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THE PROGRESS OF EVANGELICALISM
IN THE
WESTERN ISLES
1800 - 1850

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Title of Thesis THE PROGRESS OF EVANGELICALISM IN THE
WESTERN ISLES, 1800-1850

In the first half of the nineteenth century the Highlands and Islands of Scotland were affected by social and economic changes. During that half-century the religious life of the people of the Western Isles was also transformed, so that by the time of the Disruption, Skye and the Outer Hebrides had become a stronghold of Evangelicalism. The purpose of this thesis is to explore and evaluate the different forces which moulded the religious thinking and practice of the Presbyterian population of the islands during that period.

Because parishes were extensive and ministers few, religion in many remote areas must have been of a nominal nature, although there was much traditional religious lore extant among the people. Endeavours which were made in the first half of the nineteenth century to improve the educational and religious lot of the Hebrideans introduced to the Western Isles earnest men of Evangelical faith. A revival movement began whose impact is still felt in the twentieth century.

For the purposes of this survey the three Presbyteries of Skye, Lewis and Uist are included in the term "Western Isles" - the Argyllshire islands, with their distinctive religious history, are omitted.

This work has been written solely by



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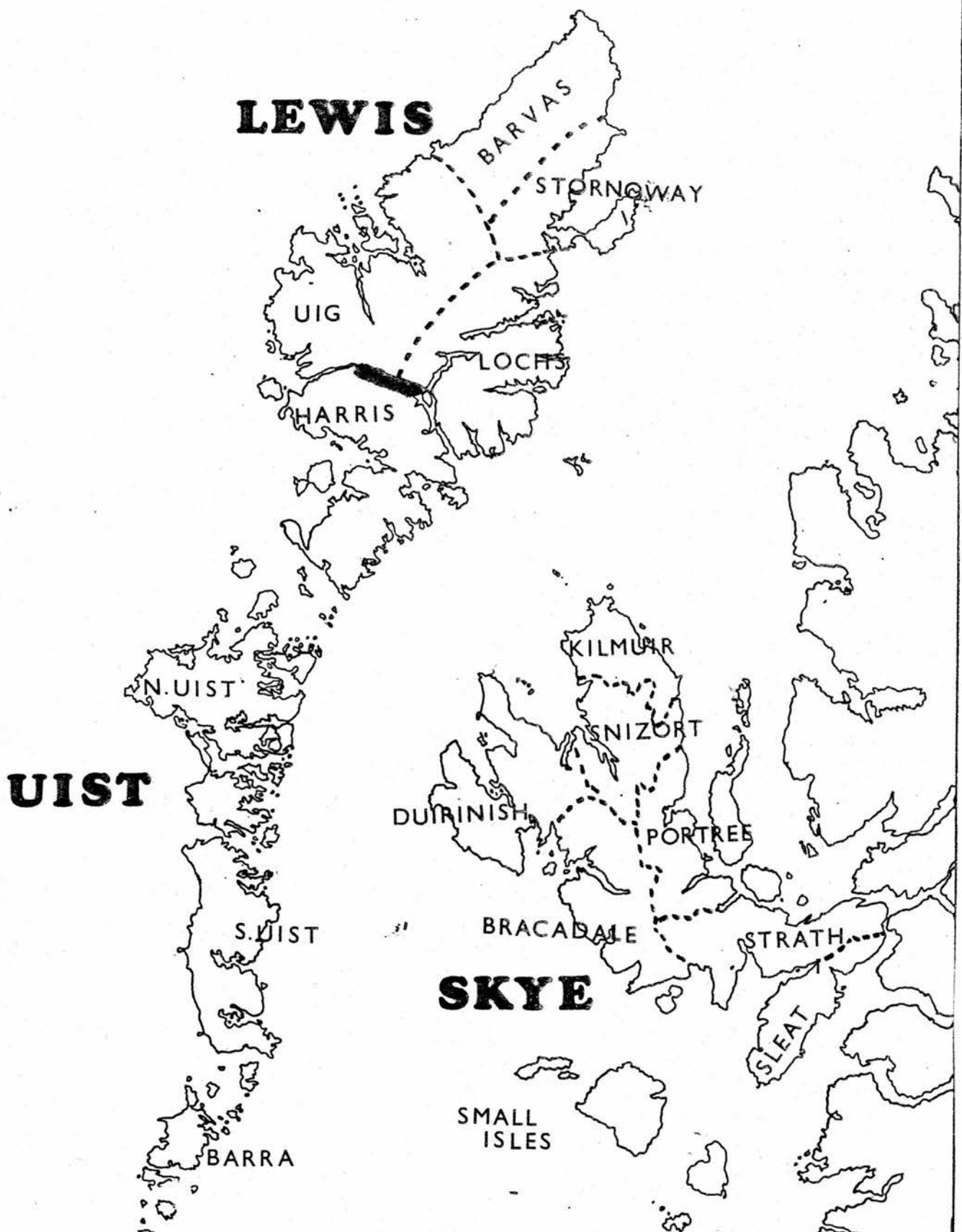
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ABBREVIATIONS

BHMS	Baptist Home Missionary Society
C. of S.	Church of Scotland
Church Sites	Reports from the Select Committee on Sites for Churches (Scotland)
EGSS	Edinburgh Gaelic School Society. (Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools)
FC	Free Church of Scotland
FES	Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae
NSA	New Statistical Account
OSA	Old Statistical Account
SCHS	Records of the Scottish Church History Society
SP	Seaforth Papers
SPGH	Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home
SSPCK	Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge
TGSI	Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness

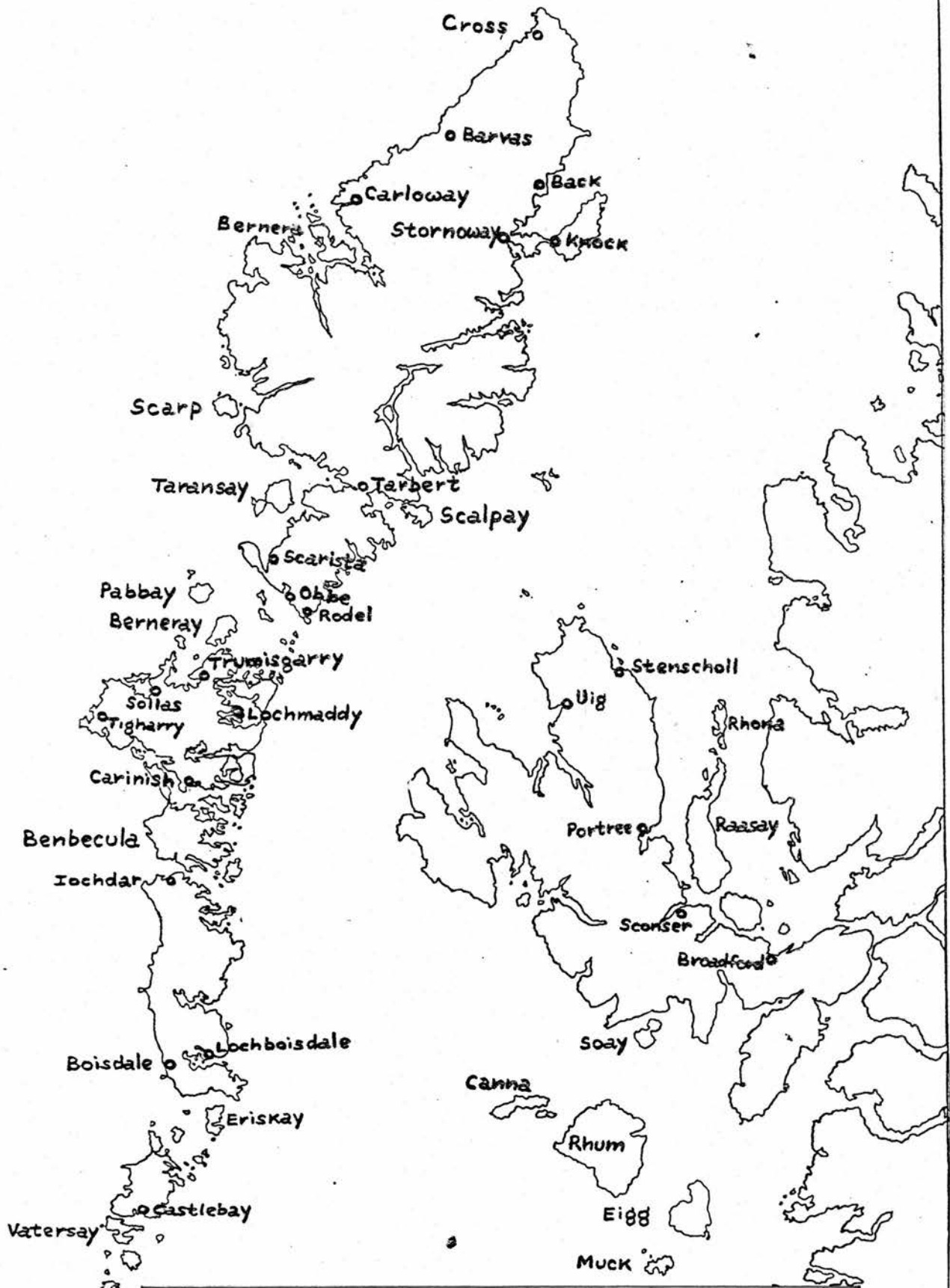
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WESTERN ISLES

PRESBYTERIES AND PARISHES 1800



WESTERN ISLES

PRINCIPAL PLACES MENTIONED IN THESIS

INTRODUCTION

We firmly hold, and count it no disgrace,
Old faiths, old customs, that alive will stay
When much of modern growth has faded quite away.¹

A city-dweller, on his first visit to the Western Isles, cannot but sense that he has entered a unique social, cultural and religious environment. Gaelic is still the everyday language of the majority of the people. According to the 1971 Census the Small Isles was the only parish in the Western Isles in which most of the inhabitants were not Gaelic speakers. In the island of Lewis over 90 per cent of the inhabitants of Barvas, Lochs and Uig speak Gaelic, and even in the parish of Stornoway, which contains the only town in the area, the figure is over 68 per cent.²

The guide book which the stranger obtains on his arrival at the ferry terminal provides him with this information: "In the Protestant isles great emphasis is still laid on Sabbath observance. If visitors are prepared to respect the cherished convictions and way of life he will find a warm welcome and a spirit of companionship scarcely possible in urban life."³ Attending a church service on Sunday, the holiday-maker will notice some differences from the worship to which he is accustomed in his home town. In nine churches out of ten in the Presbyterian islands, only the metrical psalms are sung, and if the service is conducted in Gaelic, the singing proceeds in the moving traditional manner, led by a precentor. In most pulpits the tone of preaching is decidedly Evangelical, and contains more references to the Shorter Catechism or the Westminster Confession of Faith than would be the case in the Lowlands of Scotland. In his intimations the minister will in all probability announce the time of at least one prayer meeting to be held during the week.

If the visit of a newcomer from the mainland of Scotland happens to coincide with the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion in the parish in which he is to spend his holiday, he will note that the "Communion season" lasting from Thursday to Monday, and which was once customary throughout Scotland still survives in the Western Isles. On Communion Sunday the church is packed with worshippers from several neighbouring congregations, but only a minority of the people are communicant members of the Church. During the service the traditional "fencing of the Table" takes place.

It was during the first half of the nineteenth century that Skye and the Outer Hebrides were influenced by the Evangelical movement which had affected the Highland mainland before 1800.¹ In the following chapters the different forces which produced the Evangelicalisation of the Western Isles are examined.

INTRODUCTION. NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Edinburgh University Highland Society Year Book, 1964-65, p.2.
(Verse by William Shepherd Morrison, Viscount Dunrossil of Vallaquie,
whose ancestral home was in North Uist.)
2. Census 1971, Scotland. Gaelic Report, p.21.
3. The Western Isles Official Guide Book, 1975, p.17.
4. See J. MacInnes, The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of
Scotland. (1688 to 1800. (Aberdeen 1951.)

CHAPTER ONE

THE HEBRIDEAN CHURCH IN ITS SOCIAL SETTING1800

A necessary preliminary to a study of the factors which affected the development of Evangelicalism in the Western Isles from 1800 to 1850 is a consideration of the economic, social, cultural and ecclesiastical state of the people of the Hebrides as the nineteenth century opened. Some of the changes which were to influence the Church in the islands in the first half of the nineteenth century were already foreshadowed in the events of the last decades of the eighteenth. Alterations in material conditions were to have their effect upon the religious life of the people.

Population

In the period from 1755 to 1831 many of the parishes in the area with which this thesis deals were to experience a rapid increase in population. The two parishes in which the change was most apparent were the neighbouring islands of North and South Uist. The number of inhabitants in North Uist increased by 141 per cent, while the population explosion in South Uist brought a growth of 211 per cent. The population of the island of Lewis expanded by 127 per cent, while in Harris the figure was 98 per cent.¹ By 1801 the population of Skye was some 16,000, and at the time of the census of 1841 it had attained a peak of 23,000.² There were to be fluctuations during the first half of the nineteenth century, with variations from parish to parish.

Several causes were suggested for the increase in the population of the Western Isles. The minister of North Uist, who compiled an excellent account of conditions in his parish for the Old Statistical Account, postulated a

number of reasons for the rise in the number of inhabitants in his island.

1. The preference given by the proprietor of the estate to small tenants resulted in more people being attracted to the land.
2. Early marriages also led to a growth in population. Statistics provided by the minister of North Uist reveal that, on average, there were seven persons per household in the parish in the closing years of the nineteenth century.
3. Inoculation was becoming more acceptable to Hebrideans and assisted in combating diseases which in the past had caused many deaths.³ In 1790 Donald MacKinnon, minister of Strath, apologised for being absent from a sitting of the Presbytery of Skye because "he proposed to inoculate his children for the small pox at the time of this meeting".⁴

The minister of South Uist, writing in the New Statistical Account in 1837, expressed the belief that the population of his parish had increased due to "early and improvident marriages, the healthiness of the climate, and the facility of parents in giving to their sons a portion of their lands, small enough for their own subsistence".⁵

In three of the parishes in the Western Isles - Barra, South Uist and the Small Isles - the Catholic religion predominated. In 1760 only 80 of the 1100 inhabitants of the island of Barra were Protestants.⁶ In 1840 the minister of Barra reported that during his incumbency the number of Protestants in the parish had increased from 60 to about 380, out of a total population of 2000.⁷ A tradition as old as the middle of the eighteenth century offered an explanation of why the Catholic faith prevailed in Barra: "In King Charles the First's time, Harris and Barra were one parish, and the Inhabitants were all protestants, but after the Restoration, popish priests got in amongst them

and perverted them, and their protestant minister was a man Inattentive to his Character and Duty."⁸ In the second half of the eighteenth century only about an eighth of the people of South Uist professed the Protestant religion.⁹ In Eigg, the largest island in the parish of the Small Isles, 90 per cent of the population were Catholics.¹⁰

Language

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Gaelic was the universal language of the people of the Western Isles. Before the chiefs became anglicised, a common language and culture formed one of the bonds which united the different classes in Highland society. But even before the influx of English literature and the coming of mass media of communications, observers noticed that external influences were beginning to have an adverse effect upon the language of the Gael. "Their intercourse with fishers and passengers to and from other countries, introduced a mixture of words from the English and other nations," wrote John Lane Buchanan. He added a prophetic note: "This mixture will gradually spoil that nervous expressive language."¹¹ But in 1837 the minister of South Uist could state, "The language used by the inhabitants is Gaelic, which is spoken with considerable purity, and has not lost ground within the last forty years."¹²

To many in the south Gaelic was a symbol of barbarism and backwardness. This attitude found expression in the report of a committee appointed by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland which visited the Highlands and Islands in 1760: "Till the partition arising from Different Languages be removed and the Common Language of Great Britain be diffused over the Highlands the Inhabitants will never enjoy in their full extent the benefits of Religion and Civil Government."¹³ The committee's report was drafted at a time when the Jacobite rebellions were still fresh in the memory of the majority, but

their words display the kind of bigoted outlook which governed the operations of such bodies as the SSPCK during the early period of their history. The two SSPCK schools in Stornoway about 1765 were regarded as being "at present of great Use in spreading the English language in that party of the Country."¹⁴ Chapter Four of this study includes a discussion of the societies formed in the first quarter of the nineteenth century which were not prejudiced against the Gaelic language and which were influential in giving Gaelic a new status in education.

