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The Sacramental Theology and Practice  
of the Reverend John Willison.  
(1680-1750).

Ian MacLeod.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Divinity  
in the University of Glasgow as a requirement for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May,  
1994.

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Abstract.

John Willison (1680-1750) was a leading Evangelical in the Church of Scotland, whose prolific writing had a pronounced sacramental emphasis, at a time when the Lord's Supper was infrequently celebrated. The thesis aims to examine his sacramental theology and practice.

Chapter one reconstructs his 'roots' and considers the influence of family, home church and university on his thinking. Ministries at Brechin and Dundee are outlined and his publications are placed in context.

Chapter two examines his adherence to the federal scheme of theology. Willison is shown to identify three covenants, which he understands as having a contractual basis. Consideration is given to his stance on the Marrow Controversy, and to areas of agreement and disagreement with the Marrow men.

Chapter three examines his sacramental theology which is based on that of the Westminster Confession. His adherence to federalism is shown to result in his assertion that the sacrament is not a 'converting ordinance', his emphasis that it is a seal of the believer's faith and a badge of Christian profession, and his rigorous 'fencing' of the table. Consideration is also given to his positive stress on the sacrament as a means of grace, and to his teaching on the 'real presence' of Christ.

Chapter four analyses the form, style and content of Willison's preaching, and his aversion to that of the Moderates. His sacramental sermons, prayers, 'fencing' of the table and table addresses are examined and compared with those of contemporaries from both parties.

Chapter five considers his catechetical material and practice and comparison is made with the work of others. Particular attention is given to his practice of admitting communicants, and it is shown that while Willison objected to the Episcopalian rite of confirmation, he believed, nevertheless, in a distinctive form of admission which involved a 'renewal of baptismal engagements'.

Chapter six examines the issue of infrequent celebration in the Church of Scotland, Willison's desire for change, his arguments for greater frequency, and his own practice. His influence on later pamphleteers is traced, as is their realisation of the truth of his assertion that greater frequency would only be achieved through changes to the customary sacramental 'season'.

Chapter seven makes an assessment of Willison and his work, showing him as a typical Evangelical of the eighteenth century who had a measure of broadmindedness, but no latitude in theological outlook. The consequences of his theological stance and its effect on his sacramental theology and practice are considered. Willison is also shown to differ from his contemporaries in his demand for a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, and in his attempts to promote it. A conclusion is then made on Willison's significance.

The author submits that the study contributes to scholarship for two reasons. Firstly, no work exclusively on Willison's sacramental material has been undertaken hitherto. Secondly, the issue of frequency of celebration is a continuing debate in the Church of Scotland, and, since some Evangelicals today express a viewpoint which is diametrically opposed to Willison's, the thesis has particular relevance.

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Abbreviations.

- A.G.A. Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1638-1642 (Edinburgh : 1843).
- B.U.K. Peterkin, A. The Booke of the Universal Kirk of Scotland Wherein the Headis and Conclusions Devysit Be The Ministers and Commisionares Of The Particular Kirks Thereof Are Specially Expressed and Contained (Edinburgh : 1839).
- C.R.A. Central Region Archives.
- E.B.D. Cameron, J. (Ed.) The First Book of Discipline (Edinburgh : 1972).
- E.L.T. Willison, J. A Fair and Impartial Testimony, Essayed in the Name of a Number of Ministers, Elders and Christian People of the Church of Scotland, unto the laudable Principles, Wrestlings and Attainmenmts of that Church: and Against the backslidings, Corruptions, Divisions and Prevailing Evils, both of Former and Present Times. And namely, the Defections of the Established Church, of the Nobility, Gentry, Commons, Seceders, Episcopalians etc. etc. Containing a Brief Historical Deduction of the Chief Ocurrances in this Church, from the beginning to the year 1744, with remarks, and Humble Pleadings with our Mother Church to exert Herself to stop Defection, and promote Reformation (Edinburgh : 1744).

Abbreviations (contd.)

- HTH. Hetherington, W. M. The Practical Works of the Revd. John Willison (Edinburgh : 1844)
- Plain Cat. Willison, J. An Example of Plain Catechising on the Assembly's Shorter Catechism (Edinburgh : 1734)
- Sac. Cat. Willison, J. A Sacramental Catechism; Or, a Familiar Instructor for Young Communicants (Edinburgh : 1720).
- Sac. Dir. Willison, J. A Sacramental Directory (Edinburgh : 1716).
- S.R.A. (A) Strathclyde Region Archives, Ayr.
- S.R.A. (G) Strathclyde Region Archives, Glasgow.
- S.R.O. Scottish Record Office.
- Treatise. Willison, J. A Treatise Concerning the Sanctification of the Lord's Day (Edinburgh : circa 1713).

## Chapter One.

### Willison's Background And Ministries.

...there is ground to fear that the unfrequent celebration and participation of this blessed feast, which Christ hath prepared for us, is an evil that many in this church are chargeable with, and for which the Lord may plead a controversy with us....<sup>1</sup>

These words on the Lord's Supper, which could have been written by a high churchman of the present day, were written by John Willison, whose qualities as a minister and writer won him distinction as a leader of the Evangelical party of his time, and made his name a household word in Scotland, as long as a century after his demise.

Willison was born in 1680, the year which heralded the onslaught of the 'killing times' when Covenanters paid the extreme penalty for their faith. His boyhood coincided with the period when James II, anxious to secure liberty for Roman Catholics, judged it expedient also to offer a measure of toleration to Presbyterians, allowing them to worship in Meeting Houses. His youth was concurrent with events following the Revolution Settlement, when the polity of the Church was settled for the future, and Presbyterianism was established by law. Ordained at the beginning of the new century, he served during some of the most turbulent times in the history of the Scottish Church which then faced, from without, the antipathy of Episcopalians and Jacobites, bitterly resentful of the new order and, from within, the dangers of schism and heresy.

Willison's prolific writing covers a period of almost forty years, and may broadly be placed into two categories which, at times,

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 444.

overlap. Many of his major works, written from his experience of, and in response to the troubles of the period, are of a polemical nature presenting his case against diocesan Episcopacy, <sup>1</sup> certain practices within Episcopalian worship, <sup>2</sup> the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, <sup>3</sup> the Independents, <sup>4</sup> and the Secession, <sup>5</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *A Letter from a Parochial Bishop to a Prelatical Gentleman in Scotland, Concerning the Government of the Church* (Edinburgh : 1714).

Willison, J. *An Apology for the Church of Scotland Against the Accusations of Prelatists and Jacobites, and particularly the Reflections of J.S. late incumbent at Forfar* (Edinburgh : 1719).

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Queries to the Scots Innovators in Divine Service and particularly to the Liturgical party in the Shire of Angus, and places adjacent thereto. Being a Compendious Collection of the Choicest Arguments against the present Innovations. By a Lover of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh : 1712).

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Popery Another Gospel* (Edinburgh : 1745).

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *A Defence of National Churches, and particularly of the National Constitution of the Church of Scotland, and the Conduct of our Reforming Ancestors, against the Cavils of Independents, with a Confutation of Independency, and several New Opinions vested in some late pamphlets etc.* (Edinburgh : 1729).

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *A Fair and Impartial Testimony, Essayed in the Name of a Number of Ministers, Elders, and Christian People of the Church of Scotland, unto the laudable Principles, Wrestlings and Attainments of that Church: and against the Backslidings, Corruptions, Divisions and Prevailing Evils, both of Former and Present Times. And namely, the Defections of the Established Church, of the Nobility, Gentry, Commons, Seceders, Episcopalian etc etc. Containing a Brief Historical Deduction of the Chief Occurrences in this Church, from the beginning to the Year 1744, with remarks, and Humble Pleadings with our Mother Church to exert Herself to stop Defection, and promote Reformation* (Edinburgh : 1744).

also expressing his aversion to the influence of the Moderates, <sup>1</sup> the systems of Patronage <sup>2</sup> and Feudal Superiorities. <sup>3</sup>

The second and larger category is work of a pastoral nature, which, again allowing for overlap, may be classified into three types. First, there is teaching material in his Catechisms, <sup>4</sup> *Sacramental Directory*, <sup>5</sup> *Short Christian Directory*, <sup>6</sup> *Treatise on the Sabbath*, <sup>7</sup> *Afflicted Man's Companion*, <sup>8</sup> and a paper on praying societies. <sup>9</sup> Second, there is homiletic material in *The Balm of Gilead*, <sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. Also in Willison, J. *The Church's Danger, and Minister's Duty* (Edinburgh : 1733).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Letter to An English Member of Parliament From A Gentleman in Scotland, Concerning the Slavish Dependencies, which a great Part of that Nation is still kept under, by Superiorities, Wards, Reliefs, and other remains of the Feudal Law, and by Clanships and Tithes* (Edinburgh : 1721).

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *The Nother's Catechism for the Young Child* (Edinburgh : 1731).

Willison, J. *A Sacramental Catechism; Or, a Familiar Instructor for Young Communicants* (Edinburgh : 1720).

Willison, J. *The Young Communicant's Catechism* (Edinburgh : 1734).

Willison, J. *An Example of Plain Catechising on the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (Edinburgh : 1734).

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *A Sacramental Directory* (Edinburgh : 1716).

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *A Short Christian Directory; Consisting of Forty Scripture Directions* (Edinburgh : 1747).

<sup>7</sup> Willison, J. *A Treatise Concerning the Sanctification of the Lord's Day* (Edinburgh : circa 1713).

<sup>8</sup> Willison, J. *The Afflicted Man's Companion* (Edinburgh : 1737).

<sup>9</sup> Willison, J. *The Duty and Advantage of Praying Societies* (Dundee : 1740).

<sup>10</sup> Willison, J. *The Balm of Gilead For Healing A Diseased Land* (Edinburgh : 1742).

his sacramental sermons, <sup>1</sup> *Sacramental Meditations and Advices*, <sup>2</sup> and a sermon preached before the General Assembly, <sup>3</sup>. Third, there is devotional material of the type found in his hymn collections. <sup>4</sup>

The present thesis is mainly concerned with works in the second category, and will tend to deal with Willison's controversial writing only where it impinges on his scheme of theology in general, his Evangelical stance and, more particularly, on his understanding of the Lord's Supper and its celebration.

#### Willison's Background and Formative Influences.

Little has been written of Willison's early life, but the evidence available suggests that influences in his home church, family and student life, proved formative of his later thought and practice.

#### Church Connection:

In the late seventeenth century, none of the Stirling churches had an easy transition from Episcopacy to Presbyterianism, and St. Ninian's, the parish church for the Craigforth area, the largest of the parishes, <sup>5</sup> in which Willison was born, was no exception.

- <sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Five Sermons Preached Before and After the Celebration of the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh : 1722).
- <sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sacramental Meditations and Advices* (Edinburgh : 1747).
- <sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *A Sermon preached Before the General Assembly* (Edinburgh : 1734).
- <sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Scripture Songs for Zion's Travellers in Their Way to Heaven* (Edinburgh : 1747). Also, *One Hundred Gospel Hymns In Memory of Redeeming Love And of the Death and Sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ for Perishing Sinners Much Adapted to Sacramental Occasions* (Edinburgh : 1747).
- <sup>5</sup> Kyd, J. G. (Ed.) *Scottish Population Statistics (with Webster's analysis of population, 1755)* (Edinburgh : 1952) pp. 37 and 44.



After the Revolution, the minister, James Forsyth was accused, in 1689, of failing to read the Proclamation of the Estates, to pray for William and Mary, and to observe the thanksgiving, but he was acquitted, the 'libel not being proved.' He was finally deposed, by Presbytery, however, on a charge of 'celebrating an incestuous marriage', the sentence being confirmed by the Assembly in 1690. <sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, as in neighbouring Logie, <sup>2</sup> a Presbyterian Meeting House was established at Bannockburn, in 1688, at which time the Presbytery admitted Mr. Patrick Couper as minister. <sup>3</sup> Four years later, Couper, the minister of Willison's youth, was translated to Pittenweem. <sup>4</sup> Thereafter, during a protracted vacancy, it is notable that Alexander Douglas of Logie, whose charisma inspired other young men to the ministry, <sup>5</sup> often conducted Session meetings and preached at St. Ninian's. At length, in 1694, after overtures to Presbytery, and just before Willison left to study at Glasgow, the Revd. John Logan was transferred from Lecropt to St Ninian's. <sup>6</sup>

From his home situation, then, Willison had some experience of the situation he encountered in Brechin, where an Episcopalian declined to accept the new order, refused to comply with conditions which would secure his ministry, and attempted to maintain his position.

#### The Willison Family:

Almost nothing of Willison's family background has been uncovered.

- <sup>1</sup> St. Ninian's Session Minute Book, CH2/337/2 (1667-1705), p. 205. Central Region Archives, Stirling.
- <sup>2</sup> Menzies Fergusson, R. *Logie : A Parish History* (Paisley : 1905) Vol. 1, p. 139.
- <sup>3</sup> Presbytery of Stirling and Dunblane Minutes CH2/723/4, (1671-1688). Minute of August 14th. 1688. C.R.A.
- <sup>4</sup> St. Ninian's Session Minute Book, CH2/337/2, p. 234. C.R.A.
- <sup>5</sup> Menzies Fergusson, R. *Logie* : Vol. 1, pp. 152 and 155.
- <sup>6</sup> St. Ninian's Session Minute Book, CH2/337/2, p. 235. C.R.A.

*Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* simply records his birth, in 1680, at Craigforth near Stirling, firstborn to James Willison and Bethia Gourlay, <sup>1</sup> while neither Hetherington's essay on Willison, nor entries in the *Dictionary of National Biography* or the *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*, offer much additional information. Hetherington states that the family had a 'small property', while the *Dictionary of National Biography* speaks of the Willisons as long settled in the area, with 'considerable property'. <sup>2</sup>

Substantial evidence reveals that Willison came from a relatively influential, affluent and property owning family.

A history of Logie Parish contains the Willison family tree <sup>3</sup> and claims that his ancestors came from Corntoun, within the bounds. Willison's descendants, however, contend that that information is inaccurate in parts, although both sources agree on the identity of his paternal grandfather as James Willison, miller of Craigforth.

W. D. Pomeroy, in his thesis on Willison, suggested that his origins were humble, citing, as evidence, an extract from the Burgh Records of Stirling, which states that 'at a Poll election of the magistrates and Council in 1689, the right of severall men to vote was questioned'. Among other protests, 'it was objected against James Willisone in respect he lives not within the towne'. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Scott, H. (Ed.) *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae, Vol. 5* (Edinburgh : 1868) p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> Hetherington, W. *Practical Works*, p. vii.

Lee, S. (Ed.) *The Dictionary of National Biography* (London : 1900) p. 498-9.

Chambers, R. *A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (Edinburgh : 1856) Vol. 1V, p. 467-8.

<sup>3</sup> Menzies Fergusson, R. *Logie* : Vol 2, pp. 206-10. The disputed family tree is on p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Renwick, R. (Ed.) *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling*, Vol. 2 (Stirling : 1889) p. 58.

Pomeroy identified this man as John Willison's father. <sup>1</sup> The full Council Minute, however, reveals his error, for it continues, 'it was alsoe objected against Hugh Willisone and Thomas Murdoch that they ought not to have the benefite of ane vote in this election, in respect they neither resyde within this Burgh nor beares portable burding with the rest of the neighbours'. <sup>2</sup>

It is clear from that part of the family tree on which sources agree, that the Minute was not referring to Willison's father, but to his grandfather and his great uncle Hugh. Nor is it possible to infer from it that the family was insignificant. The objections, in fact, were valid, for neither Willison resided within the town itself, the one living in Craigforth, and the other, if Fergusson is correct, in Corntoun, so that their right to vote at the election to Stirling Council was indeed questionable.

The evidence, to the contrary, is that the Willison family was of considerable influence, and it may be that it was precisely because of their status in the community that they felt entitled to vote!

James Willison, the Reverend John's grandfather, was the miller of Craigforth, an elder of St. Ninian's, <sup>3</sup> was to become a burges of Stirling on moving there in 1696, <sup>4</sup> and is even listed as lending money to the Burgh in 1715, the year before his death. <sup>5</sup> His brother, Hugh, was to become a member of the Merchants' Guild <sup>6</sup> and

- <sup>1</sup> Pomeroy, W. D. 'John Willison of Dundee', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1953, p. 4.
- <sup>2</sup> Stirling Burgh Records, Council Minutes (1680-1703), B66/20/6. Minute of 1st. June, 1689. C.R.A.
- <sup>3</sup> St. Ninian's Session Minute Book, CH2/337/2, C.R.A. p. 152.
- <sup>4</sup> Stirling Burgh Register of Deeds (1693-1702), B66/9/11. Entry dated 20th. May 1696. C.R.A.
- <sup>5</sup> Stirling Burgh Records, Council Minutes (1703-1721), B66/20/7. Minute of 24th. May 1715. C.R.A.
- <sup>6</sup> Stirling Guildry Records, (1669-1733), PD6/1/4, p. 128. C.R.A.

was a wealthy man by marriage, if not in his own right. A third brother, John, also became a member of the Merchants' Guild, <sup>1</sup> was later appointed a bailie and Councillor of the town, <sup>2</sup> and an elder of the Kirk of the Holy Rood, <sup>3</sup> while a sister, Jane, was married to a landowner in Larbert. <sup>4</sup>

Willison's grandfather, then, was an affluent and influential man who served on the St Ninian's Session during the Episcopal period. Admitted in 1683, the only other reference to him in the Church Records relates his contribution of 'four pounds Scots for the use of the velvet mortcloth for all time'. <sup>5</sup> Both entries suggest that, at one time, he had resided in Corntoun in Logie Parish. In 1696, however, he appears to have left the Craigforth area where he presumably operated the mill with his son, John Willison's father, and moved to Stirling where he became a burgess in the same year.

A family Bible of John Willison's, states that, born on 23rd. Dec. 1680, at Craigforth in Stirling, he was baptised by one, Thomas Harredor. <sup>6</sup> Sadly, no record of any such minister exists.

Ten years later, his father was ordained an elder at Bannockburn Meeting House. The Minute is unclear, for, among the list of those ordained is one name which appears as James Willison. <sup>7</sup> Subsequent

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 1693, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Stirling Burgh Records, Council Minutes, B66/20/6. Minute of 20th. Sept. 1693. C.R.A.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 11th. Nov. 1693.

<sup>4</sup> Burgh Register of Deeds (1693-1702), B66/9/11, Folio 19, C.R.A.

<sup>5</sup> Entry No. 4. Book on the Mortcloth of St. Ninian's, (1660-1753), CH2/337/3. C.R.A.

<sup>6</sup> Extract from flyleaf of John Willison's Family Bible, supplied by Willison's descendant, E. Stanton of Essex.

<sup>7</sup> Bannockburn Meeting House Minute - St. Ninian's Session Minute Book, (1688-1692), CH2/337/2. Minute of 17th. May 1690. C.R.A.

entries, however, show it as James Willison. Any possibility that this was James the elder who could have left the parish church to attend the Meeting House, must be discounted for two reasons. First, he was already an elder of the parish, but his name neither appears on the sederunt at the first meeting of the Bannockburn Session, nor at subsequent meetings. Secondly, the name of James Willison appears long after James the elder moved to Stirling. The reference, therefore, is certainly to Willison's father.

James Willison was a very active elder. After the translation of the Revd. Patrick Couper to Pittenweem, and when St. Ninian's had been vacant for two years, the Session sent representatives to Presbytery to expedite the call of a minister. James Willison was amongst them. <sup>1</sup> He was also a man with practical uses, who was deputed, for example, at the communion season, to 'provide horses for those ministers that are to come from Glasgow'. <sup>2</sup> Or, again, long after the Meeting House was no longer required, the members having returned to the parish church for worship in 1692, he was responsible for negotiating the sale of the building. <sup>3</sup>

Such entries demonstrate that John Willison's father was respected within the community, considered able to represent his congregation at Presbytery, and one whose means and practical skills were of value to the Kirk. The expectation that the 'miller of Craigforth' would provide horses for ministers attending the communion from Glasgow, perhaps also indicates that the family enjoyed a measure of affluence as did their forebears. Indeed, documentary evidence shows that John Willison inherited considerable property from his father, which he later transferred to his youngest brother, Robert, <sup>4</sup> in recognition of his care of their widowed mother.

<sup>1</sup> St. Ninian's Session Minute Book, CH2/337/2. 15th. October 1694.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Minute of 7th. July 1698.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Minute of 15th. June 1699.

<sup>4</sup> Stirling Burgh Register of Deeds (1809-1821) B66/10/1. Recorded 13th. May 1812. C.R.A.

Overall then, the picture of the young Willison, is that of a boy, growing up in a 'comfortable' and staunchly Presbyterian home, under the influence of parents who left the worship of the Parish church to play a prominent part in the life of the Meeting House. That background, in itself, cannot have been insignificant in shaping Willison's outlook.

It may well be, indeed, that the young Willison's experience was parallel to that of Thomas Boston, his contemporary, who found in the Presbyterian Meeting House at Newtown of Whitsome and in the preaching of Henry Erskine, a lively faith such as he had never encountered in the worship of the Episcopal system, and who could record that herein lay his aversion to Episcopalianism 'which hath continued with me all along to this day'.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps for Willison a similar experience, combined with his later treatment at Jacobite and Episcopalian hands, would help to explain his antipathy to that form of worship which appears in so much of his writing. Indeed it may be that he was speaking from boyhood memory, when he wrote of James II's Indulgence to nonconformists, 'Presbyterian ministers generally accepted of this liberty, and those who were abroad returned home, and got meeting houses fitted up for them, and multitudes flocked to attend their ministry, and found it remarkably blessed to them'.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Willison was one who, even as a child, was 'remarkably blessed' in the worship at Bannockburn.

But, in addition to the staunch Presbyterian background of his parents, and the worship of the Meeting House, there may well have been a third influence which played on John Willison as a boy.

During the four year period, from when he was eight until he was twelve, the minister in the Meeting House at Bannockburn, was Patrick Couper, and, during the protracted vacancy which lasted

<sup>1</sup> Low, G. (Ed.) *A General Account of My Life by Thomas Boston* (London : 1908) pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 893.

until he left for college in Glasgow, another who often preached in St. Ninian's was Alexander Douglas of Logie. The ability of the latter to inspire young men to the ministry has already been noted. Patrick Couper, however, Willison's own minister, possessed a similar charisma, for, in a letter written at Pittenweem, he refers to a case against Mr. Drummond of Auchterarder, stating that Mr. Drummond is known to him, and adds, '....I believe him a good man. He was under my ministry in St. Ninian's parish'. <sup>1</sup>

Yet, whatever the formative influences, John must have decided at an early age to study for the ministry, his licensing taking place at Stirling in November 1701, <sup>2</sup> before he was quite 21 years old, and his ordination at Brechin two years later. Doubtless it was for this reason that the operation of the family mill, which, by tradition, should have fallen to him, fell to his younger brother, James, who became known as 'miller of Craigforth'. <sup>3</sup>

Nothing is known of his schooling, and presumably he attended the parish school of which a record exists in the Session register. It is related, however, that he was of a 'singularly gentle and pious disposition', and that these characteristics, 'together with the extraordinary aptness which he had discovered for learning, determined his parents to devote him, from a very early period of his life, to the service of the church'. Further, that the 'young Willison cordially acquiesced in that determination', since the ministry was 'the profession of all others which he preferred'. <sup>4</sup> Such commendation cannot be verified from any known source, but given his home and church background, there is little reason to doubt its validity.

<sup>1</sup> McCrie. T. (Ed.) *Wodrow's Correspondence, Vol. II* (Edinburgh: 1843) p. 452.

<sup>2</sup> Presbytery of Stirling Minute Book, (1701-1712), CH2/722/9, pp. 3-6. C.R.A.

<sup>3</sup> Menzies Fergusson, R. *Logie* : Vol. 2, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Chambers, R. *Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. IV, p. 467.

### Study at Glasgow:

*Fasti* states that Willison studied at Glasgow University, and is said to have graduated. <sup>1</sup> The words are well chosen. His registration is recorded on 23rd. April, 1695. <sup>2</sup> The practice, in Willison's day, however, differed from that of the present, in that matriculation was not completed annually. The student registered only once, and at any stage of his course. Many did not do so until their third or fourth year. Willison's name is found under the entry, 'nomina discipulorum secundae classis', showing that he registered in the second year, which was the Greek class. It is possible, however, that he had attended the Latin class of the previous year. Yet, while his registration is clear, *Fasti* rightly questioned his graduation. No evidence of it exists and the probable explanation is that, while he was sometimes styled 'Master of Arts' by others, he did not, in fact, graduate.

His matriculation date is important, however, because it provides a clue to yet another, and probably the major influence in his life and thought, for the Divinity Professor at the time was James Wodrow. Indeed, the profound influence which Wodrow exerted on the young student becomes apparent in Willison's later thought, preaching, writing and practices.

### The Influence of James Wodrow:

James Wodrow, after spending several years of teaching Divinity, was appointed to the Chair at the University of Glasgow in 1692 and remained Professor of Divinity until 1707. Such was the impression he made on his students, that it has been suggested that both he and his friend George Campbell, Divinity Professor at Edinburgh,

<sup>1</sup> Scott, H. (Ed.) *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. 5, p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> *Munimenta Alme Universitatis Glasguensis, 1430-1727.* Vol. III, p. 156. The University of Glasgow.



proved to be 'the builders of the theology of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, as far as concerned Presbyterians'.<sup>1</sup>

Wodrow bore all the hallmarks of the pietist. In early life at College, he could speak of a 'work of grace' in his soul, and a 'conversion' experience. Robert Wodrow, his son, writing his father's biography, included in it fragments from his diary, showing that he indulged in the practices common to pietism in seventeenth century Scotland. He wrote out a covenant on his 'conversion' and renewed it frequently. He prayed at regular times, practiced self examination, recorded 'frames' or religious experiences while noting 'providences', and he meditated much on death.<sup>2</sup>

After his licensing in 1671, and despite his fears that he was lacking in the 'heroic virtues', Wodrow had accompanied Donald Cargill and John Welch to field preachings, had become a field preacher himself, experiencing at least one narrow escape from arrest, although he 'preached seldom after Bothwell Brig'.<sup>3</sup>

In 1687, while several places wished to call him as minister, the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr committed the students for the ministry to his care, and he taught Divinity at home from 1688 until his appointment to the Chair at Glasgow.

So well documented is Robert Wodrow's account of the life, thought and teaching methods of his father, under whom he studied himself, that it is impossible not to see in the Divinity Professor, the major formative influence on Willison. Indeed, the young Wodrow's testimony that his father 'formed' many who 'have been employed in

<sup>1</sup> Reid, H. M. *The Divinity Professors in the University of Glasgow, (1640-1903)* (Glasgow : 1923) p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of James Wodrow* (Edinburgh : 1828) pp. 21-4, 156-9, 179-81.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 64-6.

the holy ministry', and that 'some hundreds of worthy, painful and pious ministers owe some part of their instruction to him' is probably an understatement. <sup>1</sup>

Clearly, here was the mould in which the framework of Willison's theological thought was cast, for, from Wodrow, he learned not only the federal scheme of theology but also that marked emphasis on obedience as a necessary condition of the Covenant of grace - a position which Willison was to embrace and later defend. <sup>2</sup>

Here too, Willison was introduced to the wide range of theological works from which he frequently quoted. Wodrow related his teaching method to a Parliamentary Commission in 1696, narrating that he began with 'Wendelin's Minus Systema Theologiae, Paraeus on Ursin's Catechism, Calvin's Institutio', followed by 'Turretin, Walaeus, Maresius, Essenius, Altingius, Maccovius, the Theses Leidenses, Polani Syntagma etc'. For the private reading of his students, he commended, 'Chamier in four volumes, Voetius....and others such as Bellarmine, Socinus, Arminius, Limborch'. <sup>3</sup> That Willison was at least acquainted with these and more is evident from his allusions to them. <sup>4</sup>

Indeed, Willison's taste for heavy reading never diminished, for, there are, in Glasgow University Library, two volumes preserved from his own library. One, bearing his signature on the title page, and, on the inside cover, an inscription, in Latin, relating that it formerly belonged to John Willison of Dundee.... 'pastorem vigilantissimum', is a 1684 edition of *De Veritate Religionis*

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 147-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 36-9, fn. Compare with below, p. 47f.

<sup>3</sup> Reid, *H. M. The Divinity Professors*, p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Typical examples are found in : Willison's *Letter from A Parochial Bishop*, p. 130 : *Papery Another Gospel*, HTH. p. 869, and *F. I. T.* HTH. p. 910.

*Christiana*,<sup>1</sup> by Hugo Grotius, the Dutch theologian. The other, also bearing his name and marked, 'ex libris Joannis Willison', is the work, *Synopsis Metaphysicae Ontologiam et Pneumatologion*,<sup>2</sup> published in 1749 at Glasgow by Francis Hutcheson, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow from 1729 until 1747. Willison's possession of the latter, in fact, not only provides evidence that he kept abreast of philosophical and theological trends, the book only appearing in the year before his death, but that he also read the works of those whose thought differed from his own. Indeed, his occasional notes in the margin of the text, show that he read with critical acumen. So, for example, in Hutcheson's chapter, 'De Voluntate', and against the heading, 'Imperium animi in motus perturbatos', Willison has added the comment, 'This ought to be the last in the book'.<sup>3</sup>

It was also from Wodrow who regarded Durham as 'an idol', that Willison caught his admiration for Durham and Gillespie,<sup>4</sup> and for Guthrie's *Trial of a Saving Interest*. Willison, indeed, was to commend the latter work with a similar enthusiasm to that of his Professor who had regarded it as 'the best book he knew next to the Bible'.<sup>5</sup>

Another feature of College life under James Wodrow was the existence of Student Societies. These, according to his son, were really 'Praying Societies' in which each student took his turn to participate. But more was involved than prayer. Each group or society was made up of ten to fourteen students, and the exercise

<sup>1</sup> Glasgow University (Provenance Index) Special Collection, 102.

<sup>2</sup> University of Glasgow. MU 41-1, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Hutcheson, Frances. *Synopsis Metaphysicae Ontologiam et Pneumatologion* (Glasgow : 1749). Willison's comment is on p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, p. 26. Compare with Willison's *Preface to his Sacramental Catechism*, HTH. p. 446.

<sup>5</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, p. 24. Compare e.g. with Willison's *Treatise*, HTH. p. 58.

also included debate on specific topics. Once per month there was a joint meeting of all groups, when the answers prepared by each society were read. <sup>1</sup> Typical examples of topics discussed are found in a manuscript volume retained at Glasgow University. <sup>2</sup>

The volume contains the findings of around two hundred 'cases', alphabetically listed. Under the letter A, for example, the subjects discussed were : 'Actions, Adoption, Affliction, Alms, Ambition, Anger, Apostasy, Assurance, Atheistical Thoughts and Attributes of God'. Or again, the subject of 'Conversion' was discussed under several heads: 'Motives to seek after Conversion, Delaying Conversion, Hindrances of Conversion, Directions for attaining Conversion, Marks of True Conversion, Duties of Converted persons, What is to be said to one who doubts his Conversion, Motives to study the Conversion of others, Directions to those who would be useful in the Conversion of others'.

It is possible that Willison already had experience of praying societies or fellowship meetings, if they were a feature of the Presbyterian Meeting House at Bannockburn as they certainly were at Blairlogie. There can be little doubt, nevertheless, that those societies which he cherished in Dundee, and recommended elsewhere, were modelled on those of Wodrow, Willison also stipulating as an essential ingredient the need for discussion on chosen topics. <sup>3</sup>

Any examination of Willison's sermons also reveals a conformity to the structure taught by Professor Wodrow. <sup>4</sup> In his biography of his father, Robert Wodrow quoted from the Professor's 'Methodus

<sup>1</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, pp. 127-8.

<sup>2</sup> Wodrow, J. *Cases answered by the Society of the Students*. MS Gen 343. The University of Glasgow.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *The Duty and Advantage*, pp. 19-23.

<sup>4</sup> See below p. 99f.

Studii Theologici', another manuscript still preserved. <sup>1</sup> This contains his 'advices', dictated to his students, and includes the method of preaching which he recommended. The form prescribed is typical of sermons of the period, recommending an exordium, followed by textual division, paraphrase, doctrines, uses, application and epilogue. Among the 'uses' he lists seven. 1) Informatio; 2) Refutatio; 3) Reprehensio; 4) Consolatio; 5) Terror; 6) Exhortatio; 7) Dehortatio (including exploratio et examinatio). It is noteworthy that Willison's published sermons follow that familiar structure and demonstrate that he was adept at employing all the 'uses' which Wodrow recommended.

But in addition to what he digested in formal teaching, it may be that it was from Wodrow that Willison developed his pietistic practices and many of his attitudes. What is undeniable is that he was to follow and commend to others the practices of personal covenanting, <sup>2</sup> self examination, <sup>3</sup> and maintaining an awareness of death, <sup>4</sup> already noted as features of Wodrow's life. <sup>5</sup>

Wodrow too, from his youth, had set great store on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, communicating, in 1660, on no less than five occasions, <sup>6</sup> his son recording that such was his 'great regard for Christ's gospel ordinances' that it was his pattern to 'regularly attend when able with the greatest of pleasure'. <sup>7</sup> Willison not only shared that same high regard for the sacrament, but in his

<sup>1</sup> Wodrow, J. *Dictata on Theology - Methodus Studii Theologici* (Murray Manuscripts, 218) The University of Glasgow.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. pp. 186-90, and *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 484-93.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. pp. 162-72.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *The Afflicted Man's Companion*, HTH. p. 782.

<sup>5</sup> See above, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 178.

later life was to preface an edition of the Communion sermons of Andrew Gray, <sup>1</sup> whom Wodrow had greatly admired in his youth, under whose ministry, in Glasgow, he had first observed 'the motions of God's spirit in him', <sup>2</sup> and whose preaching proved to him a lasting inspiration. <sup>3</sup>

Nor can it be a matter of coincidence that Willison came to hold and to express identical attitudes to Wodrow on many widely diverse issues. Was it from Wodrow's 'great regard for the rules, forms and acts of the General Assembly', and his insistence that any infringement of them would cause 'confusion and every evil work to come in upon this church', <sup>4</sup> that Willison could write, although sympathising with the Seceders and pleading for leniency for them, 'As for my own part, I was always for maintaining the authority of the General Assembly as sacred and inviolable, seeing it is of so great consequence to the preserving of peace and unity in this church...'? <sup>5</sup> Was it from Wodrow, the field preacher who had visited Donald Cargill in his prison, and James Guthrie in his cell on the eve of his execution, <sup>6</sup> that Willison derived his admiration for the Covenanters, so that he could graphically rehearse their lives? <sup>7</sup> Was it from the Wodrow who had preached 'under the direction of ministers, indulged and not indulged, between whom he never made a difference, valuing many on both sides', <sup>8</sup> that Willison learned his identical tolerance for those who had accepted indulgences? <sup>9</sup> And was it from the Wodrow who,

<sup>1</sup> Scott, H. (Ed.) *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. 5, p. 321.

<sup>2</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 26 and 166.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 177-8.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *The Church's Danger*, HTH. p. 827, and *A Sermon Preached Before the General Assembly* (Edinburgh : 1734) p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, pp. 32-3, 64-5, and p. 162.

<sup>7</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 891f.

<sup>8</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 892-3.

in his youth, had 'fully considered the controversy about prelacy, and was after his utmost search, persuaded of its dissonancy from Scripture and its unlawfulness', <sup>1</sup> who, also, in 1691, could write of the 'perversity, peevishness and haughtiness of the Jacobites', of the need to 'argue ad hominem' for Presbytery against Episcopate, and of Episcopalians 'conducting themselves impudently and insolently in their pamphlets, stuffed with lies', <sup>2</sup> that Willison found inspiration for his spirited defence of the validity of the office of Presbyter over against that of diocesan bishop, <sup>3</sup> his vigorous condemnation of Jacobites <sup>4</sup> and the ardour with which he attacked both?

Wodrow expressed himself strongly on all these matters and there can be little doubt that he must have proved influential in sowing ideas in the mind of his student or in confirming the validity of ideas and practices with which he may have already been familiar. The stamp of Wodrow was deeply imprinted on Willison.

A few other manuscript volumes still preserved from Wodrow's time, reveal something of the standard of work required from students. Two small volumes, each contain about ten handwritten homilies written by students between the years 1696-1707, some of whom studied alongside Willison. Sadly, none is by Willison, himself, though the exercise was regularly required of them all. <sup>5</sup> Four or five volumes, each containing around twelve exegetical theses written by students in the same period, have also been preserved. Again, none is by Willison, but they are valuable as a guide

<sup>1</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* fn. pp. 112-4.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Letter from a Parochial Bishop*, pp. 129-38.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *A Letter To An English M.P.* p. 7f.

<sup>5</sup> Bible Miscellanea. Homilies by Various Glasgow Students 1696-1707. MS Gen. 341, 342. The University of Glasgow.

to what he too was expected to undertake. Unlike the homilies, written in English, the theses were in Latin, and typical topics were 'De penato originale', 'De Immortalitate Animo', 'Contra Socinum', 'De Sabbato' and 'De Transubstantio'.<sup>1</sup>

The precise duration of the Divinity course when Willison was a student is unknown. Wodrow's Correspondence refers to 'overtures anent probationers', accepted by the Assembly of 1710, which stated that probationers should not 'enter on trials till six years studies were passed', which would suggest that this may already have been the norm.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, for Willison, six years passed between his date of registration at University and his licensing by his home Presbytery of Stirling on 26th. November 1701.<sup>3</sup>

From his own experience, the younger Wodrow also recalled that classes were held daily from Monday to Friday, although on the Wednesdays when Presbytery met, students were urged to attend and listen to the proceedings. He describes the pattern in full. On Monday a student would deliver an exegesis in Latin, while the others commented on it, the Professor making his judgement. On Tuesdays, students had two discourses, a lecture and a homily. On Thursdays, scripture doubts were handled, and on Friday the teaching was in theology. Saturday was the day for the meeting of the students societies already described.<sup>4</sup>

Probably then, for six impressionable years, and in the manner detailed, Willison was moulded under the influence of the erstwhile field preacher.

<sup>1</sup> Exegesis Theologica. MS. Gen. 2118, 2140, 2147/8. The University of Glasgow.

<sup>2</sup> McCrie, T. (Ed.) *Wodrow's Correspondence*, Vol. 1, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> Presbytery of Stirling Minutes, (1701-1712), CH2/722/9. pp. 295/321/326 and a final Minute of Nov. 26th. 1701. C.R.A.

<sup>4</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, pp. 122-9.



Ministry at Brechin.

Willison was inducted to the first charge of Brechin, a collegiate charge, on 3rd. December 1703, the call issued 'jure devoluto',<sup>1</sup> the magistrates and heritors having failed to present a nominee.

That ministry has been researched by D. B. Thoms,<sup>2</sup> while Dr. H. Sefton has placed some of Willison's publications of the period in context.<sup>3</sup> Mainly polemical, these reflect his struggle against Episcopalian rivalry, practice and opinion, which, occupying him almost to the exclusion of all else, precluded development of the sacramental emphasis in his ministry, which, though apparent, was limited to providing teaching material for communicants and the eventual introduction of an annual communion celebration.

Arriving as a young incomer, his situation was unenviable, for the people were largely pro Episcopalian. Herein lay their reluctance to nominate a minister of the Established church, coupled with their sympathy for the residing Episcopalian, John Skinner, a native of the town, the son of, and assistant to, the former and now deceased minister of the second charge, Laurence Skinner.

From the outset, therefore, Willison had to endure the harassment of one who had no legal right to a ministry of the second charge, never having been inducted to it, who spurned the authority of the Established Church, who enjoyed substantial support from the people and who persisted in both intruding the Church to conduct rival services, and in using every means to impede the young minister.

<sup>1</sup> Scott, H. (Ed.) *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. 5, p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> Thoms, D. B. *The Kirk of Brechin in the Seventeenth Century* (Brechin : 1972) pp. 125-56.

<sup>3</sup> Sefton, H. R. 'John Willison and His Times'. *Book of the Society of Friends of Brechin Cathedral*, No. 24 (Brechin : 1975).

The goading took several forms. In common with ousted Episcopal clergy elsewhere, <sup>1</sup> Skinner retained the Communion utensils, account books, Proclamation and Baptismal registers. Only through the intervention of the magistrates was the communion ware returned in 1704, <sup>2</sup> and Baptismal registers in 1709. <sup>3</sup> He also continued to baptize, marry, catechize and give testimonials, in spite of the Session's protest, <sup>4</sup> and was not averse to stirring a mob to deter any minister of the Establishment from conducting afternoon worship, which he claimed his right. <sup>5</sup> When Willison first celebrated the Lord's Supper, in 1707, Skinner announced a rival celebration, though Brechin had not celebrated for fifteen years. Indeed, not content with a rival service, he encouraged parishioners to attend elsewhere on Willison's appointed day. <sup>6</sup>

In 1709, following court action, Skinner was banned from the bounds of Presbytery, but intruded again during the rebellion of 1715, when Willison was temporarily dispossessed of his pulpit. <sup>7</sup>

Yet, respite was brief, for renewed competition was to emanate from an Episcopalian Meeting House established under a Gideon Guthrie.

Resentful of the 1712 Toleration Act which allowed 'the Episcopal clergy the use of the English Liturgy in Scotland', and a right 'to preach, pray, administer the sacraments and marry', Willison, who regarded such toleration as 'contrary to the word of God' <sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Burns, T. *Old Scottish Communion Plate* (Edinburgh : 1892) p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Brechin Session Minutes (1701-1716), p. 25. Brechin Cathedral.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> McCrie, T. (Ed.) *Wodrow Correspondence* Vol. 1, p. 80.

<sup>6</sup> Brechin Session Minutes, p. 72. Brechin Presbytery Minutes (1706-1710) CH2/40/5, p. 223-4. S.R.O.

<sup>7</sup> Brechin Session Minutes, p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T. HTH.* pp. 901-2.

responded, in that same year, with a pamphlet, *Queries to the Scots Innovators in Time of Divine Service*, in which he alluded to Gideon Guthrie, <sup>1</sup> and to the 'innovations' introduced at Brechin.

The pamphlet, in forty seven questions, makes specific objection to the English prayer book with its set, read prayers and responses, <sup>2</sup> and to such Episcopalian practices as the use of organs, altars, confirmation, private communions, the sign of the cross, kneeling at communion, the observation of fasts and festal days, burial services, bowing to the altar, and, at the name of Jesus. For Willison such practices were unwarranted and unjustifiable,

Is not Christ the Great King and Lawgiver in his Church who hath the sole power of appointing the method and manner of his own worship?... Did Christ or his Apostles enjoyn or practice any such? Nay, on the contrare, we find them practicing a pure, simple and spiritual way of worshipping God.. <sup>3</sup>

In 1715, Guthrie, too, was banished, the court of Session finding that he had encroached on the Kirk Session's right by exercising discipline over persons with no authentic attachment to the Meeting House, the miscreants finding that place more accommodating because Guthrie exacted a smaller penalty. <sup>4</sup> Yet, during the rebellion, Guthrie aided Skinner in dispossessing Willison of his pulpit.

But the *Queries* is also important because it shows where the powerful support for the Episcopal party lay in Brechin and the reason for its influence. Wodrow had referred to the support of 'country gentry', <sup>5</sup> and Willison shows that these landowners

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Queries*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 2, 3, 9, 17, 18, 27, 29, 30, 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Brechin Kirk Session Minutes, p. 109. Brechin Presbytery Minutes (1710-1717) CH2/40/6, pp. 118 and 178. S.R.O.

<sup>5</sup> See above p. 22, fn. 5.

exercised a form of tyranny over tenants,

There is a persecution already begun by some who... compel their tenants and dependaries to separate from the Established Church and attend their new worship under pain of being ruined or cast out of their houses and possessions..... It is indeed the mercy of God's people that you can banish them no farther than your own territories; tho it is pretty odd, that Papists and Quakers may possess your land, but Presbyterians cannot. <sup>1</sup>

Whether through this tyranny or not, the Episcopal faction remained strong, for, as the century ended, of the populace of 2,000, about 500 were 'qualified Episcopalians'. <sup>2</sup> Such a proportion indicates the extent of Willison's problem almost a century before, and the reason why his ministry was diverted to defence and apologetic.

Other works of the Brechin ministry, some polemical, some pastoral, and some a mixture, were Willison's *Treatise on the Lord's Day*, his *Letter from a Parochial Bishop to a Prelatical Gentleman*, his *Mother's Catechism* and the *Sacramental Directory*.

The first, which Hetherington dates as early as 1712 or 1713, <sup>3</sup> certainly belongs to the period of Episcopalian controversy, for, in its Preface, Willison refers, not only to those who 'disown the perpetual obligation of the fourth commandment', but 'plead for carnal diversions and recreations' after worship. <sup>4</sup>

Such a viewpoint had been expressed in Laud's *Book of Sports*, of 1633, with a 'declaration for liberty of sports and recreation

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Queries*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Sinclair, J. (Ed.) *The Statistical Account of Scotland Drawn Up From The Communications Of The Ministers Of The Different Parishes* (Edinburgh : 1791) Vol. 21, p. 103f.

<sup>3</sup> Hetherington, *Practical Works*, p. ix.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Treatise*, HTH. p. 2.

on the Lord's Day', <sup>1</sup> and Willison's protest was that some wished 'this abomination revived'. Making reference to 'one, J. S., who calls himself a Presbyterian of the Episcopal church of Scotland', Willison was alluding to James Small, Episcopalian minister at Forfar, who had made a plea for Sabbath recreations both as 'lawful and dutiful, after the public worship, is over'. <sup>2</sup>

Willison's treatise, 'partly controversial and partly practical', <sup>3</sup> aimed to show that such opinion was a travesty of biblical thought, and, regarding the Sabbath as a 'preservative to the truths' of the faith, <sup>4</sup> he wanted to 'remedy woeful abuses' of it. <sup>5</sup>

The first part of the document, therefore, sought to establish the 'morality of the Sabbath', and the 'Divine institution of the Lord's Day'. The second part offered instruction on its proper use, which, for Willison, demanded public duties of 'worship', 'hearing the Word', 'prayer', psalmody, 'partaking of the Lord's Supper', 'baptizing', and 'making offerings for the poor', <sup>6</sup> and private duties of 'family worship', 'private prayer', 'catechising and instruction', 'Godly conference', 'restraining the profanation of the day', 'the reading of scripture and other good books', 'meditating on Divine subjects' and 'self examination'. <sup>7</sup>

The inclusion of the Lord's Supper, catechising and instruction are significant, and indicate their prominence in Willison's thought.

Yet Episcopalian controversy was to make further demands on his time, and James Small earned his scorn in the postscript to another

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 46-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 48-64.

work of 1714. <sup>1</sup> Doubtless remembering the admonition of his Professor, <sup>2</sup> Willison felt bound to defend the Established Church against its critics, and his *Letter from a Parochial Bishop* was a spirited attack on diocesan episcopacy, which, he held, found 'little shelter' in scripture or the primitive church, and had paved the way for such abuses as Patronage, Erastianism and the right of bishops to take civil office. <sup>3</sup>

These works evoked replies from Small in defence of Episcopacy, and the debate continued beyond the Brechin ministry, Willison's final word on the matter appearing in 1719. <sup>4</sup> Yet his antipathy to prelacy and Jacobitism was unabated and gave rise to two further works written in the Dundee ministry. One proposed practical measures by which Jacobite activity could be curbed, <sup>5</sup> while the other was a series of sermons preached in the aftermath of the '45 rebellion, on the error of Roman doctrine. <sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, two other pastoral works from Brechin - the *Mother's Catechism* and the *Sacramental Directory* - further endorse his interest both in teaching the young and in the Lord's Supper.

The former, an instruction manual for mothers for their children, is wrongly dated by Pomeroy as first published in 1731. <sup>7</sup> It was, in fact, published much earlier, appearing as an appendix to the combined publication of the *Treatise on the Lord's Day* and the *Sacramental Directory*, produced in 1716.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Letter from a Parochial Bishop*, pp. 142-5.

<sup>2</sup> See above p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Letter from a Parochial Bishop*, pp. 120-6.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *An Apology for the Church of Scotland*.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Letter to an English M.P.*

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *Popery Another Gospel*.

<sup>7</sup> Pomeroy, W. D. Chronological List of Willison's Works. Appendix to 'John Willison of Dundee', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1953.

*The Sacramental Directory*, then, first published in that year, was a sequel to the *Treatise on the Lord's Day*, as the expanded title given to the work, when the two were printed together, suggests. <sup>1</sup> It embodies Willison's own teaching on the Lord's Supper, and was specifically written for communicants, for whom he was to make further provision during the Dundee ministry.

Both documents <sup>2</sup> show that, early in his ministry, and despite the time demanded to secure his position and contend with Episcopalian rivals, communicants and the Lord's Supper were of prime concern.

Unable to celebrate in the early years without a working Session, town or landward, <sup>3</sup> or the Communion utensils, and prevented by Skinner's harrassment in later years, including the rival communion after Willison's celebration in 1707, it cannot be insignificant that from 1711, the year after Skinner quit the parish, Willison held an annual communion without fail for the next five years. <sup>4</sup>

Moreover, in addition to providing the *Mother's Catechism* to aid instruction at home, Willison introduced a system whereby two scholars would publicly read the catechism each Sunday. <sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Treatise Concerning the Sanctifying of the Lord's Day. And Particularly the right Improvement of a Communion Sabbath* (Edinburgh : 1716)

<sup>2</sup> Comment is made on both in below, Chapters 2 and 5.

<sup>3</sup> Presbytery of Brechin and Aberbrothock Minutes (1702-1704) CH2/40/4, p. 103, S.R.O. Presbytery of Brechin Minutes (1704-1706) CH2/40/4, p. 32. S.R.O

<sup>4</sup> Brechin Session Accounts Register, Brechin Cathedral. Communion Sunday offerings are recorded on pp. 103 (1711), 118 (1712), 130 (1713), 150 (1714), 156, (1715). Also Brechin Session Minute Book, p. 94 (1711), p. 100 (1712), p. 112 (1714), p. 116 (1715). Session minutes merely mention the Fast day in 1713 on p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Brechin Kirk Session Minute of 29th. March, 1710, p. 80.

Yet Episcopalian controversy beset the Brechin ministry to the end. Not only were Willison and his colleague forced to retire for their safety, while the church was intruded during the 1715 rebellion, <sup>1</sup> but the defection of several officebearers, and the disciplining of many church members for 'complying with wicked impositions and base oaths', <sup>2</sup> must have proved totally disheartening.

In July of 1716, he was called to Dundee, although he received, before moving, a call from 'the Council and Kirk Session' of Stirling to become second minister of the Burgh. <sup>3</sup> Ironically, his hometown would have welcomed the prophet so dishonoured in Brechin, from whence he found no 'Brechin carter to convey his furniture to his new charge, so violent was the prejudice against him'. <sup>4</sup>

#### Ministry at Dundee.

That Willison enjoyed a popularity in Dundee, which eluded him in Brechin, is evident from the fact that, as Glasgow did, later, for Norman MacLeod of the Barony, so the City Fathers of Dundee named a street in his honour. It is still so named.

At Dundee, Willison's ministry embraced far wider horizons, and, within a decade, his name commanded respect throughout the Church.

Evidence of his pastoral diligence is found in the published works of that ministry. Largely devotional, these were his explicatory catechism, <sup>5</sup> preparatory material for communicants <sup>6</sup> with special

<sup>1</sup> Brechin Kirk Session Minute of 4th. March, 1716, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 120-6.

<sup>3</sup> Stirling Burgh Records. Council Minutes (1703-1721), B66/20/7. Minutes of 3rd. July, 10th and 13th. Sept. 1716. C.R.A.

<sup>4</sup> Black, D. D. *History of Brechin* (Edinburgh : 1867) p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *An Example of Plain Catechising.*

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *A Sacramental Catechism.*



provision for the young, <sup>1</sup> words of counsel for the sick and dying, <sup>2</sup> homiletic material on the Lord's Supper, <sup>3</sup> a description of the characteristics of the Christian, <sup>4</sup> a collection of hymns, <sup>5</sup> and a series of sermons with the national interest at heart. <sup>6</sup>

Much of this material was related to his consuming interest in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. His catechisms were concerned with preparation for it, <sup>7</sup> his meditations, advices and published sermons are replete with teaching given at it and about it, and most of his hymns have the sacrament as their theme. <sup>8</sup>

In Dundee, indeed, freed from the harrassment of a rival, Willison was able to develop his views on sacramental practice, and, with the approval of his Session, introduced more frequent celebration, commending the practice to others. <sup>9</sup>

Three other polemical works appeared in Dundee, the first of which was occasioned by a dispute with John Glas, minister of Tealing, <sup>10</sup> a fellow presbyter, who later established an Independent church in Dundee, the embryo of a sect which became known as the Glasites or the Sandemanians, after Glas's son in law, Robert Sandeman, an elder of an independent congregation in Perth. Glas had come to believe that the idea of a National Church was foreign to the New

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *The Young Communicant's Catechism.*

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *The Afflicted Man's Companion.*

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sermons Before And After The Lord's Supper, and Sacramental Meditations and Advices.*

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *A Short Christian Directory.*

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Gospel Hymns, and Scripture Songs.*

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *The Balm of Gilead For Healing A Diseased Land.*

<sup>7</sup> See below, p. 174f.

<sup>8</sup> See below, pp. 87f.

<sup>9</sup> See below, p. 218.

<sup>10</sup> Willison, J. *A Defence of National Churches.*

Testament, that the Church was truly a spiritual society embracing only believers who had an experience of saving grace, that no magistrate should exercise a function within it, and that no scriptural warrant existed for Covenants.

