ‘court of inquisition’.¹²⁷ The solution Erskine proposed was that ‘if we give our colonies terms indeed for their interest, their allegiance will be faithful and perpetual... A small matter may now quench the spark, which, if suffered to kindle into a flame, may consume all our power and glory’.¹²⁸ As opposed to those who saw him as propagating insurrection, Erskine argued that his words were simply the efforts of a religious diplomat who peacefully wanted to keep America within Britain’s fold.

Based on his fears, he was compelled to speak out since he was witnessing a war between the two countries that he loved dearly. He felt that he could not rest until he at least attempted to make a ‘feeble effort to prevent it’.¹²⁹ Those who stood by and did nothing were little better than ‘blind or mercenary watchman’ who allowed ‘beasts of prey to devour and destroy a flock’.¹³⁰ As a true Whig, Erskine aligned

¹²⁵John Erskine, *Shall I Go to War with My American Brethren?* (London: Printed for G. Kearsly, 1769), 21–22.

¹²⁶John Erskine, *The Equity and Wisdom of Administration, in Measures That Have Unhappily Occasioned the American Revolt, Tried by the Sacred Oracles* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1776), 4.

¹²⁷Erskine, *Equity and Wisdom*, 7.

¹²⁸Erskine, *American Brethren*, 22.

¹²⁹Erskine, *American Brethren*, 4.

¹³⁰Erskine, *Equity and Wisdom*, 15–16.

himself with the Hanoverian government. He could sincerely say: ‘I love and respect my Sovereign, not only as the guardian of our civil and religious privileges, but as one, whose virtues would honour and ennoble even a private station.’¹³¹ But his appreciation for the monarch did not deter Erskine from voicing his opinion that the American war would be disastrous, not only to the colonists, but to Britain as well. ‘The principles of humanity and universal benevolence, and the warm attachment I feel to British Liberty, and to the succession in the illustrious house of Hanover’, he said, ‘constrain me... to sound an alarm.’¹³² This signal for help that he was calling for was a result of the disturbing realisation that two groups of people, originally headed by the same government, were in the midst of a hostile engagement. ‘If war with foreign nations is undesirable, how shocking is it to think of war with our own countrymen, connected with us by birth, alliance, or commercial interest?’¹³³ If he could make even the slightest difference in convincing his fellow Britons to change their stance, no effort would be spared.

Erskine defended himself from the charge of enthusiasm by claiming that his conclusions were not formed ‘rashly’, but by ‘books, pamphlets, and periodical publications’ which others ‘have not opportunity or leisure to peruse’.¹³⁴ From his reading of the statesman Thomas Pownall’s *Administration of the Colonies*, 4th edition (London, 1769), for instance, he determined that there was not an overwhelming body of republican opinion in America prior to Britain’s forceful measures. This meant that ‘had Britain left them in the happy situation in which they were before the stamp act, these would have been few in number, and could never have persuaded twelve provinces to revolt from a government, under which they felt themselves easy and secure’. Erskine saw the colonists as generally loyal to George

¹³¹Erskine, *American Brethren*, 4.

¹³²Erskine, *American Brethren*, 3–4.

¹³³Erskine, *American Brethren*, 9–10.

¹³⁴Erskine, *Reflections*, 1.

III, 'well affected to the mother country, zealous for her prosperity, and far from harbouring any rebellious designs against the just rights of government'.¹³⁵ These opinions were not only formed by the books that he read, but also from the firsthand accounts given by his American correspondents. Joseph Bellamy, in his letter on 15 April August 1786, told Erskine, 'In all my acquaintance in 6 of the Northern colonies for above 40 years, I never heard of one who desired to be disconnected with Britain. Our Mother hath driven us out of her house. We went out with tears in our eyes. We look back with anguish.'¹³⁶ Thus, from the books that he read and the letters that he received, Erskine became convinced that the colonists did not initially want to separate from the mother country. The Americans' complaint about taxation without representation seemed justified since parliament 'has always given subjects power to send representatives, as they have arisen to an importance and share of influence in the state, which could justify the measure'.¹³⁷ It was the imposition of internal taxes that disrupted the peace between Britain and her American colonies. Now, there seemed to be no other option than that 'they be put either in the situation of Scotland, or in that of Ireland', meaning that they receive representative voting rights or their own parliament.¹³⁸ Instead of the rebellious Americans who some believed instigated the war, Erskine argued that it was the unreasonable demands of the British government which brought the colonists into the 'madness of despair'.¹³⁹

Despite trying to straddle the fence of neutrality by including statements on the virtuous strength of the Hanoverian government, there can be no doubt that Erskine favoured the colonists. He defended their integrity and loyalty and with prophetic insight, planted a seed of doubt that the mother country might not win this

¹³⁵Erskine, *Reflections*, 2.

¹³⁶Quoted from Erskine's letter to John Ryland Jr, 19 August 1786, EUL, E.99.14.

¹³⁷Erskine, *Reflections*, 10–11.

¹³⁸Erskine, *Reflections*, 13.

¹³⁹Erskine, *Reflections*, 5.

war. 'Tell me not, that it is certain, from the wealth and power of Great Britain, that she must prevail, and that her colonies are as yet too weak to give her any effectual opposition. That this is probable, I allow: that it is certain, no wise or modest man will venture to assert.' Even though the British troops were more numerous than the American forces, Erskine argued that 'the New Englanders inured from their infancy to fatigue and hardship' were not given to the 'soft and delicate' education that many British soldiers received, and so might not be up to task in outlasting these determined foes.¹⁴⁰ He recognised their 'vigorous exertion and persevering steadiness' and 'those who fight from principle', as opposed to 'men hired to hazard their lives for sixpence a day' and 'who by running away may earn two shillings a day for their work'.¹⁴¹

There was also a religious component to this war, where God seemed to be protecting this budding nation:

Though some may pronounce it enthusiasm, I must add, that as the first planters of New England honoured God, by leaving their estates, their friends, and their native country, that they might worship him, though in a wilderness, according to the dictates of their consciences, God has honoured them and their posterity with distinguishing instances of his favour and protection; and often, when they were on the brink of ruin, has interposed in their behalf.

Although they were small in number when they settled in America, and facing numerous hardships, 'God suffered no man to do them wrong, and reprov'd the numerous tribes of Indians for their sake. By unusual sickness and mortality, he drove out the heathen, and planted them, increased his people greatly, and made them stronger than their enemies.'¹⁴² Erskine believed that the Almighty could end the war if he so desired and even considered reviving a concert of prayer between him and his friends in Britain and America for the express purpose of praying for peace.¹⁴³ So

¹⁴⁰Erskine, *American Brethren*, 14–15.

¹⁴¹Erskine, *Reflections*, 51.

¹⁴²Erskine, *American Brethren*, 16.

¹⁴³Erskine to Levi Hart, 21 April 1775, HSP, Gratz MSS.

even though he was ‘heartily sorry the breach between Britain and North America seems every day to widen’, Erskine told Joseph Bellamy that he was comforted ‘that the folly, wrath and wickedness of men shall finally be made to praise God’.¹⁴⁴ If God was on their side, Erskine contended, who could stand against them?

Shall I Go to War? was the most prominent of the pro-American pamphlets, and its content did not go unnoticed in many of the newspapers and literary magazines in Britain. In the May 1776 edition of the *Scots Magazine*, one critic reviewed the work saying that, although he ‘expresses the highest regard for Dr Erskine’, he was ‘under melancholy apprehensions’ of this work since he feared that ‘it may induce the colonists to reject the plan of reconciliation which is to be proposed to them, and so protract the unnatural war’.¹⁴⁵ The *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* offered an even more sweeping criticism. In the June 1776 edition, the reviewer blasted the author for this ‘treasonable paper’.¹⁴⁶ The critic wrote that the ‘evident spirit of his discourse is to inflame the people against the measures of government, and to foster the obstinacy of the colonies’.¹⁴⁷ Despite the harsh words, the magazine recognised that Erskine was a well respected member of society. ‘His piety we dispute not’, the reviewer admitted, ‘his learning is extolled by his friends, and the influence he enjoys from his station is extensive’, but that did not stop the author of the review from discouraging his audience from purchasing this piece.¹⁴⁸ Erskine’s pamphlet, however, did not receive negative press everywhere. The February 1769 edition of the London *Monthly Review*, which evaluated the first edition, claimed that here was ‘A very sensible and pathetic dissuasive against violent measures with the colonies.’¹⁴⁹ These

¹⁴⁴Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 31 March 1775, JBL, 188:2937:81373.

¹⁴⁵*SM* 38 (May 1776), 265.

¹⁴⁶*The Edinburgh Magazine and Review* 5 (June 1776), 270.

¹⁴⁷*The Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, 268.

¹⁴⁸*The Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, 270.

¹⁴⁹*The Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal* 40 (February 1769), 173.

critiques show that although Erskine received harsh comments from many Britons, not everyone saw him as a traitor.

Erskine's relationship with America was a deep well from which to draw. Raised in Presbyterian Scotland, he had much in common with the Puritan-based American Calvinists. The religious affiliation between Britain and America received new life with the Great Awakening. News of revival spread and Erskine, like many other Scottish Evangelicals, was eager to form a transatlantic partnership. Erskine established contact with a multitude of leading ministers and patriots in the colonies. Men like John Witherspoon, Jonathan Edwards and Joseph Bellamy received a steady flow of letters and books from Erskine who hoped that by propagating American religious works and passing along information on current literature, true religion would thrive. The loyalty that he displayed towards his American Evangelical contacts was unrelenting, and once the conflict between the two countries was over, he eagerly sought out his old connections. The friendships formed, according to Moncreiff, 'had a strong hold [on] his mind, which was not shaken' by the war.¹⁵⁰ While Erskine was not necessarily popular in his home country at times, due mostly to the pro-American pamphlets that he wrote, he continued to shoulder his opponents' criticism as long as there was a chance that his words might contribute towards a peaceful outcome. Inexhaustible in his efforts, Erskine became a key contributor to colonial America.

¹⁵⁰ *Erskine*, 163.

Chapter Eight

The Disseminator

Erskine's main role within Evangelicalism was as a disseminator of orthodox Calvinism. This was manifested in a number of ways. He was, for instance, actively involved in foreign missions. Beginning with his translation from Culross to New Greyfriars at Edinburgh in 1758, he served the SSPCK faithfully for nearly forty years.¹ Erskine was also the founding president of the Edinburgh Missionary Society, established in 1796, an organisation consisting of members of the Kirk and Seceders, with the main objective of having the gospel preached throughout the world.² Erskine's membership in missionary societies, however, represented only a small part of his significance as a disseminator of Evangelical Calvinism. His primary means of dissemination was through books. He had numerous correspondents in America and Europe and used his knowledge of literature to produce and distribute the most current religious works to his friends and worthy establishments. In this final chapter, the extent of Erskine's knowledge of literature will be examined through his involvement with the publishing industry and his individual relations with booksellers and correspondents in order to investigate the extent of his dissemination of enlightened Evangelical Calvinism.

The foundation for the Scottish Enlightenment was its literary works, authored by such men as David Hume, William Robertson, Adam Ferguson and Hugh Blair. There was a conscious attempt among the Scottish literati to bring fame and glory to

¹*An Account of the Funds, Expenditure, and General Management of the Affairs, of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge* (Edinburgh: Printed by J. Paterson, 1796), 2. See also SSPCK Council Minutes for the eighteenth century, NAS, GD95/2.

²See the 'Edinburgh Missionary Society' pamphlet, 1796, NLS, MS Acc. 7548 D1. See also Erskine's discussion of the Edinburgh Missionary Society in his letter to Levi Hart, 23 July 1796, Gratz MSS, HSP, and the debate between Erskine and the Moderates on missions in the *Account of the Proceedings and Debate, in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 27th May 1796; on the Overtures from the Provincial Synods of Fife and Moray, Respecting the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Heathen* (Edinburgh: Printed for Alex. Lawrie, 1796).

themselves and their country through their writings.³ While it was the Scottish authors who became famous and sometimes wealthy through their literary contributions, it was the British publishers who provided the means for them to gain international acclaim. These bookseller-publishers often served as patrons to their authors, wining and dining them.⁴ The Presbyterian minister Thomas Somerville, for instance, described the London publisher Andrew Strahan's and Thomas Cadell's parties as 'the most elegant and splendid I had ever seen before'.⁵ The American physician Benjamin Rush remarked that he was 'frequently and kindly entertained' by the Dilly brothers of London, Edward and Charles.⁶ 'At their hospitable table', Rush continued, 'I met with many gentlemen of literary characters. Indeed their bookstore was a kind of Coffee house for authors.'⁷ The Dilly brothers were known to spoil authors like James Boswell by providing a place to stay and lavish meals.⁸ So there was often more to a bookseller than simply selling and publishing.

The dominant printing cities in the Scottish Enlightenment were London followed by Edinburgh.⁹ Cooperation developed between many of the London and Edinburgh firms so that they could share the costs of advertising and the copyright payment to authors, helping to spread the risk of ventures.¹⁰ Depending on the terms of a contract and the sales of a book, not only was it possible that British authors could become wealthy, but also it was likely that their publishers would flourish. The

³Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland & America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 44.

⁴Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 195–209.

⁵T. Somerville, *My Own Life*, quoted by Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 199.

⁶Benjamin Rush, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush: His 'Travels Through Life' Together with His Commonplace Book for 1789–1813*, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), 62.

⁷Rush, *Autobiography*, 62–3.

⁸Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 199–200.

⁹Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 268.

¹⁰Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 270–1.

Edinburgh bookseller and publisher William Creech, for example, died with the handsome net worth of £20,000, more than double the estimated wealth of the leading seventeenth-century printer and book merchant Agnes Campbell.¹¹ The premier publishing firm of the Scottish Enlightenment was the enterprising partnership of William Strahan and Thomas Cadell based in London. Strahan's personal assets equalled some £100,000 and Cadell's even more at £150,000 at their respective deaths.¹² So although prominent British authors like William Robertson earned an impressive £4,000 for his three-volume *History of the Reign of Charles V* (1769), and Edward Gibbon an astonishing £9,000 for his massive six-volume *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-78), the publishers had the opportunity to make even more money.¹³

Erskine too was involved in the publishing industry, but not for the purpose of amassing wealth. As a bibliophile, he was greatly interested in the format and distribution of religious works. In Scotland, he had established relationships early on with several booksellers, such as Thomas Lumisden of Edinburgh and Robert Urie of Glasgow, but William Gray and his daughter Margaret were his primary publishers.¹⁴ Table one gives a glimpse of Erskine's involvement with the Grays. Not only did he publish many of his own writings with them, but Erskine also chose the Grays for several of the works that he edited and prefaced. Unfortunately, however, there is little known about this father and daughter team.

¹¹Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 436; Alastair J. Mann, *The Scottish Book Trade, 1500 - 1720: Print Commerce and Print Control in Early Modern Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 194-6.

¹²Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 358-9.

¹³Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 214, 259.

¹⁴See Table 1. On Urie, see Hugh McLean, 'Robert Urie, Printer in Glasgow', *Records of the Glasgow Bibliographic Society* 3 (1914), 89-108.