By the eighteenth century, the day of the learned Gaelic bards, who were required to undergo an elaborate system of training, had come to an end. The era of the hereditary bard was also passing by the close of the century. In 1787 a visitor to the Hebrides encountered in South Uist one of the last representatives of the old order: "By the way, overtook an old man, riding on a small horse, with a young person of each sex attending him. He accosted the company with great courteousness. Found he was MacFuirich (sic), Clanranald's blind bard."¹⁵

Social Structure

The upper class in Hebridean society as the eighteenth century drew to a close were the principal proprietors, some of whom were also chiefs of their clan. MacNeil of Barra was commended as one who "encourages all kinds of improvement, exercises justice among his tenants, and protects them from those oppressions which are too common in other parts of the Hebrides."¹⁶ The estate owners of South Uist were MacDonald of Boisdale and MacDonald of Clanranald, the former, according to Buchanan, being "universally allowed to be the best farmer in the west of Scotland".¹⁷ The sole proprietor of North Uist was Lord MacDonald, who with MacLeod of MacLeod also possessed extensive lands in Skye.¹⁸ The MacLeod family also owned the Harris estate.¹⁹ The

island of Lewis was in possession of MacKenzie of Seaforth.²⁰ The MacKenzie family were to use their position to encourage Evangelical religion.

In the social structure of the Western Isles, the tacksmen occupied the intermediate class. "They were friends or relatives of the proprietor," explains James MacDonald, "who had no other means of providing for their connections than by giving them portions of their land". MacDonald characterises them as "men of elegant manners, good education, and capable of acquitting themselves in every relation of life, and in every part of the world, as finished gentlemen".²¹ Some of the tacksmen had visited foreign lands, for in Buchanan's time several of them were half-pay army officers.²² The disappearance of the native tacksmen in certain parts of the Hebrides was to remove "the only class other than the chiefs to which the Highlanders might have looked for leadership".²³

Buchanan draws a sad picture of the conditions of the lowest stratum of Hebridean society - the subtenants and "scallags". The latter, especially, had a miserable existence. "The scallag, whether male or female, is a poor being, who, for mere subsistence, becomes a predial slave to another, whether a subtenant, a tacksmen, or a laird." The scallag was obliged to spend five days each week working for his master.²⁴

As John Lane Buchanan's book is one of our principal sources for the social and ecclesiastical history of the Outer Hebrides in the 1790's, it is perhaps appropriate to include a note at this juncture on the author's career. Buchanan was appointed as missionary minister in the north of Harris by the Royal Bounty Committee in 1782, and in December 1790 he was deposed by the Presbytery of Uist on several charges of immorality. The Presbytery found him guilty of fornication, when he was accused of being the father of the child born to a certain Ann MacLeod of Tarbert. The minutes of Presbytery

assert that Buchanan "acquiescing in this guilt, did by a special messenger make overtures of compromise to the Presbytery of Uist and the Elders of the parish of Harris with a view to inducing them to pass from the prosecution as the deposition of the said witnesses extant in process bear".²⁵

John Buchanan next appeared in London in 1793 when his book "Travels in the Western Hebrides" was published. Some reviewers treated the work with a certain amount of scepticism. "We are at a loss to determine," said a writer in the "Gentleman's Magazine" in October 1793, "Whether it is Baron Munkhausen, or an ill-informed credulous Scotch missionary who speaks; and we are led to doubt whether his credulity has not misguided his prejudices in other matters."²⁶ The magazine quoted from what was obviously a press hand-out which described Buchanan as "A native of the Highland part of Menteith", in Perthshire, who had been given an appointment as missionary "for which he was well qualified by his knowledge of the Gaelic language, his religious sincerity and zeal, and his habit of living and conversing with the poorer sort."²⁷

A reference in the introduction of the book to Buchanan having held a commission from the SSPCK from 1782 to 1791²⁸ was to cause a furore. (Responsibility for the error in describing the author as being employed by the SSPCK rather than the Royal Bounty probably lies with the editor rather than with Buchanan.) When the committee of the SSPCK met in April 1794, one of the items on the agenda was the former missionary's book. An advertisement was to be placed in London and Edinburgh newspapers disclaiming any connection between the Society and John Lane Buchanan.²⁹ At a meeting of the Committee held the following month it was announced that Buchanan had advertised in the press claiming that he had in fact held a commission in the Western Isles.³⁰ The SSPCK decided to publish a second statement. The Royal Bounty Committee had previously had a public notice printed in which the fact of Buchanan having

been removed from office "for Immoralities" was mentioned.³¹

John Lane Buchanan continued his literary exercises. (The middle name Lane or Lanne was added after he had left Harris.) In "A General View of the Fishery of Great Britain" he blamed William Thomson for sections in his earlier book which had caused offence. Thomson had apparently been entrusted with the publication of Buchanan's "Travels", but he had "abused the confidence placed in him, and discharged his whole wrath against part of the clergy and others, under the said author's name." He added: "These scurrilities the author disclaims, and he has since resented the indignity severely; and shall purge out all his dirty eructations from his second edition."³² As far as can be traced, the expurgated version was not published. Buchanan also produced "A Defence of the Scots Highlanders".

It is rather strange that the author should censure another for the vituperative language in the book, as some of the most scurrilous remarks are quoted in the original Gaelic, of which only Buchanan could have been the source.

The value of John Lane Buchanan's book is difficult to assess. As the author himself pointed out, he was in a better position to ascertain the true situation of the common people than writers from the south who visited only the homes of tacksmen and proprietors, and drew much of their published information from their hosts.³³ Knowing that Buchanan had been deposed by the Presbytery of Uist after a long and exhaustive trial, his observations on the Church in the Western Isles have to be treated with a considerable degree of caution. Smout remarks that Buchanan "being a retired missionary he could be franker than the parish incumbents of the Statistical Account and New Statistical Account"³⁴ should be read against the background of the circumstances surrounding his "retiral".

Trade

The sea and the land have always been important for the Highland economy. Until the second half of the eighteenth century horses and cattle had been the only significant exports from the islands. By the last decade of the century Buchanan writes, "Now kelp has taken the precedence."³⁵ Kelp is defined as "an alkaline seaweed extract used in the manufacture of soap and glass".³⁶ A visitor to the Hebrides recounts his experience in Uist in the summer of 1737: "On approaching to South Uist and Benbecula, the whole island seemed on fire. There was a great smoke in a variety of places round the shore. At this season kelp is burning in every creek."³⁷

While the kelp industry was not yet at its height when the nineteenth century began, already it was assuming an importance in the economy of the islands. The shores of South Uist were producing 1100 tons of kelp per annum,³⁸ and North Uist 100 tons more.³⁹ People from Uig in Lewis travelled as far as Harris and Uist in order to obtain employment on the kelp estates.⁴⁰

Gray notes the effect of the kelp industry upon the Highlands and Islands: "An expanding product was sold at increasing prices and a new and growing stream of income coursed through the old society of the west."⁴¹ Being a labour-intensive industry it attracted a large population to estates where there were plentiful supplies of seaweed. When kelp had to compete with Spanish barilla after the time of the American War of Independence, there was a sharp decline in price. During the Peninsular War kelp prices again increased, reaching £22 a ton in 1810. In peace-time the importation of barilla lessened the value of kelp, and the reduction of duty on salt spelled ruin for this Highland industry.⁴² With the decline of the kelp industry the annual value of South Uist estate fell from £15,000 to under £5,000.⁴³ The collapse of kelp manufacture left a high population in some areas with their source of income gone, and this was one of the factors leading to emigration and eviction.

Emigration

In the nineteenth century, in the wake of crop failures in the 1840s, thousands of Highlanders had to leave their native shores and seek a new home in America or Australia. But before the end of the eighteenth century what the minister of North Uist called "the rage for emigration" had already begun. Between 1771 and 1775, 200 natives of North Uist had emigrated to America. Among the reasons given for this exodus were lack of employment in the homeland, the "flattering accounts" which arrived from those who had already settled overseas and the sudden rise in land-rents.⁴⁴

Emigration from South Uist to Canada had commenced in 1772.⁴⁵ 200 emigrants had sailed from Barra, "upon promises of the undisturbed profession of their religion."⁴⁶ Between 1788 and 1790, 183 of the inhabitants of the Small Isles had gone to America, while 55 had moved to the mainland of Scotland or to neighbouring islands. The parish minister of the Small Isles believed that emigration had taken place because "the country was overstocked with people, arising from frequent early marriages".⁴⁷ Between 1801 and 1803 some 25 vessels had sailed from Skye to America.⁴⁸

Shifts in population must have created a feeling of unrest and tension in the Western Isles. Such an atmosphere was conducive to the spread of the revival movements scrutinised in Chapter Five.

Geographical Difficulties

As the nineteenth century began, the Church in the Western Isles faced several obstacles, caused by the peculiar geography of the Highlands and Islands. Many island ministers were settled in parishes of vast proportions. Commenting on the huge size of some West Highland parishes a committee of the General Assembly had written: "Several of them resemble rather a province."⁴⁹

A difficult situation was complicated by the fact that some Hebridean parishes had within their bounds a number of small uninhabited islands, which were often rendered inaccessible by adverse weather conditions. "One parish has often several islands belonging to it," noted a traveller in the Western Isles, "at which the minister must preach alternately; and, so boisterous are the ferries, and drunken the boatmen, that the clergyman is often not only drenched to the skin, but in danger of his life."⁵⁰ The minister of North Uist conducted services in the off-shore islands of Boreray and Heisker, but was able to visit his parishioners there only once a year.⁵¹ Berneray and Pabbay were included in the parish of Harris, and the minister was under obligation to preach there once a quarter, although the voyage to those islands was "difficult and dangerous". John MacLeod of Harris told of one of his predecessors who had been storm-bound for weeks on one of his visits to Pabbay, "to the great detriment of the rest of his parochial charge".⁵² Once a month the minister of Portree crossed to Raasay to hold services.⁵³ On every fourth Sunday the minister of Barra visited the island of Vatersay.⁵⁴

The parish with the most formidable difficulties of communication was the Small Isles. The minister was based in Eigg, but officiated once a month in Rhum and quarterly in Canna, provided the weather was favourable. The smaller island of Muck, which was also incorporated in the parish, was six miles from Eigg. Because of the amount of travel involved in the performance of his parochial duties the minister was required to keep a vessel of considerable size at his own expense. Owing to the amount of time spent in visiting the islands within his parish and in attending statutory meetings of Presbytery and Synod, he did not expect to be at home for more than a third part of the year.⁵⁵ The minister of Uig reported in the middle of the eighteenth century that he "lies under the necessity of keeping up and maintaining, upon his own proper charge, a large boat and a crew of six men".⁵⁶

Even within the confines of a parish in the larger islands travel could be extremely arduous. "There are many rapid waters," writes Roderick MacLeod, who was minister of Bracadale in 1800, "which are frequently attended with inconvenience, difficulty and danger, to people travelling from one part of the parish to the other."⁵⁷ There had been little improvement in conditions since the middle of the eighteenth century when Donald MacQueen of Kilmuir reported that he had two places of worship in his parish, adding, "He has an impetuous river to wade through before he comes at the first, and has two of that sort betwixt him and the last."⁵⁸ In the parish of Stornoway there were "six rapid rivers" which often swelled to a great height.⁵⁹

The uncertainty of inter-island communication is revealed in Presbytery minutes which from time to time note the difficulty in obtaining a quorum. In 1792 Donald MacLean of the Small Isles was excused for being late for a meeting of the Presbytery of Skye, and for being absent from the previous sederunt, as his brethren were "made sensible that Mr. MacLean hath used all the efforts which wind and tide could permit to appear earlier".⁶⁰ Even those members of Presbytery who did not have to undertake a perilous sea journey were sometimes prevented from attending meetings. In 1795 a meeting of the Presbytery of Skye was cancelled because "the rain was so incessant and heavy that it was impossible for any of the members to cross the rivers that lay in the way to the seat of Presbytery".⁶¹ The following year the scheduled meeting was postponed until April as a heavy fall of snow made travel impossible.⁶² The minister of Kilmuir was separated from the seat of Presbytery by eight rivers and a ferry.⁶³

Towards the end of the eighteenth century a traveller journeying from Harris to Barra could expect to be three weeks away from home.⁶⁴ John Knox discovered that crossing the Minch could be a frightening experience. "Captain

MacLeod of Harris, who had often passed the Cape of Good Hope, declared that he would rather go there again, than come from Sky, in such a day, with an open boat."⁶⁵ No-one acquainted with the Hebrides at that time would have disputed the view of one writer of the period: "The ferry-boats among these isles are too few, and too uncertain and irregular in their passages."⁶⁶

Internal communications were also poor at the beginning of the half-century under discussion. It was not until 1791 that road-building commenced in the island of Lewis, and within a few years a road of about ten miles in length had been constructed across part of the moor separating Stornoway and Barvas.⁶⁷ In 1809 there were only two stretches of carriage road in the Outer Hebrides, consisting of about eight miles in North Uist, and the 15 miles of road between Stornoway and Barvas.⁶⁸ In other areas in Lewis road construction was no easy task. The minister of Stornoway wrote: "The moor across the island from Stornoway to Uig is so extensive and soft, that it would require the labour of many ages to open a road through it."⁶⁹ Road building in Skye had begun a little earlier. In 1786 Knox had seen 200-300 men engaged in road construction from Portree westwards. Roads were being built in other parts of Skye "under the inspection of the gentlemen and tacksmen, and accompanied, each party, by a bagpiper".⁷⁰

As the nineteenth century advanced there was an improvement in both internal and external communications. By 1837 there were in North Uist "no less than eighty miles of good roads".⁷¹ A packet sailed twice weekly between Lochmaddy and Dunvegan, and letters and papers from Edinburgh were delivered in North Uist within "the surprisingly short time of four days".⁷²

Ecclesiastical Provision

The Church in the Hebrides was beset by difficulties in regard to accommo-

dation, and many years were to pass before these problems were to receive even a partial solution. Some of the buildings in which islanders met for services were far from satisfactory. In Strath there were three stated places of worship - but only one church building. At the other two locations the minister preached on the hillside, or in a house, should the weather be unsuitable for an open air service.⁷³ In Snizort only "the vestiges of a parish kirk" remained.⁷⁴ The parish church of Barvas was "a perfect ruin" in the 1790s, but plans were in hand to have it rebuilt.⁷⁵ Because of the insignificant number of Protestants in the island of Barra, "it was thought unnecessary to put the heritor to the expense of building a church".⁷⁶ Even in the middle of the nineteenth century there was no parish church in South Uist, where the people met "in a private house with 200 sittings".⁷⁷ As late as 1835, when there had been some improvement in the situation with the erection of "Parliamentary churches", Simon MacLauchlan, minister of Snizort, calculated that the ecclesiastical buildings in Skye could accommodate only one sixth of the population.⁷⁸

The scattered nature of island population and travel difficulties resulted in many people in the Western Isles being deprived of regular Church services. The church in the town of Stornoway was vacant on each occasion the minister held services in outlying parts of his parish.⁷⁹ During the winter months the parish church of Portree was inaccessible to two-thirds of the population.⁸⁰ What Allan MacQueen stated about North Uist could be repeated in the case of many of the parishes in the three island Presbyteries: "It is impossible that one clergyman, however assiduous he may be in the discharge of his duty, can be equal to the task of instructing in the principles of religion, such a multitude of people dispersed over a great tract of country, many of them in situations so discontinuous to the places of worship, that they hardly have an opportunity of hearing the word of God preached once in a twelvemonth."⁸¹ In

1824, the 29 parishes which comprised the Synod of Glenelg contained an average of 3000 souls, while some of them had a total of 5000-6000.⁸²

One of the methods used by the Church of Scotland to compensate for the insufficiency of preachers in the Western Isles was the employment of catechists. In Harris a sum of money had been bequeathed to pay for the services of a catechist whose surname must be MacLeod "for teaching the illiterate to repeat the creed and Lord's prayer, and to answer theological questions by rote, in Gaelic, and explain their meaning".⁸³ If Buchanan's evidence is accepted, some of the catechists who served island parishes in the closing years of the eighteenth century were disreputable characters. The catechist appointed in Harris procured two substitutes, one "an old blind beggar, of fourscore years and upwards," and the other "a decrepid changeling, but endowed with a tenacious memory".⁸⁴ Others were dismissed by Buchanan as "worthless drunkards".⁸⁵ In 1824 there were only 10 catechists employed in the extensive Synod of Glenelg.⁸⁶

It was not unusual for blind men to be commissioned as catechists in the Hebrides. Donald Munro, born about 1773, learned the Shorter Catechism and large portions of the Bible by heart.⁸⁷ The most colourful of Hebridean catechists was to be found in North Uist. "There is a blind bully of this order in Uist, who in order to escape contempt, and secure respectful attention both to his person and his doctrines, carries about with him, wherever he goes, loaded pistols."⁸⁸