The two had expressed contrary views on national Churches and Covenants before, preaching on the subject at a Fast Day service in Strathmartine, in 1726, and in view of the controversial nature of their respective sermons, were asked to give an account of their opinions at Presbytery. The court deferred judgement, but ordered Glas to desist from further discussion on the issue. His failure to comply ensured that the matter became a 'case', which, in 1727, was taken to Synod, where Willison spoke against Glas's opinions, insisting that his stance would encourage separation from the Church. <sup>1</sup> Ultimately, Glas was deposed in 1728, <sup>2</sup> and, in time, formed his independent churches whose characteristics were regular celebration of the sacrament, an agape or 'fellowship meal', <sup>3</sup> a 'plurality of elders' in each congregation, and an insistence that no knowledge of the Bible tongues was necessary for ministers, <sup>4</sup> an idea Willison scorned as productive of 'illiterate men'. <sup>5</sup>

Willison's document is a defence of the idea of a national Church, arguing its validity from scripture - from the existence of the

- <sup>1</sup> Hornsby, J. T. 'The Case of Mr. John Glas'. *R.S.C.H.S.* Vol. VI, 1938, pp. 120-1. Also in *The Whole Practical Works of the Reverend and Most Learned Mr. John Willison* (Aberdeen :1771) pp. v-vi.
- <sup>2</sup> Dundee and Forfar Presbytery Minutes (1725-1731) CH2/103/10 (M) pp. 128-34 and p. 162. S.R.O. Angus and Mearns Synod Minutes (1726-1736) CH2/12/6, pp. 66-8, 87-93, and 122. S.R.O.
- <sup>3</sup> Murray, D. B. 'The Influence of John Glas'. *R.S.C.H.S.* Vol. 22, 1986, Part 1, p. 51.
- <sup>4</sup> Hornsby, J. T. 'John Glas: His Later Life and Work', *R.S.C.H.S.* Vol 7, 1941, pp. 95-96, 104 and 108.
- <sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *The Church's Danger*, HTH. p. 834.

Jewish Church, which was national in character, <sup>1</sup> from prophecies on the enlargement and state of the church in Gospel times, <sup>2</sup> from the commission of Christ to the Apostles and their successors, <sup>3</sup> and from the fact that many churches belonging to the same city, province or people, were represented as one body or society, and sometimes called 'one Church, one House, one Flock', as, for example in Acts 8'. 13'. and Revelation 2'. Moreover a national Church constitution offered the practical advantages of preventing schism, <sup>4</sup> suppressing heresy, <sup>5</sup> and possessing authority to maintain discipline with sanctions. <sup>6</sup>

Willison's remaining polemical works - his Synod Sermon of 1733, and the *Fair and Impartial Testimony*, both had similar aims. Both demonstrate his concern for the Church on a national scale. Both were designed to expose its existing deficiencies - the teaching of heresy, the abuse of Patronage, schism, the secession, and Moderate preaching. Above all, both are a *crie de coeur* to her from an impassioned soul, to recover her Evangelical zeal, her pastoral diligence, and to participate in missionary endeavour.

Undoubtedly, Willison's rise from parish minister to national figure was a direct consequence of his written word, and recognition came in several forms. He served twice as Moderator of his Synod. <sup>7</sup> He preached on three occasions before the General Assembly or its Commissioner. <sup>8</sup> He vigorously participated in debates in Presbytery, Synod and Assembly on the major issues of

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *A Defence*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> 1712 and 1743, *The Church's Danger*, HTH. pp. 823 and 828.

<sup>8</sup> See below, p. 91.

the Secession, Moderate preaching and heresy. <sup>1</sup> Regarded by Wodrow as one of the 'great men' of the Church, <sup>2</sup> he was nominated as Moderator in 1739, although the appointment went to another. <sup>3</sup> He was sent to Parliament as a representative of the Assembly in 1734, over the Patronage issue, <sup>4</sup> and he played a significant part in the Revival movement through his involvement with George Whitefield, his participation in the Cambuslang and Kilsyth Revivals, and his correspondence with Jonathan Edwards and other ministers in America. <sup>5</sup> Above all, his devotional works were the inspiration of many homes, some being reprinted on several occasions, so that his *Mother's Catechism*, for example, saw at least eleven editions in Gaelic alone, one of which was certainly as late as 1851, a century after Willison's death. <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McCrie, T. (Ed.) *Wodrow's Correspondence*, Vol. 3 pp. 247 and 429, and Warrick, J. *The Moderators of the Church of Scotland, 1690-1740* (Edinburgh :1919) p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> McCrie, T. (Ed.) *Wodrow's Correspondence*, Vol. 3 p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> Morren, N. *Annals of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh : 1838) p. 297.

<sup>4</sup> Warrick, J. *The Moderators*, pp. 316 and 332.

<sup>5</sup> See below, p. 264.

<sup>6</sup> Sefton, H. R. 'John Willison and His Times', p. 21.

## Chapter Two.

### Willison's Scheme of Theology.

Before examining his sacramental theology, prior consideration should be given to the general scheme of Willison's theology, for his emphasis on the Supper as a 'non converting ordinance', and a 'badge of Christian profession', and his stress on the need for an intense preparation for communion, were all consequential to it.

Taught by Wodrow, who adhered to the scheme of 'Covenant Theology', schooled in, and praising the Westminster documents, 'the first reformed documents to enshrine the federal scheme in a mild way',<sup>2</sup> acquainted with the works of such exponents of federalism as Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), William Ames (1576-1633) and Gisbert Voet (1589-1677),<sup>3</sup> and defending Durham, Gillespie, Rutherford, Guthrie, Dickson and others<sup>4</sup> whose theology was of a federalist strain, Willison, too, thought in terms of that scheme.

G. D. Henderson wrote of the eighteenth century Evangelicals,

all were enthusiastic for the Covenant idea, and for its expression in one or other of the scholastic systems that lasted well into the nineteenth century and may even in some quarters still survive.<sup>5</sup>

Willison, like his contemporaries, was such an enthusiast.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 445-6.

<sup>2</sup> Torrance, J. B. "Covenant or Contract". *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 23, 1970, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 14, and *F.I.T.* p. 910.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* p. 446, and Preface to *A Defence*, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Henderson, G. D. *The Burning Bush* (Edinburgh : 1937) p. 73, and *Religious Life in XVII Century Scotland* (Cambridge : 1937) p. 163f.

Covenant theology had several distinctive features, the first of which was the attempt to distinguish different kinds of covenant, and to create from them 'a framework within which all theology is cast'.<sup>1</sup> In particular, it made a distinction between a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace.

The former was understood as an agreement between God and Adam, that if Adam obeyed the laws of nature, which are God's laws, and thus fulfilled the demands or conditions of the covenant, he would attain eternal life. His failure to comply, however, would affect the entire race, since as its federal head, his disobedience would bring the curse on mankind.<sup>2</sup> David Dickson expressed it in these terms,

God made our first parents, Adam and Eve, the root of mankind, both upright and able to keep the law written in their heart, which law they were naturally bound to obey under pain of death, but God was not bound to reward their service, till he entered in a Covenant or Contract with them, and their posterity in them, to give them eternal life upon condition of perfect personal obedience, withal threatening death in case they should fail. This is the Covenant of Works.<sup>3</sup>

The Covenant of Grace, on the other hand, was an agreement whereby God chose not to destroy humankind for its disobedience, but to elect a number for himself, making a Covenant of Grace for them in Christ - 'a covenant which is already promised in the promise to Abraham, reaffirmed at Sinai, and fulfilled in Christ'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Torrance, J. B. 'Covenant or Contract', p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>3</sup> Dickson, D. *The Sum of Saving Knowledge; Or a Brief sum of Christian Doctrine contained in the Holy Scripture and holden forth in the foresaid Confession of Faith and Catechism, Together with the practical use thereof* (Edinburgh : 1871) p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Torrance, J. B. 'Covenant or Contract', p. 61.

Later exponents, however, often spoke, not of two but of three covenants: the Covenant of Works between God and Adam, the Covenant of Redemption, between the Father and the Son, and the Covenant of Grace or Reconciliation, between God and the elect through Christ.

So Dickson, whose thought both Wodrow and Willison admired, <sup>1</sup> said,

the sum of the Covenant of Redemption is this: God having freely chosen unto life a certain number of lost mankind... did give them, before the world, unto God the Son, appointed Redeemer, that upon condition he would humble himself, so far as to assume the human nature of a soul and body, and subject himself to the law as a surety for them, and satisfy justice for them by giving obedience in their name even unto the suffering of the cursed death upon the cross, he shall ransom and redeem them all from sin and death and purchase unto them righteousness and eternal life. This condition the Son of God did accept before the world began. <sup>2</sup>

But then, identifying a Covenant of Grace, Dickson asserted that, through all the ages, Christ has been engaged in the work of applying the benefits to the elect by entering a Covenant of Grace or Reconciliation with them 'through faith in himself'. <sup>3</sup>

Another feature of Covenant theology was the notion that covenants had a contractual basis, so that the benefit promised in each, depended on the fulfilment of conditions. <sup>4</sup> Thus, for Dickson, for whom the words 'covenant' and 'contract' seemed synonymous, each covenant was couched in conditional terms, so that, in the Covenant of Works, Adam could gain the benefit only as a result of

<sup>1</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, p. 173, and Willison, J. Preface to *A Defence*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Dickson, D. *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Torrance, J. B. 'Covenant or Contract', pp. 62-3.

'personal perfect obedience', in that of Redemption, the Father makes a covenant with the Son provided that he accepts the terms laid down before the world began, while that of Grace is dependent on the exercise of 'faith' by the elect, and is described elsewhere by Dickson, as a 'contract between God and man procured by Christ', that whoever receives Christ has him and the benefits. <sup>1</sup>

A third feature was a stress on a limited atonement. Since the covenant made between God and Christ was for saving the elect only, the federalists could only speak of Christ dying for the elect, but not for all men. <sup>2</sup> So, Dickson again, could say that 'by the outward means and ordinances' of 'Word', 'Sacraments', 'Kirk Government' and 'Prayer', the elect are 'infallibly converted', while, in contrast, 'the reprobate' are made inexcusable. <sup>3</sup>

#### Willison's Understanding of the Federal Scheme.

David Lachman, writing of John Willison, states that he 'conceives of only two covenants, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace'. <sup>4</sup> Broadly, that may be true, but based, as it is, on only a few of his published works, the assertion tends to oversimplify Willison's thought. Consideration of the relevant sections of his *Example of Plain Catechising* and his *Sacramental Catechism*, on the other hand, amply shows that, while only speaking of two covenants, he both expounded and thought in terms of a threefold scheme.

Thus, he asked, for example, 'How many covenants hath God made with man, concerning life and salvation?'. The answer is, 'Two; the

<sup>1</sup> Dickson, D. *Therapeutica Sacra* (Edinburgh : 1664) Bk. 1, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Torrance, J. B. 'Covenant or Contract', p. 68, and Murray, D. M., 'A Personal View', in Heron, A. (Ed.) *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today* (Edinburgh : 1982) pp. 119-20.

<sup>3</sup> Dickson, D. *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> Lachman, D. *The Marrow Controversy, 1719-1723* (Edinburgh : 1988) p. 197.



first being called the Covenant of Works : the second the Covenant of Grace.' The first is understood as a gracious agreement between God and Adam and Eve, the first parents of the race, to whom God promised life and happiness in return for perfect obedience to his will and law, but threatened them with death and misery should they fail. <sup>1</sup> Moreover, since Adam is the federal head of the race, humanity becomes liable to the curse through his fall. It is chargeable with his guilt, 'because when the covenant was made with Adam, he acted as a public person, representing his whole posterity who were then in his loins; and thus the covenant being made with them in him, they sinned in him, and fell with him'. <sup>2</sup>

Having shown that there is no salvation by way of the old covenant, he then turns to the new, asserting that it may be described as 'twofold',

1) The Covenant made from eternity with Christ, in name of the elect, commonly called the Covenant of Redemption: 2) The Covenant of Reconciliation, made in time, with the elect in Christ, commonly called the Covenant of Grace. <sup>3</sup>

So Willison, while suggesting that the covenants are those of Works and Grace, then, like Dickson, proceeds to separate the latter into two parts or movements - the 'Covenant of Redemption', made in eternity, and that of 'Reconciliation' or 'Grace', made in time.

The Covenant of Redemption is defined as 'an eternal and gracious agreement in the counsel of the glorious Trinity'. Made with foresight of man's fall it aimed to secure his redemption. Thus, God the Father, in mercy, gave a certain number of fallen mankind to God the Son as their federal representative and surety, to be redeemed and saved by him. This agreement depended on the

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 447.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 448.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 449, and Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 623.

condition that the Son assume their nature and satisfy divine justice in their place, by paying their whole debt of obedience and suffering, to which they were obliged by the Covenant of Works. In return, Christ was promised support, and 'a glorious reward to himself, together with grace and glory to his people'. <sup>1</sup>

The Covenant of Grace is identified as 'God's free and gracious paction with elect sinners in Christ, proposed to and made with them in the gospel'. By it, in terms of his eternal agreement with Christ, and because of his mediation, God promises them pardon, peace, grace and glory. Especially, he promises them, absolutely, the blessings of vocation, faith, regeneration, and other means of salvation. In turn, in order to receive pardon of sin, the adoption of children and eternal life - all of which are purchased by Christ - God requires that they believe in his Son, and accept him with all the blessings of the covenant, 'by a true and lively faith, which they are called to show forth by a sincere repentance, and study of new obedience'. <sup>2</sup>

Accepting that there is a great affinity between the covenants of Redemption and Grace, in that they agree in their source, aims, nature and substance, Willison, nevertheless, insists that they differ in several respects. The first is made from eternity, the second is only made in time. In each the federates are different, so that in the former, only the Father and the Son covenant, while in the latter, the parties are God and the elect. The first consists of a 'prior treaty or agreement made by one friend for behoof of another', while the second consists of an offer to the elect for their acceptance, and requires ratification by the beneficiaries. And again, the first is more comprehensive than the second, the Covenant of Redemption containing not only 'what is promised to and required of the elect', but also what is demanded of Christ as their surety - incarnation and death - and the

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 449-50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 450.

promises of support, success, a personal reward, resurrection and exaltation over principalities and powers, made to him by God. <sup>1</sup>

Yet, for all their differences, Willison contends that the two are part of a whole, employing a simile to illustrate the relationship between them. The Covenant of Grace or Reconciliation is like 'the map of a particular province', which though distinctly bound and illustrated, and with its own inscription or dedication, is, still, part of a general map of a whole kingdom to which it belongs. <sup>2</sup>

But having so stated, Willison tries the arithmetical impossibility of making the sum of one and two equal two, by insisting that the Covenant of Grace or Reconciliation is a 'distinct covenant' from that of Redemption, returning, therefore, to a threefold scheme. <sup>3</sup>

For Willison, they are 'distinct' in view of both their conditions and promises. So, the Covenant of Redemption was conditional on Christ accepting death and the satisfaction of sins, while that of Grace is conditional on faith and 'closing with Christ' from the elect. Moreover, although Christ the Mediator is bound for the performance of the conditions of both Covenants, his requirement for that of Redemption is that he 'stands as principal' - 'doing some things for us himself', while for that of Grace he 'stands as surety' - 'enabling us to make and do certain things'. Thus, while it is true that Christ died for us and has obtained satisfaction for us, it cannot be said that he repents or believes for us. <sup>4</sup> These must be our own acts though 'it is Christ who enables us to perform them'. <sup>5</sup> Secondly, there is a distinction in view of the promises of each covenant. That of Redemption entailed a promise

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 450-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 451.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>4</sup> The opposite view was expressed by John McLeod Campbell in *The Nature of the Atonement* (London : 1878) pp. 117f.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 451.

of God to Christ which was to 'give him a seed and a glorious reward'. That of Grace entailed a promise of God to the elect, 'the gift of redemption and eternal life to the believer'.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly then, Willison saw not only a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace, but the latter as involving two distinct but related covenants, that of Redemption and Grace or Reconciliation.

The second characteristic of Federal theology was an understanding that the covenants had a contractual basis. That Willison so understood them, whether two or three, is beyond dispute.

So, speaking of the Covenant of Works, he asks, 'Had this covenant a condition to it?' Subsequent replies show that the blessings promised were entirely conditional upon perfect obedience to the will of God, which entailed 'doing all things commanded by God, without any defect...'<sup>2</sup> Or again, he speaks of the parties

contracting, God on the one part, and man on the other. We have God requiring something of man, viz. obedience to his will; and we have this requisition, attended with a promise of life upon obedience; and a threatening of death upon disobedience. And lastly, we have Adam submitting or consenting to all this...<sup>3</sup>

For Willison, the Covenant of Redemption is conditional too. It is

a gracious agreement made between the Father and Christ..wherein God promised to him, that, upon condition of his ministerial obedience and satisfaction in their stead, he should be gloriously assisted and rewarded in himself, and have grace and glory to all his seed.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 451-2.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 612.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 447.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 623.

Or, again, it is described as an agreement

wherein God the Father, out of his infinite mercy, gave a certain number of fallen mankind to God the Son, as their federal representative and surety, to be by him redeemed and saved, demanding of him that he should assume their nature, and in their room satisfy divine justice. <sup>1</sup>

Similarly, for Willison, the Covenant of Grace had conditions. So, having distinguished the Covenant of Redemption from that of Grace, he asks, 'What is the Covenant of Grace?' The reply is,

God's free and gracious paction with elect sinners in Christ.. wherein...he graciously and immutably promiseth, pardon, peace, grace and glory to them.. And in order to their obtaining of the pardon of sin, the adoption of children and eternal life... he requires that they believe in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and accept of him with all the benefits of this covenant, by a true and lively faith, which they are called to show forth by a sincere repentance, and study of new obedience. <sup>2</sup>

Later, indeed, he speaks of 'faith' and 'closing with Christ' as the condition of the Covenant of Grace on the elect's part. <sup>3</sup>

A more detailed study of Willison's understanding of conditionality attaching to the Covenant of Grace will be made in consideration of his comments on the Marrow controversy, but it is notable that, in common with the federalists, he employed contractual language in describing the covenants and saw them as having such a basis.

A third feature of Covenant theology was its stress on a limited atonement, and this also was a facet of Willison's thought. So,

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 449.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 450.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 451.

he asks, 'Doth God deliver all men from perishing in their fallen estate?' The answer is 'no, but only some'. These are identified as the 'elect' whom 'God has chosen from all eternity', of his own 'mere good pleasure'.<sup>1</sup> Or, again, he states that the Covenant of Grace is not universal, but is only made with such as accept its offer and terms, 'and these are none but the elect'. To the question of why Christ and his benefits are tendered to all who hear the gospel, without exception, when the Covenant of Grace is only made with the elect, he replies that the sovereign God 'is not bound to give an account of his matters'. Yet Willison suggests that it is done, first, to proclaim the sufficiency of Christ's ransom and the freeness of divine grace to all who flee to Christ for refuge, and secondly, so that the elect may be separated from those who refuse Christ, who are left without excuse.<sup>2</sup>

Willison then, bore all the hallmarks of the federalist, following the threefold scheme of Dickson. He understood the covenants to have a contractual basis, and, as a corollary to his understanding of the Covenant of Redemption, thought in terms of a limited atonement.

In consideration of the foregoing, it is difficult to accept the assertion of J. R. McIntosh, that few in the mainstream of Popular thought, attempted to 'define the atonement in terms of covenant theology'.<sup>3</sup> Listing only John Dun, John Muckersky, John MacLaurin and Robert Walker as among those who did so, in varying degrees,<sup>4</sup> he overlooks the fact that Willison, whom he rightly regards as standing within that mainstream, and whom he quotes liberally,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 622.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 455-6.

<sup>3</sup> McIntosh, J. R. 'The Popular Party in the Church of Scotland, 1740-1800'. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. The University of Glasgow, 1989. Thesis No. 8399.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 109-110.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 125-6, 192-3, 197-204.

expressed his whole understanding of atonement in these precise terms - on God's provision of a Covenant of Redemption, because of man's failure to meet the terms of a Covenant of works, so that, through faith in Christ's 'mediatorial obedience and satisfaction in his stead', he might thereby receive 'pardon and salvation', having met the terms of the Covenant of Grace. <sup>1</sup>

Nor was Willison any exception. The federal scheme provided the basis for an understanding of the atonement in the thought of other contemporary Evangelicals, such as Ebenezer Erskine. <sup>2</sup>

Indeed, rather like examining the separate pieces of a jig saw puzzle, without noticing that they interlock to create a cohesive picture, McIntosh's extensive treatment of Popular theology examines the thinking of Evangelicals on such subjects as the attributes of God, the nature of man, the doctrines of sin and atonement, the nature of faith and its obligations, <sup>3</sup> without showing that, in eighteenth century thought, these interlocked to form the federal scheme.

#### Willison and the Marrow Controversy.

It was Willison's opposition to anything savouring of Antinomianism and his tendency to stress conditionality in the Covenant of Grace, that led him to protest against the terminology of the Marrowmen.

The Marrow Controversy followed the republication in Scotland, in 1718, of the first part of the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*, a book then out of print, written by one, Edward Fisher, and published in London in 1646. Persuaded by friends who were sympathetic to its 'emphasis on grace in the saving of men', <sup>4</sup> James Hog of Carnock,

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 623.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 103-104.

<sup>3</sup> McIntosh, J. R. 'The Popular Party', p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Burleigh, J. *A Church History*, p. 288.

wrote a preface to it and arranged its publication, but its teaching prompted the opposition of Principal Hadow of St. Andrews, who attacked its alleged Antinomianism, at the Assembly of 1720.

The whole question of whether grace was conditional or absolute, which the charge of Antinomianism raised, was a sensitive one which the Assembly had addressed in the years immediately preceding.

In 1717, the Auchterarder Presbytery had added to the prescribed questions asked of candidates on trial for licence, requiring them to subscribe to the proposition that it was 'not sound or orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to come to Christ and to be instated in covenant with God'. One student, William Craig, found the proposition objectionable, refused to subscribe, and complained of it to the Assembly which declared it 'unsound and most detestable'.<sup>1</sup> The matter was raised again over the next two years, for the 1718 Assembly accepted that, while the Presbytery was sound and orthodox in its meaning, it was to desist from employing such unwarrantable and exceptionable words in the future, while the 1719 Assembly was required to ensure that the Presbytery had complied. The Marrow Controversy, therefore, which centred on this and related questions, revived the debate.

In his thesis on the controversy, David Lachman analyses five key doctrinal issues raised in the work, then considers the opinions of both the supporters and the opponents of the *Marrow* to them.

Willison is rightly listed an opponent, and Lachman, again citing evidence from only a limited area of Willison's writing, concludes that his thinking on these issues was 'little different' from those who defended the *Marrow*, that his objection was 'almost wholly a matter of terminology', and that his refusal to align himself with them stemmed from 'his desire to maintain the purity of doctrine,

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, J. *Church History of Scotland*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh : 1859) pp. 376-7.



including what he thought of as the form of sound words, and unity among the ministers of the Church of Scotland'.<sup>1</sup>

The five issues which Lachman identified were: 1) Assurance and saving faith, 2) the extent of the atonement and the Gospel offer, 3) the Covenant of Grace and faith, 4) preparation for grace and evangelical repentance, and 5) the necessity of holiness and good works for salvation. An examination of Willison's thought on each, as represented in his different works, clarifies his position.

1) On the question of saving faith and assurance, Willison conceived of 'saving faith' as 'a special gift of God to the elect, wrought in their hearts by the Spirit and Word of God'. By it, they are convinced of sin and their inability to recover themselves from their lost condition, 'so that they not only assent to the truth of God's records concerning Christ in his word, but also receive and rest upon Christ and his righteousness for pardon of sin and salvation'. This receiving and resting on Christ, by faith, as a Priest who offered himself a sacrifice to justice, and made satisfaction, is the means of justification before God.<sup>2</sup> Those who have known that experience can be sure that they have true saving faith, while other marks of it are: the soul which regards Christ as precious in his offices as prophet, priest and king, and which embraces him wholly and recognises him as Lord; repentance; humility; obedience; the aim of honouring Christ in every action; duty performed for love of Christ rather than law or fear of hell; purifying the heart from sin.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly in his *Example of Plain Catechising*, and writing on the Covenant of Grace, Willison asks, 'How may we know whether we be included in this promise?' The reply is, 'If we have been enabled to take God to our God, and to surrender and give up ourselves unto

<sup>1</sup> Lachman, D. *The Marrow Controversy*, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat. HTH.* p. 501.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 502.

him, we may claim an interest in it'.<sup>1</sup> Or again, the believer may know that God has chosen him to eternal life, if he has chosen God to be his God and portion, and gives himself to God. Then he may conclude that 'God hath first chosen us'.<sup>2</sup>

On this the Marrow men would not have quibbled. Such doctrine was compatible with their own.

2) On the second issue of the extent of the atonement and the gospel offer, it has already been noted that Willison thought in terms of a limited atonement. He believed, nevertheless, that the Gospel was to be freely offered. So while he points out that the Covenant of Grace was not made with all mankind, it is still to be tendered and offered 'to all'. 'All sinners, even the worst of them, have a call and warrant to come and take hold of the Gospel'.<sup>3</sup> The same thought appears in the *Sacramental Catechism*. Christ and the benefits of the covenant are to be tendered to all who hear the Gospel, without exception. 'Every man is required to come to him, and believe in him, and that under the pain of damnation'. Even the worst of men have warrant to come and take hold of the covenant with its benefits and promises. This they can do without fear of presumption, 'firmly expecting welcome'. Indeed, they sin 'heinously' against God and their souls if they do not respond.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, on this issue, too, Willison's thought was perfectly in harmony with that of the Marrow men who held that Christ should be offered to all, even if he did not die for all.

3) Of the relationship between the Covenant of Grace and faith, Willison saw faith as the 'instrument' by which the benefits of the

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 624.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 622.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 624.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 455-6.

Covenant are appropriated by the believer. Explaining that the Covenant of Grace, as made in time with the elect, is the 'execution or application of the covenant made with Christ, as to what immediately concerns the elect themselves', he asks, 'What is the condition required of us to interest us in these promised blessings?' The answer is 'faith in Christ Jesus'. Nevertheless, the elect do not fulfil this condition or believe of themselves. Christ has purchased faith for them and promised it to them in the Covenant. Faith then, cannot be called a condition of the covenant in a strict and proper sense, but only in a more general sense as the 'only mean or instrument for applying the righteousness of Christ to us'. Under the first Covenant, man was justified before God on condition of his own righteousness, whereas, under the second, he is justified only by the righteousness performed by Christ which is apprehended by faith. '

This too was in harmony with the Marrow men. But it was over the issue of conditionality that Willison parted company with them.

Insisting on calling repentance and subsequent holiness conditions, he believed the Marrow men to overstress free grace, at the expense of these, and therefore accepted the charge of Antinomianism made against them. Lachman correctly asserts that Willison's doctrine was basically the same as that of the Marrow men, and that the difference was one of terminology. Willison, nevertheless, clearly found their terminology unacceptable.

An understanding of Willison's position can only be reached from a complete examination of his definition of the Covenant of Grace, which ran as follows:

God's free and gracious paction with elect sinners in Christ, proposed to and made with them in the gospel; wherein according to his eternal compact with Christ, and for the sake of his

' Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 623-4.

mediation and merits, he graciously and immutably promiseth pardon, peace, grace and glory to them. Particularly he promiseth in an absolute manner, to grant them the blessings of vocation, faith, regeneration and other means of salvation. And in order to their obtaining pardon of sin, the adoption of children and eternal life (all which blessings are purchased by Christ), he requires of them that they believe in "his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ", and accept of him with all the blessings of this covenant, by a true and lively faith, which they are called to show forth by a sincere repentance, and study of new obedience. All which gracious promises and demands, the elect, in due time, upon God's call, cordially acquiesce in, accept of, and give consent to: And this they do through the grace and strength of Christ their surety, according to his eternal engagement for them. '

The nature of this covenant and its terms must be contrasted with that of the Covenant of Works. The Covenant of Works was one of friendship between God and an innocent creature. The Covenant of Grace is one of reconciliation between enemies. The first sprang from divine love and goodness, but the second from divine mercy. The first was universal, made with mankind in Adam. The second is particular, made with the elect. The first has the condition of obedience to perfection. The second requires believing. The first demanded the righteousness of man, but the second the righteousness performed by Christ. The first had no provision of a Mediator or surety to answer for Adam's fulfilling his part of the covenant, and offered no remedy if he broke it - neither repentance nor forgiveness. The second makes that very provision. The first could be broken or disannulled. The second cannot be dissolved and is everlasting because of the sufficiency and faithfulness of its surety. The first was rendered void by the slightest sin or failing, so that Adam lost the blessings promised, but no sin of

' Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 450.

the elect can dissolve the second or deprive them of happiness. <sup>1</sup>

For Willison, the Covenant of Grace demands faith, but this cannot be compared to the demand for obedience on Adam's part in the first Covenant. Adam's obedience was his righteousness before God, but this cannot be said of the believer's faith, which is neither the believer's righteousness before God, nor his claim to bliss. It is only the 'instrument' or 'mean' or 'applying condition' required of him for claiming an interest in the righteousness of Christ as his surety. He alone is the ground of the believer's justification and claim to bliss, the 'only pleadable and meritorious condition of life and salvation which the poor, naked soul must flee to and depend on'. Moreover, Adam was required to meet the condition of the covenant in his own strength, whereas that required by the elect sinner is to be performed by the strength freely promised and communicated in the covenant. <sup>2</sup>

Equally, the Covenant of Grace obliges obedience, but not in the same way or for the same ends as did the first Covenant, for it requires not legal, but evangelical obedience. Legal obedience was commanded as man's duty. Evangelical obedience is promised as a gift of God. The first had to be perfect to be accepted. The second is acceptable, if sincere, despite its imperfections. The two are also different in their ends. Legal obedience was required in the first covenant as the proper condition of life and bliss. Evangelical obedience is required, in the second, as evidence of faith and conformity to Christ. Legal obedience was required for the justification of our persons. Evangelical obedience testifies to our gratitude for redeeming love. Legal obedience was required as the condition, in the first covenant, for the purchasing of heaven and glory, while Evangelical obedience is a gospel qualification, only in order to possess it. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 452.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>3</sup> *Idem.*

With his definition of the Covenant of Grace in mind, and the foregoing explanation of its nature, it is possible to examine what Willison means by conditionality.

To the question whether the Covenant of Grace is absolute or conditional, Willison replies that it is partly both. <sup>1</sup> This seemingly ambiguous statement is explained as meaning that it is absolute with regard to the first blessings promised in it, which are identified as effectual calling, regeneration, faith and repentance. These are promised and given absolutely and freely by God for Christ's sake, without depending on any condition to be performed by the elect. But the covenant is conditional in respect of its subsequent blessings, which are identified as union with Christ, justification, adoption and glorification. These, God suspends until the condition of faith is exercised by the elect, <sup>2</sup> the act or qualification required before the promised blessings of pardon and life can be conferred.

Willison, indeed, proceeds to identify three conditions of the Covenant of Grace. The first, 'conditio propter quam', refers to Christ's satisfaction and merits, and is the condition on account of which the blessings of the Covenant are bestowed on the elect. Secondly, there is 'conditio per quam', which refers to faith as the condition, instrument or mean, through which we may share in the blessings of the Covenant. Thirdly, there is the 'conditio sine qua non', which is identified as that without which the blessings of pardon and eternal life cannot be enjoyed. Repentance and new obedience belong in this category. These are absolutely necessary for believers, 'as the concomitants, fruits and evidences of a true faith' on the one hand, and as the means to make them fit "for the inheritance of the saints in light", on the other. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 453.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 453-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 454.

In Willison's view, however, insistence on such conditions does not detract from the free grace of the Covenant. Duties required by it are neither performed by natural strength, nor give a right to its blessings in any 'meritorious' way, as though they can be earned. Even faith, which is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, although called a condition, is only to be understood as the instrument purchased for the elect by Christ and promised by God. All is of God. Nevertheless, faith is a condition in the sense that, while the grace and power of believing are derived from God's Spirit, the act of believing is the act and deed of the soul in response to the exertion and performance of his grace. <sup>1</sup>

Moreover, while love, repentance, humility, self denial, holiness and new obedience may be called conditions, being required of all who enter the Covenant, and many of the blessings are suspended until they are performed, there is a great difference between the conditionality of these and that of faith. The others are consequential to the soul which has apprehended Christ by faith.

Yet, in the broadest sense, these too can be termed as conditions. Indeed, endeavouring to be more explicit, Willison lays down a threefold scheme of conditions for those who enter the Covenant.

There are antecedent terms or qualifications, identified as hearing the Word, some knowledge of God, a sense of misery, despair of self help, awareness of the need for a Mediator. There are concomitant conditions, such as repentance, love, humility, self denial and spiritual hunger, because, of necessity, these accompany and belong to true faith. Consequent terms or qualifications are evangelical obedience, taking up the cross, patience and perseverance. As 'fruits and evidences of true faith', these are necessary for our enjoyment and possession of the ends of the Covenant. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 454-5.

In all of this, Willison's thought is identical to that of Dickson, who held that first, as a precondition, a man must possess an awareness of sin, secondly, that there is a condition of faith by which he is received into the Covenant, and thirdly, that there is also a condition on the covenanted, to 'up-give of themselves to Christ's Government', to 'take up his yoke', and to 'obey his commands', as evidence of sincere faith. <sup>1</sup>

In Willison's scheme then, a sense of sin and helplessness leads to the exercise of faith in embracing Christ as Mediator. Thus faith precedes repentance, but repentance must still be considered as a condition which is 'concomitant with', and evidence of that faith, which will result further in a new obedience on the part of those who have entered the Covenant.

Finally, Willison reiterates the distinction between the condition of faith and the other conditions. Repentance, and the other conditions he has mentioned, are only 'conditions of certain connection, without which we cannot be justified, united to Christ, or inherit his purchased glory'. Faith, on the other hand, is the 'only instrumental, uniting and applying condition of our justification, by and through which, as a mean or instrument, we are actually justified, united to Christ and entitled to all the blessings of his purchase'. Faith, therefore, exceeds all the other graces, because it has a particular influence on our justification and union with Christ. It accomplishes what no other act or grace of ours is capable of, because by it alone we 'take hold of the Redeemer and close with his righteousness'. This is why we are said to be justified by faith, but never by repentance, love or any other grace.

Yet, even faith does not justify us on account of its own worth, or because it is a work of grace of ours. It is simply the 'hand of the soul', apprehending Christ and taking hold of his righteousness

<sup>1</sup> Dickson, D. *Therapeutica Sacra*, BK. 1, Ch. 6, pp. 99-101.



which is the only ground of justification before God. Faith then, strictly speaking, is the only condition of the Covenant of Grace on our part. <sup>1</sup>

The difference between Willison and the Marrow men, then, lay principally in his emphasis on the word 'conditionality' with reference to repentance and holiness in the Covenant of Grace. Since, for him, repentance was 'concomitant with', and 'inseparable from', the soul's exercising faith, and since holiness was its evidence, he neither could nor would omit the term. Indeed, in several places, not cited by Lachman, he defends his use of it, and in two at least, refers to supporters of the Marrow, whom, on this issue, he will not support. Moreover, since some of these are only found in updated editions of original works, rewritten several years before the *Fair and Impartial Testimony* and its *Postscript*, of 1744, cited by Lachman, he is wrong to assert that Willison gave no more consideration to the issue in intervening years. <sup>2</sup> Clearly, he not only did review the matter but remained resolute.

So, in the 1734 edition of his earlier *Sacramental Catechism*, he complains of 'shaking and fluctuating times when new thoughts and expressions in matters of faith are vented, which are not agreeable to the form of sound words formerly used in this church'. Praising the doctrine of the Confession of faith and Catechisms, he pleads that Christian people will adhere to them, so that

we will carefully avoid every appearance of error; nay, even be afraid to disuse the former modes of speaking and expressing gospel truths used in the church, or adopt new phrases and expressions in their stead; seeing such a practice hath often introduced new errors into the church.

Then alluding to the Marrow men, he continues,

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 455.

<sup>2</sup> Lachman, D. *The Marrow Controversy*, pp. 195 and 198.

It cannot but be thought strange, that any lovers of our Zion, for the sake of some fond new thoughts and peculiar expressions, which perhaps their hearers cannot comprehend so well as themselves, but are apt rather to construct to a wrong sense, should choose to recede from the old approved ways of speaking, or find fault with those that retain them, whereby their people are brought to stumble at worthy gospel ministers that have not learned their new phrases and pass harsh censures on them; which not only tends to mar people's edification, but also to endanger the peace of our Mother Church, and the purity of her doctrine. For, by such course, the seeds may be sown that may spring up, if God prevent it not, into the noxious weeds of schism and error, when we of this generation are rotting in the dust. I cannot yet be persuaded that Rutherford, Gillespie, Durham, Guthrie, and other such eminent lights in this church, that were blessed with such large measures of the Spirit of God, had as clear discoveries of the gospel-mysteries and doctrine of grace; were as spiritual and evangelical in their preaching, frame and conversation; and also honoured by their Master to bring in as many souls to him, as any in our day; notwithstanding that they taught "The Covenant of grace its being mutual, faith being its condition; the necessity of personal covenanting with God, of leaving sin in order to come to Christ; of closing with him upon the terms of the gospel; of obeying gospel precepts, making vows at the sacraments" etc. Though perhaps, in some places, those who would adventure to speak in the style of the foresaid worthies, may lay their account with being censured as legal preachers.

I pray the Lord..... that no opinion or expression be vented among us..... that, under the pretext of advancing free grace, weakens the people's obligations to holy duties. ' 1

Or again, in the Preface to the second edition of his *Sacramental*

' Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* (Glasgow : 1734) pp. xxi-xxiii.

*Directory*, printed in 1726, Willison updated what he had written in the first, and, objecting to the legal and moral preaching of the Moderates, had also alluded to the Marrow Controversy.

There he suggested that two extremes are to be avoided, and he directed his readers to the Westminster standards which preserve the necessary balance between them. The one extreme is legalism and the other Antinomianism, so that there is a danger, on the one hand, of producing 'fine rational harangues' aiming to enforce morality, and on the other, of overstressing free grace.

For Willison, therefore, there is danger in preaching only on great themes, such as 'the freedom of grace in the salvation of sinners, justification by the righteousness of Christ our Surety, the excellency of faith in Christ, and the privileges of the covenant', and making these the only subject of preaching. If these are the entire content of the message, then people are not led to study regeneration of heart, holiness of life and the practice of commanded duties. Thereby they miss the design of the Incarnation which is 'to destroy the works of the devil, and to teach man to live soberly, godly and righteously'. The other extreme is to insist on morality with little use of Gospel motives to press for it. In this way, it is possible to preach against vice and immorality without teaching its root in the fall of Adam, the corruption of our nature, and the need for regeneration.

Then, alluding to the *Marrow*, he says that just as the Church, years ago, had shown its 'zeal against Antinomianism' and doctrine which tended towards it, so it is still incumbent on it to ensure that preachers do not, 'under the specious pretext of exalting free grace', weaken the obligation to holiness and good works. '

Or again, in a later edition of his explicatory catechism, first published in 1734, Willison says of his use of conditionality,

' Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* 2nd. edition (Edinburgh : 1726) p. xxxvi.

The Westminster Assembly, and our Assembly 1648, in Lar. Cat. Quest 32 also assert this in express words, that God requireth faith as the condition to interest sinners in Christ... Now our Larger Catechism that hath these words was approved by the Westminster Assembly, and the Assembly 1648, after the most exact trial and examination, both by themselves, and by the respective presbyteries of this church; as appears from the Act of Assembly, 1648, sess. 10. If these noble reforming Assemblies had not thought fit to use the word condition to guard against the Antinomians, who say the elect are justified before they believe, I might have dropped it as being abused by some. But I continue to use it in order to explain the words of our standards, to prevent mistakes, and to show in what sense the word condition may be safely used when applied to faith as our Reformers understood it. <sup>1</sup>

All of these passages clearly show that Willison opposed the Marrow men by conviction, and that, far from not reconsidering the matter, he had given thought to it on several occasions, but saw no reason to change his mind, just as it remained unchanged by the time he wrote the *Fair and Impartial Testimony*, cited by Lachman.

Willison was also at variance with the Marrow men on the two remaining issues which Lachman identified as crucial within the Marrow Controversy.

On the doctrine of preparation for grace and evangelical repentance, Willison, in common with other reformed Divines, <sup>2</sup> spoke, as already noted, about antecedent conditions to the Covenant of Grace. He believed that saving faith is wrought by the Spirit of God who prepares the soul by the ministry of the law, so

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. fn. p. 623. The passage does not appear in the original work, or in the 1737 edition.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, J. *Scottish Theology and Theologians*, The Cunningham Lectures 1870-1 (Edinburgh : 1872) p. 55.

that the soul realizes the evil and guilt of sin, the punishment due for it, and the need of a Mediator. Equally, it is brought about by the Spirit's using the ministry of the gospel which offers 'the ability and fulness of an offered Saviour', by stirring in the soul a high esteem for Christ, and hope of relief in him. Thus the soul ceases to depend on its own righteousness and lays the stress of salvation on Christ alone. <sup>1</sup> For Willison, hearing the word, some knowledge of God, a sense of misery, our hopeless state and need of a saviour, were 'preparatory conditions of our entering into the covenant', 'necessarily and previously requisite to it'. <sup>2</sup>

On the necessity of holiness and good works to salvation, it has already been noted that Willison did stress these. Like Rutherford, however, he saw them 'as conditions of the covenanted ones, not of the Covenant'. <sup>3</sup> So Willison listed 'evangelical obedience, taking up the cross, patience and perseverance', as 'consequent to entering the Covenant' and 'qualifications required of all those that enter into it'. <sup>4</sup>

#### Willison's Conclusions on the Marrow Controversy.

Willison's final assesment on the Controversy is found, as Lachman noted, in the *Fair and Impartial Testimony*, where he wrote,

About this time, there arose debates and great noise, as if some ministers were bringing in a new scheme of doctrine, because in their sermons they disused and censured several old approved words and phrases as too legal, and affected some new modes of speaking: and because they recommended to their people an old book called the 'Marrow of Modern Divinity'. This book was laid before the Assembly, 1720, as containing

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 502.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 454.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Lachman, D. *The Marrow Controversy*, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 455.

gross Antinomian errors, and several passages and propositions being excerpted from it by a committee, the Assembly proceeded in a hurry to pass a condemnatory act against them all in cumulo: and, among the rest, they condemned as erroneous two propositions, viz. That believers are altogether set free from the law as a covenant of works, and that they are set free both from the commanding and condemning power of the covenant of works. Which two are surely sound and orthodox principles in themselves. Likewise that same Assembly, by another act, recommended to ministers to insist in preaching certain doctrines, and among others the "necessity of a holy life, in order to the obtaining of everlasting happiness".<sup>1</sup>

While Willison considered that the two propositions 'were sound and orthodox in themselves', he sympathised even more with what the Assembly wished to safeguard, although he felt that its objection was 'very ill worded, however sound its meaning, in that it tended to require 'legal' as distinct from 'evangelical obedience'.

Maintaining that the *Marrow* contained several 'stumbling and unjustifiable expressions', Willison believed the Assembly would have been wiser to remit the question to Presbyteries, sure that such a course would have prevented 'the oversight and mistakes of the Assembly', and the offence which its finding had given to the *Marrow* men with the consequent danger of schism. He also felt that the Assembly of 1722, which reviewed the Act of 1720, did 'justice to truth' and preserved 'peace and truth in the Church', when it explained that the expression, "the necessity of a holy life in order to the obtaining of eternal happiness", really meant "the necessity of a holy life for obtaining the enjoyment and possession of everlasting happiness, but not the right and title to it, which they say all justified persons have already attained, viz. through the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 906.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

In a postscript to the 'Testimony', written some twenty five years after the controversy, Willison returned to the matter. Prompted by an act passed, in 1744, by the Associate Presbytery, on the doctrine of grace, which declared that the General Assembly of 1722 had opened a door to Arminian and Socinian errors, he says that, on second thoughts, the 1722 Act was also badly worded, and that the word 'causality' is unfit to be used in asserting the necessity of holiness to salvation. Nevertheless, still believing that the Assembly was right to disapprove any suggestion that the Christian is not obliged to study holiness, he felt that the Associate Presbytery had no right to censure it. The 1722 Assembly had not only explained that "the necessity of holiness for achieving everlasting happiness" only referred to its necessity for obtaining "the enjoyment and possession" of it, and not of "the right and title to it", but had also said that "it is dangerous to assert that holy obedience is not a federal or conditional mean, nor has any kind of causality in order to the obtaining of glory, as it seems to exclude all usefulness and influence of holy obedience, in order of means towards the possession of heaven".

Willison asserts that this later clause limited the sense in which the Assembly of 1722 disapproved the former assertion.

His conclusion is that the 1722 Assembly's position was sound, and 'intended no hurt to the doctrine of grace'. It did not assert that 'a believer's holiness hath any causal influence or virtue to purchase heaven', but that God requires holiness as the means of preparing and making believers 'meet for possessing heaven'.

Willison, then, embraced the federal scheme of theology, regarding covenants as contracts with conditions to be met by man in order to receive the promised benefits of God. Moreover, unlike the Marrow men, he emphasised repentance and new obedience, evidence of the believer's sincere faith, as conditions of the Covenant of Grace.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 946.

### Chapter Three.

#### Willison's Sacramental Theology.

Willison's acceptance of the federal scheme had implications for his understanding of the Lord's Supper which is treated in his *Sacramental Directory*, *Sacramental Catechism*, *Young Communicant's Catechism*, and, to a lesser extent, in his *Example of Plain Catechising*.

But he was also influenced by others who thought in terms of that scheme, often quoting them verbatim without acknowledgement. Not that it was done with dishonest intent. Indeed, in the Preface to the *Sacramental Catechism*, he writes, 'I frankly acknowledge, I have borrowed many things from others that have written upon the subject, and especially from our excellent Larger Catechism'.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from that named source, however, others from which he quoted liberally, were the works of Stephen Charnock (1628-1640) sometime chaplain to the Chief Governor in Ireland, and later, pastor to a Presbyterian/Independent congregation,<sup>2</sup> Thomas Doolittle, an English Puritan Divine,<sup>3</sup> Thomas Vincent, sometime minister of Maudline Milk Street, London,<sup>4</sup> and Matthew Henry (1662-1714) a Puritan Divine and Commentator.<sup>5</sup> The first of these, Willison never acknowledged, but he did commend Vincent's *Catechism* to his readers and the sacramental works of Doolittle and Henry.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* Preface, HTH. p. 446.

<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh : 1864)  
Willison's use of it is shown below, p. 222f.

<sup>3</sup> Doolittle, T. *Treatise on the Lord's Supper* (Glasgow : 1700).

<sup>4</sup> Vincent, T. *An Explicatory Catechism* (London : 1720).

<sup>5</sup> Henry, M. *The Communicant's Companion or Instructions and Helps for the Right Receiving of the Lord's Supper* (Glasgow : 1761).

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* (1740 edition) p. 1.



Willison's general teaching on the sacraments conforms to that of Chapter XXVII of the Confession of Faith. Thus, sacraments are appointed by God to be the 'means of salvation', but more especially for the increase of grace and comfort to his people. <sup>1</sup> They differ from the 'word' both in form and end. The end of the 'word' is to produce faith, while that of sacraments is to confirm it. The word, by form, appeals to the ear. Sacraments appeal to other senses. They have, therefore, a greater impact than that which is merely audible. As 'visible signs of his love to mankind', they were given by Christ to remedy unbelief, stimulate faith and stir the affections.

Sacraments have no efficacy in themselves. Yet God, 'according to his pleasure communicates virtue' to them, making them efficacious, because of the blessing of Christ on them and the working of his Spirit. It is the Spirit who 'puts life and virtue in to the ordinances, and by them conveys and applies Christ and his benefits to the souls of men'. <sup>2</sup> In this way, they prove effectual means of grace and salvation to the elect. Yet, they do not benefit all who receive them, 'but only such as receive them by faith'. <sup>3</sup>

Willison's definition of a sacrament is an amalgamation of that supplied in the Westminster Confession and Larger Catechism. It is

a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, and annexed as a seal to the covenant of grace; wherein, by outward and sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of his mediation, are represented, sealed and applied to those that are within the covenant, to confirm their interest in him, to strengthen and increase their faith and all other graces, to testify and cherish their love and communion with one another, to put a

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH.~ p. 701.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>3</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, in Ch. XXVII, para. 3, speaks of 'a promise of benefit to worthy receivers'.

visible difference betwixt those that belong to the church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ according to his word. <sup>1</sup>

The signs of water in baptism, and bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, along with the invisible things represented by them, are 'visible seals to the church of the benefits of Christ's mediation and purpose'. <sup>2</sup> As signs they represent the blessings available in Christ and the Covenant of Grace. As seals they confirm the right to them of believers who are in the covenant. Those, on the other hand, who are outwith the covenant, and who might partake of them, do so without profit and merely 'apply God's seal to a blank'. <sup>3</sup>

Willison suggests that there were sacraments under the Covenant of Works - the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. Further, in harmony with the Westminster Confession, that circumcision and the Passover were Old Testament sacraments, when the Covenant of Grace was manifest by 'types and sacrifices before the Incarnation'. Yet they were seals of the Covenant of Grace representing 'Christ as to come', so that the Passover Lamb, for example, 'represented Christ and his sufferings, and the receiving of him by faith with sincere repentance'. Baptism and the Lord's Supper in the New Testament, on the other hand, represent Christ as already come, and do so, therefore, in a clearer and plainer manner. <sup>4</sup>

Baptism for initiation, the sign and seal of spiritual birth, and the Lord's Supper for nourishment in Christ, are the only New Testament sacraments. Instituted by Christ, no more are needed, and the five other sacraments of the Roman Church are repudiated.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 456-7. Compare with *Larger Catechism*, Q. 162, and *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. XXVII, para. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. pp. 701-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>4</sup> *Idem.*

Willison's Understanding of the Lord's Supper.

Willison's thinking on the Lord's Supper, too, is substantially that of Westminster, and his treatment of it expands the material produced by that Assembly. His definition of it is an amalgamation of what is supplied in the Shorter and Larger Catechisms,

a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein by giving bread and receiving wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is showed forth: and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal or carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace: to the confirming of their union and communion with Christ, renewing of their covenant with God and their thankfulness to him: and their mutual love to and fellowship with one another, as members of the same mystical body. <sup>1</sup>

For Willison, every part of the Lord's Supper has significance, and he develops his understanding of it by expounding, alternately, the meaning of the sacramental elements, actions and words.

Just as Calvin, describing the congruity of the elements, wrote of them analogously, 'as bread nourishes, sustains and keeps the life of our body, so Christ's body is the only food to invigorate and enliven our soul.... we must reflect on the benefits which wine imparts to the body, and so realize that the same are spiritually imparted to us by Christ's blood. These benefits are to nourish, refresh, strengthen and gladden', <sup>2</sup> so Willison, too, tries to show their fitness for their purpose, but does it by expanding on the allegorical meaning attached to them by Doolittle.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 466. Compare with *Shorter Catechism*, Q. 96, and *Larger Catechism*, Q. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV. XVII. III, in McNeill, J. T. (Ed.) *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London : 1961) p. 1363.

Just as the seed, from which bread is produced, must be sown and die in the earth, so Christ's body had to be buried before it could feed the souls of men. Just as bread is processed food, whose production entails threshing, bruising, grinding and baking, so Christ was 'bruised between the millstone of God's wrath and human sin', and 'scorched in the oven of the Father's wrath'. As bread nourishes the body, so Christ's body preserves the soul. As it must be broken and received, so Christ's body must be broken, received and fed on by faith, before it can benefit spiritual health. And, as bread becomes one with the body, so, by eating the sacramental bread, believers become one with Christ's body. '

Similar parallels are drawn from the wine. As it is squeezed from the grape, so Christ was crushed in the winepress of the Father's justice. As it refreshes and cheers, so he refreshes the soul of the penitent. As it warms, so his blood warms the affections with divine love. As it emboldens, so his blood animates the saddened soul. As it has medicinal properties, so Christ cures the wounds of the soul. And, as it serves no purpose until it is consumed, so the blood of Christ is of no avail, unless applied in faith. <sup>2</sup>

Willison, next, and still 'borrowing' from Doolittle, explains the meaning of the sacramental actions of minister and communicant. <sup>3</sup> So, the minister's taking bread is eloquent of the Father's taking

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 468. Compare with Doolittle, T. *A Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper* (Glasgow : 1700) p. 144. Doolittle uses the identical phrase, 'scorched in the oven of the Father's wrath'.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 468-9.

<sup>3</sup> A similar, though shorter explanation of the significance of the actions is found in the sacramental sermons preached in the Kirk of Edinburgh by Robert Bruce in 1589. Bruce, R. in Torrance, T. F. (Ed.) *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper* (London : 1958) pp. 78-9.

Willison, in fact is expanding on Doolittle, pp. 145-6.

Christ as the surety and laying on him the sins of the elect. The blessing of the elements signifies not only their reservation for sacramental purposes, but thanksgiving for God's grace in providing a Saviour, and for the sacrament, itself, as a means of conveying and sealing Christ's purchase to believers. It also speaks of God's own action in sending Jesus, 'sanctified, blessed and endowed with the graces' required for his work. The breaking of bread signifies the breaking of Christ's body to satisfy God's justice, pacify his wrath and purchase salvation. The giving of it betokens God's offering of his Son, Christ's offering of himself, and God's sealing of Christ and his benefits to worthy receivers, while the distribution signifies Christ's presence, dispensing the benefits of his death and suffering to all. <sup>1</sup>

Similarly, each action of the communicant has significance. So the reception of the elements speaks of extending the hand of faith to appropriate Christ and his benefits, and the taking in both kinds signifies receiving Christ wholly, without making exception of any of his offices or demands - 'his laws and his love, his precepts and his promises, his cross and his crown'. Eating and drinking signify union with Christ, the satisfaction of the believer in partaking of him and his benefit, the imparting of strength and grace, and the mutual giving and taking 'seising and infeftment' <sup>2</sup> between Christ and the communicant'. The passing of elements, hand to hand, signifies the fellowship of Christian people. <sup>3</sup>

Much of Willison's comment on the actions reflects the antipathy of the Confession of Faith to Roman practice. Thus, he abhors the

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 468-9, and *Plain Cat.* p. 708.