Table 1: Works published or sold by William or Margaret Gray that were prefaced, edited or written by Erskine

Date	Author	Title	Format	Price as Advertised	Imprint
1754	Samuel Davies	<i>A Sermon Preached at Henrico, 29th April 1753</i>	23pp; 4to		Printed for W. Gray and W. Peter
1761	Joseph Bellamy	<i>Nymphas to Sosipater</i>	23pp; 4to		Printed for W. Gray
1765	Jonathan Edwards	<i>An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd</i>	504pp; 8vo	5s. bound; fine paper, 6s. bound	Printed by John Gray and Gavin Alston. For William Gray in the Front of the Exchange
1765	James Hervey	<i>Aspasio Vindicated</i>	295pp; 12mo	2s. 6d. in boards, and 3s. bound	Printed for W. Gray
1765	John Erskine	<i>Mr Wesley's Principles Detected</i>	49pp; 8vo	4d.	Printed for William Gray Front of the New Exchange
1765	John Erskine	<i>Theological Dissertations</i>	311pp. 12mo	2s. 6d. or 3s.	Printed for Edward and Charles Dilly, in the Poultry, near the Mansion-House [Sold by W. Gray]
1771	James Hall	<i>Meditations and Letters of a Pious Youth Lately Deceas'd, 2nd edition</i>	203pp; 12mo	1s. 6d.	Printed by J. Reid. For W. Gray Front of the Exchange
1771	Thomas Gillespie	<i>An Essay on the Continuance of Immediate Revelations of Facts and Future Events in the Christian Church</i>	33pp; 8vo	6d.	Printed by A. Murray and J. Cochran. For W. Gray, Front of the Exchange
1774	Thomas Gillespie	<i>A Treatise on Temptation</i>	235pp; 12mo	1s. 8d. stitched; 2s. bound	Printed for W. Gray, Front of the Exchange
1774	Jonathan Edwards	<i>A History of the Work of Redemption</i>	378pp; 8vo	4s. 6d. 'coarse', and 6s. 'fine bound'	Printed for W. Gray, Edinburgh, and J. Buckland and G. Keith, London
1774	John Erskine	<i>The Education of Poor Children Recommended</i>	28pp; 8vo	6d.	Printed by A. Murray & J. Cochran [Sold by W. Gray]
1778	John Erskine	<i>Considerations on the Spirit of Popery</i>	42pp; 8vo	6d.	Printed by Murray & Cochran. Sold by W. Gray, Front of the Exchange
1779	John Erskine	<i>Prayer for Those in Civil and Military Offices Recommended</i>	32pp; 8vo	6d.	Printed for W. Gray, Front of the Exchange
1780	John Erskine	<i>A Narrative of the Debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, May 25 1779</i>	79pp; 8vo	1s.	Printed for W. Gray, Front of the Exchange
1785	Thomas Prince	<i>Six Sermons by the Late Thomas Prince</i>	156pp; 12mo	9d.	Printed by David Paterson, for William Martin, Bookseller, Lawn-Market [Sold by the Grays]

1785	Thomas Prince	<i>Dying Exercises of Mrs. Deborah Prince</i>	46pp; 12mo	4d.	Printed by D. Paterson, for W. Martin, Bookseller, Lawn-Market [Sold by the Grays]
1785	Jonathan Edwards	<i>Sermons on Various Important Subjects</i>	408pp; 12mo	3s. bound	Reprinted for M. Gray
1788	Jonathan Edwards	<i>A History of the Work of Redemption</i>	434pp; 12mo AND 395pp; 8vo	12mo 3s. 6d. bound; 8vo 5s. bound	Printed for M. Gray; - and J. Buckland and T. Vernor, London
1788	Jonathan Edwards	<i>Practical Sermons</i>	401pp; 8vo	'fine' 6s.; 'common' 5s.	Printed for M. Gray, Front of the Exchange
1789	Jonathan Edwards	<i>Twenty Sermons</i>	426pp; 12mo	3s. 6d.	Printed for M. Gray
1790	John Erskine	<i>Sketches and Hints of Church History</i> , vol. 1	308pp; 12mo	3s. 6d. fine; 2s. 6d. coarse	Printed for M. Gray
1790	John Erskine	<i>Letters Chiefly Written to Comfort those Bereaved of Children or Friends</i>	75pp; 12mo	Fine 8d.; coarse 6d.	Printed for M. Gray
1791	William Cooper	<i>A Reply to the Religious Scruples against Inoculating the Small Pox</i>	15pp; 12mo		Sold by M. Gray
1792	Samuel Stoddard	<i>The Safety of Appearing at the Day of Judgment in the Righteousness of Christ</i>	350pp; 12mo	3s. 6d.	Printed for M. Gray; and T. Vernor, London
1793	John Erskine	<i>The Fatal Consequences and the General Sources of Anarchy</i>	45pp; 8vo	6d.	Printed for M. Gray
1793	Jonathan Edwards	<i>A History of the Work of Redemption</i> , 4 th edition	434pp; 12mo	3s. 6d.	Printed for M. Gray, Edinburgh; - and T. Vernor, London
1793	Jonathan Dickinson	<i>Sermons and Tracts</i>	483pp 8vo		Printed for M. Gray, Royal-Exchange; and for Vernor and Hood, and Ogilvie and Speare
1793	Jonathan Edwards	<i>Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects</i>	476pp; 12mo	3s. 6d. in boards	Printed for M. Gray, Edinburgh; and for Vernor & Hood, and Ogilvie & Speare, London

Sources: the books advertised in the Grays' publications: John Erskine, *Mr. Wesley's Principles Detected* (1765); Thomas Walker, *Vindication of the Discipline and Constitutions of the Church of Scotland* (1774); *A Full Account of the Several Ends and Uses of Confessions of Faith*, 3rd edition (1775); William Gray, *A Catalogue of Books in History, Law, Physic, Divinity, &c* (1778); Jonathan Dickinson, *Familiar Letters to a Gentleman*, 4th edition (1784); Jonathan Edwards, *Practical Sermons* (1788); Jonathan Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, 4th edition (1793); Jonathan Dickinson, *Sermons and Tracts* (1793).

William Gray was a founding member of the Edinburgh Booksellers Society, which sought to regulate the Scottish trade, and he served briefly as a director for the SSPCK

in the late 1770s alongside Erskine.¹⁵ Gray had a shop in Edinburgh on the front of the east wing of the Royal Exchange, a building on the High Street across from St Giles Church, and died sometime prior to his daughter's wedding to William Galloway on 11 April 1785.¹⁶ Margaret worked for her father and when he passed away, she carried on with the family business until her death in 1794.

The Grays specialised in religious works, publishing books from some of the leading Evangelicals of the day.¹⁷ Scottish authors such as Thomas Bell, Thomas Boston, James Fraser, John Maclaurin, James Oswald, Robert Walker and Alexander Webster; English divines, including Philip Doddridge, John Newton and Isaac Watts; and American Calvinists like Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Davies, Jonathan Dickinson, Jonathan Edwards and the Scottish emigrant John Witherspoon were all names whose works bore the Gray imprint. They often partnered with the London firm of Edward and Charles Dilly, 'staunch dissenters' and outspoken American sympathisers, but towards the end of the century the relationship went sour.¹⁸ According to Erskine, Margaret Gray had ceased dealing with Charles Dilly, the surviving brother of the pair, by 1786, 'because instead of making her returns in money or saleable books, he wants to palm upon her books which are not in her way to dispose of and would be lumber in her shop'.¹⁹ By this point, Margaret had transferred her allegiance to the London publisher Thomas Vernor, who was also known to favour religious literature.

¹⁵Richard B. Sher, 'Corporatism and Consensus in the Late Eighteenth-Century Book Trade: The Edinburgh Booksellers Society in Comparative Perspective', *Book History* 1 (1998), 93; SSPCK Council Minutes, NAS, GD95/2/9.

¹⁶For a picture and description of the Exchange, see Thomas H. Shepherd, *Modern Athens! Displayed in a Series of Views...* (London: John & Co., 1829), 46-7; H. R. Plomer, G. H. Bushnell, and E. R. McC.Dix, *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who Were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1726 to 1775* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 315.

¹⁷See William Gray, *A Catalogue of Books in History, Law, Physic, Divinity, &c* (Edinburgh, 1778).

¹⁸On Edward and Charles Dilly, see L. H. Butterfield, 'The American Interests in the Firm of E. and C. Dilly, with Their Letters to Benjamin Rush, 1770-1795', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 45 (1951), 283-332 and *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 154: *The British Literary Book Trade, 1700-1820*, eds. James K. Bracken and Joel Silver (Detroit, MI: Gayle Research, 1995), 97-8.

¹⁹Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 19 August 1786, EUL, E.99.14.

Erskine knew the Grays very well and on several occasions used his influence to persuade them to propagate many of the texts that were deemed to be edifying for the dissemination of Evangelical Calvinism. In 1782 Erskine made arrangements for William Gray to barter with John Collett Ryland and his son, proposing that Gray send the English Baptists works like Jonathan Edwards's *Life of David Brainerd* (Edinburgh, 1765) and Edwards's *Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival* (Edinburgh, 1743), in exchange for John Collett Ryland's *Contemplations on the Divinity of Christ* (3rd volume of this series, 1782); John Ryland Jr's *Christ Manifested* (1782); Robert Hall's *Help to Zion's Travellers* (1781) and *Dr Mather's Student and Preacher* (London, 1781). Erskine reported that Gray seemed willing since he had 'repeatedly written to London for pieces which I certainly know were published at Bristol or Northampton', but was unable to procure them.²⁰

Margaret Gray, like her father, often consulted Erskine about what to print and sell. In October 1791, for instance, Erskine had shown her Ryland Jr's *Salvation Finished* (1791), which was his funeral sermon in memory of Robert Hall, as well as John Rippon's *Baptist Register*, 'advising her to commission some of both'. This Baptist periodical was looked upon with particular interest since Erskine had found that 'no English periodical' was better at 'exciting clergy and laity of all denominations', meaning that it was appreciated by a number of Evangelicals other than those who were Baptists. Erskine was pleased to learn that once Margaret examined these pieces 'her favourable opinion of them is the same as mine'. The precise number of copies of Ryland's sermon that she ordered is unknown, but *The Baptist Register* from this point was 'sold by... Mrs. Gray' for the remainder of her life.²¹ Regardless of whether or not they were Evangelicals themselves, William and Margaret Gray were receptive to Erskine's expertise on the best orthodox publications

²⁰Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 7 June 1782, EUL, E.99.14.

²¹Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 3 October 1791, EUL, E.99.14. See the ESTC for the publication of *The Baptist Register* by Margaret Gray.

to be sold in Edinburgh and contributed to the spread of the gospel through their publishing business.

The effect of the Erskine-Gray collaboration is best seen in the publishing of Jonathan Edwards's posthumous works. After Edwards's death, Erskine became this American's 'most ardent champion', as David Bebbington put it.²² One way that Erskine demonstrated his friendship was by securing subscriptions for some of Edwards's theological treatises. Along with John Maclaurin of Glasgow, he acquired forty-five subscriptions for eighty-five copies of the first edition of the *Freedom of the Will* (1754) and just prior to Edwards's death, Erskine was busy collecting names in Glasgow and Edinburgh for the forthcoming treatise on *Original Sin* (1758).²³ After Edwards died, there was discussion among his friends on printing some of his unpublished writings. 'I'll gladly do my best to procure subscriptions for any writings of Mr Edwards', Erskine told the Connecticut pastor Joseph Bellamy, 'whose abilities as a divine and philosopher were of the first magnitude... whose compositions discovered the utmost strength of genius and solidity of judgment', and who was able to 'throw new light even on the most beaten subjects'.²⁴ Erskine estimated in another letter to Bellamy that some four dozen subscribers could be found in Scotland for a two-volume octavo format of his 'practical works' provided that the manuscript was 'printed in as comprehensive a type' as his treatise on *Freedom of the Will*, with approximately 400 pages in length and sold for no more than four and a half shillings for each bound volume. But Erskine warned that if it was not 'printed comprehensively... few will subscribe, as there are great complaints of the price of the

²²David W. Bebbington, 'Remembered Around the World: The International Scope of Edwards's Legacy', in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 179.

²³Christopher Wayne Mitchell, 'Jonathan Edwards's Scottish Connection and the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Evangelical Revival, 1735–1750', PhD Dissertation, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, 1997, 235; Erskine to Jonathan Edwards, 24 January 1758, TFP.

²⁴Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 18 May, 1759, Joseph Bellamy Papers, 1752-1785, SML, MS 609.

Book on original sin, which it is thought might have sold a shilling cheaper, had it been printed, in the same way as the treatise on freedom of will'.²⁵ There were high hopes for the work on original sin, provided that it was marketed properly.

Erskine could hardly wait for more of Edwards's unpublished writings to be printed. 'I long for a particular account', he told Bellamy, of 'what MSCTS Mr Edwards has left behind him, and what prospect there is of their being published.'²⁶ A *History of the Work of Redemption* was especially revered. Once Erskine heard from Edwards about its subject matter, he waited with anticipation for its publication.

'Tho' I long to see Mr Edwards' confutation of the different branches of Arminianism', he remarked, 'yet I more long to see his intended history of Man's redemption. From such a pen upon such a subject, something highly valuable may be expected. May a kind providence preserve from danger a life so important!'²⁷

Although Jonathan Edwards Jr was at first apprehensive about the idea of publishing his father's dormant writings, the son wrote that the 'obstacle was removed' when he became accustomed to Erskine's ability as an editor of this work and the latter's confidence in securing a publisher.²⁸ For his part, Erskine stated in the advertisement that 'I have not presumed to make any change in the sentiments or composition.' His goal was to change the flow of the piece from a series of sermons into a theological treatise and, therefore, only 'altered and diversified the marks of the several divisions and subdivisions, that each class of heads might be easily distinguished'.²⁹ The end result was that the world was given Edwards's *magnum opus*, which was published by

²⁵Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 8 June 1759, JBL, 188:2933:81262. Sometimes Gray advertised both the *Freedom of the Will* and *Original Sin* for six shillings, without mentioning the format, but on one occasion he listed *Original Sin* at 6s. and *Freedom of the Will* at 4s. 6d. Either way, *Original Sin* was probably priced too high, at least in its first edition.

²⁶Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 8 June 1759, JBL, 188:2933:81262.

²⁷Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 24 March 1755, JBL, 188:2932:81234.

²⁸Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption: Containing the Outlines of a Body of Divinity, in a Method Entirely New*, ed. John Erskine (Edinburgh and London: Printed for W. Gray, J. Buckland and G. Keith, 1774), iii.

²⁹Edwards, *Redemption*, vi.

William Gray in 1774, packaged in an octavo format and sold for four and a half or six shillings, depending on the quality of paper and the book binding. As tables two and three show, these were comparable prices considering the similar format and cost of Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* and *Original Sin* as listed in various booksellers' catalogues.

Table 2: *Freedom of the Will* (1754)

Catalogue Year	Year of Publication	Format	Price as Advertised	Description
1778	1775	8vo	4s 6d	new
1788	1775	8vo	6s	new
1792	1790	8vo	6s	new
1800	1790	8vo	5s	new

Table 3: *Original Sin* (1758)

Catalogue Year	Year of Publication	Format	Price as Advertised	Description
1789	1789	8vo	6s	new
1793	1789	8vo	5s	new and neatly bound
1793	1789	8vo	4s 6d	new edition in boards
1797	1789	8vo	5s 6d	new

Sources: Thomas Bernard, *A Catalogue of Books, Being a Select and Valuable Collection Both Antient and Modern* (London, 1788); John Binns, *A Catalogue of Books, Containing Several Valuable Libraries, Lately Purchased, with a Large and Good Collection of Modern New Books, in Various Languages, Arts, Sciences, &c* (Leeds, 1789); John Binns, *A Catalogue of Books, for 1797, Containing Several Valuable Libraries* (Leeds, 1797); John Cuthell, *A Catalogue of Books for the Year 1800, in Various Languages and Classes of Literature, on Sale for Ready Money* (London, [1800]); Samuel Hayes, *A Catalogue of Books, Consisting of a Great Variety of Curious Articles Lately Imported from the Continent* (London, 1792); Thomas King, *A Catalogue of Books, Containing Many Valuable Articles, in Ancient and Modern Literature* (London, 1792); James Lackington, *Second Volume of Lackington's Catalogue for 1793* (London, 1793); Thomas Lowndes, *T. Lowndes's Catalogue for 1778* (London, 1778); John Walker, *A Catalogue of Books, Including the Libraries of Israel Mauduit, Esq. Rev. Mr. Forster, Harleston, Suffolk; William Frederick Glover, Esq. Late Surgeon of the East Essex Militia* (London, 1778).