In 1725 George I granted £1000 for the provision of catechists and preachers in the Highlands and Islands. This "Royal Bounty" was increased to £2000 by George IV.⁸⁹ In 1800 the Royal Bounty Committee employed an itinerant missionary in Duirinish and Vaternish at a salary of £30, a catechist in Portree, who received a salary of £25, and another catechist in Eigg, Rhum

and Carra, who received £12. In the Presbytery of Uist the itinerant minister, with a salary of £30 officiated on alternate Sundays at Benbecula and Carinish, holding services every fifth weekend at Iochdar in South Uist. In North Uist a catechist received £25 annually.⁹⁰

The catechists in Portree and North Uist were also schoolmasters of the parish. When the school of North Uist was vacant in 1795, two candidates were examined as to their knowledge of English, Latin, Greek and the principles of religion. The successful candidate, Alexander Stewart, was requested "to employ as much time as he can spare from his business as Catechist in teaching such parts of Literature as may be useful to prepare such persons for the University as have a view to be students of Divinity". The teacher and catechist at Portree was expected to render a similar service to prospective students of divinity in his parish.⁹¹

In 1802 the Royal Bounty Committee finally agreed to appoint a missionary to serve the islands in the Sound of Harris and part of North Uist. Donald MacLean was in that year appointed to the mission of Sand and Sollas. He was to officiate for two successive Sabbaths on the mainland of North Uist, and on the third he was to conduct services in Berneray. Services were to be held for a further two Sundays at Sand, and on the following weekend he was to cross to Pabbay. This sequence of services was to continue throughout the year.⁹² Later Boisdale in South Uist was added to the list of missions, and Carinish and Benbecula became separate stations. The missionary of South Uist preached on alternate Sundays at Boisdale, with services on intervening Sundays at Frobost and in the islands of Eriskay. A Royal Bounty missionary was also stationed in Raasay, holding services every third Sunday at Sconser on the mainland of Skye.⁹³

A writer who visited the Western Isles early in the nineteenth century

spoke highly of the work of Royal Bounty catechists and preachers. He writes of them as "in general, sober and attentive, going from house to house instructing and catechising the people".⁹⁴

Educational Provision

The Reformers' dream of a school in every parish took longer to become a reality in the Western Isles than in any other area in Scotland. It was not until the 1760s that any parish school was opened in Lewis outside Stornoway, when a school was provided in Lochs.⁹⁵ Education of the kind offered in the parish school was available to very few. In 1834 there was no school of any description in the island of Barra; "The minister is the only person in the parish who employs a private teacher for the education of his own family."⁹⁶

Where parish schools did exist, their value was often limited by the enormous area which they served. One commentator felt that each parish would require two or three schools if adequate provision were to be made for the education of the young.⁹⁷ The minister of Lochs was of the view that his parish which was "so much intersected by lakes, rivers and arms of the sea" that the parochial school and six other schools which were in operation would need to be doubled in number.⁹⁸ The location of Kilmuir school was such that only a quarter of the children of the parish could attend "with convenience".⁹⁹

The usefulness of parish schools was also restricted by the fact that in many cases the teacher was unable to speak Gaelic. In 1800 the Presbytery of Skye opposed the candidature of John Campbell as parish schoolmaster of Strath, because on his own confession, he knew "little Latin and no Greek".¹⁰⁰ A knowledge of Gaelic does not appear to have been regarded as a prerequisite

for teachers in parish schools in the Western Isles. In 1834 the only parish schools listed as including Gaelic in their curriculum were Sleat,¹⁰¹ South Uist,¹⁰² Barvas¹⁰³ and Lochs.¹⁰⁴

A considerable number of the ministers of the Western Isles spent some years as schoolmasters before being settled in a parish. John Lees and Allan MacKenzie had been parish teachers in Lewis,¹⁰⁵ and MacIntosh MacKay taught in Portree.¹⁰⁶ The most distinguished students to pass through the parish school in Harris in the early years of the nineteenth century was William MacGillivray, who became Professor of Natural History at Aberdeen University. In 1807, at the age of 11, MacGillivray left Harris, and entered college after only a further year's schooling in Aberdeen.¹⁰⁷

In 1701 a group of gentlemen in Edinburgh met to discuss ways and means of benefiting the people of the Highlands and Islands. In 1709 they were formed into a corporate body, assuming the title "The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge".¹⁰⁸ The general objective of the Society was "to erect and maintain schools in such parts of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland as should be thought to need them most; in which schools, the children of Popish as well as Protestant parents should be taught the English language, reading and writing, and especially the principles of true religion."¹⁰⁹ In 1738 the Society was granted a second patent, and established schools which taught such subjects as sewing, knitting, weaving and spinning.¹¹⁰ In 1800 the SSPCK had 208 schools on the first patent and 100 on the second.¹¹¹

In 1796-97 the SSPCK supported schools at Eynort and Kilnaluaig in the Presbytery of Skye.¹¹² Schools in Lewis were situated in Stornoway (where there was a master and assistant), Swainbost, Carloway and Uig.¹¹³ In Uist Presbytery there were schools at Borve (Barra), Stoneybridge, Benbecula and Scarista.¹¹⁴ On the second patent were 10 spinning schools in Stornoway

which received financial assistance from Seaforth.¹¹⁵ Similar institutions had been opened in Kilmuir,¹¹⁶ Benbecula and Harris.¹¹⁷

A review of the Society's operations towards the end of the eighteenth century stated that "the salvation of souls" was the chief object of the association.¹¹⁸ Allied to this aim was a desire "to send the Scriptures to the Highlanders and to teach them to read them".¹¹⁹ Between 1767 and the end of the century the Society spent over £2000 in publishing the Gaelic Bible.¹²⁰

Candidates for schools were examined in Edinburgh by two Directors of the Society in reading and spelling, English writing, arithmetic and church music, "but also, and most particularly, upon acquaintance with the Evangelical system".¹²¹ Each master was ex-officio catechist of the district.¹²²

Although not included in the original scheme, the SSPCK also appointed missionary ministers to such places as Saint Kilda¹²³ and Eynort in Bracadale.¹²⁴ Missionaries were expected to be "Evangelical in their doctrine, and faithful and laborious in the public and private duties of their office."¹²⁵ The Society also awarded six bursaries annually to Gaelic-speaking students of divinity.¹²⁶

The impact of the SSPCK on the spiritual life of the Western Isles is not easy to assess. There are no reports on revivals occurring before 1800 in which their teachers and missionaries were involved. In some ways the Society prepared the ground for the coming of Evangelicalism which was so closely associated with other bodies which were formed after the nineteenth century had begun. The methods that were used to relieve the educational and ecclesiastical destitution of the Hebrides from 1800 to 1850 were also the means of introducing Evangelical teachers and clergy.

A writer from the beginning of the period covered by this thesis commented on the parish ministers of the Hebrides: "The clergymen, who appear to be respectable and enlightened, ought not to become tacksmen or farmers, or wander for months together from their charges; but to be encouraged to employ themselves in continual and extraordinary diligence for the edification of the people."¹²⁷ One of the criticisms made by opponents of ministers who belonged to the Moderate wing of the Church of Scotland was that agricultural interests assumed too much importance in their lives. In the next chapter the Moderate clergy of the Western Isles are discussed.

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CHAPTER TWO

A PROFILE OF THE MODERATES

Kenneth MacDonald, in his quaint but useful book, "Social and Religious Life in the Highlands", provides us with what might be called an "Identikit" picture of what he considered to be the typical Moderate clergyman. Identikit pictures employed by police forces in piecing together portraits of suspected criminals, often produce a mere approximation to the real thing, and at their worst, may amount to a caricature. It should be remembered that many of the portrayals of Moderate ministers come from observers who could hardly be looked upon as disinterested bystanders. I.D.L. Clark has written: "Seldom has an ecclesiastical party been condemned by posterity quite so mercilessly as the 'Moderates'."¹ Some of the principal sources for this chapter belong to the turbulent years of the Disruption period, when feelings ran high, and statements were made which were later regretted. According to James Cameron Lees, such terms as "dumb dogs" and "stinking Moderates" were common in the islands during those days.² Moderate clergy were castigated as "lazy workers in the vineyard" and "lovers of loaves and fishes".³ Other derogatory terms used by critics, especially visiting missionaries, were "slow bellies", "wolves in sheep's clothing", and "shepherds that feed not the flock".⁴

1.

Kenneth MacDonald says of Highland Moderates, "They paid more attention to their glebes than to pastoral work ... Many of them had large farms adjoining their glebes, and they proved themselves to be skilful toilers of the land".⁵

The last section in this statement is beyond dispute. Moderate ministers, as a rule, were interested in agriculture, and often sought

to give a lead to their parishioners in improving their land and in modernising their methods of tillage and techniques of management. This interest in cattle and cultivation did not always endear the Moderates to their opponents. Writing in 1827 about the opinion of those who had ceased to attend the services of certain ministers in Skye, one writer stated: "They say that some of them are most excellent and extensive sheep farmers, that some of them can at times act in the capacity of factors with so much attention, fruitfulness and skill, as would do credit to any Writer of the Signet or Accountant in Edinburgh".⁶ Souter of Duirinish was one clergyman in Skye who earned little popularity among Evangelicals by combining the offices of parish minister and estate factor.⁷ He was the unfortunate target of the satirical verses of Gilleasbuig Aotrom, the Skye "fool" -

Bidh an saoghal 'na bhutarras
 fhad's bhios Souter 'na shiamarlan ...
 Is olc an obair fear teagaisg
 a bhith beagadh na tuatha.⁸

(The world will be a hotch-potch as long as Souter remains chamberlain ... It is evil work for a preacher to bring the peasantry to reduced circumstances.)

It was no unusual occurrence for a minister to be tenant of a large tract of land. A reporter from the "Scotsman" newspaper discovered in 1847 that Coll MacDonald of Portree had a "sheep-farm of about eight miles in extent."⁹ He held the tenancy of the glebe of Benmore, and the farm of Glenvarigill, and he was also reputed to have "laid claim" to part of the common grazing of Mugary.¹⁰ An obvious reference to the grasping nature of certain clergy of the past is immortalized in the North Uist

proverb: "Cròg ministèir agus spòg iolaire".¹¹ (A minister's "paw" and an eagle's claw.) A visitor to Uist a few years after the Disruption pointed out that Finlay MacRae, parish minister of North Uist, held a "gigantic farm, larger than many a German principality",¹² at a time when the people of Sollas were being evicted from their small crofts. In 1829 MacRae had been granted the let of the farms of Griminish and Vallay.¹³

In recent years scores of acres in the island of Lewis have been transformed from brown moorland to green pastures by reseeded. But a century and a half ago the enterprising minister of Barvas had already begun experimenting with new methods of cultivation. The geologist Headrick was impressed by his initiative: "The only person in Lewis who (six) I found had tried shelly sand was the Rev. Mr. MacDonald, minister of Barvas".¹⁴ Patches which had been treated with manure brought forth many weeds, and the grass they produced was not so lush as that which grew on the portions to which sand had been applied. James Hogg confirmed that MacDonald was "well versed in agriculture and the management of different soils, which is of great importance in such a place; yet the people are so much prejudiced in favour of their ancient and uncouth modes that few follow his example".¹⁵

Donald MacDonald was succeeded at Barvas by another minister who was an expert in agriculture, William MacRae. MacRae endeavoured, with little success, to persuade his parishioners to take ten-acre lots and to adopt a regular system of rotation.¹⁶ His fellow-presbyter, Alexander Simpson of Lochs was also remembered as "a good agriculturist".¹⁷ Robert MacGregor of Kilmuir "had an extensive knowledge of agriculture".¹⁸ Although William Ferguson has argued that "Moderatism as practised in the South had little relevance to the Highland scene",¹⁹ Sir Archibald Geikie spoke of the "older type of minister", who survived in the Highland area after he had become extinct in the Lowlands.²⁰ This is how Geikie represented him, "He

cultivates his glebe, and sometimes has also a farm on his hands. He has thus some practical knowledge of agriculture, is often a good judge of cattle, and breeds his own stock".²¹

John Matheson of North Uist used his satirical powers to define what to an Evangelical mind was the credo of the Moderate:

Creideam an crodh is an caoraich;
 Creideam an stiòpainibh mòr;
 Creideam 'san duais tha mi factaim,
 an t-airgiod, an glìob, is an t-òr.²²

(I believe in cattle and sheep; I believe in large stipends;
 I believe in the reward which I receive, the silver, the glebe,
 and the gold.)

A rhyme containing similar sentiments was current in English -

I do believe in stone and lime,
 A manse of large dimension,
 Broad acres for a glebe and farm -
That is my church extension.²³

Because of the large size of the average Highland glebe, and the work involved in its management, it is natural that critics of the Moderates should accuse them of attending to these occupations at the expense of their pastoral duties. As the result of a visit to the Highlands at the end of the eighteenth century, James Haldane came to the conclusion that the glebe could be an obstacle and "to say nothing of the temptation to worldly-mindedness to which a minister having a farm, attending markets, etc. is liable, it has had a bad effect on its people. It often creates jarring interests."²⁴ Another visitor from outwith the Established Church, who seldom minced his words in criticising Highland ministers was Relief Synod missionary, Neil Douglas. "What his boat is to one," he observed,

"his farm is to another, and his horse-couping, driving etc. to a third; and betwixt these serious avocations, the poor flock is left to the mercy of the foxes and the wolves."²⁵

John Lane Buchanan, Royal Bounty missionary at Tarbert, Harris, from 1782 to 1790, asserts that in contrast to their predecessors, the clergy of the Western Isles in his own day, "completely neglected their pastoral obligations". Looking back to what he pictures as a religious Golden Age, which ended about the middle of the eighteenth century, Buchanan declared that at that period, "the clergy were exemplary in their lives, regular and conscientious in the discharge of their duty. They visited the sick, and spent much time in examining and praying with and for their people; ministerial duties, which at this day are not so much as named in the Western Hebrides; except indeed among the Catholic clergy, who are very assiduous in the discharge of their religious functions."²⁶ Once again, Buchanan's words must be read against the background of his chequered career, as sketched in Chapter One. The motive behind his remarks may well have been vindictiveness against the ministers responsible for his dismissal, although his remarks are not without confirmation from other authorities. Donald Sage was informed that when Finlay Cook arrived in Lewis in 1829, the "public teachers were both idle and inefficient".²⁷

But even in a Presbytery where Moderates predominated, a minister could find himself accused of neglect of his pastoral responsibilities. In 1835 Donald MacLean, minister of the Small Isles, appeared before the Presbytery of Skye on several charges. It is significant that one of the accusations made by the Presbytery against MacLean was that he had "neglected his duty as parish-minister, in connexion with the Church of Scotland, by not preaching in his parish, and by not performing the other duties of his charge, such

as visiting the sick, and catechizing; thus exhibiting a total disregard of the spiritual interests of his parishioners, and for the advancement of religious truth".²⁸ This shows that even among the maligned Moderates such duties as pastoral visitation and regular catechizing were looked upon as the norm, although not all attained the expected standard.

It cannot be denied that Moderate clergymen were genuinely concerned about the educational progress of their people. Writing about General Assembly Schools, a commentator reminded critics of the Moderate party, "At the head of this movement was the late Principal Baird, one of these Moderates whom it is now the practice of Free Churchmen to revile as enemies of the schemes of the Assembly".²⁹ (He might have added the name of Norman MacLeod of St. Columba's, Glasgow, a member of one of the greatest Highland clerical families, another of the moving spirits behind the Assembly schools.)³⁰ When Finlay MacRae arrived in North Uist in 1818 the only means of education were provided by the parish schools. By 1823 he had secured four schools from the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society, and two from the Glasgow Society. When requested by the Inverness Education Society to provide statistics regarding the literacy of his parishioners, the minister of North Uist divided the island into ten districts, and personally gathered the relevant details from all but one of them.³¹ Coll MacDonald of Portree took an active interest in the work of the schools set up by the General Assembly after 1824. In 1831 he wrote, "I have travelled about 100 miles in my circuit, in examining the General Assembly's Schools, and I consider my trouble fully compensated from the very great pleasure I have received in seeing the incomparable success of these highly respected seminaries".³² To this list of Moderates interested in education might be added Simpson of Lochs who gave this information to the Gaelic School Society about their teacher at Shawbost, "I often examined his school with great delight."³³

Strath and Sleat were identified as the only two parishes in Skye which did not give enthusiastic support to the work of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society.³⁴ But this lack of cordiality was probably due, not so much to a reluctance on the part of the ministers to support the educational advancement of their parishioners, as to doubts about the theological outlook of the teachers. "Moderate", in a poem by John Morrison, the blacksmith bard of Harris, defines one of the characteristics of his party -

Tha sìochaint is sàmhchair
fainear dhuinn gach aon uair.³⁵

(We always aim at peace and tranquillity.)