<sup>2</sup> Both of these are legal terms relating to rights of possession, and Willison refers to the feudal practice of giving possession of property by the symbolic delivery of earth and stones. Thus, the reception of sacramental elements is a sign of rights granted to communicants.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 470-1, and *Plain Cat.* p. 708.

practice of using unbroken wafers, as a departure from the original practice and because it fails to remind communicants that Christ's body was broken. He scorns the practice of a wafer being placed in the communicant's mouth, because thereby the extension of the hand, representing a consent of faith, is lost. Also, defending the mode of communicating seated at the table, he traces a kneeling posture to Honorius II, whose decree followed that on transubstantiation issued by his predecessor, Innocent III. <sup>1</sup> Willison's objection, which would equally apply to the Lutheran position, is that that posture implies worship of the sacramental bread, and suggests that God or Christ is worshipped in, or by use of, the elements. <sup>2</sup>

Yet, for Willison, the sacramental words reveal 'the doctrines, uses and ends of the sacrament', <sup>3</sup> and in considering these his theology on the Lord's Supper is clearly expounded.

First, he considers the words, 'Take, eat, this is my body', which mean that the bread signifies and represents the body of Christ so that believers partake of him spiritually, by faith. Although not corporally present, Christ is really present in a spiritual manner.

In this context, he presents a number of arguments against the doctrine of transubstantiation, most, though not all of which, are taken from Vincent's Catechism. <sup>4</sup> The belief violates the nature and end of the sacrament, which is to commemorate Christ who is spiritually present but physically absent. Were Christ corporally present there would be no difference between the signs and the

- <sup>1</sup> A decree on transubstantiation was issued under Innocent III. *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* (Bologna : 1973) p. 230, lines 33-38, but his successor was Honorius III, who passed no act or decree on kneeling at Mass. Barbiche, B. *Index Actorum Romanorum Pontificum*, Vol. 1 (Citta Del Vaticano : 1975) p. 52f.
- <sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 471, and *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 707.
- <sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 472.
- <sup>4</sup> Vincent, T. *Explicatory Catechism*, pp. 312-5.

thing signified. It also violates the nature of Christ's body which could not be human were it capable of contraction 'into the bounds of a piece of bread'. It violates scripture, which refers to the elements, even after consecration, as bread and wine, and speaks of Christ's ascension to heaven where his body remains until his coming. Consequently, it cannot be eaten at the sacrament. It violates sense and reason - sense, because our senses of touch, taste and smell, apprehend that the elements remain unchanged in substance, while reason convinces us that the same body cannot at the same time be glorified in heaven and broken and eaten here.

Moreover, the doctrine has other absurdities. It demands that, either Christ has thousands of bodies, or that one body can be present simultaneously and ubiquitously, which is equally impossible. It suggests that a priest is empowered to 'create his maker and eat his God', since he worships what he creates and eats what he worships. According to the belief, Christ's glorified body is still subject to corruption. And again, the insistence that the words be interpreted literally demands that several other figurative expressions of scripture should be similarly treated, so that Christ is a door, a vine etc. <sup>1</sup>

There is a change in the elements, however, but it is not in their form. It is in their use and significance, since, by consecration they are set apart for a sacred and mystical use. No longer intended for bodily nutrition, but as 'signs of Christ, seals of grace, pledges of justification and earnest of salvation', they retain their former nature and are not Christ's real body and blood under the accidents of bread and wine. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 473-4, and *Plain Cat.* p. 709.

The arguments against transubstantiation and Roman practice are amplified in Willison's *Popery Another Gospel*, HTH. pp. 865-7.

<sup>2</sup> Willison's teaching here is entirely compatible with that of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chap. XXIX, V and VI, and with that of Calvin in *Institutes* IV. XVII. XI.

Similarly, the words, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood', are to be understood figuratively. The meaning is that the wine, in the cup, represents the shedding of Christ's blood for sin, a sign of God's making and confirming the Covenant of Grace, and a visible pledge of its blessings effected by Christ's death. ' The words are a reminder, therefore, that the Covenant of Grace is Christ's testament whereby he bequeaths legacies to his people, that his testament is sure because it is confirmed by the death of the testator and sealed with his blood, and that, at the Table, he delivers a copy of his testament into believer's hands. They also call to mind that the Covenant was costly. Its price was the blood of Christ without which 'there could be no remission of sin', so that the gift of pardon is invaluable. Equally, they remind that the blood of Christ is only efficacious when received and applied by faith, so that each has to avail himself of the benefit. Yet to all such, the Covenant ratified and pardon sealed by Christ's blood is as refreshing to a guilty soul as wine that gladdens the heart.

The legacies bequeathed in the covenant are stated as the Spirit to teach, guide and comfort, pardon of sin and peace with God, with further promises of 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, grace and glory'. Moreover believers can be assured that the covenant is unalterable: first, because of the character of the testator; second, because of the unalterable force of his death and confirmation by his blood; and third, because the sacraments, themselves, declare the validity of the Covenant. Indeed, a guarantee is given that the testament will be executed as Christ willed, because it is in the 'sure and faithful hand' of the Spirit, who, as executor, will bestow the legacies, while the Risen Christ, himself, will ensure the execution of his own will.

Believers have the promise now. The word and sacraments are proof that they are invested with the right to the estate which Christ left, receiving, in the present, enough for their maintenance, and

' Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 475, and *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 708.



when the time comes, the full possession of the whole. <sup>1</sup>

The words, 'Drink ye all of it'. 'This do ye as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me', are a reminder of the welcome Christ gives to all, and of the liberality of his grace. To receive the cup is to receive the precious blood of Christ and to apply it to the soul for the curing of spiritual disease, the washing away of sin and the supply of spiritual needs. It is also to remember with thankfulness what Christ has done, is doing, and will do for us.

But to remember Christ, also implies a knowledge of him and his sacrifice, some acquaintance with him by a work of grace on the heart and 'closing with him' by faith. It demands a believing contemplation of his death and suffering, and the characteristics of such remembrance will be awe and reverence, sorrow, revulsion towards sin, affection and thanks to Christ and trust in him. <sup>2</sup>

The words, 'for as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come', are a reminder that the sacrament has frequently to be celebrated. This is the believer's duty because Christ commanded it. It is in his interest, because, by the sacrament, the benefits of the Covenant are sealed and

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 476. Speaking of the Covenant and the Testator, Willison is following Matthew Henry, who wrote 'It is left in good hands, in the hands of the Spirit of Truth who will not deal unfaithfully with us... Nay, Christ himself is risen from the dead, to be the overseer of his own will and to see it duly executed'. Henry, M. *Communicant's Companion*, 11th. edition (Glasgow : 1761) p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* p. 475. Willison again uses Doolittle here. Doolittle asking what kind of remembrance communicants should possess, answered - 'an affectionate remembrance, a sorrowful remembrance, a joyful and thankful remembrance, a fiducial remembrance, a silent remembrance, a sin loathing remembrance. Doolittle, T. *Treatise*, pp. 16-17.

applied. It is a matter of gratitude, because it is the Saviour's will, because the sacrament perpetuates the memory of his love, and because such remembrance is the only return which he seeks. It is also for his safety, because wilful neglect is a sin before God. Indeed, negligence is to treat Christ's dying words with contempt, is to disobey his command, is to be guilty of base ingratitude, and is to slight God's love, Christ's suffering, and the preparations which Christ made for us. <sup>1</sup>

'Showing forth the Lord's death', has implications with respect to communicants, to the world and to God. By partaking, the love expressed in the death of Christ is recalled, thereby producing not only fresh remembrance of it, but evoking a renewed response of faith and hope. Communicants are also testifying to the world that they are Christ's disciples, unashamed of him, and that, to the contrary, they glory in him and rely on the merits of his death as the hope of their salvation. They are also giving glory to God for the sacrifice he provided, and pleading before him - a just and sin revenging God, the sacrifice of Christ as their 'cover from the sword of justice and the law, and the ground of their hope'. <sup>2</sup>

'Till he come', is a reminder that celebration is to be perpetuated until the second advent. Thus it recalls the time when Christ will judge the sincerity and faithfulness of those who have covenanted with him. Equally, it reminds communicants of the hope of his coming and of everlasting glory - a time when the sacrament will become obsolete, for we will see Christ and enjoy him perfectly. <sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the meaning of, 'Henceforth, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until I drink it new with you, in my Father's kingdom', is a reminder that while Christ left sacraments, there will be no use for them hereafter; that the sacrament is an emblem

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 476-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 477.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 478.

of the Lamb's Marriage Supper where the saints will forever partake with Christ; that the pleasure of that communion will not tarnish; that here we may not have his bodily presence, but may feed on him by faith; and that believers should maintain their communion with him in this ordinance, patiently awaiting its accomplishment. '

Finally, Willison contrasts communion on earth with that beyond the veil. Here believers have but a foretaste, for the comforts of the lower table are small and fleeting, while those above are full, satisfying and everlasting. Here we feed on Christ by sign and symbol, but there in his bodily presence. Here we meet in groups in various places. There, the Church meets in general assembly with Christ. Here unworthy communicants mingle and situations arise to mar the joy. There, such things cannot happen. Here the tables are placed in temples made with hands and men serve them. There, heaven is the venue with heavenly hosts attending. Here we are entertained at the table with psalm singing. There, by the heavenly host singing ascriptions of praise.

Willison then summarises the significance of the Lord's Supper by enumerating the 'uses and ends' of the sacrament, which are:

- 1) to maintain the solemn and lively remembrance of Christ's death and dying love to lost sinners, among men.....;
- 2) to solemnly apply and seal Christ, his purchase and the benefits of the new covenant to believers;
- 3) to publicly profess that we receive and own a crucified Jesus as our only Saviour and Master;
- 4) ..to express thankfulness to God for giving Christ for our redemption, and to Christ for laying down his life for us;
- 5) to get a pledge and seal of our union and communion with Christ and our faith in his promises strengthened and confirmed;
- 6) that we may renew and seal our covenant with God in Christ, ratifying our baptismal vows, bind ourselves to God for our

' *Idem.*

God, and give ourselves up to be his people and walk with him in gospel obedience;

- 7) to be a special meal for strengthening the Lord's people...for nourishing their graces, cheering their hearts, removing their fears, and giving them a pledge of heaven and a foretaste of communion above. <sup>1</sup>

From much of the foregoing, it is clear that Willison's thinking on the Lord's Supper was influenced by his acceptance of the Covenant scheme as the framework of his theology. Indeed, it was precisely because he thought in terms of the federal scheme, that he placed such a value on sacraments, describing them as 'a visible gospel; the offers of free love and benefits of Christ's purchase...exposed to the eye, as the word doth sound them in the ear', <sup>2</sup> and could even speak of the Lord's Supper in particular as 'the epitome of the whole Christian religion, both as to doctrine and practice'. <sup>3</sup> For Willison, at the Lord's table, the Covenants of Redemption and Grace were visually represented.

There in the very elements, and the actions associated with them - broken bread and poured out wine - was portrayed Christ's costly redemptive work, by which he met the conditions agreed with the Father from eternity, thus satisfying his justice, and securing, for the elect, pardon, peace, assurance, salvation and glory. The sacrament was a reminder of the cost to Christ in meeting the terms of the Covenant of Redemption. There, also, in the communicants' extending the hand to receive the elements, the condition of the Covenant of Grace, made with the elect in time, was visibly and tangibly represented, the Father offering pardon, peace, assurance, salvation and glory, to those who extended the hand of faith to accept Christ for justification, and who, relying on the Spirit, for sanctification, sought to live in new obedience.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 479.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 457.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* Preface, HTH. p. 442.

But not only was the Lord's Supper a visual representation of these Covenants. It was also, for Willison, a reminder that the Covenant of Grace was a 'bargain' with a contractual nature. So, citing the cases of Isaac and Abimelech, and Jacob and Laban, he demonstrates that, in Eastern countries, it was common for people to ratify their covenants by eating and drinking together, and then asserts that, in the same way, the Lord's Supper is a

covenanting feast, wherein a bargain is solemnly ratified and sealed betwixt God and us. God's exhibiting the elements to us, is a seal of the covenant on God's part, that he will be our God, and doth freely give us his Son with all his purchase, and will fulfil his promises to us in him: our taking the elements is a seal on our part, of our accepting Jesus Christ upon the terms of his grace, our engaging to be his people, and that we will, in his strength, perform all the duties required of us. Here Christ gives us his body and blood to save us, and here we give our souls and bodies to serve him. ' 1

It was this very understanding of the Covenants as contracts, that produced a negative emphasis in much of the sacramental teaching of the federalists, and Willison was no exception.

So, in the first place, he stressed that the sacrament is not a 'converting ordinance'. Thus, as distinct from the idea 'at the very heart of reformed theology' that the Supper is a 'covenant

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 141.

Willison is apparently leaning on Henry here, who wrote, 'It is a feast upon a covenant. The covenant between Isaac and Abimelech was made with a feast ....So was that between Laban and Jacob..... feasting upon the sacrifices was a federal rite in token of peace and communion between God and his people. In the Lord's Supper, we are admitted to feast with God in token of reconciliation between us and Him through Christ'. Henry, M. *Communicant's Companion*, p. 24.

meal, a receiving afresh of God's promise in Jesus', ' to be offered to all, he saw it as for the 'elect' alone, for those who had met the condition of faith demanded in the Covenant of Grace. Thus, in his Synod Sermon, for example, he said,

Though this be not a converting ordinance, but strengthening and confirming, yet sermons and discourses about this time, on the melting subject of a crucified Jesus, have been the means of converting thousands. <sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, the question of whether the ordinance is appointed for conversion, is answered with a direct negative, <sup>3</sup> and, in the *Sacramental Catechism*, it is stated that the sacrament 'is not a converting, but a confirming ordinance in its own nature' and that, even though sovereign grace has used the word preached at sacramental occasions to convert, 'this is no warrant for unconverted persons to come and partake of this holy feast'. <sup>4</sup>

Willison's case to support the proposition, is that God welcomes only believers in Christ to the table

because the Lord's Supper is a seal of God's covenant with his people which supposeth that it should be made and consented to on our part beforehand, otherwise we annex the great seal of heaven to a blank: which is a mocking of God... the ordinance is instituted to confirm believers who are in the covenant: and not to convert unbelievers. <sup>5</sup>

In this, Willison's thinking was in harmony with that of some of his favourite writers. So, Doolittle had written, 'conversion must

<sup>1</sup> Heron, A. *Table and Tradition* (Edinburgh : 1983) pp. 31-2.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *The Churches' Danger*. HTH. p. 837.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 710.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* p. 479.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 480.

go before participation of this holy ordinance which is not appointed of God to beget but encrease grace'.<sup>1</sup> So also, George Gillespie had set out twenty propositions and arguments to prove that the Lord's Supper was not a converting ordinance.

Thus, Willison, while holding, on the one hand, that the sacrament is a means of grace, would have supported Gillespie's propositions, on the other, that 'the Lord's Supper beinge a signe of our spiritual life, faith and union with Christ and remission of sins, is not instituted to convey these spiritual blessings to those who have them not',<sup>2</sup> that 'growth in grace and confirmation of faith is given to *believers* in the sacrament', and that the ancient proclamation of 'Sancta Sanctis' before celebration, meant in practical terms, 'Si quis non est sanctus, non accedat'.<sup>3</sup>

For Willison, this understanding had four consequences. First, it led to his belief in a vigorous 'fencing of the table', second, to an emphasis on intense preparation and examination before and after communicating, third, to a stress on the sacrament as a seal, not merely of what God has done, and is doing, for man in Jesus Christ, but of what the believer intended and was committed to do, and fourth to an emphasis on the sacrament as a 'distinguishing badge' and token to the infidel world of the Christian's faith.

Clearly, in Willison's thinking, there were prerequisites without which communicating was not permissible, and he raised the issue of the right to participate with the question, 'To whom is the Lord's Supper to be administered?' The answer given was, 'Only to those who have a gospel-right to it, and gospel-preparation for it'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Doolittle, T. *Treatise*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Gillespie, George. *Aarons's Rod Blossoming, or The Divine Ordinance of Church Government Vindicated* (London : 1646) p. 504

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 519-21.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 479, and *Young Communicant's Catechism*, HTH. p. 581.

But he then differentiates between an external gospel-right in the eyes of the church, and an internal right in the eyes of God. <sup>1</sup>

Those with the external right are the baptised who have a competent knowledge of the faith, profess their faith in Christ, and live religious and blameless lives before men. Any such cannot be debarred from the table. This, to his credit, was Willison's stance against John Glas of Tealing, who, in his Independent Church only admitted to Communion and membership those who could give positive evidence of regeneration. Arguing against that position, from the evidence of the people of Israel, the practice of John the Baptist, Jesus himself, the Apostles etc. Willison held that 'a serious visible profession of Christ entitles a Man foro ecclesiae to Church Membership and Communion in sealing ordinances, though he cannot give positive evidence of Grace, convincing and satisfactory unto all'. <sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, he held that those ignorant of God in his nature, person and attributes, unaware of their need of conversion, and who lack knowledge of the uses and ends of the Supper, should be debarred, because they are incapable of discerning the Lord's body, and will. Any such communicating do so to their hurt and provoke God. Similarly the profane - those who commit sin or omit duty, without sorrow and a desire to reform, should be debarred. All such mock God because their covenant with him is a sham, and because with unholy hands they meddle in holy things. <sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, Willison believed in strictly 'fencing the table'. Indeed, he tells his colleagues that, from their warrant in the Confession of Faith, it is incumbent upon them to exclude 'any swearer, drunkard, Sabbath breaker, evil speaker, malicious person,

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 479, and *Young Communicant's Catechism*, HTH. p. 582.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *A Defence*, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 479-80.



or any guilty of any other scandalous sin, to eat of these holy things'. Then he adds,

it would be a means to dart home convictions and awaking thoughts upon sinners, to find themselves excluded from this holy ordinance for want of family worship, for idle walking on the Lord's day, for malicious words or actions, for excessive drinking, for abusing of God's name, for using petty oaths, as by faith, or by conscience etc. <sup>1</sup>

Willison, in fact, was one of those who even believed in debarring those who used what were known as 'minced oaths' <sup>2</sup> on the grounds that all such could not be considered people who 'feared an oath'. Exercising such strictness, he could speak of those who, later, thanked him for withholding the sacrament from them, 'because the dispensation had been blessed for humbling and reforming them'. <sup>3</sup>

In this respect, Willison, with many eighteenth century ministers, took advantage of the latitude of the warrant in the Westminster Directory, <sup>4</sup> departing from the simple 'exhortation' of Knox's *Book of Common Order*, <sup>5</sup> based on the Decalogue. Instead, by amplifying the Decalogue, the result was a 'fencing' which identified as sins, behaviour which could exclude many, if not most. Not without good reason did Alexander Gerard (1728-1795), Professor of Divinity at Aberdeen, advise students that, in 'fencing', 'care should be taken to require no qualifications which are not absolutely required by

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *The Churches' Danger*, HTH. p. 838.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of 'faith', 'troth', 'losh', 'gosh' and 'lovenandie' are cited by Dean Ramsey. Dean Ramsey, *Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character* (Edinburgh : 1947) p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *The Churches' Danger*, HTH. p. 838.

<sup>4</sup> Leishman, T. (Ed.) *The Westminster Directory* (Edinburgh : 1901) p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Spratt, G. W. *The Book of Common Order* (Edinburgh : 1901) pp. 121-3.

the scriptures'.<sup>1</sup>

Yet for Willison, even those who escape the Churches' sanctions, who have an external right to communicate because of their knowledge of God and moral living, are not necessarily worthy, for they may lack grace in their hearts. Those with a right to communicate are those who have not only an external right before men, but also an internal right before God. Such he identifies as 'those who are truly in covenant with God, who believe in Christ in their hearts, obey him in living, and make suitable preparation'. Indeed, even true believers can communicate unworthily, for worthy communicating depends not merely on being 'in a good state', but also in a 'good frame', that is, possessing not just 'habitual' but 'actual' grace.<sup>2</sup>

The difference between Glas's and Willison's position, was that Glas believed it the duty of the Church to decide on a prospective communicant's fitness, whereas, with those who clearly had an 'external right', Willison believed it was the individual who had to decide whether he also had an 'internal right'. Such a right, however, demanded preparation, self examination, and 'the exercise of faith, love, repentance, spiritual hunger, thankfulness, covenanting with God and resolution against sin'.<sup>3</sup>

Willison's understanding of worthy communicating is that 'it is a complex act, and a very great work' which depends on receiving Christ and his benefits with the hand of faith and applying them to the needs of the soul. It is to throw oneself on Christ for mercy, to embrace him as High priest, to fly to his wounds for shelter and apply his blood for pardon, to take his body and blood to save, and to give oneself to be saved, ruled and taught by him. In short, it is to eat and drink with a 'believing and thankful remembrance of

<sup>1</sup> Gerard, A. *The Pastoral Care* (London :1799) p. 381.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 480.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem.*

his love, resting on his merits, mourning for sin that pierced him, and solemnly resolving to pierce him no more'.<sup>1</sup>

Adamant that none could do this without much forethought, Willison laid down an intensive scheme of preparation, the aim of which was to complement the examination by the Churches' officers, with a detailed, personal examination of one's right, need and fitness.

So, communicants must examine their right to communicate, and will know that they have it when they place no reliance on a covenant of works, and rely instead on the new covenant. All such will have accepted Christ as Mediator in all his offices, will have offered themselves to him with the intent to walk in newness of life, and will also long to be conformed to the laws and image of God.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, they must examine their needs, because, at the sacrament, when Christ is set forth, receivers, to benefit, must be aware of their deficiencies. Sins of 'omission, commission, open and secret' will be identified, and reference to the Larger Catechism and Commandments is recommended for this purpose. Communicants, thereby, will be able to 'look at him whom we pierced and mourn', to point to some particular 'wound for a cure', and seeing the evil of their sin, be moved to loathe and renounce it. Similarly, consideration should be given to those graces which are weakest in communicants - faith, hope, love, meekness - as also to the mercies which they need, whether 'pardon, liveliness in duty, patience or strength against temptation'. Examination will also show the faculties of the soul which need sanctified - an intellect needing cure for its blindness, a will requiring cure for its perverseness, a conscience requiring stimulation, or affections in need of stirring. Lastly, examination will also reveal the offices of Christ most needed - whether as Prophet to cure ignorance, Priest

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 481.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Young Communicant's Cat.* HTH. pp. 581-2.

to intercede and cover with righteousness, or King to subdue the heart to himself. <sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, communicants should examine their fitness to communicate, ensuring that they possess habitual and actual fitness, the former demanding a 'gracious state', and the latter, a 'gracious frame'. Moreover, since the 'gracious frame' requires the exertion of grace in lively exercise, <sup>2</sup> prospective communicants will ensure that they exercise 'knowledge, faith, repentance, love, humility, thankfulness, spiritual appetite and longing for new obedience'. <sup>3</sup>

Willison then expands at great length on this list of 'graces', without which one cannot communicate in a worthy manner, and concludes by asking how they can be stimulated before the event.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 582-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 583 and *Sac. Dir.* pp. 156-7. Here Willison is expanding on Vincent who wrote, 'There is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper, habitual preparation that the persons who receive it may be in a state of grace. Actual preparation that their grace may be drawn forth into exercise'. Vincent, T. *Explicatory Catechism*, p. 318.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Young Communicant's Cat.* p. 583-6. Again, this is taken from Vincent who asked, 'Wherein are we to examine ourselves in order to our preparation for this sacrament? We are to examine ourselves 1) in our knowledge to discern the Lord's body which is represented by the bread. 2) In our faith to apply Christ and nourishment from him. 3) In repentance, self judging and sorrow for our sins which hath brought sufferings on our Lord. 4) In our love to Christ, who in his love hath expressed such love to us, and in our love to one another who are redeemed by the same blood. 5) In our new and sincere obedience to the Gospel, which we must engage in, and be fully resolved in the strength of the Lord to perform'. Vincent, T. *Explicatory Catechism*, p. 319.

The means to what he calls the 'excitation of graces' is employment of the things appointed by God, such as reading and hearing the word, Christian conference, meditation, prayer and an earnest seeking of the influence of the Holy Spirit. After such exercises, if 'spiritual deadness' continues, the requirement is to go further in humiliation and prayer, and to meditate more deeply on Christ's suffering, asking him to quicken these dead graces. The need is to pray with humility, faith, fervency and importunity, pleading the power, the mercy, the free promise of God and the merits of Christ. Specifically, prayer will be made for preparation of heart, sanctifying grace and a spiritual frame of soul, for liveliness in all the sacramental graces and the help of the Holy Spirit, for the cure of all diseases of the soul and pardon of defects, for communion with God at his table, and for the Lord's presence with ministers and people. <sup>1</sup>

Particular instruction is given to all communicants for the Saturday evening and Sabbath morning before the celebration. On these occasions, besides the examination of self and the exciting of graces, time should be spent in covenanting with God on one's knees, taking and accepting God for one's God and Christ the Mediator in all his offices, giving up the self, soul and body to be his. Advance consideration has also to be given to how one should act at the table, with thought for how one's faith and love should be employed there, and reflection made on those sins to be mourned. Such exercise will ensure that the time spent at the table is not wasted in confusion. <sup>2</sup>

Insisting on such prerequisites for worthy communicating, Willison, in common with many eighteenth century Evangelical ministers, fell into the trap, not only of stressing what man has to do for God, rather than what God has done for him in Christ, but also of demanding the impossible. Calvin, cautioning care on the matter of

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Young Communicant's Catechism*. HTH. p. 586.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem*.

preparation, had written,

Commonly, when they would prepare men to eat worthily, they have tortured and harassed pitiable consciences in dire ways: yet they have not brought forward a particle of what would be to the purpose. They have said that those who were in state of grace ate worthily. They interpreted "in state of grace" to mean to be pure and purged of all sin. Such a dogma would debar all the men who ever were or are on earth from the use of this Sacrament. <sup>1</sup>

Willison's intensive scheme of preparation was of the nature that left communicants in the dilemma of never feeling sufficiently worthy to communicate, on the one hand, and yet, on the other, with a feeling of guilt and even doom for neglecting Christ's dying wish by failing to do so. He does acknowledge that 'every man in a legal sense, is unworthy to approach the table', <sup>2</sup> but the warning that 'by communicating unworthily', on account of being 'in an unworthy state, or an unsuitable frame or with wrong ends', 'the sin or crime is no less than that of murdering Jesus Christ, and of being found accomplices of the Jews and soldiers who imbrued their cruel hands in the innocent blood of the Son of God' - leaving the unworthy communicant open to 'temporal strokes and eternal damnation', <sup>3</sup> is an unhappy prospect. No better is the penalty for failing to communicate, for, of that offence Willison wrote, 'How great then must the sin and danger of wilful neglecting it be? In effect, it is no less than an open denying of Christ before men: and such, he says "he will deny before his Father in heaven".'<sup>4</sup>

Confronted with such a choice, it is evident, from contemporary

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV. XVII. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 144f.

accounts, that intense preparation of the kind Willison and others commended, engendered not only a morbid introspection, but a neurotic and anguished soul searching on the part of communicants.

George Brown, for example, a Glasgow merchant, recorded his attendance at Communion in Glasgow, Kilsyth, Kirkintilloch and Paisley between 1745 and 1753. Several entries show his anxiety and lack of assurance about the state of his soul, which led him to question whether he was in the right 'frame' to communicate. <sup>1</sup>

A pamphlet written by an Ayrshire woman describes her experiences at communion seasons. So, she could write of being 'disappointed of a token' for a communion at Kilmarnock. She does not divulge the reason, but only that she was deprived of the outward right to communicate 'by men'. In consequence, she tried to discover the mind of God, for, 'unaware of having omitted anything of outward order', she 'feared greatly that matters were fundamentally wrong betwixt God and my soul'. <sup>2</sup> On another occasion, before the Ayr sacrament, in 1728, she felt a 'deadness and dejection of mind', and her description is typical of the soul torture of those who indulged in an introspective approach to the Supper. 'I may say with the spouse, 'I sought him but I could not find him: I called him but he gave me no answer... My distress was great'. Relating that even meat and sleep were of no account, she spent 'a day apart for humiliation and prayer', when 'the Lord gave her enlightening,

<sup>1</sup> *The Diary of George Brown, Merchant In Glasgow, 1745-1753* (Glasgow : 1856) p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Somervell, M. *A Clear and Remarkable Display of the Condescension, Love and Faithfulness of God in the Spiritual Experiences of Mary Somervell wherein is shown her near access to the throne of Grace, her remarkable Discoveries and sweet enjoyment of the Love of God, the sensible and particular returns of prayer she received as also her personal Engagements to the Lord. Who died at Ayr, 1762, Aged 84.* Printed from her own manuscript (Paisley : 1782) p. 9.

reviving and enlargement of heart and soul in prayer'. Thus the sacramental day was a 'day of sweet refreshing from the presence of the Lord... especially at the Lord's Table'.<sup>1</sup>

Another writer, Neil Currie of Arran, shows that the same self obsessed attitude could prevail not only before the sacrament, but even at the table.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper being celebrated... I was enlightened and much delighted in hearing one of the ministers preaching in the tent, and somewhat in a desirable frame of mind and brokenness of spirit... I got a token for myself and my companion: we went into the church; our minister was serving the table... we went to the next table; I was in the same frame of mind... until another minister rose up to serve. When he spoke, my pleasant frame was over. I felt as if a veil was drawn between me and the light, which left me in darkness and confusion. It was said by the godly, that this man although a minister was unconverted.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the diary of R. B. relates her attendance at Canongate, in 1737, when she felt it wrong to be there with 'no one grace in exercise'. At the table, she sat 'mourning in bitterness of soul after an absent beloved', feeling 'shut out', 'afraid' and 'cast off', and departed 'like to distract for want of the Lord'.<sup>3</sup>

Such examples amply demonstrate the anxiety of communicants over their 'frame' at Communion celebrations.

Thirdly, Willison laid stress on celebration of the sacrament as a

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Currie, N. *The Religious Experiences of Neil Currie, A Native of the Isle of Arran, Scotland* (Ottawa : 1846) p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> R. B's. Diary. A Diary kept by Provost Drummond of Edinburgh. Edinburgh University Manuscripts, DC 1 82 83, Vol. 1, p. 179.



public confession of faith or allegiance, 'a peculiar sign and distinguishing badge of the Christian Church from the infidel world, and a visible token that we profess and own a crucified Jesus for our Redeemer and Saviour'.<sup>1</sup> Calvin, while showing that this was a feature of sacraments was anxious to emphasize that it was only a secondary feature, their primary function being their ability 'to serve our faith before God'.<sup>2</sup>

Fourthly, in common with the federalists, Willison also saw the sacrament as a seal of the believer's faith. Indeed, he saw it as a seal in two senses - on the one hand, confirming the right of God's people to 'the promises and blessings of the covenant', and, on the other, as a seal of their 'engagements to new obedience'.<sup>3</sup>

Analysing the strengths and weaknesses of Westminster theology, Professor J. B. Torrance argued that a consequence of the federal scheme, was that the Lord's Supper, regarded by the 'older Scottish Divines' as an evangelical 'converting ordinance', 'where Christ was held out in bread and wine to be received by all in faith', was now seen as a sacrament for the elect alone, which meant, in practice, that only those who showed evidence of election were worthy to come. Thus it was regarded as the seal of the believer's faith, giving rise to the kind of fencing which deterred multitudes and the 'introspective tradition of self examination for evidence

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac Dir.* HTH. p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV. XIV. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* p. 457. Robert Bruce only saw the sacrament as a seal in the first sense. Bruce, R. in Torrance, T. F. (Ed.) *Mystery of the Lord's Supper*, pp. 106-7. Candlish, in discussing the seal does mention the human response, but saw the sacrament primarily as a seal in the first sense - a seal of Christ's love and of his offer of himself and the blessings of salvation. Candlish, J. S. *The Sacraments* (Edinburgh : 1881) pp. 98-102.

of election, with the resulting loss of joy and assurance'.<sup>1</sup> Willison, accepting the Covenant scheme exhibited all these traits.

Nevertheless, not all his emphases were negative, for, reflecting the 'high doctrine' of the Supper found in the Confession of Faith,<sup>2</sup> he saw the sacrament not merely as a memorial of Christ's death nor as a simple commemoration of it. His teaching stressed nothing less than the 'real presence' of Christ in the sacrament.

So he wrote, 'Though Christ is not bodily present, yet he is really and truly present in an invisible and spiritual manner. He is present by his God-head, and by his Spirit. He is present by his power and efficacy, communicating and applying the virtue and benefits of his death; and thus we are really made partakers of Christ in this ordinance'.<sup>3</sup> To illustrate the point, he uses an example employed both by Calvin<sup>4</sup> and Robert Bruce.<sup>5</sup> 'We partake of the sun when we have its beams of light and heat darted down upon us, although we have not the bulk and body of the sun put into our hands: so we partake of Christ in the sacrament, when we share of his grace, and the blessed fruits of his body, though we do not actually eat his flesh with our mouths'.<sup>6</sup>

The point is made again, when, in describing the sacramental action of the communicants, he says that the distribution of the elements

<sup>1</sup> Torrance, J. B. 'Strengths and Weaknesses of Westminster Theology', in Heron, A. *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>2</sup> Murray, D. M. 'A Personal View', in Heron, A. *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 473, and *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 709.

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV. XVII. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce, R, in Torrance, T. F. (Ed.) *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper*, p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 473.

to them signifies Christ's 'real though invisible presence'.<sup>1</sup>

Or, yet again, he urges communicants to pray 'for nearness and communion with God in his ordinances, and especially at the communion table'. Indeed, not content with giving such advice, Willison supplies a specimen of such a prayer.

Lord, what will a communion feast avail me without communion with Christ in it? I go not there for bread and wine, but to see Jesus. What are the elements to me without Christ's presence? Nothing but this can satisfy me: Lord, what wilt Thou give me, if I go away from thy table Christless? Shall I go away empty from a treasure, hungry from a feast, dry from a fountain, cold from the sun, comfortless from a comforter? Lord, stand not at a distance behind the wall: show thyself through the lattice of thy ordinance, and let me see the goings of my God and my King in his sanctuary. Lord, do thou not only stand and knock, but do thou also open the door of my heart: vouchsafe to come in and abide with me, yea, sup with me, and let me sup with thee, that I may be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and drink of the rivers of thy pleasures .... Descend into my heart by the influences of thy grace... O let Christ appear and be known of me in the breaking of bread.....<sup>2</sup>

Willison also wrote and published around one hundred and fifty hymns,<sup>3</sup> most focussing on the theme of the suffering and death of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 470.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 199. Also in *Sermons Before and After the Lord's Supper*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>3</sup> Although entitled 'hymns' or 'scripture songs', these would not be sung in church. They may have provided material, however, for the element of 'praise' which Willison commended as part of the content of 'fellowship meetings'. Willison, J. *The Duty and Advantage of Religious Societies* (Dundee : 1740) p. 24.

Christ, while at least half centre on the Lord's Supper. In many of these the doctrine of the real presence of Christ is expressed.

Come to thy table with us sit  
Our grudges all remove.  
Unite our hearts and make us fit  
To keep the feast of love. <sup>1</sup>

Or again, in a hymn entitled, the 'Gospel Passover', he wrote

Here things of sense, but there's far more  
Than hallow'd bread and wine:  
Lo! there is here immortal cheer  
And streams of life divine.

Lord, grant thy presence with thy guests,  
Thy peace to them afford;  
No music can delight our hearts  
Like thy forgiving word. <sup>2</sup>

Or, in yet another, entitled 'the Communion Feast', he sings,

The feast's prepared, we nothing want  
But Christ the Lord, our guest:  
Thy presence grant to hungry souls  
And we'll begin the feast. <sup>3</sup>

Clearly, Willison held to that 'high doctrine' of the Supper which maintained that the proper emphasis, in the sacrament, is communion rather than mere commemoration.

There is also in Willison, an emphasis on the sacrament as a 'means

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Scripture Songs* (Edinburgh : 1747) Song 1.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Gospel Hymns* (Edinburgh : 1747) p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.

of grace'. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, repeating the terminology of the Confession of Faith, <sup>1</sup> points out that 'the Reformed emphasis in sacramental teaching is that the sacraments exhibit grace and elicit faith', <sup>2</sup> but fails to show that, in contrast to present usage, the original meaning of exhibit was stronger than 'to signify' or 'display' and could actually mean 'apply'. <sup>3</sup>

Willison had no doubt on the matter.

Christ, by his Spirit puts life and virtue into the sacraments, and makes them effectual means for conveying and applying his saving benefits to his peoples' souls. <sup>4</sup>

Or, again, the 'sacraments prove effectual means of grace to the elect'. <sup>5</sup> The sacrament is given to 'excite grace', <sup>6</sup> to 'promote grace', <sup>7</sup> and 'is a spiritual meal, for strengthening the Lord's people in the inner man, for nourishing their grace etc.' <sup>8</sup>

Clearly, Willison thought in terms of something stronger than a mere 'exhibition' of grace.

The same idea also figures in his hymn, 'A Communion Sabbath',

<sup>1</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. XXVII, para III.

<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, S. B. 'The Teaching of the Confession', in Heron, A. (Ed.) *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Macleod, J. 'The Holy Sacrament of Baptism', in *The Divine Life in the Church*. Scottish Church Society Conferences. 2nd. Series, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh : 1895) fn. p. 102, and Hodge, A. *Commentary on the Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia : 1869) p. 451.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 457.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 701.

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 457.

<sup>7</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 701.

<sup>8</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 479.

We'll show his death who bled  
To save our sinful race,  
And in the Supper to us comes  
With messages of grace. <sup>1</sup>

And again, in a hymn called 'the believing soul's feast',

Thine ordinance, Lord countenance  
Shew us thy smiling face:  
Cause streams of living water flow  
In channels of thy grace. <sup>2</sup>

Willison, then, held to a 'high doctrine' of the Supper, seeing it not merely as a memorial of Christ's death, but as a sacrament where Christ is really present, and as a means whereby, through the Spirit's operation, the communicant finds grace to help in time of need.

He was not free, however, from that emphasis common among those who held to the federal scheme, who, regarding God's covenant as 'a kind of commercial contract or bargain which men can make with God, and in which they can be sure of his love for them only by satisfying certain conditions', consequently lost sight of that understanding of the sacrament, 'at the heart of Reformed theology' which saw it as a 'receiving afresh of God's promise in Jesus', the 'token of forgiveness and reconciliation and the pledge of the covenant itself'. <sup>3</sup> On the issues of the right to the sacrament and preparation for it, therefore, Willison laid greater stress on what man has to do, than on what God has done for him in Christ, just as his emphasis on the sacrament as a seal and as a 'badge of faith' stressed the human rather than the divine action.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Gospel Hymns*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Gospel Hymns*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Heron, A. *Table and Tradition* (Edinburgh: 1983) pp. 31-2.

Chapter Four.

Willison's Preaching and other Sacramental Material.

Willison's reputation as a preacher of note is clear both from contemporary comment and from those who, later, assessed his skill.

On at least three occasions he preached before the Assembly or its Commissioner. So, Wodrow wrote, in 1721, 'On Sabbath we had a very good sermon from Mr. Willison in Dundee'.<sup>1</sup> Six years later, he preached at the time of the second heresy case against John Simson, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, Wodrow commenting, 'He had many good things upon Christ's Divinity, and the hazard of error and Atheism creeping in upon this age'.<sup>2</sup> On the third occasion, in 1734, his sermon attacked Patronage, and its supporters who took 'violent measures to censure and excommunicate those who opposed them', but also castigated any who might contemplate joining the Seceders. That sermon was later published by popular request.<sup>3</sup>

Further evidence is found in the record of the Kilsyth Revival of 1742, the minister, James Robe, recording,

Upon Thursday evening, the 15th of April last, Mr. John Willison... came to my house in his return from Cambuslang.. I desired him to preach to us upon the Friday morning.... Several of those now awakened date their first serious concern about their souls from their hearing this sermon, and the blessing of the Lord upon it.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Wodrow Correspondence*, Vol 2. p. 581.

<sup>2</sup> *Wodrow Correspondence*, Vol 3. p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *A Sermon Preached Before The General Assembly* (Edinburgh : 1734), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Robe, J. *A Faithful Narrative of the Extraordinary Work of the Spirit of God at Kilsyth; and other congregations in the Neighbourhood* (Edinburgh : 1742) p. 27.

Indeed, another entry reads,

E. F... about twenty-five years of age, blameless in his former life, and professing religion, began to be convinced more than ordinarily about his spritual state, from the day he heard the Rev. Mr. Willison of Dundee preach here. <sup>1</sup>

Later assessments are no less charitable. One saw his preaching as 'the result of much study', containing 'sound theology' and 'heart searching application'. <sup>2</sup> Another, writing of the *Sacramental Meditations and Advices*, which he held to 'embody the substance of sermons' which Willison did not choose to publish as such, called him 'the mystic of the eighteenth century'. <sup>3</sup> Yet another termed him an 'excellent middle class preacher, plain warm and homely', on whose sacramental work hung 'all the glory of the gospel'. <sup>4</sup>

In Willison's time, preparatory work for communion could prove an intolerable burden. He, himself, called it a matter of 'outward toil and labour'. <sup>5</sup> In addition to sermons on Fast, Preparatory and Thanksgiving Days, the sacramental day alone demanded the preparation of prayers, an 'action sermon', a 'fencing of the table', several 'table addresses' and a post communion sermon, if a minister was obliged, like John Mill of Shetland, to celebrate unaided by colleagues, <sup>6</sup> or if, like Willison, he chose to

<sup>1</sup> Robe, J. *Narratives of the Extraordinary Work of the Spirit of God at Cambuslang, Kilsyth etc.* (Glasgow : 1790) p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> Hetherington W. M. 'Essay on The Life and Times of the Revd. John Willison', *Practical Works*, p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Watson, J. *The Scot of the Eighteenth Century.* (London : undated) p. 254.

<sup>4</sup> Blaikie, W. G. *The Preachers of Scotland, 6th. to 19th. Century.* The Cunningham Lectures. (Edinburgh, 1888) p. 284.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* p. 445.

<sup>6</sup> Goudie, G. (Ed.) *The Diary of the Revd. John Mill* (Edinburgh: 1889) pp. 43-4.



celebrate with few. <sup>1</sup> Since examples of Willison's material for the constituent parts of the Communion season are extant, it is possible both to examine his manner of celebration, and to compare his material with that of contemporaries, Evangelical and Moderate.

In form, his sermons followed the pattern taught by Wodrow. This, which had also been the style of the English Puritans, <sup>2</sup> entailed a cumbersome division of the material into sections. First came the text, an exordium, and a statement of the doctrine to be expounded. Thereafter, an outline of the method of treatment followed, which involved tabling several main points to be made and subdivided. The development of these formed the main part of the sermon, which concluded by applying the stated doctrine to specified ends or 'uses', each of which was also expounded with many subdivisions. <sup>3</sup>

Using this method, Willison's sermons were lengthy, though Wodrow had recommended brevity for sacramental preaching. <sup>4</sup> Indeed, if his spoken addresses compared to their printed form, then 7000 to 8000 words was not uncommon. Yet, such a feature was relative, and the sermons of some of his contemporaries were even more verbose.

In style, Willison employed simple language. Blaikie's description of it as 'homely' is apposite, and occasionally it reflects the

<sup>1</sup> The normal practice was for the parish minister to conduct the first table service, giving the first 'table address' himself. Those assisting would conduct the subsequent table services giving a 'table address' at each. Willison appears to have used only one assistant, and would, therefore, have conducted many of the table services himself, as did ministers in remoter areas. See below, p. 254f.

<sup>2</sup> Haller, W. *The Rise of Puritanism* (Columbia : 1935) p. 134f.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 17. The format of Willison's Preparatory Sermon in *Sermons Before and After the Lord's Supper*, p. 26f. provides a clear example of Wodrow's influence.

<sup>4</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, p. 178.

crudity of a period less concerned with refinement. The use of illustrations is not uncommon. Sometimes these are simple similes and metaphors, or parallels drawn from biblical sources. <sup>1</sup> At others, they arise naturally from the subject, as for example, when treating Galatians 4<sup>7</sup> 'Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son... an heir of God..', he refers to contemporary laws on inheritance. <sup>2</sup> Occasionally, illustrations are from history. <sup>3</sup>

There was also a directness about his style, in the sense that his preaching always sought a response. Sometimes this was achieved by such a graphic description of a biblical incident that the hearer felt himself involved in it and forced to make his own response to it. More often, it was evoked by the deft employment of jussive subjunctives, interrogatives, and imperatives, all of which demand a reaction, and frequently these were bolstered with pleading ejaculations. <sup>4</sup> For Willison, preaching always involved *krisis*.

The content of his sermons was thoroughly doctrinal, and every point was argued from and substantiated with scripture references. Christ and Christ crucified were his tireless themes, so that, as distinct from some of the Moderates, who 'made less of the sacraments' than Evangelicals, <sup>5</sup> and whose sermons were sometimes more akin to lectures on a moral principle, Willison's were a proclamation of revealed truth demanding a response to Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sacramental Meditations and Advices*, HTH. p. 556 has several examples.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sermons Before and After*, p. 90f.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *The Churches Danger*, p. 832, and *Sac. Dir.* p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> Many examples of this technique are found in Willison's action sermon quoted in Hetherington, W. *Practical Works*, p. 308.

<sup>5</sup> Leishman, T. 'The Ritual of the Church', in Story, R. (Ed.) *The Church of Scotland Past and Present*, Vol V. (London : 1890) p. 411. Perhaps this accounts for the paucity of sacramental material published by Moderates. Where it does exist, however, comparison is made with Willison's.

The Preaching of the Moderates.

The preaching of the Moderates, indeed, was another issue on which Willison voiced anxiety, and, before examining his own material, consideration should be given to his opposition to it.

Stemming from his esteem for the pure doctrine of the Westminster Confession, Willison became increasingly concerned over legal or moral preaching, and his argument against it was not unconnected with what has been said on the Marrow Controversy.

He first raised the matter at the 1726 Assembly, stating that a 'scandal was like to arise from legal preaching of morality, and sermons where nothing of Christ was'. A committee, which included Willison, was appointed to draft an Overture, and four days later, a motion was proposed that 'as in the case of the Marrow, the Assembly had asserted the obligation of the law', so it should now commend 'the preaching of Christ, and discharge legal preaching', which was identified as 'recommending duties only on the powers of nature and without grace, and neglecting Christ as our only strength for performing them'. <sup>1</sup>

When the matter was remitted to the Commission, Wodrow, who believed it a 'good act', regretted its deferral, suggesting that it was set aside, because its proposers were seen as 'favourers of the Marrow', though he correctly added, 'I do not think any of them did favour it'. His final comment expressed a forlorn hope, 'considering the not preaching Christ... and the spirit that is so common at this time among our young preachers, it will be a pity if the Commission do not effectually form the act'. <sup>2</sup>

The ground of Willison's objection to 'legal' or 'moral' preaching,

<sup>1</sup> *Wodrow Correspondence*, Vol. III, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 259.

originated from his belief that holiness came only from union with Christ, and not from any attempt to follow the pattern of Christ.

Thus, in a later edition of the Preface to the *Sacramental Directory*, while stating, on the one hand, that it is incumbent on the Church to ensure that preachers 'do not, under the specious pretext of exalting free grace', omit the obligation of holiness, he also states unequivocally, on the other, that it has to manifest its concern, too, against legalism, the preaching of morality in a legal strain, neglectful of Christ and his righteousness and to the disparagement of free grace. <sup>1</sup> Referring to the attempt to introduce legislation at the 1726 Assembly, he says that it was impeded by some leading men, lest it reflected on the characters of some preachers whom they respected. Nevertheless, grateful for the Act anent preaching, eventually passed a decade later, <sup>2</sup> he was delighted with its provisions, no doubt feeling that his own case had been vindicated. The 1736 Act included recommendations that ministers warn people against Atheism, Deism, Arminianism, Socinianism, Bourgeoisism, Popery, superstition, Antinomianism or any other errors; that ministers, in treating 'the doctrines of God's redeeming love' should so handle them as to lead their hearers into 'an abhorrence of sin, the love of God and our neighbours, and the practice of universal holiness' - not only to insist, therefore, on the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation, but also on the necessity of repentance for sin and reformation from it: that ministers, in pressing moral duties, should show the nature of gospel holiness, not from the principle of reason only, but more especially from revelation - showing men the depravity of nature from the fall, their impotence for and aversion to what is good, and a view of union with Christ by the Holy Spirit as the only source of all grace and holiness. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1638-1842* (Edinburgh : 1843) p. 636.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* p. 135.

Later, Willison amplified his objections to legal preaching. They were 1) that sermons demanding morality with little of Christ in them, suggest to hearers that there is small difference between them and moral heathens, and therefore that the way to heaven can be earned by merit; 2) that while morality is desirable, it becomes an impediment to souls coming to Christ when it takes the place of Christ and his righteousness. None are saved by goodness. Man has to depart from 'the old bottom of the Covenant of Works' and from any efforts of his own to find salvation. The way to that goal is believing in Christ and resting on his righteousness; 3) that while faith is the instrument by which we receive and apply Christ, and obedience and holiness are required as signs and fruits of faith, neither faith, obedience or holiness are any part of our justifying righteousness. They are the foundation of our acceptance or of our title to life eternal. We are only saved by the morality and righteousness of Christ imputed to us. <sup>1</sup>

Yet, since morality has to be preached, preachers must ensure that it is done in an evangelical strain. Thus they will impress duty as the 'natural and necessary fruit of faith in a crucified Christ and of love to him', commending it as a response of gratitude. Not authority, but thanks should be the motive. They will also direct people to perform duties by his grace, pointing out that natural powers are insufficient, since man has a natural 'impotence and enmity to what is good'. Likewise, they will persuade them to leave sin by the preaching of Christ's coming and judgement, and the 'wrath of the Lamb' for all who slight his grace and disregard his laws. They will remind hearers that our need is to be found in Christ, since our righteousness is as filthy rags which cannot hide us from God, and that unregenerate morality does not please God, so that a moral man, even though professing himself Christian, is not so, unless he is united to Christ. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* pp. 923-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 924. Willison presents the same argument in his Synod Sermon, *The Churches' Danger*, HTH. p. 835.

For Willison, true Christian preaching always centred on Christ, and, more particularly, on Christ crucified, and he commended this for four reasons. First, the preaching of Christ crucified is the appointed way for bringing elect sinners to God, and the method to which he promises blessing. Second, success came to the Apostles, not as they preached morality, but Christ crucified. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them and converted multitudes. Thirdly, the preaching of a crucified Christ is the method that God has instituted as the means to produce virtue, goodness and good order. Heathen philosophers failed in their attempt to turn men to God and virtue by stressing the power of nature and reason, and men, mastered in skill and eloquence who still excel in moral preaching, have no success by that means. Christless moral sermons do not turn men from evil, and turn fewer to Christ. The way to produce moral reform is to bring hearers to him. Thus you turn men from sin and make them moral at once. Fourthly, ministers whose preaching centres on Christ have the greatest success throughout the world. The temperature of true religion rises and falls depending on whether a crucified Christ is faithfully preached. <sup>1</sup>

Writing some years after the 1736 Act, however, Willison expressed regret that the legislation had still had little effect on some.

No wonder our flocks look poor and lean, when we take no care to lead them into these green pastures of evangelical truths, but set before them the dry insipid stuff of a heathenish morality, which can never feed them... How can we expect assistance from Jesus Christ in our work, or the influences of his Spirit, when we take no more notice of Christ in our sermons than the moral philosophers among the heathens? <sup>2</sup>

For Willison, indeed, those 'dry moral preachers', keener to recommend a sort of pagan morality than to show the usefulness of

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 925.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

Christ for perishing sinners, are men who 'oppose the dim candle of man's reason to the sunshine of Gospel light displayed in the Holy Scriptures'. ' Doom awaits the Church should this practice continue, and he prays that the Church of Scotland will never become like its English counterpart, which suscribes 'to sound articles of doctrine, and never minds them more afterwards'. <sup>2</sup>

Willison also insisted that 'a crucified Christ' was the proper subject for preaching at the Lord's Supper. That subject was 'the spring and scope, the matter and end of all gospel preaching... the substance of the whole Bible', and one which provided a 'variety of suitable material' for sacraments. <sup>3</sup> His own material shows that he rarely strayed from that principle.

#### Preparatory Sermons.

Examples of his texts for Preparatory sermons, are 'Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you', Joshua 3<sup>5</sup>; 'O the Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble; why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man, that turneth aside to tarry for a night?' Jeremiah 14<sup>6</sup>; 'Happy is that people whose God is the Lord'. Psalm 145<sup>15</sup>

A sermon on the latter shows his treatment of a Preparatory theme.

First, an exordium discusses the universal desire for happiness, and the sources from which it is sought. Then, placing the verse in context, he states that while material happiness is desirable for a nation, Israel's joy consisted 'in this peculiar privilege, that the great Jehovah, the Lord of heaven and earth, is their God by covenant and special relation'.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *The Balm of Gilead*, HTH. p. 405.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *F. I. T.* HTH. pp. 925-6.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 132.

Next, the doctrine to be expounded is stated as: 'the greatest happiness we can possibly attain is to be in covenant with God, and to have God for our God'.

An outline of his proposed method is then set out as follows: 1) 'To inquire when it may be said that a person or people are in covenant with God, and have a special interest in him as theirs' - this to be considered negatively and positively, 2) 'What is meant by the privilege to have God for our God', 3) How this privilege is the sum of happiness, 4) 'To make improvement on the whole'. Willison then develops each point, and, under the first, expounds his threefold Covenant scheme.

So, speaking negatively, he states: a) that to stand in covenant relation with God is not 'to be understood as being under the Covenant of Works' which furnishes no happiness. Since we have broken it, God is not obliged to provide us with happiness, and is, indeed, under 'engagement to destroy us'; b) that more is required to make this covenant relation with God than the 'Covenant of Redemption', which, although the basis of the relationship, does not constitute it. The elect, in fact, are not formally in the covenant till they believe and approve what Christ did for them. 'The Covenant of Redemption will not save you, nor instate you in covenant with God, if ye can say no more'. To be in covenant with God demands the ratification of that treaty, 'made with the elect in time..... which is called the Covenant of Grace'; c) that there is more to a covenant relationship with God which makes us happy than externally professing Christianity and using Gospel ordinances. A visible church can defect from God, who then threatens to "avenge the quarrel of his covenant". Leviticus 26<sup>15</sup>. 'All members of a visible church are federally in covenant with God by their professing of Christ' and baptism, but such an external covenant relation will not give them happiness, which only comes from being 'really and internally in covenant with God'; d) that there is more to being in a covenant relationship with God than suscribing to a National Covenant. Many did that, but never



embraced the Covenant of Grace; e) that there is more to it than writing a 'personal covenant', for, while commendable, that can be done 'hypocritically', making it an 'abomination'.