Once this partnership was in place, with the younger Edwards transcribing his father's manuscripts and then sending them to Scotland to be edited, more subsequent projects were planned. The war between Britain and America, however, disrupted the publishing of further posthumous works.³⁰ It was not until the transatlantic conflict came to an end that the two were able to reconnect. But once they did, a regular

³⁰See Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 30 March 1782, EUL, E.99.14.

supply of Edwards's unpublished writings was sent from New Haven to Scotland, even though there were delays from time to time, which Erskine attributed to 'the carelessness of the gentleman' that the younger Edwards had entrusted to deliver the manuscripts.³¹ By 1785 Ryland Jr was also corresponding with Edwards Jr, due to Erskine's encouragement, and the three men then worked diligently sharing ideas on how to publish the next featured set of sermons.³² This next posthumous work became Edwards's *Practical Sermons* (1788), published by Margaret Gray, packaged in an octavo format and priced as six shillings for 'fine' or five shillings for 'common'.

Part of Erskine's reasoning for selecting the Grays was his suspicions of the greed of most London publishers. Although he believed that a 'London bookseller would be fittest for the sale' of the *Practical Sermons*, and 'for allowing something handsome', he complained that 'they print very incorrectly especially from manuscripts' and often sold their stock at such an 'exorbitant a price', which would discourage 'those of the middle or lower ranks to purchase'. He gave the example of Charles Dilly, who sold the *Life and Character of Jonathan Edwards*, 8vo (London, 1785) for five shillings, even though the Glasgow edition that came out in the same year was priced at only two shillings for those who had subscribed.³³ Even eight years after its publication, the Edinburgh publisher and bookseller William Creech was selling the 1785 Glasgow edition for only three shillings.³⁴ While the cost of five shillings might not have seemed unreasonable for an octavo work of about 400 pages, Erskine recognised that the book could have been priced much cheaper at that time.

³¹Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 31 August 1784, EUL, E.99.14 . See Jonathan Edwards Jr to Erskine, 8 February 1787, Jonathan Edwards Jr Papers, 1765–1801, Franklin Trask Library, Andover Newton Theological Seminary, MSS 1983–4.

³²John Ryland, *Pastoral Memorials: Selected from the Manuscripts of the Late Revd. John Ryland, D. D. of Bristol* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1826–1828), 49.

³³Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 19 August 1786, EUL, E.99.14. See Dilly's 1787 catalogue: Charles Dilly, *A Catalogue of Books Printed for, and Sold by Charles Dilly, in London* (London, 1787), 10.

³⁴William Creech, *A Catalogue of Books...* (Edinburgh, 1793), 145.

As opposed to many other eighteenth-century authors, who hoped to make fortunes from publishing their works in expensive formats, Erskine sought to produce low-priced treatises and sermons to be distributed throughout Britain, America and Europe.³⁵ Erskine was clear in his intentions, recommending to Ryland that the remainder of Edwards's manuscripts be published in Northampton as well as Edinburgh, 'where greater care would be taken to do them cheap, and correct than if the matter was trusted to London Booksellers, whose carelessness and selfishness I well know'.³⁶ It seems likely that Erskine purposely edited Edwards's posthumous works so that they would be no longer than one volume and priced by the Grays at no more than six shillings for an octavo edition. Even when publishing his own works, Erskine made sure that they were reasonably priced. His *Theological Dissertations* (1765) and the first volume of his *Sketches* (1790), for instance, were not printed in a regal quarto or octavo format, but in duodecimo, and cost only from two and a half to three and a half shillings.³⁷ By keeping the format of the books primarily as one-volume pieces, many of which were published in their first edition as duodecimo, Erskine could ensure that the works that he helped produce were affordable.

In 1790 Edwards Jr successfully negotiated with Margaret Gray to publish more of his father's manuscripts, which eventually became the *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects* (1793).³⁸ This was another significant contribution for Evangelical Calvinism and Erskine recognised its strengths. 'In ingeniousness, solidity and usefulness', he claimed, 'the original reflexions on the arguments for and against Christianity, on mysteries, and especially on the divinity of Christ, in my opinion often equal, and sometimes exceed, the justly

³⁵For a list of the more lucrative publications, see the indexes in Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*.

³⁶Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 20 August 1787, EUL, E.99.14.

³⁷See Table 1.

³⁸Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 9 August 1790, EUL, E.99.14.

admired private thoughts of Pascal.³⁹ But Erskine's assessment was not entirely favourable. Since over two-thirds of this manuscript consisted of extracts from other authors he feared that the book would not sell as this information would have been repetitive to the learned reader who was already familiar with the names of Grotius, Stapfer, Newton and Tillotson. 'My chief objection', Erskine clarified, was that 'the large extracts on a subject so generally studied as the deistical controversy, might be disagreeable to many purchasers, and even hinder the sale of what might afterwards be published from President Edwards' papers'. Erskine's apprehensions were laid to rest, however, when he learned that those who were interested in Edwards's publications knew very little about these authors. Archbishop John Tillotson, whom Erskine had studied as a divinity student, was now viewed as 'too orthodox and serious, and too plain and unanimated to suit the polite modest taste, while others dislike his Arminianism so that he is now little read'.⁴⁰ Whereas when Edwards was living deism was viewed as the foremost enemy of Reformed Christianity, by the end of the eighteenth century it was *passé*.⁴¹ After consulting with Thomas Randall and Walter Buchanan, Erskine and the other two Edinburgh ministers concurred that publishing should commence. But as a precaution, Erskine convinced Margaret Gray to send the manuscript to Ryland Jr for one final opinion. Ryland then made some corrections, which were accepted, prior to its publication in 1793.⁴²

When Margaret Gray died on 3 June 1794, Erskine was devastated. He had lost his primary outlet for the distribution of Evangelical Calvinistic works. She and her father had published and sold the writings of a number of such authors and had been the chief publishers of Edwards's posthumously edited writings.⁴³ Erskine

³⁹Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 7 July 1792, EUL, E.99.14.

⁴⁰Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 27 July 1792, EUL, E.99.14.

⁴¹On Edwards's polemic against the deists, see Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34-51.

⁴²Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 27 November 1792, EUL, E.99.14.

⁴³See Table 1.

lamented to John Ryland Jr that her death was ‘not only a heavy stroke upon her aged husband, her only son, 2 sisters, and many distressed people to whom she was kind and charitable, but to the general interests of religion, which she much promoted by her readiness to publish or republish many useful American books’.⁴⁴ With the death of William and Margaret Gray, a search was needed to find another reliable bookseller who would be willing to continue publishing Erskine’s recommended books and pamphlets.

There was a short interval between 1796 and 1797 in which John Galbraith, Margaret Gray’s apprentice, tried to sustain her publishing business. Erskine sought to encourage this young man by giving him the chance to print Jonathan Edwards’s posthumous *Remarks on Important Theological Controversies* (1796). ‘As he is a young bookseller and of a small stock’, Erskine told Ryland Jr, ‘I wish he may meet with that sale, which may encourage him to other similar undertakings.’⁴⁵ Another youthful Edinburgh resident, Archibald Constable, who later became Sir Walter Scott’s chief publisher, was also enlisted to help produce this work. But Erskine’s patience wore thin with Galbraith by 1797. The Presbyterian minister viewed the young bookseller as incompetent and so ceased doing business with him, which probably led to Galbraith’s demise as an up-and-coming publisher. Still reeling from a recent commission that Galbraith had botched, the frustrated Erskine told John Ryland Jr, ‘I fear Mr Galbraith has not the [care?] and attention [that] could be wished in executing commissions.’ By comparison to Gray’s former apprentice, Erskine communicated that ‘Mr Constable appears to me a preferable correspondent.’⁴⁶ The outcome was that for the next few years, Archibald Constable became Erskine’s favourite publisher.

⁴⁴Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 16 June 1794, EUL, E.99.14.

⁴⁵Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 30 December 1795, EUL, E.99.14.

⁴⁶For Erskine’s complaint, see his letter to John Ryland Jr, 25 October 1796, EUL, E.99.14. See also Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 9 August 1797, EUL, E.99.14.

One of the minister's first recommendations to Constable was to reprint Friedrich Lampe's *Theological Dissertations Concerning the Endless Duration of Punishment* in 1796, a work viewed by Erskine as important in the war against universal salvation.⁴⁷ Constable was disappointed that the Dutch Reformed professor's work 'did not sell'. But he admitted that this favour 'introduced me to the publication of Dr. Erskine's own works, which proved to be a matter of no small éclat, though not of great emolument'.⁴⁸ Constable's patience was rewarded, however, when he was introduced to Erskine's American correspondents and granted the rights to publish John Gillies's posthumous *A Supplement to Two Volumes (Published in 1754) of Historical Collections* (1796), the second volume of Erskine's *Sketches and Hints of Church History* (1797), *Dr Erskine's Reply to a Printed Letter, Directed to Him by A. C.* (1798) and the first and second editions of Erskine's first volume of sermons (1798-1800).

Throughout his involvement with these Scottish printers, Erskine's goal remained the same: to produce moderately priced religious literature that would be widely available for the general public. He shuddered to think that useful titles were being printed in expensive formats. After reviewing Robert Hall's *Help to Zion's Travellers*, for instance, Erskine commented

What a pity that Mr. Hall's help was not printed in the same cheap and comprehensive manner, which might have rendered the sale and spread of that useful work much greater... How different was it in the end of the last century, when the chief dignitaries of the Church of England printed so many useful tracts against Popery on coarse paper... that the less opulent might be able to purchase them!⁴⁹

⁴⁷See the preface in Frederick Adolphus Lampe, *Theological Dissertations Concerning the Endless Duration of Punishment*, trans. Joseph Robertson (Edinburgh and London: Printed for J. Fairbairn and Archibald Constable and J. Mathews and T. Chapman, 1796), iii-iv.

⁴⁸Archibald Constable, *Archibald Constable and His Literary Correspondents: A Memorial by His Son Thomas Constable*, ed. Thomas Constable, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1873), 26.

⁴⁹Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 15 March 1784, EUL, E.99.14. No price could be found for Hall's work.

Even at the end of his life, Erskine remained convinced that the best way to propagate Evangelicalism was to publish inexpensive texts from respectable authors. ‘I do not expect much good from the publishing complete uniform editions of the works of Watts, Doddridge [and] Owen’, Erskine told Ryland Jr shortly before his death. ‘They may adorn and enrich the library of a few. But I think the gospel would be better published to the poor, by printing cheap editions of their most important works.’⁵⁰ Throughout his life, Erskine worked tirelessly to distribute quality theological books that were not only edifying, but reasonably priced.

Equipped with knowledge of the book trade, and access to the latest publications, Erskine could offer intelligent advice to his correspondents on what to purchase or avoid. A good example of the evolution of his thought can be seen by examining table four, which showcases the recommendations of reading material that he gave for divinity students.⁵¹ In his 1743 letter to James Hall, his childhood friend, his list was dominated by the works of English Puritans and seventeenth-century Scottish divines. In the category of style as well, with the exception of the French Roman Catholic theologian Fénelon, Erskine did not deviate from his focus on orthodox authors, even if he was suggesting books by the more elegant writers of this tradition such as Richard Alleine, Richard Baxter and Isaac Watts.⁵²

⁵⁰Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 18 May 1802, EUL, E.99.14.

⁵¹See Table 4 and Erskine to Hall, 15 July 1743, JEL.

⁵²Erskine’s recommendation of Fénelon was not unusual since eighteenth-century British rhetoricians like Hugh Blair were known to admire the simple style of the Catholic bishop. See Kathy M. Houff, ‘François De Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon’, in Michael G. Moran (ed.), *Eighteenth-Century British and American Rhetorics and Rhetoricians: Critical Studies and Sources* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994), 82-3.

Table 4: Suggested readings for divinity students: Erskine to James Hall, 15 July 1743

Knowledge of Deism	Practical Divinity	Lives of Ministers	Church History	Moral Philosophy	Style
Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1671–1737)	David Dickson (c.1583–1662)	James Fraser (1639–1699)	Friederich Lampe (1683–1729)	Hugo Grotius (1583–1645)	François Fénelon (1651–1715)
Benedict Pictet (1655–1724)	Robert Trail (1642–1716)	Thomas Halyburton (1674–1712)	Johann Sleidan (1506–56)	Samuel Pufendorf (1632–94)	Richard Alleine (1610/11–81)
Thomas Ridgley (1667–1734)	Thomas Boston (1676–1732)		Geeraert Brandt (1626–85)	Francis Bacon (1561–1626)	Joseph Alleine (<i>bap.</i> 1634–1668)
Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)	James Durham (1622–1658)		Gilbert Burnet (1643–1715)		Richard Baxter (1615–91)
	Richard Sibbes (1577?–1635)		John Knox (1514–72)		John Howe (1630–1705)
	Richard Capel (1586–1656)		Robert Wodrow 1679–1734)		Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)
	Jeremiah Dyke (<i>bap.</i> 1584–1639)		David Calderwood (c.1575–1650)		Mathias Maurice (1684–1738)
	Robert Bolton (1572–1631)		John Foxe (1516/17–1587)		Isaac Watts (1674–1748)
	John Owen (1616–1683)				
	Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)				
	Richard Vines (1599/1600–1656)				
	Bernard Gilpin (1516–1584)				

Erskine was fully aware of the polite literature that existed at this time, but could not justify recommending the writings of some authors whose views gravitated towards heterodoxy. He stated that if some people were to read his letter to Hall, they would probably comment on ‘the old fashioned taste of it’s writer, and take it heinously ill, that the noble Earl of Shaftesbury and several English Divines, (who write in the same strain tho’ not with the same spirit, and seem to have derived their notions more from him than their bibles) have not been recommended’. If a more comprehensive list was assembled, Erskine added, Socrates and Seneca would have been ranked higher than most of the more prominent names in polite literature at that time. ‘They have most of them banished true Christianity from their sermons, and it’s no wonder morality should be set apacking after it, and principles advanced, which a modest heathen would have blushed at.’⁵³ These harsh words reveal Erskine’s age,

⁵³Erskine to Hall, 15 July 1743, JEL.

for in his later years it would be difficult to find any scathing criticism from this tolerant minister, unless he was addressing David Hume. What may be drawn from this table is that Erskine, even as a youth, sought to promote content over style.

If there was an orthodox author who could write with more eloquence than former divines, Erskine was more than willing to recommend him. Writing to Joseph Bellamy over a decade later, he proposed James Hervey's *Theron and Aspasio* as an enlightened Evangelical alternative to Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*.⁵⁴ An excited Erskine wrote, 'The most remarkable book published in Britain on justification thru' an imputed righteousness, has just now appeared, from a corner whence we least expected it, I mean the Church of England. The book I have in mind is Hervey's *Theron and Aspasio*.' Erskine's praise was not without criticism, however. 'I can't say that the book is arranged in the most philosophic and convincing order', he told Bellamy. Nevertheless, Hervey's 'book is highly valuable, not only as it may probably lead many of the admirers of his *Contemplations*, to think on a subject they have little considered, but also as it abounds in judicious and beautiful illustrations of many important scriptures'. Hervey's book was admired because it was an Evangelical substitute for those interested in polite literature.⁵⁵

Thirty-eight years after his initial letter to James Hall, Erskine offered John Collett Ryland a revised list of recommended authors for divinity students. Ryland had edited *Dr. Cotton Mather's Student and Preacher* (London, 1781) in which the Baptist had made his own compilation of names 'for the use of students of divinity, and Christian preachers'.⁵⁶ After reviewing Ryland's suggestions, Erskine added a

⁵⁴See Isabel Rivers, 'Shaftesburian Enthusiasm and the Evangelical Revival', in Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew (eds.), *Revival and Religion Since 1700: Essays for John Walsh* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1993), 36.

⁵⁵Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 24 March 1755, JBL, 188:2932:81234.

⁵⁶Cotton Mather, *Dr. Cotton Mather's Student and Preacher*, ed. John Collett Ryland (London: Printed for Charles Dilly, 1781), xiv.

few of his own.⁵⁷ This time he included not only older works, but also some more current pieces.