Teachers whose views appeared to Moderates extreme and fanatical would be felt to be a potential cause of disharmony within the community.

A number of Moderate clergy in island Presbyteries showed a concern for the culture and traditions of their people. Donald Morrison, who collected much traditional lore in the island of Lewis, was encouraged in his researches by William MacRae of Barvas and John Cameron of Stornoway - the only two non-Evangelical ministers in the Presbytery at the time of the Disruption.³⁶ Finlay MacRae of North Uist noted with regret that a "taste for song" was on the decline among the common people. The custom of having a piper at the head of funeral processions was also disappearing, and MacRae added, with a glance at the Evangelicals, "There are some individuals - doubtless with good intentions - whose zeal has not been wanting to put down the practice."³⁷

2.

Kenneth MacDonald gives his own description of the Moderate clergyman in the pulpit. "Unedifying preaching was another mark of the Moderate minister. His sermons were simply moral essays. His hope of salvation

was founded on good works of a very superficial kind. The necessity of regeneration, repentance, or faith in Christ was not insisted on. The Gospel, in fact, was not preached, and it could not be when the preacher himself had not tasted that the Lord is gracious".³⁸ In this section we shall consider whether this rather uncharitable view is a misrepresentation of the Moderates of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Roderick MacLeod of Bracadale and Snizort expressed the view that the preaching of the clergy of Skye when he entered the ministry "was nothing better than scraps of Blair's sermons or of some other equally meagre stuff".³⁹ Hugh Blair was minister of Saint Giles from 1758 to 1800, and his sermons are held to be "perfect examples of Moderate preaching".⁴⁰ In an article on "Evangelical Preaching" in the "Christian Instructor" for January 1824, an anonymous contributor says of Dr. Blair, "His sermons, elegant as they are, and much praised as they have been, were instantly taken as the text book from which his followers were to derive their creed. Inferior to their master in style, but surpassing him in zeal as proselytes generally do, his disciples, while they made their sermons far less interesting in matter, contrived to render them many times more cold in matter than his".⁴¹ By 1812 Hebridean admirers of Professor Blair were able to procure some of his sermons in a Gaelic translation.⁴² The Gaelic collection contains twelve sermons. The last two sermons in the book - "On Death"⁴³ and "On the Last Judgment"⁴⁴ - would appear in an anthology of Evangelical preaching. But a sermon on "The Reasons for Persevering in Virtue" is vintage Moderatism.⁴⁵

John Matheson, in his stinging satire on Moderate clergy, supports MacDonald's claim that the Moderates looked upon good works as the basis of their salvation:

Creideam an cumhnanta gnìomha,

Creideam a'm dhèanadas féin.⁴⁶

(I believe in the covenants of works, I believe in my own deeds.)

When Alexander MacLeod came to Uig as the first Evangelical minister in the Long Island, he discovered that the result of a prolonged Moderate ministry was that his parishioners' religious hope was founded on "good conduct and doing the best we could".⁴⁷ On a Communion Sabbath in Lochs, five of the worshippers made a public protest, calling Alexander Simpson "a murderer of souls", because he taught that a man's salvation depended on his "friendliness and kindness".⁴⁸

In tradition, Coll MacDonald of Portree appears as one of the most dreary of Moderate preachers. John MacKenzie of Lochcarron is reputed to have said to him in jest, "Mr. Coll, you and I ought to be very friendly. People say we are the two poorest preachers and biggest Moderates in the Synod of Glenelg."⁴⁹ On another occasion, the wife of the minister of Portree went to listen to MacDonald of Ferintosh in the course of one of his preaching tours. On her return home, her husband enquired whether she had enjoyed the service. "No," replied Mrs. MacDonald, "I would rather be hearing yourself."⁵⁰ This assessment would not have been accepted by all the parishioners of Portree.

In 1842 a number of parishioners in the island of Berneray protested to the Presbytery of Uist about alleged irregularities of conduct by their minister, John Bethune. When the Presbytery refused to accept the petition, one of the grounds for refusal being the fact that the complainants did not attend Bethune's services, and were therefore not members of his congregation, the complainants replied, "They acknowledge, indeed, they do not countenance the ministry of Mr. Bethune, but their reason for dis-countenancing his

ministry is, that they had never received any benefits from his ministrations."⁵¹
 When MacIntosh MacKay who had an intimate knowledge of the Western Isles, was asked what specific features in the clergy of the Establishment had influenced some parishioners in the Highlands to abandon their services even before the Disruption, he answered, "I should say that the prevailing cause was the want of edification which they felt from the ministrations of the Established Church".⁵²

Critics of the Moderate clergy maintained that even the central themes of the Christian message were absent from their preaching. Kenneth MacDonald quotes the lines:

My folk may perish if they like;
 Christ's name I never mention.
 I take the stipend due by right
 To men of good intention.⁵³

Angus MacIver passes this rather staggering judgement upon Hugh Munro, the parish minister of Uig during his youth: "The name of Christ was not to be heard in his sermons". MacIver relates the kind of subject featured in Munro's sermons: "He would tell the few that did go to Church that he had good news to tell them. That the British Army gained the battle on their enemies and that was great matter of thankfulness. Such was the ignorance of the people that they believed all that the minister said as an oracle."⁵⁴
 However, as the minister would probably have been the only person in the parish to receive a newspaper, when the people gathered on Sunday, it is not surprising that he should take the opportunity to give the congregation news of the progress of the Napoleonic Wars - there were many soldiers and officers in the British Army at that time who were natives of the Western Isles. On the mainland, William Leslie of Lhanbryde once was handed his

weekly newspaper on a Sunday morning as he was on his way to church. When the worshippers finished singing, he requested the precentor to give out another verse, in order to allow him time to complete the paragraph which he was reading. During the sermon, the minister informed the congregation of the outcome of a battle of which he had read in the paper.⁵⁵

Professor Burleigh distinguishes between the preaching of Evangelicals and Moderates in this way: "The difference between the two parties lay in the aim, manner and content of their preaching. Moderates were content to teach the commonplaces of natural or rational theology and to inculcate the prudential virtues".⁵⁶ Even their adversaries did not go as far as to accuse Moderate ministers of being unorthodox in their theology. When asked to give a definition of Moderate preaching, MacIntosh MacKay provided this answer, "I should rather characterise Moderate preaching by the absence of what was positively evangelical, than as directly contrary to orthodoxy".⁵⁷

There were occasional clashes between Evangelicals and Moderates within the island Presbyteries over questions of orthodoxy. At the opening of the Synod of Glenelg in 1840 Finlay MacRae of North Uist preached from a text which at first sight appears innocent enough, 1 Corinthians 1:10 - "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement." But in the charged atmosphere of the Ten Years' Conflict, some of MacRae's remarks offended his Evangelical brethren, as he seems to have fired a salvo at those who, in his opinion, held extreme and narrow views in regard to the qualifications required for admission to the Sacraments.

Roderick MacLeod of Snizort, obviously stung by MacRae's barbs, complained that there were in the Moderator's sermon "several objectionable

passages, and some contrary to the doctrines of Scripture and the standards of our Church". He called for the setting up of a committee to examine the manuscript and report back. However, this motion was defeated, and in dissenting from this decision, MacLeod was joined by Norman MacLeod, Trumisgarry, John R. Glass, Bracadale, and Archibald Clerk, Duirinish.⁵⁸ The matter went as far as the General Assembly, and a committee of the higher court "unanimously found that unsoundness of doctrine was not chargeable on Mr. MacRae".⁵⁹ In point of fact, the parish minister of North Uist "was also complimented by the Assembly on the general ability of the sermon."⁶⁰

Finlay MacKae came from an Evangelical background, although his affinity was with the Moderate party. His father was ruling elder during the spectacular ministry of Lachlan MacKenzie of Lochcarron,⁶¹ and his brother Donald belonged to the Evangelical wing of the Church of Scotland.⁶²

There are numerous examples in print of sermons by Highland Evangelicals, but very few preached by Gaelic-speaking clergymen of Moderate sympathies have been published. The manuscript of Finlay MacRae's controversial sermon has not been preserved, but a sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of Glenelg in 1799 was deemed worthy of publication by the members of the Synod. The Moderator in that year was John MacLeod of Harris, and he selected as his text, Colossians ii:8 - "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and deceit". The sermon bears the imposing title "Caution Against the Philosophy of the Times", and if preached in its printed form, would have taken well over an hour to deliver. The subject and style are more appropriate for an audience of ministers than for Dr. MacLeod's regular congregation at Scarista, and the theme is to be seen against the backdrop of revolutionary upheaval in Europe as the eighteenth century drew to a close.

The opening sentence of John MacLeod's address to the Synod gives an

indication of the profundity of his subject, and the elegance of his language: "Philosophy and Theology are twin sisters, whose birth may be dated at the creation of intellectual nature, and whose mutual object is to enable man, by knowledge and wisdom, to approximate the divinity."⁶³ In vindication of the Christian Religion, the sermon had two aims: 1. "To expose the fallacy of the principles in vogue with some modern philosophers", and 2. "To show the pernicious effects of such principles on the human mind and upon human society: From whence the necessity of a steady and resolute perseverance in Christian Faith and virtue will be abundantly manifest".⁶⁴

In presenting his argument for the existence of God, Dr. MacLeod proclaimed: "Nature has engraved the affirmative, in legible characters, on our hearts; and the operations of the divinity are manifest even to our external senses".⁶⁵ In discussing the revelation of God, he referred to "the other received truths of natural theology, such as an universal and particular providence, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retribution, equally supported by the light of nature".⁶⁶

From a general revelation of God in nature, the preacher progressed to the special revelation in the Gospel of Christ. He spoke of Christ as "the restorer of the forfeited hopes of a fallen and apostate race",⁶⁷ the kind of language which might not appear out of place in a sermon by an Evangelical like Alexander MacLeod.

In stressing the need for opposing the trend of the philosophy of the age, John MacLeod summoned 1. "The wise and good of every nation and of every religious persuasion ... to unite in asserting the honours of insulted reason", 2. "Christians of all denominations to unite with ardour in the common cause of religion", and "to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints", and 3. "All guardians of public order and all

instructors of mankind to zealous assiduity and attention in their several stations".⁶⁸

The scholarly approach of Dr. MacLeod to his subject is evident from the above outline of his sermon. An Evangelical of a later period would have found nothing unorthodox in his statements, but would perhaps feel that the sermon was rather vague and general and that its teaching should have been applied more directly to the individual. Alexander MacLeod of Uig would probably have concluded with a call to repentance and stern warnings to the impenitent. In the preaching of Evangelicals there would have been a heavier concentration of Biblical texts than in MacLeod's Synod sermon.

The erudite discourse delivered by MacLeod of Harris may be set beside a sermon preached by another island Moderate, Robert MacGregor of Kilmuir. The text is Proverbs xviii:24 - "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother", and no Evangelical could find fault with the sermon.

MacGregor begins by comparing Christ with the friend mentioned in the verse.

1. We may divulge the secrets of our hearts to a faithful and sympathetic friend.
2. We may expect compassion in our troubles from a tender-hearted friend.
3. From a steadfast and kindly friend we may look for sanctuary when wrong is done to us, and when we are in danger.
4. From a constant and generous friend we shall receive the good things which he possesses and which we require.

In the second section, the minister of Kilmuir draws a contrast, showing that Christ is much more than an earthly brother to the believer.

1. A friend and brother may withdraw his friendship and be inconstant.
2. Even the best friends and brethren upon earth may not be able to give us the help which we require.
3. Our best friends and brethren may be summoned far from us where we may not approach them, and where they may not approach us.
4. Death dissolves the greatest earthly friendship, and plucks from us the companions of our youth and the joy of our hearts.⁶⁹

"Never," concluded MacGregor, "shall death destroy or break the blessed union which has been wrought by grace between the soul and the Saviour."⁷⁰ This sermon would not appear incongruous among the pulpit productions of the Evangelical Finlayson of Lochs. There is a danger in attempting to draw a clear-cut demarcation line between the two parties within the pre-Disruption Church of Scotland, as in so many instances there is blurring of the boundaries. The published sermons of the Moderate Norman MacLeod of Saint Columba's are still popular in the Western Isles. The difference between the preaching of Moderates and Evangelicals was often one of emphasis.

Parishioners of Evangelical sympathies were displeased by any rationalization of Biblical texts by Moderate preachers. Evangelicals in Skye were shocked to hear that a minister in the island, to whom a certain man had mentioned that the Scriptures declare that men must be born again, had replied, "Men will be born again in the resurrection."⁷¹ Another Moderate preacher gained little favour with fundamentalists when he expounded 1 Peter v:8 - "Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." His exposition began: "My dear friends, the apostle here meant by the roaring lion, Nero, the Roman Emperor."⁷²

The reading of sermons was frowned upon by the opponents of Moderatism, and is still not in favour among many of the inhabitants of the Western Isles. James Fraser (1700-1769), minister of Alness, in his work, "A Treatise on Sanctification", attacked the practice as an innovation imported from the South, and which would not be approved by those "who have the best taste of gospel-preaching, or are most serious in religion".⁷³ The story is told of a certain occasion when Alexander Simpson of Lochs was on his way to preach at a remote station in his extensive parish. As he and a companion drew near to their destination, a gust of wind blew away the minister's hat, and it could not be retrieved. Much to the annoyance of his friend, Simpson proposed that they return home. Finally, he was obliged to admit that the lost hat had contained the manuscript of his sermon.⁷⁴

Angus MacIver passes this harsh verdict on Munro of Uig: "The minister was ignorant of the Gospel and of the nature of true Godliness, and therefore could not impart to others that Gospel of which he was not made a partaker himself, by the teaching of the Spirit of God in his own soul."⁷⁵ MacIver's estimate of his minister's spiritual condition should be balanced by evidence from less biased sources. Evander MacIver gives a contrary view - "Mr. Munro, Uig, had the reputation of being a worthy man and minister, much liked by his congregation and people, and who performed all his duties with strictness and propriety in every way. He paid much attention to the moral habits of his people, who regarded him with much respect."⁷⁶ Donald Morrison, the Stornoway cooper, also has a word of praise for Munro, writing that he was "exemplary in many ways, and though he did not pretend to be amongst those who were styled first-rate in the pulpit, yet he was a sincere lover of the truth".⁷⁷ He alludes to the minister's "frequent and profuse almsgiving", adding that he was "an example for his rectitude of conduct and endearing virtues".⁷⁸

Some of the Evangelical party were dubious about the efficacy of prayers offered by the Moderate clergy. In the early years of this century Kenneth MacLeod heard in North Uist the expression "Urnuigh an Tughaidh" - the thatch prayer. This saying referred to prayers which were thought to ascend no higher than the thatched roof of a Highland cottage. "At the time of the 1843 secession," explained MacLeod, "some uncharitable Seceder revived the old phrase, and, of course, applied it to the 'Moderate' prayers."⁷⁹

Kenneth MacDonald refers to certain ministers in the Highlands who were erroneously numbered among the Moderates because their knowledge of Gaelic was defective, and they were misunderstood by the people.⁸⁰ Thomas Chalmers reckoned that in 1829 there were six times as many divinity students as vacancies could absorb,⁸¹ so it is not surprising that some ministers acquired Gaelic in order to be eligible for presentation to a Highland parish. The imperfect Gaelic spoken by Souter of Duirinish was lampooned by Gilleasbuig Aotrom:

4 Nuair a thèid thu do'n chùbaid
 nu' thu ùrnuigh bhios gleusda,
 bidh cuid dith 'na Gàidhlig,
 is pàirt dith 'na Beurla;
 bidh cuid dith 'na h-Eabhra,
 'na Fraingis, 's 'na Gréigis,
 's a' chuid nach tuig càch dhith
 bheir e gair' air Fear Gheusdo.⁸²

(When you enter the pulpit you offer up an ingenious prayer, some of it being in Gaelic, with parts of it in English; a certain amount of it consists of Hebrew, French and Greek, and the bits that nobody else understands make the laird of Gesto laugh.)