Positively, we enter covenant with God in a saving way, 'when we are taken within the bond of the Covenant of Grace'. This occurs, when, 'convinced of our sin, misery and undone state under the Covenant of Works', we embrace the new covenant, accept Christ as Mediator, choose God to be our God, and give ourselves to be his, engaging in his strength to abandon sin, to live for him, and walk with him in newness of life. Thus we belong among those 'happy people whose God is the Lord'.

On the second point - the import of having God for our God, Willison explains that this means: a) that we have reconciliation and friendship with him; b) that we can enjoy a closer relationship with him than with any other being; c) that we have a right and title to God and all that He possesses. His promise is, 'I will give you myself.' Consequently, believers, have all that God is personally - the Father to love, elect and contrive redemption, the Son to satisfy justice, the Spirit to change, teach, sanctify, indwell and guide. They also have all that He is essentially, in all his attributes - 'wisdom for our ignorance, grace for our guilt, power for our weakness, mercy for our misery, goodness for our evil, faithfulness for our inconstancy, holiness for our impurity, riches for our poverty and fulness for our wants' - a 'remedy for all maladies' caused by sin. d) that all God has is available to us - his 'promises', his 'gifts' and 'graces'.

Thirdly, Willison demonstrates that being in covenant relationship with God is the sum of happiness. This is evident from: 1) all that we have in God - more 'than eye hath seen, ear hath heard, or the heart of man can conceive'; 2) the abundance of God's provision for all our needs; 3) the fact that it removes all terrors from us - terror of God's holiness and justice, of afflictions, of God's judgements, of death, of the day of judgement; 4) the fact that it

sweetens everything that is comfortable - the thoughts of Christ to the believer, the Gospel ordinances of prayer, word and sacraments, the thoughts of God's works in creation and providence, all our outward mercies, such as the recovery of health after sickness, and 'every meal of meat' on our table; 5) the fact that the covenant relationship is indissoluble. Since God is faithful, nothing can destroy it, not even death. So Olevian the dying saint comforted himself, "My hearing is gone, my smelling is gone, and my sight is going: my speech and my feeling are almost gone; but the loving-kindness of God is still the same, and will never depart from me".

Lastly, Willison turns to the application of the text.

His first 'use', is of 'information' where he shows that the unbelieving world is mistaken about the believer's lot. Through all that he has in God, the believer's is the happier portion. His second 'use' is of 'terror', and he advises those outside the covenant of Grace that their case is 'sad', that they are 'still tottering on the brink of hell', that they should be afraid to sleep at night in such a condition, and that they should 'awake from sleep, and find no rest for the sole of your foot, till, like Noah's dove, ye come into the ark of the covenant'. The third 'use' is 'examination', and, by it, all are urged to ensure that they are within the covenant and have a right to the Table. Marks of this are: a hatred of sin, a love for God and Christ, an awareness of choosing God as our God, a resignation of the self to him, pleasure in the 'design of this covenant', and a willingness to perform covenanted duties, relying on covenant strength. The final 'use' is of 'exhortation', and consists of an appeal to embrace the Covenant of grace. Here, Willison absolves himself of blame from those who reject the Gospel, and appeals to the young,

O young people! What say ye to it? Will ye take hold of the covenant? Your baptism will not profit you, unless now, ye ratify your parent's deed, and personally join yourselves to the Lord. If ye approach to the Lord's table without doing it,

you will be unworthy communicants.....

Concluding, Willison lists four things requiring to be done to enter into the covenant: a) a renunciation of the world, the flesh and devil; b) an acceptance of God through Christ the Mediator, and acceptance of the Holy Spirit; c) a dedication of the self and possessions to God; and d) an engagement to live wholly for God - to walk in newness of life, to perform the duties he commands, to suffer patiently what he inflicts, to guard against the sins he forbids, and to fight his enemies. <sup>1</sup>

The form, style and content of Willison's sermon was common among Evangelicals. The structure he had learned from Wodrow would also appear to have been that recommended by Professor Campbell in Edinburgh, <sup>2</sup> for Ebenezer Erskine, Campbell's student, used the same format. Like Willison's, Erskine's style too was always direct, appealing for a response, while his content was unfailingly doctrinal and thoroughly scriptural.

Indeed Willison's treatment of the Covenant scheme in sacramental preaching was also common among Evangelicals. So Erskine, in a sacramental sermon asks his hearers to 'see the great difference between the first and the second Adam - the head of the Covenant of Works and the head of the new Covenant'. Then he urged,

O what a blessed exchange doth the sinner make, when he quits the first Adam and his covenant, and betakes himself to a second Adam, and takes hold of him as the head of the Covenant of Grace! When he doth so, he quits the foundation of sand, and builds upon that Rock of Ages. The first Adam is a fountain of death to all his posterity... but the second is a fountain of

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sermons Before and After the Lord's Supper*, p. 26f.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 13.

life to all his seed. <sup>1</sup>

Action Sermons.

Two of Willison's 'action sermons' were published, although the material in the *Sacramental Meditations and Advices* tends to support the view that these are abridged sermons. <sup>2</sup> If so, it is notable that his sacramental preaching centred on the death and suffering of Christ, with treatment of such texts as, 'They shall look upon me whom they have pierced and mourn', Zechariah 12<sup>10</sup>. 'And being in an agony, his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood', Luke 22<sup>44</sup>, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things', Luke 9<sup>22</sup>. 'Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood', Revelation 1<sup>5</sup>.

Another source, extensively used by Evangelicals, was the Song of Solomon, preachers capitalising on the rich imagery of its love poetry to describe the yearning love of Christ for the elect, and the reciprocal devotion required between the communicant and Christ. <sup>3</sup> Willison often used it, and it is not surprising that one 'action sermon' is based on Chapter 2<sup>4</sup>.

As distinct from some contemporary viewpoints, which recognise the book purely as love poetry, Willison, accepting the interpretation

<sup>1</sup> Erskine, E. *The Whole Works of the late Ebenezer Erskine, Minister of the Gospel at Stirling*, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh : 1871) pp. 154-5.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> McGregor, M. (Ed.) *Three Sermons by the Revd. Charles Calder of Ferintosh (1774-1812)* (Edinburgh : 1877) p. 84. MacLeod, I. (Ed.) 'The Sacramental Work of John Mill', being a transcription of Mill's Sacramental Manuscript, D8/78, The Archives, Lerwick, submitted as an appendix to M.Th. Thesis. The University of Glasgow, 1989, Thesis No. 8344, pp. 17, 32, 33, 47, 72, 92. Also, Erskine, E. *Whole Works*, Vol. 3, p. 197.

of his day, regarded it as an allegory describing 'the mysterious union and communion between Christ and his Church'.

Following the familiar structure taught by Wodrow, and drawing a parallel between the banqueting house to which the spouse is brought, and the Lord's Supper, where Christ 'entertains his people on earth' and welcomes them under a 'banner of love', Willison develops two main points:

First, that the Lord's Supper is Christ's principal provision for his people. 'Here there is more than bread and wine, even the body and blood of Christ'. Here is spiritual food to the hungry soul, bread that strengthens men's heart and wine that cheers the fainting spirit. Willison, indeed, expands on the 'dishes' set forth at the Table - pardon, peace and fellowship with God, adoption into his family, peace of conscience, strength to meet weakness, Christ's presence and the Spirit's comfort.

Moreover the Supper was provided with certain ends in mind. It is a memorial of his love, revealing his infinite riches and grace. It expresses the joy he finds in believers coming to him, and gratifies his longing for nearer communion with them. It confirms the covenant between God and man. It provides strength to fainting children, fortifying them against difficulties and weaning them from the world's vain pleasures.

Since this is so, this banquet is worth more than many days of worldly feasting. Moreover, since it is the Lord of glory who has made the provision we must admire his condescension. Consequently, those who slight his goodness are inexcusable.

An invitation, therefore, is extended to all who have prepared for the sacrament. While many come to the feast who have no ground to expect admission, those whom Christ welcomes are hungry and thirsty sinners who long to meet him. All have a promise to be filled 'who cry like the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner".' More

specifically, those who are content to 'close with Christ as He offers himself', are welcomed. All such should come with awe, with pure heart and clean hands, with holy fear, afraid that they are not ready, with a broken heart to view the slain lamb, with a wedding garment, which is faith in Christ's righteousness, with love because it is a love feast, with desire to meet Christ, with expectation, depending on his merits, with resignation to Christ and with admiration and praise.

The second point developed is that those who so come, do so under a 'banner of love'. Christ raised such a banner on the cross, declaring himself willing to receive every soul that would come, enlist and fight under his colours.

A banner is a sign of union, so that all who serve under it are united. Thus, division and discord should be shunned. It is a sign of protection, and Christ promises to defend those whom he loves. It is also a sign of victory, so that Christians are urged to be faithful to their Conqueror, to keep out their 'enemies and lusts', and to fight under Christ's banner holding the fort which he has won. 'Christ has delivered you out of the hands of Satan; submit therefore kindly to his government and laws...' <sup>1</sup>

All the characteristics of Willison's preaching, and the elements which he sought in the preaching of others, are evident in this sermon. It is thoroughly doctrinal expounding the teaching that, at his supper, Christ himself is the host, and that the sacrament is a means of grace, open to all who are conscious of their need. Frequent quotation from the Bible is made to support the doctrine, while the development of each point and sub point is couched in language which pleads throughout for a direct response to Christ who is the focus of the whole address. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. Appendix to *Sacramental Meditations*, HTH. pp. 303-9.

<sup>2</sup> See above p. 94, fn. 4.

Comparison may be made with an 'action sermon' of Hugh Blair, ' the celebrated Moderate, a contemporary, whose published sermons won the admiration of Dr. Samuel Johnson, and whose work has been described as 'the very model of Moderate preaching'. <sup>2</sup>

His sermon on Psalm 73<sup>a</sup>. 'It is a good thing for us to draw near to God', is shorter than Willison's and has a totally different structure, Blair abandoning the formula of text, doctrine, method and uses, to a system of introduction, points and conclusion.

An introduction places the words in context. Baffled by the prosperity of the wicked, the adversity of the worthy, and the disorder of human affairs, the author is beset by doubt. His trust in God's rule is shaken, until he enters the sanctuary where he finds a new perspective. Now he sees the vanity of such prosperity as the wicked enjoy, and the joy which will finally belong to the good. He becomes aware of the divine presence surrounding the pious, invisibly bringing them to ultimate glory. Thus he finds peace, and reason to praise God in the words of the text, which Blair feels appropriate to the sacramental occasion.

The whole tone of the sermon is set in the next paragraph,

To draw near to God is an experience of awful and mysterious import, in employing which, we have much reason to be sober and modest, and to guard with care against every enthusiastic excess, remembering always, that, rise as high as we can, an immeasurable and infinite distance must ever remain between us and the Supreme Being.

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Blair was licensed in 1741, and his career saw a meteoric rise. After a one year ministry in Collessie, he moved to the Canongate, thence to Lady Yester's, and finally, in 1758, to the High Kirk, Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup> Watson, J. *The Scot of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 170.

Blair, concedes, however, that we may draw near to God in two ways: first, by living a pious and virtuous life, and second, by acts of devotion.

1) By practicing a virtuous life we draw near to God, for, thus 'we can make to the resemblance of his moral perfections'. The image of God in man is defaced through sin, but, by a return to God and duty, it is renewed on the soul by the intervention of Christ. 'Man is said to be regenerated and born again, and so, in some degree, restored to that connection with God which blessed his primeval state'. The exercise of virtue and piety maintains, so far as man's infirmity allows, conformity with the nature of God, while worldly, corrupt men estrange themselves from him, sinking in the scale of being to the order of the brute.

A virtuous man is thus on 'the course of constant approach towards celestial nature'. Loving order, he follows the righteousness of which God is the source. So, piety is described in scripture as friendship with God. A good man is said to 'dwell in God and God in him'. Proportionately, then, as we approach to or deviate from God's nature, we discover the happiness or misery of all rational creatures.

Those, therefore, who do not draw near to God in this way are departing from Him. There is no *via media* between sin and righteousness. People may be surrounded and amused by shadows of pleasure, but they are mere shadows, nevertheless, bearing no connection with God, the origin of all good. As the stream cannot flow cut off from the fountain, or the branch flourish when severed from the stock, neither can human beings find happiness severed from the source of happiness. On the other hand, the good man lives under the smiles of God who will illumine his way and help him progress to perfection. The goal may be distant and progress slow, but he has set out on 'the dawn of a glorious morning which increases by degrees to a meridian splendour', while the wicked man



is in the dusk of evening moving towards the shadows of night which will envelop him in endless and impenetrable gloom.

2) Man also draws near to God by religious exercises which elevate the soul, raising the human nature toward the Divine, provided that these are not engaged in formally or 'with cold and backward hearts'. Only when they are 'of the heart' are they efficacious. Moreover, when performed with real affection, we bring home the divine presence to our feelings and formally place ourselves in it. Then we draw near him through a great Mediator.

This intellectual correspondence of the heart with the Maker is called 'communion with God'. Reason demands that, if God exists and is good, then the worship of the good must please him. Yet a caveat is necessary, for there is danger in mistaking imagination for 'supernatural impressions from Heaven'. A safer yardstick is found in comparing our lives with the word of God and measuring how far they show evidence of the fruit of the Spirit.

Thus it is good for us to draw near to God in devotional exercises, and then give proof of our pious affections to God by our living. Morality without piety makes for imperfect character - 'neither stable in its foundation, nor universal in its influence; and gives us no ground to look for the rewards of those whose prayers, together with their alms, come up in memorial before God'.

But, aside from reminding of duty, religious exercises are good in themselves. Providing 'improvement, satisfaction and comfort, they enable a raising of the heart to God and celestial objects'. The pleasures of the world produce a sense of emptiness, leaving with them pains and distress, 'but occasional intercourse with God and divine things must furnish a comfortable relief to the mind'.

Thus, drawing near to God relieves distresses. In devotion to God, passions, cares, and anxieties are counteracted in calm and repose.

The believer, in his distress, 'looks up to a Father and a Friend in whom he can place his trust'. Contemplation of a God who cares, creates a disposition, in which, contrasted with 'the confusion of earth, we behold all things above, proceeding in the same perfect order with the heavenly bodies' which are maintained in their course. We see the river of life flowing continually from the throne of God, and diffusing, among the blessed inhabitants, fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

Anxious lest this be seen as 'enthusiasm or mysticism', Blair warns that religion does not wholly consist of internal devout emotions, but is an 'active principle in the conduct of life and exerting itself in good works'. He concedes, nevertheless, that the heart must be in it. It cannot merely be calm and rational. Without warmth of sentiment it has little influence on conduct.

In conclusion, the subject is relevant to the sacrament, for there we draw near to God.

All that is encouraging and comforting in Christian faith is set before us in this effectual proof of God's mercy to mankind, giving up his Son to the death as the sacrifice for our sins... In celebrating the memorial.... we are placed as under the immediate brightness of heavenly light and under the warmest ray of divine love. If there be any consolation in Christ, any fellowship of the Spirit, any pleasing hope of eternal life and joy, it ought... to be drawn forth, and deeply felt.

Communicants, therefore, should kindle at the altar, the fire which will 'diffuse its vivifying influence' through them in the world. They should draw near as to a Father, but reverently and humbly, through the 'great Mediator, by whose merits and intercession alone our services find acceptance at the divine throne'. '

' Blair, H. *Sermons by Hugh Blair*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh : 1825) pp. 398-408.

Blair's sermons are masterpieces of prose. His use of language is impeccable, and it is not surprising that, with Samuel Johnson's commendation, they became popular. <sup>1</sup> Eschewing the crudity and excesses of the Evangelicals, they are more refined. Yet, totally dispassionate, it is impossible not to recognise their deficiency as vehicles for communicating the faith, and to credit Willison's criticism of Moderate preaching, with a measure of validity.

Blair emphasises the transcendence of God at the expense of his immanence, commending the contemplation of a God in heaven, to whom man can draw near - so far! Indeed, the impression created is that of a remote God who ultimately rewards the virtuous, while present help is limited to a calm derived from thinking of his sovereignty. Little is said of the revelation of God in Christ, of atonement, or of the grace of God mediated through the Holy Spirit. Notably, nothing is said about the Real Presence of Christ, which would seem the obvious point for a communion sermon on 'drawing near to God'. Of Willison's sermons, on the other hand, these are hallmarks.

Blair commended 'occasional intercourse' with God, Willison a life of daily communion. Blair spoke of drawing near in the sacrament, Willison of a God who drew near to the communicant. Blair commended morality, but said little about the means to attain it. Willison, on the other hand, who did overstress the qualifications of holiness for worthy communicating, at least was able to point to its source, and to the power of the Spirit.

Voges asserted that Moderate and Evangelical differed in 'attitude, rather than in expressis verbis theology' - the Moderate insisting on rationalism and controlling the feelings, and the Evangelical on 'personal religion' aiming 'to reach men through the heart'. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Watson, J. *The Scot of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Voges, F. 'Moderate and Evangelical Thinking in the Later Eighteenth Century: Differences and Shared Attitudes', *R.S.C.H.S.* Vol. 22, 1986, pp. 146-7.

That difference is apparent in the comparison between Willison's and Blair's communion sermons. Yet, it is this very feature which makes Willison's work a 'word of God' demanding a response, as compared to a lecture on the value of the moral life.

Preaching like that of Blair may well have been designed to appeal to the cultured classes, but, as Burns noted, the purveyors of cold morality were poorly received on a Communion Sunday,

Smith opens out his cauld harangues  
On practice and on morals,  
An' aff the godly pour in thrangs  
To gie the jars an' barrels  
A lift that day. ' 1

But Willison's critique of Moderate preaching was not always valid, and he was prey to the censoriousness which can beset Evangelicals. So, he pilloried William Leechman, Divinity Professor at Glasgow, who, although not listed by Robert Wodrow as among the "Neu lights and Preachers Legall", <sup>2</sup> has been described alternatively as a 'liberal Calvinist', <sup>3</sup> and the 'saint of Moderatism'. <sup>4</sup>

While minister at Beith, Leechman had preached a course of sermons

<sup>1</sup> Douglas, W. S. (Ed.) *The Kilmarnock Edition of the Poetical Works of Robert Burns. The Holy Fair*, p. 22 (Glasgow : 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Sefton, H. R. ' "Neu-lights and Preachers Legall" : Some observations on the beginnings of Moderatism in the Church of Scotland', in McDougall, N. (Ed.) *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1407-1929* (Edinburgh : 1983) p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Mechie, S. 'The Theological Climate in Eighteenth Century Scotland', in Shaw, D. (Ed.) *Reformation or Revolution* (Edinburgh : 1967) pp. 269 and 271.

<sup>4</sup> Sefton, H. R. 'The Early Development of Moderatism in the Church of Scotland'. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. The University of Glasgow. 1962. Thesis No. 2013, p. 2.

on prayer. About the same time, a pamphlet, suggesting that prayer was 'absurd and unreasonable' was in circulation. <sup>1</sup> Aiming to refute that opinion, Leechman published a sermon on prayer, which proved sufficiently popular to be reprinted. The Evangelicals, however, denounced Leechman's effort as a 'Christless sermon', and raised the matter at Presbytery, Synod, and at the General Assembly of 1744, where Leechman's defence of his orthodoxy was accepted.

Willison, incensed by his sermon, thanked Glasgow Presbytery for calling the author to account. He objected that Leechman had presented God as the object of prayer, 'merely as creator, without any relation to Jesus Christ the only mediator'. He had not spoken of God 'as upon a throne of grace', nor mentioned the 'merit, satisfaction or intercession of Christ'. He had not referred to 'the influence or assistance of the Spirit, by which the duty is to be performed', nor had he made it clear that God 'is a "consuming fire" to sinners out of Christ'. Thus, condemning Leechman for his omissions, he continued, 'O how worthless, lifeless, sapless, and fruitless, must all our preachings and prayers be, if precious Christ be left out of them! Mr. Leechman's sermon is one instance among many, to show how well grounded those fears are....' <sup>2</sup>

Yet the same Leechman preached an 'action sermon' at Glasgow, which Willison, even by his own criteria, would have been hard put to criticize. Far from being a 'Christless sermon', it was based on John 1<sup>4</sup>. and entitled, 'Jesus Christ, full of Grace'.

The introduction offered an explanation that 'grace', in the New Testament, infers a 'kind, benign and merciful disposition, or those benefits and favours which flow from it', and proceeds to argue that Jesus was 'full of grace' on several accounts:

1) On account of his extraordinary goodness and benignity of temper

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, J. *Church History of Scotland*, Vol. 2, p. 469.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T. HTH.* p. 945.

displayed to a) his disciples, b) his enemies, and c) the world.

2) On account of the kindness found in his doctrine. The primary doctrine of the faith is that God is love, and his government benign. From this benignity and mercy of God, the whole scheme of redemption by the blood of Jesus has its root, and the Redeemer was motivated by the same Spirit. The gracious end of God's plan is the deliverance of 'many myriads of mankind from sin and death', and their establishment in virtue and immortal happiness.

But grace also means favour to those who have no claim to it. The Gospel is a gift which man cannot be said to deserve. 'By grace ye are saved through faith'. Moreover, the Gospel is grace in its promises of exemption from the punishment of sin for repenting sinners and of resurrection to eternal life. Jesus, who came to save people from their sins, began his ministry with a call to repentance, and showed, throughout, 'the utmost tenderness to all in whom he discovered any dispositions towards repentance and amendment'. It was the burden of his words at the Last Supper - "This is my blood .. shed for many for the remission of sins". It was also the charge committed to the apostles - the preaching of repentance and remission of sins to all nations. Thus, pardon for sin is the fundamental doctrine of the Gospel. The whole Gospel is grace, therefore, 'in a very peculiar sense, as it proclaims a full indemnity, in the name and through the blood of Jesus Christ to all who repent of their sins and forsake them'.

3) On account of the fact that Jesus is the source of many great blessings which the world enjoys. The apostles acknowledged that they had received "grace for grace out of his fulness", and even after his departure were endowed with the Spirit, so that the world derived great benefit from their testimony. Indeed, through Christianity, millions have been turned from the power of sin to the service of the living God.

Moreover as opposed to the 'deadness of the Mosaic dispensation',

there is spirit and life in the Gospel, for its doctrines, promises and proffered assistance elevate and fortify the mind, 'leading men to have their conversations in heaven, to set their affections on things above... and to walk by faith and not by sight'.

Praise for it all should be ascribed to Jesus 'whose name is justly more glorious than those of heroes or sages, renowned in the history of the world'. So, at the Supper we do what we can to transmit his memory and religion to succeeding generations.

The sermon has a fine conclusion.

Let us meditate on the fulness of grace and truth in Jesus, till we feel our hearts burning within us, and disposed to join fully with Mary in... her hymn of praise: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour". And till, from the bottom of our hearts we can ascribe praise and glory to Him who loved us, who washed us from our sins in his own blood, and makes us kings and priests to God his Father for ever and ever. ' 1

A sermon as gracious in structure, style and content, as its title, is difficult to fault. Sound in doctrine, totally Christocentric, persuasive in presentation, and seeking a response, Leechman, the despised 'Moderate', could present the evangel with a winsomeness which many Evangelicals would have done well to emulate.

#### The Fencing of the Table.

Following an 'action sermon' on the text, 'Let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely', Revelation 22'. Willison published the 'speech' used before moving to the communion table. This contains his 'fencing of the table'.

<sup>1</sup> Leechman, W. *Sermons by William Leechman, Late Principal of the College of Glasgow*, Vol. II (London : 1789) pp. 107-128.

Just as the 'diet of examination', before Communion in the Reformed Church, 'took the place of confession and absolution before Easter in the Old Church',<sup>1</sup> so the table fencing further reflected that emphasis in Reformed rites which replaced the old penitential system. It presented a final appeal for self examination, lest communicants partook unworthily to their hurt. The practice, then, which existed from the outset in the Reformed church in Scotland, was to detail such offences as would render communicants unfit.

In the Church prayers at Strassburg and Geneva, (Strassburg, 1545 and Geneva, 1542) Calvin, after the Institution, reminded communicants that 'strangers and those who do not belong to the company of the faithful must not be admitted'. Then, he continued,

Therefore, following that precept, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I excommunicate all idolaters, blasphemers and despisers of God, all heretics and those who create private sects in order to break the unity of the Church, all perjurers, all who rebel against father or mother or superior, all who promote sedition or mutiny, brutal and disorderly persons, adulterers, lewd and lustful men, thieves, ravishers, greedy and grasping people, drunkards, gluttons and all those who lead a scandalous and dissolute life. I warn them to abstain from this Holy Table, lest they defile and contaminate the holy food which our Lord Jesus Christ gives to none except they belong to his household of faith. <sup>2</sup>

The Genevan service Book, produced in 1556, and used among the Marian exiles in Geneva, on which the *Book of Common Order* was based, had a similar address, but with different wording. It

<sup>1</sup> Burnet, G. B. *The Holy Communion in the Reformed Church of Scotland, 1560-1960* (Edinburgh : 1960) p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, B. *Liturgies of the Western Church* (New York : 1962) pp. 205-6.



warned from the table, blasphemers, those who hindered or slandered God's word, adulterers, envious and malicious persons and those guilty of any other grievous crime, urging them to 'Iudge therefore your selues brethrene, that ye be not judged of the lorde'.<sup>1</sup>

In Knox's *Book of Common Order*, that address was called the 'exhortation', and as in the Genevan Book, followed the words of institution. Opening similarly, with a reminder of Paul's words on self examination, it warned of danger for unworthy communicating.

<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, bearing a closer relation to the offences listed in the Decalogue, it debarred blasphemers, idolaters, murderers, adulterers, the malicious and envious, the disobedient to parents, princes or magistrates, pastors and preachers, thieves, those who deceive neighbours, and live contrarily to the will of God.<sup>3</sup>

Following the list, however, the *Book of Common Order* stated that no genuinely penitent person should be excluded - 'only such as continue in sin without repentance' - and both books concluded with the reminder that the 'Sacrament is a singular medicine for all poor, sick creatures, a comfortable help to weak souls, and that our Lord requireth no other worthiness on our part, but that we unfeignedly acknowledge our naughtiness and imperfection'.<sup>4</sup>

The Westminster *Directory* added nothing on the categories to be debarred. Nevertheless, it obliged ministers to warn those

ignorant, scandalous, profane, or that live in sin against

<sup>1</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *The Liturgical Portions of the Genevan Service Book* (London : 1965) p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Spratt, G. W. *The Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland Commonly known as John Knox's Liturgy* (Edinburgh: 1901) p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 121-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 123, and Maxwell, W. D. *Liturgical Portions*, p. 124.

their knowledge or conscience, that they presume not to come to the holy table... and, on the other part, in an especial manner, to invite and encourage all that labour under the sense of the burden of their sins, and fear of wrath, and desire to reach out unto a greater progress in grace...to come to the Lord's table; assuring them, in the same name, of ease, refreshing and strength to their weak and wearied souls. ' 1

Willison's 'fencing', begins with a link from his 'action sermon'.<sup>2</sup> Informing communicants that they are to receive the 'water of life in a visible and sacramental way', and urging reverence, the institution is read. Then, reminding them that, at the table, 'Christ crucified' is not only 'signified and represented to your view, but also exhibited, offered, sealed and applied to your souls', he invites the communicants to come exercising faith and love, so that they may be partakers of Christ's body and shed blood, together with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. But first, he solemnly advises,

I must first set a rail about the table, that none who have no right to the table and children's bread may come near it. And, therefore I, in Christ's name, my Master and the Master of this feast, excommunicate and debar from this table:

Those to be debarred include:

1) All 'strangers to God', 'enemies of Christ', those who are 'not content with the way contrived of salvation through a redeemer', all unwilling to accept Christ as 'Prophet, Priest and King' and to give themselves 'to be saved, taught and ruled by him', all atheists, the ignorant who do not know what Christ has done for

<sup>1</sup> Leishman, T. (Ed.) *The Westminster Directory* (Edinburgh : 1901) pp. 47-8. Fuller treatment of the development of the 'fencing of the table' is found in Macleod, I. 'The Sacramental Work of John Mill'. M.TH. Thesis. p. 63f.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 115.

them, those who neglect Christ and those who are slaves to the world, the flesh and the devil.

- 2) 'All worshippers of images', those who invent ways of worship other than those appointed by God or who approve of corruptions in worship, ordinances and sacraments.
- 3) Blasphemers, cursers, swearers, those who invoke the devil, swearers by faith, conscience or soul, mockers of religion or scripture, perjurers, covenant breakers and apostates.
- 4) Sabbath breakers - those who do unnecessary things on the Lord's Day, including 'walking in the fields or sitting or standing in the streets' when they should be at home or in church.
- 5) All who disobey magistrates, parents, ministers, all who disrespect their parents and fail to maintain them when poor, all parents who neglect their children's education failing to teach them to read and to pray.
- 6) 'Murderers, envious, malicious and revengeful persons'.
- 7) 'Gluttons, drunkards, adulterers, fornicators, unclean persons' and those who utter obscenity.
- 8) 'Thieves', 'robbers', the unjust, those who cheat neighbours.
- 9) 'Liars, backbiters, slanderers'.
- 10) Those who are not content with the 'lot God has carved out to them, but grudge at their neighbours' prosperity'.

Thereafter, the gracious invitation follows:

On the other hand, I, in the same name and authority, invite, all that are sincerely willing to part with their sins, turn their back on the devil and hell, and take on with a new Master, Jesus Christ, and join in covenant with him'.

More specifically, those invited include:

- 2) 'All who are truly sensible of their lost and perishing state without him.... all thirsty souls panting for Christ.. all that truly love Christ, whose souls' desires are towards him' ....
- 3) 'All poor cloudy believers who have many doubts and fears'.

4) 'All who are groaning under heart plagues and soul diseases'.

To all such a welcome is extended,

..... come away to the Physician. All shelterless souls, come away to the ark. All heavy-laden souls, come to your rest. All humble beggars, come away to the King's feast; all that would have more strength of grace, faith, love, repentance. All that would have their sins and lusts killed. O here is a feast and medicine, come to it, for it will prove life to your souls, strength to your graces, poison to your sins and death to your lusts.... O come, now, lift up faith's hands, and the doors of your souls, to let in the King of Glory, with the voice of joy and praise....<sup>1</sup>

Willison's fencing, in form, style and content, was typical of that used by Evangelicals. Comparison may be made with that of Mill of Shetland,<sup>2</sup> whose prelude and postscript besides the content, show that it was based on one found in the material of James Spalding,<sup>3</sup> one of Willison's predecessors in Dundee from 1691-1699. <sup>4</sup> There is little difference between the three 'fencings', except that while Willison's, like Knox's 'exhortation', had followed the words of institution, Mill's, like Spalding's, preceded them.

As Willison had done, Mill opened with an authoritative word, explaining that some have to be excluded from the table,

I come now, in the name and authority of my great Lord and Master, as one of the meanest and most unworthy of his

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 565-7.

<sup>2</sup> Minister of Dunrossness, Shetland from 1743-1805.

<sup>3</sup> Spalding, J. in Wemyss, G. (Ed.) *Synaxis Sacra* (Edinburgh : 1703) pp. 173-5.

<sup>4</sup> Scott, H. (Ed.) *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae*, Vol. 5, p. 320.

servants, in virtue of the keys of his kingdom committed to his faithful servants, to set a fence round his holy table, and, thereby, excommunicate and debar from the holy table of the Lord, all swine from these precious pearls, and doggs from partaking of the children's bread.

Thereafter a general debarring excluded all who reject the way of salvation provided in Christ, while a 'more particular' list of those to be debarred followed. Like Willison's, this was based on the Decalogue with a somewhat fuller expansion, so that on the tenth commandment, for example, as compared to Willison's exclusion of those who are 'not content with the lot God has carved out to them, but grudge at their neighbour's prosperity', Mill debars,

All covetous worldlings whose God is their belly, who mind earthly things more than heavenly: such as are discontent with their lot and condition, fretting, murmuring and repining at the providence of God, envying and grieving at their neighbour's good, in mind, body, reputation and estate, and having inordinate desires to anything that belongs to him.

Like Willison, he also ended with the gracious invitation,

In the same name and authority, I am to set open a door for all penitent, broken hearted sinners... Al ye poor, blind and naked, lame, dumb and deaf who are holding up your hearts to Christ this day... I charge and command you in the King's name, that ye approach and take your sacrament upon it... Let neither the pride of your worthiness bring you, nor a sense of unworthiness keep you back.....<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MacLeod, I. (Ed.) Mill's Manuscript, p. 98f.

Yet while the fencings of Willison, Mill and Spalding were fairly lengthy, expanding on the Decalogue, there is evidence that for some, it was a more simple affair. After the death of John Logan of Leith <sup>1</sup> - an account of whose student days casts doubt on his possession of pietistic tendencies, <sup>2</sup> and whose entry in *Fasti*, recording his acceptance by the literati in Edinburgh, his work as a poet and playwright, and his demission of his charge after his play 'Runnameda' was performed on stage, amply show that he was a Moderate - <sup>3</sup> a volume of his sacramental material was published, together with a description of his conduct of the Lord's Supper. The table fencing was missing from his manuscript, but, to complete the book, one was supplied by a friend, in Logan's style.

Just as the structure of Moderate preaching, with its simple system of introduction, points and conclusion, was a far more palatable arrangement than the cumbersome scheme of text, doctrine, methods and uses, with its endless divisions and subdivisions, so Logan's fencing had a structured, but less imperious style.

It begins, not with an authoritative statement announcing the minister's duty to 'fence' or 'rail' the table, but with a simple reminder of what is about to take place,

Christians, We proceed now to the particular and solemn service of this day.... The Table of the last Supper of our Lord, is before you... Let now, therefore, the believer in Christ, and the keeper of his commandments, prepare himself, approach and sit down, partake of the spiritual feast, and present his vows to the Most High.... Before, therefore we advance, let us enquire - What is it that God hath required of us. How read the Commandments and the Law?

<sup>1</sup> Minister of South Leith (1748-1788).

<sup>2</sup> MacFarlane, J. *The Life and Times of George Lawson* (Edinburgh : 1862) pp. 34-35.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, H. (Ed.) *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Vol. 1, pp. 167-8.

Thereafter, instead of expanding on the Commandments, the Decalogue itself was read, and the fencing continued:

Such is the law: And we read that when it was delivered, there was thunder on Sinai, and the people in fear "removed and stood afar off". Let him who is guilty of wilfully and habitually breaking the law, forbear to approach unto this table: Stand back thou profane! But let him who obeys, and who loves the law, come forward: Sit down, thou blessed of the Lord!

Next, the Beatitudes, as the 'Laws of Christ', were read, and the fencing continued,

Such is the character of the disciples of Christ.....  
Let him whose character is opposite, forbear to approach unto this table. Stand back thou profane! But let him who imitates and loves this character, come forward. Sit down thou blessed of the Lord!

Finally, the gracious invitation was given,

Some, my brethren, are thus debarred; but the invitation to this feast is large and generous. All who repent and propose a reformation of life are welcome. Everyone that thirsteth is invited ... They who labour and are heavy laden, are desired to come.... and he that cometh to me, saith the Master of the feast, I will in no wise cast out.

Trusting in the grace of Heaven, let us therefore advance; and in vows of obedience..... partake of the banquet which is prepared. And, may he himself be with us this day with the wedding garment, and his banner over us be love. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Logan, J. *Sermons by, One of the Ministers of Leith.* 2nd. edition (Edinburgh : 1790) p. 335f.

This simpler, less authoritarian approach, had the added advantage of allowing scripture to speak for itself, thus avoiding the more dubious expansions to the Decalogue which subjectively identified specific 'sins', ' and intensified feelings of guilt.

Later in the century, the 'fencing' began to lose its precise form, simply becoming another sermon. Examples are found in the published work of Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, <sup>2</sup> and in an early nineteenth century manuscript of a minister whose identity is unknown. Headed, 'The Fencing of the Table', the latter opens,

Brethren, we now have a feast before us of rich, suitable provision. The Master of the Feast is the Prince of the Kings of the earth. The guests for whom it is prepared are his loyal subjects. These and these only have a right to partake of this feast. But who are to be considered his loyal subjects? They are described in the word as 'willing people'. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power".

1) Willing to recognise and acknowledge God's will as the rule of their whole deportment.

2) Willing to renounce all merit in what we have done, and depend entirely on what he hath done as the ground of acceptance with God.

3) Willing to part with all worldly concerns when they stand in competition with him. Boats and nets and fishing and the receipt of custom were left to follow Christ and his call. "For we have left all". Not that we are able to leave these things literally, but in affection, and to love Christ more than them all.

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, J. *Discourses Suited to the Administration of the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh : 1853) 3rd. edition, pp. 187-98.



4) Willing to suffer the greatest hardships to which we may be exposed for the sake of Christ and his cause. Christ told his disciples they must take up their cross, willing that they shall be brought before kings, willing that some of you they shall kill. Paul was willing to die for Christ. "I count not my life dear that I may finish my course".<sup>1</sup>

Such examples show that there was variety in the 'table fencing'. That of Willison, Spalding and Mill suggest that Evangelicals followed a familiar pattern, that offered in Logan's name, suggests that the Moderates may well have opted for a simpler, though still structured form, while others, later in the century and thereafter, were simply to produce yet another sermon.

Several features are notable in Willison's 'fencing'. First, that it was based on the style of the 'exhortation' found in the Book of Common Order, with which he was familiar,<sup>2</sup> is apparent for several reasons. Like Knox's form, the address is divided into a debarring and an invitation - although such a procedure had also been prescribed in the Directory.<sup>3</sup> Like that in the Book of Common Order, the offences listed are founded on the Decalogue, although Willison does expand them. Again, as in the Book of Common Order, 'only such as continue in sin without repentance' are debarred. Finally, just as in that source the invitation ended with 'an expansion of sursum corda',<sup>4</sup> so Willison ended by encouraging communicants to 'lift up faith's hands and the doors of your souls, to let in the King of glory, with the voice of joy and praise'.

<sup>1</sup> Sacramental Addresses dated from 1835-1840. Author Unknown. MS. 9. Alexander Wood Collection. Ardrossan Local Library.

<sup>2</sup> Although replaced by the Directory, publication of the *B.C.O.* continued. Bishop Sage, in 1695, wrote of an edition 'lately published'. *Bishop Sages' Works* (Edinburgh :1844) p. 350. fn. Willison's knowledge of it is evident in *Sac. Dir.* p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> *Leishman, T. (Ed.) The Westminster Directory*, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> *Sprott, G. W. (Ed.) B.C.O.* p. 203.

Secondly, while Willison, in listing offences, permitted himself a measure of the latitude which the Directory allowed, and perhaps even encouraged, so that sins like 'walking in the fields on the Sabbath', or 'sitting or standing in the street' when one should be at church or home, fall strangely on twentieth century ears as sins, he did not go to the excesses of others who were not beyond including their political aversions as sins and debarring those who were persuaded otherwise. <sup>1</sup> Indeed, in voicing an expectation that communicants should care for needy parents, and that parents had a duty to cater for their childrens' education, Willison was expressing a note of real social concern.

Thirdly, by following the form of the Book of Common Order, he did not, like those of a later period, permit the form of the 'fencing' to degenerate into yet another lengthy sermon. Fencing sermons of 2,500 words were not unknown, <sup>2</sup> and must have added to the tedium of the occasion.

#### Willison's Prayer of Consecration.

Following the 'fencing', Willison proceeded to the prayer of consecration, and, during the call to prayer, he appears to have taken the bread in his hands, with the words,

You have seen our commission and warrant, and we are come to our Redeemer's table; bread and wine are set before us, but ... they must be solemnly set apart, and consecrated by prayer and thanksgiving as our Saviour did. And that we may hold close to the institution, we, after our Saviour's example, first take the bread. And now let us join our address to the King of heaven, for the blessing thereon. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Graham, H. G. *Social Life in Eighteenth Century Scotland*, Vol. II (Edinburgh : 1899) p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, J. *Discourses*, pp. 187-98.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 567.

A prayer of around 1,400 words follows. Beginning with confession and thanksgiving for salvation offered in Christ, the consecration follows in the words,

Sanctify these elements of bread and wine (which thou took, blessed and broke and distributed to thy disciples) <sup>1</sup> that they may be the symbols of thy body and blood. O, that we, in receiving them, may partake of Christ's body and blood, and share in all his benefits. Lord stamp and consecrate these creatures of bread and wine that they may be the means of conveying life and salvation to our souls.

Such a prayer was recommended by the Directory, and it is noteworthy that Willison has it, for the inclusion of any such words had been a matter of controversy for a lengthy period.

The Book of Common Order contained a eucharistic prayer which simply ended with an ascription of praise and without invoking any blessing on the elements. <sup>2</sup> Yet, this was soon recognised as deficient, and, within a short time, it had become the custom to use a form of consecration which may have included an epiclesis.

So, Maxwell quotes a remark of Row, who, referring to a service in St. Giles, in 1622, wrote, 'Mr. Patrick Galloway, having kneeled and prayed (I would say, having read the prayer of consecration, wherein there is not one word of 'Lord, bless the elements or action')..... <sup>3</sup> That remark has been understood as a protest that the absence of an epiclesis was a gross omission. Or again, Maxwell quotes Calderwood, who, in 'Altare Damascum' said, that

<sup>1</sup> These words are in parenthesis in Willison's text. There seems no logical reason for this, unless it indicates, perhaps, that, at this point, and during the prayer, the fraction took place.

<sup>2</sup> Spratt, G. W. (Ed.) *B.C.O.* p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *A History of Worship in the Church of Scotland*, (London : 1955) p. 88.

'the minister recites the words of institution, then he blesses'.  
1 And Alexander Henderson, 2 who in describing the communion service, spoke of the minister 'giving thanks', himself offered a prayer which sought more than merely to express gratitude,

Sanctify these means to us whilk we are about, that so they may represent Christ to us... And grant, Lord, that now by faith Christ may be made ours, and we may be made his; and so let ane union be made up now that sall never be dissolved again. 3

The first attempt to introduce a consecration with an epiclesis proved abortive. In 1615, Archbishop Spottiswoode of St. Andrews returned from London with a document believed to have been the result of consultation with James VI. Entitled, 'Articles required for the service of the Church of Scotland', it proposed to remedy deficiencies in worship and recognised that, 'the administration of the Lord's Supper must be in some points helped'. 4 The following year the Assembly approved the revision of the Book of Common Order and a liturgical committee was set up. Two drafts were produced in the ensuing years, and the second, authorship of which is ascribed to Bishop Cowper of Galloway, contained a consecration with a partial epiclesis, reading,

Him also Thou hast vouchsafed to give us this day to be the foode of our soules in this sacrament ..Send doune, O Lord, Thy blissing upon this sacrament, that it may be unto us the

1 *Ibid.* pp. 62-3.

2 Alexander Henderson (1583-1646) was minister at Leuchars for thirty years, a Moderator of the General Assembly and commissioner at the Westminster Assembly.

3 Martin, R. (Ed.) *Sermons, Prayers and Pulpit Addresses of Alexander Henderson.* (Edinburgh : 1867) p. 164.

4 Sprott, G. W. (Ed.) *The Scottish Liturgies of the Reign of James VI* (Edinburgh : 1901) pp. xvi-xvii.

effectual exhibitiv instrument of the Lord Jesus. <sup>1</sup>

The next attempt proved no more successful. Appearing in Laud's Liturgy which met an orchestrated protest when used at St. Giles in 1637, the epiclesis read,

We most humbly beseech Thee, and of Thy almighty goodness vouchsafe to bless and sanctify with thy word and Holy Spirit, these thy creatures of bread and wine, that they may be unto us the bodie and blood of thy most dearly beloved son'. <sup>2</sup>

Row, who had previously protested at Patrick Galloway's omission of an epiclesis, now demurred, 'it hath the very popish consecration', <sup>3</sup> while Henderson proclaimed at Leuchars in 1638,

Beloved we do not pray "that Almighty God would sanctify this bread and wine, by his word and Spirit, that it may be the body and blood of Christ", but we say only that when it is sanctified by the word and prayer, then it is the sacrament representing the body and blood of Christ to them that believe: and to those who has faith we may say so. So after the bread and wine is sanctified we have warrant to say, "This is my body, broken for you. This is the cup of the new testament in my blood, shed for the remission of many"; but we have no warrant to pray that God by his almighty power would sanctify the elements to be the body and blood of Christ. <sup>4</sup>

Faced by the objection that the corporeal presence of Christ in the elements was inferred in the prayer, Laud refuted it on two

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93, and Donaldson, G. 'Worship in Scotland in 1620'. *Liturgical Studies. The Journal of the Church Service Society*, Nov. 1971 p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, R. *Henderson's Sermons*, p. 166 fn.

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *A History of Worship*, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Martin, R. *Henderson's Sermons*, pp. 165-166.

grounds. Conceding that the words did not appear in the English prayer book, he said he wished it otherwise, 'for though the consecration of the elements may be without it, yet it is much more solemn and full by that invocation'.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, to the objection that the wording implied a change in the elements themselves as a work of God's omnipotence, Laud retorted,

A work of omnipotency it is, whatever the change may be. For less than omnipotence cannot change these elements in nature or use, to so high a service as they are put in that great sacrament. Therefore the invocation of God's goodness to effect this by them is no proof of intending the corporeal presence in this sacrament.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these counter arguments, however, such was the widespread, though not universal, revulsion to the book, that the Church in general reverted to the use of the Book of Common Order, until the Westminster Directory took its place.

The Directory merely offered a guide for the communion service, and, for the prayer of 'thanksgiving or blessing for the bread and wine', suggested that the consecration should be of the nature

Earnestly to pray to God, the Father of all mercies, and God of all consolation, to vouchsafe his gracious presence, and the effectual working of his Spirit in us; and so to sanctify these elements both of bread and wine, and to bless his own ordinance, that we may receive by faith the body and blood of Jesus Christ, crucified for us, and so to feed upon him, that he may be one with us, and we one with him, that he may live in us, and we in him.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dowden, J. *The Scottish Communion Office* (Oxford : 1922) p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Leishman, T. (Ed.) *The Westminster Directory*, pp. 50-1.

The Directory, therefore, recommended the use of an epiclesis.

Willison's consecration prayer was close to what the Directory had prescribed. Technically, it may not have included an epiclesis. Yet, it is implicit in the words,

Sanctify these elements of bread and wine, (which thou took, blessed and brake, and distributed to thy disciples)... O that we in receiving them, may partake of Christ's body and blood, and share in all his benefits. Lord, stamp these creatures of bread and wine that they may be the means of conveying life and salvation to our souls.

Such words compare favourably with those composed by Richard Baxter in the Savoy Liturgy,

Sanctify these thy creatures of bread and wine, which, according to thy institution and command, we set apart to this holy use, that they may be sacramentally the Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ.

Thus, if, by Maxwell's criteria, Baxter's wording includes an epiclesis, <sup>1</sup> it is difficult to argue less of Willison's.

Moreover the wording of the prayer shows that Willison clearly regarded the Lord's Supper as a real means of grace, the petitions stimulating a sense of expectation and lively encounter.

Lord bless the ordinance, and let wondrous changes be made on all. Let here the empty soul be filled, the starving creature fed, the poor beggar enriched, the hard heart softened, the cold heart inflamed, the dead soul quickened, the paralytic hand cured, the blind eye enlightened, the thirsty heart satisfied, the feeble knees strengthened, the

<sup>1</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *Liturgical Portions*, p. 135.

straitened heart enlarged, the wandering heart fixed, the creeping desires elevated, the cloudy soul brightened and the doubting soul resolved ...Lord, grant that in these holy mysteries, we may not only commemorate but effectually receive Christ and all his benefits..... <sup>1</sup>

Such words were in harmony with the Westminster Confession which held that those who partook worthily of the outward elements, also inwardly, by faith, 'receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death', the body and blood of Christ being as present to the faith of believers as the elements to the senses. <sup>2</sup>

Willison's Table Addresses.

Several of Willison's 'table addresses' were published. These are of interest not only for their content, but also because they reveal his manner of serving the sacrament. His practice was to serve the elements during the address. Part of it was delivered, then the bread was distributed. Another part was delivered, then the cup was distributed. Thereafter the address had a short conclusion. <sup>3</sup> John Mill's practice in Shetland was identical. <sup>4</sup>

Table addresses also represented a development from the original practice at communion in the Reformed Church in Scotland. The *Book of Common Order*, concerned to focus the minds of communicants on the Passion, rather on the sacramental signs, had simply required, during the distribution of the elements, the reading of 'some place of the scriptures which doth lively set forth the death of Christ'. <sup>5</sup> Knox had followed that practice, in Geneva, <sup>6</sup> while Calvin's

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 567-8.

<sup>2</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. XXIX. VII.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 568-9.

<sup>4</sup> MacLeod, I. (Ed.) *Mill's Manuscript*, pp. 1-77.

<sup>5</sup> Sprott, G. W. (Ed.) *B.C.O.* p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *Liturgical Portions*, p. 126.



own order had prescribed psalm singing or scripture reading, <sup>1</sup> a procedure which he outlined in the *Institutes*. <sup>2</sup>

In Scotland, the *First Book of Discipline*, like the *Book of Common Order*, required that 'some comfortable places of the scriptures be read', <sup>3</sup> and the liturgy prepared in the reign of James VI, but abandoned before publication, instructed, more specifically, that during the act of communicating, the 'Reader read distinctly the historie of Christ's passion', from John chapter 13 forward. <sup>4</sup>

Yet, descriptions of early communion services, show that, soon after the Reformation, it became the custom to deliver a table address. Calderwood, writing about 1620, but claiming to describe the pattern in Scotland for sixty years, <sup>5</sup> spoke of the minister addressing 'those at the table, as long as the action of eating and drinking lasts', and of singing or scripture reading occurring as people left and filled the tables, <sup>6</sup> while Henderson, who wrote two decades after Calderwood, and who certainly delivered table addresses at Leuchars, in 1638, <sup>7</sup> spoke of the minister stirring up the communicants after the giving of the elements, 'either by his own speech', or by having the Passion read. <sup>8</sup>

Both accounts suggest that table addresses were not uncommon. In 1645, however, the Assembly formalised their use by an Act which required the minister to make 'a short exhortation at every table', and disallowed reading 'at the time of communicating'. Moreover,

<sup>1</sup> Sprott, G. W. (Ed.) *B.C.O.* p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV. XVII. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Cameron J. (Ed.) *F.B.D.* p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Sprott, G. W. (Ed.) *Scottish Liturgies*, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Sprott, G. W. (Ed.) *B.C.O.* pp xxxviii-xxxix.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. xxxix.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, R. *Henderson's Sermons*, pp. 165-82.

<sup>8</sup> McMillan, W. *Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church, 1550-1638* (Edinburgh : 1930) p. 173.

silence during the action could be punctuated with brief sentences, suitable for stimulating the devotion of communicants. <sup>1</sup>

That Assembly also authorised use of the Directory which stated that 'after all have communicated, the minister may, in a few words, put them in mind of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, held forth in this sacrament; and exhort them to walk worthy of it'. <sup>2</sup>

The 1645 Act then, officially substituted a 'short' exhortation for the reading of the Passion during the 'action'. Brevity, however, is relative, and Bishop Sage had grounds for declaring the act a grievous innovation not only for prohibiting reading at the time of communicating, but also for legalizing table addresses, whereas, 'in the time of celebration the Reformers had no exhortation at all'. <sup>3</sup> The result was that the communion service became more protracted as lengthy table addresses were added, <sup>4</sup> and therein lay the main cause of long and tedious celebrations. Maxwell estimated the duration of a 'table service' at half an hour, <sup>5</sup> but that had to be multiplied by the number of tables to be served, which depended, in turn, on the number of people receiving, in relation to the number which each table could seat. In Shetland, where the tables held 80, John Mill could serve 500-600 people with seven table services. <sup>6</sup> Often the tables were smaller, and Webster

<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) *AGA 1645*, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Leishman, T. (Ed.) *The Westminster Directory*, p. 52. A full treatment of the development of table addresses is found in MacLeod, I. 'The Sacramental Work of John Mill'. M.Th. Thesis, p. 91f.

<sup>3</sup> *Bishop Sage's Works*, Vol. 1 (London : 1844) p. 364f.

<sup>4</sup> Lockhart, J. G. (*Pseud. Peter Morris*) *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk*, Vol 3 (Edinburgh : 1819) p. 320, and *Bishop Sage's Works*, Vol. 1 p. 365.

<sup>5</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *A History of Worship*, pp. 172-3.

<sup>6</sup> Goudie, G. (Ed.) *The Diary of the Revd. John Mill*. (Edinburgh: 1889) p. 51.

states that, at Carnock, 25 tables were needed to accommodate 700-800 people, each therefore, taking only around 30 communicants, so that the service would 'pretty well fill a long summer day'. <sup>1</sup>

Calderwood, describing the service in 1623, had concluded,

if the whole congregation could sit at one time at the tables, it would be more agreeable and advantageous, as they could thus all together, eat, drink, meditate, sing, and hear the minister's address. <sup>2</sup>

Willison, seeing the need for change, introduced a double table at Dundee, thereby halving the table services and addresses. <sup>3</sup>

His table addresses are double the length of Alexander Henderson's, averaging at around 1,000 words, but are shorter, nevertheless, than those of many others. <sup>4</sup> Unlike Mill of Shetland, he prefaces them with neither title nor text, and they are unconnected with the theme of the action sermon - a feature of some of Henderson's table addresses. Willison's second 'Speech' may serve as an example. <sup>5</sup>

He begins with questions designed to remind participants of the gravity of what they are about to do.

Where are you? At the Lord's table. What are you come for?  
....Are you come to suscribe and seal a marriage covenant with Christ, before the glorious Trinity and elect angels?. Are ye come to join hands with him?

<sup>1</sup> Webster, J. M. *History of Carnock* (Edinburgh : 1938) p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Spratt, G. W. (Ed.) *B.C.O.* p. xxxix.

<sup>3</sup> See below, p. 218.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, J. *Discourses*. Brown's table addresses, split into two parts with words before and after the action, average at around 2,000 words each. Examples are found on pp. 199-218.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 568-9.