Table 5: Suggested readings for divinity students: Erskine to John Collett Ryland, 2 November 1781

Exegesis	Pastoral Theology	Practical Divinity	Bible Commentaries	Foreign Calvinists	Lives of Ministers	Abstract Reasoning
August Hermann Francke, <i>Praelectiones Hermeneuticae</i> (1717)	Pierre Roque, <i>Le Pasteur Evangelique</i> (Basil, 1723)	William Crawford, <i>Zion's Traveller</i> (1729) and <i>Dying Thoughts</i> (1738)	Matthew Poole, <i>Synopsis Criticorum Aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae Interpretum</i> (1669)	Daniel Wytttenbach, <i>Tentamen Theologiae Dogmaticae</i> (1747)	Cotton Mather, <i>Magnalia Christi Americana</i> (1702)	James Harris, <i>Philosophical Arrangements</i> (1775)
Johann Jacob Rombach, <i>Institutiones Hermeneuticae</i> (Jena, 1732)	John Mason, <i>The Student Pastor</i> (1755)	Henry Scougal, <i>The Life of God in the Soul of Man</i> (1677)	Friedrich Lampe, <i>Evangelicum Joannis</i> (1724)	Johann Friedrich Stapfer, <i>Institutiones Theologiae Politicae</i> (1743-7)	Samuel Hopkins, <i>Life and Character of Jonathan Edwards</i> (1765)	George Campbell, <i>Philosophy of Rhetoric</i> (1776) and <i>Dissertation on Miracles</i> (1762)
	Augusti Hermanni Francke, <i>Methodus Studii Theologici</i> (Halle, 1723)	Samuel Shaw, <i>Immanuel</i> (1667) and <i>Welcome to the Plague</i> (1668)			Ebenezer Turrell, <i>Life of Benjamin Colman</i> (1749)	Lord Kames, <i>Elements of Criticism</i> (1762)
		Thomas Goodwin, <i>Works</i> (1681-1704)			Gilbert Burnet, <i>Life of William Bedell</i> (1685)	Jonathan Edwards, <i>Freedom of the Will</i> (1754)
					William Gilpin, <i>Life of Bernard Gilpin</i> (1752)	*'Controversy between Law and Jackson'
					William Whiston, <i>Life of William Whiston</i> (1749-50)	

*Possibly Alvery Jackson's *The Question Answered, whether Saving Faith in Christ, is a Duty Required by the Moral Law* (London, 1752).

He advised reading about the life of the American ministers Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Colman along with more controversial figures like the English divine

⁵⁷See Table 5.

William Whiston who claimed that the early Church was of an Arian bent. Since Erskine knew that Ryland was ‘well acquainted’ with Edwards, Bellamy and Hopkins, he did not bother to make a separate category of treatises dedicated to the defence of Christian doctrine. Where Erskine’s enlightened mindset is illustrated best is in the final entries, which were advertised as ‘the best pieces of abstract reasoning I ever read’.⁵⁸ The Moderate party clergyman George Campbell was honoured as well as Lord Kames who was accused of heresy for his earlier publication, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751) by some of the Popular party ministers alongside David Hume.⁵⁹ Erskine justified this last segment as useful for divinity students since books ‘of this kind sharpen the understanding, and promote acuteness of arguing for truth and in detecting error’.⁶⁰ So while he had initially advocated authors of the Puritan persuasion in his letter to James Hall in 1743, by 1781 the progressive Evangelical was prepared to include some more contemporary names in order to encourage critical thinking.

In his role as a disseminator, Erskine had a number of reasons for sending books. Sometimes he searched for specific titles in order to fulfil his correspondent’s requests. Jonathan Edwards occasionally gave his Scottish friend instructions on his literary needs. ‘You would much oblige me’, Edwards wrote on 31 August 1748, ‘if you would inform me what are the best books that have lately been written in defence of Calvinism.’⁶¹ Two months later, Edwards stated that ‘among other things, I shall be glad to be informed of any books that come out, remarkably tending either to the illustration, or defense of the truth, or the promoting the power of godliness, or in any respect peculiarly tending to advance true religion’.⁶² Erskine was glad to ‘oblige’.

⁵⁸Erskine to John Collett Ryland, 2 November 1781, EUL, E.99.14.

⁵⁹See John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740–1800* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 68–74.

⁶⁰Erskine to John Collett Ryland, 2 November 1781, EUL, E.99.14.

⁶¹George S. Claghorn (ed.), *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, vol. 16 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 249.

⁶²Edwards to Erskine, 14 October 1748 in Claghorn (ed.), *Edwards’s Letters*, 260.

Along with his letters dated 12 and 20 September 1749, he included a number of religious books that were intended to meet Edwards's criteria.⁶³ In his letter on 30 April 1750, Erskine posted even more items, namely James Fraser's *Treatise on Justifying Faith* (Edinburgh, 1749), in which the seventeenth-century Scottish minister argued that Christ died for all and not simply for the elect; William Crawford's *A Short Manual against the Infidelity of this Age* (Edinburgh, 1734), aimed against deism; Thomas Randall's *A Letter to a Minister Concerning Frequent Communicating* (Edinburgh, 1749), advocating the regular administration of the Lord's Supper among Christians; *The Importance of Religious Knowledge to the Happiness of Mankind* (Edinburgh, 1750) by Hugh Blair who claimed that the spread of Christianity would lead to the humanising of mankind; and Thomas Sherlock's *Letter from the Lord Bishop of London to the Clergy and People of London and Westminster* (London, 1750), a jeremiad by the Bishop of London who posited that God had used an earthquake as a warning to the people of London and Westminster as a response to sinful behaviour.⁶⁴ This impressive assembly represented some of the publications that Erskine found relating to the American's original requests.

When Jonathan Edwards wrote to Erskine on 7 July 1752, desiring a complete book on the history of enthusiasm, 'written by some good hand, a hearty friend of vital religion, a person of accurate judgment and large acquaintance with ecclesiastical history', Erskine responded once again.⁶⁵ In his letter to Erskine on 15 April 1755, Edwards acknowledged receipt of a packet of books 'last year in the spring' that contained a number of valuable books on the subject of enthusiasm, including *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* by the 'bookish' seventeenth-century

⁶³John Glas's *Notes on Scripture Texts* (1747-60); Thomas Ridgley's *The Doctrine of Original Sin Considered* (1725); Charles Wheatley's *The Schools of the Prophets* (1721); Thomas Davidson's *The Triumphant Exit of a Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ* (1749) and Hugh McKaile's *The Last Publick Sermon Immediately Preceding that 8th of September 1662* (1749). Claghorn (ed.), *Edwards's Letters*, 347.

⁶⁴Claghorn (ed.), *Edwards's Letters*, 364.

⁶⁵Claghorn (ed.), *Edwards's Letters*, 490.

Anglican Meric Casaubon as well as other relevant titles.⁶⁶ Erskine had established himself as Edwards's primary source for acquiring relevant works in order to aid the Northampton minister's theological research.

While this Scottish disseminator often supplied his friends with books on the subjects they requested, on other occasions his intention was to send literature that related to controversial authors with the hope that his correspondents would use this material to write polemical treatises against perceived heretics. By mid-century it seemed as if unorthodoxy was reigning in the literary world. Erskine complained to Bellamy in 1753 that 'Essays on morality, neither Clarkian nor Shaftsburian, Calvinist nor Arminian, but downright Sceptical and Atheistical' were surfacing.⁶⁷ To counter this growing trend, Erskine often sent current publications, both heretical and orthodox, in order to enlighten his friends and motivate them to defend traditional doctrines. On 2 March 1754, Erskine forwarded to Joseph Bellamy, David Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), 'a most wicked and imprudent Book', along with *A Delineation of the Nature and Obligation of Morality* (1753) by James Balfour, the man later chosen as Edinburgh University's moral philosophy professor largely because of his argument against the strictly secular morality discussed by Hume in his *Enquiry*.⁶⁸ In the same letter, Erskine also sent other works that confronted perceived heretics.⁶⁹ All of these titles were sent with the purpose of

⁶⁶Meric Casaubon's *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (London, 1655; 2nd ed., rev. and enl., London, 1656); Archibald Campbell's *A Discourse Proving that the Apostles Were no Enthusiasts... With a Preface Containing Some Reflections on a Late Book, Entitled, Christianity as Old as the Creation; and on What Mr. Woolston Alledges with Respect to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1730); William Wilson's *A Discourse Concerning Some Prevailing Evils of the Present Time: wherein Mr. Campbell's Reasonings Concerning the Nature and Influence of Religious Enthiasm are Particularly Examined* (1731) and *A Letter to Professor Campbell, whereto is Subjoin'd Remarks on His Vindication of the Apostles from Enthiasm* (1731). Claghorn, *Edwards's Letters*, 661–2. On Casaubon and his fight against enthusiasm, see Michael Heyd, 'Be Sober and Reasonable': *The Critique of Enthiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Brill: Leiden, 1995), 72–92.

⁶⁷Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 26 January 1753, JBL, 187:2930:81199.

⁶⁸On Balfour's stance against Hume, see James Fieser (ed.), *Early Responses to Hume's Moral, Literary and Political Writings*, 2nd edition (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2005), 79–101.

⁶⁹*Some Late Opinions Concerning the Foundation of Morality, Examined* (1753); the *Scots Magazine* for April, 'in which are truly judicious remarks on Lord Kames by Mr Witherspoon of

providing Bellamy with a view of ‘what dreadful schemes of morality are advanced here’.⁷⁰ As a high-born theologian, Erskine was in a favourable position to evaluate new books and blessed with the means to pay for them.

Bellamy was a person specifically targeted because once Jonathan Edwards died he was seen as one of the few who had the acumen to engage with these perceived infidels as well as authors who were too stringent in their views about the offer of salvation being preached to non-believers. ‘I wish you would write and answer to what has been advanced by Hussey... Sandeman and others against offers of Christ’, Erskine pleaded to the Connecticut minister, since their sentiments are ‘gaining ground in many parts’.⁷¹ As opposed to the English Presbyterian Joseph Hussey and the Scottish separatist Robert Sandeman, Erskine believed that the gospel message should be preached to all without restrictions. Continual updates on the state of religion in Britain and the prospects of an Evangelical champion responding to these challenging times were provided by Erskine. He informed Bellamy in 1770 that ‘Harwood, Priestley, and Wesley are at present the most zealous opposers in England of Calvinist principles. The two first are followed by many of the learned and polite, and the last by the devouter sort. No able Defender of these doctrines has appeared either in the Church of England or dissenting body.’⁷² Someone like Bellamy was needed to ensure that Evangelicalism did not become as rigid as that of Hussey and Sandeman, as liberal as the Unitarian inclinations of the English Dissenters Edward Harwood and Joseph Priestley, or as anti-Calvinistic as that of Wesley’s Arminianism.

B[e]ith, a valuable Young Minister’; and *True State of the Difference between the Reformed Presbytery and Some Brethren who Lately Deserted Them* (1753).

⁷⁰Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 2 March 1754, JBL, 187:2931:81212.

⁷¹Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 18 May 1759, Joseph Bellamy Papers, 1752–1785, SML, MS 609. On the eighteenth-century debate on preaching the gospel message to unbelievers, see Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 455-9.

⁷²Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 16 March 1770, JBL, 188:2936:81355.

To inspire the New England minister to rise to the occasion, Erskine sent Edward Harwood's *The Melancholy Doctrine of Predestination Exposed* (1768) and Walter Sellon's *Arguments against the Doctrine of General Redemption Considered* (1769), which he had heard was written by Wesley. These writings were viewed by Erskine as threatening to the vitality of Calvinism. Harwood, as an example, referenced the Established and Dissenting clergy as those who had 'duped' congregations into thinking that only a select few were predestined to eternal life in heaven; the rest of humanity was sentenced to everlasting punishment.⁷³ For Harward, God was a purely benevolent being who would not let anyone eternally perish. Erskine condemned *The Melancholy Doctrine* as 'a remarkably flimsy superficial performance', but conceded that due to its widespread advertisement and distribution it had 'done a deal of harm'. According to Erskine, those who were ignorant of the arguments on predestination were already claiming that the Bristol Presbyterian had posited ideas that were 'unanswerable'. In order to 'guard against it's doing further hurt', it was hinted that 'some writer of ability and spirit... would give it a reply'.⁷⁴

The hope was that the unorthodoxy taught by Harwood would be refuted by an able Evangelical. In a later letter to Bellamy Erskine was more direct: 'I now send you more heretical pieces, as I wish them in hands capable of answering them.' These were the anti-Trinitarian publications: Edward Harwood's *Five Dissertations* (1772); Anthony Temple's *Remarks on a Late Publication, Intituled, A Scriptural Confutation of the Arguments against the One Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Produced by the Reverend Mr. Lindsey in His Late Apology* (1775); James Foster's *Essay on Fundamentals, with a Particular Regard to the Doctrine of the Ever-Blessed Trinity* (1720); *A Letter to the Mayor and Corporation of Deale, in*

⁷³Edward Harwood, *The Melancholy Doctrine of Predestination Exposed: and the Delightful Truth of Universal Redemption Represented* (London: Printed for T. Becket and P.A. de Hondt, 1768), v-vi.

⁷⁴Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 16 March 1770, JBL, 188:2936:81355.

Relation to their Opinion upon the Trinity (1752); and *The Art of Squeezing; or, the Publications of Mess. Dalglish* (1778), ‘so trifling a piece, that I would not have sent it, had I not sent you all the rest that I could procure on [William] Dalglish’s Controversy’.⁷⁵ Arian and Socinian writings were sent with the goal of finding an orthodox champion to counter these anti-Trinitarian views.

For years scholars were puzzled as to how Bellamy, the ‘arch defender of Calvinism in western Connecticut’, accumulated such ‘scandalously seditious books’. Mark Valeri, in his exceptional book on Bellamy, shows that the New England pastor had not turned into a heretic.⁷⁶ He remained a staunch defender of Evangelical Calvinism, but now he was able to formulate his theology in terms that related to the latest religious books. It was Erskine who was supplying Bellamy with these rational works in order to enlighten the American. By providing controversial texts, Erskine hoped that Bellamy, or someone within his sphere of influence, would be compelled to respond to those authors who were tainting Calvinism.

Erskine firmly believed that ministers like Edwards and Bellamy were needed to ‘combat’ Joseph Priestley, Theophilus Lindsey and other Unitarians. But once Bellamy died, the prospect of finding other able theologians grew dimmer.⁷⁷ ‘I much regret that our dear deceased friend had not lived to execute his defence of the atonement against the objections of Priestley’ and others, Erskine told the American Levi Hart. ‘Such a work in the spirit and with the accuracy of his true religion delineated would have been an important service to the church.’ Although the Baptist theologian Caleb Evans and the Methodist surgeon William Hey of Leeds had ‘written well against Dr Priestley’, Erskine believed that ‘as yet no man has taken the field against him with the philosophical abilities of President Edwards or Dr

⁷⁵Erskine to Joseph Bellamy, 21 September 1784, JBL, 188:2938:81393.

⁷⁶Mark Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy’s New England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 42.

⁷⁷Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 15 March 1784, EUL, E.99.14.

Bellamy... or with any measure of acuteness in criticism'. Even the English bishop Samuel Horsley, whom Erskine admired as an able defender of orthodoxy against Priestley, was viewed as inept since he drew his argument almost strictly from the Church Fathers and 'only in a cursory way established the sense of two or three controverted texts'.⁷⁸ Bellamy's death was nearly as disappointing as Edwards's since there seemed to be relatively few Evangelical Calvinists remaining who could produce significant polemical tracts.

Erskine worked hard at propagating the works of Evangelical theologians such as Edwards and Bellamy because he feared that theology as a discipline was becoming less in vogue in his day than in previous centuries. Erskine told the Connecticut pastor Joseph Fish that in many parts of Scotland 'indifference to any system of doctrine orthodox or heretical, conformity to the manners of the times, aversion to a tender circumspect walk, and contempt of inward vital piety woefully gain ground'. In enlightened Scotland, Erskine continued, 'we have many greater proficientes than our forefathers in philosophy, belles letters, history, politics, and some branches of the deistical controversy', so that they 'have gained [a] high reputation by writing on these subjects'. Erskine was probably referring to authors like David Hume, William Robertson and Hugh Blair, men who had received acclaim for their works in philosophy, history and rhetoric. But for those 'who sincerely mourn such things', Erskine continued, few 'have that measure of theological knowledge, for which many of the last generation of ministers were distinguished'.⁷⁹ The same gloomy outlook was relayed to John Ryland Jr and his father. Whereas 'A bigoted zeal... whose sentiments were different as to church government... was the disease 50 years ago', now the 'disease is indifference about the most fundamental

⁷⁸Erskine to Levi Hart, 3 February 1791, HSP, Gratz MSS.