According to MacDonald, another characteristic of the Moderate clergyman was "his levity, and his indifference to the morals of the people ... He treated the concern of anxious enquirers with ridicule ... He was frequently the best dancer in the parish, and as good a drinker of toddy as the laird".⁸³ More than one historian has argued that such charges "are not always just".⁸⁴

When Alexander MacLeod was settled in Uig following the long ministry of the Moderate Hugh Munro, he found that the state of the parish was far from satisfactory. He informed Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth a few months after his induction: "The work of the Lord having been so deplorably neglected in this Parish, there is no Sacramental table or cloth or any of the things needed on such a solemn occasion."⁸⁵ But before charging MacLeod's predecessor with complete apathy and a lack of concern for his flock, we should not forget that Munro during his last years suffered from asthma, which severely restricted his activities.⁸⁶

If John Lane Buchanan's account is to be believed, Presbytery meetings in the islands in the last decade of the eighteenth century were accompanied by unseemly scenes. "Presbyteries," he writes, "are for the most part held at public houses, and continued sometimes without adjournment or prorogation for three successive days and nights. The holy fathers stand in no need of Paul's advice to Timothy respecting his weak stomach".⁸⁷ He singles out the members of the Presbytery of Uist as being particularly guilty of such unbecoming behaviour. The increasing tourist traffic passing through the town of Stornoway acted as a check on the activities of the Presbytery of Lewis, whose members were afraid that travellers from the South would report such goings-on to the outside world!⁸⁸ When Roderick MacLeod was settled in Skye one of his first duties was to assist his fellow-presbyters to find their beds.⁸⁹

The "levity" of one of the ministers of Skye was illustrated by the report that he was accustomed to play the violin or bagpipes at weddings, even when such gatherings took place in his manse.⁹⁰ But as we shall discover in Chapter Three, even in the manse of the highly respected Evangelical minister, MacDonald of Ferintosh, dancing was not unknown.

The charge of drunkenness was sometimes made against individual Moderates. In 1842 John Bethune of Berneray was accused by a number of his parishioners of being "a drunkard in habit and repute". They drew attention to "one of his intoxicating fits in Obb, in spring last, in company".⁹¹ According to Berneray tradition, this is the incident mentioned by John Morrison of Harris in one of his spiritual poems.

Chan 'eil thu fhéin gun chluasan,
 's nach cuala tu mu'n truaghan,
 bha beagan tìmh roimh'n uair seo
 le uaislibh ag òl?
 Mar chuir a' mhisg 'na bhruailleann
 a cheann mar neach fo'n tuaicheal,
 's gun neach an taic r'a ghualainn
 nach gluaiseadh o'n bhòrd;
 bha iosgaidean air luaths chrith
 air chor 's an uair a ghluais e
 gun d'ràinig e 'na luaithrean
 gu gruaidh taobh an ròid;
 's gun thuit e bharr na bruaiche
 's an tiotadh thug e fuaim
 cur smùid as an torr luathaidh
 le tuaineal na pòit.⁹²

(As you yourself are not deaf, surely you have heard about the wretch who, a short time ago, was drinking in the company of gentry? How drink confused his mind like one afflicted by vertigo, while no one was able to move from the table to support him; his thighs were trembling to such an extent that he arrived in a dizzy condition at a brow by the roadside, and fell over the bank in a drunken condition, and immediately he made a noise, causing the ash mound to smoke.)

It is significant that the person whose unhappy experiences are so graphically depicted in this verse had been drinking with gentry. Moderates were accused by hostile critics of displaying "a preference for the society of the better educated among their parishioners".⁹³ In fairness to Bethune of Berneray, it should be stated that a counter petition in his favour, signed by 180 males from the island, was presented to the Presbytery. In that document he is praised for his mildness, kindness and affability, and his conduct is said to have been that of "a worthy, pious clergyman, most attentive to his sacred duties".⁹⁴ Nevertheless, when Norman MacLeod of Saint Columba's visited Berneray in 1847, his opinion of the minister was that he was "indolent, useless as a clergyman".⁹⁵

Alexander Simpson of Lochs, who was Bethune's father-in-law, has also gained an unenviable reputation in island tradition as a hard drinker. The story is still related of how the immense minister of Lochs was being carried across Bayhead Burn in Stornoway when it was in spate by Murdo MacDonald, one of the early "Men" of Lewis. MacDonald staggered under the preacher's heavy weight and Simpson cried out, "Don't you realize whom you are carrying?" "I do well," retorted his carrier, "it's the big drunkard of Lochs".⁹⁶

Donald MacLean of the Small Isles had been condemned by his Presbytery, and

when his case

when his case was about to be discussed, he attempted to enter the General Assembly of 1838 "in a state of brutal intoxication", having been seen on the streets of Edinburgh in a similar condition.⁹⁷

Souter of Duirinish also appears in tradition as one addicted to alcohol. In a Gaelic reading book still used in Highland schools, the minister is reported to have been overfond of whisky and that his conduct did not accord with his holy calling.⁹⁸ Norman MacLeod of the Barony paints a completely different picture of Souter. He gives the same account as in the reader of the practical jokes which Gilleasbuig Aotrom played upon Mr. Souter, but he refers to the latter as "an old acquaintance of mine, a minister in Skye, who possessed the kindest disposition and an irreproachable moral character".⁹⁹ It would appear that tradition may well have been unkind to Souter, and one wonders how often the cautious words recorded by Donald MacKinnon about Coll MacDonald of Portree could be reiterated in respect of other Moderate clergy: "It is possible that many of the traditional tales about Mr. Coll are apocryphal".¹⁰⁰ We have already observed that the estimation of Hugh Munro of Uig from Moderate sources is at variance with the impression given in Evangelical tradition.

The statement that Moderate clergy were indiffererent to the moral condition of their parishioners may also be challenged as a generalization which sometimes conceals the true position. Coll MacDonald of Portree expressed satisfaction that "profane swearing, intemperance, drunkenness, and the desecration of the Sabbath" were on the decrease as compared with the situation twenty or thirty years before the compilation of the New Statistical Account.¹⁰¹ MacKinnon of Strath regarded tea drinking and the chewing and smoking of tobacco as gross vices.¹⁰² "We would earnestly recommend," he writes, "anti-tea and tobacco societies to be set on foot here."¹⁰³

The reception accorded by Moderate ministers to enquirers burdened by a sense of sin, is exemplified in an anecdote told by Alexander Auld. A friend of his, probably Malcolm MacRitchie, later a minister of the Free Church, when a young man, went to consult Hugh Munro of Uig about the state of his soul. "One such visit was enough, for next time he came to the manse he found the door barred against him, and the servants looking in terror at him through the window - the minister having told them that the lad was 'out of his mind'." ¹⁰⁴ To a Moderate the young man's excited actions would have smacked of a fanaticism and extremism, which ought to be suppressed rather than encouraged.

Moderate ministers were suspicious of revival movements, and were especially critical of the excesses which were frequently associated with them. MacRae of Barvas protested to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth about "the blind, daring fanatics who now infest this Island". ¹⁰⁵ It is perhaps not to be wondered at that the Moderates, "men of a calm and politic disposition, not ready to be carried away by fancies or declamation, or extreme views", ¹⁰⁶ should react in this way to revivalism. In Skye there were ministers "in whose parishes no appearance of concern began to be manifested, were thanking God that the creidimh mor, the great faith, or religion, had not commenced in their parishes". ¹⁰⁷

4.

According to Kenneth MacDonald, "extreme exclusiveness was another peculiarity of the Moderate minister which did not add to their popularity in the Highlands". ¹⁰⁸

Moderate ministers in the islands generally disapproved of those who worshipped outwith the fold of the Established Church. John MacLeod, a Skye man, who came to Galson as a Gaelic schoolmaster in 1820, earned the displeasure of William MacRae, parish minister of Barvas, when he insisted

on holding meetings for reading and expounding the Scriptures, a practice contrary to the regulations of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society.¹⁰⁹

Coll MacDonald of Portree is given as another example of a Moderate minister who practised exclusiveness. "Not ultra-evangelical himself", writes Donald MacKinnon, "he was not the friend of those of his parishioners who were evangelically inclined, and his pulpit was not open to Gospel ministers".¹¹⁰ Others were less prejudiced, and allowed MacDonald of Ferintosh to preach in their churches when he was en route for Saint Kilda.¹¹¹ John MacKinnon of Strath was approached by the local Baptist minister to ask him if he would use his influence to obtain from the factor a site for a Baptist Church. The parish minister supported this request, and when someone made a disparaging remark about the new church, MacKinnon remarked: "If from God, it will prosper; if from men, it will come to naught".¹¹² During the 1842 revival in Skye the minister of Strath made his church available to MacDonald of Ferintosh and Fraser of Kirkhill, although he expressed a certain degree of annoyance because they had unexpectedly held a service the previous day in the mission church at Strathaird.¹¹³

5.

Kenneth MacDonald furnishes us with another instance of what were supposed to be Moderate tendencies: "Their idea of Sabbath observance was different from that of the Highlanders of the present day. They did not hesitate to transact worldly business after divine service if they found it convenient to strike a bargain".¹¹⁴ Again, this statement requires some qualification, as MacDonald appears to be quoting extreme instances of Moderate clergy in the Highlands.

Hugh Munro of Uig appears to have taken a soft line in regard to Sabbath observance. On his first Sunday in the parish, his successor,

Alexander MacLeod, was appalled to find a man serving whisky from a jar following the service, and another selling tobacco.¹¹⁵ Coll MacDonald, minister of Portree, won no friends among the Evangelicals of Skye, when stories circulated about his indifference to the sanctity of the Sabbath. It was alleged that "after Church on Sabbath he would discuss with his people the price of wood, and buy or sell a horse".¹¹⁶ During the heyday of Moderatism in Lewis, tradition records that the minister would announce from the pulpit: "If the weather is fine next Sunday, we shall go to the hill; if not, we shall have a sermon."¹¹⁷

But there is also some evidence which demonstrates that Moderates did take a stand in the courts of the Church against breaches of the Sabbath. When the railway began, the Presbytery of Skye had a Moderate majority. The Presbytery decided to protest against public transport operating on the Sabbath. In 1841 the clerk wrote to the railroad company, protesting against the movement of "Railway conveyances on that Holy Day".¹¹⁸ Although MacDonald of Portree had a reputation for being permissive in his views on Sabbath observance, when he drew up the New Statistical Account he made a point of observing that "the desecration of the Sabbath" was on the decrease within his parish.¹¹⁹

6.

Another characteristic feature of the Moderate clergy was their support for the patronage system in settling ministers. According to G.D. Henderson, "Moderates further had little respect for the popular judgment and had a serious dread of mob rule".¹²⁰

John Matheson, the metrical propagandist of the Disruption era, presents a belief in the propriety of patronage as one of the tenets in the Moderate's creed:



Creideam 'sa phàtronage bhreugaich
a dh'èalaidh a stigh air a' chléir.¹²¹

(I believe in the deceitful patronage which has crept in
upon the clergy.)

The Veto Act, which declared that if the majority of heads of families objected to a presentee, the Presbytery were to reject him, was anathema to dyed-in-the-wool Moderates. When Angus Martin was about to be settled in Duirinish in 1842, there was a dispute between Evangelicals and Moderates within the Presbytery of Skye. John MacKinnon of Strath moved that in the settlement of presentees, no regard should be paid to the Veto Act, as it had been found illegal by "the highest civil court in the land", and the motion was seconded by another member of the Moderate party, Coll MacDonald. The Evangelical John R. Glass vacated the Moderator's chair in order to register a protest against the motion. Martin himself became involved in the controversy when he wrote to the Presbytery in the following terms: "The Presbytery of Skye having resolved to proceed with my settlement in the parish of Duirinish in disregard to the Veto law, I consider it my duty to state, as I hereby do, my willingness to submit myself to the said law."¹²² The conflict which was to reach its climax in the Disruption of 1843 was already causing serious divisions in island Presbyteries.

John Morrison's dialogue poem, "Comhradh eadar Soisgeulach agus Cuibheasach", (A Conversation between Evangelical and Moderate), from which we have already quoted some lines, delineates the points of divergence between the two parties within the Church. In one stanza the bard launches an attack upon the Court of Session for allowing "graceless ministers" to be settled in parishes. He gives the result of the patronage system as -

Bhith sparradh le fòirneart
 ro mhór air a' phobull
 luchd-teagaisg gun ghràs
 nach deàn Iacob a thogail.¹²³

(Foisting with great violence upon the people preachers
 without grace who do not exalt Jacob.)

Even after the time of the Disruption, those who had remained loyal to the Establishment were known colloquially in the Highlands as Moderates despite the fact that some of them had sided with the Evangelical wing before 1843. At the Free Church General Assembly, which met at Inverness in 1845, Candlish remarked, "In the North they keep to the old name, and always speak of the Establishment and its adherents as the Moderates."¹²⁴ Even today it is not unusual to hear members of the other Presbyterian denominations in the Western Isles referring to followers of the Church of Scotland as "Moderates".

From the pen of Lord Ardmillan comes an evaluation of the Moderate party by one with an opposite theological viewpoint: "The sad results of the reign and fruits of Moderatism are well known. Yet it was a potent and distinguished party. Its culture was attractive and commendable, and procured for it a general acceptance among the upper classes; but its influence on religious conviction, sentiment and character was chilling and withering."¹²⁵

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When Finlay Cook was settled in the Parliamentary Church of Cross in 1829, Donald Sage could write that "the ministers of Barvas and Stornoway

were models of Moderatism in their day, but they were the 'ruins grey' of what their system was in past ages."¹²⁶ As the walls of the ancient edifice of Moderate religion began to crumble and decay, the construction of another building, with "Evangelicalism" inscribed in bold lettering above its portals, was in its initial stages. New voices, preaching a message whose emphasis was quite different from that of eighteenth century Hebridean ministers, were heard in the pulpits of Lewis and the other islands. New words, such as "dùsgadh" (revival) and "ath-bhreith" (rebirth) entered the vocabulary of the Church in the Hebrides. In the next chapter we examine the work and characteristics of the Evangelicals who were introduced into the island Presbyteries during the first half of the nineteenth century, assessing their influence on the life of the Church in the years preceding the Disruption.

CHAPTER TWO. NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. D. Campbell, Reminiscences and Reflections of an Octogenarian Highlander, p. 152.
4. Anon., A Critical Examination of Dr. MacCulloch's Work on the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, p. 133.
5. K. MacDonald, Social and Religious Life in the Highlands, p. 77. (For complete names of works cited, and alternative titles, see Bibliography.)
6. Lay Member, An Account of the Present State of Religion throughout the Highlands of Scotland, p. 70.
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8. R. MacCowan, The Men of Skye, p. 114.
9. Scotsman, Letters on the Present Condition of the Highlands and Islands, p. 62.
10. R. MacCowan, op cit. p. 177. Fullarton and Baird make a clear allusion to the minister of Portree: "In Skye there is, we understand, another instance, on a large scale, of a clerical farmer." (Remarks on the Evils at Present Affecting the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, p. 30.)
11. K. MacLeod, 'Gaelic Proverbs and Maxims', The Celtic Monthly, XVII, p. 39.
12. T. Mulock, The Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland, Socially Considered, p. 13.
13. H.H. MacKenzie, The MacLeans of Boreray, p. 112. Fullarton and Baird obviously have Finlay MacRae in mind with one of their criticisms - "The Minister of one of the Uists is a very enterprising and extensive farmer, holding a possession capable of bearing 70 milch cows, with their followers, till they obtain to the age of three years. Now, we have no objection, but the reverse, to a Minister being a very diligent labourer, but we think it evident that this Reverend Gentleman has mistaken his neighbour's vineyard for his own. We would advise him speedily to retrace his steps, and betake himself to the energetic discharge of his pastoral duties, which will more than occupy all his time, as now-a-days such conduct is properly appreciated, even in the Highlands. The injury which a single instance of this kind does to the advancement of true religion is incalculable." (Remarks on the Evils at Present Affecting the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, p. 26.)
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CHAPTER THREE

THE EMERGENCE OF THE EVANGELICALS

The majority of ministers who were appointed to parishes in the Western Isles in the generations before 1800 are regarded as belonging to the Moderate party within the Church of Scotland. It has to be admitted that evidence for the doctrines and practice of the Hebridean clergymen of that period is extremely scanty, but the traditional picture of the islands is that they were in the firm grip of "a Moderate frost".¹ In the Presbytery of Skye a few of the ministers were looked upon as adherents of Evangelicalism, even before the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Early Evangelicals

Donald MacQueen, who was minister of Kilmuir from 1740 to 1785,² "supported the evangelical party in the Church of Scotland."³ During the celebrated tour of the Hebrides undertaken by Johnson and Boswell, the two travellers spent a considerable amount of time in the company of MacQueen. Dr. Johnson held a high opinion of the minister of Kilmuir, remarking to him before they parted: "I shall ever retain a great regard for you."⁴ John Erskine was impressed by MacQueen's scholarship and spirituality, and published in one of his volumes of "Sketches" an essay of his, bearing the title, "On Stopping the Sun in its Course in the Days of Joshua, and on the Retrogradation of the Shadow of the Gnomon on Ahaz's Dial."⁵

Another early Evangelical in the Presbytery of Skye was Malcolm MacLeod, who ministered at Snizort from 1788 to 1832. The fact that at the time of his death his obituary appeared in the Edinburgh "Christian Instructor",

founded by Andrew Thomson, is sufficient to show that he was looked upon as having an Evangelical outlook. The notice in the Evangelical periodical refers to his "high moral worth", his "unaffected piety", and his "faithfulness and diligence in his ministerial calling". One method which he adopted in helping to strengthen the spiritual life of his parish was the provision of schoolmasters and catechists.⁶

"A Lay Member of the Church of Scotland" who published his anonymous pamphlet in 1827, is in general highly critical of the clergy who served the parishes of Skye in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, but he has a word of praise for MacLeod of Snizort. While other members of the Presbytery, particularly Ross of Kilmuir, voiced their strong disapproval of services which were held in some parishes outwith the auspices of the Church of Scotland, he had "all along been far more tolerant than his other brethren. Instead of a persecuting spirit, he manifested much lenity".⁷

In announcing the death of Malcolm MacLeod, the correspondent from Skye who contributed to the "Christian Instructor" implies that the minister was not a militant Evangelical. He strove, "without compromising his principles, or demeaning his character, to be at peace with all men". While he was accepted as a supporter of Evangelicalism, he "never affected violence to his conscience in support of any sect or party".⁸ John MacCowan, one of the early "Men" of Skye, apparently entertained doubts about MacLeod's standing as an Evangelical, and did not apply for baptism for his five children during his ministry. It was only when Simon MacLachlan - a minister whose Evangelicalism was unquestioned - arrived in Snizort, that he approached the Kirk Session.⁹ Even Roderick MacLeod does not appear to have esteemed his father's preaching very highly, and when home on vacation from college, observed after one of Mr. MacLeod's services: "Thug thu gu leòr de bhrochan

gun salann dhoibh an diugh."¹⁰ (You gave them plenty salt-less porridge today.)