Communicants are told that they should come, in as serious a manner as they would were they going to death. Then, they would place all their hope in Christ, realising that, without his friendship and his blood to plead, they would be 'lost and undone for ever'. Their chief regret would be their 'sighting of Christ, giving the world his room, forgetting eternity, and praying seldom and formally'. Here, therefore, they should mourn just as earnestly. If they come with dead hearts, carnal, hard, wandering, filled with lusts - the nails that pierced Christ - they will participate unworthily. On the other hand, to come worthily they should bestir themselves. Are the arms of faith stretched wide out to clasp hard and fast about a crucified Redeemer? Are they ready to 'make and close the bargain.... saying, 'My Beloved is mine and I am his?'

At this point the bread is given, and the address continues, presumably as they share it,

Believing soul, I now deliver to thee the body of Christ; O now receive a broken Christ and apply him by faith. Behold his wounds opened, and deep clefts made in the rock of our salvation..... O, poor dove, come into the ark that the floods drown thee not: mercy has opened a window in the side of the ark, and is putting out a hand to pull thee in....

Here the cup is given, and the address proceeds further with a plea to communicants to avail themselves fully of what is offered,

O see as the fountain runs and follows poor sinners. O are ye not desirous to be bathed therein? O have ye no pollutions, no plagues, no soul diseases? Is there no blind or cripple here? weak hands or feeble knees; no cold or hard hearts? Is there any doubting sinner here? O come, drink and bathe, and be made whole.

Thou hast now a cure for all thy diseases and wants.... O will ye not clasp about the Physician, when he is within reach of

you.... tell him all that is ill with you... table all your complaints before him..... Have ye no lusts that ye would have killed? no weak grace to be strengthened? Your King will not deny you anything. Deep calleth unto deep, the depth of our misery for the depth of thy mercy.

The conclusion follows with a reminder that since communicants, just like the elements, are now consecrated to Christ, it is their duty to keep the temple clean. 'O watch against temptations. You will meet with many, but may God's grace be sufficient for you'.

The table addresses of the Evangelicals, like their sermons, tended to be similar in form, style and content.

The form was that of a relatively short address of an intensely devotional nature, and usually on a single topic. Sometimes, it was continuous, while at others it was divided into several brief but related points. Not all, however, followed the practice of Willison and Mill, both of whom divided the address with the action of distributing the bread and wine.

The style, nevertheless was common to all. Aiming to inspire devotion to Christ, these addresses employed the most intimate language to implore a response of wonder, affection and loyalty to the one whose outpouring of love was recalled in the table action.

The content, too, therefore, was similar, so that common themes were such subjects as Christ's suffering, communicating rightly, renewing baptismal engagements, or joining in a marriage covenant. The latter theme, indeed, appears not only in Willison, as already noted, but also in Mill and Spalding, each treating it differently.

So, Spalding began in arresting fashion with a proclamation, 'O yes, O yes, there is a purpose of marriage between the King's Son and the Daughter of Zion'. Subsequent exposition suggests that Christ is the groom and the communicant the bride, and a contrast

is drawn between them. The Bridegroom is the fairest of the Sons of Men, the bride the blackest among women. He is the loveliest in earth and heaven, she the most loathsome of creatures. He is the heir of Heaven, she the heir of Hell. He is the King's son and she a beggar's daughter.

Parallels are drawn between the conditions required of partners in a marriage contract, together with the provision which a husband makes for his wife, and the conditions which Christ expects from communicants and the provision he makes for them, and the address then closes with a challenge to communicants.

Now is it a bargain? I say to you as Laban said to Rebekah, 'Wilt thou go with this man?' Yes, say ye, if he would take me; let me tell you, he came not here to scorn you.... He regards not your blackness for he counts you fair, and can make you fair. He regards not your want of tocher, for he has enough for you and him both. He lays his count with your infirmities, only as in Hosea 3<sup>3</sup>. 'Abide for me many days, and thou shalt not be for another'; and then it is a bargain and let it stand so. Amen, so be it. '

Mill's address opens with a call to prepare for the wedding day,

Thou art call'd, O serious Soul, to come quickly from the highways and hedges. Putt off thy filthy raggs. Putt on the wedding garment to get clean hands and a pure heart.. All things are ready. T'is true, wilt thou say, on his part? But, alas! I'm unready - unworthy to be a guest of such noble entertainment.

The mood of the address then changes into a prayer, which ends,

' Spalding, J. in Wemyss, G. (Ed.) *Synaxis Sacra*, pp. 208-9.

I heartily accept of the Lord Jesus Christ as the way, the truth and the life, the only new and living way whereby sinners have access to the Father.... This day, therefore, I desire to join myself in marriage covenant with him, and in testimony thereof to take my sacrament upon it.....

The bread is then given to the communicants, and presumably as they communicate, the address continues with the prayer,

O blessed Jesus, I come to thee hungry, poor, wretched, miserable, blind and naked... But since such is thy unparallel'd love, (to condescend so far as to make offer of Thy love) I do here with all my heart accept of Thee for my Head and Husband, for better or worse, richer or poorer, in prosperity and adversity, for all times and conditions to love, honour and obey Thee before all others to my last breath.

Thereafter the cup is given, and the long prayer concludes,

And the covenant which I have made with Thee at this time on earth, let it be ratify'd and confirm'd in heaven. This is my earnest request, O Lord, thou Lover of Souls. May the Lord grant that this may be the practical longing of every heart at this table. Amen. '

Both addresses, like Willison's, were designed to elicit a personal response of devotion to Christ, and couched in language of an intimate nature.

The Table Addresses of the Moderates were not greatly different, although they did omit the lurid imagery in which Evangelicals revelled. Phrases to describe sinful man, such as 'black as hell

' MacLeod, I. (Ed.) Mill's Manuscript, pp. 6-8.

with sin', <sup>1</sup> or, to describe the unregenerate, such as 'child of wrath and heirs of hell', <sup>2</sup> or words like 'letting loose my affections on dung and dross' to describe the occupations of the pre Christian life, <sup>3</sup> or, 'returning like the dogg to the vomit', <sup>4</sup> to describe those who returned to unworthy ways after communion, <sup>4</sup> are not found in the preaching of the Moderates who both wrote and spoke in a more literary and refined style.

Yet the aim, form and content was identical. Indeed, a fine table address by Logan, was written on the subject of Christ's suffering, a theme which Mill, <sup>5</sup> Spalding <sup>6</sup> and Willison <sup>7</sup> also used.

As distinct from Willison's style of dealing with the subject, which attempted to involve the communicant intimately, in what he was describing, Logan's language is much more formal. Willison said,

You are now upon Mount Calvary, at the foot of the cross, near the wounds: he is saying, "Pray, believing soul, reach hither thy hand, feel the print of the nails; yea, thrust into my pierced side, and feel my warm, bleeding heart, and see if I love you not".....<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Substance of Four Table Addresses delivered in the Tolbooth Church of Edinburgh on the 16th. day of March 1760, by the late Rev. Dr. Muir of Paisley* (Edinburgh : 1793) p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> MacLeod, I. (Ed.) *Mill's Manuscript*, p. 63, and Willison, *Treatise, HTH.* p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> MacLeod, I. (Ed.) *Mill's Manuscript*, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* p. 192, and MacLeod, I. (Ed.) *Mill's Manuscript*, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> MacLeod, I. (Ed.) *Mill's Manuscript*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>6</sup> Spalding, J. in Wemyss, G. (Ed.) *Synaxis Sacra*, pp. 213-4.

<sup>7</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 569-70.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 570.



Logan says,

Remember now then, O Communicants! the Man of Sorrows...Mark the reception he met with, despised and rejected of men: He came to his own, and his own received him not. In the midst of scorers, in the hands of persecutors, mark the patience and meekness of the Lamb of God. Follow him to the court of Herod, the hall of Pilate, and the hill of Calvary. See him at last forsaken of God. Was there ever sorrow like unto his sorrow!

Nevertheless, the object of the address was the same,

Turn now, Christians, with hearts penetrated with grief.... to the table that is now before you. You are now to engage in the most solemn ordinance of your religion. You are going to transact with the King of Glory.... You are about to commemorate that scene at which the sun grew dark, and the earth trembled. You are going to seal your souls to the day of everlasting redemption. Not the last hour of your lives can be more awful than the present. In the view of so great a covenant, I call upon you to banish all worldly passions, all unhallowed affections, all the leaven of malice and of wrath, and to sit with reverence, with faith and with love at the feast of salvation, of which you are now to partake.

Differing from Willison and Mill, Logan distributed the elements, in both kinds, at this point, and, after all had partaken, the address concluded with an exhortation to faithfulness,

While you now sit with him at his table, the Patriarchs who foresaw this day, the Prophets who foretold it, and the righteous men who desired to see it, are beholding your Redeemer face to face, and sitting on thrones in heaven, where they now dwell in the presence of God... My friends! There are vacant thrones. Say, are they vacant for you? Do you look on him whom you have pierced with repenting eyes? Do your

hearts glow with love to God, with love to Christ, with love to the brethren? . . . Do you aspire to the regions above, and breathe towards the mansions of immortality? Then, my friends, these thrones are vacant for you! If you fulfil the vows you now make, the gates will lift up their heads that ye may enter in: Your blessed Redeemer will call unto you, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joys of your Lord".<sup>1</sup>

As with Leechman's action' sermon, it is difficult to fault Logan's table addresses, even by applying Willison's criteria. There is no apparent doctrinal difference between them, and no parade of 'cold morality'. 'Christ crucified' is the focus of Logan's addresses, and, apart from the more refined language of the Moderate, it would be difficult to judge the label applicable to the author.

Moreover, both Evangelical and Moderate sought a response in their table addresses. So, in another table address, Logan stated,

The prophet Daniel foretold concerning your Saviour, "That he should confirm a covenant with many". It is for this purpose that we have assembled this day. You sit down at this table to avouch the Lord to be your God, and to join yourself to him, in a perpetual covenant never to be broken. If with sincere and upright hearts, if with true repentance and faith unfeigned, you accept the terms of the Gospel, then all the blessings of the new covenant are in this ordinance sealed to your souls. Then the promises of the covenant become your portion: Then the blood of the covenant pleads for you in heaven: Then the messenger of the covenant brings you the glad tidings of salvation: Then the Mediator of the covenant gives you access to the Holiest of all, by that new and living way which he hath consecrated with his flesh within the vail.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Logan, J. *Sermons by*, pp. 355-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 361.

Similarly, in giving the bread, during his table address on Christ's sufferings, Willison had said,

Now take hold of the covenant and embrace Christ in it. Accept of a bruised Lord, a bruised friend: open your hearts to him as he opened his side to you. O keep him not at the door now when he knocks with his nailed hands..... look what my own disciples have done, one betrayed me, another denied me, and all the rest forsook me. And O, wilt thou not give me harbour in thy heart, when I am thus shamefully used for thee? <sup>1</sup>

For both Evangelical and Moderate, then, the aim, form, and content of Table addresses was similar. The only difference was in style, Logan's language tending to be more formal, while Willison's more intimate and passionate style sought to involve the hearer in what he was describing, and to create a sense of encounter.

#### Willison's 'Speech' After the Tables. <sup>2</sup>

After all had communicated, a final address was made to the whole congregation. It is evident, from the advice offered by Alexander Gerard, Divinity Professor at Aberdeen, to his students, that this address had a particular pattern and aim, for he suggested three examples of 'very fit topics' for the occasion. The first was a description of the different 'characters of communicants', so that they might judge whether their motive in communicating was 'right or faulty'. The second, was to offer some corrective to common errors about expectations at sacramental occasions, especially with regard to 'immediate and sensible illuminations or consolations', by advising people to judge the validity of their communion by their 'after conduct, and to improve their communication by a holy life'. Or thirdly, communicants might be reminded of their obligation towards virtue and holiness. Yet, whatever the topic,

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 569-70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 574-6.

Gerard insisted that it should impart 'something practical, something moral, something fit to enter into their temper, and regulate their life'.<sup>1</sup>

Willison's 'speech', conforming to the first type, was addressed to 'several sorts of persons'.

First, those who did not communicate, who 'slighted the ordinance, and Christ's dying charge', are scolded for losing the opportunity. Well may they fear that the sentence will be theirs, "Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone". "He that is filthy - let him be filthy still", for Christ may say to them, as he said to his drowsy disciples, "Sleep on". Having refused the call to the table, it should be remembered that there is a call that none can refuse. Further, to those who protest that they were unprepared, Willison asks, 'are you prepared for dying, and will ye wilfully go on in sin and make your sin your excuse?' There may be a danger in coming unworthily, but there is also a danger in staying away.

Second, to those who communicated unworthily, 'pretending to join in covenant with God, while they are fast in league with the devil and the world'...their guilt is greater than ever. These should flee to the blood they have shed, and plead mercy.

Third, to those who communicated, but feel that the experience did not match their expectations, Willison suggests three things:

- 1) that they are to blame if their preparation was inadequate, or if they slighted 'former calls'. Such should lay at his feet and say, 'I will not let thee go till thou bless me';
- 2) that there are such things as 'after diets', so that the advantage of communicating may yet become apparent;
- 3) that one can be mistaken. If one has received a greater vision of the evil of sin and a higher esteem of Christ, then this is benefit;

<sup>1</sup> Gerard, A. *The Pastoral Care*, pp. 385-6.

Fourth, that those who have experienced real communion, should bless God, striving to keep what they have received. All such are under oath, having 'sworn allegiance to the King of heaven, over the broken body and shed blood of Christ'. Accordingly, any who perjure themselves by returning to 'drunkenness, swearing, lying, backbiting and neglecting prayer', are warned that 'they will incur all the curses of the law, and vengeance of the Gospel'. They will sink deeper into hell than many others and bring the curse of God and the lamb upon them. Communicants must walk worthy, so that all 'may take knowledge of you, that you have been with Jesus';

Finally, addressing all, Willison suggests that the question of the Psalmist be kept in mind, 'What shall I render unto the Lord?' He suggests twelve answers from the psalm, urging love for God, trust in God, dependence on God, devotion, obedience and thanks to God, unity with fellow Christians and charity to the poor. <sup>1</sup>

Mill's concluding 'speech' had the same form, style and type of content as that of Willison. <sup>2</sup> Indeed, a large section of it is taken from Willison's *Sacramental Catechism*.

Like Willison, he exhorts the 'worthy' to Christian witness. For the unworthy and unprepared, however, he offers only terror. Like Willison, Mill believed in the need for 'actual preparation', so that those who came without exercising 'faith, love, repentance, hunger of spirit, thankfulness to God, covenanting with him, and resolving against sin', have 'undervalued Christ's precious blood and redeeming love, hugging vipers to their breasts which will sting to death'. All such should set their souls a-trembling before God, 'for their condition is sad and dangerous'. Condemning them, he uses Willison's words, without acknowledgment,

If ye have been pretending to join yourselves in covenant with

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 574-6.

<sup>2</sup> MacLeod, I. (Ed.) *Mill's Manuscript*, pp. 103-9.

God while ye still continue in league with Satan.. Think what a wonder it is that the Lord didn't lay his hand upon you and smite you dead with the bread in your mouths, the cup in your hands and send you from the communion table to the bottomless pit!

And while this conviction of unworthy communicating is fresh upon your spirits, let all care be taken to mend matters. Bless God...that ye're as yet in the land of prayers and repentance, and have access to mercy and pardon through the blood of sprinkling. Go presently, and weep over your sins, especially this sin of unworthy communicating whereby ye have pierced the Lord of life and glory. Repent of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thoughts of your hearts may be forgiven you. And let it be done with a double care, after this ordinance, that should have been done before. Fly - fly by faith to that blood of Christ which ye have spilt, by which alone ye can be pardon'd.. for the blood of Christ Jesus cleanseth from all sin. '

Equally, those who did not communicate because they are 'drunkards, swearers, liars, deceivers, brawlers, Sabbath breakers and fornicators, drudges to the world, or slaves to base lust', have grounds for fear. It might be nothing now to be separated from the sheep of Christ... but it will be something shortly when they are allotted a place among devils and goats! Although now they prefer the drunkard's cup to the cup of blessing, soon a cup of humbling will be given them when they drink the wrath of the Lamb. All such need to repent and give their hearts to Christ in sincerity.

The concluding address of Logan, the Moderate, also addressed to different kinds of communicants, had the same aim as that of Mill and Willison, but the tone is more conciliatory, and his message to

' Mill 'borrowed' this entire section of his address from Willison's *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 526-7.

the unworthy and unprepared is imparted without terrifying threats,

Yet my brethren, draw nigh, and give ear to me - it is only those who have prepared themselves according to the preparation of the sanctuary, who have washed their hands in innocence before they approached to the altar of the Most High, that these blessings are promised. It is to be feared, that, with many ... the performance of the solemn duty has rather a matter of form, than of true devotion. To such I must say, The bread is not the bread of life, nor the cup the cup of blessing. Their hearts may have burned for a time within them; but this flame will soon be extinguished..... I may predict... that not a few will break their sacramental vows, and profane that holy name by which they are called: That by secret sins, and open wickedness, they will crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to open shame: That he will be wounded in the house of his friends... that one man shall prefer the gains of iniquity, another the cup of drunkenness, and all their darling sins to the tender mercies of the God of peace, and the dying love of a crucified Redeemer....

But my friends we hope better things of you, though we thus speak. Many, it is to be hoped, (and fain would I say, all) who have sat with Jesus this day, will sit again with him in his Father's kingdom. And for your encouragement - He will always be with you.....

Walk then as becometh the children of the resurrection, and the heirs of glory. Keep yourselves unspotted from the world, and let your conversation be in heaven, from whence you look for the Saviour.... ' 1

All three addresses aimed to assist communicants to judge whether their approach had been 'right or faulty', and to exhort them to future devotion. Nevertheless, the motive appealing for future

<sup>1</sup> Logan, J. *Sermons by*, pp. 374-8.

good conduct supplied by Moderate is different from that offered by Evangelical. For Logan, it is a reciprocal obligation of devotion for the love of God shown in man's redemption through Christ. For Mill and Willison it is fear of judgement and hell.

Willison's Sermon after Communion.

Willison's final sermon for the Communion season, probably preached on the Monday, is based on Isaiah 40<sup>29</sup>. 'He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength'.

It is a lengthy address reminding communicants that they are liable to discouragements both temporal and spiritual. The former may include 'poverty', 'loneliness', 'sickness', 'bereavement' and 'oppression', and the latter, 'strong temptations', a feeling of helplessness against evil and weariness in spiritual duty.

Yet God provides help in all exigencies, through Christ, through the Spirit, and through the word, sacraments and prayer. Such help was purchased for the elect by Christ. It is imperative, however, that believers rely on God for aid. Trusting in their own ability, or in 'something they got at this occasion', they will faint.

Nevertheless communicants should consider what they derived from the sacrament. If faith is enlivened, repentance for sin more acute, and love for Christ stimulated, then they should find more delight in Christian duty, prayer and sabbath observance, and be more animated to 'fight the good fight'.

Finally, believers are urged to obtain God's help by: 1) knowing their insufficiency; 2) repenting their weakness and concentrating on God; 3) exercising any small power they possess; 4) waiting on God; 5) abstaining from sin; 6) welcoming 'motions' of the Spirit; 7) knowing the promises in scripture and pleading them in prayer. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sermons Before and After*, pp. 115-39.



Willison's thanksgiving day sermon, then, was an exhortation to Christian duty, and a reminder that there are resources available to assist in its performance. Reiterating, therefore, instruction given in the post communion address, it would appear superfluous.

Consistency of Willison's Sacramental Material and Theology.

From all of these examples, it is clear that the content of Willison's sacramental material is entirely consistent with what has been said on his theology.

His adherence to the federal scheme of theology appears overtly in his sacramental preaching. Indeed, his understanding of its threefold nature is explicitly expounded - the Covenant of Works in which there is no happiness, because of mankind's failure to meet its demands, the Covenant of Redemption which, because it was merely an agreement made in eternity between God and Christ, "will not save you nor instate you in covenant with God", and the Covenant of Grace, made with the elect in time, by entry into which alone, "we have ground to claim...God for our God".<sup>1</sup>

Consequential to his understanding that the Covenants had a contractual nature, there is, in his preaching, only terror for those outside the Covenant of Grace.

*It is terrible to be under sentence of death by an earthly judge, and to be looking every hour to be taken forth to the scaffold; you are doomed to eternal death, and you may be looking every moment to be led forth to execution..... Sad is your case, O uncovenanted soul, you may sleep and wake in continual fear: for you are still tottering on the brink of hell and ridge of destruction.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 30-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47.

Willison, therefore, sought a response to the Gospel, from the motives of 'fear of hell and hope of heaven', rather than from that of gratitude for grace.

Moreover since the Lord's Supper was a sign of the Covenant of Grace, only those who could claim the right to be within the Covenant, by virtue of their acceptance of its terms, had a right to the table. But even possession of that right was insufficient, for in Willison's view, 'worthy communicating', required not only an 'external right', but an 'internal right'. Thus he demanded not only 'habitual' but 'actual' preparation for the sacrament, which entailed 'separating ourselves from the world, self examination, humiliation for sin, renewing of a personal covenant, reforming what is amiss, exciting the graces to a lively exercise, meditating on the death and sufferings of Christ, and earnest prayer to God'. <sup>1</sup>

Those who failed so to prepare were unworthy, and their neglect merited the most dire consequences,

If you do not sanctify yourselves, God will come and do wonders of judgement, wonders of wrath among you - He may inflict bodily diseases.. He may send untimely death.. He may smite with desertion from God... He may send darkness on the mind... He may let Satan loose against you with temptation, atheistical and blasphemous thoughts... He may send you to hell from the communion table. Like the man without a wedding garment, the word may be "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into utter darkness". <sup>2</sup>

In all of this, Willison, believing that the blessings of God were conditional, laid greater stress on what man has to do, than on what God has done for him in Christ, a feature which is reflected

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sacramental Meditations* (Appendix) HTH. pp. 302-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 302.

not only in his demand for intense preparation, and his dire warnings to those who failed to comply, but also in his rigorous fencing of the table. A similar emphasis, consistent with his notion of the sacrament as a seal of the believer's faith, and a badge of Christian profession, appears in his post Communion speech, with its reminder that communicants are 'under oath, having sworn allegiance to the King of Heaven', and in his thanksgiving day sermon with its stress on 'duty'.

Yet, on the other hand, in 'fencing the table', while Willison issues his catalogue of those to be excluded, he does state that it is only those 'who live in those sins unrepented of' who are debarred from the table, and his invitation is extended to all burdened souls, doubters, and those conscious of 'their heart plagues and soul diseases', to find their rest in Christ. <sup>1</sup>

Also, it is abundantly evident from his preaching, his consecration prayer, his gracious invitation, his hymns and the substance of his 'table addresses', that, in harmony with the Confession of Faith, he had a 'high view' of the sacrament, believing that communicants found, at the table, nothing less than the real presence of Christ. Indeed, it is this note of encounter which dominates Willison's material which was lacking in the preaching of some of the Moderates, like Blair.

Thomas Leishman, in the early twentieth century, writing of the Church of Scotland, past and present, complained of the influence of the "Zwinglian" school in the English Reformation, which, after the Commonwealth, was diffused 'more widely in Scotland' where 'it found nothing to withstand it in the decadent theology of the eighteenth century, and was not disturbed by the revival of the nineteenth century'. <sup>2</sup> That charge did not apply to Willison.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 566.

<sup>2</sup> Leishman, T. *The Church of Scotland, As She Was And As She Is.* The MacLeod Memorial Lecture (Edinburgh : 1903) p. 39.

Indeed, together with others, he is actually commended by Leishman as one of those who 'were proud of the Westminster traditions and of those of the Reformation'. <sup>1</sup>

In sum, while his sacramental material was conditioned by his adherence to the federal scheme, a fact of which writers like Leishman failed to take account, it demonstrates, nevertheless, that for Willison, the Lord's Supper was the means to nothing less than an encounter with Christ. His adherence to the Westminster traditions, and the influence on him, of the 'liturgical outline' prescribed in the Directory for the Publick Worship of God - a form which has been described as a 'piece of ritual' almost incomparable 'for dramatic power'.... whose leading thought is that of Christ's 'presence that he may enter into the hearts of the faithful and unite them with himself' - <sup>2</sup> is eloquent of his high estimate of the ordinance.

<sup>1</sup> Leishman, T. 'The Ritual of the Church', in Story, R (Ed.) *The Church of Scotland, Past and Present*, Vol. 5 (London :1890) p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> Brillioth, Y. *Eucharistic Faith and Practice, Evangelical and Catholic* (London : 1934) p. 188.

## Chapter Five.

### The Preparation and Admission of Communicants.

Much of Willison's writing had an educational purpose, and his catechisms, originating from his pastoral work, were so designed.

### The Churches' Legislation and Practice.

From the outset, in keeping with earliest Christian tradition, the Reformed Church in Scotland insisted on the continuing education of the whole people, stressing the needs of children and adolescents.

Urged to diligence before 'admitting to thir great Mysteries such as be ignorant of the use and vertue of the same', <sup>1</sup> and because none could partake of the Lord's Supper 'who cannot formally say the Lord's prayer, the articles of the Beliefe, and declare the summe of the law', <sup>2</sup> ministers conducted an examination prior to the celebration, and special care was given to any deficient in knowledge. Such requirements demanded a scrutiny of all, while stipulating a minimum qualification for first communicants.

The material, for general instruction, was *Calvin's Catechism*, and, for purposes of the examination, the *Little Catechism*, <sup>3</sup> and both were printed in early editions of the *Book of Common Order*. <sup>4</sup>

Divided into five sections - Faith, the Law, Prayer, the Word of

<sup>1</sup> Cameron, J. (Ed.) *F.B.D.* p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>3</sup> Peterkin, A. *The Booke of the Universall Kirk of Scotland Wherein The Headis And Conclusions Devysit Be The Ministers and Commisionares Of The Particular Kirks Thereof Are Specially Expressed And Contained* (Edinburgh : 1839), p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> Spratt, G. W. (Ed.) *B.C.O.* pp. 173 and 208.

God and Sacraments - *Calvin's Catechism*, based on the Creed, the Commandments and the Lord's prayer, ' has been described as a 'masterpiece of simplicity and condensation', and 'informed with evangelical feeling'. <sup>2</sup>

The mode of instruction, following the practice of Geneva, was 'afternoon catechization' on Sunday, the *First Book of Discipline* stipulating that 'after noone must the children be publickly examined in their Catechisme, in the audience of the people'. <sup>3</sup>

Sources also record the practice in operation. So, James Melville wrote that, at Montrose,

the minister desyrit me ever to rehearse a part of Calvin's Catechisme on the Sabothes, at efternoone, because he heard the peiple lyked weill of the clearnes of my voice.... <sup>4</sup>

Or, at Salt Preston, where the minister catechized 'the haill Parochin, euerye Sabboth afternoone', <sup>5</sup> the material used for the examination has been preserved, and following it, the narrative continues,

Followes our ordinarye Catechisme according to the former grounds... euerye Moneth once wee goe through the principles of Religion, as they are contained therein: the children of the schoole, as by turne they are appointed, by cuples,

<sup>1</sup> 'The Catechism of the Church of Geneva', in Torrance, T. F. *The School of Faith* (London : 1959) pp. 5-65.

<sup>2</sup> McNeill, J. T. *The History and Character of Calvinism* (London : 1967) p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> Cameron, J. (Ed.) *F.B.D.* p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> Pitcairn, R. (Ed.) *Autobiography and Diary of James Melvill*, (Edinburgh, 1842) p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> 'Davidson's Catechism', in Bonar. H. (Ed.) *Catechisms of the Scottish Reformation* (London : 1866) pp. 329-30.

demanding and answering one another before the people, as by the Catechisme they are led.... <sup>1</sup>

More specific instructions on the matter were issued by the General Assembly of 1570 which required examination of children at nine, twelve and fourteen. <sup>2</sup> Yet, the Assembly of 1580 noted that the desired instruction was not being given, and urged ministers to greater diligence. <sup>3</sup> In 1590, to standardise procedure, it was decided that "ane schorte forme of examination" be prepared, <sup>4</sup> and the work of John Craig was presented in the following year, when it was agreed that it should be printed in an abbreviated form. <sup>5</sup> In 1592, the Assembly agreed that *Craig's Catechism* should replace the *Little Catechism* as the official manual. <sup>6</sup>

*Craig's Catechism* was based on the Creed, the Commandments and the Lord's prayer, and dealt with man's creation and innocence, his fall, his restoration through Christ, faith, the law, prayer, thanksgiving, the Word, the Sacraments, the ministry of men, discipline, and the end of our redemption. <sup>7</sup>

Other Catechisms were also produced. The *Heidelberg Catechism*, for example, printed in Scotland in 1591, was bound with some later editions of the *Book of Common Order*, but Craig's remained the official examination manual until replaced by the Westminster catechisms. <sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 347.

<sup>2</sup> *B.U.K.* p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 460.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 774.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 784.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 788.

<sup>7</sup> 'Craig's Catechism', in Torrance, T. F. *The School of Faith*, pp. 99-165.

<sup>8</sup> Bonar, H. *Catechisms*, p. 175. Burnet, G. *Holy Communion*, p. 50.

Yet besides such accredited works, other catechisms also existed. A Session record of South Leith, in 1616, states that 'every Sabbath day... there shall be two bairns out of the Grammar school that shall repeat Mr. James Nicholson's Catechys, openly in the kirk for instruction of the commons'. <sup>1</sup> Horatius Bonar reprinted, in full, Davidson's catechism of 1599. <sup>2</sup> McMillan quotes Dr. Forbes of Aberdeen, who protested that 'almost every minister in the land had a manual of his own', <sup>3</sup> while James VI has been credited with the remark that 'everyone who was the son of a good man thought himself competent' to produce a catechism. <sup>4</sup>

Further Acts on catechising were passed by later Assemblies, each reflecting changes in the polity of the kirk.

In 1608, while moving towards episcopal government, the Assembly decided that children should be examined in the Lord's Prayer, the "Beliefe" and the Ten Commandments, after parental instruction, at the age of six. Examinations would then continue towards their admission as communicants at the age of fifteen or sixteen. <sup>5</sup> By 1616, when episcopacy had been established, the Assembly proposed a new Confession of Faith and liturgy, deciding that every church and family should have a catechism for the instruction of children and servants, and enacting that children be presented to the bishop and archbishop at the age of five to make a confession of faith. This would follow with an examination every two or three years until age fourteen, when, if their knowledge was sufficient, they would be admitted. <sup>6</sup> In 1639, in the wake of the National Covenant, the Assembly decided that 'every minister besides his paines on the

<sup>1</sup> McMillan, W. *Worship*, p 134.

<sup>2</sup> Bonar, H. *Catechisms*, pp. 324f.

<sup>3</sup> McMillan, W. *Worship*, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> Wightman, W. M. *Youth in the New Order*. The Baird Lecture for 1942. (Edinburgh : 1942) p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> *B.U.K.* p. 1052.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1123.



Lord's day, shall have weekly catechising of some part of the parochie, and not altogether cast over the examination of the people till a little before the Communion'. <sup>1</sup>

The effect of that latter act may be assessed from the Session records of Dalgety. There, weekday catechising first appears in 1646 when the elders were appointed... 'to keip the dyets of weeklie catechizing quhen their quarters are called'. <sup>2</sup> Or again, in 1654, 'The Sessione appoints the Monday morning for opening up the grounds of the Catechise to the people, and that the whole congregation be exhorted to keip the diet weiklie, at 9 a cloak'. <sup>3</sup>

But responsibility for education in the faith was not confined to ministers. The Assembly of 1639 declared that worship should also be established in every family, with catechising, a duty for which family heads would be accountable to ministers and elders. The 1647 Assembly approved censure for those who neglected that demand, <sup>4</sup> and approved the *Directory for Family Worship*, which prescribed daily worship and catechising, and, on Sunday, after worship, prayer, rehearsing what was heard in church, catechising and 'conferences upon the word of God'. <sup>5</sup> An act of 1694 reiterated these demands, adding that any were to be debarred from eldership who failed to meet them, <sup>6</sup> while another, in 1697, required that the Act anent family worship be read in churches yearly. <sup>7</sup>

Yet, returning to public catechising, the 1649 Assembly, since the Catechisms of Westminster had now been approved as the standard for

<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) *A.G.A.* p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Ross, W. *Glimpses of Pastoral Work in The Covenanted Times* (London : 1877) p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) *A.G.A.* p. 154.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 155-6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 241.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 259.

instruction, decided that every home should possess copies, and reaffirmed the Act of 1639, directing every minister so to order his weekly catechising that the people 'may at every diet have the chief heads of saving knowledge in a short view presented unto them'. Moreover, aware that the previous Act was neglected, it instructed Presbyteries to enquire half yearly of progress made, urging ministers to be admonished for the first fault, rebuked for the second and to be suspended for the third. <sup>1</sup>

### Explicatory Catechisms.

While John Willison judged the *Shorter Catechism* an 'excellent' production, <sup>2</sup> that opinion was not uniform. When first presented to the General Assembly, some felt it 'too long and too high for the common people and children'. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, just as earlier, other catechisms supplemented those officially approved, so now, many explicatory catechisms, aiming to elucidate the doctrine of the *Shorter Catechism*, were to be published. Some were written by eminent Scottish ministers, amongst whom were Hugh Binning in the seventeenth century, Boston, Willison and John Brown of Haddington, in the eighteenth, and Alexander Whyte, in the nineteenth. <sup>4</sup>

One of the most popular, for example, was *An Explanation of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* by Thomas Vincent. Published in 1674, records exist of its use by Mill of Shetland, <sup>5</sup> John Willison, <sup>6</sup> and the ministers of Glasgow Barony and Kilsyth, <sup>7</sup> while Alexander

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 593.

<sup>3</sup> Baillie, R. *Letters and Journals*, (Laing, D. Ed.), (Edinburgh : 1842) Vol. III, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, A. F. *Catechisms of the Second Reformation* (London : 1866) p. lxxiii-lxxiv.

<sup>5</sup> *Mill's Diary*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 445.

<sup>7</sup> Fawcett, A. *The Cambuslang Revival* (London : 1971) p. 71 and 85.

Cruden left a trust for a student at Marischal College who had a 'perfect acquaintance with Vincent's Catechism'.<sup>1</sup> John Brown of Haddington memorised its entire contents,<sup>2</sup> and Tongue Presbytery, in 1727, recommended its study to their catechists.<sup>3</sup>

#### John Willison's Catechisms.

Willison's catechisms sought to meet the range of need identified by Assembly Acts. His *Mother's Catechism* was an aid for the young child, his *Sacramental Catechism* and *Directory* offered instruction on the sacraments and, more particularly, on the Lord's Supper, the *Young Communicants Catechism* was for those preparing for admission, while the *Example of Plain Catechising*, a manual for family heads responsible for instructing others,<sup>4</sup> also provided material for the ongoing Christian education of the whole people.

#### Willison's Evaluation of Catechetical Instruction.

Before examining these, consideration might be given to the value which Willison placed on catechising.

The supreme value, for Willison, was that it imparted knowledge, which led to saving faith. So, he warns parents in his *Example of Plain Catechising*, 'There is no heaven without Christ, no interest in Christ without faith, and no faith without knowledge'.<sup>5</sup> But, in addition, he encouraged catechising, because it promoted

<sup>1</sup> Youngman, W. 'Sketch of the Life and Character of Alexander Cruden', in *Cruden's Complete Concordance* (London; 1896) p. xv.

<sup>2</sup> Anon. 'The Life of the Rev. John Brown' (Haddington) in *Brown's Bible* (Glasgow : 1831) p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> MacInnes, J. *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland* (Aberdeen : 1951) p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 598.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 599.

'orthodoxy and intelligence' among the people. <sup>1</sup> For Willison, both orthodox faith and an understanding of it were crucial.

Anxious to provide a bulwark against heresy, Willison regarded his day as a 'shaking time, when the winds of error are blowing', and he complained of 'Deists, Socinians, Arians and others'. <sup>2</sup> Writing his *Example of Plain Catechising* in 1737, he had several recent events in mind, which he mentions elsewhere, and which he saw as symptomatic of the malaise within the Kirk. One was the trial of James Simson, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, who, in 1729, had been charged at the Assembly and suspended for teaching Arianism and Arminianism. <sup>3</sup> Another was the expulsion of a student, William Nimmo, from the Edinburgh Divinity hall, in 1735, for preaching deism. <sup>4</sup> Yet another lay in what he considered the Assembly's 'soft' treatment of Archibald Campbell, Divinity Professor at St. Andrews, who was acquitted, in 1736, of teaching in his 'Discourse concerning Enthusiasm' that self-love lay at the basis of religion, Campbell explaining to the court's satisfaction that his meaning was that 'our delight in the honour and glory of God is the chief motive of all virtuous and religious actions'. <sup>5</sup> At the same time, a case was being prepared against William Wishart, Principal at Edinburgh, the main charge against whom was that he diminished the due weight and 'influence of arguments taken from the awe of future rewards and punishments'. <sup>6</sup> Willison

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 593.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 594.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. pp. 913-14. See *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (1720-1742)* Vol. 2. Act VI, 1729, pp. 12-14.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 923. See A Table of the Printed Acts of the Assembly, 1735, p. I' in *The Principal Acts*.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 926. See *The Principal Acts*, Act X, 1736, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. pp. 927-8. See Index of the Acts of the Assembly, 1738, p. G<sup>a</sup>. H, and H'. *The Principal Acts*.

eventually complained of the latter, that not only was he guilty of heresy, but that following his acquittal, he commended and prefaced sermons 'savouring of Socinianism', so that he was clearly unfit 'to head the most frequented college in Scotland'.<sup>1</sup> Besides such specific incidents, however, there was also his constant anguish over the Moderates whom he accused of extolling natural over revealed religion,<sup>2</sup> berating their 'Christless way of preaching morality', as 'an inlet to deism and infidelity'.<sup>3</sup>

In the Preface to his *Example of Plain Catechising*, therefore, he states that 'natural religion' has strict limitations, and argues for the need of instruction in revealed religion. Those who rely on reason for guidance 'have but faint discoveries of divine things' so that they are barely influenced by them. The Christian revelation, in contrast, 'gives us a noble description of the perfections of God, and of the worship and service he requires'.<sup>4</sup> That revelation is contained in the Old and New Testaments, while the catechism is a 'compound of the Christian religion'.<sup>5</sup>

Willison's secondary aim, then, was to counter heresy, and to teach the faith as revealed in scripture and compended in the catechisms. But equally concerned for 'intelligence', his *Example of Plain Catechising* was also written for that end. Believing the answers in others deficient, 'too prolix for the memories of learners, or else too short to explain the nature and reason of things', he wished to offer a catechism avoiding both extremes.<sup>6</sup>

His work was not intended, however, as a sole means of instruction, but to supplement the *Shorter Catechism* which children and servants

<sup>1</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *The Church's Danger*. HTH. p. 830.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 923.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 594.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 595.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 594.

would learn. It was an aid to help responsible parties to teach others, 'and prepare them better for the public catechising'.<sup>1</sup>

Believing that young people could learn his answers by rote, the method proposed was that, on Sunday evenings, families would cover two questions of the *Shorter Catechism*. The master, stating the question and answer found there, would then ask the first question of Willison's catechism of his neighbour, who would recite or read the answer. He would then ask the next question of his neighbour, who would take the book and reply, the process continuing until Willison's questions and answers to the two questions from the *Shorter Catechism* selected for the night were exhausted. Thus families would cover 'the whole book once every year'.<sup>2</sup>

Aiming therefore, to promote knowledge, orthodoxy and intelligence, Willison held catechising in high esteem, considering it superior to preaching as a means of communication because by it 'the attention is provoked, the understanding instructed, and memory is gratified'.<sup>3</sup> Tracing the practice to the early church, he lavished praise on the Westminster Catechisms, expressing the desire that the *Shorter Catechism* should be preserved entire for posterity.

In the twentieth century, the catechetical method has been attacked by religious educationists who have applied the results of Piaget's analytical study in developmental psychology to their subject.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 598.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 599.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 593.

<sup>4</sup> Wightman, W. M. *Youth in the New Order* (Edinburgh : 1942) p. 69. Goldman, R. *Readiness for Religion* (London : 1965) pp. 32-3. Loukes, H. 'Religious Education in the Secondary School', in Wedderspoon, A. (Ed.) *Religious Education 1944-84* (London: 1966) pp. 48-9. Grimmit, M. *What Can I do in R.E.?* (Great Wakering : 1973) pp. 39-45. Matthews, H. F. *The New Religious Education* (London : 1971) pp. 27-8.

Against such opinion, Professor T. F. Torrance has protested that 'naturalistic development' has dominated the concept of education, and that, from a Christian view, the personal nature of the Truth, 'which is Christ himself', and the radical nature of evil and the need for 'reconciliation with the Truth', ' have been overlooked.

In view of this, he presents a formidable case for catechising:

- 1) that learning demands asking questions apposite to the subject. These, the catechisms provide for Christian faith;
- 2) that educational theories which aim to help a child form judgements, but do not also attend 'to the supply of information' are 'mistaken'. Christian truth, like history, demands the imparting of knowledge. Catechising supplies information, but does it at an age before the child can grasp its full meaning, thus providing ideas for consideration as his capacities develop;
- 3) that a vital factor in the education process, is the need to hold together both image and idea. To omit either of the two is to create a situation where a child becomes limited to thinking either in 'images' or 'abstractions'. For this reason, the presentation of both Bible stories and doctrine is essential;
- 4) that since learning demands possession of the requisite tools, catechetical instruction is necessary. It provides the tools for reading and understanding the Christian revelation. Without a basis in Christian doctrine, the young are unequipped to grasp the teaching of the New testament when they read it;
- 5) that environment is crucial. Christian instruction requires community, and takes place properly, not in isolation, but in the community of the church - the Communion of Saints. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Torrance, T. F. *The School of Faith*, p. xxxii and xxxvi..

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xxv-xxxi.

Although they would reject Torrance's comment that naturalistic development has been overstressed, something of his argument finds unintentional support in a study on Religious Education, recently published by I. Fairweather and J. MacDonald. There, they refer to a memorandum on Religious Instruction in Scotland presented to Parliament in 1943, which recorded that 'except in a few areas, the use of the *Shorter Catechism* has been discontinued, but the Bible has retained its place in the schools'. Commenting on the effect of that, the authors of the study concluded, 'In reality, of course, teachers were even worse off without the Catechism to tell them what they were to teach'.<sup>1</sup>

Willison believed the catechism essential for communicating what had to be taught and learned. Without imparting knowledge there could be no faith in Christ, and, without Christ, no heaven. He also believed catechising the best method, not only of providing knowledge, but of preserving orthodoxy and promoting understanding. Equally aware that environment was important in training, his *Mother's Catechism* and *Example of Plain Catechising* were designed for use in the home. Yet, even so, this was merely groundwork to be supplemented in the public catechising, within the community of faith. That process allowed for dialogue, and therefore furnished the opportunity for greater understanding.

#### The Example of Plain Catechising.

The material of Willison's catechism is copious, for his method was to expand the 107 questions and answers of the *Shorter Catechism* with supplementary questions and answers. Thus the first question

What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever,

<sup>1</sup> Fairweather, I, and MacDonald, J. N. *Religious Education* (Edinburgh : 1992) p. 5.



is expanded by some three dozen supplementary questions, replies and scripture texts, aiming to clarify what is meant by an 'end', whether one can add to God's essential glory, in what sense and by what means one can glorify God, the meaning of enjoying Him, and the idea of eternal bliss. <sup>1</sup>

The whole of the *Shorter Catechism* is treated in identical fashion, so that the complete text is voluminous.

Willison is unrestrained in using theological terms, so that much of his work could well tax the mind of a divinity student of the present day. Thus, for example, dealing with the second question of the catechism, relating to the scriptures of Old and New Testaments, Willison asks, as a supplementary question,

How could the first part of the Bible have the force of a Testament, while it was not confirmed by the death of the Testator?

The answer is less intelligible,

It was confirmed by Christ's death typically in slain sacrifices, on which account Christ is called the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world". And the blessings of the Old Testament, being dispensed to believers, in view of the actual death of the Testator prefigured by the slaying of the sacrifices, were, upon their believing, made good to them. <sup>2</sup>

Or again, treating the fortieth question of the *Shorter Catechism*,

What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience? The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience was the moral law,

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. pp. 599-600.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 601.

Willison asks as one of his supplementary questions,

How is Christ said to be the end of the law for righteousness to us? Romans x v. 4.

The answer supplied is,

In regard Christ doth answer the primary design of the law under the first covenant, which was to bring men to a perfect obedience or righteousness for their justification: this we cannot now find by the law, therefore we must seek it in Christ, where it is to be found. The end and scope of the law is now gained in Christ, seeing he is that to a believer which the law would have been to him, if he could perfectly have kept it; namely, righteousness, justification, and salvation. <sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Willison, in producing this catechism, was more successful than others who preceded him. Certainly many of the replies to his questions are relatively brief. Yet it is doubtful whether many could have committed his work to memory, and his expectation that young persons would comprehend its theological terminology, was to stretch optimism beyond reasonable bounds. That said, the material was to be supplemented in visiting homes and in public catechising, so that there was opportunity for clarification.

Nevertheless, some of his material is expressed in simple language, and his explanation of the commandments is a case in point. Here, often relying on the *Larger Catechism*, his teaching is thoroughly practical. His treatment of the eighth commandment, for example, touches on 'gaming', 'usury', 'monopolies', 'tax evasion', 'theft', 'fraud', 'resetting', and 'exorbitant pricing', <sup>2</sup> while his expansion of the ninth, speaks of 'slandering', 'backbiting',

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 658.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 685-6.

'reproaching', 'scolding', 'taking up and spreading evil reports', 'evil speaking', 'rash judging or censuring', 'whispering', 'talebearing', 'misconstructing the actions, words or intentions of others', 'not covering their infirmities', 'stopping our ears against their vindication', 'not clearing their innocence when we know it', 'speaking truth with an ill design.....' <sup>1</sup>

Equally valuable teaching is given on the sacraments, <sup>2</sup> on prayer, and more particularly on the Lord's Prayer, <sup>3</sup> and all at a level which could readily be understood by the majority of his readers.

Allowing that his expectation that the young might memorise his work, was unrealistic - a fact which he acknowledged when he rewrote another of his catechisms - <sup>4</sup> and that the theological language must have presented difficulties to readers, it cannot be doubted that those who used the catechism as recommended, would eventually attain a standard of theological literacy undreamed of in the present day. It provided material for consideration as mental and spiritual faculties developed, the comprehension of which would progress in the public catechising.

#### The Mother's Catechism.

Willison's *Mother's Catechism*, one of the earliest and most popular of his works, <sup>5</sup> was written with the young child in mind, and developed over several editions.

The content was divided into three sections, the first being a catechism containing around 360 questions and answers based on the *Shorter Catechism*. Written in simple form, many of these are so

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 687-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 701-11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 711-27.

<sup>4</sup> See below, pp. 175 and 183.

<sup>5</sup> See above, pp. 26 and 32.

framed that they occupy only a single line or short phrase, and the answers are equally brief. Typical examples are,

Quest: Who made you?	Ans: God.
Quest: Who is it that redeems you?	Ans. Christ.
Quest: Of what are you made?	Ans. Of dust.
Quest: Had God any beginning?	Ans: No.
Quest: Will he have any end?	Ans: No.
Quest: Is he from everlasting to everlasting?	Ans: Yes. ' 1

By this scheme, the child was confronted with basic doctrine on creation, God, the Trinity, the scriptures, the covenants of works and grace, death temporal, spiritual and eternal, the person and work of Christ, sin, judgement, redemption, heaven, hell, the ten commandments, the sacraments and the Lord's Prayer.

Yet the same criticism must be made as of the *Example of Plain Catechising*, for the language used was beyond the comprehension of young children. Phrases like 'communion with God', and such words as 'justification', 'redemption', 'salvation', 'heaven', 'hell', 'Paradise', 'resurrection', 'original sin', 'elect', 'conviction', are typical examples. Equally, the expectation that a young child could memorise the work was a forlorn hope.

The second section was entitled 'Historical Questions out of the Bible, for Children'. To all intents and purposes, a Biblical quiz, it asks and answers simple questions on Bible knowledge, such as: 'Who was the first man?' 'Who was the oldest man?' 'Who was the wisest man?' 'How many apostles did Christ choose?' 'Who was the first Christian martyr?' 2

The third section contained a miscellany of material - a grace for children before and after 'meat', some prayers for the very young,

1 Willison, J. *The Mother's Catechism* (Kilmarnock : 1817) p. 4.

2 *Ibid.* pp. 17-20.

and a metrical form of the ten Commandments which reads,

Have thou no other God but me  
Unto no image bow thy knee.  
Take not the name of God in vain  
Do not the Sabbath day profane.  
Honour thy Father and Mother too,  
And see that thou no murder do.  
From Whoredom keep thee chaste and clean  
And steal not though thy state be mean.  
Of false report bear not the blot  
What is thy neighbour's covet not. ' 1

But perhaps the most notable part of the work is the Preface, where Willison sets out his reasons for writing, and attempts to motivate parents and children to use the catechism.

Parents are reminded that they have the charge of souls. The laws of God and nature, and the engagements made at baptism oblige them to faithful education of their children. For this reason, children should be schooled in prayer, and 'put to it, morning and evening every day, but more frequently on the Lord's day'. They should be taught, as much in the company of other children as in secret, learning to use their own words, 'because God loves those words that come from the heart'. They should be given a copy of this catechism, Bibles, Confessions of Faith, and such books as *Vincent's Catechism*, and Guthrie's *Trial of a Saving Interest*. Reminded of parental vows made for them, they should be urged to renew them personally. All this should be done with urgency, for no parent would wish to be met at God's tribunal, 'with the curses and imprecations' of their children against them, or the sound of 'their screeching in endless torments thereafter'. Mothers who love the souls of their children would grieve to 'see them frying in hell without relief'. Therefore they will be diligent to

' *Ibid.* pp. 20-1.

prevent such, by means of their 'early instruction and prayers.' <sup>1</sup>

Addressing the children, Willison invites them to 'get the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and some of the sweet Psalms of David by heart'. The *Shorter Catechism*, along with his own, which 'will be easy to get by heart', should also be memorised. Advice is given on obedience to parents, and on the prudent use of childhood, so that children are advised to shun 'all lying, swearing, and wicked children', being wary 'of cards, dice and other bewitching games'. Finally, there is a warning. Justice will not spare them on account of their youth, if they are found 'Christless, prayerless and living in sin'. Rather, if they would be 'saved from hell and happy for ever', they will 'flee from the devil and sin, to our Lord Jesus Christ...that saith of little children, "Suffer them to come to me".....' <sup>2</sup>

While such language seems cruel, it is a consequence of Willison's adherence to the federal scheme of theology. Believing that only those who accepted the terms of the covenant of grace, that is, 'those who have fled to Jesus Christ, and closed with him by true faith', <sup>3</sup> were saved from the wrath of God both here and hereafter, his warning was prompted, on the one hand, by a real affection for children, and, on the other, from a fear for their wellbeing in a 'Christless' state.

Yet, as compared to other children's catechisms of the time, the *Mother's Catechism* is favourable in style, language and content. A similar work, by the minister at Kinkell, first appeared in 1779. Longer than Willison's, it opens with simple questions, some in

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

identical wording to Willison's. <sup>1</sup> Indeed, they seem to be a selection from the *Mother's Catechism*, which the author admits to having read. <sup>2</sup>

The Catechism is then divided into 40 chapters, each containing around 12-20 questions. These deal with God, the Trinity, the Covenants of Works and Grace, the person and work of Christ, the sacraments, death, resurrection, judgement, hell and heaven.

In contrast to Willison's, however, while the questions are brief, the answers are more verbose, and expressed in language even more complex. So, for example, in response to the question, 'What was the eternal life that was promised?', the answer given is,

It was the glorious vision and fruition of God in heaven, in a state of union and communion with him, in both soul and body there for ever, after he had passed through the time of his trial here upon earth, Rom. vii. 10 - The commandment was ordained to life. <sup>3</sup>

Or again, answering the question, 'How doth it appear that the righteousness of Christ is the true and proper condition of the covenant?', the response is,

God proposed the fulfilling of this righteousness to Christ as the ground of his seeing his seed. And they make mention of this only before God, as the ground of their access to, and acceptance with him. Isaiah liii. 11. Psalm lxxi. 16. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Muckarskie, J. *The Children's Catechism or An Help To The More Easy Understanding Of The Doctrine Taught In Our Confession Of Faith And Catechisms, Larger And Shorter, Humbly offered for instructing The Young And Ignorant* (Kilmarnock : 1826). pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

Apart from the complexity of the sentences, and the use of terms which would try the adult mind, this catechism is replete with words like 'imputation', 'approbation', 'effectual calling', 'immutable', 'corruption', 'essence', 'mortification', 'subsists', 'vivification', and 'contrivance'. Clearly, this is not the language of children.

It is notable too, that while Muckarskie's work purports to be an aid to understanding the Westminster documents, it contains no teaching on either the Commandments or the Lord's prayer, both of which were essential ingredients of the *Shorter Catechism*.<sup>1</sup>

Childrens' Catechisms were also written by John Brown of Haddington and James Oliphant, then of Dumbarton.

Brown's questions, the first ten of which are almost identical to those of Willison,<sup>2</sup> form a scheme which deals with sin, salvation, God, the Covenants of Works and Grace, the person and work of Christ, the Commandments, the sacraments and the Lord's Prayer.

Oliphant's *Mother's Catechism*, like Willison's, has a historical section resembling a Biblical quiz. The lengthy catechism, itself, raises almost 600 questions, the first nine of which are similar to those of Willison. The scheme deals with God, the Covenants of Works, Redemption and Grace, sin, salvation, the work of Christ, the Spirit, the Decalogue, sacraments, the Lord's Prayer, death, judgement, hell and heaven. Yet while the brevity of questions and answers is commendable, they are too numerous to have provided a realistic scheme for young children, and the use of such words as 'justification', 'adoption' and 'sanctification' is commonplace.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Shorter Catechism*. Questions 41-81, and 98-107.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, J. *A Catechism for Young Children* (Stirling : 1786) p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Oliphant, J. *A Mother's Catechism*. Sixth edition (Edinburgh : 1798) p. 15.



Willison's *Mother's Catechism*, despite its limitations, was, by contrast, an altogether praiseworthy effort, and its many editions, continuing long after it was written, are eloquent of its value.