⁷⁹Erskine to Joseph Fish, 11 February 1773, Connecticut Historical Society, MS 65282.

doctrines'.⁸⁰ There was now a 'coldness of love to divine things', so that theological books were not as widely read as in previous years.⁸¹

Was Erskine right about a decreasing interest in theology? Of the 300 'theology' titles printed in Scotland by individual authors in the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC), 261 were published in the eighteenth century, a 569% increase from the previous century's production of thirty-nine.⁸² Most of that growth took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century, when there was a 153% increase over the first fifty years, from seventy-four to 187. While the 261 titles in Scotland pales by comparison to the 2,298 total number of theological works listed on the ESTC in the eighteenth century, there was a definite increase in the production of theological titles in Scotland during this period. So in terms of the number of Scottish theological texts that were printed in the eighteenth century, by comparison to the previous century, his fears were unsubstantiated.

Table 6: Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Theological Works Published in Scotland

Seventeenth Century		Eighteenth Century	
1601-1610	0	1701-1710	9
1611-1620	1	1711-1720	8
1621-1630	1	1721-1730	16
1631-1640	1	1731-1740	16
<u>1641-1650</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1741-1750</u>	<u>25</u>
1601-1650	4	1701-1750	74
1651-1660	7	1751-1760	28
1661-1670	5	1761-1770	40
1671-1680	6	1771-1780	52
1681-1690	4	1781-1790	30
<u>1691-1700</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>1791-1800</u>	<u>37</u>
1651-1700	35	1751-1800	187
1601-1700	39	1701-1800	261

⁸⁰Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 31 August 1784, EUL, E.99.14.

⁸¹Erskine to John Collett Ryland, 18 August 1781, EUL, E.99.14.

⁸²See Table 6.

If the number of theological works was growing at a healthy rate throughout the eighteenth century, why was Erskine so discouraged in his letters to the Rylands and Joseph Fish? The answer is that most of these books published in Scotland were by seventeenth-century divines whose works were reprinted in the eighteenth century. One hundred and one of the 300 titles by individual authors can be attributed to only eleven names: the Church of England clergyman and ejected minister, Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664); the philosopher and Church of Scotland minister, Hugh Binning (1627-1753); the Church of Scotland minister and theologian, Thomas Boston (1677-1732); the English Baptist and author, John Bunyan (1628-1688); the Church of England clergyman and natural philosopher, William Derham (1657-1735); the Church of Scotland minister and theologian, David Dickson (1583-1663); the Scottish Secession minister, Ralph Erskine (1685-1752); the clergyman and ejected minister, Walter Marshall (1628-1680); the naturalist and theologian, John Ray (1627-1705); and the Church of Scotland minister and political theorist, Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661). Thomas Boston alone accounted for forty-five of the 101 theological titles printed in Scotland. Erskine was right then when he complained that there were few in Scotland at that time who were accomplished theologians. The author who published the most theological texts in eighteenth-century Scotland was the Anglican clergyman James Hervey with seventeen. Thus there was reason for Erskine's concern about the lack of theological knowledge among the current ministers in Scotland.

If the outlook for the study of divinity in Scotland was bleak, Erskine was hopeful that the prospect for America's future was brighter. One of the ways that he sought to encourage the next generation of Calvinist ministers in America to study theology was to help fill the bare shelves of the impoverished colonial libraries. Since most of these budding religious institutions were struggling financially, literary donations were greatly appreciated. The College of New Jersey, for instance, between 1769 and 1775, had an annual deficit of over £800. The new school in Philadelphia did not fare much better. It had an annual debt of some £700 by 1761. The cost of

constructing buildings for student housing, classrooms and equipment often surpassed allotted budgets. The precedent set by Harvard, William and Mary and Yale had been to receive subsidised grants and endowments from their respective local governments.⁸³ Of the schools which were fortunate enough to receive grants, the College of William and Mary was the most affluent since it received £2,300 in annual income by mid-century.⁸⁴ This institution, as well as Harvard and Yale, was exempt from some of the difficulties in raising funds that the later schools of Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania, Queen's College, King's College and Dartmouth were forced to absorb.

Even though some schools fared better than others, practically all the colleges struggled with filling their library shelves. Harvard and Princeton, for example, experienced devastating fires in the 1760s and the early nineteenth century respectively, which wiped out the 5,000 and 3,000 stockpile that had been accumulated.⁸⁵ Yale's library had some 2,600 volumes by 1743, and by 1766, it could boast holdings of 4,000. But the ransacking by British troops during the Revolutionary War reduced its total to 2,700 by 1791.⁸⁶ Part of the problem of finding adequate reading material was that the American book trade was not yet established, and was much less lucrative than the publishing houses in Britain and even Ireland.⁸⁷ Erskine was aware of this situation and commented on this difficulty to John Ryland Jr. He explained that 'Even when communication with New England was open [prior to the war], books and still more single sermons or pamphlets could rarely be gotten 10 years after their publication. And American divinity books except

⁸³Beverly McAnear, 'The Raising of Funds by the Colonial Colleges', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38 (1952), 591.

⁸⁴Louis Shores, *Origins of the American College Library, 1638–1800* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1935), 4.

⁸⁵Shores, *Origins*, 15, 31–2.

⁸⁶Shores, *Origins*, 27–8.

⁸⁷Sher, *Enlightenment & the Book*, 503–11.

those reprinted in Britain, never are to be gotten in shops, and seldom in auctions.’⁸⁸

With the study of divinity waning in Scotland and the dire need for religious books in America, here was an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone: help supply the depleted colonial colleges and provide future pastors with resources for theological study.

To counteract the difficulties of keeping a school well funded and stocked, many of the new colleges sent emissaries to Britain in order to solicit money. Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Davies travelled to Britain in 1753-4 on behalf of the College of New Jersey; their tour was the model for subsequent endeavours.⁸⁹ The two collected around £3,000, which was primarily used for the construction of Nassau Hall and the president’s home. While visiting Scotland, Davies met Erskine, noting that the Scot ‘really exceeds the high Character I had heard of him for a hard Student, a growing Genius, and uncommon zeal for the public Good. In short, he promises much Service to the Church of Scotland.’⁹⁰ Erskine was fond of Davies too. While the American was raising funds, Erskine published the ‘imperfect Notes’ of Davies on 1 John 2:3, which included a preface by the Scotsman who encouraged financial donations to the College of New Jersey.⁹¹ Davies joyfully noted that this preface ‘has already had happy Effects in Braintree, and excited sundry to double their intended Benefactions’.⁹² The Earl of Leven and the Marquis of Lothian were two of the more prominent donors during this visit, but Erskine was also involved by using his time and connections to contribute to this fund-raising mission.⁹³

⁸⁸Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 14 January 1782, EUL, E.99.14.

⁸⁹McAnear, ‘Funds’, 606.

⁹⁰Samuel Davies, *The Reverend Samuel Davies Abroad: The Diary of a Journey to England and Scotland, 1753–55*, ed. George William Pilcher (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 99.

⁹¹This was Samuel Davies’s *Sermon Preached at Henrico, 29th April 1753. And at Canongate, 26th May 1754* (Edinburgh: Printed for W. Gray and W. Peter, 1754).

⁹²Davies, *Diary*, 130.

⁹³George S. Pryde, *The Scottish Universities and the Colleges of Colonial America* (Glasgow: Jackson, Son & Company, 1957), 48.

Not all of these campaigns were well received or appropriately timed. When Witherspoon was planning on travelling to Britain to raise money for the College of New Jersey, Erskine wrote to his former colleague in 1784, cautioning him that such a trip would not be fruitful. It seems as though the president of Princeton thought that he could simply appear unannounced and enjoy the same fruits as his predecessor, Samuel Davies. Erskine soberly informed his friend, ‘I am heartily concerned, such a measure was adopted without previously consulting your friends in Britain’. He went on to say that ‘everyone of whose opinion I have had access to know, disapproves it as utterly imprudent’. He gave the example of Benjamin Rush, who had written to Erskine six months ago about a man who was sent to Britain to raise funds for Dickinson College. ‘I wrote him my opinion’, Erskine warned, ‘that if he came to Scotland, he would not procure in money or books, what would defray the charge of his journey. I’m afraid the case would be the same with you.’⁹⁴ One had to be prudent in raising funds in Britain.

Harvard, although beginning to shed its orthodox skin in the seventeenth century for more liberal teachings in the eighteenth century, was not snubbed from Erskine’s benevolence. A later librarian of Harvard, Benjamin Peirce, noted that the Scottish Presbyterian presented a number of valuable books.⁹⁵ Some of the works donated are still held there: *The Life and Death of Mr. Vavasor Powell, that Faithful Minister and Confessor of Jesus Christ* (London, 1671), Jonathan Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will* (Boston, 1754), Robert Findlay’s *A Vindication of the Sacred Books and of Josephus* (Glasgow, 1770), William Hobby’s *The Happiness of a People, Having God for their Ally* (Boston, 1754), James Robertson’s *Clavis Pentateuchi* (Edinburgh, 1770) and Colin Maclaurin’s *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophical*

⁹⁴Erskine to John Witherspoon, 5 February 1784, John Witherspoon Papers, 1766–84, New Jersey Historical Society, MG 58.

⁹⁵Benjamin Peirce, *A History of Harvard University, from Its Foundation, in the Year 1636, to the Period of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Brown, Shattuck, and Company, 1833), 295.

Discoveries (London, 1748).⁹⁶ These were books that were deemed to be helpful for divinity students, whether they were about the itinerant preaching of the seventeenth-century Welsh Baptist Vavasor Powell, the Reformed philosophical theories of Jonathan Edwards, the reliability of scripture expressed by the Scottish minister Robert Findlay, the godly Commonwealth preached by William Hobby, an analysis of the Hebrew language in the Pentateuch by the Edinburgh University professor James Robertson or the natural science taught by the Scottish mathematician Colin Maclaurin.

In most cases Erskine sent unsolicited books that he thought would be valuable additions to the various college libraries. But since he knew that Edward Wigglesworth, Harvard's divinity professor, was knowledgeable on theological treatises, Erskine simply asked what titles should be given. In a letter to Wigglesworth, Erskine explained that

Dr Cumming, Mr Robertson Professor of Hebrew, Mr Millar bookseller and I spent some hours together last week in deliberating what divinity books should be sent to your library by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge. We thought it of consequence to avoid as much as possible sending you books, which you may have in another way, and therefore have jotted down a few that perhaps may not otherwise be sent you, but suspend sending any of them, till you acquaint us what of them you are not provided with and would chuse to have. I suppose you sufficiently know the character of most of the books.

The hope was that Wigglesworth would 'mention in general' the kinds of divinity books that he wanted so that Erskine could look for additional rare finds to dispatch.⁹⁷

Yale's president, Ezra Stiles, could count on regular 'pacquets' from 'that aged & learned Divine', which supplemented the school's library.⁹⁸ Between the

⁹⁶Harvard Library printed books, Provenance File, 'E'.

⁹⁷Erskine to Edward Wigglesworth, 9 May 1766, Wigglesworth Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Autograph File, 1s. (3p.).

⁹⁸Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D., President of Yale College*, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 183. See also Stiles Miscellaneous Papers, 820:35, 898:21m, 927:18, 24m, 40m; 985:43m; 1004:11m.

years of 1788 and 1795 alone, Erskine donated some 120 volumes.⁹⁹ ‘I doubt not you are laying up treasure in heaven’, Stiles wrote to thank Erskine, which was due to ‘your incessant efforts to do good in promoting the Redeemer’s cause and the interests of literature’.¹⁰⁰ Erskine was constantly on the lookout for books that could be collected for the benefit of Yale’s divinity students. On some occasions, he would write that it simply ‘occurred to me that there were valuable foreign theological books not in your library, and which it might not otherwise be like to procure’, which was reason enough to send them.¹⁰¹ At other times, he made a conscious effort to search for valuable literary gifts. ‘I have a prospect tho’ uncertain of procuring them some important foreign books’, the guarded, but optimistic, Erskine reported.

But as I am not always timeously informed of opportunities from Greenock by New York, and as my most frequent opportunities are by one whom I could not trouble with large parcels, I beg to know, if there is any person in London bookseller or merchant with whom you correspond, and whose care in forwarding large parcels you could trust.¹⁰²

Erskine suggested that if a reliable contact could be found, more books could be expected. Although occasionally he sent his own publications, the Evangelical’s modesty often led him to procure books from others first. He told Stiles that ‘Tho’ importuned to published some of my sermons, I think it a more necessary and important work to give information as to many things in the state of churches in Germany, Holland &c. which I came to know by my acquaintances with modern languages originally procured for very different purposes.’¹⁰³ Stiles was thrilled to have such a generous friend, and as a reward for his efforts, Erskine was granted an

⁹⁹Ebenezer Baldwin, *Annals of Yale College, from Its Foundation, to the Year 1831*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: B. & W. Noyes, 1838), 314.

¹⁰⁰Ezra Stiles to John Erskine, 19 April 1792, ESP, MS folder 1733.

¹⁰¹Erskine to Ezra Stiles, 20 January 1792, ESP, MS folder 1724.

¹⁰²Erskine to Ezra Stiles, 25 June 1791, ESP, MS folder 1709.

¹⁰³Erskine to Ezra Stiles, 25 June 1791, ESP, MS folder 1709.

honorary doctorate in divinity from Yale in 1788, which was gratefully acknowledged.¹⁰⁴

The College of New Jersey, or Princeton as it later became, was the beneficiary of numerous literary gifts from Erskine. The news of the ‘greatest Difficulty’ of finding books for the school’s library had reached his ears and the Scot responded accordingly.¹⁰⁵ As early as 1748, the American divine Aaron Burr was already speaking of Erskine, who ‘has been so kind as to procure us a valuable collection of books’, even though in this particular instance the fruit of his generosity was accidentally placed on board a ship to Virginia instead of New Jersey!¹⁰⁶ In writing his history of the college, John Maclean discovered that when Nassau Hall burned down in the spring of 1802, Erskine sent thirty volumes to the college library.¹⁰⁷ Some of the books included the *Reasonableness and Certainty of the Christian Religion* (London, 1698) by Cambridge’s divinity professor Robert Jenkins and works by the German Lutheran theologian and philosopher Joannes Buddaeus, an author whose writings were also donated to Yale and Dickinson College’s library.¹⁰⁸ Douglas Sloan estimates that that ‘It was probably owing in large part to his veneration of Edwards that John Erskine took a special interest in the College of New Jersey.’¹⁰⁹ But this reasoning does not account for Erskine’s patronage to other colleges, including Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth and Dickinson College.

¹⁰⁴Erskine to Ezra Stiles, 18 February 1789, ESP, MS folder 1608.

¹⁰⁵Unknown to Erskine, [1747?], University of Pennsylvania, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Misc MSS.

¹⁰⁶Aaron Burr to Philip Doddridge, 24 November 1748, TPC, Ch.A.3.51.

¹⁰⁷John Maclean, *History of the College of New Jersey: From Its Origin in 1746 to the Commencement of 1854*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1877), 49–50.

¹⁰⁸For a full, but difficult to read transcription of the list donated to Princeton, see ‘Donations in Books and Apparatus Received for the Use of the College of New Jersey since it was Consumed by Fire, 1802-1822, 1850-1853’, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University.

¹⁰⁹Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971), 72.