One of the early Evangelical ministers of Skye, whose party credentials were in no doubt, was Donald Martin, who in 1785 succeeded Donald MacQueen as minister of Kilmuir.¹¹ Like Thomas Chalmers, he was not an Evangelical when he entered the ministry. There are two distinct versions of how Martin was converted to Evangelical Christianity.

If one island tradition is accepted, Donald Martin underwent a conversion experience while listening to John Farquharson, the itinerant preacher, who visited Skye in 1805. The minister happened to be passing the spot where the evangelist was preaching, and was attracted by his message. He afterwards invited Farquharson to his manse, where he was to remain until the conclusion of his evangelistic mission.¹²

Another source dates Martin's conversion sometime earlier, in 1803. In this version the spiritual crisis in the life of the minister of Kilmuir came as the result of a sad family bereavement. As his wife lay dying, he is said to have asked her if she felt sorry to be leaving him. "That is not what is troubling me," she replied, "but that I am leaving children without a father and a minister without grace."¹³ It may well be that a combination of the two events brought Donald Martin to a turning point in his spiritual experience.

After his conversion, Martin manifested a new enthusiasm for Evangelical religion. He was to spend only a few years more in Kilmuir, being translated to the East Church in Inverness in 1808. Before moving to the mainland, "he endeavoured to make all the provision he could for the spiritual instruction of the parishioners he was leaving behind him, by procuring two

pious men for catechists".¹⁴ Donald Martin has been described as "an able Gospel preacher, and in Gaelic an orator of the highest order".¹⁵

A few years after Donald Martin departed from Skye, another Evangelical minister was settled within the bounds of the Presbytery. The three early Evangelicals who have been dealt with above were natives of the island, but John Shaw, who came to Skye as assistant to Souter of Duirinish in 1811, belonged to Perthshire. Two years later he became minister of the parish of Bracadale, where he remained until his death in 1823.¹⁶ Although he died when not yet forty years of age, he made a lasting impression on the religious life of Skye during the formative years of Evangelicalism in the island.

John Shaw earned the respect of those who would have disagreed with him on some points of doctrine and practice. John Souter - who confronts us in tradition as a typical Moderate - paid a warm tribute to Shaw during a General Assembly debate in 1826, admitting that he had been "a man distinguished not only for his piety, activity, and zeal, but for his scrupulousness in admitting his parishioners to ordinances".¹⁷ Evangelicals also bore testimony to the saintliness of Shaw's character.¹⁸ Donald Sage wrote that he was "a simple-minded and worthy man". MacDonald of Ferintosh acclaims him as "a man singularly devoted to the work of the Lord".¹⁹

By temperament, John Shaw was not the ideal person to lead a spirited campaign to win over the people of Skye to a vigorous Evangelicalism. MacDonald of Ferintosh disclosed at the General Assembly of 1826 that "Mr. Shaw complained much of the lamentable ignorance of his parishioners, and often wished that he had only nerve to resist their application for baptism".²⁰ During Shaw's ministry there were some 250 communicants in the parish of

Bracadale - a very high number by later Evangelical standards. Nevertheless, one of his parishioners acknowledged that he "was stricter than most of the clergy of the Established Church".²¹

In a quiet unassuming manner Shaw advanced the cause of Evangelicalism in Skye in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. He "secured for his parish the benefit of Society teachers, godly men, by whom a knowledge of the truths of the gospel was extensively communicated".²² It was he who obtained a teaching post in the island of Soay for Donald MacQueen, who during his long life was to become one of the most prominent Skye laymen.²³ Six years after being settled in Bracadale Shaw expressed satisfaction with the fact that knowledge of the Bible was increasing in his parish. When he first arrived, "hardly a Gaelic Bible was to be seen, and scarce one that could read them; now they are in every hamlet, and almost in every house".²⁴

In other ways also John Shaw was an influence for good within the Presbytery. Those who had been converted in early revivals were strengthened in their faith through his counsel and preaching.²⁵ John Finlayson, who exercised brief Evangelical ministries in Lewis and Skye, is said to have been converted as a result of Shaw's preaching.²⁶ Perhaps the greatest contribution which the minister of Bracadale made to the promotion of Evangelical religion in Skye was a somewhat indirect one - to him is given the credit for first introducing the Apostle of the North, MacDonald of Ferintosh, to the island Presbytery.²⁷ At the General Assembly of 1818 MacDonald had been censured for preaching in other parishes without the consent of the resident minister. Among the commissioners who dissented from this decision appears the name of John Shaw.²⁸

The New Evangelicals

The conversion of Roderick MacLeod marked a watershed in the history of Evangelicalism in the Western Isles. He succeeded Shaw as minister of

Bracadale, but it is obvious that he was made of sterner stuff than his predecessor, and that he was ideally equipped to act as leader of the Evangelical forces in the island. "Maighstir Ruairidh" was one of the five sons of Malcolm MacLeod, minister of Snizort mentioned above.²⁹ In 1819 he was appointed to the mission at Lyndale, and for the first two years of his ministry there, he "walked according to the 'course of this world', and went as far, and perhaps beyond any of his clerical brethren in the Presbytery in thoughtlessness and improper conduct".³⁰

In 1821 Roderick MacLeod visited John Shaw, who gave him an opportunity to choose any book from his study which he wanted to read. He selected Joseph Bellamy's "True Religion Delineated", exclaiming, "That is the very book that I want." This book, according to MacLeod himself, "threw him into a state of alarm for his own salvation". A sermon by Thomas Chalmers, on man's enmity to God, "opened his eyes to the Gospel".³¹ It is interesting to note that Alexander Stewart of Moulin in the generation before MacLeod also became an Evangelical through the reading of Christian classics: "The writings of pious men, which were put in my hands by one or another friend, were made the means of bringing me acquainted with the truths of the gospel".³²

When one studies Bellamy's book it is difficult to discover which section would have impressed Roderick MacLeod. On one of its early pages he would have read, "How false and dangerous therefore is that principle, that it is no matter what men's principles be, if their lives be but good."³³ It may well be that this book persuaded MacLeod that his religion lacked reality and conviction.

Before his conversion Stewart confessed that his sermons and prayers had been "for the most part, cold and formal". After engaging in a diet of catechising, he used to rush home to join a dancing party or to read a

novel.³⁴ During his early ministry MacLeod also believed himself to be "an entire stranger to the Gospel scheme of salvation".³⁵

Shortly after the time Roderick MacLeod became a convinced Evangelical, another member of his clan was to be settled in Lewis as the first acknowledged Evangelical minister to be inducted to a charge within that Presbytery. On May 1, 1823, Hugh Munro, who had been minister of Uig since 1774, died.³⁶ Under the patronage system which prevailed in the Church of Scotland at the time, "Patrons had tended to favour the selection of Moderates as men of better social class or ideals, more culture and urbanity, mannerliness and restraints, less intrusiveness with regard to religion, more latitude in theology, less puritanism as to behaviour, perhaps also more obsequiousness".³⁷ Where there was a patron with Evangelical sympathies, he or she could exert an important influence in introducing Evangelical clergy to areas where Moderatism had reigned supreme. This was what happened in the island of Lewis, and on April 21, 1824, Alexander MacLeod was translated from the Gaelic Chapel in Cromarty to the parish Church of Uig.³⁸

Evander MacIver, who betrays in his writing an antagonism towards Evangelical Christianity, emphasizes the role played by the proprietress of the Lewis estate. "Mrs. Stewart MacKenzie of Seaforth", he writes, "took a deep interest in the appointment of successors, and was anxious to appoint men of more violent religious feelings than those who were removed by death had favoured. The Crown was patron, but presented any one recommended by the Seaforth family, sole proprietors of the island".³⁹ She is reputed to have relied on the guidance of MacDonald of Ferintosh in selecting suitable pastors for vacant Lewis parishes.⁴⁰

Mrs. Stewart MacKenzie is an example of several aristocratic ladies

in the history of the Church in Britain who used their wealth and position to support Evangelicalism. England produced Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, while her counterpart in Scotland was Lady Glenorchy.⁴¹ Mrs. MacKenzie was the Lady Glenorchy of the Highlands, while in Skye Mrs. MacDonald of Bernisdale was a champion of Evangelical Christianity. When blind Donald Munro was relieved of his post as SSPCK catechist, Mrs. MacDonald granted him a house and croft for life.⁴²

In island tradition Alexander MacLeod of Uig is remembered as the first preacher of an Evangelical gospel in the island of Lewis. One of the bards sings of him -

'Se cheud neach bha'n Leódhas
 dh'aidich Dia a theachdaireachd
 Maighstir MacLeòid mór sin
 le soisgeul Chrìosd bha aithnichte.⁴³

(The first person in Lewis whose preaching God acknowledged was that great Mister MacLeod who gained renown with the Gospel of Christ.)

It should be stressed that there were Evangelicals active in Lewis even before the arrival of MacLeod, and considerable preparatory work had already been done by teachers and lay preachers. While the ministers of Uig is always mentioned as the first Evangelical minister in the Presbytery of Lewis, the importance of the contribution of those already operating in the island has not always been realised. The reaction of Moderate clergy to the coming of Evangelicalism has been placed on record. On February 5, 1823, Alexander Simpson - son of the parish minister of Lochs - wrote to Mr. Adam, chamberlain of Lewis, complaining of a hysterical religious movement within the island.⁴⁴ In December of that year William MacRae of

Barvas wrote to MacKenzie of Seaforth, drawing his attention to the case of a certain Donald MacLeod of Lower Barvas, "who has been afflicted for near twelve months with mental derangement brought on by religious melancholy and utter despair of salvation". He traced his parishioner's mental condition to the activities of "blind, daring fanatics", who "unhinge the minds of the people by constantly singing in their ears the terrors of the law without holding out any of the promises of the Gospel and the consolation of Religion".⁴⁵ Some years before 1824, during the ministry of Simon Fraser of Stornoway, a group of parishioners, whom Donald Morrison calls the "fanatics" caused a disturbance when they "cried out against Mr. Fraser's doctrine as he preached at Back".⁴⁶

From the above evidence, it is clear that an Evangelical Gospel was being preached in Lewis before the settlement of MacLeod of Uig, although not in the pulpits of the four parish churches. But for the coming of MacLeod and other representatives of a new generation of clergy, Evangelicalism would have been forced to flourish outwith the aegis of the Church of Scotland.

Alexander MacLeod appreciated the value of having a proprietress who was sympathetic to Evangelical religion, although he himself had little affection for the patronage system. In 1834 he wrote to Stewart MacKenzie, commending "the Scriptural use which we so happily know by experience you and your Honourable Lady make of the Power vested in you to recommend and to appoint Pastors to Church".⁴⁷ As well as favouring Evangelical presentees, Mrs. MacKenzie assisted young men like Duncan Matheson while they pursued their studies for the ministry. In a letter addressed to her in November 1829, Matheson alludes to the assistance he had received from generous friends during the course of three academic sessions, making special reference to "your liberal donation". When offered the parish of Knock by Mrs. MacKenzie

his reply was: "There is no place in which I would more willingly enter on the labours of the holy ministry than in your Interesting Island".⁴⁸ Matheson was ordained on September 27, 1831, and remained as minister of Knock until the time of the Disruption.⁴⁹

At Knock, Duncan Matheson succeeded Robert Finlayson, who had been transferred to Lochs in June 1831.⁵⁰ Evander MacIver's assertion that in practice the Seaforth family recommended ministers for vacant Lewis parishes, although in theory the Crown was patron, is confirmed by a letter from Sir Robert Peel to Stewart MacKenzie on July 27, 1830, in which the former writes that he had "laid before the King your Recommendation of the Revd. Robert Finlayson to be Minister of the Parish of Locks (sic) in the island of Lewis".⁵¹

One of the means used to alleviate the problems of large and scattered parishes in the north of Scotland was the passing of the Highland Church Act, which made fifty thousand pounds available for the erection of churches and manses. Between 1827 and 1830 some 32 churches with manses, one church without a manse, and ten manses were given certificates of completion. This resulted in many thousands of people in the Highlands and Islands who lived in areas remote from the parish church having regular services in their own neighbourhood. Another incidental consequence was the introduction of Evangelical ministers into parishes where Moderatism had been prevalent.

In the Presbytery of Skye "Parliamentary" churches were built at Stenscholl, to serve the spiritual needs of 1700 people in an area comprising part of the parishes of Kilmuir and Snizort. 1000 people were catered for by the new church at Hallin. On Lewis, the church at Knock in the Point peninsula, in the parish of Stornoway, was erected in a district with a population of 1450. There was a similar population in Ness, the northern portion of Barvas parish, where the new church of Cross was constructed.

The Parliamentary church in Berneray also served the smaller islands of Pabbay, Ensay and Killegray - a total population of 1000. In North Uist the Parliamentary parish of Trumisgarry contained 1150 people. The churches, solid substantial buildings, designed by Thomas Telford, cost about £750 and the manses £720. If galleries were to be added to 30 of the churches, they would be able to accommodate a total of 20,000 worshippers.⁵²

As indicated above, the Parliamentary church of Knock, which had formed part of the parish of Stornoway, had an Evangelical ministry between 1829 and the Disruption. From 1829 to 1833 Finlay Cook was minister of Cross, in the other Parliamentary parish in Lewis. He was followed by another Evangelical pastor, John MacRae, generally known as "MacRath Mor" (Big MacRae), who was translated to Knockbain in 1839.⁵³ From 1840 to the time of the Disruption the people of Cross enjoyed the ministry of the Evangelical John Finlayson.⁵⁴ Thus, primarily as a result of the influence of Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, four out of the six parishes in Lewis were served by Evangelical incumbents for a considerable time before the Disruption - Uig from 1824, Knock from 1829, Cross from 1829, and Lochs from 1831. This infiltration of Evangelicals was one of the several factors which enabled the Free Church to make such a clean sweep throughout Lewis in 1843.