'Household catechisms', including those for children, which were popular among the Puritans in seventeenth century England, were written so that 'individual hearts might be transformed in the context of the family'.<sup>1</sup> Those who provided them in eighteenth century Scotland wrote with the same aim, and it may well be, that, since his work preceded that of others, and in view of the similar content and style of these to his own, Willison established an idea and a pattern which others were to follow.

#### The Limitations of Willison's Explicatory Catechisms.

Both of these catechisms by Willison were based on the *Shorter Catechism* of Westminster. But one feature of the Westminster Catechisms, was their departure from the common basis of earlier catechisms in the Creed, the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer. They did expound the two latter, but abandoning the Creed, which kept exposition close to the mighty acts of God in Christ, they adopted the scholastic pattern of federal theology, expounding doctrine according to that framework.

Pointing out that all catechisms have limitations,<sup>2</sup> Professor T. F. Torrance has shown that those of Westminster, as compared to those of the early Reformed church, are less Christological,<sup>3</sup> do not deal with the Church,<sup>4</sup> and introduce the work of the Spirit 'incidentally', regarding it 'instrumentally',<sup>5</sup> while through

<sup>1</sup> Hutchison, M. P. *Social and Religious Change : The Case of the English Catechism, 1560-1640* (Stanford : 1984) p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> Torrance, T. F. *School of Faith*, p. xx.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. xvii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. xvi.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. cxl.

their stress on federalism, they become dialectical rather than dialogical, emphasising the 'appropriation of salvation and the working out of sanctification'.<sup>1</sup>

It has already been noted that the latter criticism of Willison's catechisms is valid.<sup>2</sup> The others also have validity. There is nothing in them, for example, corresponding to the treatment given to the Church in *Calvin's Catechism*,<sup>3</sup> nor to that given to the Spirit in Craig's,<sup>4</sup> although the Christological element is treated in the expansion of the *Shorter Catechism's* questions on Christ's work as Prophet, Priest and King.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, whatever their deficiencies, Willison's *Mother's Catechism* and *Example of Plain Catechising*, like the *Shorter Catechism* itself, provided a structured account of the Christian faith, and were long to enjoy popularity as instruction manuals.<sup>6</sup>

#### The Sacramental Catechism.

In 1716, around the close of his Brechin ministry, Willison published his *Sacramental Directory*. The *Sacramental Catechism* first appeared in 1720, under the title of *A Sacramental Catechism: Or, A Familiar Instructor for Young Communicants*. It was not intended, however, solely for the young, for whom special provision

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. xviii.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> Torrance, T. F. 'Calvin's Catechism', *School of Faith*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 'Craig's Catechism', pp. 117-9.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. pp. 628f, and *The Mother's Catechism*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Low, S. (Compiler) *The English Catalogue of Books, 1881-1889*, (London : 1891) p. 662, shows that *Plain Cat.* was being published as late as 1885. The *Mother's Catechism* was published as late as 1851. See above, p. 32.

was made fourteen years later, when, recognising the need to reproduce his material in simpler form, he published a shortened version, which included 'a proposal for young communicants'. That work was entitled, *The Young Communicant's Catechism: Or, A Help Both Short and Plain, for Instructing and Preparing the Young to Make a Right Approach unto the Lord's Table.*

*The Sacramental Catechism* is much longer than the *Directory*. Yet the content of both is similar while the form is different. The *Directory* was written to advise communicants on 'how to prepare for a communion sabbath before it come', 'how to spend it when it is come', and 'how to behave ourselves when it is over'.<sup>1</sup> To that end, it offered a series of detailed directions providing a programme which would assist parties to attend in 'a due and suitable manner'.<sup>2</sup> *The Sacramental Catechism*, on the other hand, while containing similar advice, was also concerned with the meaning of the Lord's Supper, and was written not as a series of directions, but in catechetical form, so that principal questions on sacraments are asked, then expanded with supplementary questions and answers. Indeed, Willison, himself, described it, in contrast to the *Directory*, as 'doctrinal and casuistic'.<sup>3</sup>

In the Preface, the reasons for writing it are outlined. Aware of the 'lamentable ignorance among many, of the nature of this holy ordinance, and the principal acts required in communicating',<sup>4</sup> his principal aim was to educate.

Such teaching was directed, firstly, towards the young. Reminding his readers that the General Assembly had enacted, in 1706, that ministers must take special pains to instruct first communicants, Willison makes a plea to the young, in particular, to have a

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>3</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 442.

special regard to preparation for their first communion, 'for very much depends upon it'.<sup>1</sup> Those who come, for the first time, in ignorance, 'stumble on the threshold', and will prove themselves unworthy communicants.

But, in addition, those who have communicated frequently, also need solemn preparation. Since experiences at the Lord's Table have proved a stabilising influence to many in time of trial, there is a need to provide 'cordials' against such times.

The work, therefore, attempted to meet a broad spectrum of need, aiming to 'instruct, direct and confirm some, and to confute, reprove and reform others'.<sup>2</sup> More specifically it was written: 1) to instruct the ignorant; 2) to assist the young by a display of the nature, parts, uses and ends of the sacrament; 3) to assist any who fear that they may participate unworthily; 4) to confute those who corrupt the ordinance; 5) to reprove those who come unprepared and unworthily; 6) to reprove those who neglect it; 7) to reprove those who communicate only once a year or once in two years - only when their parish makes provision.<sup>3</sup>

After a plea for more frequent communicating and celebration, Willison commends study of the Longer and Shorter Catechisms, and copies of *Vincent's Catechism*. Yet, recognising that works which cover the whole body of Divinity, cannot give the Supper the attention it merits, his effort is an attempt to meet this need.

Much of the content of the *Sacramental Catechism* has already been discussed in the analysis of Willison's sacramental theology,<sup>4</sup> so that little additional expansion is necessary.

<sup>1</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 443.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 443-4.

<sup>4</sup> See above p. 62f.

Discussion of the purpose of sacraments is initiated with the question, 'For what end hath the Lord appointed sacraments in his church'? The answer is,

to be visible signs and seals of his gracious covenant with man, in order to represent and apply Christ and his benefits to his covenanted people; to strengthen their faith in his promises, and solemnly to engage them to his service. <sup>1</sup>

Supplementary questions lead on to the familiar distinction between the 'covenant of works' and the 'covenant of grace', and the federal scheme, in its threefold aspect, is expanded at length. <sup>2</sup>

The catechism then moves on to define a sacrament, the response to the second question stating that a sacrament 'is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in his church, and annexed as a seal to the covenant of grace...' <sup>3</sup> Supplementary questions and answers, deal with the sacraments as signs and seals, the differences between the word and sacraments as means of salvation, the reasons for which God has joined sacraments to the word, the efficacy of sacraments to work grace, while others compare and contrast the sacraments of the old covenant with those of the new.

### Baptism.

The third section deals briefly with baptism, exploring: the meaning of the outward part and the spiritual part; the meaning of the words of institution; the significance of using water; the reasons for which Christ appointed baptism; the things sealed to the recipient by it; the things engaged or sealed on the part of the baptised; the necessity for baptism; where it should be administered and why; those who should and should not receive it;

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 446-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 447-56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 456.

membership of the church visible and invisible; the question as to whether infants should not also be admitted to the Lord's Supper; the issue as to whether children should be baptised when they cannot understand the meaning of the rite; scriptural warranty for infant baptism; the obligations of Christian parents; the duties of the congregation; the duty of Christians to improve their baptism; the reasons why baptism is not to be repeated; and the similarities and differences between the sacraments.

It is notable, however, that in a catechism which bears the name of a 'sacramental' catechism, less than one twelfth of the material deals with baptism. <sup>1</sup> Indeed, in the *Young Communicant's Catechism*, this is further reduced, so that only six questions and answers deal specifically with baptism, while a further five relate to the duties of the baptised, the whole subject being dismissed in less than one of its fifteen pages. <sup>2</sup> This disproportionate treatment, contrasts with the more equitable consideration given to each sacrament in the earlier Reformed Catechisms <sup>3</sup> and reflects the scant treatment given to baptism in the Westminster Catechisms.

#### The Lord's Supper.

The largest part of the work, therefore, deals with the Lord's Supper, and can be divided into two sections with subdivisions.

The first, which can be divided into three parts, deals with what the Lord's Supper is, the authority for it, why Christ instituted it, the circumstances of the institution, the names applied to the sacrament, the parts of the sacrament - the outward visible signs, and the spiritual things signified by them, the elements and their suitability as outward visible signs. <sup>4</sup> The second part explains

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 458-66.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *The Young Communicant's Catechism*, HTH p. 578.

<sup>3</sup> Torrance, T. F. *School of Faith*, pp. 56-64 and 152-5.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 466-9.

the sacramental actions, <sup>1</sup> and the third, the sacramental words. <sup>2</sup> But the largest section, reiterating much of what is said in the *Sacramental Directory*, is concerned with duties incumbent on communicants before, during and after communicating.

Preparation is necessary for several reasons: 1) because God requires it; 2) because just as there was great need of preparation for the Passover, so there is also for the Lord's Supper; 3) because there we approach a holy God; 4) because we are by nature unfit and unready; 5) because God has made great preparations for us; 5) because there are dangers in celebrating unprepared. <sup>3</sup> In view of this, Willison outlines an intensive twofold preparation programme of 'self examination', and 'exciting of the graces'. <sup>4</sup>

The concluding sub sections deal with the duties of communicants both at and after the table.

At the table, the communicant, aware of his privilege and conscious that each communion may be his last, should guard against wandering thoughts, and, contemplating Christ's love, consider him 'surety for debt', 'physician to heal', 'mediator to make peace with God', 'ransomer to deliver', 'refuge from danger', 'teacher' to instruct, 'bountiful friend' to give, and 'loving husband' to provide. <sup>5</sup> Thus he should come with reverence, humility, single mindedness, a burning love to Christ, confidence, a sense of hunger and a mourning for sin.

Equally, he should consider the crucified Christ, the justice of God, the misery of the damned, the wrath from which the believer is delivered, the greatness of Christ's love, the bliss of pardon, the

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 64-6.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 66-71.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 482-3.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 79-81.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 518.

worth of heaven, the riches of glory, Christ's desire to benefit his own, and the Saviour's triumph over evil and darkness. <sup>1</sup>

Moreover, every part of the 'action' should stimulate thought. The bread and wine is a reminder that Christ is nourishment to the soul, and the 'setting apart' of the elements that he was set apart by eternal decree. The blessing on bread and wine should speak of God sending his Son furnished with the things needful for his office as mediator, while the broken bread should speak of his body broken, and the poured out wine of his blood shed. The giving of the elements is a reminder of God's giving his Son. The words, 'Take eat: Drink ye all of it', speak of how freely God gives Christ to us. The offered elements are a reminder that we should stretch out arms of faith to receive the benefits of Christ. The sight of bread and wine separately should stimulate thought of Christ's blood separated from his body, 'that we might not be separated from God forever', <sup>2</sup> and the elements divided among the people, that Christ is 'really though invisibly' dealing forth the benefits of his death. In eating and drinking, one should meditate on receiving Christ by faith, and when the wine warms the stomach, contemplate the warm love of Christ until one's heart is moved to reciprocal love, while the words, 'Do this in remembrance' should prompt remembrance of Christ's death and his legacy to believers. Finally, communicants are reminded that, at the table, they should vow to refrain from sin, and to make it their aim to please God.

Duties after communicating are threefold. First, to maintain an attitude of admiration, thankfulness, joyfulness, humility, watchfulness, prayerfulness, charity, obedience, resolution, and earnest longing. <sup>3</sup> Second, a self examination, considering how one has dealt with God at the sacrament, and God's response. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 519.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 519-20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 523-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 525f.



Third, to accept the obligation to follow God's word, the pattern of Christ's life, the principles of Christian profession, the vows made, the sights seen, the favours received, the promises sealed. <sup>1</sup>

Another feature of this Catechism, therefore, is that only one fifth of the material on the Lord's Supper contains teaching on the sacrament, the remainder dealing with duties of communicants. Thus again, in contrast to the earlier Reformed catechisms, it stresses what man has to do for God, rather than what God has done for him in Christ. Indeed, the assertion that without 'liveliness of grace', <sup>2</sup> one risks unworthy communicating, contrasts with Calvin's teaching that the Supper is 'an aid and support for our weakness', which 'would be of no use to us, if we were not imperfect'. <sup>3</sup>

It was not that Willison did not suscribe to that view. Indeed in a sermon, he stated that imperfection does not necessarily make a communicant unworthy. <sup>4</sup> On the other hand, holding that those who communicated without 'repentance', 'preparation', 'dread and reverence', 'spiritual hunger and thirst', and without 'exercising faith', and 'strong resolution against sin', were unworthy, <sup>5</sup> he urged people to spend 'a night wrestling and praying', and then 'come with hearts burning and souls thirsting'.

The weakness lay in the perpetual emphasis on what individuals had to do to find acceptance, coupled with the threat that those who failed would turn 'wholesome food into poison' and 'the cup of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 539.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 513.

<sup>3</sup> Torrance, T. F. 'Calvin's Catechism', *School of Faith*, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *The Nature, Guilt and Danger of Unworthy Communicating. Salvation from Wrath through Jesus Christ. The Heinous Sin and Inevitable Punishment of Slighting the Gospel, Being the Substance of Three Sermons* (Edinburgh : 1743) p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 4-14.

salvation into the cup of damnation'. Such teaching robbed many of the joy of the experience. <sup>1</sup>

Willison was one of only a few who actually wrote a sacramental catechism. Another, was James Oliphant, minister at Kilmarnock, who figured in the poetry of Robert Burns. <sup>2</sup>

In his Preface, he states that 'the only sacramental catechism in the hands of the people of this country is Mr. Willison's'. Then, in what can only be an implied criticism, added,

those who are acquainted with that performance may profitably use this notwithstanding. The most of writers upon this sacrament have confined themselves too strictly to that present subject..... I have endeavoured to lead Christians in their preparation into a summary view of those great and fundamental truths necessary to be known in order to distinct and profitable communicating. <sup>3</sup>

Containing some 360 questions, it is much shorter than Willison's, with fewer scriptural references. The scheme treats the Covenants of Works and Grace, Christ as Mediator, his death, resurrection and ascension, Old and New Testament sacraments, and duties before, during and after communicating.

#### The Young Communicant's Catechism.

An Act of Assembly of 1706 had recommended ministers

<sup>1</sup> See above p. 82f.

<sup>2</sup> Boyle, A. M. *The Ayrshire Book of Burns-Lore* (Ayr : 1985) p. 66. Also in Charles. R. (Ed.) *Life and Works of Robert Burns*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh : 1896) p. 299. Oliphant is mentioned in *The Ordination*.

<sup>3</sup> Oliphant, J. *A Sacramental Catechism For Communicants Old and Young* (Glasgow : 1772) p. 1.

to take as strict a trial as can be of such as they admit to the Lord's Supper, especially before their first admission thereto, and that they diligently instruct them particularly as to the Covenant of Grace, and the nature and end of that ordinance, as a seal thereof... <sup>1</sup>

That Willison took that act seriously is plain from the existence of the *Young Communicant's Catechism*, a simplified version of the *Sacramental Catechism*, following the same format. Published in 1734, Willison acknowledged that the questions raised in the earlier work had been 'large and too burdensome to the memory', while the book itself had 'become scarce'. <sup>2</sup>

Further evidence of his concern is found in his Synod sermon, of 1733, where he advised his colleagues to attend to the youth,

And seeing youth is the moulding age, and the proper season for receiving instruction, we ought to improve it well, by frequent and diligent catechising. A vessel will long retain the scent of that with which it is first seasoned.... This is the most usual season of conversion, the time when the heart is soonest melted, and the affections are the most pliable, and if ever we prevail with sinners, youth is the most likely time for it....<sup>3</sup>

The brevity and simplicity of his *Young Communicant's Catechism*, therefore, provided a commendable attempt to meet a need.

Willison's catechisms enjoyed wide popularity. Evidence of their extensive use exists not only in the fact that many editions were printed both in English and Gaelic at home, <sup>4</sup> with a similar demand

<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) *A.G.A.* p. 394.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *The Young Communicant's Catechism* (Edinburgh : 1734) p. iii.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *The Church's Danger.* HTH. p. 835.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 174.

in America, <sup>1</sup> but also from other writers who read his work and may well have used it. <sup>2</sup> John Erskine <sup>3</sup> and Alexander Cruden <sup>4</sup> heartily commended it, while it provided valuable resource material for ministers, <sup>5</sup> catechists <sup>6</sup> and lay people alike. <sup>7</sup>

### Catechising Practice.

Willison nowhere discusses his practice, but he lists catechising as a sabbath 'duty' for the people. <sup>8</sup> Certainly, at Brechin, he used schoolchildren 'to repeat a part of the Westminster Catechism publicly in the Church every Lord's day betwixt sermons'. <sup>9</sup>

One artist has captured such a scene, portraying a minister seated at the precentor's desk, an hour glass, delicately poised, measuring the passing time. Some present sit in lofts. Others stand or sit on stools. A youth is seated on the flagged floor, his hand supporting his head. Beside him lies his dog. Before the desk, two children read the catechism, while the minister is asking or explaining some point to an adult standing close by. <sup>10</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Jones, L. (Compiler) *The American Catalogue of Books in Print and For Sale, July 1, 1876*, Vol. 1 (New York : 1880) p. 810, shows that *Sac. Cat.* and *Sac. Dir.* were in print at the time.
- <sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 170-1 and p. 182.
- <sup>3</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt to Promote Frequent Communicating* (Glasgow : 1749) pp. 40-3.
- <sup>4</sup> Youngman, W. *Cruden's Concordance* (London : 1896) p. xv.
- <sup>5</sup> See above, p. 145.
- <sup>6</sup> MacInnes, J. *The Evangelical Movement*, pp. 209-10.
- <sup>7</sup> McCulloch, W. *Examinations of Persons Under Spiritual Concern at Cambuslang During the Revival in 1741-42*, MIC 77, Edinburgh University Manuscripts, Vol 2, pp. 639 and 661.
- <sup>8</sup> Willison, J. *Treatise*, HTH. p. 83.
- <sup>9</sup> See above, p. 27.
- <sup>10</sup> Allan, D. (1774-1796) 'Catechising in the Church of Scotland', See Appendix 1.

But, in addition to catechising in church, ministers were expected, by the Assembly act of 1639, to visit homes to ensure that family catechising was carried out, while a further act of 1652 expressly obliged them to catechise from house to house. <sup>1</sup>

John Erskine's biographer describes that process, <sup>2</sup> while another artist gained inspiration from it, his painting showing a sparsely furnished room containing a dozen or so adults, some children and a young woman with babe in arms. Seated in the centre, the minister, hands folded over the Bible, is the focus of attention. <sup>3</sup>

Willison was conscious of the burden the task placed on ministers, because one of his arguments for more frequent celebration, was that the exertion demanded in preparing people would be reduced since communicants would be in a continual state of preparation. <sup>4</sup>

Others spoke freely of their difficulty. One wrote, 'I have about 1200 Examenable persons in my care... I visit every family of my charge once a year', <sup>5</sup> while another stated that his parish had 'upward of 5,000 examinable persons', so that, even with a colleague, for 'two ministers to accomplish annually... the public examination and family visitation of so wide and populous a parish, was a very great labour'. <sup>6</sup> John Mill protested that, in winter,

<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) *A.G.A.* p. 1151.

<sup>2</sup> Wellwood, Sir Henry Moncrieff (Bart.) *The Life and Writings of John Erskine* (Edinburgh : 1818) pp. 70-1.

<sup>3</sup> Phillip, J. (1817-1867) 'Presbyterian Catechising'.

See Appendix 2.

<sup>4</sup> See below, p. 225.

<sup>5</sup> 'Church Life and Work in the Days of the Rev. Mr. Dow, Minister of Ardrossan, 1752', containing a reprint of Mr Dow's letter. *The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 21st. November 1890.

<sup>6</sup> Fraser, D. *The Life and Diary of the Reverend Ralph Erskine, A. N. of Dunfermline, One of the Founders of the Secession Church* (Edinburgh : 1834) pp. 46 and 58.

he had to catechise some ten or eleven miles from his manse. <sup>1</sup>  
Yet, George Ridpath's practice, at Stichel, was less exacting, for, over six or eight weeks, and usually between January and March each year, he examined the townspeople in church, and those of remoter areas in their homes or some other convenient place. <sup>2</sup>

So important was the task considered, that even where there was no minister, laymen were employed as 'catechists' to read the questions and hear replies. <sup>3</sup> The task of explaining the catechism, however, was usually regarded as the exclusive right of the minister. Indeed, Tain Presbytery records that a minister was deputed to rebuke a catechist who had acted *ultra vires* by not only asking the questions, but presuming to explain them. <sup>4</sup>

That Willison's Presbytery expected diligence in catechising, is clear from an incident occurring in the aftermath of the 1715 rebellion. At Lethnot, the incumbent, who had been active in the event, was deposed in 1716. In the following year, the Presbytery, aware that Lochlee, one of the districts of the parish, was a 'nest of Jacobitism', decided to separate the area into two parishes, Lethnot and Lochlee. To strengthen its case, representatives visited the area, noting the number of 'reeking lums', thereby assessing the number of 'examinable persons' whom the minister would require to visit and catechise in the year. <sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willcock, J. *A Shetland Minister of the Eighteenth Century* (Lerwick : 1897) p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> Paul, J. B. (Ed.) *The Diary of George Ridpath* (Edinburgh : 1922) pp. 224-33.

<sup>3</sup> A letter from Kintyre Presbytery to the General Assembly requests payment of seven pounds to each of its catechists, some of them schoolmasters, for their year's work. General Assembly Papers, 1733. CH1/2/68, Document 362. S.R.O.

<sup>4</sup> MacNaughton, C. *Church Life in Ross and Sutherland* (Inverness : 1915) pp. 39-41.

<sup>5</sup> Cruikshank, F. *Navar and Lethnot* (Breachin : 1899) pp. 102-10.

Willison's diligence in the task is clear from Presbytery records. From 1711, Dundee Presbytery required an annual statement from ministers to that effect. Members 'were removed by turns', and 'judgement' was given 'against each as they were called' to acknowledge visits to 'the families of their parish at least once in the year', and an annual 'examination'. When serving at Dundee, Willison could always acknowledge diligence, as he had done in the 'privy censures' first recorded in Brechin Presbytery in 1710. <sup>1</sup>

Sometimes eighteenth century Evangelicals accused Moderates of laxity over catechising. <sup>2</sup> Yet, Alexander Gerard, a 'typical Moderate', <sup>3</sup> was at one with Willison on the subject. Regarding catechising as 'the properest method of instructing', <sup>4</sup> he also believed that it had advantages over preaching. It stimulated the attention better. It allowed the catechist to assess the effect of his teaching. It tended to make material taught more memorable, and served to illumine much that was said in preaching, so that it proved a suitable preparation for profitable hearing of sermons. <sup>5</sup> Indeed, his concluding words on the matter agree remarkably with those which Willison had employed in his Synod sermon,

The duty of catechising should be diligently practised, especially with regard to the young. It is by this means that they can best learn the great articles of the Christian religion; if they do not learn them then, they will scarce ever learn them thoroughly; but if they then learn them, they will

<sup>1</sup> Presbytery of Dundee and Forfar Minute Book, (1710-1715) CH2/103/7 (M) p. 38. S.R.O. Presbytery of Brechin Minute Book, (1710-1717) CH2/40/6, p. 22. S.R.O. Specific mention of Willison's replies when he had missed the diet of Privy Censures is found in Brechin Presbytery Minute Book, CH2/40/6, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Goudie, G. (Ed.) *Mill's Diary*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>3</sup> Henderson, G. D. *The Burning Bush* (Edinburgh : 1957) p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Gerard, A. *The Pastoral Care*, p. 217.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 218.

keep a fast hold of them to the end of their lives.... their minds are open to truth, and pliable to goodness...'

Few were more diligent in catering for that need than Willison.

#### The Admission of First Communicants.

The precise period at which communicants were first admitted by a distinctive procedure in the Reformed Church in Scotland cannot be dated with precision.

While a public profession of faith was required in some of the Calvinistic churches, <sup>2</sup> no formal mode of admission appeared in the service book used among the Marian exiles in Geneva, <sup>3</sup> and there was none, therefore, in Knox's *Book of Common order*. At the outset, then, new communicants were treated no differently from others, simply receiving tokens after the common examination.

McMillan, referring to prayer and exhortation preceding examination at Salt Preston suggests that there was possibly a corresponding prayer and exhortation at the end, and therefore the probability of an early date for formal admission. <sup>4</sup> However, since neither is found in the text of Davidson's Catechism, and further evidence to support the probability is lacking, this can only be speculation.

Burnet, on the other hand, dates the practice later, suggesting that it may have originated from the Assembly of 1706. <sup>5</sup>

Yet evidence exists of isolated occurrences before then. Ten days

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Thomson, T. B. S. 'Confirmation in the Church of Scotland'. *Church Service Society Annual*, 1938-9, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *Liturgical Portions*, p. 120.

<sup>4</sup> McMillan, W. *Worship*, p. 230.

<sup>5</sup> Burnet, G. B. *Holy Communion*, p. 259.



before the sacrament at Dalgety, for example, a Session Minute of June, 1654, reads, "Some young men and women, to enter to the Lord's table at this ensuing dyett, seriously exhorted to studie the Scriptures and the knowledge off God, and to walke in some sutebaleness to the Gospell, and so receaves tokens".<sup>1</sup>

Evidence is also found in an edition of Oliphant's Catechism, which contains 'an abstract of that solemn mode of public admission of young communicants to the Lord's Table which has been practiced in the parish of Kilmarnock almost since the Revolution'.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, however, no Session records exist for Oliphant's Church, a chapel built in 1733, while the Session minutes of the neighbouring Laigh Kirk in Kilmarnock record no such practice until 1726.<sup>3</sup> Yet, since Dalgety and Kilmarnock were Covenanting areas,<sup>4</sup> it could be that the practice may have originated among the Covenanters.

Clearly, formal admission did not originate from the Westminster Assembly, for although the Scottish representatives are said to have prepared a chapter on the subject, which may have been erased by Parliament or dismissed by the Independents, the Directory for the Public Worship of God made no provision for it.<sup>5</sup>

Nor did it begin during the Episcopal periods. The Five Articles of Perth required that children of eight who could repeat the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed be brought to the bishop for confirmation, and the rite appeared in

<sup>1</sup> Ross, W. *Pastoral Work*, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> Oliphant, J. *A Sacramental Catechism*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Kirk Session Minute of Laigh Kirk, Kilmarnock, CH2/1252/3, p. 220. SR0. Oliphant was a minister in Kilmarnock from 1763-73.

<sup>4</sup> Ross, W. *Pastoral Work*, pp. 212-7.

<sup>5</sup> Spratt, G. W. *Worship and Offices of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh : 1882) p. 86.

Cowper's draft of the Liturgy of James VI. <sup>1</sup> Laud's Liturgy also had an order for confirmation, <sup>2</sup> and Robert Leighton as Archbishop of Glasgow from 1670-1674, wrote a catechism for the 'examination of communicants' which concluded with a specific question to the young before admission,

Whereas you were, in your infancy, baptized into the name of Jesus Christ, do you now, upon distinct knowledge, and with firm belief and pious affection, own that Christian faith of which you have given an account, and withal your baptismal vow?... <sup>3</sup>

Yet the consensus of opinion among historians, is that no service of confirmation was used in either period of Episcopacy. <sup>4</sup>

There can be no doubt, however, that discussion of formal admission in the 1704 and 1705 Assemblies and the Act of 1706, provided the impetus for churches to adopt the practice. That act, which urged ministers 'to take as strict a trial as can be of such as they admit to the Lord's Supper..', had closed, 'and charge upon their consciences, the obligations they lie under from their baptismal covenant, and seriously exhort them to renew the same'. <sup>5</sup>

Eighteenth century church records are remiss in recording material which interests later generations, and Session minutes noting adoption of the procedure are few. Perusal of the records of some

<sup>1</sup> Spratt, G. W. *Scottish Liturgies of the Reign of James VI* (Edinburgh : 1871) pp. 79-86.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, G. *The Making of the Scottish Prayer Book of 1637* (Edinburgh : 1954) p. 217f.

<sup>3</sup> Aikman, J. *The Whole Works of Robert Leighton, Archbishop of Glasgow* (Edinburgh : 1836) pp. 505-506.

<sup>4</sup> McMillan, W. *Worship*, p. 231. Spratt, G. W. *Worship and Offices*, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) *A.G.A.* p. 394.

twelve Ayrshire parishes, for example, reveals that most, like that of Straiton, were more intent on noting disciplinary cases than events of greater import, so that an ordination, a schoolmaster's appointment or a sacramental celebration are briefly dismissed. Two recording the practice, however, show that the method varied.

In Ardrossan, a record of the event appears for the first time, in May 1740, when 'The Session met and constituted 41 young communicants, after engagements made by them, and prayer made for them, before the congregation'. <sup>1</sup>

Dalrymple parish adopted the practice about the same time, a minute relating the appearance of first communicants, not before the congregation but the Kirk Session. Listing the names, it adds '.... came into the Session, and professed their desire of ratifying their Baptismal Engagements. And, after trial taken of their knowledge, they received their tokens for the first time'. <sup>2</sup>

The edited biography of Thomas Boston shows that the practice at Ettrick was similar to that in Dalrymple. Introducing a procedure, in 1728, whereby questions were proposed, before the Session, to first communicants, Boston wrote, 'this method I have since observed, when formerly I was wont only to take them engaged privately, at my private examining of them....'. <sup>3</sup>

Yet allowing that Session Minutes often omit significant matters, so that others may have adopted the procedure without recording it, there is evidence that churches were slow to adopt the practice.

<sup>1</sup> Ardrossan Parish Kirk Session Minutes (1739-1795) Minute of 15th. May, 1740. MS. 3, The Alexander Wood Collection. Ardrossan local Library.

<sup>2</sup> Dalrymple Session Register (1726-1783). Minutes of 23rd. July, 1739, and 23rd. July, 1740. CH2/87/2. S.R.A. (A).

<sup>3</sup> Low, G. (Ed.) *A General Account*, pp. 283 and 341..

John Erskine's biographer shows that the custom of the minister speaking to first communicants in private, was long to continue, <sup>1</sup> while the pre sacramental day diary entries of George Ridpath, of Stichel, describe the practice of many, when he wrote, in almost disinterested fashion, 'spoke to some catechumens'. <sup>2</sup>

In contrast, for Willison and others admission was important and Willison strongly supported the Act of 1706. But before examining the procedure which he recommended, comment should perhaps be made on the form described in Oliphant's Catechism, since the author claimed that it had been in use 'almost since the Revolution'.

#### The Kilmarnock Admission Service.

The service described by Oliphant opens with the rubric,

The minister and elders having each spent several days with candidates for admission, in examining, exhorting, and praying with them; thereafter, at a joint meeting they conclude upon who are to be taken forward, and whose admission is delayed for that time; which judgement is duly intimated to the parties. Then, upon a week day, a sermon is preached suitable to the occasion, and after that, the list of young people is called, and each compearing, all stand up immediately before the pulpit.... The minister addresses them in some such terms as follow. <sup>3</sup>

There then follows an address to the communicants which begins,

We are told that the Lord looketh down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there was any that did understand, and seek God. May we not, therefore, say concerning you, this is (part of) the generation of them that seek him, that seek

<sup>1</sup> Moncrieff Wellwood, H. *Life and Writings of Erskine*, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> *Ridpath's Diary*, pp. 73, 151, 254.

<sup>3</sup> *Oliphant's Catechism*, p. 43.

Thy face, O God of Jacob? .....

What a charming thing it is to see a young person, separating himself from a crowd of sinners of the same age, rank and station as himself, nobly rising above the temptations of his younger years, and devoting himself to God through Christ, and minding the great concerns of eternity!.....

And therefore.. I propose the following questions unto you, as containing the sum of your engagements, and require not only your outward assent before this congregation, but also and more especially your inward consent thereunto before God. <sup>1</sup>

The communicants were asked twelve lengthy questions. The first, requiring assent to a belief in scripture as the word of God. The second, third and fourth required a belief in God the Father Almighty, in Christ as Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier of the church. The fifth sought acknowledgement of a sinful state, the sixth, acquiescence in the covenant of grace. The seventh demanded that, in response to God's covenant, parties would give him the obedience of willing subjects. The eighth sought a renewal of baptismal vows. The ninth demanded acknowledgement of a desire to remember Christ's death, to show it forth till he come again, to show love for Christ and for all the saints, and to keep the feast with 'the unleavened bread of truth and sincerity'. The tenth sought assurance that communicants intended to cleave to God's covenant, and to renounce the world, the flesh and the devil. The eleventh sought a declaration of loyalty to the church, and the last, a resolution that communicants would live in godly fashion. <sup>2</sup>

An address followed, which reminded new communicants that 'it would be... a joy to this congregation, if you who are now admitted to full communion with us, shall prove so many holy Christians, and

<sup>1</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 44-5.

useful members of society while you live, and carefully transmit the truths of Christianity.....' Secondly, it addressed any who had never been admitted and those formerly admitted who had 'lost sight of their profession', reminding them of what it meant to be 'an outcast of heaven, a stranger to God's covenant, and an enemy to Christ'. Lastly, a word to the whole congregation reminded them to come to the sacrament prepared.

Finally, a rubric states, 'The whole is concluded with prayer for all these different classes, particularly for young communicants, after which they are served in tokens'. <sup>1</sup> And a postscript adds the remark, 'In this mode of admission, no set form of words is used, nor is a public appearance insisted on, but that, upon sufficient reason, or particular desire, individuals, especially old persons, are frequently admitted in private'. <sup>2</sup>

#### Willison's Form of Admission.

Minutes of the Dundee Session only briefly record sacramental occasions, so that none speaks of admitting first communicants. Yet, that Willison had a form of admission is clear from remarks in the *Young Communicant's Catechism*, and in his Synod sermon.

In the latter, he advises particular concern for the young,

And this being such a critical time for their souls, we ought, according to the Assembly's direction, diligently to instruct them before their first admission to the Lord's Supper, particularly as to the covenant of grace..... and take them solemnly engaged thereunto, and that in a more express way than we did their fathers at baptism. Let us put such questions to them as these, and wait for their answers: <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *The Church's Danger*, HTH. p. 835.

Of the lengthy list of twenty seven questions, all but two seek simple assent. Of these, one is the introductory question which asked, 'What sense have you of your misery by nature, and while under the covenant of works?' Those following asked for: a recognition of the need of the Mediator's help; a recognition of the violation of 'baptismal engagements'; expression of the desire to return to the Lord; a pledge that there is a desire to break with the world, the flesh and the devil; recognition that the communicant admired the redeeming love in the Son of God; approval of the gospel-method of salvation; a willingness to renounce self righteousness and to trust in Christ's righteousness; a willingness to enter this self denying method of salvation; a willingness to recognise Christ as mediator in all his offices; a will to accept the Lordship of Christ; an awareness of sin as the crucifier of Christ; a willingness to reject every sin for him; a desire to come to Christ for justification and sanctification; an assent that the communicant has come voluntarily to take up the cause of Christ; an acceptance of the sacraments as means of grace; an acceptance of fellow Christians as beloved friends; a pledge not to follow others in evil ways; a promise to accept the 'rod and discipline' of the Church; a pledge not to desert the cause of Christ; a pledge to surrender self and possessions to the Lord; a promise to reject the devil when tempted; an acknowledgment that 'engaging in the articles of the covenant' demands borrowing the strength of Christ; a promise to live a life of prayer and faith; a promise that ordinances will be a trysting place between the communicant and Christ; a promise to engage in a personal covenant before communicating, and then to ratify it before men and angels. '

Willison concludes by urging colleagues to take pains to

instruct young people in the nature and articles of the covenant of grace, and to take them engaged, with some solemnity, to own and adhere to them, at their first admission

' *Ibid.* pp. 835-7.

to the Lord's Supper; and let them, with solemn and fervent prayer, recommend and give up these young communicants unto the Lord; such a course hath been found, by experience, very much to contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the church. <sup>1</sup>

Willison commended, therefore, admission which involved responses from new communicants, after which they would be commended to God. Indeed, in the *Young Communicants Catechism*, before supplying his list of questions, he writes 'a proposal for young communicants', explaining that this requires 'their express renewing the baptismal engagements before their first admission to the Lord's Table: which practice might be much more for edification: especially if duly managed and done with some solemnity before witnesses, such as ministers, elders, and other young persons'. <sup>2</sup> Public admission was 'preferable by far to a private deed'. <sup>3</sup>

The questions are in the form of catechetical questions with lengthy responses. More numerous than those in the Synod sermon, their content is similar, apart from such additional questions with a corresponding answer, as 'What do you think of the world to come?': 'Do you also resign and give up the passions and affections of your soul to the Lord?'; 'In what respect do you resign your bodily senses and members to the Lord?'; 'How do you resign your enjoyments and comforts to the Lord?' <sup>4</sup>

Both sources show that Willison saw public admission as beneficial both to first communicants, because it emphasised the solemnity of the deed, and also to those who witnessed the proceedings.

In contrast to Willison's questions, Boston's were few and brief. Recognising that some lacked the ability for extended responses, he

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 837.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *The Young Communicant's Catechism*, HTH. p. 589.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 1743 edition. Preface, pp. ix-x.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Young Communicant's Catechism*, HTH. p. 590-1.



recommended four questions to be answered by 'Yes or No',

Do you believe the doctrine of the Shorter Catechism of this church so far as you understand the same to be the true doctrine agreeable to the holy Scriptures, and resolve through grace, to live and die in the profession of the same?

Do you consent to take God in Christ to be your God, the Father to be your Father, the Son to be your Saviour, and the Holy Ghost to be your Sanctifier; and that renouncing the devil, the world and the flesh, you be the Lord's for ever?

Do you consent to receive Christ as He is offered in the gospel, for your prophet, priest and king; giving up yourself to Him, to be led and guided by His word and spirit; looking for salvation only through the obedience and death of Jesus Christ, who was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem; promising in His strength to endeavour to lead a holy life, to forsake every known sin, and to comply with every known duty?

Do you promise to subject yourself to exhortation, admonition, and rebuke, and the discipline of the church, in case (which God forbid) you fall into any scandalous sin? <sup>1</sup>

For Boston, each candidate was to 'confess, consent and promise' to the questions, before admission by 'a sentence of the Session...' <sup>2</sup>

From the sparse records of Sessions consulted, it is impossible to assess how widely the Assembly's act of 1706 was put into effect, but evidence would suggest that, as with legislation to provide more frequent communion, the response was slow.

<sup>1</sup> Boston, T. *The Memoirs of the Life, Times and Writings of Thomas Boston of Ettrick, Written By Himself with Appendices.* (Glasgow : 1899) pp. 470-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 471.

Both Willison and Boston discovered it to be of value and commended it to colleagues. Others also commended it, not simply because it had the imprimatur of the General Assembly, but because they saw that the effect was beneficial and that benefits would accrue from its wider adoption. One such was Alexander Gerard.

When a person designs first to partake in the Lord's Supper, a minister may make good impressions on the person himself and on others, by making not only in private, but in as public a manner as he finds it convenient to use, to make solemn profession of his embracing the Christian faith for himself, and to vow that he will live suitably to it, renouncing the sins which he has formerly indulged, and promising to live henceforth as becomes a Christian. This is practiced by some ministers with good success, and with a very great effect. <sup>1</sup>

#### Personal Covenanting.

One feature of Willison's programme meriting further attention, was his determination that the young should make a 'personal covenant'. Reflecting the Evangelicals' stress on personal religion, the last questions proposed, both in the *Young Communicants' Catechism* and the Synod sermon raised the issue. So, the latter asked,

Are you resolved to engage to all these articles, in a secret transaction and personal covenant with God, before you come to his table, and then to come in a solemn way to seal and ratify this bargain and covenant before men and angels at his table? <sup>2</sup>

Making a covenant usually entailed the writing of a document expressing commitment to the God of the Covenant of Grace. Often, it ended in terminology commonly used at the conclusion of a will, and the 'Covenant Engagement' could be renewed in later documents

<sup>1</sup> Gerard, A. *The Pastoral Care*, p. 381.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *The Church's Danger*, HTH. p. 837.

known as a 'Renewal of Covenant Engagements'.

The origin of the practice is unknown, but it may well have been inherited from the English Puritans. Robert Browne, (1550-1633) a leader of the Elizabethan separatists, had written in *A Booke Which Sheweth the Life and Manners of all True Christians*,

The Church planted or gathered is a companie or number of Christians or beleeuers which by a willing covenant made with their God, are under the government of God and Christ, and keepe his laws in one holie communion. <sup>1</sup>

At any rate, it was an established practice for the Puritan 'saint to begin his new life by setting down on paper an account of his spiritual rebirth'. <sup>2</sup>

Yet, whatever its true origin, the practice was also common among the Covenanters of Scotland, and G. D. Henderson certainly felt that the 'personal covenants' of Boston and Ebenezer Erskine reflected 'the heart and attitude' of the 'hillmen' whose 'spirit did not die out in Scotland with the Revolution Settlement'. <sup>3</sup>

Many sources reveal that the entering of such a contract, in Scotland, was closely associated with communion seasons. So, Willison's Divinity Professor, who shared in conventicles with some of the noted Covenanters, would appear not only to have made his 'personal covenant', in 1660, about the time of his first communion, but to have suscribed it five times that year at different sacramental occasions. <sup>4</sup> Long after Wodrow's day,

<sup>1</sup> Peel, A, and Carlson, L. (Editors). *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne* (London : 1953) p. 253.

<sup>2</sup> Haller, W. *The Rise of Puritanism* (Columbia : 1937) p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Henderson, G. D. *Religious Life in Seventeenth Century Scotland* (Cambridge : 1937) p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> Wodrow, R. *Life of Wodrow*, pp. 24-5.

diaries and pamphlets show that the writing of such documents remained common among the devout, particularly at the time of the sacrament, and many examples of them still exist.

Wodrow's, in contrast to those of half a century or so later, is brief. Probably written in 1660, when he was 23 years of age, it is translated from Latin by his son.

Thus it is spoken, not to be retracted. I accept, I add my consent to all the commands and promises of God; and to the whole purpose of God manifested in relation to the salvation of men, whether known or unknown, pleasant or painful, whatever the Lord willeth to be done, entirely, uniformly, (i.e. neither exceeding nor falling short of, but in perfect and equal proportion to the will of God, discovered or to be discovered), and without reservation. Amen, O Lord.

A postscript relates that it was 'suscribed' five times, adding

For so often hath it been mutually renewed, with the delivery and reception of the symbol, beside the baptismal covenant; the part of God in the mean time stands full and immutable in his own word. '

Covenants of later Evangelicals tended to be more protracted, referring to sins of the past, promises of the present and aspirations for the future. Much use was made of scripture, and vows were made in an effusion of pious language.

John Mill, for example, wrote a *Renewal of His Covenant Engagement* in 1770. A wordy document, it acknowledges that he was 'called, and that early, about 15 or 16 years old, from a state of vile nature, enmity and rebellion into a state of Grace, favour and friendship with God'. He gives thanks that though his pious father

' *Idem.*

died while he himself was an infant, God had stirred up friends to care for his education, and that God had put him into the ministry. Confessing to many breaches of his covenant, he appeals to the 'Searcher of all hearts, who knoweth all things, that I love him above all, and that t'is the sincere desire of my heart to be found faithful to Christ, to my soul, and to those committed to my care'. Mill concluded in legal terms, 'And in testimony hereof, have suscribed these presents at Manse of Dunrossness, this 3rd. day of February, 1770 years'. <sup>1</sup>

Often strange witnesses were named in the documents, John Stevenson invoking 'heaven, earth and sun in the firmament', <sup>2</sup> Boston, his bed posts, <sup>3</sup> and Mary Sommervell, 'heaven and earth, the liches and timber of her house'. <sup>4</sup> A Katharine Brown, perhaps the only writer in a family, concluded hers, 'likewise in behalf of my yockfalu (yokefellow) and four children', <sup>5</sup> while George Brown, the Glasgow merchant, found a unique way of signing his, for, regarding the drafting of it as a 'Bethel' experience, he closed, 'In testimony of my sincerity in these engagements, I have, and now do suscribe my name to the Lord, and surname myself by the name of "Jacob"'. <sup>6</sup>

A curious book on the subject was written, in 1707, by a Glasgow minister. Originally communion sermons, it explained that the practice involved 'deliberately accepting God, by faith, as offered in the Covenant of Grace... an entire, solemn devoting of himself

<sup>1</sup> *Mill's Diary*. pp. 33-4.

<sup>2</sup> *A soul strengthening and comforting cordial for old and young Christians, By John Stevenson, Labourer in the Parish of Daily, in Carrick, who died in the year 1728* (Paisley: 1786) p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Burnet, G. W. *Holy Communion*, p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> Sommervell, M. *A Clear and Remarkable Display*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> The Personal Covenant of Katherine Brown, Edinburgh University Manuscripts. Box 2.3.11. New College Library.

<sup>6</sup> *The Diary of George Brown*, pp. 253-6.

to the Lord, to be for His service all the days of his life'.<sup>1</sup>

The author listed occasions on which covenants should be renewed, citing sacraments especially, for 'the time when we remember his covenant, is specially the time to renew our personal covenant'.

Evangelical ministers took pains to ensure that their people made such a contract. Mill preached table addresses on the subject.<sup>2</sup>

Willison, like James Clerk of Glasgow, supplied a model. Written as a lengthy prayer, it has seven main ingredients, the first of which is a confession of the communicant's lost state,

Eternal and Almighty God, behold me a poor creature; lost and undone by Adam's folly and deeply sunk into the gulf of sin and misery..... I see the sword drawn, the law thundering curses against me, the clouds hanging black above my head. My soul is within a step of death and hell. There, a hell is gaping for me from beneath, and my sins are like millstones around my neck weighing me down into it....

Thanks is then expressed to God for his redeeming love,

But glory to God for his redeeming love, for though I have destroyed myself, yet a way is found out for satisfying, and saving sinners by the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ.

This is followed by his response to the Gospel offer, and desire to embrace Christ as Mediator and to accept him in all his offices,

<sup>1</sup> Clerk, J. *The Communicant's Best Token, or, A Practical Treatise of Personal Covenanting With God, Wherein the Nature, Necessity, Usefulness and Practice of this Spiritual Duty is Explained and Pressed* (Glasgow : 1707) p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> MacLeod, I. (Ed.) *Mill's Sacramental Work*, pp. 6-9.

I humbly desire to fall in with this project of sovereign offered grace, and venture my perishing soul upon the blood of that Glorious Redeemer. I am well pleased with the Mediator and his righteousness, and acquiesce heartily in the wise and noble method of salvation through him..... I do here make choice of God in Christ as my God and Portion for time and eternity.....

Next comes the acknowledgement of his rule,

I likewise honour Jesus Christ as my King and Ruler, and make choice of his government and laws, and favour allegiance to him .... I renounce all other Lords and lovers and will have none but Christ.....

A pledge is then made to resign the self to Christ,

I give my hearty consent this day to thy entering in and taking possession of the throne of my soul and bursting open all the doors of my soul, that the King of glory may enter them...

This is followed by a commitment to walk in the way of God, depending on his strength,

O Lord, I do here avouch thee this day to be my God, to walk in thy ways and statutes..... O Lord, I depend entirely on thee for the daily assistance of thy Spirit in order to my resisting temptations, bearing afflictions, conquering lusts...

Lastly, having invoked heaven and earth as witnesses, Willison prays that his covenant will be ratified in heaven, that it may be

a sure and everlasting covenant which thou hast made with me as well as I with thee. And let this covenant be a never failing spring of comfort to me through all the steps of my life... ' 1

' Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 543-5.

A copy of Willison's specimen covenant, along with those of Richard Allaine, William Guthrie, Alexander Shields, Thomas Boston and others, is preserved in a manuscript held in Edinburgh. <sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, as Burnet remarked, covenants were 'quaint wills and testaments', but they are evidence that the Evangelicals, far from content to leave communicants with abstract doctrine, were determined to lead them to commitment, an aim which some later Evangelicals regarded as their goal for first communicants. <sup>2</sup>

Such at least was the concern of Willison, and, apart from the model provided, more is said in the *Sacramental Directory*, where the duty of renewing a covenant is urged upon all communicants,

If ye would be found within the covenant, you must by faith take hold of the covenant, and heartily go on with the gracious terms and contrivance of it.. and this is what we commonly call personal covenanting ... And the more express and distinct we are in this matter, we will have the more comfort. <sup>3</sup>

Willison believed that the written document was the means of being 'express' and 'distinct' for, not only did he supply his model, but, like James Clerk of Glasgow, regarded the practice as the 'communicant's best token', advising readers that they will deceive their souls if they take 'the great seal of heaven and append to it a blank or a clean sheet of paper'. <sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the duty is especially urged on the young, who are advised that it is not enough to be 'Christians by their parents'

<sup>1</sup> Autobiographical Notes of Colin Alison (1684-1723) with 10 Forms of Personal Covenanting by Different Divines, one dated 16 July 1726. MS. LA 111. 542. Edinburgh University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Thomson, D. P. *First Communion* (Perth : 1969) pp. 41-2.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 187.



dedication'. Those who enter the state of adult church membership, must choose for themselves, by personally and explicitly renewing their baptismal covenant and ratifying their parent's deed. To that end, the young should.... 'enter a covenant with God', so that the communion day 'may be a day of espousal to the Lord Jesus, and the marriage knot may be cast sure at the table'.<sup>1</sup>

Confirmation or Renewing Baptismal Engagements.

Yet, while Willison believed in admitting first communicants by taking vows in public, he opposed confirmation. The issue arose in the 22nd. question of his *Queries to the Scots Innovators*,

What warrant is there for confirmation, after the Method of the Service Book? And why is the Apostles' practice alleged for the Bishop's imposing of hands in confirming of children? And is it sufficient to qualify any person or child for confirmation, to repeat the short Catechism, when a child of five or six years old may do this? And ought their doing this be reckoned a sure mark of their being in a regenerate and pardoned state? And they thereupon declared to be in such a happy condition, (as is done in the office of confirmation) when it is nottour that many children and others who can repeat the Catechism shew no liking to Godliness, but instead thereof discover most vitious inclinations and break out into gross sins which are small evidence of their Regeneration and forgivenness. Moreover, is it not strange that there should a higher value be put upon confirmation, (one of the Papists' bastard sacraments) than upon the Sacraments of our Lord's institution, seeing Deacons, Curates and unpreaching ministers are allowed to dispense these, but the Bishop alienarly can dispense this.....<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Queries*, p. 21.

Willison's objection was, therefore, that this rite lacked biblical and apostolic warrant, that it was given to children who had only learned the basics of the faith by rote, and who showed no visible signs of 'regeneration', and that it held greater status than baptism and the Lord's Supper, since these could be performed by any ordinand, while confirmation was the prerogative of bishops.

Calvin had made the same objection. While he did write that in presenting the young, he 'warmly approved such laying on of hands, which is simply done as a form of blessing' and could 'wish that it were today restored to pure use', <sup>1</sup> he regarded confirmation, nevertheless, as a spurious sacrament, <sup>2</sup> objecting to its elevated status in the Roman Church, and the reservation of its practice to bishops. <sup>3</sup>

Nor was the description of confirmation as a 'bastard sacrament' new. That appellation appears in an Assembly Act of 1638. <sup>4</sup>

Yet while Willison rejected confirmation, his objection was to the rite of the Episcopalian Service Book. His own admission service, however, actually sought a confirmation of baptismal vows, which he chose to call 'the renewal of baptismal engagements'.

Questions in his 'Proposal to Communicants', which were to be asked 'before ministers, elders and other young persons', illustrate the point. The first asked, 'What moves you to seek access to the Lord's Table?' The suggested answer was,

The Lord's command, and because I desire to renew my baptismal engagements, and declare myself a Christian by my own free choice and consent.....

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV XIX IV.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* IV XIX V.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* IV XIX X.

<sup>4</sup> Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) *A.G.A.* p. 20.

The second question asked, 'Why do you desire to do so?' The proposed answer reads,

Because when I got the first seal of the covenant, viz., baptism, I knew not what was done for me, nor was I capable to consent to my parent's deed; but now, when I am come to some knowlege and capacity, I am willing to declare that I make religion my free choice and reasonable service. <sup>1</sup>

The tenth question asked, was 'What is that baptismal vow or covenant which you desire to renew?'. And the suggested answer,

According to my engagement and dedication in baptism, I desire expressly to own and acknowledge the only living and true God as my God in Christ, as he offers himself in the covenant of grace.....And design....to declare my acceptance of God the Father as my Father, of God the Son as my Redeemer, and of God the Holy Ghost as my sanctifier; in whose blessed name I was baptised, and to whose service and glory I was dedicated. <sup>2</sup>

Such questions and answers demonstrate that, for Willison, the 'Renewal of Baptismal engagements', is synonymous with the expression, 'confirmation of baptismal vows', where that phrase implies confirmation by the communicant of vows taken on his behalf at baptism, and where, on receiving such promises, the Church not by a sacramental but by a judicial act, exercises its authority to admit to the Lord's Table.

Yet the Church remained suspicious of confirmation, and uneasy about any ritual with that name. A century later, a publication by an American Presbyterian and a Church of Scotland minister stated that the Church 'rejected' confirmation for four reasons: first

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *The Young Communicant's Catechism*. HTH. p. 589.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 590.

that it lacks scriptural warrant; second, that antiquity provides little warrant for such ritual performed exclusively by bishops; third, that while 'not altogether destitute of Divine warrant', confirmation is 'superfluous', for while it is arguable that there should be some 'solemnity' by which those baptised in childhood recognise their religious obligations, such already exists in the Lord's Supper; fourth, that the language used in confirmation services is objectionable, if, as in the liturgy of the Episcopal Church in the United States, the Bishop pronounces candidates 'regenerate, not only by water, but also of the Holy Ghost'. Such language, the authors argued, 'perverted the doctrine of regeneration by the Holy Spirit', so that the church would be 'criminal' in adopting such a rite. <sup>1</sup>

Sadly, that article also suggests that any distinctive procedure for admission is unnecessary. Indeed, such opinion shows that, despite the Act of 1706 and the efforts of ministers like Willison and Boston, Erskine's biographer was correct when he asserted that the old practice of simply admitting communicants privately, after the 'examination', was long to continue. Further, that some offered a rationale in defence of that position.