Although Witherspoon's library of some 300 volumes was considered a significant addition to Princeton when he became its president, this collection represents only a fraction of the almost 4,000 titles sold from Erskine's personal library at the time of his death.¹¹⁰ Some of the books in Witherspoon's holdings were in fact a going-away present from Erskine and the Edinburgh bookseller, Alexander Kincaid.¹¹¹ Rush was aware of this potential literary supply and wrote to Witherspoon on 29 December 1767 hoping that the Paisley minister could convince Erskine to donate his holdings to the College of New Jersey. 'His library I am told is very valuable, and contains a number of books in the Oriental languages', Rush responded, and if 'we can prevail upon him to leave even this itself to the College, the acquisition will be valuable.'¹¹² After British soldiers ransacked the college library during the Revolutionary War, Witherspoon cried out for help to his Scottish friend. Writing to Walter Minto on 24 May 1788, the president of Princeton informed the mathematics professor that 'I mentioned to Dr Erskine my Intention of applying to the many Scot Authors now in Life with the greatest part of whom I was personally acquainted in early Life begging that they would present our College Library with their Works.' Such a blessing 'would be a great Addition to our Stock & is the more needed that Several of them which we had bought before the War were carried off so that except what is in my own Library I do not recollect that we have any of them at all'.¹¹³ The library at Princeton was in dire need of new acquisitions, and Witherspoon's personal collection was insufficient to correct this problem.

¹¹⁰*Catalogue of the Library of the Late John Erskine of Carnock, D. D.*, 1811, University of Aberdeen, Special Collections, MN.10.208. The list of works auctioned did not include the 'considerable collection of Books in the Dutch and German Languages'.

¹¹¹See Witherspoon letter to Rush, 18 May 1768 in L.H. Butterfield, *John Witherspoon Comes to America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 75.

¹¹²Benjamin Rush, *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, ed. L.H. Butterfield, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 48.

¹¹³Luther Eisenhart, 'Walter Minto and the Earl of Buchan', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 94 (1950), 290.

Princeton also benefited indirectly by the books it acquired from Erskine's literary donations to Samuel Miller, a New York clergymen who was later appointed in 1813 as the professor of church history at the newly formed Princeton Theological Seminary. When it was learned that Miller had delayed publishing his *Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century* (1803), Erskine gave rare German and Dutch volumes in order to 'contribute... to its improvement'.¹¹⁴ In another letter to Miller, Erskine again sent more German books, explaining that he believed it was his 'duty to send them' because of the information that they contained.¹¹⁵ Even when he was close to death, Erskine was sending Miller books. 'Tho' my rheumatic pains much disable me from writing', Erskine told Miller, 'I would not let slip the opportunity of... sending a box [of books] for Princeton Colledge.'¹¹⁶ Princeton certainly owed Erskine a debt of gratitude.

Charles Nisbet's connection with Dickinson College gave Erskine an ample enough reason to mail books periodically to his friend for personal reading, to build up the school's infant library and to provide reading material for divinity students. In a letter to Nisbet in 1787, Erskine sent at least a dozen books, mostly German and Dutch works, which were used for research purposes in his later *Sketches and Hints of Church History*.¹¹⁷ Samuel Miller even found evidence that Erskine had planned on bequeathing Dickinson 'a large part of his library'. But since Nisbet died shortly after his fellow Scot, it appears as though Erskine's family never followed through with this pledge.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴Erskine to Samuel Miller, 27 September 1802, Samuel Miller Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University, C0277.

¹¹⁵Erskine to Samuel Miller, 31 December 1801, Samuel Miller Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University, C0277.

¹¹⁶Erskine to Samuel Miller, 13 January 1803?, Samuel Miller Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University, C0277, 13 January 1803?

¹¹⁷See Erskine to Charles Nisbet, 23 May 1787, JDP, MC 2001.13.

¹¹⁸Samuel Miller, *Memoir of the Rev. Charles Nisbet, D.D., Late President of Dickinson College, Carlisle* (New York: Robert Carter, 1840), 296.

Eleazar Wheelock, the founder of a school for educating American Indians which became Dartmouth College, received numerous literary acquisitions from Erskine. Dick Hoefinagel and Virginia L. Close list twenty-two books in the college's library from Edinburgh by 1764, the majority of those being donated through Erskine's efforts.¹¹⁹ One of the known donations included *Conciones Quaedam Miscellaneae* (Amsterdam, 1654) by the seventeenth-century Dutch Calvinist minister Caspar Streso. The book bears the inscription on the front free endpaper: 'The Gift of the Revd. Mr. John Erskine of Edinburgh.' A second book, *An Exposition upon the Prophet Jonah* (London, 1613) by the devoted Calvinist and early seventeenth-century Archbishop of Canterbury George Abbot, contained the inscription on the title page, 'The Gift of Revd. Mr. John Erskine of Edinburgh, received June 1764.'¹²⁰ The generous Presbyterian also tried to use his influence to secure a publisher for Wheelock's *A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Original Design, Rise, Progress and Present State of the Indian Charity-School at Lebanon, in Connecticut*.¹²¹

But at some point, Erskine determined that the direction of Dartmouth seemed to be veering away from its original purpose, which was to provide a Christian education for the American Indians. Writing to John Ryland Jr in the summer of 1795, the Edinburgh minister stated that 'My opinion of Wheelock's Indian School is by no means favorable. Mr Whitefield was originally one of his firmest friends, but when the school was transferred from Lebanon, Connecticut to New Hampshire, and the charter for Dartmouth Colledge procured, Mr Whitfield thought he was sacrificing the welfare of the Indian School [for] the ambition of being head of a colledge.'

¹¹⁹Dick Hoefinagel and Virginia L. Close, 'Charles N. Haskins and the Woodward Room at Baker Library', *Dartmouth College Library Bulletin* 39 (1998), 22; David McClure and Elijah Parish, *Memoirs of the Rev. Eleazar Wheelock, D.D., Founder and President of Dartmouth College and Moor's Charity School; with a Summary History of the College and School* (Newburyport, MA: Edward Little & Co., 1811), 37.

¹²⁰I am indebted to the detective work of Sarah Hartwell and the library staff at Dartmouth College for these finds.

¹²¹Erskine to Eleazar Wheelock, 15 August 1765, Dartmouth College Library, MS, 765465.1.

Erskine added, 'I never learned that any of those educated at Wheelock's Indian School turned out useful except Mr [Samson] Occom and Mr [Samuel] Kirkland and I much doubt if either of these had the zeal and other qualifications of an Elliot or a Brainerd.'¹²² There is no indication that Erskine continued to support Dartmouth College after the 1760s because he believed that it was not fulfilling its original mission to educate and equip students for God's work.

With more and more individuals and establishments receptive to Erskine's literary generosity, and with a growing concern about unorthodoxy and indifference to true religion, he determined to gain a greater depth of theological knowledge by learning to read Dutch and German at the ripe old age of sixty. He was already familiar with the Netherlands since his father and grandfather were two of the many Scots who studied law at Leiden and Utrecht.¹²³ Further, Erskine and his family were well acquainted with ministers of the Scots Church of Rotterdam such as Hugh Kennedy.¹²⁴ For his part, Erskine played a crucial role in helping to elect Evangelical ministers for this English-speaking Dutch church. Contrary to A. L. Drummond's contention that the Rotterdam church attempted on many occasions to employ Erskine as a pastor, the Edinburgh minister's responsibility was as the chief clerical headhunter, in charge of replacing their clergymen, and not as a candidate himself.¹²⁵ From 1759 until close to the time of his death in 1803, Erskine was instrumental in the appointment of William Walker, Archibald Smith, James Somerville, Alexander Scot, Maurice Ritchie, Thomas Ross and William MacPhail as successive ministers of

¹²²Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 18 June 1795, EUL, E.99.14.

¹²³See Andrew L. Drummond, *The Kirk and the Continent* (Edinburgh, The Saint Andrew Press, 1956), 147 and N. T. Phillipson, 'Lawyers, Landowners and the Civic Leadership of Post-Union Scotland', *Juridical Review* 21 (1976), 107.

¹²⁴See Gerardus Meerman to John Erskine Sr, 27 December 1750, Westreenianum, Meerman Archives, The Hague, Museum Meermanno, MS 258/11g-120 and John Erskine Sr to Gerardus Meerman, 1 July 1751, Westreenianum, Meerman Archives, The Hague, Museum Meermanno, MS 258/121-122.

¹²⁵Drummond, *Kirk and Continent*, 156-7.

the Scots Church at Rotterdam.¹²⁶ By using his influence in this way, he was able to secure orthodox clergymen to a prestigious charge and thus help to sustain Evangelical Calvinism in the Netherlands.

While maintaining his relationship with the Rotterdam church, Erskine discovered that the Netherlands was a rich source for theological works. Since Margaret Gray did not commission books from Holland, he had to pursue alternative means.¹²⁷ He discovered that the Canongate bookseller, William Laing, purchased texts from Dutch booksellers and then these merchants found Laing works from Germany. By having too many middlemen, however, the cost of bringing over these foreign gems raised the price to unjustifiable figures. Erskine found it more economical to deal directly with booksellers in the Netherlands, such as W. Bennet of Rotterdam, or by ordering from the catalogues of B. Wild and J. Altheer of Utrecht. Using his new linguistic skills, Erskine could send or recommend correspondents books such as Bernhardus De Moor's *Commentarius Perpetuus in J. Marckii Compendium Theologiae Christianae Didactico-Elencticum* (Leiden, 1761-78), which Erskine judged to be the 'longest and latest Calvinist system I know'. Although it was 'not equally ingenious or judicious with Stapfer, and contains many things which might have been omitted', Erskine asserted that in it there were 'many valuable interpretations of scripture, and reasonings on points of theology from foreign books little known here'.¹²⁸ Having access to additional Reformed titles, albeit in a foreign language, was nonetheless useful for Erskine's literary outlets, providing them a different perspective on aspects of Calvinism.

¹²⁶See William Steven, *The History of the Scottish Church, Rotterdam* (Dublin, London and Rotterdam: W. Curry, Whittaker and Van der Meer, 1833), 201-44; Archives of the Scots Church Rotterdam, Gemeentearchief Rotterdam, MS 24; Scots Church at Rotterdam Minutes, West Register House, RH4/17/2.

¹²⁷Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 4 February 1794, EUL, E.99.14.

¹²⁸Erskine to John Ryland Jr, [1?] October 1793, EUL, E.99.14.

On one occasion Erskine added an unnamed Dutch book with his letter on 13 May 1789 to Ryland Jr, who reported his finding to another notable Baptist. ‘Well, Mr. Carey,’ Ryland began, ‘you remember [how] I laughed at you when I heard of your learning Dutch; for I thought you would never have any use for that language: but now I have the first opportunity of profiting by it. I have received a parcel from Dr. Erskine, of Edinburgh, who has long been used to send me any interesting publications which he receives from America, or which have been printed in Scotland.’ Ryland explained to the Baptist missionary William Carey that this new acquisition ‘is a volume of sermons written by a Divine now living in Holland; at the end of which is a Dissertation on the Call of the Gospel, which, if any friend of mine or Mr. [Andrew] Fuller’s understands the language sufficiently to translate it for us, he should be glad to see.’ ‘Now’, continued Ryland, ‘if you will translate this Dissertation for me, I will give you the whole book.’ Ryland recounted that Carey ‘soon brought me a good Dissertation on the subject, and, afterwards, an extraordinary Sermon on Hosea, Chap. iii, which, doubtless, [was] translated from this book’.¹²⁹ This anecdote provides one example of the effectiveness of the Dutch books that Erskine collected for the benefit of other Evangelical Calvinists.¹³⁰

With his knowledge of the language and his connections with booksellers in Holland, Erskine was able to maintain relationships with Dutch natives and discuss the latest theological ideas. He was, for instance, well acquainted with several of the professors at the University of Utrecht, such as William Laurence Brown and Gijsbert Bonnet, and often sent American and British texts to the latter with the hope that they would be translated into Dutch. Bonnet, a man ‘of great learning and zeal’ and ‘the only clerical correspondent on the continent who would relish what relates to the controversy on the extent of the gospel call’, was Professor of Divinity at Utrecht and

¹²⁹John Ryland, *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope, Illustrated; in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (Charlestown: Samuel Etheridge, 1818), 148-9.

¹³⁰See also Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 13 May 1789, EUL, E.99.14.

one of Erskine's contacts for gaining insight into the theological treatises published in the Netherlands. Bonnet's interest in Calvinistic soteriology led Erskine to send him publications from the Evangelical Baptists: Andrew Fuller, Robert Hall and John Ryland Jr.¹³¹

Besides Bonnet and other Dutch professors, Erskine also maintained contact with a society in the Netherlands that was dedicated to the defence of orthodoxy. When a *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1782) was translated into Dutch in 1784, a book by Joseph Priestley who suggested that Christianity was tarnished over the centuries from its purest form, many of the Reformed ministers in the Netherlands became alarmed about the influence of this work.¹³² The synod of the province of South Holland debated the potential impact of this bold piece at Dordrecht between 5 and 15 July 1785, and from this meeting a society was proposed to defend Reformed Christianity from such publications. But instead of waiting for such a society to materialise, five of the synod members formed that same year The Hague Society for the Defence of Christianity against Its Present Day Adversaries, which offered a prize for the best essay that refuted Priestley.¹³³ Erskine was aware of this organisation and the effects of heterodoxy on the continent. 'Socinianism has been spreading rapidly in Germany especially in the Prussian dominions', he told Ryland Jr on 20 February 1789, and 'Holland was in danger by Dutch translations of some of the most dangerous German and English books.'¹³⁴ But he was somewhat consoled by his

¹³¹Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 31 August 1789, EUL, E.99.14.

¹³²Paul E. A. van Gestel, 'Coleridge, Priestley and Dissent', in C. C. Barfoot (ed.), *A Natural Delineation of Human Passions': The Historic Moment of Lyrical Ballads* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 131.

¹³³Judith Frishman, 'The Jews' Refusal to Believe 19th Century Dutch Polemics Concerning the Jews and Their Fate', in Judit Targarona Borrás and Angel Saenz-Badillos (eds.), *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the 6th EAJS Congress, Toledo, July 1998: Volume II: Judaism from the Renaissance to Modern Times* (Leiden, Boston and Köln: Brill, 1999), 293. The society continued to reward prize-winning essays until 1967, with the first few aimed at Priestley.

¹³⁴Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 20 February 1789, EUL, E.99.14.

belief that the Netherlands had ‘supplied excellent antidotes’ to combat this ‘infection’, a programme in which the Hague Society participated.

In order to assist the newly-formed Hague Society for Defending Christianity, Erskine became a corresponding member in 1790. He was ‘deeply sensible of the honour’ conferred on him by this ‘good cause’. The way in which he sought to contribute was by sending what he perceived to be the best British and American books that successfully countered heterodoxy. In his letter to the society on 3 November 1790, Erskine included the American polemical works, Jonathan Edwards Jr’s *The Salvation of All Men Strictly Examined* (1790) and Stephen Johnson’s *The Everlasting Punishment of the Ungodly, Illustrated and Evinced to be a Scripture Doctrine* (1786), both arguing against Charles Chauncy’s stance on universal salvation; Caleb Evans’s *Christ Crucified; or the Scripture Doctrine of the Atonement Briefly Illustrated and Defended* (1789) and two copies of William Hey’s *Short Defence of the Doctrine of Atonement for Sin by the Death of Christ* (Leeds, 1774, and Edinburgh, 1789), texts that were directed against the heterodoxy of Joseph Priestley; along with several other titles that defended orthodox interpretations of the atonement and Christian faith.¹³⁵ Erskine hoped that God would ‘prosper the pious efforts’ of this society because he believed that it was well designed for the defence of Christianity on the continent.

Erskine again sent books to the Hague Society with his letter on 23 September 1793. These were primarily British publications, ‘in which purity of doctrine is attacked or defended’, and which were perhaps not easily accessible in the

¹³⁵Two copies of Ambrose Serle’s *Address to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity* (1772); David Bogue’s *The Great Importance of Having Right Sentiments in Religion* (1788); Erskine’s own *Sketches and Hints of Church History, and Theological Controversy*, vol 1 (1790); *Display of the Orthodoxy of Dr McGill’s Practical Essay* (1789), written by a ‘Member of the last General Assembly’, and James Moir’s *A Distinct and Impartial Account of the Process for Socinian Heresy against William McGill* (1790), the two of which ‘give a pretty full view of Dr McGill’s errors’; Thomas Walker’s *A Vindication of the Discipline and Constitutions of the Church of Scotland, for Preserving Purity of Doctrine* (1774), which ‘well defends the importance of purity of doctrine, and the usefulness of formulas for defending that purity’; and Peter Allinga’s *The Satisfaction of Christ, Stated and Defended, against the Socinians... Faithfully Translated from the Dutch, by Thomas Bell* (1790). Erskine to the Hague Society for Defending Christianity, 3 November 1790, The Laing Collection, EUL, La.II.587.