The erection of Parliamentary churches had the effect of bringing the first Evangelical minister to the Presbytery of Uist. In 1835 Norman MacLeod, a Skyeman who had been a missionary among the Gaelic population in Saltcoats, was inducted as minister of Trumisgarry in North Uist.⁵⁵ He had been converted when a young man at a service conducted by his more famous cousin, Roderick MacLeod.⁵⁶ The coming of Norman MacLeod was to influence the course of events in the religious history of Uist as the Disruption drew near. The remote island of Saint Kilda had an Evangelical ministry from

1830, when Neil MacKenzie was settled there as SSPCK missionary.⁵⁷ MacDonald of Ferintosh introduced the new minister to the Saint Kildans. The Apostle of the North heard MacKenzie preach a sermon in Saint Kilda on the parable of the ten virgins, and was highly impressed: "His lecture throughout was clear, pointed, and impressive; and the application was peculiarly faithful and close to the conscience".⁵⁸

Although it was not until 1835 that an Evangelical minister was presented to a parish in Uist, there were many within the Presbytery who had heard an Evangelical gospel from the lips of John MacDonald, a number of years before that date. On four separate occasions between 1822 and 1830, the Minister of Ferintosh visited Saint Kilda and preached many sermons during his missions there.⁵⁹ While awaiting the arrival of the vessel which was to convey him to his destination, he occupied his time in preaching in Harris and Uist. In May 1824, for example, he addressed an audience of between 350 and 400 in Harris. "The congregation were very much affected," he observed in his journal, "many were in tears." In the evening many gathered to hear MacDonald conduct family worship.⁶⁰ He also engaged in personal evangelism while on such excursions to the Hebrides. He gives an account of a visit to a sick man in Harris, adding: "I took an opportunity of conversing privately with the man respecting the state of his soul."⁶¹

In June 1827, MacDonald was the preacher during an unforgettable Communion season at Uig. On the Sabbath some seven thousand worshippers were present. The evangelist writes: "The Lord seemed to have favoured us with a shower of divine influences, which had been evidently felt both by saint and sinner."⁶² The title given by Buchanan to John MacDonald is not inappropriate: "The Whitefield of the highlands and islands".⁶³

Some years before, the Highland Apostle had been censured by the General Assembly for preaching outwith the bounds of his own parish without the consent of the local minister. So on his tours of the islands he invariably made a point of seeking the permission of the parish minister before holding a service. In 1818, with particular reference to MacDonald, the Assembly condemned "any minister of this Church who exercises his pastoral functions in a vagrant manner, preaching during his journeys from place to place, in the open air, in other parishes than his own".⁶⁴

Another minister who, apart from one unsuccessful experiment, never held a charge in the islands, but who, like MacDonald of Ferintosh, was to exert a considerable influence on Hebridean Evangelicalism during the years it was being moulded into shape, was Francis MacBean. During his earlier years he had severed his links with the Established Church and joined the Original Seceders. For some years he acted as Inspector for the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society.⁶⁵ When his activities became restricted, he resigned from this post, complaining to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth that the Directors of the society were afraid of "the offence of the blind and ignorant ministers throughout the Highlands".⁶⁶

MacBean settled for some time in the town of Stornoway, where he was employed by the proprietress in supervising the building of schools and the making of roads. He was even less confined in his actions than MacDonald of Ferintosh. "His employment as overseer left him free to preach at large, and as he was not under the Established Presbytery he knew no parochial boundaries".⁶⁷ We shall return to Francis MacBean when we consider schools and missions in the following chapter.

For a number of years Roderick MacLeod of Bracadale and Snizort fought

a lonely battle for Evangelicalism within the Presbytery of Skye. By constitution he appears to have been equipped for such a task. Thomas Chalmers had used the adjective "dour" to describe MacLeod, which Alexander Beith interpreted as "a self-possessed, self-reliant, and self-willed man".⁶⁸ MacIntosh MacKay preferred to speak of his "firmness of principle", rather than the "obstinacy" of which his opponents accused him.⁶⁹ But the increasing number of Evangelical ministers throughout Scotland was reflected in the changing membership of Skye Presbytery. From 1833 to 1838 Roderick MacLeod had an Evangelical colleague in the person of Simon Fraser MacLauchlan, whom he was to succeed at Snizort.⁷⁰ MacLeod's successor at Bracadale was John Robertson Glass, "a man richly indued with the new faith".⁷¹ In 1839 John Swanson, a convinced member of the Evangelical party, became minister of the Small Isles.⁷²

Donald Martin of Kilmuir and Roderick MacLeod of Bracadale have been cited as examples of Hebridean pastors who were converted to Evangelicalism during the course of their ministry. In John Cameron of Stornoway we have an instance of a minister whose theological position underwent a change in the opposite direction. In August 1825, he became minister of this large parish, shortly after Alexander MacLeod had been settled in Uig.⁷³ "It was said at the time," writes Evander MacIver, "that he was to follow in the footsteps of MacLeod, which he did to a considerable extent at the outset of his career in Stornoway; but he soon found that the better classes in Stornoway did not fall in with Mr. MacLeod's views or style of preaching, and he toned down, which caused a difference between them which was never made up".⁷⁴ It is not without significance that it was the so-called "better classes" who found Evangelical preaching an embarrassment.

A bitter clash occurred between MacLeod and Cameron in August 1828, when

the minister of Uig was invited to assist during the Communion season in Stornoway. The point of controversy was one which was to be the cause of several acrimonious disputes in the Western Isles - the qualifications required in those who were admitted to partake of Sacraments. In his diary Alexander MacLeod explains what led to the quarrel between the two ministers: "I saw it was my duty not to address any of the tables, finding that, owing to the description of people Mr. C. admitted, that the Lord's people in general declined to come forward." Because MacLeod refused to serve the tables, his colleague would not consent to his preaching "on which account," writes the Uig minister, "I immediately retired".⁷⁵

The modification in John Cameron's approach and attitude also produced dissension between him and Mrs. Stewart MacKenzie. In 1827 the Evangelical proprietress of the Lewis estate had written to the minister of Stornoway, expressing her disquiet about reports she had received regarding Cameron's activities. In his reply the minister of Stornoway, who emerges from the Seaforth Papers as something of a controversialist, vehemently denied the charges. He quoted some of her objections: "Your mind has long since been disturbed by the state of things in some quarters; that I make the enemies of religion to triumph, the friends of it, of whom you would most humbly call yourself one, can only lament and mourn." Launching into a spirited defence, Cameron stated indignantly, "This is a woeful charge indeed, brought against one to whom you lately gave the charge of this parish." He considered that he was being unjustly hounded, while the minister of Uig - to whom he refers rather snidely as "your favourite, Mr. MacLeod" - was exempt from such close scrutiny.⁷⁶ Alexander MacLeod's letters to Mrs. MacKenzie differ greatly in tone from those of Cameron. He refers to the lady of Seaforth as "my dear friend".⁷⁷

Lord Teignmouth has left us an account of a funeral service which he

attended in 1829, when the minister of Stornoway "alluded in his sermon to the prevailing tempest; and availed himself of other circumstances of recent occurrence to preach impressively on the duty of preparation for a future state".⁷⁸ During the course of his sermon he indicated in turn different groups of worshippers within the church, exclaiming, "You must all appear before the judgment-seat".⁷⁹ One might expect this personal challenge, with an emphasis on eternity, in the preaching of an Evangelical rather than in the pulpit exercises of an out-and-out Moderate. At that time Cameron may still have maintained some of the characteristics of his Evangelical days, although he was already in dispute with his Evangelical colleagues.

Social Background

Comparing the Evangelicals and the Moderates, Clark writes: "Investigation reveals that the majority of the clergy of both parties were drawn from exactly the same strata of society".⁸⁰ In general terms this statement is true of the Hebridean ministers, and it is only towards the end of the period under review that the situation began to alter.

The earlier Evangelicals sprang from the same social group as the Moderates of that period. Donald Martin of Kilmuir was the son of Sir Alexander MacDonald's agent. During his four sessions as a student in Edinburgh he "resided in the house of Lord MacDonald as the favoured son of his father".⁸¹ Through marriage ties the early Evangelicals also had close connections with the tacksmen and factors of the islands. Donald Martin's wife, renowned for her piety, was the daughter of Norman MacDonald of Scalpay and Bernisdale.⁸²

An elegy on Roderick MacLeod contains these lines:

A thaobh do cheud-bhreith bha thu àrd,
 's tu càirdeach thaobh na feòladh
 do dhacine cumhachdach na tìr
 dha'm buineadh inbhe 's mórachd.⁸³

(As regards your birthright you were high born, for according to the flesh you were related to the mighty men of the land to whom belonged rank and dignity.)

His father was the son of MacLeod of Raasay, and he himself married the daughter of MacDonald of Kingsburgh and Skeabost.⁸⁴ In becoming an Evangelical, and in favouring the company of men like Donald Munro, the blind catechist, MacLeod was probably regarded as being something of an apostate from the social class to which by birth and upbringing he was connected. It is revealing that Norman MacLean represents the change in MacLeod's way of life as "throwing in his lot with the party of 'the Men'".⁸⁵ MacIntosh MacKay testified that "to many, the esteem in which he was held by the common people, and his popularity, were distasteful, and his followers were held fanatics and despised; of course, no gentleman associates with Donald Munro." Alexander Beith, who knew Roderick MacLeod well, was of the opinion that the minister of Snizort was by no means inferior to his more famous cousins, Norman MacLeod, senior, of Saint Columba's, and Norman MacLeod, junior, of the Barony, in scholarly attributes. Beith writes: "Our friend inherited the natural talent - the genius - of the family, and, though he walked through life in a sphere more sequestered than that in which his more distinguished relatives moved, to those who knew him well he was in no respect inferior to either in intellectual endowments".⁸⁶ Adversaries of the Moderates accused members of that party of elevating the intellectual and philosophical to the detriment of the spiritual. But the early Evangelicals did not despise erudition and scholarship. "He knew well both the Greek and Latin classics," said MacIntosh MacKay of Roderick MacLeod, "and enjoyed their reading." Both in mathematics and in the physical sciences we know him to have been proficient; and in metaphysical science he was still more so, and had a predilection for that study. In theological learning and its literature he had read very

extensively, and continued his reading till the close of his life."⁸⁸

Samuel Johnson was much impressed with the accomplishments of Donald MacQueen of Kilmuir, who has already been mentioned as the first Skye minister on record as supporting the Evangelical party. Dr. Johnson remarked to Boswell: "This is a critical man, sir. There must be great vigour of mind to make him cultivate learning so much in the Isle of Skye, where he might do without it. It is wonderful how many of the new publications he has. There must be a snatch of every opportunity."⁸⁹ A study by the intellectual minister of Kilmuir, bearing the title, "Dissertation on the Government of the people in the Western Isles", was incorporated in Pennant's "Tour". In 1781 he became a corresponding member of the Society of Antiquaries. Donald MacQueen was also one of the leading Gaelic scholars of his day.⁹⁰

Some of the Evangelical ministers who flourished in the Hebrides in the second quarter of the nineteenth century were talented students during their university days, and, like Roderick MacLeod, they did not turn their backs on scholarship when they became parish ministers. While studying at King's College, Aberdeen, John MacRae of Cross gained a fifth prize in Junior Greek, but it was in the Mathematics class that he shone, gaining second place in his year.⁹¹ Swanson of the Small Isles went one better than "MacRath Mór", winning the class prize in Mathematics, and coming second in Natural Philosophy.⁹² Duncan Matheson of Knock studied the Old and New Testaments daily in the original tongues,⁹³ and was also well versed in English and Latin divines.⁹⁴ Alexander MacColl, who was parish schoolmaster at Uig when the Disruption came, and was later Free Church minister of Lochalsh, "was a good Hebrew scholar, and had a wide knowledge of Church history."⁹⁵

John Morrison, in his imaginary Gaelic dialogue between representatives of the two parties in the Church of Scotland, makes "Moderate" protest that his party cannot be dismissed as blind teachers, bearing in mind the extent of their book-learning.

Ciamar 's doill sinn gun léirsinn
 gus an treud chur air seachran
 'n déidh na chosg sinn ri Beurla,
 Eabhra, Gréigis, is Laidiann,
 agus feallsanaich fheumail
 chum na dreuchd seo fa leth?⁹⁶

(How can we possibly be sightless blind men, when one considers the amount of time we have devoted to English, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and useful philosophers, subjects which individually are necessary for this office?)

"Evangelical" had a ready reply to his opponent's protestations:

Tha bhur foghlum gun stà
 mur 'eil gràs 'na cho-chuideachd.⁹⁷

(Your learning is worthless unless it is accompanied by grace.)

As we have already discovered, the Evangelicals, like the Moderates, were men of considerable erudition, but John Morrison would claim that in the Evangelical clergy mental accomplishments were combined with spiritual vitality.

The earlier Evangelical ministers had the advantage of being born in fairly comfortable circumstances, and of having parents with the means to send them to school and college. Roderick MacLeod, like many other Hebridean ministers, was a son of the manse, and connected with one of the oldest Skye families.⁹⁸ Simon Fraser MacLauchlan was tutored by his father, the minister of Moy.⁹⁹ Finlay Cook's father was a farmer in Arran¹⁰⁰ and

Robert Finlayson's father derived what would be regarded as a reasonable salary from his post as schoolmaster.¹⁰¹

As the century progressed, candidates of humbler origins whose parents would have found it difficult to pay for their education, came forward for the ministry. Some of the Evangelical ministers of Lewis came from crofting stock in Ross and Sutherland. Evander MacIver claims that Alexander MacLeod of Uig was "a fisherman, and son of a tenant in Stoer district of Assynt, and was grown up before he began to study for the Church, and was imperfectly educated."¹⁰² MacLeod had no desire to deny that his origins were among the common people, but to suggest that his education was deficient is unfair. One reason why he was older than the majority of students when he entered college, was that in his younger days he had been associated with the sect led by Norman MacLeod. Before being licensed, Alexander MacLeod had to convince the Presbytery of Tongue that he had "renounced the peculiar tenets of said party". Licensing him in 1818, the Presbytery expressed themselves "fully satisfied" with his knowledge of the learned languages, philosophy and theology.¹⁰³ This evidence appears to contradict the opinion of Evander MacIver that the minister of Uig was "imperfectly educated". (It has to be admitted, however, that the occasions when Presbyteries expressed dissatisfaction with candidates being examined are indeed rare, and it is impossible to ascertain how rigorous were the exercises assigned to students.)

On New Year's Day, 1829, Alexander MacLeod of Uig cast a retrospective glance over his past life, remembering the hardships he had faced while preparing for the ministry because of lack of funds. Before entering college he had been employed as a crofter/fisherman. In his journal MacLeod wrote: "Recollect how you went to Edinburgh to prosecute your studies without

money in your purse or (to your knowledge) any friend before you, but how soon the Lord raised friends for you then and money as you needed to prosecute your education until it was finished."¹⁰⁴

The father of John MacRae had been a farmer of comfortable means who had become bankrupt through no fault of his own. Because of the reduced circumstances of his family, MacRae worked as a shepherd and a fisherman, but was still able to prosecute his studies for the ministry.¹⁰⁵ The family of Duncan Matheson, who was from a crofting background, had emigrated to America, and but for the assistance of friends during his years at college, *he* would have had difficulty in completing his course.¹⁰⁶

It is only in the wake of the revivals of the second quarter of the nineteenth century that candidates of crofting stock who were natives of the Western Isles began to study for the ministry. One of the Uig converts who became a minister was Peter MacLean, whose father was a crofter at Crowlista. MacLean had outstanding pastorates in Cape Breton, Tobermory and Stornoway.¹⁰⁷ Another was Malcolm MacRitchie, who was minister of Strathy.¹⁰⁸ Duncan Matheson's successor at Knock, just after the Disruption, was Donald Murray, a native of Melbost, near Stornoway.¹⁰⁹ Following 1843 an increasing number of islanders entered the ministry.

One of the charges usually levelled at the Moderates was that the management of their glebes caused them more anxiety than the spiritual life of their parishioners. Some Evangelical ministers appear to have been attracted to agriculture, which is perhaps not surprising as the earlier Evangelicals in particular had connections by birth and marriage with the tacksman class. Other Evangelical ministers took little to do with the cultivation of their glebes. Shortly before the Convocation of 1842 John Swanson of the Small Isles had stocked his glebe well with sheep and

cattle, which he had to sell at a loss soon after the Disruption.¹¹⁰ Before 1843 Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry had occupied a small farm on which he had built a six-roomed cottage. The minister of Trumisgarry belonged to the MacLeods of Ebst, while his wife was a daughter of An Dotair Ban, Lord MacDonald's chamberlain.¹¹¹

Robert Finlayson "was innocent of business", and reserved all his energies for the work of his parish, leaving his wife to deal with other matters.¹¹² Finlay took also seems to have regarded agricultural affairs as an unnecessary distraction in the life of a minister of the Gospel. He "had a glebe at Cross, but though reared on a croft he had no interest now in questions of land and crop. Fortunately he had a brother who managed the glebe and left the minister free for higher work."¹¹³

Evangelical Preaching

One of the contrasts to be drawn between the two parties within the Church of Scotland is found in their style of preaching and in the doctrines which they emphasised from the pulpit. John Witherspoon provides us with a somewhat tongue-in-cheek account of the Moderate preacher: "1. His subjects must be confined to social duties. 2. He must recommend them only from rational considerations, viz.:- the beauty and comely proportions of virtue and its advantages in the present life without any regard to a future state or more extended self-interest. 3. His authorities must be drawn from heathen writers, none, or as few as possible, from Scripture. 4. He must be very unacceptable to the common people."¹¹⁴ Evangelical preachers, on the other hand, "laid emphasis on the great Christian doctrines of sin, grace and redemption, and their aim was to awaken in their hearers a deeper personal religious experience".¹¹⁵ An article in the "Christian Instructor" for January 1824 gives a catalogue of Evangelical doctrines

which Moderate ministers were alleged either to neglect or ignore: "The fallen and forlorn condition in which we are placed in the world - the great and awful sacrifice which was given for sin ... the mysterious and unseen agency of that spirit who is to apply the benefits of this sacrifice to the souls of men - and ... an immortality of blessedness or wo (sic) which must be the lot of all".¹¹⁶

When Alexander MacLeod arrived in 1824 as the first Evangelical minister to be settled in Lewis, "he was said to have often stated from the pulpit that the ministers who preached in Lewis had never taught their people the true gospel of Christ".¹¹⁷ Evander MacIver points to some of the subjects which were highlighted in MacLeod's preaching: "Violent denunciations as to their future were made, and wild descriptions of hell and its punishments expressed. This style of preaching became very popular."¹¹⁸ The group of separatists in Sutherland to which MacLeod had belonged as a young man had broken with the Establishment because they objected to "the life and doctrine of a certain class of ministers in the Church of Scotland".¹¹⁹ Even after he returned to the fold of the Church of Scotland as a minister, he apparently retained something of the censorious outlook of his younger years. The Evangelical party were sometimes dubbed "the Wild" by their critics, a title which MacIver no doubt felt aptly described the new class of ministers in Lewis.