Willison would doubtless have endorsed the argument of G. W. Sprott, in favour of the early admission service produced by the Church Service Society. <sup>2</sup> That such has a 'solemnizing effect on catechumens', was an argument that he himself had advanced, and Sprott's statement that it provides those who are younger with a sense of anticipation 'of something awaiting them in due time', <sup>3</sup> was also in Willison's mind when he proposed that communicants be admitted in the presence of other young people. However, whether,

<sup>1</sup> Miller, S, and Lorimer, J. *Manual of Presbytery* (Edinburgh : 1842) pp. 141-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Euchologion*, 2nd. Edition. 'Admission of Young Persons to the Lord's Supper' (Edinburgh : 1869) pp. 204-14.

<sup>3</sup> Sprott, G. W. *Worship and Offices*, p. 96.

in view of his antipathy to Episcopalian practice, he would have accepted the admission service of later editions of *Euchologion*,<sup>1</sup> or, more especially, that in the *Book of Common Order* of 1940, and later editions,<sup>2</sup> is more doubtful. He would certainly have rejected the Anglican view of confirmation, accepted by H. J. Wotherspoon, D. B. Nicol and other high churchmen, as endowing the believer with the gifts of the Spirit for living the Christian life.<sup>3</sup>

What is clear, is that Willison was zealous in preparing all communicants, and particularly the young. Equally, that he believed that such should be admitted, after vows taken publicly to renew their 'Baptismal Engagements', though he rejected any confirmation rite as practiced by Episcopalians.

<sup>1</sup> *Euchologion*, 11th. Edition. 'The Order for the Admission of Catechumens to the Confirmation of the Baptismal Vow and to the Participation of the Lord's Supper' (Edinburgh : 1924) pp. 313f.

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Common Order* (Edinburgh : 1940) pp. 101-4.

<sup>3</sup> Wotherspoon, H. J. *Religious Values in the Sacraments* (Edinburgh : 1928) p. 186.

Wotherspoon, H. J. and Kirkpatrick, J. M. *A Manual of Church Doctrine* (London : undated) pp. 64-6.

Nicol, D. B. 'Confirmation', *Church Service Society Annual*, 1929-30. p. 42.

## CHAPTER SIX.

### The Frequency and Mode of Sacramental Celebrations.

One of Willison's recurring themes was the need for more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. The problem, however, was no novelty. It had been a matter for debate and legislation long before his day, and has proved a controversial area since.

### Attitudes of Reformers and Reformation Documents.

The Reformers, themselves, the Zurich school aside, had desired a frequent celebration. Scorning both pre Reformation practice, in which regular communion, although available, was not generally taken by the people who, nevertheless, were expected to attend and to observe the rite on Sundays and Holy Days, <sup>1</sup> and the sanctioning of infrequency by enactments which merely required the laity to communicate once a year at Easter, <sup>2</sup> Calvin protested to the Council of Ministers at Geneva, in 1537, "It was not instituted by Jesus for making a commemoration two or three times a year". <sup>3</sup> Indeed, holding annual participation to be 'an invention of the devil', <sup>4</sup> he recalled the frustration of John Chrysostom over those who communicated 'only once at Easter, though unclean'. <sup>5</sup>

Envisaging, at Geneva, a return to the weekly communion of the

<sup>1</sup> Dugmore, G. W. *The Mass and the English Reformers* (London : 1958) p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Sykes, N. *Crisis of the Reformation* (London : 1938) p. 24, and Patrick, D. (Ed.) *Statutes of the Scottish Church* (Edinburgh : 1907) p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, J. 'Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva', in Reid, J. (Ed.) *Theological Treatises* (London : 1954) p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV, XVII, 46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

primitive church, he wrote, 'It would be well to require that the Communion of the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ be held every Sunday at least as a rule'.<sup>1</sup> Or, again, 'The table of the Lord ought to be spread in the sacred assembly at least once a week'.<sup>2</sup> When it became clear, however, that the magistrates would permit, at best, monthly celebration, he planned a system whereby, 'once a month it take place at St. Pierre, once at Riue, and once at St. Gervais'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, with a celebration in each parish of the Genevan church once a month,<sup>4</sup> and the service held at such a time that people from the others could attend, he was virtually providing weekly celebration. The magistrates rejected the plan, however, and this was one of the issues over which Calvin left Geneva in 1538. Returning in 1541, indeed, he had to compromise further, for the Council insisted on compliance with practice in the powerful cantons of Zurich and Berne<sup>5</sup> which held to the Zwinglian custom of quarterly communion.

In Scotland, while the *Scots Confession* of 1560 made no comment on frequency, quarterly communion was deemed sufficient in the *First Book of Discipline*, which also commended as 'distinct times' for celebration, the first Sundays of March, June, September and December. Chosen to avoid the superstition of former times, and the urgency to celebrate at 'Pasche' while neglecting the sacrament for the rest of the year, parishes, were to be free, nevertheless, to change the occasions and to celebrate more frequently.<sup>6</sup> Knox's

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, J. in Reid, J. (Ed.) *Theological Treatises*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J. 'The clear explanation of sound doctrine concerning the true partaking of the flesh and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper', in Reid, J. (Ed.) *Theological Treatises*, p. 310.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, J. in Reid, J. (Ed.) *Theological Treatises*, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> McNeill, J. T. *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford : 1967) p. 164.

<sup>5</sup> Hageman, H. *Pulpit and Table* (London : 1962) p. 31.

Walker, W. *A History of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh.: 1963) pp. 345, 348, 353, 356.

<sup>6</sup> Cameron, J. (Ed.) *F.B.D.* pp. 183-4.

*Book of Common Order* proposed a monthly celebration. <sup>1</sup> Yet an Assembly act of 1562, making a slight but not insignificant change to the proposal of the *First Book of Discipline*, had laid down that the Communion should be 'ministrat four tymes in the yeere within the burrowes and twyse in the yeere toward landwart'. <sup>2</sup>

Attitude of the Westminster Assembly.

At the Westminster Assembly of 1645, the main dispute on the Lord's Supper arose not over frequency, but mode. The only comment on frequency, made in the *Directory*, states vaguely that the Supper 'is frequently to be celebrated', the issue of regularity being left to those in authority within 'each congregation'. <sup>3</sup>

Yet, the sacrament was never celebrated in Scotland with the frequency which the Reformers envisaged. Indeed, for the first century, parishes did well to celebrate annually. Not untypical was the situation at Lochbroom, which, in the seventeenth century, had no celebration for seven years, or Foddarty for twelve or Glenurquhart for twenty four, or the situation facing the Synod of Moray, which, in 1679, ordered Inverness Presbytery to celebrate that year, and noted that, by October, not one parish had complied. Even when the order was repeated, in 1681, only Inverness, Daviot and Wardlaw had celebrated, while, of the others it was said that their performance, 'is much to be regrated'. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Spratt, G. W. (Ed.) *B.C.O.* p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Peterkin, A. (Ed.) *B.U.K.* p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Leishman, T. (Ed.) *The Westminster Directory*, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> MacKay, W. (Ed.) *Inverness and Dingwall Presbytery Records* (Edinburgh : 1896) pp. xxi-xxii. Other examples are found in Burnet, G. W. *The Holy Communion*, pp. 121-5 and pp. 210-13, McMillan, W. *Worship*, pp. 194-5, and Muirhead, I, 'Admission to the Lord's Supper', in Hamilton, D. G. and Macdonald, F. A. J. (Eds.) *Children at the Table* (Edinburgh : 1982) p. 16 and 21.



Several factors contributed to infrequency. Initially, after the Reformation, there was a shortage of ministers. Kirk says that in 1561, the number probably exceeded 240 men for about quarter of the parishes. <sup>1</sup> Sprott, for 1567, quoted 289 ministers and 715 readers, <sup>2</sup> the latter of whom could not celebrate, and Burleigh relates that by 1581, in view of the shortage, parishes were reduced, by unions, from 924 to around 600. <sup>3</sup> Consequently, at the outset, even a quarterly celebration was impossible. Or, again, the old practice of annual communicating was ingrained, so that, even when ministers were available, infrequency had become the accepted norm. Faction, on occasion, also contributed, so that the Protestors' and Resolutioners' dispute in the seventeenth century, and that of Juror and Non Juror in the early eighteenth, when opposing parties refused to celebrate together, were reflected in infrequent celebrations, whole cities and towns being deprived.

Occasionally, however, the causes were more practical. Some churches had no utensils. During the Interregnum, the communion ware of some parishes was misappropriated by Cromwell's men, while, after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, ministers often found that utensils were jealously retained by ousted Episcopalians or by heritors, determined that they would not fall into the hands of the opposition. Such, indeed was the experience of John Willison himself. <sup>4</sup> Or again, sometimes ministers withheld celebration, believing members to be unworthy. <sup>5</sup> Even the 'great occasions' of the eighteenth century, far from providing a solution, tended to exacerbate the problem, the cost of celebration and the hospitality expected of parishioners towards visitors, being prohibitive for small parishes. <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kirk, J. *Patterns of Reform* (Edinburgh : 1989) p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Sprott, G. W. (Ed.) *B.C.O.* p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. *A Church History*, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Mill, J. *Sacramental Work*, D8/78 The Archives, Lerwick, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *A History of Worship* (London : 1954) p. 141.

Acts of The General Assembly Anent Frequency. <sup>1</sup>

Several Assembly Acts aimed to correct the matter. An Act of 1638, for example, recognising that ministers only received allowance for annual celebration, declared that costs 'be rather payed out of the dayes collection', than that congregations lack frequency. <sup>2</sup> An Act of 1701 urged Presbyteries to ensure more frequent celebration, and to limit the ministers assisting, 'so that neighbouring churches be not thereby cast desolate on the Lord's Day'. <sup>3</sup> An Act of 1711, recognising that the sacrament was only celebrated in summer, so that 'people are deprived... the rest of the year', required courts to ensure celebration 'through the several months of the year'. <sup>4</sup> The 1712 Assembly went further, enjoining 'Presbyteries to ensure that ministers conform', by calling any who neglected to celebrate in a year to account for 'his omission'. <sup>5</sup> In 1724, the Act of 1711 was reaffirmed, the Assembly again instructing Presbyteries to ensure that no church was left without sermon, while its minister assisted elsewhere. <sup>6</sup> Stricter measures were enacted in 1751, when the Act of 1712 was renewed, requiring 'every Presbytery... before the winter Synod', to enquire of ministers whether they had celebrated at least once in the year, to note excuses in the minutes and to report to Synod on what action it had taken. <sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fuller treatment of these, and of the summary above on attitudes to frequency is found in MacLeod, I. 'The Sacramental Work of John Mill'. M.TH. Thesis. pp. 21-27.

<sup>2</sup> Pitcairn, T. *A.G.A.* p. 25. The cost of elements was no trifle. A Stirling communion in 1728 required 41 pints of wine at 20 shillings scots per pint, and 19 loaves at 12 shillings. Muirhead, A. T .N. 'Eighteenth Century Occasions'. *Forth Naturalist and Historian*, Volume 15, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Pitcairn, T. *A.G.A.* p. 311.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 451.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 471-2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 568.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 705.

The Situation in Willison's Day.

These Acts, together with contemporary accounts and Willison's own comments, reveal that, while annual celebration had more or less become the norm in the eighteenth century, there were still parishes which failed to meet even that minimum requirement.

George Turnbull's diary reveals that in almost ten years at Alloa, he only celebrated the Lord's Supper on three occasions, <sup>1</sup> while in his next charge at Tynninghame he conducted an annual communion from 1701 until his record ends in 1704. <sup>2</sup> John Mill of Shetland resolved, at the start of his ministry, to celebrate 'as oft as possible'. <sup>3</sup> Yet he held no communion service for the first six years, pleading the shortage of utensils and the unfitness of the people. <sup>4</sup> Indeed, in his long ministry between 1740 and 1803, he only celebrated communion on Fair Isle on a handful of occasions. His churches on the Shetland mainland, however, fared somewhat better, with an annual celebration in August, but there were times when, much to the displeasure of his parishioners, he cancelled the celebration for the want of assistance on the day. <sup>5</sup> Thomas Boston indicates that the sacrament was celebrated annually in Ettrick parish. Yet, even for that celebrated Evangelical, things did not always run to course, for he omitted a celebration in 1717, and in 1726, recorded that the 'administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was interrupted, 'thro' a disorder in the eldership, and my wife's heavy case meeting together'. <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paul, R. (Ed.) *The Diary of the Rev. George Turnbull, Minister of Alloa and Tynninghame, 1657-1704* (Edinburgh : 1893) pp. 354, 364, 373.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 403, 422, 434.

<sup>3</sup> *Mill's Diary*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Mill, J. *Sacramental Work*. D8/78, The Archives, Lerwick, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Mill's Diary*, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Low, G. (Ed.) *A General Account*, pp. 229 and 275.

Yet, while most churches, allowing for a few rare exceptions which celebrated oftener, ' provided only annual communion, communicants often partook more frequently by attending celebrations elsewhere.

Between 27th. October 1745 and 28th. October 1746, George Brown, the Glasgow merchant had attended, as a communicant, no less than six sacramental occasions, three of which were in his own church of Ramshorn, Glasgow, which by then celebrated the sacrament twice a year. The others he attended were in Kirkintilloch, Kilsyth and Paisley. <sup>2</sup> A record of his father's attendances shows that in 1703, he communicated on no less than three occasions, in April, August and November, by attending celebrations in neighbouring parishes. <sup>3</sup> The Diary of R. B. records her attendances, in 1737, at eight sacramental occasions in churches in and around Edinburgh, <sup>4</sup> and at nine in the following year, while Mary Sommervell's published 'Experiences' relate a similar interest in Ayrshire. <sup>5</sup>

John Willison's Celebrations at Brechin and Dundee.

Before examining Willison's case for more frequent celebration, consideration should be given to his own practice.

Taken at face value, the record of only six celebrations at Brechin in thirteen years represents a fairly meagre performance. Yet, given the opposition, harrassment and competition he experienced, they are valuable evidence of his thinking on the matter.

<sup>1</sup> Kilmarnock celebrated twice a year from 1706-7. Kilmarnock Session Minutes (1689-1711). CH2/1252/2, p. 346. SR0.

<sup>2</sup> *Brown's Diary*, pp. 1-246.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Appendix.

<sup>4</sup> R. B's Diary, pp. 11, 14, 26, 35, 65, 70, 78, 105.

<sup>5</sup> Sommervell, M. *Christian Experiences*. Examples are found on pp. 8, 9, 27 and 29.

Unable to celebrate in the early years, for the most compelling reasons, <sup>1</sup> it was much to his credit that he held his first celebration in 1707. <sup>2</sup> The occasion was marred, however, by Skinner's decision to hold a rival celebration. The affair began on the Sunday after Willison had announced his intention. That afternoon, Skinner announced that he too would shortly celebrate, despite the fact that Brechin, under Episcopacy, had had no communion for fifteen years. The rival service was held in March 1708, <sup>3</sup> and the Session Accounts Register gives an indication of the support which Skinner still commanded, for the offering taken at his sacrament over a Preparation Day, the Sacramental Day and the Thanksgiving Day, was £37-2-6d, comparing very favourably to the £41-12-6d, taken at Willison's communion. <sup>4</sup>

There can be no doubt that Skinner's obstructive reaction to all Willison's efforts, the support which he still enjoyed, and the possibility of a rival communion whenever the parish minister chose to celebrate, were the principal reasons for infrequency during the first eight years of Willison's ministry. Indeed, it is notable that, after the Presbytery took court action against Skinner, and the Lords of Justiciary had ordered him, in 1710, "to remove out of the bounds.....", <sup>5</sup> Willison settled to a regular annual celebration, from the following year. <sup>6</sup>

His first communion, therefore, held in such adverse circumstances, and his regular celebration when the troubles were over, do show a determination in the matter. Indeed, that he believed in frequent

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 22, and 27.

<sup>2</sup> Brechin Kirk Session Minutes, p. 48, Brechin Session Accounts Register, p. 45. The Cathedral, Brechin.

<sup>3</sup> Brechin Session Accounts Register, p. 48. (No record of this communion appears in the Kirk Session Minute Book).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. pp. 45 and 48.

<sup>5</sup> Thoms, D. B. *The Kirk of Brechin*, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 27.

celebration is clear from both his *Treatise on the Lord's Day*,<sup>1</sup> published in the Brechin ministry, and from the first edition of the *Sacramental Directory*,<sup>2</sup> obviously also written at Brechin.

The minutes of the Dundee Session show a more resolute pattern from the start. Willison was inducted there on 10th. September, 1716,<sup>3</sup> and, within a year, had celebrated his first communion.<sup>4</sup>

Thereafter, celebration is annual until 1732. Then, the Session agreed to a new mode of communicating 'for the dispatching of the work of the Lord's Day in shorter time'.<sup>5</sup> This was the prelude to change, for, from February of 1733 until his death, Willison celebrated twice in the year, usually in spring and autumn. The one exception was in 1745, when, during the Rebellion, he was threatened by one of the Highland Captains that 'he could not pray for our Sovereign King George, but if he would pray for all Christian Kings, he might preach'. That year saw no celebration, and Willison, concerned for the poor, for whom provision was made through communion offerings, instructed the elders to collect from home to home in their quarters, for their relief.<sup>6</sup>

Willison's own practice, then, was consonant with his opinion that the sacrament should be frequently celebrated. Prevented from celebrating more frequently in Brechin, his published works written there, nevertheless, expressed convictions on the subject, while, in Dundee, freed from a situation where he constantly had to justify his position, he was able to translate them into action.

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 219-20.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 27 fn. 1. The 1716 edition merely mentions the necessity of frequency on Preface p. iii. This is amplified and developed with arguments in the second edition of 1726.

<sup>3</sup> Dundee Kirk Session Minute Book (1716-1756) CH2/1218/2, The Archives, Dundee, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 302.

<sup>6</sup> Dundee Kirk Session Minute Book, 21st. Dec. 1745. CH2/1218/2.

Willison's Demands for More Frequent Celebration.

Nowhere does Willison recommend an optimum number of celebrations within parishes. Often the reader has grounds for thinking that he would have welcomed weekly celebration, for he stresses, in arguing for frequency, the practice of the primitive church, the Fathers, and Calvin who had cherished that desire. Speaking, for example, of the weekly celebration of the early church, and Augustine's reference to Sunday as 'the day of bread', Willison adds,

and though these first Christians were animated with more life and love, and were habitually in a better frame for partaking of this love feast, than, alas, we now are, yet we must own that we are under the same obligation of love and gratitude to our dying Redeemer, and have the same need of the frequent application of his blood, and of a confirmed interest in his death, that they had. And consequently ought to dedicate many more Lord's days to the celebration of the memorial feast of his Supper, than now we do. <sup>1</sup>

At other times, he seems content to plead for an early restoration of the quarterly celebration first approved in the *First Book of Discipline*. In the *Sacramental Directory*, for example, he opens with a criticism of ministers who fail to provide opportunity for a regular celebration, realising that it is useless to exhort Christians to 'frequent receiving, unless ministers also frequently administrate the ordinance'. <sup>2</sup> Repeating his argument from the practice of the primitive church and the Fathers, he reminds his readers that in the early centuries, the sacrament was even celebrated daily. Noting also the practices of the Reformed churches in Geneva, Holland and New England, he then refers to Knox's aim for a monthly celebration in Scotland, reduced, in the *First Book of Discipline*, to a quarterly one. While he can accept

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Treatise*, HTH. p. 47, and *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. pp. 127.

that there were weighty reasons for this change, he objects to the Assembly Act of 1562, which reduced 'landward' celebrations from four in the year to two, whereas the *First Book of Discipline* had made no such distinction. <sup>1</sup> His direct plea, therefore, is that,

by degrees we might again attain our reformers' frequency of celebrating this Christ exalting and love inflaming ordinance, and so change our annual to quarterly communions. <sup>2</sup>

What is clear is that Willison believed annual celebration inimical to the Gospel and injurious to Christian life, a 'lamentable deviating from the sentiments and practice of our great and zealous reformers', <sup>3</sup> and a mark of 'sad decay of love to a crucified Jesus'. <sup>4</sup> He takes to task those who only communicate once a year, or every two years - only as often as their parish church may provide opportunity. This 'is an evil that many in this church are chargeable with, and for which the Lord may plead a controversy with us'. <sup>5</sup> Such wilful neglect had to end.

It is to be hoped that the Church of Scotland... which so much abhors Popery and all Papish customs, will at length throw out this of annual communicating, as well as they have done of others. <sup>6</sup>

Failure to deal with it could not be delayed. Infrequency is a 'reproach to us among foreign churches, as well as a real loss to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 128-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Also see below, p. 229, fn. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 444. ◆

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 130.



the souls committed to our charge',<sup>1</sup> and Willison begs his fellow ministers to 'retrieve the honour of this national church, and wipe off her reproach by administering the Lord's Supper oftener than once in the year'.<sup>2</sup> Perpetuation of the error is more than an affront. 'Our unfrequency and sloth in celebrating...', he lists as one of the Churches' sins to be confessed and mourned over.<sup>3</sup>

For that reason, and to the end of promoting greater frequency, Willison welcomed any advance in the increase of sacramental occasions. So, he warmly commended ministers who increased their celebrations to two a year.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, writing to John McCulloch of Cambuslang a year after the Revival in that parish, he remarked,

Your good news ....gives me much pleasure; as doth your account of the Lord's countenancing your second sacrament. Mr Robe also writes me a most refreshing account of his second communion. I rejoice that both you and he are heartened and strengthened to celebrate that blessed ordinance twice a year. I hope God will help you to persevere in that course.<sup>5</sup>

As a realist, Willison saw infrequency as a continuing problem which had beset the Reformed Church from the beginning, and he recognised that change would be slow, and, 'by degrees'. Quarterly observance, therefore, was a realistic target at which to aim, and he welcomed whatever moves any parish made towards realising it.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *The Churches' Danger*. HTH. p. 837. Willison cites greater frequency in America and in the French and Dutch Reformed Churches in *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 128. These claims are partially corroborated by John Erskine's enquiry, documented in Moncrieff Wellwood, H. *Life and Writings of Erskine*, p. 153-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 838.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 843.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 445.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Letter to Mr. McCulloch of Cambuslang*. 22nd. Sept. 1743. HTH. p. xviii.

Willison's Arguments for a More Frequent Celebration.

Willison presents his main arguments for more frequent celebration in the *Sacramental Directory*, sometimes employing the catechetical method. Anticipating specific objections, or, perhaps dealing with objections he had encountered, he states and answers each.

The first, is that the Lord's Supper stands in the place of the Old Testament Passover, which was only celebrated annually. His answer is threefold. First, that while the Passover prefigured Christ's death and suffering to the Jews, it was instituted to commemorate their liberation from Egyptian bondage and therefore was celebrated only on the anniversary of the event. Jesus, however, fixed no appointed time for celebrating the Lord's Supper, but he did request frequent remembrance. Second, that if the Pasover was designed to remind people of the coming, suffering and death of the Messiah, they did not need a regular celebration of it. Cultic practices, and, more particularly, the sacrificial system of the temple reminded them daily of sacrifice for sin. For the Christian, in contrast, no other institution is a reminder of these things. Therefore, the sacrament must frequently be held. Thirdly, even if the Jew possessed no other ordinance to remind him of a suffering Messiah to come, for Christians that event has come. Enjoying, therefore, greater evidence of God's love than the Jews did under the law, Christians are under greater obligation to observe frequently the rite which betokens these things. '

' Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 130. Willison was following, here, the argument of the English Puritan Divine, Richard Charnock, who had written in his 'Discourse Of the End of the Lord's Supper', 'The Passover indeed was annual. God fixed it to that time; but they had their daily sacrifices in the temple which were types of Christ. We have none but this settled by Christ as an ordinance of commemoration of what hath been exhibited'. Nichol, J. (Ed.) *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, Vol. 4 (Edinburgh : 1844) p. 403.

The second objection he posits, and one still commonly heard, is that frequent celebration will diminish respect for the sacrament. Willison answers this at length. First, that if celebration is performed by conscience, Christ can be trusted to protect his ordinance. Second, that it was not the experience of the apostles that frequency demeaned the sacrament. Third, that the objection is invalid, in any case. If it were valid, then the same argument would apply to other means of grace - prayer, preaching and the use of scripture, so that the church should be equally anxious to protect their esteem by preventing their overuse. Fourth, that many Christians communicate regularly by attending sacramental celebrations outwith their parishes, yet, far from finding the experience to engender contempt for the sacrament, they reap, to the contrary, spiritual advantage. Fifth, the notion that infrequency promotes reverence for the sacrament is false, for the value of a thing depends not on its rarity, but on a knowledge of its intrinsic worth and utility. Those unacquainted with Christ will never have a due respect for sacraments, whereas those who are so acquainted will value them the more.

I cannot think this blessed sacrament will be undervalued by frequent repetitions, but by persons most unworthy who ought not much to be regarded... no true hearted Israelite would loathe his heavenly manna because it is common and afforded in plenty. <sup>1</sup>

Finally, Willison contends, in harmony 'with the judgement of the famous Mr. Calvin and others', that infrequency, far from preserving the sanctity of the Supper, 'is a device of Satan', encouraging sloth and stifling true Christian love. <sup>2</sup>

A third objection, is that baptism has suffered from constant repetition, and that the Lord's Supper regularly celebrated would suffer the same fate. Willison's response is that if frequency

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

breeds contempt, then the logical answer is to celebrate baptism only once a year to preserve its solemnity. Since both are seals of the same covenant, it cannot be justifiable to treat them disparately. Secondly, while baptism is regularly administered, the Lord, in fact, so preserves its reputation that no party is easily excluded from it. There is, indeed, a general impression, in spite of all the churches' assertions on the importance of the Lord's Supper, that baptism is a more important rite. Since the Lord, then, so evidently protects that ordinance, the answer, is for the church to do its duty and celebrate the Supper often; trusting that he will safeguard it too. Third, if it is the case that baptism is held in low esteem, then the reason is probably that the people, as a whole, do not participate in it. In this respect, however, the Supper is different, and the obligation of frequent celebration would promote participation with awe. <sup>1</sup>

Or, again, some argue that in churches which celebrate regularly, the sacrament is treated lightly, and that infrequency produces less of a sense of formality to the rite. Willison categorically rejects this assertion, countering it with the argument that a low estimate of the sacrament is held where it is seldom celebrated, while a higher regard is prevalent where celebration is frequent. Moreover, a low estimate, he maintains, may well issue from the pastor's attitude in administering it. If it is done diligently, by restraining the unworthy, educating the people on its greatness, observing Fast, Preparation and Thanksgiving Days, preaching doctrinally and fencing the table solemnly, then none could ever receive lightly or regard the sacrament as of no account. <sup>2</sup>

The remaining objections considered may reflect views common among ministers, the first, that it could be difficult to find suitable preaching themes for frequent celebrations. Willison's reply is that Christ crucified is an inexhaustible theme. Such was the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

constant theme of Paul's preaching and no minister should find it difficult up to four times a year.

A crucified Christ is a subject so pleasant, so fertile, that we cannot be strained to preach directly thereof many times a year..... In this noble subject there is a perpetual plenty and variety of suitable material for sacramental occasions. <sup>1</sup>

Another objection is that frequent celebration would lay a great burden on clergy. Willison replies that, to the contrary, the workload would be reduced by frequent celebration, for the people would be more ready for it, and ministers would be less exerted in preparing them. Moreover ministers should not distrust the Christ who strengthens his servants for their work. Yet, if it did demand more effort, there would be recompense in seeing esteem for Christ elevated, while sin and the world would be held in contempt. <sup>2</sup>

Another complaint among ministers was that the unworthiness of the people was a disincentive to providing frequent celebration. <sup>3</sup> Willison counters with the objection that, given its validity, the logical conclusion would be that one should never celebrate. Yet, not all are unworthy, and it is as sinful to deprive the deserving, as it would be for parents to deny their children food. Since the Reformed Church condemns those who deny the cup to the laity, how can ministers justly refuse to give either to their people for lengthy periods? Further, even if only a few communicate, there were only a few on the night when the sacrament was instituted. <sup>4</sup>

Lastly, in the Preface, he deals with the objection that frequent

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 132-3.

<sup>3</sup> Mill, J. *Sacramental Work*. D8/78, The Archives, Lerwick, p. 1. *Memoirs of Mrs. Veitch, Mr. Thomas Hog, Minister of the Gospel at Kiltearn, in Ross* (Edinburgh : 1846) p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 133.

celebration would be a financial burden on parishes. His reply is that cost should never be a prohibitive factor. It is a Christian duty to use our resources and to be used for Christ. Moreover the law of the church required that there be a fund for such expenses in each parish, and if regular communion became the established norm, no doubt the extra provision would be made by those responsible. Even if funds were insufficient, however, there is no reason why a collection should not be taken for the purpose. Citing Eusebius, he maintains that there is precedent in the early church, and that people would respond generously rather than see the Lord's work hampered. Finally, he appeals to the Act of Assembly of 1638, which allowed that communion expenses might be a legitimate expense on the day's offering, rather than that frequent celebration be hindered on the grounds of cost. <sup>1</sup>

In the development of the Directory, Willison treats the subject by the same method, and while much is a repetition of the foregoing, he does supply answers to four other objections to frequency.

The first is one which was to be made by at least one writer as an argument for not greatly increasing frequency, <sup>2</sup> namely that the zeal of the apostolic age is past and that Christians who have grown careless in their religious observance are unfit for frequent observance. While acknowledging some truth in the statement, Willison retorts that all Christians are under the same obligation of love and have the need to celebrate frequently. Moreover, again pointing to the weekly celebration of the primitive church, he argues that the blood of Christ is as efficacious now as ever, and should, therefore be as precious to Christians in the present. Thirdly he expresses sadness that any Christian should accept passively the decay of piety now so manifestly evident, and urges prayer on the matter. Lastly, he suggests that the reason for such decay may be the infrequency of sacramental celebration, for

<sup>1</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 242.

observance of this sacrament arouses faith, keeps sin in disgrace, and Christ himself in high esteem. <sup>1</sup>

A second objection treated, which, at first, seems more of an excuse than a reason, is that business interests could prevent frequent communicating. Yet this was a live issue which posed a problem for some communicants, and, more particularly, for those who belonged to the merchant class, for whom occasions spread over valuable working days presented real difficulties. George Brown, the Glasgow merchant, for example, in his Diary, related his attendance at sacramental occasions when he felt disinclined to communicate, because business worries or personal anxieties caused him to feel unsuitably prepared. <sup>2</sup> Responding, Willison recognised that some do have less time than others, and suggests that one's affairs, so far as possible, should be arranged in advance to allow for frequent communion. However, if people, in the providence of God, found themselves involved in unexpected business, such a situation was excusable for one occasion. They should, however, be diligent in using the first opportunity to communicate, preferably by attending a celebration within another parish within the month. Quoting from the book of Numbers, he argues that,

In keeping the Passover there was a dispensation allowed to them that were under ceremonial uncleanness, or engaged in business on a journey. (Num. IX) Yet, it was allowed not for a year, but for a month's omission. For, when they could not keep it upon the 14th. of the first month, they were ordered to keep it upon the 14th. of the second month, and not to stay until the next annual revolution. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> *Brown's Diary*, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. pp. 153-4. This entire argument is taken from Charnock's *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p. 403, and the quotation is almost verbatim and without acknowledgement from that source.

Thirdly, dealing with the complaint that communicants did not always feel benefit from the sacrament, and their fears that such an experience indicated unworthy communicating, so that greater guilt feelings would be incurred were communion more frequent, Willison replies that lengthy postponement is a greater hurt. Just as too much fasting distends the stomach, so infrequency gives rise to a loss of desire for spiritual food. The answer, for those who feel unworthy, is to pray to Christ for cleansing and pardon. <sup>1</sup>

Lastly, there is the objection that frequent communion would leave little time for preparation. Willison's reply is that the more often people participate, then the more ready they will be. <sup>2</sup>

But his method is not confined to that of countering objections. So, he contrasts baptism and the Lord's Supper, asserting that the latter has frequently to be repeated for eight reasons:

First, though Willison's exegesis is suspect on the point, because scripture urges that it be done 'often'. <sup>3</sup>

Second, for the early church, weekly celebration was a principal part of the Christian religion, 'an epitome of the whole', so that

they would not slight the occasion of taking this provision and viaticum in those stormy times, when they knew not but they might be snatched away by the fury of persecutors before the next day of public meeting. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 150. 'Often' in 1 Cor. 11<sup>26</sup> means 'whenever'. Many of // the ensuing arguments are repeated in *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 477.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 151. This is from Charnock who wrote, 'they would lay in a viaticum or provision in those hard and stormy times when they expected to be snatched away by the fury of persecutors before the next day of public meeting'. *Complete Works*, p. 403.



Third, the sacrament is the means that Christ appointed for his remembrance. To assert that one can remember him otherwise, is not only to be wiser than the one who instituted it, but a sign of 'base ingratitude'. In comparison, reading and preaching of the word stimulate but a 'poor remembrance'. So, after the manner of the old Statute of the pre-Reformed church, which urged priests to celebrate the sacrament 'oftener ... that thereby they may the more easily stir up Christian people to piety and devotion', ' Willison commended frequency in the knowledge that 'the solemn ordinance' has the power 'to return and revive the memory of his love and fix the mind more solemnly on him'. <sup>2</sup>

Fourth, the sacrament is spiritual food offering nourishment. Like meals for the body, therefore, it requires frequent repetition. <sup>3</sup>

Fifth, the sacrament is a means to communion, and, since the sacrament is a greater means to that end than even prayer and praise, it should be celebrated often. The greatest communion we may have with a great man, is not by petitioning him or thanking him for benefits received, but by sitting at a table and sharing a meal with him. So Willison, like Robert Bruce, two centuries before, who said that, 'we get Christ better, and get a firmer

<sup>1</sup> Patrick, D. (Ed.) *Statutes*, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 151. Willison often stressed frequency as a 'duty', as he does again, for example, in *Sac. Cat.* p. 477. There, and whenever he argues the point, one can trace shades of the writing of Daniel Campbell (1665-1722) the minister of Kilmichael, Glassary, whose work Willison admired, (*Treatise.* HTH. p. 58) who wrote, 'We will be found unthankful and unfaithful to Christ and injurious to our flocks, if we do not frequently celebrate this ordinance, in which Christ's sufferings for us are so lively represented, sealed and applied to believers'. *Sacramental Meditations on the Sufferings and and Death of Christ*, 13th. edition (Glasgow : 1752) p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 151.

grasp of him by the sacrament', ' contends that the sacrament offers that 'firmer grasp', because, at the Holy Table, 'the believer sits, feasts and converses with Christ'. <sup>2</sup>

Sixth, the sacrament, representing the suffering of Christ, exposes the results of sin, so that, celebrated frequently, it becomes a means of weakening sin.

The soul's looking upon Christ here opens the spring of sorrow for sin. Zech XII. 10. Our frequent approaches to a wounded Saviour here, kindle frequent resolutions against sin that pierced him. <sup>3</sup>

Seventh, the sacrament repeated often strengthens faith in God's promises, confirming an awareness of Christ's love. <sup>4</sup>

Eighth, the sacrament should be celebrated regularly, because Christian people need the regular influence of the Spirit. The work of the Spirit is to bring all things to our remembrance. The end of the sacrament is to bring a crucified Christ and his love to remembrance. Because the function of the Spirit and that of the sacrament are at one, therefore, it is there that the Spirit will most likely exercise his function. For that reason, 'becalmed souls will come often and wait for the Spirit's gales'. <sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bruce, R. in Torrance, T. F. (Ed.) *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh : 1958) p. 85,

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 151-2. This also is from Charnock who had written, 'The looking upon Christ opens the spring of sorrow. Zech. XXII. 10..... The very approach to this ordinance kindles resolutions against corruption, and smothers the flames of sin in the soul'. *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p. 408.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac Dir.* HTH. p. 152.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Willison again uses here, almost verbatim, the argument of Stephen Charnock in *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, p. 410.

Yet, it was in his Synod sermon, that Willison expressed most succinctly, the reasons why, for him, the sacrament merited frequent celebration. Supremely, it was because, in St. Paul's words, the Supper is a proclamation of the Lord's death,

though this be not a converting ordinance to the receivers, but strengthening and confirming, yet sermons and discourses about this time, upon the melting subject of a crucified Jesus, have been the means of converting many thousands. <sup>1</sup>

That is to say that the action, as a vivid portrayal of the Lord's death, together with the Christocentric preaching surrounding it, afforded an evangelical opportunity. For Willison, the sacrament

promotes remembrance of God, of Christ, and of heaven, and stimulates an awareness of the evil of sin, the worth of souls, the love of God, the love of Christ.

Therefore, seeing it as expressing 'the whole scheme of the Christian religion at once', Willison urged his colleagues to

set frequently before their eyes the bleeding wounds of a crucified Jesus, these sin halting objects, as represented in the holy sacrament. <sup>2</sup>

These arguments for frequent celebration reveal that, in addition to Henry, Vincent, Doolittle and Campbell, <sup>3</sup> another who influenced Willison on the sacrament, was Stephen Charnock.

Stephen Charnock (1628-1680), in common with many of the English nonconformist clergy living under the Stuarts, had fled to Ireland during the troubles, and, later, served as a Presbyterian minister

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *The Churches' Danger*, HTH. p. 837.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 838.

<sup>3</sup> See above, pp. 69, 80 and 229.

in England. A prolific writer, his 'Complete Works' was published in the late seventeenth century.

In common with later Evangelicals, Willison appears to have found parts of Charnock's sermon on the sacrament helpful in developing his own thought on frequency of celebration, although, unlike John Erskine, Thomas Randal and John Mason, all of whom were to write later on the subject and also to quote Charnock, <sup>1</sup> Willison never acknowledges him as a source.

Nevertheless, it should be added that while he did borrow some of Charnock's arguments, even, at times, taking not only his actual words, but also the scriptural quotations which Charnock had used to support his case, Willison did not use all of his material. He judiciously selected only those parts of the work which he found convincing, often developing them in his own way, and adding to them forcefully with further arguments of his own.

#### Willison - A Forerunner to Change.

That Willison stood in the forefront of a movement for change in sacramental practices, is evident from the fact that his writing on the subject precedes any of the attempts towards achieving a more frequent celebration which were shortly to come. This movement was to gather momentum as the century proceeded and other capable and erudite ministers took up the case. Indeed support for it was to peak just before the time of Willison's death in 1750.

<sup>1</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, pp. 8, 10, 33, 36. Randal, T. *Letter from a Minister to his Friend Concerning Frequent Communicating*, in *The Celebration of the Lord's Supper Every Lord's Day Shewn to be the Duty And Privilege of Every Christian Church*, By the late Mr. Randal of Stirling, Mr. Glas of Dundee, and by Dr. Erskine, Edinburgh (Edinburgh : 1802) p. 61. Mason, J. *Letters on Frequent Communion* (Edinburgh : 1798) p. 97 fn.

The Scheme Proposed by the Presbytery of Edinburgh.

In January of 1720, Edinburgh Presbytery considered the Assembly acts of 1711 and 1712 anent more frequent celebration, <sup>1</sup> and, on 27th. April proposed a system whereby the sacrament would be held in each of its churches at least once a year, the celebrations taking place not just in the summer months but throughout the year, and with reduced preaching on Fast, Preparation and Thanksgiving days. This was done with the specific aim that the people

may have the opportunity with the more conveniency the oftener to participate thereof either in their own parishes or in neighbouring congregations if they desire the same. <sup>2</sup>

The scheme proposed that Canongate would celebrate in January, North Leith in February, all the churches in Edinburgh in March, Corstorphine in April, South Leith and Kirknewton in May, WestKirk and Currie in June, Colinton, Ratho and Canongate in July, Liberton and Cramond in August, Westkirk in September, Duddingston and all the Edinburgh churches in October, and South Leith in November. <sup>3</sup>

That it was not only successfully implemented but met a need is evident from the diary of R. B. which records her attendance, in 1737, twice at Canongate, three times at Westkirk, once in Edinburgh, twice in Leith and once at Liberton. <sup>4</sup>

Overture of the Synod of Argyll.

In July 1737 the Synod of Argyll recommended its Presbyteries to prepare an overture 'for the more general and frequent celebration

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery of Edinburgh (1718-1721) CH2/121/10, pp. 262 and 287 S.R.O.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 301-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 216.

of the Lord's Supper within their parishes'.<sup>1</sup> Deliberations there, however, proved more protracted than in Edinburgh, and seventeen years elapsed before any practical effort was made. An overture of 1754 recognised that the main barrier was the number of sermons on weekdays which prevailed within the church 'without any foundation in scripture, or in the practice of the primitive times or of other Protestant churches, or in our own Directory for Publick worship'. Moreover, celebrations within the bounds, held only every two or three years, had been marred by the crowds attending, the installation of booths for liquor and merchandise, and the occasion given for irregularities unsuitable to the occasion. The Synod determined, therefore, that the use of sermons on the Saturday and Monday should cease, and that ministers 'be at pains to obtain a more frequent celebration', so that the sacrament might be administered 'at least once a year in every parish'.<sup>2</sup>

Returns made in the following year, showed that all charges in Lorn and Dunoon Presbyteries had complied, six out of seven in Inverary, while in Mull only three of seven had succeeded although two were vacant. Kintyre Presbytery reported success in Campbelltown and Gigha, while Kilcalmonell, Skipness and Saddel had shared a celebration, and Arran had made no return.<sup>3</sup>

Overture Anent Frequency from the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr.

The most ambitious proposal of all, however, which aimed to secure a quarterly celebration throughout the church, was first made by the Presbytery of Glasgow and placed before the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr in 1748. John Erskine, then of Kirkintilloch, was chosen to propose the subject to the Synod's Overtures committee, which, after deliberation, agreed that

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Synod of Argyll (1728-1755) CH2/557/6, p. 168.  
S.R.O.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 341f.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 350-1.

it would be for the honour and interest of religion that some method were devised whereby..... the Lord's Supper might be more frequently celebrated agreeably to the Word of God, to the apostolic practice recorded therein, to the practice of the primitive church, and that of all other Protestant churches..... In the opinion of the committee, it would answer this purpose if the Lord's Supper were celebrated four times a year in every parish, and that only one day in the preceding week, either the Friday or Saturday were employed in public fasting and preparation, and that the sacrament were administered on the same Sabbath in all the parishes of the same Presbytery at least. <sup>1</sup>

An overture, embracing these terms, was drafted for the Assembly of 1749, <sup>2</sup> but, receiving it, the Assembly acknowledged receipt of overtures on frequency from two other Synods, and agreed to prepare a draft overture to be remitted to Presbyteries for consideration, their reports to be submitted to the next Assembly. <sup>3</sup>

Yet the consequent response was disappointing. Few responded, while the findings of those which did varied considerably. The Assembly of 1750, therefore, remitted the overture again, meanwhile urging that ministers have the 'ordination administered as often as the circumstances of their parishes permit'. <sup>4</sup> Nor did the 1751 Assembly fare much better. No Act was passed legislating for such frequency as the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr had sought. To the contrary, the 1751 Act, appointing a more frequent celebration, simply renewed Act XI of 1712, and stipulated that ministers were required to have celebrated the sacrament once in the year. <sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Synod of Glasgow and Ayr Minutes (1715-1760) CH2/464/3, p. 385. S.R.O.

<sup>2</sup> Morren, N. (Ed.) *Annals of the Assembly*, p. 153-4, fn.

<sup>3</sup> *The Scots Magazine*, 1750, Vol XII, p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> Morren, N. (Ed.) *Annals*, p. 169.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 214.

Dr. John Erskine.

One notable feature of the movement for frequent celebration, in the mid eighteenth century, is that its leading figure and source of the Glasgow proposal, was John Erskine, <sup>1</sup> then of Kirkintilloch, grandson of John Erskine of Carnock.

The diary of the latter, kept in the late seventeenth century, relates that while he spurned the services of the 'King's Curates', so that, often of a Sunday he 'heard no sermon', he communicated, nevertheless, at field conventicles and in Rotterdam at the Scots Kirk whilst studying in Holland. <sup>2</sup> Whether or not the grandson brought up in his home, <sup>3</sup> was influenced by his reminiscences, it is evident that one clear influence on the young Erskine's thinking on the Lord's Supper was that of the 'judicious Mr. Willison'. <sup>4</sup>

The Pamphleteers.

In 1749, at the time of the Glasgow and Ayr overture, a number of pamphlets appeared on the theme of frequent communicating. While the objective of that Overture failed, however, and few churches even within the Presbyteries involved increased celebrations, <sup>5</sup> the pamphlets were important for stimulating a debate which continued for years to come, ensuring that the issue was kept alive in all

<sup>1</sup> Wellwood, H. M. *Account of the Life and Writings*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> MacLeod, W. *Journal of the Hon. John Erskine of Carnock* (Edinburgh: 1843) p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 185 and 112.

<sup>4</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> In Glasgow Presbytery only Kirkintilloch did it, and in Ayr Presbytery, only Ayr itself. Kirkintilloch Session Minutes (1709-1750) Ch 2/1027/1, Minute of 17th. Nov 1749. S.R.A. (G). Ayr Session Minutes (1735-1752) CH2/751/12. Minutes of Jan 25th. 1750, and July 30th. 1750. S.R.A. (A).



the churches of Scotland, since those whom they motivated for change were not only to be found in the Kirk itself, but also in the dissenting churches. Indeed, until the end of the century, many pamphlets on the subject were to appear from varied sources.

The first of the writers was Dr. Erskine himself, whose pamphlet was an erudite work. Beginning with the assertion that scripture places no limit on frequency, he opens with the premise that no degree of celebration is prohibited, and proceeds to argue that frequency is not only lawful, but expedient. An ordinance so 'comforting and improving' should be enjoyed frequently. Four reasons are given. First, that Christ instituted it and is dishonoured when it is set aside. Second, that celebration is a badge of Christian profession, and a public testimony which should be made often. Third, that the sacrament is a seal of the Gospel offers and nourishment to the soul. Last, that as a means to communion, neglect is injurious to spiritual interest. <sup>2</sup>

Secondly, Erskine examines the scriptural evidence for frequency of celebration and demonstrates that a weekly celebration, at least, was the practice of the primitive church. <sup>3</sup> Referring to Pliny's letter, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose of Milan, Hierom and Augustine, he shows that for the first 300 years of the churches' life, the sacrament was celebrated weekly and even more frequently. <sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, he argues that neglect of the sacrament stemmed from a nominal and lukewarm Christianity which first became common after the faith had become an established religion. So, in 324 a Council of the church in Spain, and another at Antioch, in 341, had imposed sanctions on those who did not participate in the sacrament. So,

<sup>1</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 4-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 11-15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 16-18.

by the end of the 4th. century, John Chrysostom complained, 'In vain we stand at the altar. None come to receive'. So, the Council of Toledo in 400 AD showed that neglect was not uncommon among the clergy too. So, later Councils, from that of Agde, in 506 AD, which declared that 'none should be regarded as good Christians who did not receive at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost', to that of Trent, which allowed communion once a year as enough, had permitted a gradual diminution of the requirement of Christ. '

Fourthly, he upholds the proposal of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, and considers objections to frequency.

Finally, although, like Willison, he often quotes Charnock, Erskine was more concerned to cite the names and opinions of those whom he considered 'the great' who had argued for frequent celebration. 'If great names were of any weight in such a debate, I could easily multiply authorities. But I shall content myself with mentioning the few that follow'. <sup>2</sup> The names cited are those of Calvin, Baxter, Willison of Dundee and Jonathan Edwards in New England. <sup>3</sup>

Three arguments of Willison's appear to have particularly appealed to Erskine, and acknowledging their source, he quotes them in full, the first being Willison's statement that neglect of the sacrament is an affront to God. So Erskine asks,

Who is there among us, whose need of the Lord's Supper does not frequently return? Has then God provided for us so rich an Entertainment? Does he allow us often to regale ourselves with it? Yea, even invite us in the most warm and earnest manner? And is it not a contempt of the goodness and condescension of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 18-22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 38-42. Willison also quoted Calvin, but he does not refer to Baxter on the issue of frequency, while Edwards wrote on the subject after Willison's works were published.

God, and an injuring our own spiritual interests to neglect any opportunity of sitting down at the table of the Lord? <sup>1</sup>

Then, quoting Willison at length, he adds,

For we are oft' ready to forget Christ, and therefore we oft' need this ordinance to bring him to our Remembrance. We are oft' subject to spiritual deadness, weakness of faith, and decays of grace; and therefore have frequent need of his ordinance for strength and quickening. There is ground to fear, that the unfrequent celebration and participation of this blessed feast, which Christ hath prepared for us, is an evil that many in this church are chargeable with, and for which the Lord may plead a controversy with us. How can we expect but he will depart from us, when we stand at such a distance from him, and come so seldom near him in the method he hath appointed?...<sup>2</sup>

Or again, Erskine employs Willison's argument when countering the proposition that frequent celebration diminishes respect for the Supper, contending that, by this argument, one should only pray seldom and hear the Word seldom, lest they also be demeaned. <sup>3</sup>

Thirdly, he quotes him again, in full, in deprecating the copious preaching attached to sacramental occasions. This, in fact, was a major barrier to frequency, and Willison scorned the practice. <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 444 and 477. Erskine's lengthy quotation, abridged above, is an amalgamation of both passages.

<sup>3</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, p. 35. Compare with Willison. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 130. Also on the same theme, Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, pp. 40-1, where another lengthy quotation amalgamates passages from Willison's *Sac. Cat.* HTH. pp. 444 and 447.

<sup>4</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, p. 42f. Erskine quotes at length from *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 444f.

Willison, of course, was not the only influence on Erskine's thinking on frequency. Other works which he acknowledges are Charnock's 'Discourse on the Ends of the Lord's Supper', <sup>1</sup> Baxter's *Christian Directory*, <sup>2</sup> and Jonathan Edwards' book, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion*. <sup>3</sup>

It is significant, however, that Erskine regarded Willison as one of the 'great' who had written on the subject, so that his work was to influence the man who proposed the first major move, for two centuries, towards more regular celebration of the sacrament.

Thomas Randal of Inchtute.

Another, writing at the same time, and also in defence of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, was Thomas Randal of Inchtute. His equally lengthy pamphlet, in the form of an open letter, lacks the force and easy style of Dr. Erskine's, but covers the same ground.

Opening with a statement supporting the Overture, he argues that the early church celebrated every Lord's day, and provides evidence both from scripture and the early Fathers. Like Erskine, he dwells on the abuses which crept into observance in the Roman Church, and then turns to the Reformed church. Noting that the sacrament was never celebrated with the frequency which Calvin desired, he expresses deep sadness at the difference between Reformed theory and practice. Referring to the rubric of the Book of Common Order, for example, which urged a monthly celebration, he asks sardonically, 'What think you then, dear Sir, the order of Geneva is behind the original way, as twelve is to fifty-two?'. <sup>4</sup> Sooner, indeed, than accept the proposal of the Presbytery of

<sup>1</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, pp. 8, 33 and 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Randal, T. *Letter*, in *Celebration*, p. 45.

Glasgow (which he does support in the interests of an improvement to the situation), he could wish that the Assembly would return to the monthly communion desired by Knox which he has just caricatured. Indeed, Randall shows that his own basic belief is in a weekly celebration. <sup>1</sup>

Like Willison, Randal also felt that an annual celebration was scandalous. He bitterly regretted the emphasis presently placed on 'sacramental days' as though they were more special than others, and felt that the present situation in the Church of Scotland, 'where many still run superstitiously to the action of the Supper once yearly, who the rest of the whole year are negligent about the duty', <sup>2</sup> was not very different from the old and legitimate complaint against those who celebrated once a year at Pasche. Finally, like Willison and Erskine, Randal dismisses objections to frequency, and speaks in favour of the Glasgow and Ayr Overture.

John Glas.

A third pamphlet, written in answer to Randal's letter, was penned by John Glas of Tealing, formerly an adversary of Willison. His letter objects to Randal's proposal on two grounds. First, that there can be no connection between the demand for a quarterly celebration and the requirement of Christ himself, which, as evident from the practice of the primitive church was held weekly. The argument, he says, is 'that as four times in the year is oftener than once in the year, the church should choose this rather than the other'. <sup>3</sup> But no law of the church exists to prohibit a weekly celebration, should ministers so choose. Thus, if the Overture urging quarterly communion were to be enacted as law, it would limit the matter more than the law does at present. The root

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 45-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Glas, J. *Letter to Mr. Randal from Mr. Glas, in Celebration*, p. 82.

of Glas's second objection lay in his sectarian position, and therefore contributed little of value to the debate. Pointing out that the primitive constant communion existed in churches where Christ's discipline was exercised and accepted by communicants, and inferring that the Church of Scotland, from which he was deposed, failed on both points, Glas held that a more frequent celebration could only lead to further profanation of the holy ordinance.

#### Later Letters and Pamphlets.

As the century wore on, the debate continued undiminished, with a flood of letters and pamphlets being produced on either side.

A Pamphlet by the Anti Burgher, Josiah Hunter, an instigator of the 'Lifter Controversy',<sup>1</sup> argued for a via media. Acknowledging that the early church celebrated weekly, he believed that what the Church did in youthful vigour could not be regarded as a precedent for all time, and that such frequency would lead to 'ignorance', 'contempt' and 'wild superstition'. Contending that extremes are to be avoided, he spoke, on the one hand, of the dangers of 'such frequency as would bring it into formance or to a superstitious estimating' pleading that such should be shunned, but also argued that the Church should beware of such neglect in celebrating, as would 'be a plain slighting of it, in bringing it into desuetude'. Clearly, however, Hunter's position was unhelpful, since he nowhere indicated what degree of celebration constituted overfrequency on the one hand, nor neglect, on the other.<sup>2</sup>

Another, published in 1765 by James Smith, Minister at Newburn,

<sup>1</sup> Small, R. *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church, From 1733 to 1900 Vol. 1* (Edinburgh : 1904) p. 662.

<sup>2</sup> Hunter, J. *An Inquiry Into the Scriptural Order and Method of Dispensing the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* (Falkirk : 1771) pp. 129-38.

adopting Willison's style of question and answer to objections to frequent celebration, closed with a remark which showed that while the debate was still alive, the author was sceptical as to its eventual outcome.