Netherlands. Topping the list was Andrew Fuller's *Calvinistic and Socinian Systems Examined and Compared, as to their Moral Tendency* (1793). Even though the Englishmen Samuel Badcock, Bishop Samuel Horsley and Edward William Whitaker 'have displayed more eloquence and learning in their answers to Dr Priestley', Erskine assured the society that 'no book published in Britain is known to me, in which the dangerous influence of Socinianism on the temper and conduct is so ably demonstrated' as Fuller's contribution.¹³⁶ By forwarding this work to the Hague Society and also to Professor Gijsbert Bonnet of Utrecht, Erskine later told John Ryland Jr that he hoped it would be translated into Dutch and be useful for the propagation of Evangelical Calvinism.¹³⁷ Second was *Jesus Christ God-Man: or, the Constitution of Christ's Person, with the Evidence and Importance of the Doctrine of His True and Proper Godhead* (1719, republished in 1790) by the English Independent minister John Guyse. This new edition included a preface by the Relief Presbytery minister James Ramsay 'where zeal for truth and just remarks on the progress of error, are mixed with observations less accurate, and more bitter than could be wished'. Despite its deficiencies, Erskine stated that it was 'much esteemed' and that it was 'now difficult to procure any' copies of it. Four other German theological treatises were added, which he wondered whether the society might already possess but reasoned that 'it better that you should have two copies than none'.¹³⁸ In all, the Evangelical disseminator included close to twenty works with his two letters. He continued to track this Dutch society, for in his correspondence to John Ryland Jr on 30 March 1800, Erskine wrote that 'I am happy that notwithstanding the political revolution in Holland, the Hague Society are as zealous as

¹³⁶See Erskine to the Hague Society for Defending Christianity, 23 September 1793, The Laing Collection, EUL, La.II.587.

¹³⁷Erskine to John Ryland Jr, [1?] October 1793, EUL, E.99.14.

¹³⁸Erskine to the Hague Society for Defending Christianity, 23 September 1793, The Laing Collection, EUL, La.II.587. Erskine's poor handwriting and the quality of this letter make it difficult to identify the titles of these works.

ever in publishing prize dissertations against the dangerous errors of the German Reformers.¹³⁹ There can be no doubt that this organization was supported because of its desire to be a guardian of orthodox Calvinism.

Erskine's Dutch contacts were useful correspondents, but his 'chief information as to the state of religion' on the continent came from German and Dutch literary journals.¹⁴⁰ Erskine kept current with *Gemeinnützig Betrachtungen der Neueften Schriften...* and *Beylage zu den Gemeinnützigen Betrachtungen...* and *Theologisch-kritische Betrachtungen der Neueften Schriften* by George Frederic Seiler, the divinity professor at Erlangen, as well as professor H.M.G. Köster of Geissen's *Religions Begebenheiten*, which alerted him to the threat of the Illuminati.¹⁴¹ Erskine was already familiar with the German philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Christian Wolff since he was sending Joseph Bellamy titles like Ludwig Phillipp Thüemmig's *Institutiones philosophiae Wolffianae* (1725-6) as early as 1755 in order to explain this system to his American friend.¹⁴² But by the last two decades of the century, being one of the few Evangelicals in Scotland who could read German, he was able to track the influence of men like Immanuel Kant and passed this knowledge on to others in Britain and America. Ezra Stiles, for instance, received a letter on 15 September 1794 in which he learned from Erskine that Kant's philosophy was 'making almost as many proselytes in Germany as Leibniz's did forty or fifty years ago', and John Robison, Professor of Natural History at Edinburgh University, knew who in Scotland had the best German journals outlining Kant's philosophy.¹⁴³ By learning German and Dutch, Erskine opened himself up to further

¹³⁹Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 30 March 1800, EUL, E.99.14.

¹⁴⁰Erskine to John Ryland Jr 31 August 1789, EUL, E.99.14.

¹⁴¹See Erskine to Charles Nisbet, 23 May 1787, JDP, MC 2001.13 and Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 1 September 1800, EUL, E.99.14.

¹⁴²On Wolff, see George Becker, 'Pietism's Confrontation with Enlightenment Rationalism: An Examination of the Relation between Ascetic Protestantism and Science', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (1991), 139–58.

¹⁴³Erskine to Ezra Stiles, 15 September 1794, ESP, MS folder 1759. See the end of John Robison's letter to Erskine, 19 July 1800, Morse Family Papers, 1779–1868, SML, MS 358.

theological resources which he could be used to enlighten his British and American friends as well as aspiring colonial ministers.

As an enlightened bibliophile, Erskine was the leading disseminator of Evangelical Calvinism in the eighteenth century. He was heavily involved with the book trade, advising various publishers on what to print and editing the works of some of the foremost Evangelicals in Britain, America and the continent. His correspondents could count on a regular supply of literature to which he wanted 'no remittance in money for any of them'.¹⁴⁴ If there was a specific title or theme on religion to be had, Erskine was the person whom they sought. When Samuel Hopkins wanted to read John Berridge's *The Christian World Unmasked* (1773), a book about the Evangelical conversion and theological stance of an Anglican clergyman, Hopkins petitioned the Edinburgh minister in 1774, saying that he had 'no way to come at it, at present, unless by your assistance'.¹⁴⁵ Erskine's expertise in the book trade and broad resources made him especially useful for sending literature to his various outlets.

There was a pattern in the kinds of works that Erskine propagated. Regardless of an author's denominational affiliations, he typically endorsed literature by Calvinists – American, British or European – whether it was early in Erskine's life, when he was studying Puritan thought, or later when he was advancing more current pieces. Erskine seemed to favour the writers who presented a rational form of orthodoxy, as evidenced by the works that he forwarded by men like the Swiss Reformed theologians Johann Friedrich Stapfer and Daniel Wytttenbach, those by the Geneva Academy theologian Jean-Alphonse Turretin or the natural theology of the Congregationalist Thomas Ridgley. Sometimes Erskine sent books to fulfil his friends' requests, as in the case of Jonathan Edwards, while at other times it was to encourage other theologically-minded Evangelicals to combat heresy. He had no qualms about posting questionable texts by such authors as Edward Harwood,

¹⁴⁴Erskine to John Ryland Jr, 7 June 1782, EUL, E.99.14.

¹⁴⁵Samuel Hopkins to Erskine, 28 December 1774, HSP, Gratz MSS.

Theophilus Lindsey or Joseph Priestley if there was the chance that an Evangelical correspondent would be aroused to vindicate Reformed orthodoxy through print. Individuals were not the only ones who benefited, for several colonial American colleges as well as European establishments were given regular allotments. But throughout the eighteenth century, Erskine's motive in his role as disseminator remained the same: to enlighten his recipients with the most current religious works in order to strengthen Evangelicalism and spread the gospel message.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

How should one sum up Erskine's contribution to Evangelicalism? Starting from his early years, he was educated at Edinburgh University, a key institution for transmitting Enlightenment epistemology. Here, Erskine was taught that Locke's empirical method had trumped the scholastic pedagogy of Aristotle. Since mankind did not have innate knowledge, one needed to test the reliability of ideas by observation and experiment. A. T. B. McGowan's opinion that the Age of Enlightenment 'should not be regarded as a positive force for the establishment and strengthening of orthodoxy' since it was 'a period of darkness' in which the Church was led 'into its greatest departure from its orthodox roots and received theology', besides being inaccurate, was clearly not Erskine's standpoint.¹ The progressive thought espoused in the Age of Reason informed his outlook as an Evangelical Christian. Even though some of his classmates, Moderates such as William Robertson, viewed the ecstatic revivals at Cambuslang and Kilsyth as fanatical displays of enthusiasm, Erskine argued that the 'uncommon melting' of the converts was the natural outcome of the work of the Holy Spirit and not an unreasonable exhibition of emotion. The same type of contrast between the Moderates and Erskine can also be illustrated in their perception of the emotional preacher George Whitefield. Whereas Robertson and other Moderates viewed the Anglican itinerant as a propagator of enthusiasm, Erskine saw Whitefield as an instrument of God. The fact that Robertson and Erskine were trained to appreciate the epistemology of the

¹A.T.B. McGowan, 'Evangelicalism in Scotland from Knox to Cunningham', in Michael A. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (eds.), *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 79.

Age of Reason did not necessitate that they would come to the same conclusion regarding Christianity. The combination of his education and his witnessing the revivals at Cambuslang and Kilsyth led to Erskine's abandonment of a lucrative career as a lawyer for the unassuming office of the pastorate. This unusual choice for a high-born Scot to become a minister can only be explained if Erskine saw no discrepancy between Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment.

While much of the secondary literature by Alexander Broadie, Charles Camic, Anand Chitnis and Richard Sher can sincerely praise the Moderates as patrons of the Scottish Enlightenment, they were not the only contributors to the intellectual climate of the day.² As Ned Landsman and John McIntosh have shown, Evangelicals like Erskine were also full participants.³ Confirmation that Erskine was not opposed to the prevailing thought of the age can be seen in his writings. As a preacher, Erskine focused on teaching 'practical religion' and 'sound morality', which was based upon 'an extensive and enlightened acquaintance, both with scriptural doctrine, and with the conduct of human life'.⁴ This was a far cry from the anti-intellectual, doom-and-gloom homilies that Leslie Stephen equated with Evangelical preaching.⁵ Erskine's sermons were short and simple, markedly different from the longer, repetitious discourses of former sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divines. Regardless of the

²Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 113-18; Charles Camic, *Experience and Enlightenment: Socialization for Cultural Change in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983); Anand Chitnis *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London: Croom Helm, 1976) 43-70; *Church*.

³Ned C. Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740-1775', in John Dwyer and Richard B. Sher (eds.), *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1993), 120-49; John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740-1800* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998).

⁴*Erskine*, 380-1.

⁵Sir Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 (New York: Harbinger, 1962), 364.

accuracy of Thomas Sommerville's and Charles Rodgers McCain's assessment that Erskine's style of preaching surpassed the discourses of some of the Moderates, William Blaikie was surely right when he said that Erskine's sermons outshone those of many of the Seceders and seventeenth-century divines.⁶ Erskine believed that in order for the gospel message to be attractive in the urbane eighteenth century, the style of the former seventeenth-century discourses needed to be updated.

The 'Rise of Moral Paganism' that Peter Gay characterises as the resurgence of classical philosophy during the Age of Enlightenment has proven to be not so pagan after all, especially when considering the work of David Allan, John Dwyer and Ingrid Merikoski who have cogently argued that Stoicism was ingrained in the teachings of many Scottish ministers alongside their Christian beliefs.⁷ Yet that which is missing in modern scholarship is an analysis of the influence of Stoicism on Scottish Evangelicals. Erskine was not opposed to the moral teachings of the Stoics, who were so revered by other leading eighteenth-century intellectual figures like Voltaire, Diderot, Francis Hutcheson, William Robertson and Hugh Blair. But unlike many of the *philosophes* and other Scottish ministers, Erskine advocated a kind of Stoicism that was subordinate to the gospel message which was considered to be the essential element in a sermon. The Stoic themes that he included in his discourses –

⁶Thomas Somerville, *My Own Life and Times, 1741–1814* (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1861), 61–2; Charles Rodgers McCain, 'Preaching in Eighteenth Century Scotland: A Comparative Study of the Extant Sermons of Ralph Erskine (1685–1752), John Erskine (1721–1803), and Hugh Blair (1718–1800)', PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1949; William Garden Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland from the Sixth to the Nineteenth Century: Twelfth Series of the Cunningham Lectures* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888), 238.

⁷Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977); David Allan, 'Reconciliation and Retirement in the Restoration Scottish Church: The Neo-Stoicism of Robert Leighton', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50 (1999), 251–78 and *Philosophy and Politics in Later Stuart Scotland: Neo-Stoicism, Culture and Ideology in an Age of Crisis, 1540–1690* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000); John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1987); Ingrid Ann Merikoski, 'Christian Stoicism and Politeness: The Making of the Social Ethics of the Scottish Enlightenment', PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1999.

happiness through contentment, the harmful effects of materialism, accepting one's lot in life, working for the benefit of society and true virtue – were only appropriate if they supplemented the primary message of the salvation accomplished through Christ's death on the cross.

But Erskine's style and content were not so innovative that he deviated from the orthodox content espoused by Calvinists of the previous centuries. G. D. Henderson was not wrong to include Erskine in his chapter on 'Puritanism in Eighteenth-Century Scotland'.⁸ Humanity continued to be in a fallen state and in need of salvation from its sinful nature. While other British clergymen were preaching the optimistic message that mankind was spiritually healthy and need only tap into their own good nature to assist God in the soteriological process, Erskine remained committed to the Calvinistic teaching of total depravity. Imputed righteousness, though a doctrine that was waning in the thought of other eighteenth-century divines, was vigorously defended by him. Erskine, however, was not rigid in his Calvinism. Although championing the doctrine of election, that God purposely decreed to save only a select number of people, he argued that Christ's death as the means of salvation was sufficient for all people and so the gospel message should be preached without discrimination. In most of his sermons, there was a call to receive Christ's offer of salvation. This moderate and optimistic form of Calvinism was much less stringent than the high doctrine of other Reformed ministers at that time and was characteristic of other Evangelical Calvinists of the eighteenth century who were influenced by the culture of the Enlightenment.

⁸G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1957), 139-50.

Erskine's theological discourses also demonstrated his acceptance of Enlightenment epistemology. As opposed to his sermons, in Erskine's treatises he was willing to experiment with his ideas. In his theory on the treaty between Yahweh and the Israelites at Mount Sinai, Erskine proposed that spiritual blessings were not a condition of this covenant. Instead, it was simply a contract between an employer and an employee whereby if the Israelites obeyed the law, they should expect material prosperity. It was only through the new covenant in Christ that believers were given spiritual blessings. Erskine's thesis on the Mosaic Covenant was a striking divergence from what most Scottish Presbyterian ministers were teaching at that time. The covenant theology taught by the Puritans in which the prosperity of the whole of a nation was dependent on its morality was rejected. Even the Moderates, who were assumed to be the most progressive advocates of the Age of Reason, continued to preach jeremiad-type sermons in which God's wrath would be poured out on a nation for its moral failures. Erskine, however, contended that it was only coincidental if natural disasters or wars fell on a nation as a result of its moral depravity. In this way, Erskine was more in line with the individualism that was so common during the eighteenth century than the corporate federal theology of the Puritans.

Even Erskine's treatise in which he proposed more frequent communicating in the Church of Scotland revealed his willingness to deviate from the normal practices of church tradition. He complained to Thomas Foxcroft that something as simple as changing the tempo of the singing of the Psalms in a church service met resistance at that time. Nevertheless, if Erskine believed that change was necessary for the spiritual vitality of the Church as a whole, he was willing to voice his sentiments, either in speech or in his writings. From his study of scripture, he concluded that the Lord's Supper should be offered perhaps as frequently as once a week. This was a

radical suggestion considering that communion at that time was typically practised only once or twice a year in each parish.⁹

Erskine's experimental theology, however, was not an adulteration of his Calvinistic heritage. So while he presented his idea of faith as being a form of intellectual assent, he would not concede that the volition was in any way involved in the soteriological process, even if other Evangelicals were prepared to make some concessions in this regard. Nor was he willing to align himself entirely with the view of faith proposed by Robert Sandeman, who vehemently denied that works were necessary for believers to demonstrate the sincerity of their faith. Erskine followed the pattern set by John Locke in his *Reasonableness of Christianity* that faith was logical, and need not be a form of enthusiasm if the mind was presented with overwhelming evidence to convince it that the proposition that Jesus Christ was the Son of God was a reliable statement. Faith, however, was not simply a theoretical exercise within the mind. One needed to demonstrate faith actively through good works, which proved one's sincerity. Thus there was a blending of the principles of the intellectualism of the age with traditional Calvinism among Scottish Evangelicals in the way that David Bebbington has outlined.¹⁰ The Holy Spirit 'enlightens' the mind with the truth of who Jesus is and the intellect accepts this information as conclusive since it is thorough evidence. The natural outcome for a person who accepts this truth is to demonstrate this faith by doing charitable acts as a testament to this newfound revelation.