It is indeed said, some of them begin to be ashamed of opposing the frequency, and give out that it is not the frequency, but the limitation, which they so greatly dislike. But time will show whether they will stand to this, when they see, for it is like they do not yet see it, that granting the frequency, all their arguments against the limitation will fall to the ground. ' 1

Yet such scepticism was not wholly merited. In the established Church, some congregations had already increased celebration from once per year to twice. Many others were being convinced by those who argued the case, and the mood for change was growing in all the churches.

A Reformed Presbytery pamphlet of 1795 stated that it was improper for any individual to enforce the scriptural frequency, but added,

nothing but impediments arising from natural circumstances, will exempt us from blame, while neglecting that frequency which the nature of the ordinance, the words of institution, the practice of the primitive ages, and the doctrine of our standards do require.

Indeed, the anonymous writer of the pamphlet states that his

<sup>1</sup> Smith, J. M. *A Compendious Account taken from Holy Scripture Only of the Form and Order of the Church of God In the several great periods thereof; Also of the nature, design and right manner of observing or eating the Lord's Supper, with Answers to the Arguments of those who have objected unto some of the particulars* (Edinburgh : 1765) p. 98.

own congregation in Glasgow attempts 'not only an entire conformity to the frequency enjoined by our First Book of Discipline, but even to surpass it, by maintaining a still closer imitation of the primitive practice'.<sup>1</sup>

Another Anti Burgher Pamphlet of 1794 showed that in that church too, some had advanced from one to two communion seasons a year. Like others, however, answering objectors to greater frequency and arguing for change, he realised that the laudable objective could only be realised by making radical alteration to the customary and cherished mode of administering the sacrament.<sup>2</sup>

Yet another spirited document was the work of N. Douglas of the Relief Church in Dundee, who included a lengthy quotation from the *Sacramental Catechism* 'of the late Mr. Willison', whose 'sentiments are well known'.<sup>3</sup> While adding little new to the debate, however, Douglas's presentation of the material in dialogue form offered the old argument in a lively way.

Indeed, Douglas was one who actually suffered for his attempts to

- <sup>1</sup> *An Address to the Christian People under the inspection of the Reformed Presbytery Concerning the More Frequent Dispensing of the Lord's Supper, By one of themselves* (Glasgow : 1795) pp. 68-9.
- <sup>2</sup> *A Candid Inquiry into some points of Public Religion; or Animadversions on Existing Circumstances Among Anti Burgher Seceders in Queries Adressed to Ministers and Others of that Party. By One of Themselves* (Glasgow : 1794) pp. 29-31.
- <sup>3</sup> Douglas, N. *The Duty of Pastors Particularly Respecting the Lord's Supper: A Synod Sermon to which is added a Dialogue on the Duty of Frequent Communicating* (Dundee : 1796) pp. 195-6. Douglas recites Willison's arguments that frequency will not bring contempt, and that Christians are as obliged to frequency as the apostles and the primitive church. Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 130, and *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 477.



introduce more frequent celebration. While at Cupar he had tried, in 1792, to increase celebrations by dispensing with the weekday services associated with them, except when they coincided with the town fasts. It is said of him, that, in this respect, 'he was too far in advance of his times to get a single elder to support him'.<sup>1</sup> Translated to Dundee, he attempted to repeat the experiment, but, meeting similar opposition, demitted his charge.<sup>2</sup>

Many others lent pen to the cause, and even at the end of the century, it is still possible to trace shades of Willison. So, John Brown of Haddington, for example, opened his work by quoting Calvin and the Independent, John Owen, on frequency, adding, 'I pass over Doolittle, Campbell, Willison, Henry, and a multitude of others, because I can add....' Thereafter follow his own arguments for frequency, and refutation of the common objections to it, which, in spite of his being 'passed over', include some which Willison had advanced, such as

Why is not baptism also restricted to once or twice a year?  
Why are we not taught that we should seldom, pray, read, hear  
and meditate, in order to keep up the solemnity of these  
ordinances?<sup>3</sup>

Others of note who contributed to the debate were Haldane the Independent,<sup>4</sup> and Mason of the Secession, the latter drawing much of his material from John Erskine.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Small, R. *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church, From 1733 to 1900* (Glasgow : 1904) p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, J. *An Apology for Frequent communicating* (Glasgow : 1804) p. 13. See above, p. 226.

<sup>4</sup> Haldane, J. *To the Church Assembling for Worship in the Tabernacle, Edinburgh, in Celebration*, p. 127f.

<sup>5</sup> Mason, J. *Letters*, pp. 37-46, 76-8, 87.

The effort of all of these was not unrewarded. Slowly, change was occurring. Aside from the scheme of 1720 proposed in Edinburgh, the Glasgow and Ayr Overture of 1749, and that of Argyll in 1754, additional communions were becoming the practice. Willison's second celebration continued under his successor. Kilsyth and Cambuslang followed suit from the time of the Revival. <sup>1</sup> Ayr, Kirkintilloch, and Glasgow Ramshorn adopted second communions in the mid century, <sup>2</sup> and Montrose in 1770. <sup>3</sup> Dr. Snodgrass of the Middle church, Paisley, later in the century, introduced to that town a scheme for more frequent celebration with fewer preaching days. <sup>4</sup> Indeed, yet another pamphleteer wrote, in 1822, without specifying which, of 'a respectable Presbyterian congregation in Paisley which have been for years in the habit of eating the Lord's Supper monthly'. <sup>5</sup> Among the dissenters, John Brown of Haddington introduced a second communion to his congregation in 1756, <sup>6</sup> and the pamphlets cited showed that others were making similar attempts. Indeed, by the end of the century, it is notable that some arguing the case were no longer protesting at the offence of communion only once a year, but at the inadequacy of its observance on only two occasions in the year. <sup>7</sup>

The dream for change, therefore, was becoming a reality. That it was slow in coming, was no less than what Willison had expected when he had argued the case seventy years before, realising that it would only happen 'by degrees'.

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 216 and 236.

<sup>3</sup> Burnet, G. B. *Holy Communion*, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup> Morren, N. (Ed.) *Annals*, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> *A Brief Inquiry Into the Origin and Tendency of Sacramental Preaching Days* (Kilmarnock: 1822) p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> McKenzie, R. *John Brown of Haddington* (London : 1918) p. 89.

<sup>7</sup> Mason, J. *Letters*, pp. 117 and 119.

The Structure of Communion Seasons and the Mode of Celebration.

Yet the frequency of celebration which Willison, Erskine and others sought, could never be realised without changing the structure of communion seasons and the mode of communicating.

Communion of the time have been variously described as 'mass communions', 'great occasions', and 'holy fairs'. Lasting from a Thursday to a Monday, held in summer with its better weather, and attended by crowds from several parishes, most contend that they were popularised by, if they did not actually originate from, the Protestors' and Resolutioners' dispute of half a century before.

Opposed to tenders made to Charles I, and feeling that any contract with a pro Episcopalian monarch was a betrayal of the National Covenant, one of the results of that dispute emanating from the strict Covenanters who formed the Protestors' side, was the organising of mass communions which probably had the twofold aim of increasing support and of nurturing a sense of solidarity.

Erskine found the evidence in a pamphlet of 1657, entitled, 'A True Representation of the Rise, Progress and State of the Divisions of the Church of Scotland', which stated,

Since our divisions, our dissenting brethren have taken up a new and irregular way of dispensing the holy Supper.....

Then, describing occasions spread over a Saturday, Sunday and Monday with many ministers assisting, and many sermons being preached throughout to crowds from many parishes, it concluded,

... uninterested observers perceive a clear design in all this, to set up themselves as the only zealous and pious people, worthy to be trusted and followed in our public differences.. '

' Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, pp. 29-30.

Such procedure violated the General Assembly's Act of 1645, which limited both the number of ministers permitted to assist at a sacramental occasion, and the preaching on each of the days. <sup>1</sup>

The Protestors' practice continued, nevertheless, throughout the Interregnum, also, albeit illegally, through the period of the restored monarchy, and was to be perpetuated, by necessity, after the 'Glorious Revolution'. Moreover, around the middle of the seventeenth century, a Fast Day service on Thursday was added to the proceedings. In Dalgety, for example, an entry dated June 5th. 1654, appears for the first time in Kirk Session records, stating,

The Thursday befoir the comunione to be keiped in a solemne fast  
..... And the Lord be dealt with and soucht efter for his  
presence to the ensuing comunione. <sup>2</sup>

Such was the legacy inherited by the eighteenth century church, and, while some have written nostalgic descriptions of these four day occasions, <sup>3</sup> others also wrote longing for their demise.

One of the latter was the minister at Ardrossan, who, writing, in 1752, to his cousin, a clergyman of the Anglican church, related,

The dispensing of the above ordinance gives us a good deal of trouble. It is generally done only once a year in most parishes of Scotland, and with a great number of sermons, and several ministers present, viz. Two sermons upon the Thursday (a Fast Day) immediately before. Two upon the Saturday. Upon the Communion Sabbath, besides a sermon in the church by the minister of the parish, (called the Action Sermon) and the solemn action

<sup>1</sup> Pitcairn, T. (Ed.) *A.G.A. 1645*, pp. 120-1.

<sup>2</sup> Ross, W. *Pastoral Work*, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, J. *Discourses*, p. 222. Cunningham, J. *Church History*, Vol. 2, pp. 590-1.

of distributing the communion elements to the communicants (who sit by 80 at a time at two tables, and then remove until another 80 be served, and so on, while 700 communicants and sometimes 1200 be thus served; during all which continual Speeches are made upon ye love of God, the death of our Saviour etc). I say, besides all this in the church, a tent is erected contiguous to the church from which three sermons and sometimes five or six are made to the people whom ye church cannot contain during the whole service within. Then, in the evening, there is another sermon, which in some places will not be finished before 8 or 10 of the clock at night. Again upon the Monday the people convene by way of Thanksgiving and they have two sermons. This is ye general method of communion in the Church of Scotland; and four or five ministers besides the minister of the paroch is present.

.....I long to see it redressed. I would wish to give the sacrament four or five times a year and with only a sermon or two... But I am afraid it will not be altered in my age. Our people tenaciously hold to long use and wont. <sup>1</sup>

Many, besides Mr. Dow, longed for redress and would happily have seen such celebrations fall into desuetude. Yet, however valid their objections were, resistance to change was to prove strong.

#### Objections to the Great Occasions.

Three main objections were made to these occasions, the first focussing on abuses for which they provided opportunity. These included damage to property, one parish requiring constables 'to keep the peace at the sacrament', <sup>2</sup> the raucous behaviour of the inebriated, <sup>3</sup> and the harangues to which the open air preachers

<sup>1</sup> 'Church Life and Work in the days of the Rev. Mr. Dow'. The *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 21st. November 1890.

<sup>2</sup> Dunlop, A. *Parochial Law* (Edinburgh : 1841) p. 400.

<sup>3</sup> *A Brief Inquiry*, pp. 14-15.

could be subjected by those attending the 'occasion' for unworthy ends. <sup>1</sup> No less offensive was the presence of beggars among the crowds, and tinkers selling their wares. <sup>2</sup> Complaints were also made of blasphemy and irreverence among the more unseemly element, <sup>3</sup> flirtatious frivolity, <sup>4</sup> and even promiscuity. <sup>5</sup>

'I know it will be said', wrote one, 'that those abuses are no part of the ordinance.. But why, then are they associated with it? Why is a system continued, calculated to produce and perpetuate such abuses?' <sup>6</sup> Another protested that such incidents, together with the market day atmosphere of occasions, had furnished, 'one of the enemies of religion' with credible material for his 'Holy Fair'. <sup>7</sup>

The second objection was the cost at both local and national level.

The Hamilton 'case' cited <sup>8</sup> shows that the expense of celebrating communion was considerable. For smaller parishes it could prove prohibitive, so that some found it impossible to celebrate more often than every second, or even third year, thus adding to infrequency. Parishioners too, living a threadbare existence, felt obliged to share their frugal fare with those who had travelled

- <sup>1</sup> Webster, J. M. *History of Carnock* (Edinburgh : 1938) p. 145.  
Edgar, A. *Old Church Life*, pp. 175-6.
- <sup>2</sup> Burnet, G. B. *Holy Communion*, p. 217.
- <sup>3</sup> Witherspoon, J. *A Sermon on Psalm 1:1* (Glasgow : 1762)  
Preface, pp. iii-vi.
- <sup>4</sup> Lockhart, J. G. (Pseud. Peter Morris) *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, Vol. 1 (London : 1819) pp. 308-9.
- <sup>5</sup> Witherspoon, J. *Letter from a Blacksmith to the Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland* (London : 1759) pp. 9-10.
- <sup>6</sup> *A Brief Inquiry*, p. 15.
- <sup>7</sup> Urbane, *Letter to the Members of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland Concerning the Present Mode of Administering the Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh : 1818) p. 12.
- <sup>8</sup> See above, p. 249, fn. 2.

from other parishes to be present, it being a 'point of honour that food and shelter should be provided without charge'.<sup>1</sup>

But the cost to parishes was infinitesimal as compared to that to the country. Spread over five days, the occasions posed problems for businessmen, employers and for employees too, so that the arrangement could not be repeated in parishes, within a year, without damaging industry and commerce. So, one pamphleteer wrote,

now supposing the sacrament should be administered only twice a year in all our churches, which if it be not, it ought to be; the occasions as they are managed at present, will cost Scotland at least 235,000 pounds Scots, an immense sum for sermons!<sup>2</sup>

Erskine identified the same problem, when he wrote,

It is hard to bring our people to relish a frequent administration, if it must deprive them of so many days of labour. And as Industry and Improvement increase, that difficulty will increase also, especially as some concerned in these things, have not so great a respect as might be wished for religious institutions.<sup>3</sup>

But the main objection to the great occasions was that, in addition to the preliminary duties of catechising and examining, often the work of months and onerous by itself,<sup>4</sup> the workload which a four day occasion imposed on ministers was such that there was little incentive to more frequent celebration.

<sup>1</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *A History of Worship* (London : 1954) p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Witherspoon, J. *Letter from a Blacksmith*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, pp. 43-4.

<sup>4</sup> Sefton, H. R. in Forrester, D, and Murray D. M. (Eds.) *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland* (Edinburgh : 1984) p. 69.

There was, for example, the administrative difficulty of securing assistance for the preaching, a problem compounded by the fact that since occasions were confined to summer, many were seeking help at the same time. Sometimes too, the choice was limited. Communion were not exempt from faction and could reflect the mutual antipathy between Evangelical and Moderate. <sup>1</sup> Few had the tolerance of John Galt's Micah Balwhidder, who, in seeking assistance, accepted the nominees of his Session. <sup>2</sup> Willison, nourishing an aversion to Moderate preaching, would not have countenanced such assistance.

Equally demanding, was the reciprocal request to assist colleagues. Such invitations were not always welcomed, for, frequently, it was impossible for those invited to obtain 'supply' so that their own congregations were deprived of worship for the day. Some, like Boston, resented requests to assist, if he felt that his presence would be superfluous. <sup>3</sup> That attitude was justifiable, for the numbers assisting in smaller parishes, was often disproportionate to the need. In 1705, for example, a communion at Colinsburgh had ministers assisting from Largo, Elie, Pittenweem, Kinghorn, Crail and Edinburgh, <sup>4</sup> and George Turnbull relates, that, at Tynningame, in 1704, he had assistance from ministers from Innerwick, Spott, Prestonkirk, Leslie, Stenton, Cockburnspath and Aberlady. <sup>5</sup>

#### Willison's Identification of the Problem.

Willison quantified the problem as threefold.

First, he pointed out that the accretions which had become attached to sacramental celebrations over the last century were unnecessary.

<sup>1</sup> *Mill's Diary*, p. 50.

*Ridpath's Diary*, p. 324.

<sup>2</sup> Galt, J. *Annals of the Parish* (London : 1821) p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> Low, G. (Ed). *A General Account*, p. 170.

<sup>4</sup> Dick, R. *Annals of Colinsburgh* (Edinburgh : 1896) p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> *Turnbull's Diary*, p. 444.



Narrating the Assembly Acts which had sought to promote frequency, he focussed on the Act of 1645. That act, concentrating on the structure of occasions, had stated 'that ministers should have at this work but two assistants, who were able to provide their own parishes at home with preaching', and had proposed a limitation on the preaching to one preparation sermon on Saturday, one sermon on the Sabbath before serving of the tables, and one thanksgiving sermon after communion. These provisions were framed, he averred, to prevent the number of ministers assisting and the multiplicity of preaching from hindering frequent celebration. <sup>1</sup>

The Session Minutes in Dundee, indeed, show that while Willison retained services on all four days with reduced preaching, nothing is said of ministers assisting him, and, although he probably had help, especially on the Sunday, when he introduced a system whereby two tables were served at once, it may be, nevertheless, that he conducted the ancillary services of the other days single handed, preaching at each a single sermon, according to the 1645 Act.

Secondly he saw the timing of celebrations as an obstacle. Citing the 1711 Act, which had encouraged celebrations through the several months of the year, he stated that its aim was to prevent the very situation which still prevailed, of

crowding the whole communions of the bounds, in the space of a few Sabbaths, in the summer season; whereby ministers who are called to assist at these occasions are exceedingly hurried and straitened; and serious exercised persons are deprived of the benefit of that holy ordinance during the rest of the year, which is certainly a very great loss; and also many parishes, by this method, are allowed the sacrament no oftener than once in two years. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 444.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 445.

Accordingly, when Willison introduced his second sacrament, it took place outwith the summer, usually in the month of October. <sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, he identified the main problem as the time spent in preaching and in preparation for it, declaring that it made,

that solem work a business of such outward toil and labour to the administrators, as discourages them frequently to undertake it. So that, till some regulation be made in the foresaid respect, I despair of seeing this holy ordinance dispensed so frequently among us as it ought to be. <sup>2</sup>

Herein lay the supreme disincentive to frequency. The preparation of the copious material required not only for Fast, Preparation and Thanksgiving days, but, because of the mode of celebration, for the sacramental day itself, was a harrowing prospect. The painstaking labour demanded is evident from the handwritten manuscript of John Mill of Shetland. <sup>3</sup>

Aside from the Action sermon, there were several prayers, a table fencing, and a post communion sermon. But table addresses were also required, their number depending on the seating capacity of the table in relation to the total number waiting to communicate.

Many descriptions of the mode of communicating exist, <sup>4</sup> but the process is best illustrated in an etching, by an artist whose identity is unknown, which shows such a service in progress. The minister or ministers are seated at the top of the table which is surrounded by a fence similar to a cattle fence. Elders man the

<sup>1</sup> Dundee Session Minutes (1716-1756) pp. 327/8, 357, 401, 425/6, 446, 470, 494, 518/9, 572/3, 595. CH2 1218/2, Dundee Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Cat.* HTH. p. 445.

<sup>3</sup> Mill's Sacramental Manuscript. D8/78. Lerwick Archives.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, J. *Discourses*, pp. 222-3. Also Logan, J. *Sermons by*, pp. 349-50, fn.

entrance gate, ready to collect tokens as the communicant's enter, and around the table are seated only twenty four persons. The rest of the large congregation, doubtless clutching their communion tokens marked by a number for entry to a particular table service, are accommodated in a gallery, waiting to enter, by relays. <sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, however, the tables were larger than that illustrated. At Creich they accommodated thirty to forty people, <sup>2</sup> while Mill of Shetland and Dow of Ardrossan both spoke of tables for eighty. <sup>3</sup>

At any rate, each table service, which required an address, lasted between twenty five and thirty minutes, <sup>4</sup> so that Robert Lee, in the nineteenth century, was justified in suggesting, in view of the lengthy sermons, fencings and table addresses which were customary, <sup>5</sup> that the whole should be performed by the minister unaided, for thus he would learn 'that a service which is too much for the minister's lungs, is far too much for the people's patience, piety or profit in any way'. <sup>6</sup>

The whole cumbersome mode of celebration ensured that there were places in which, like Kilmacolm 'the services lasted from early morning till late at night', <sup>7</sup> while, even in Shetland, 'it was

- <sup>1</sup> Appendix 3. From an article by Burns, T, 'An Old Communion Custom', *Life and Work Magazine*, December 1924, pp. 270-271.
- <sup>2</sup> Cant, A. 'The Communion in Creich Parish, Fifeshire 1761-1834', R.S.C.H.S. 1932, Vol. 4 pp. 83-4.
- <sup>3</sup> See above pp. 134 and 249.
- <sup>4</sup> Edgar, A. *Old Church Life*, p. 169, Maxwell, W. D. *A History of Worship*, pp. 172-3. Also see above, p. 135.
- <sup>5</sup> Ridpath once preached an action sermon lasting one hour and three quarters. *Ridpath's Diary*, p. 322.
- <sup>6</sup> Lee, R. *The Reform of the Church of Scotland in Worship, Government and Doctrine - Part 1- Worship* (Edinburgh : 1866) p. 194.
- <sup>7</sup> Murray, J. *Kilmacolm, A Parish History* (Paisley : 1907) p. 138.

nothing unusual for the service to begin at eleven o'clock in the forenoon and not end till five or six o'clock in the afternoon'.<sup>1</sup>

Such services were arduous enough for those with assistance, but, for many no help was available, and on them the burden of the entire 'occasion' fell single handed. So, Mill wrote,

but blessed be his worthy name who enabled me, notwithstanding, to go through with the work, preaching all the day and serving seven tables.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in 1757, the Assembly was informed by the Synod of Argyll and Bute, that on its twenty inhabited islands and even on the mainland, ministers were being 'brought to an untimely death, or greatly broken in their health', because of the rigour of sacramental occasions, 'and by being disappointed of the assistance they expected'.<sup>3</sup> Nor did the exhaustion of ministers escape the attention of the pamphleteers, one of whom spoke with feeling about the 'fatiguing effect upon the pastor'.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, if frequent celebration was to be achieved, some change to the structure of occasions and the mode of celebration was required.

Hence, Willison not only introduced a sacramental season, at which the occasions for preaching were reduced to conform to the Act of 1645, but also a simple change to the mode of communicating. This, by agreement of his Session, was to double the number of cups and flagons, so that two tables could be served at once 'for the dispatching of the work of the Lord's day in shorter time'.<sup>5</sup> This simple change had a twofold effect. First, it cut the time of

<sup>1</sup> Russell, J. *Three Years in Shetland* (Paisley : 1887) pp. 60-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Mill's Diary*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Morren, N. (Ed.) *Annals*, p. 110.

<sup>4</sup> Urbane, *Letter*, p. 12f.

<sup>5</sup> Dundee Kirk Session Minutes (1716-56) CH2/1218/2. Minute of 1st. Nov. 1732. Dundee Archives.

communicating in half, since two tables, presumably of identical size, would cater for double the number of communicants. Secondly, it reduced the number of table addresses by half, since those occupying the two tables would listen to the same table address.

### The Pamphleteers.

Those who took up the cause after Willison, also saw that the main obstacles to frequency were those which he had identified. More particularly, they saw urgency in curtailing the preaching at occasions, although aware that such a change would be unpopular.

Such was the case. The scheme adopted by Edinburgh Presbytery, in 1720, which had demanded a reduction in preaching, was opposed on the grounds that it served to 'abridge the solemnity'.<sup>1</sup> That view was articulated by one writer, who, while praising the idea of frequency,<sup>2</sup> scorned the proposed reduction of sermons and the abolition of tent preaching on the sacramental day.<sup>3</sup> Indeed the author of the postscript to the document, condemning the scheme for the same reason, also complained that public races would be held on the week prior to the Leith sacrament, while the Thanksgiving day would fall on Halloween,<sup>4</sup> and voiced a commonly held suspicion that the whole plan had been concocted by a few ministers 'probably after dinner', in the absence of Presbytery elders.<sup>5</sup>

The overture from the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr proposing quarterly celebration suggested not only a reduction in preaching, but also

<sup>1</sup> McCrie, T. (Ed.) *Wodrow's Correspondence*, Vol. 2, p. 547.

<sup>2</sup> *Dan, An Adder in the Path or Issachar Couching Under a Burden Containing: Some Considerations upon the New Scheme of Communion in the Presbytery of Edinburgh, By a Sincere Lover of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh : 1720) p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 9f, p. 18, p. 20f.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 32.

a reduction in the preaching days. Receiving publicity at the Assembly, it provoked a strong reply, in the Scots magazine, from a correspondent who also protested that the proposal would 'abridge the solemnity'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed Ayr Presbytery, meeting in the following year, spoke of the 'great difficulty of bringing about reformation in this matter', arising from 'the prejudices of the people who seem to look upon such numbers of sermons as in some degree essential to the celebration of this sacred institution'.<sup>2</sup>

The Synod of Argyll met furious opposition from certain elders from Southend and Campbeltown,<sup>3</sup> as did the Assembly,<sup>4</sup> in 1757, when its scheme required 'discontinuing for all time coming the services of the Saturday before and the Monday after communion'.

Ironically, almost seventy years later, when an Edinburgh Kirk Session wished to celebrate quarterly, and realised that the scheme would be facilitated by dispensing with the Fast Day on two of the four 'occasions' of the year, it was opposed, not by the people, the majority of whom approved the plan, but by the Presbytery.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, unpopular as their stance was, those who wished to increase frequency were resolute about curtailing preaching. So Erskine, like Willison, in introducing a second celebration at Kirkintilloch proposed having one assistant, with two sermons on the Fast day, one on Saturday and one on Monday, offering as an alternative to preach twice on Saturday and dispense with the Monday service.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. IX, March 1749, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Minutes of Ayr Presbytery (1746-1756) CH2/532/6. Minute of 6th. March 1750. S.R.A. (A).

<sup>3</sup> Minutes of Argyll Synod (1728-1755) CH2/557/6, p. 347. S.R.O.

<sup>4</sup> Morren, N. (Ed.) *Annals*, pp. 79-80, and pp. 108f.

<sup>5</sup> *Case of the Kirk Session of St. Mary's Parish Edinburgh Relative to More Frequent Communion* (Edinburgh : 1832) p. 22f.

<sup>6</sup> Kirkintilloch Session Minutes (1709-1750) CH2/1027/1. Minute of 17th. Nov. 1749. S.R.A. (G).

The need for a reduction in preaching, therefore, was argued in his pamphlet, <sup>1</sup> as it also was by Randall, <sup>2</sup> John Brown, <sup>3</sup> John Mason, <sup>4</sup> and by all of the lesser known writers, one of whom protested,

It is not eating the Lord's Supper, but the preaching days, that in the estimation of the bulk of Christians constitute the sacrament. It is these that constitute its main importance - its principal charm! <sup>5</sup>

Later pamphleteers, writing when celebration was becoming more frequent, concentrated on the mode of communicating, proposing a change which, in about half a century, was to become the pattern.

In 1796, Neil Douglas of the Relief Church in Dundee, wrote,

the usual mode of dispensing the Supper might be greatly simplified. If proper attention were paid to the seating, communicants might be accommodated at one sitting, which would correspond more to the unity of the action. <sup>6</sup>

Another expanded on Douglas's rationale for such a scheme,

As a great number of communicants cannot sit down at once, it has been common that after a part of the church has observed that ordinance, others take their place at the table. Thus the service is greatly prolonged. Besides here is no representation of the unity of the body. 1 Cor x. 17 While one part of the church is at the table, another is gone home, or the remaining members, if still present, are mere spectators. This seems in

- <sup>1</sup> Erskine, J. *A Humble Attempt*, pp. 42-8
- <sup>2</sup> Randall, T. *Letter*, in *Celebration*, p. 70.
- <sup>3</sup> Brown, J. *An Apology*, p. 19f.
- <sup>4</sup> Mason, J. *Letters*, pp. 56f.
- <sup>5</sup> *A Brief Inquiry*, p. 12.
- <sup>6</sup> Douglas, N. *The Duty of Pastors*, p. 183.

direct opposition to the apostolic injunction, "My brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry for one another".<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps few expressed the view more clearly, than one who began with St. Paul's words, 'Let all things be done decently, and in order'. Concerned over the length of the Communion service, and the disorder as one table service ended and people jostled for the next, he felt that the disarray was unseemly, and proposed a method which he had seen among Independents and Baptists, whereby the elements were carried to the congregation in the pews by the elders, who, with the minister had first taken communion at the table. By adopting the mode, he argued, individual table services would no longer be required, all would share the same address, and, the whole congregation could be served within half an hour.<sup>2</sup>

The idea was not new. Two centuries before, Calderwood, describing communion as celebrated in Scotland in 1623, had closed,

If the whole communicants could sit at the one time at the tables, it would be more agreeable and advantageous, as they could thus altogether, eat, drink, meditate, sing and hear the minister's address.<sup>3</sup>

Evidence suggests, in fact, that the method proposed by the nineteenth century pamphleteer may already have been tried, at least to a limited extent,<sup>4</sup> before he wrote, so that his views may have been representative of a swelling tide of opinion. Its implementation, however, in Glasgow, in 1824, was debated in the

<sup>1</sup> *Celebration*, p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> Urbane, *Letter*, pp. 13-16.

<sup>3</sup> Spratt, G. W. (Ed.) *B.C.D.* p. xxxix.

<sup>4</sup> Hunter, A. M. 'The Celebration of Communion in Scotland Since the Reformation', *R.S.C.H.S.* 1929, Vol. 3, pp. 164-5.



Assembly in the following year, and condemned. ' Seen as violating tradition and the principle fought for by the Scots at Westminster, feeling against it was strong. Yet, within half a century, public opinion which favoured the method prevailed, and, although High Churchmen, later, wished to revive the old method, <sup>2</sup> the new was adopted by most churches in the country, with the elements carried to pews covered by white cloths, symbolic of one table.

One minister who had lived through both systems, recalling memories of the early nineteenth century, certainly considered the new method 'a manifest and great improvement'. <sup>3</sup>

Willison, who longed for more frequent celebration throughout the Church never conceived of such changes. His own scheme continued with a service on the Fast Day, Preparation Day and Thanksgiving Day, but with reduced preaching. And while he was not averse to reducing the duration of the communion service, he did not depart from the long established custom of communicating at the table.

A pioneer in arguing for more frequent celebration, then, Willison also adopted practical measures to make it possible. He changed the structure of his own communion season, reducing the number of assistants and the preaching. He introduced a second celebration outwith the summer months, and he adopted a measure which reduced the time spent in communicating. His writing on frequency, his example, and above all, the influence he exerted on others like Erskine, who took the first positive moves towards achieving more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper throughout the Church of Scotland, deserves to be acknowledged with gratitude.

<sup>1</sup> Maxwell, W. D. *A History of Worship*, pp. 171-2.

<sup>2</sup> Murray, D. M. 'The Scottish Church Society, 1892-1914. A Study of the High Church Movement in the Church of Scotland'. Unpublished PH.D. Thesis. Cambridge University, 1975, p. 278f.

<sup>3</sup> Kennedy, A. *Memories of Scottish Scenes Eighty Years Ago* (Edinburgh : 1902) p. 66.

## Chapter Seven.

### An Assessment of Willison's Sacramental Theology and Practice.

Any appraisal of Willison's work must take account of the fact that he belonged both to a particular time and to a particular religious group. So, G. D. Henderson describes him as a

typical Puritan and Evangelical... an earnest, modest and diligent pastor... broader-minded than some, though no less orthodox in his Calvinism. <sup>1</sup>

### Willison - The Typical Evangelical.

That is a fair assessment. Willison, a pietist, bore the common marks of eighteenth century Evangelicalism - conservative theology, preaching which, aiming to stimulate a 'deeper, personal religious experience', placed a stress on the doctrines of 'sin, grace and redemption', <sup>2</sup> and an interest in revival and missionary work.

The epithet 'Puritan' is also fair, for Willison practised, <sup>3</sup> and commended such a lifestyle in his *Short Christian Directory*, <sup>4</sup> a work which reappeared after his death as an appendix to the reprint of a book on 'Godliness', first published in the previous century, by the minister at St. Stephen's, Walbrook. <sup>5</sup> Willison's own

<sup>1</sup> Henderson, G. D. 'Puritanism in Eighteenth Century Scotland', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. 19, 1947, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> Burleigh, J. H. S. *Church History*, p. 328.

<sup>3</sup> Hetherington, W. *Practical Works*, p. xxi.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *A Short Christian Directory*. HTH. pp. 382-390.

<sup>5</sup> Watson, T. *The Godly Man's Picture drawn with a Scripture Pensil, or some Characterised Notes of a Man that shall go to Heaven, with a Short Christian Directory Proper to all Christians Intending Heaven, by the Reverend Mr. John Willison, Minister at Dundee* (Glasgow : 1756) pp. 491-506.

spiritual stimulation, in fact, was derived from men of like piety, for, besides Rutherford, Gillespie, Durham and Guthrie, he also read the works of such Puritans as Doolittle, Charnock, Vincent, Baxter, Campbell and Calamy, <sup>1</sup> and those of contemporaries like Boston and Edwards, all of whom were popular among Evangelicals.

Nor could one quibble over his earnestness, or pastoral diligence. With no levity in his manner, all his published works reveal his serious disposition, while his catechisms, his *Afflicted Man's Companion*, and his recorded diligence in pastoral work, provide ample evidence of his care for his people. <sup>2</sup>

Moreover, like some other Evangelicals, believing that the Church had 'a duty to represent the people' on 'issues of moral or social importance,' <sup>3</sup> his sense of pastoral care extended to wider areas. Mindful of the poor, who were ever dependent on communion offerings for relief, he provided for them when no sacramental occasion was possible. <sup>4</sup> Concerned for literacy and education, he urged support for 'charity schools...', <sup>5</sup> and rejoiced that, by 1742, 130 such schools and 80 libraries existed in the Highlands and islands. <sup>6</sup> He published an open *Letter to an English Member of Parliament*, seeking parity with England and redress for Scotland on the system of feudal superiorities, clanships and tithes, <sup>7</sup> and, with others, deputed by the General Assembly, he went to London to plead for the abolition of Patronage. <sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Calamy (1600-166) was an English Presbyterian, and one of the Westminster Divines. Willison refers to him in *The Duty and Advantage of Praying Societies*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 186-7.

<sup>3</sup> McIntosh, J. R. 'The Popular Party', p. 283f.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 218.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Balm of Gilead*. HTH. p. 439.

<sup>6</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 898.

<sup>7</sup> Willison, J. *Letter to an English M.P.* p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Warrick, J. *The Moderators*, p. 316.

But Henderson's assessment of Willison was not all in the strain of praise, and his final comment on him as 'broader minded than some, but no less orthodox in his Calvinism', is perceptive.

A Limited Catholicity.

Willison had a measure of broadmindedness, but Henderson rightly qualified its extent by quoting an excerpt from a letter Willison had written to John McCulloch, minister at Cambuslang, and which was later published in the *Glasgow Weekly History* - 'Commend me to a pious, Christ-exalting and soul winning minister, whatever be his denomination'.<sup>1</sup> That is to say that Willison's catholicity was confined to those with whom he felt a natural affinity because they conformed to the parameters of his own thinking and lifestyle.

Thus he had an interest in the work of Wesley,<sup>2</sup> and in the early Methodists,<sup>3</sup> in that of the Moravians under Count Zinzendorf,<sup>4</sup> in missionary work among the North American Indians,<sup>5</sup> in the revival in New England under Jonathan Edwards, with whom he corresponded,<sup>6</sup> in the revivals at Cambuslang and Kilsyth, and in the work of George Whitefield.<sup>7</sup> It was, indeed, his association with the latter which accounts for Henderson's comment that Willison was

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Willison to McCulloch, 8 October, 1741. *Glasgow Weekly History*, 1742, No. 13, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 933.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* and in Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> Hickman, E. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (London : 1840) pp. cxlv-cxlvii. Also, Letter from Dr. Colman to Willison, dated 27th. May, 1742, *Glasgow Weekly History*, No. 42, pp. 3-4, and Letter from Mr. John Moorhead to Willison, dated 30th. July, 1742. *Glasgow Weekly History*, No. 42, p. 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Hickman, E. *Edwards' Works*, Vol. 1, p. cxlv. Letter from Willison to Edwards, dated 17th. March, 1749.

<sup>7</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 138, and *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 933.

more broad minded 'than some', for Willison, in stark contrast to the Seceders, was prepared to support and defend Whitefield, <sup>1</sup> although, when he chided him on his association with the Church of England, he had to accept a rebuke from the field preacher. <sup>2</sup>

Willison, in fact, clearly acknowledged that his catholicity had limits, when James Fisher of the Associate Presbytery, quoting the published words - 'Commend me to a pious, Christ exalting and soul winning minister' - suggested that, by these terms, Willison would find a Jesuit priest acceptable. <sup>3</sup> Willison denied the charge, stating that, for him, a sign of 'the excellency of a minister', was that 'he be pious and Calvinist in his principles' so that he would prefer 'Ebenezer Erskine, Dr. Owen or Bishop Ussher to a carnal minister of the Established Church'. <sup>4</sup> Willison's breadth of outlook, therefore, was strictly limited to those whose thought and demeanour was basically that of his own.

- <sup>1</sup> Letter from Willison to a friend in Edinburgh anent Mr. Whitefield. 8th. October, 1741. *Glasgow Weekly History*, No. 13, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>2</sup> Tyerman, L. *The Life of the Reverend John Whitefield*, Vol. 1 (London : 1876) p. 514.
- <sup>3</sup> Fisher, J. *A Review of the Preface to a Narrative of the Extraordinary Work at Kilsyth and other Congregations in the Neighbourhood, by the Reverend Mr James Robe, Minister at Kilsyth, Wherein the nature of that Extraordinary Work and the Principles of the Promoters thereof are discovered from the said Preface and other Papers lately published: And likewise the Address to the Brethren of the Associate Presbytery, anent their late Act for a Publick Fast is Considered* (Glasgow : 1742) pp. 50-1.
- <sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Letter from Mr. John Willison, Minister at Dundee, to Mr. James Fisher, Minister at Glasgow, Containing Serious Expostulations with him concerning his Unfair dealing in his Review of Mr. Robe's Preface etc. And Several suitable Advices to him and others* (Edinburgh : 1743) p. 30.

No Latitude in Theological Thought.

Henderson, therefore, was correct. Willison was 'broader minded than some', but he was also 'no less orthodox in his Calvinism', so that he had a rigidity of thought.

Influenced by staunch parents, who left the worship of the parish church for that of a Presbyterian 'Meeting House',<sup>1</sup> and unexposed to other influences which might have broadened his mind, his narrow outlook was reinforced by a theological education restricted to the works of theologians of the 'early', 'high' and 'late' Reformed Orthodox tradition, and his consequent adherence to the federal scheme of theology.

Wodrow's programme shows that lectures on theology at Glasgow were confined to a narrow range. Aside from Calvin, study was made of Ursinus, primary author of the *Heidelberg Catechism*,<sup>2</sup> together with others reflecting the same 'early orthodox style' - Maccovius who defended double Predestination at the Synod of Dort,<sup>3</sup> Polanus who upheld the Protestant view of scripture against Roman Catholic opponents,<sup>4</sup> and the work of Valaeus, one of the composers of the *Leiden Synopsis*, a manual of Reformed doctrine.<sup>5</sup> The programme also included writers from the period of 'high orthodoxy', such as Wendelin,<sup>6</sup> and Voetius,<sup>7</sup> and, from the period of 'late orthodoxy', the work of Turretin who championed the orthodox

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 8-10.

<sup>2</sup> McKim, D. (Ed.) *Encyclopaedia of the Reformed Faith* (Edinburgh : 1992) p. 381.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 230.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 280.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 217.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 267.

<sup>7</sup> *Idem.*

position in the French Reformed Church, repudiating hypothetical universalism. <sup>1</sup>

The only authors of a different strain, whose works were merely listed for private reading by students, were Arminius, <sup>2</sup> Van Limborch, whose *Theologia Christiana*, published around 1700, was an 'important dogmatic treatise on Arminianism', <sup>3</sup> Socinus, and Bellarmine whose *Controversies* were a defence of the Roman Catholic Faith. <sup>4</sup>

There is evidence that, aside from Puritan writers whom he studied assiduously, <sup>5</sup> Willison did read more widely. Indeed two works, still extant, from his personal library, show his acquaintance with opinion which was diametrically opposed to his own. <sup>6</sup>

Such, for example, was the work of Hugo Grotius, who advanced a theory of the atonement which denied the Reformers' doctrine of penal substitution, Grotius regarding God as the great moral ruler for whom sin offends against his law, so that Christ's death was no sacrifice for sin, but a tribute to the sanctity of Divine law and government. <sup>7</sup>

The other was that of Francis Hutcheson, but Willison's handwritten comments show that he read that work with a closed mind. So, his comment, 'this ought to be the last in the book', written against

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 377f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, W. A. *Christian Theology in Outline* (Edinburgh : 1931) p. 431.

<sup>4</sup> Brodrick, J. *Robert Bellarmine. Saint and Scholar* (London : 1961) pp. 53-90.

<sup>5</sup> See above, p. 263.

<sup>6</sup> See above, pp. 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Walker, W. *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 401.

Hutcheson's phrase 'imperium animi in motus perturbatos',<sup>1</sup> was in accordance with Willison's opinion that the only valid help for the living of a Christian life is the help of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> Any suggestion of dependence on human resources was abhorrent to him.

#### Consequences of Willison's Narrow Theological Stance.

Confinement in the mental strait-jacket of federalism, his belief that the covenants had a contractual nature, and his enthusiasm for that scheme of doctrine expounded in the *Westminster Confession* and Catechisms had several consequences for Willison.

It made him fastidious over the most minute doctrinal points to the extent of disagreement with those whom he would otherwise support, so that his stress on conditionality in the covenants, for example, and his opposition to any notion of absolute grace, caused him to part company with the Marrowmen, whom he dubbed Antinomian,<sup>3</sup> while, conversely, he accused Richard Baxter, whom he regarded as among the 'wisest of men', of the opposite extreme of 'legalism'.<sup>4</sup>

It made him intolerant in judgement, particularly of the Moderates, whose preaching he classed, generally, as 'the dry insipid stuff of heathenish morality'.<sup>5</sup> Doubtless, on occasion, that criticism had validity, but Willison actually pilloried the saintly William Leechman, unjustly declaring him an example of one whose pulpit deliverances were 'Christless', when Leechman, in fact, could preach a Communion sermon as Christocentric as his own.<sup>6</sup>

It robbed both his written and spoken word of the joy which is a

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> See above pp. 57f.

<sup>4</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> See above, p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> See above, pp. 113f.



characteristic note of the Christian faith, so that James Wodrow's recommended 'use' of 'terror' in preaching, was also a facet of Willison's writing. Thus only doom awaits those who have not accepted the terms of the Covenant of Grace, and Willison was adept in attempting to 'terrify' them into it, as is evident from his Preparatory Communion sermon, <sup>1</sup> and his address both to parents and children in the Preface to his *Mother's Catechism*. <sup>2</sup>

It made him relentless in attempting to preserve what he considered pure doctrine and in extirpating heresy, to such an extent that, at the slightest scent of unorthodox teaching, if he was not the leader of the baying pack, determined to bring the prey to ground, he was always hard on its heels. So, at the time of the second Simson case, it is notable that Willison preached before the Assembly, Wodrow reporting of his sermon that 'He had many good things upon Christ's Divinity, and the hazard of error and Atheism creeping in upon this age'. <sup>3</sup> Clearly, since the charge against Simson was one of teaching Arianism, and since Willison's sermon, which would have been prepared in advance, dealt with the subject of the divinity of Christ, he had already prejudged the issue, and was determined to use the opportunity to influence his hearers.

He had a similar attitude towards Professor Wishart, who was acquitted of a heresy charge at the Assembly of 1738, and, in the opinion of Dr. John Erskine, was 'justly acquitted'. <sup>4</sup> Willison, on the other hand, not only believed him guilty, but smarting over the acquittal, complained that, even after the affair, Wishart had commended sermons 'savouring of Socinianism', and pronounced him

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 102, and p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 169-70.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 91. Cunningham also notes that the Simson case 'was made the subject of the opening sermon'. Cunningham, J. *Church History*, Vol. 2, p. 402.

<sup>4</sup> Cunningham, J. *Church History*, Vol. 2, p. 469 fn.

unfit for his post. <sup>1</sup> Thus the same Willison, who maintained that the Seceders should recognise the authority of the Assembly to the extent of accepting its suspension, <sup>2</sup> was reluctant, himself, meekly to accept its judgement when it dealt with heresy trials, and, in his zeal for pure doctrine, had kept track of the later performance of the unhappy Professor.

### Willison and The Lord's Supper.

Willison's enthusiasm for the Westminster Confession and Catechisms also had important consequences for his sacramental theology and practice, as did his adherence to the federal scheme of theology.

On the one hand, reflecting the teaching of both Calvin and of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, he held a 'high' view of the sacrament, placing a stress on the Real Presence of Christ. So, he wrote, 'though Christ is not bodily present, yet he is really and truly present in an invisible and spiritual manner'. <sup>3</sup> This is plainly the teaching of Calvin, <sup>4</sup> and of the Confession of Faith, <sup>5</sup> and is distinct from mere memorialism at one extreme, and from transubstantiation and consubstantiation at another, holding that just as the bread and wine are materially present, so the body and blood of Christ, as spiritual nourishment, are present to the spiritual apprehension of those who receive the elements in faith.

He also held that the Lord's Supper is a 'means of grace', a means whereby, through the work of the Spirit, Christ and his benefits are applied to the souls of those 'who receive them by faith'. <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 160-1.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 18, and related footnotes. Also in Willison, J. *F.I.T.* HTH. p. 920.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 86f. and p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV, XVII, 10, and IV, XVII, 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. XXIX, para. VII.

<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 61 and p. 118.

Yet he did not conceive this as a mechanical process. What was important was the work of the Spirit and the faith of communicants. Calvin too had stressed the vital role of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments, <sup>1</sup> and the *Confession of Faith* held that there is nothing automatically efficacious about them, but that they depend on the exercise of faith. <sup>2</sup>

But not all of Willison's teaching was positive. His belief in a limited atonement and his insistence that the Lord's Supper was not a 'converting ordinance', but only for those within the Covenant of Grace, <sup>3</sup> led him to four negative emphases.

First, he fenced the table rigorously, warning from it those who were either outwith the Covenant, or who, for other reasons, might communicate unworthily, <sup>4</sup> thereby discouraging those of tender conscience from participating. Second, he demanded an intense preparation before communion, so that communicants were not only in a worthy 'state', but also in a worthy 'frame', <sup>5</sup> a practice which resulted in anxious soul searching which robbed many of the joy of the occasion. <sup>6</sup> Third, he stressed the sacrament as a seal not only of what God had done for the believer, but of what the believer was committed to do for God, <sup>7</sup> thus burdening communicants with obligations to be discharged after communicating, and threats of punishment for failure to meet them. <sup>8</sup> And fourth, he emphasised that the act of communicating was a distinguishing badge of the believer's faith, his public testimony to the world, <sup>9</sup> thus again

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV, XIV, 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. XXVII, para. III.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 73f.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 75-7, and p. 118f.

<sup>5</sup> See above, p. 78f. and p. 150.

<sup>6</sup> See above, pp. 82-4.

<sup>7</sup> See above. pp. 84-85, p. 145, and p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> See above, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> See above, pp. 85 and 151.

stressing that participation laid duties on the communicant, rather than serving his faith before God. <sup>1</sup>

These latter emphases came, not from Calvin, <sup>2</sup> but from Willison's federal theology, and his understanding that the Covenants had a contractual nature. Consequently, he laid far greater stress on man's duty to God than on what God had done for man, and the whole procedure represented a departure from the tradition of the early breed of Scottish ministers, who, after the 'exhortation', offered the bread and wine to all, in faith, in token of forgiveness and reconciliation and as a pledge of the covenant. <sup>3</sup>

#### Willison Also Untypical.

Thus far, Willison was a man of his time and party. The one area in which he differed, however, becoming something of a pioneer, lay in his demand for more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, so that that became a recurring theme, appearing in no less than seven of his published works over a span of thirty years. <sup>4</sup>

Several factors may have prompted him on the matter. There was his knowledge of Calvin, <sup>5</sup> who favoured a weekly celebration, and the example of Wodrow, his Divinity Professor, who, setting great store on sacramental days, had communicated frequently. <sup>6</sup> There were the Assembly Acts of 1701, 1711, 1712 and 1724, which, although merely aiming to promote within an unheeding church at least an annual celebration, Willison quoted with relish in support of his demand

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 85, 148, 149, 151.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 81-2, 85, and Calvin, J. *Institutes* IV, XIV, 3.

<sup>3</sup> See above, pp. 85 and 90.

<sup>4</sup> *Sac. Dir. Sac. Cat. F.I.T. Treatise. Plain Cat. The Churches' Danger. Sacramental Meditations and Advices.*

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 129.

<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 17.

for even greater frequency still. <sup>1</sup> There was his belief that the Lord's Supper was a 'visible gospel', so that occasions offered an evangelical opportunity. <sup>2</sup> And there was also the influence of Richard Charnock whose work he had studied with care, and whose arguments for frequency, Willison, never the most original thinker, <sup>3</sup> was to marshal when he pled the case.

Moreover, not content with presenting a case for greater frequency, Willison attempted to promote it in two ways. First, he increased celebrations in his own congregation from one in the year to two, <sup>4</sup> encouraging others to adopt the practice. <sup>5</sup> Second, he modified his communion 'season' by reducing the preaching at it, and changed even the mode of celebration by doubling the tables. <sup>6</sup>

Such modifications were important, for, although he never envisaged the sweeping changes in mode which were to come within a century, <sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> This is a feature of much of Willison's writing. See above, pp. 64, 69, 73, 80, 222, 227f. It was also a complaint made by Willison's opponent, James Small that in the debate against episcopacy, Willison was merely 'transcribing the arguments of Mr. Clarkson'. Small J. *Some Reflections Upon the Preface, and some Paragraphs of a Book printed for Mr. James McEuen at Edinburgh, 1716; called a Treatise concerning the Sanctifying of the Lord's Day, Together with An exact Answer to its Postscript. Wherein the Answer to the Parochial Bishop's Letter is vindicated, the primitive Government of the Church by Bishops is farther established, and the Presbyterians in Scotland are plainly proved to be a Schismatick Party, and consequently that their Communion is unlawful* (Edinburgh :1717) p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 218, 253, 256f.

<sup>5</sup> See above, p. 221.

<sup>6</sup> See above, p. 256f.

<sup>7</sup> See above, p. 260f.

Willison was attempting to tackle what he saw as the main barrier to frequency. <sup>1</sup> A communion season with much preaching required many ministers, and could not be repeated easily within a year.

Thus, in the first place, by holding only one service on each of the Fast, Preparatory and Thanksgiving days, he was showing that the customary practice of several services on each day was not sacrosanct. That procedure was illegal, in any case, under the Act of the Assembly of 1645. <sup>2</sup> By Willison's method, however, the parish minister could manage on his own. In the second place, by doubling the tables, cups and flagons on the day of the sacrament, Willison was reducing similarly the number of table services required, the assistance needed, and the duration of the service.

Clearly, here was an example which other parishes could follow.

#### A Commendable Achievement.

It could be argued that Willison's increase from one celebration in the year to two was a meagre one, and far short of his ultimate aim, <sup>3</sup> that his practice, therefore, failed to match his principle, and that had he believed in the cause more strongly he might have achieved even more significant results. Weighty evidence, however, would suggest that he achieved all that was possible at his time.

It is true that there were some who welcomed greater frequency and took advantage of it when it was provided. <sup>4</sup> Indeed, a collection of letters reveals the intense interest of a group of lay persons, belonging to the merchant class, in sacramental days. <sup>5</sup> It is

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 254f.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 219f.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 216.

<sup>5</sup> 'Familiar Letters which passed between intimate friends'. MS 3008. The National Library of Scotland.

also the case that an increasing number of ministers were, in time, to lend their weight to the argument, <sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards even arguing for weekly celebration. <sup>2</sup> But Willison preceded them by at least some thirty years, and introduced his second communion over a decade before the idea of several communion services a year within parishes was mooted in overtures to the Assembly in 1748.

The evidence, in fact, from antagonism to the experiment within the Edinburgh Presbytery, in 1720, the insignificant results in Glasgow and Ayr Presbyteries, before and after the overture of their joint Synod to the Assembly in 1748, and the protests in Argyll, when, in the interests of greater frequency, the ancillary services of the communion season were to be curtailed, is that the majority was totally resistant to change. <sup>3</sup> The time was clearly against it. Indeed, Neil Douglas, who at the end of the century, tried to introduce more frequent celebration to two congregations, over two ministries, found that no elder would support him, and ultimately demitted his charge. <sup>4</sup>

Willison, who had been committed to greater frequency almost from the start of his ministry, had achieved all that was possible at the time, and was discerning when he stated that change would only come 'by degrees'. <sup>5</sup>

#### Conclusion.

In sum, while we may criticize Willison for his narrow outlook, and for those negative emphases in his teaching and practice deriving from his adherence to the federal scheme of theology, he was,

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 243f.

<sup>2</sup> Hickman, E. *Edwards' Works*, Vol. 1. Letter to Dr. John Erskine, 15th. November 1750, p. clxv.

<sup>3</sup> See above, pp. 233-5, and p. 257f.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 244-5.

<sup>5</sup> Willison, J. *Sac. Dir.* HTH. p. 129.

nevertheless, an Evangelical preacher and writer of note.

His works were widely read. His catechisms, and, more especially, those for children and young people, had considerable merit as teaching aids, and enjoyed a popularity both in Scotland and beyond for well over a century.

But it was through his emphasis on the sacraments and particularly on that of the Lord's Supper, that Willison presented a challenge to the Church of his day, and made a distinctive contribution to that of the future.

Believing that sacraments were 'visible signs of God's love to mankind', <sup>1</sup> more affecting than what 'we only hear of by the ear', <sup>2</sup> and appointed by God, together with the word, as 'means of salvation', <sup>3</sup> his sacramental works aimed to instil in others, the high regard for the Lord's Supper which he held himself. As a corollary, he was determined that, in the Church of Scotland, the prevailing practice of infrequent celebration should be reversed, until, by degrees, the Reformers' frequency of celebration might be attained. <sup>4</sup>

To that end, his case for more frequent celebration, his example in promoting it in his own congregation, and the influence he exerted, by his writing, on John Erskine and others who addressed the matter after him, were a valuable legacy to the Church.

<sup>1</sup> Willison, J. *Plain Cat.* HTH. p. 701.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>3</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 220.



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