For Erskine, Evangelicalism was a reasonable form of faith, and not based on superstition. Christians need not be ignorant or deny the rigorous intellectual pursuit

⁹John Erskine, 'An Attempt to Promote the Frequent Dispensing of the Lord's Supper', in *TD*, 242-3.

¹⁰David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge 2005), 63-5.

of knowledge, for God had made mankind with the ability to reason. This view surfaced in Erskine's discourse, *The Law of Nature Sufficiently Promulgated to the Heathens*. Here he argued that humans were created by God with the ability to wield reason in order to discover the existence of an all-powerful being. Special revelation was not needed in this case to know that God exists since one could observe from the natural order that there must be a first cause in which all creation finds its origin. This awareness of God was not innate since it came from *a posteriori* analysis of nature itself. Again, Erskine was integrating current epistemology with Calvinism.

Henry May's thesis, that there were a number of different Enlightenments, is helpful in understanding the kind of Enlightenment that Erskine adopted. The 'Moderate Enlightenment', as May calls the period of time from 1688 to 1787, was when Christian thinkers sought to use the ideas of Locke and Newton to bolster Christianity. God had created mankind with the ability to reason and expected his creation to utilise this resource to formulate their beliefs. Like Locke, Erskine was arguing against blind enthusiasm and superstition. Locke believed that the existence of God was certain and logical, and that scripture was reasonable. Knowledge came from experience, not innate ideas. Knowledge obtained directly from God, however, should be believed without questioning its validity. It was simply unfathomable to Locke, or enlightened Christians such as Erskine, that divine revelation would be contrary to reason.¹¹ Biblical prophecy, miracles and the expansion of Christianity in the western world despite overwhelming odds proved the reliability of Christianity and its reasonableness. Erskine, in the same way as Locke, believed that Christianity – its doctrines and the Bible – would be verified by an intellectual investigation. The

¹¹Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 11.

subsequent reality of Locke's epistemology, however, became a launching pad for deism, scepticism, and a resurgence of Arminianism and Arianism. Instead of being confirmed by reason, the Bible was now on trial and had to prove its own trustworthiness apart from the assumption that it was God's revelation.

If Erskine is placed within this Moderate Enlightenment camp, this explains how he could be both an enlightened Evangelical in the way that Bebbington has described yet also the 'primitive saint' that Boswell had in mind.¹² In his Edinburgh University essay, Erskine was writing against the deists, the early rationalist proponents in the Age of Reason. To him, the deists were 'absurd'. 'For they demand such kind of proofs on behalf of the truth of the Christian religion as the nature of the matter does not admit, and they persistently require a mathematical demonstration, which in such matters could never be held.'¹³ The deists, however influential they were as opponents to traditional orthodoxy, were not a long-lasting faction. By 1790 Edmund Burke could ask, 'Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves Free Thinkers?'¹⁴ It was precisely this question of what it meant to be a true 'free thinker' that was the subject of Erskine's 1737 essay in John Stevenson's logic class at Edinburgh University. Erskine then was an early enlightened figure, building his religion on the epistemology of Locke and placing great confidence in the congruence of the Bible and reason.

Erskine recognised the lack of interest in the theological disputes of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when he was preparing Jonathan

¹²James Boswell, *Boswell: The Ominous Years, 1774–1776*, eds. Charles Ryskamp and Frederick A. Pottle (Melbourne, London and Toronto: William Heinemann, 1963), 169.

¹³John Erskine, 'Notes from Lectures', 30 April 1737, EUL, Dc.4.54.

¹⁴Quoted by May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 22.

Edwards's *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects* (1793) for publication.¹⁵ The governmental theory of Grotius, the natural philosophy of Newton and the latitudinarianism of Tillotson did not hold the same weight for divinity students at the end of the eighteenth century as they did at the beginning of the century. Erskine's defence of Christianity was modelled on that of the early Enlightenment thinkers so that by the time that David Hume's scepticism and Thomas Reid's common sense philosophy were gaining ground, Erskine was looked upon as a classical enlightened minister by his contemporaries. This view of Erskine as an early enlightened figure, explains why Sir Walter Scott could write in *Guy Mannering* that his former pastor's sermon was one in which 'the Calvinism of the Kirk of Scotland was ably supported, yet made the basis of a sound system of practical morals'.¹⁶ Erskine continued to read and promote the latest enlightened works, but his own thought was committed to that period of time that May has dubbed the Moderate Enlightenment.

In all his theories and beliefs, Erskine's judgment was formed from reading books. He read widely on history, philosophy, biblical studies and especially theology. His avid obsession with contemporary books was another sign that he was not content with living in the past; he wanted to search for new ways to advance Calvinism while not being unfaithful to traditional orthodoxy. By keeping up-to-date with the latest religious works that were published, Erskine could enlighten his numerous correspondents in Britain, America and Europe. He knew which works were influential and whether they were unorthodox or not. He could then encourage his friends to learn about the prevailing thought in order to prod them to respond to

¹⁵See chapter eight.

¹⁶See Scott's description of Erskine in *Guy Mannering* (London: Soho, 1987), 262.

perceived heretical authors. The objective was to offer an Evangelical alternative to the heterodoxy that was being put into print. In order to do that, however, he had to convince his correspondents that they should modernise their theology and take into account the style and theories that were forged in the fires of the eighteenth century. Thomas Boston, for instance, though a favourite author for many Scottish families, had a style of writing that was not appreciated by polite society. Thus there was a need for Evangelical Calvinists to adopt the techniques of other popular authors in order to write in a way that would be suitable for eighteenth-century readers. James Hervey was an example of an Evangelical author who wrote a theological piece explaining imputed righteousness, but he did so in a way that matched the elegant style of recent writers like the Earl of Shaftesbury.

Perhaps Erskine was not as visible in his contribution to Evangelicalism as Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley or George Whitefield, which is probably why Scotland's leading eighteenth-century Evangelical has occupied a veritable unmarked grave among the more elaborate monuments. Whereas many notable Evangelicals were busy travelling throughout Britain and America or writing definitive theological treatises, Erskine's significance was as a propagator of books. Although he published many of his sermons and even some interesting theological essays, he remained content as a man behind the scenes who promoted the abilities and writings of others. His friends had to implore him to publish his own works, because, in the words of Moncreiff, 'his literary reputation he regarded as a very secondary object'.¹⁷ After reading *The Law of Nature Sufficiently Promulgated to the Heathen World*, the Bishop of Gloucester, William Warburton, scolded Erskine

¹⁷Erskine, 146–7.

But hark you, my dear friend, why is that pen so long unemployed, that overthrew, in so masterly a manner, a large bulky volume of a noted divine, with a sixpenny pamphlet? In truth, you wrong the public, and your own reputation... The pupils of Hutcheson will write, and you will not. Is this the way to redeem the ignominy of the age from ignorance and infidelity?¹⁸

Erskine's main objective was to maximise the literary contributions of other authors.

The writer of the February 1803 *Scots Magazine* article stated that the Edinburgh minister's 'great modesty and diffidence in his own talents, rendered him averse to the publishing much of his own, while he was ever ready to bring forward the works of others'.¹⁹ Only after the repeated demands of his friends did Erskine finally arrange for the first volume of his sermons to be printed in 1798. Moncreiff was then left with the responsibility of editing the second volume in 1804, due to the death of his colleague in January 1803.

It was not as though his works would fail to turn a profit. For as the Moderate minister John Inglis eulogised, Erskine was 'Well qualified to excel, as a candidate for literary fame' and had encountered a 'favourable reception' for the books that he did publish.²⁰ The bookseller-publisher William Creech was also aware of the Edinburgh Evangelical's ability as a theologian writer. Creech had published the first volume of Erskine's sermons and informed the Scottish minister in a letter that the 'number of copies printed were not enough to supply the internal demand'. In London, the sermons had quickly sold out, leading to the conclusion that 'too few had been printed, and that a new edition should have long ago been put to press'. Creech pleaded with his unmotivated correspondent for a work on human nature, knowing

¹⁸Warburton to Erskine, 25 October 1748, quoted in *Erskine*, 165.

¹⁹'Account of the Public Life and Character of the Late Dr Erskine of Edinburgh', *The Scots Magazine*, lxxv (1803), 80.

²⁰John Inglis, *The Memory of the Righteous* (Edinburgh: Printed by James Ballantyne for Manners and Miller, 1803), 15.

that no one ‘can do this with such strength of argument, nervous views of truth and important usefulness as yourself’. Therefore, ‘Let not timidity – hesitation – or hypocritical nicety obstruct what may be for the real benefit of mankind... only publish, and in your life time.’²¹ Although he could have published more, and possibly have been as eminent a theologian as other Evangelicals, Erskine remained focused on his task as the propagator of the ideas of other authors.

He used his influence among booksellers to publish or reprint notable works by eighteenth-century Evangelicals. The goal was not to amass wealth for himself or the authors whom he propagated, but to produce affordable theological editions for the edification of the general public and the advancement of Evangelical Calvinism. Without his assistance, it is probable that Jonathan Edwards’s posthumous works would not have been published, at least for quite some time. Besides editing Edwards’s writings, he was instrumental in the New England pastor’s theological research, as Christopher Wayne Mitchell has recently inferred.²² Erskine was the primary source for the books that Edwards read. When Edwards desired the latest publications on a particular theological subject, it was Erskine who diligently sent parcels to Northampton and Stockton, Massachusetts. Edwards was not the only American who benefited from Erskine’s literary donations. Many of the leading ministers in America received regular supplies of books from Scotland. The disciples of Edwards, Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins, were especially targeted. Erskine saw pastor-theologians like Edwards and the New Divinity men as crucial figures for

²¹William Creech to Erskine, 24 January 1801, William Creech Papers, NLS, 682, fo. 44-5.

²²Christopher Wayne Mitchell, ‘Jonathan Edwards’s Scottish Connection and the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Evangelical Revival, 1735–1750’, PhD Dissertation, St Mary’s College, University of St Andrews, 1997, 199 and ‘Jonathan Edwards’s Scottish Connection’, in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 233.

the defence of orthodox Calvinism. In order for them to be able to compete against perceived heretics like David Hume or Joseph Priestley, Erskine believed that his friends needed to stay current with the latest philosophical and theological arguments.

Since America was deemed to be a godly burgeoning Protestant territory, Erskine became a key supporter of the colonies. The meticulous research by Douglas Sloan, Louis Shores and Andrew Hook indicates that Erskine worked tirelessly at filling the bare shelves of several of America's earliest college libraries.²³ Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth and Dickinson College received regular packets of books at a time when they were in desperate need of literature. As a firm believer that he was contributing towards the theological education of future Calvinist ministers, Erskine gave generously. So committed to the colonies' success was Erskine that he penned three pro-American pamphlets, even though he knew that his views could be perceived as seditious by some in Britain. He did not want the transatlantic connection to be broken between two nations that were tied to a common Reformed heritage. But, in his advocacy of America, Erskine was not the black sheep of Scotland that D. B. Swinfen believed him to be.²⁴ Even if he was the best known American sympathiser in Scotland, there were still many others who faulted the British government for her forceful measures.²⁵

Erskine had such a thirst for knowledge that he determined to learn foreign languages in order to locate additional theological texts in Europe. With an ability to

²³Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1971); Louis Shores, *Origins of the American College Library, 1638–1800* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1935); Andrew Hook, *Scotland and America: A Study of Cultural Relations, 1750–1835* (Glasgow and London: Blackie 1975).

²⁴D.B. Swinfen, 'The American Revolution in the Scottish Press', in Owen Dudley Edwards and George Shepperson (eds.), *Scotland, Europe and the American Revolution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Student Publications, 1976), 66–74.

²⁵See Dalphy I. Fagerstrom, 'Scottish Opinion and the American Revolution', *William and Mary Quarterly* 11 (1954), 252-75.

understand the English, French, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, German and Dutch languages, he could hunt down books by foreign Calvinists on the continent to strengthen orthodoxy and enlighten his correspondents in Britain and America. He also searched the continent for stories that could verify the sinister behaviour of the Jesuits and other perceived malicious Catholic conspirators. With his views of Catholicism and Wesleyan Methodism, Erskine's tolerance ended. He was willing to correspond and sometimes endorse notable critics of the Evangelical revival, such as Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew, but Erskine remained suspicious of the perceived anti-intellectual religion of the pope. It did not matter that there was substantial evidence indicating that Catholics were a marginalised and benign faction within Scotland; Erskine continued to believe that Britain was on the brink of being overpowered by an insurmountable army that was dictated by the pope and his secret emissaries. If Britain was not careful, she would be forced to replace the rational Christianity of Protestantism with the irrationality of Catholicism. There was, however, no condoning the violence of the Edinburgh and Glasgow riots. Erskine was adamant that the peaceful means of legislation should be used to oppose the Catholic Relief Bill and so his reputation as the quiet pacifist that Robert Kent Donovan portrays seems more accurate than the 'fierce' depiction of Erskine by Clotilde Prunier.²⁶

Besides apprehensions of Catholicism, Erskine had similar feelings towards John Wesley and his ministry. Contrary to James Dixon and Dugald Butler, it was not simply an incongruity between Wesleyan Arminianism and Scottish Presbyterianism that kept Methodism from thriving north of England for there were signs of growth from the time that Wesley witnessed the birth of his ministry in the

²⁶Robert Kent Donovan, *No Popery and Radicalism: Opposition to Roman Catholic Relief in Scotland, 1778–1782* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987), 18, 29; Clotilde Prunier, *Anti-Catholic Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 65.

early 1750s until 1765.²⁷ Rather, the infant ministry that Wesley had nursed from its beginnings developed a debilitating disease only when Erskine came into contact with it. But from Erskine's perspective, it was Wesley who was the sickness and the panacea for the health of Scotland was alerting his countrymen to the apparent harmful effects of exposure to the Anglican itinerant's ministry. Erskine believed that Wesley had purposely hid his rejection of predestination and imputed righteousness, standard Reformed doctrines, from his northern followers in order to gain a foothold in Scotland. Although Wesley sincerely defended his actions to Erskine and other Scotsmen, the Anglican itinerant's ministry in Scotland stagnated after 1765, the year that Erskine published Hervey's *Letters* and *Mr. Wesley's Principles Detected*. So while Erskine was known for his tolerance of others with opposing views, there were limits to his ecumenism. Those who were advancing an anti-intellectual or deceptive form of faith could expect resistance from at least one Scottish Evangelical.

Erskine's significance, therefore, was as a propagator of enlightened Calvinism that contributed towards the growth of the Evangelical movement. He was taught to appreciate current epistemology and used his knowledge to bolster Evangelical Calvinism. He defended the revival that was occurring on both sides of the Atlantic and the leaders of this movement. Erskine integrated the style and moral teachings of the Age of Enlightenment into his sermons and experimented with his treatises, yet his theology always remained within the parameters of orthodox Calvinism. And although Erskine was an accomplished preacher and theologian in his own right, he spent most of his efforts promoting the abilities of other Evangelical authors. He sent his correspondents a myriad of books so that they could learn about the latest philosophical and theological ideas. He did his best to encourage the

²⁷James Dixon, 'Methodism in the Scottish Capital', *Methodist Review* 89 (1907), 195; D. Butler, *John Wesley and George Whitefield in Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, 1898), 111-12.

publishing of the best Evangelical theologians as well as other Calvinists. Thus Erskine's main contribution to Evangelicalism was as a disseminator of enlightened Calvinism.

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