Some of the other Evangelical preachers in the Western Isles adopted a quieter pulpit style than that manifested by MacLeod of Uig. Roderick MacLeod, for example, "was never what is usually termed vehement".¹²⁰ A judgment passed on Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry is rather severe: "As a preacher he was dry, and remained dry to the end".¹²¹ The Gaelic word "sgagach" - hesitant - was used to characterise his preaching.¹²² The

coming of the Evangelicals introduced to the islands a group of talented and effective preachers. While few sermons by Hebridean Moderates appeared in print, the admirers of Evangelical ministers ensured that some of the sayings and sermons of men like Robert Finlayson, Duncan Matheson and Alexander MacLeod were handed down to posterity in published form.

Robert Finlayson spent a quarter of a century in Lochs, the longest of the Evangelical ministries in Lewis during the period covered by this dissertation. His preaching "abounded in parable, allegory and dialogue, and in pictures of the spiritual life".¹²³ For this reason he has been dubbed the "John Bunyan of the Highlands."

One of Finlayson's best-known sermons was on the return of the Prodigal Son. A quotation from that remarkable sermon - even in translation - conveys something of the vividness of the preacher's imagination. "The father said to one of the servants who stood near him, 'Although you see him in such a ragged condition, yet he is still my son, so go to the wardrobe, bring out the suit you find hanging there, and put it on him, that he may enter into the company of the guests.' The servant went and brought out a garment which he found within. But when the father looked at it, he asked, 'What suit is that?' 'It is the suit which Adam wore before he fell,' replied the servant. 'Take it away, take it away,' said the father, 'it will not suffice; he will by no means enter clothed in it. He must not mingle with the guests dressed in that suit. Bring out another suit.' The servant arrived with another elegant robe, and the father inquired: 'What garment is this?' 'It is,' said the servant 'the garment which belonged to Gabriel.' 'Take it inside immediately; it will not do either. Bring out another garment.' He went in, and brought out a third suit. 'What garment is this?' asked the father. 'That,' replied the servant, 'is the

righteousness which Christ wrought in the flesh upon earth by his life and death.' 'Well, that is the only garment suitable for him. Put it on him, and dressed in it, let him go in along with the guests, and not only may he sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but he may also sit down in the court of heaven. This suit is inexpressibly superior to the clothes worn by the children of Israel which did not wear nor wax old during forty years in the wilderness. This one will remain new during all the ages of eternity.'" ¹²⁵

Finlayson had an intriguing habit of addressing Biblical characters by name during his sermons. Preaching on the Flood, he cried, "Ho, ho, Noah! What a wonderful Admiral you, of this Ark! Many an old crock has floated the seas, but yours was the strangest of all the ships of the world's fleets, and your cargo the most amazing." ¹²⁶ Another device which he employed to make the figures in the Bible come alive for his congregation was to place them in a Hebridean setting - "He clothed those ancients in the Lewis tweeds and made them speak in the Lewis accent." ¹²⁷ A bull from the Butt of Lewis and a ram from Uig appear in his sermon on Noah's Ark. ¹²⁸

An outline of a sermon on Psalm xl:2,3 reveals how Robert Finlayson treated Scriptural texts, and also shows us the less flamboyant side of his preaching. "1. The pit in which the sinner is placed by sin. By original sin the soul falls into the pit, and by actual sin sinks deeper and deeper into it.

2. The nature of the rock upon which his feet were placed.

- a) Christ is called a rock because of His strength.
- b) He is so called because the thirsty receive satisfaction from the water which flows from this rock.
- c) He is so called because He is the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

3. The song.

- a) The first element in the song is Praise.
- b) The second element is Wonder.¹²⁹

While Finlayson has been compared with John Bunyan, John MacRae, who ministered at Cross, Knockbain, Greenock, Lochs and Carloway, has been designated the Thomas Chalmers of the Highlands.¹³⁰ Like Robert Finlayson he often allowed his powers of imagination free play in his sermons.

MacFarlane provides a good example of the way in which MacRae spiritualised a Biblical text. An outline of a sermon on the words "The king made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon" reads as follows: "The Holy Spirit was the charicteer. When some penitent was met up with, Christ said to the Holy Spirit, 'Let us stop and pick him up,' and into the chariot they took the penitent. They meet one bewailing his spiritual darkness. Again the chariot stands, and this benighted soul is taken on board. Men of a dozen various sorrows are lifted up into this chariot of the wood of Lebanon."¹³¹

MacRae, like Finlayson, took verses out of their geographical context in the Middle East and located them in the Western Isles, in order to bring his message closer to his hearers. On one occasion, while discoursing on the text, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," he commented: "I believe that the Spirit of God had the west coast of Lewis in view when He spoke those words through the prophet."¹³²

One of MacRae's homely illustrations may be quoted. "I compare Faith," he said, "to a householder, to whom is committed the care of his family, and who constantly seeks food for the family, while Hope is like a prudent housewife who makes good use of what her husband earns. On many occasions when Faith cannot bring anything home to the family, and they would die of hunger were it not for the fact that Hope, like a wise housewife, keeps a little

in reserve when the goodman of the house cannot earn anything."¹³³ This personification of Faith and Hope is reminiscent of the mode of expression popularised by Lachlan MacKenzie of Lochcarron.

While Evander MacIver had a low view of the intellectual attainments of MacLeod of Uig,¹³⁴ and even his friends dismissed some of his pulpit discourses as "very weak"¹³⁵ extant examples of his preaching would suggest that he was a competent preacher. Admittedly, his sermons are devoid of the symbolical and illustrative material found in the dramatic sermons of his colleagues, Finlayson and MacRae. The minister of Uig comes across as a thoroughly Biblical preacher, whose few illustrations are drawn from the Scriptures rather than from everyday life. "It not unfrequently happens," he remarked in one sermon, "that godly persons have very ungodly and wicked relatives. Adam had a Cain in his family, Aaron had a Nadab and Abihu, David had an Absalom, and in the Saviour's own family there was a Judas."¹³⁶

Some aspects of Alexander MacLeod's preaching will be further discussed in Chapter Five, but the skeleton of one of his sermons may be given here. Taking as his text Psalm lv:22 - "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee" - MacLeod divided his material into four headings.

- I. Some of those many burdens which every believer may be presumed to have.
- II. How we are to cast these burdens upon the Lord, or what is implied in so doing.
- III. Clear up the import of the promise - "He shall sustain thee".
- IV. Practical inferences.

The sub-divisions which appear under the first heading will indicate the exhaustive treatment given by the preacher to his subject.

- (1) Sin is a most grievous, a heavy and a dangerous burden.
- (2) The hiding of God's countenance from the soul is a burden, weighty and unsupportable, to the believer.

- (3) The believer's doubts as to his interest in the benefits of the everlasting Covenant, well ordered in all things and sure, is another heavy burden.
- (4) Their duties are a burden to believers.
- (5) The temptations of Satan are a burden to believers.
- (6) The present melancholy and unpromising state of the Church of Christ and its members is another grievous burden to the believer.
- (7) Poverty is a burden to believers, notwithstanding that the Lord has in a great measure alienated the affections of believers from earthly to heavenly objects; and that they expect to be made happy only when that which is in part shall be done away, yet they must feel like other men the ills of life.
- (8) Lastly, the want of a burden is a most grievous and weighty burden.¹³⁷

The preaching of Duncan Matheson reveals that he was par excellence, the theologian among the new generation of ministers in Lewis. Nine of his sermons, delivered during the period of his ministry at Knock, were printed for private circulation. MacFarlane summarises the characteristics of this collection of sermons: "There are no illustrations, no sparkling sentences, but they show chains of reasoning, full of the sound of hammer and anvil."¹³⁸

A sermon by Matheson, based on Romans v:10, is a suitable specimen of his preaching. The sermon contains three points, a device revered by Presbyterian preachers.

- I. We were enemies of God, no matter what difference of nature might be seen from the outward appearance.

- II. Reconciliation, and the means through which enemies are reconciled, namely the death of the Son of God.
- III. The most important teaching in this verse, a clear and powerful argument, which arises from the two heads already named. If we have been placed in a condition of reconciliation, if the wrath of God has been turned from us, and from being enemies we have been made his friends, indeed, his children, and the ransom of our liberty has been paid and accepted, the death of Christ has been accepted as a ransom for us, and we have received the first-fruits and earnest of our salvation, in which we have obtained peace with God and the love of God has been poured forth in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us, how much more shall we be made secure in that condition, so that we shall never fall from it, and we shall never come under the curse of the law, or under the punishment of the wrath of God.¹³⁹

The third section exemplifies "the chains of reasoning" noted by MacFarlane. Two of the traditional doctrines of Calvinism, the purchase of reconciliation, and the perseverance of the saints, which feature in the Westminster Confession of Faith, are central to Matheson's teaching in this sermon.

Duncan Matheson's favourite themes were faith, repentance, and the death of Christ.¹⁴⁰ He believed in thorough preparation for the pulpit, and disapproved of ministers who "are so impudent as to preach from a text without looking at the original language in which it was written".¹⁴¹

Not all the Hebridean ministers of the second quarter of the nineteenth

century had sermons published, but snippets from their discourses were remembered in oral tradition long after the preacher was dead. When Roderick MacLeod of Snizort passed away his obituarist could write: "His sayings and his views of passages of Scripture are household words."¹⁴¹

In 1863 MacLeod was elected Moderator of the Free Church General Assembly, and in his address to the Assembly we have a glimpse of his pulpit style. Warning the brethren of the dangers of "rash expansion" he used an allusion obviously drawn from his pre-conversion days when he had been a keen huntsman: "Possibly we may extend our wings beyond proportion to the body, and whenever that shall occur, weakness shall assuredly sooner or later be the result. A rock pigeon, with its compact and well-moulded body, and comparative shortness of wing, will carry double the shot that a heron will with all its more imposing length and breadth of wing."¹⁴²

Donald Sage was not impressed with Finlay Cook as a preacher, but this judgement seems rather harsh.¹⁴³ Auld gives a different view: "At times the compactness and pith of his sentences gave them the shape and force of proverbs."¹⁴⁴ One of the characteristic sayings of Cook was quoted at a Question Meeting - "Chan fhàs creideamh ann an gàradh nàduir."¹⁴⁵ (Faith will not grow in the garden of nature.) Cook "abhorred mere garnishing", and one of his favourite themes was the sovereignty of God.¹⁴⁶ Unlike other Evangelical preachers - Alexander MacLeod and Lachlan MacKenzie for example - he did not commit his sermons to a manuscript, but instead wrote his thoughts on a slate, later erasing the writing.¹⁴⁷

Francis MacBean was another preacher who made a deep impression on the minds of island congregations during the early years of Evangelicalism. He was "possessed of a natural eloquence; his expositions of Scripture were

experimental rather than critical - always fitted to awaken conscience, condemn sin, and commend the Saviour."¹⁴⁸ His expositions of Psalm cvii, and of the miracles of Christ were especially memorable.¹⁴⁹ In post-Disruption days, when he returned to Lewis to address the Gaelic congregation in Stornoway, his sermons and prayers "thrilled and interested" the people - "Every word a haunting refrain."¹⁵⁰

Temperance

The charge of intemperance was often made against the Moderates, but among Hebridean Evangelicals there were -- and still are -- differing stand-points on such issues as the use of tobacco and alcohol. Finlay Cook was not opposed to consumption of alcohol in moderation. In fact it is reported that "on more than one occasion he remarked to his people that a glass of whisky was good for a person's health". Nevertheless, he drew the line at attending wedding receptions, explaining his position with a proverbial saying: "People who go into the mill get dust on their coats".¹⁵¹ It was recorded of Roderick MacLeod on the other hand, that "his abstinence from alcohol surprised people of the old school".¹⁵² When James Wilson visited Saint Kilda during the incumbency of Neil MacKenzie, the minister's wife "produced her bottle from the press, and we took a single sip, just enough to avoid offending the usages of Highland hospitality. Usage, however, is a very inapplicable word in the present case, for the said bottle had probably not been produced for many a month before".¹⁵³ The attitude among Evangelicals thus varied between moderation and strict abstinence.

In a famous sermon, on the text "Na dèan cron ort féin" (Do thyself no harm), which he preached in Dingwall during an outbreak of cholera in August 1832, MacDonald of Ferintosh attacks excessive indulgence in alcohol. Two sentences, in translation, provide the gist of his message: "That strong

drink which is common throughout this district, which we call 'the water of life' (whisky) becomes for some, the water of death. A little of it may be useful, particularly at certain times, but when it is indulged in immoderately it certainly does harm".¹⁵⁴

In the light of the views expressed in the Dingwall sermon, roundly condemning the abuse of strong drink, it is relevant to remember Cunningham's statement about MacDonald which is sometimes quoted to discredit the Highland evangelist. "This man, believed in as an apostle, and almost worshipped as a saint, was a terrible tippler, perhaps worse. Twelve or fifteen glasses of whisky rejoiced his heart, and simply produced a pleasant glow upon his countenance".¹⁵⁵ This serious charge has not really been substantiated. Indeed, a writer who was in a better position than Cunningham to know whether this accusation had any foundation, springs to the defence of the Apostle of the North: "Dr. Cunningham, in his otherwise singularly fair account of the Disruption, when writing of this last mentioned divine, (MacDonald), has allowed himself to be egregiously sold by certain of the residuum, then the representatives of his Church in Ross."¹⁵⁶ The truth of the matter is probably that MacDonald, like some other Evangelical leaders, was not a teetotaler, but to brand him as an alcoholic without producing evidence, is unjust. It may well be the case that in the same way as tales about Moderate clergy were often exaggerated, the opponents of the Evangelical party also went to extremes in pillorying those with whom they differed.

The abuse of alcohol often occurred at gatherings held in connection with Highland funerals. The legendary Lachlan Mackenzie of Lochcarron, the mentor of the younger Evangelical clergy, took the initiative in combatting intemperance in his parish. In 1792 he drew up a set of regulations because "irregularities are practised at burials and other

meetings, and even on sacramental occasions." The aim was temperance, rather than abstinence, for the first regulation reads, "That none of us will taste a single drop of spirits at a burial after the body is interred; but, if the corpse is carried a good distance, and if the day be so coarse as to make it necessary to take a little on the road, that we shall do so at a decent distance from the churchyard, and only take very little, if necessary, to refresh nature."¹⁵⁷

MacKenzie's humanitarianism and practical outlook are seen in another affirmation contained in the regulations. "And however willing a poor widow may be, from a mistaken principle, to spend a good deal of whisky at the burial of her husband, we are determined that we shall not lay such a burden upon our consciences as to spend wantonly at the burial what might afterwards be of service to the widow and orphans."¹⁵⁸ Even in fairly recent times it was not uncommon for a bereaved family in the Highlands to incur heavy debts in order to provide the traditional level of hospitality at a funeral. The technical term used in Gaelic for such provision was "cosgais", which means, literally, expense.

MacLeod of Bracadale led a vigorous campaign for abstinence in Skye. In his account of the parish, compiled in December 1840, he did not pull his punches: "There are five licensed whisky houses; and whisky is retailed in various other places within the parish, to the manifest injury of the temporal interests of the people, and the progressive and sure destruction of their morals." Since the time of the publication of the Old Statistical Account a whisky distillery had been erected in the area, "one of the greatest curses which, in the ordinary course of Providence, could befall it or any other place."¹⁵⁹ Standing at Maighstir Ruairidh's grave, Mary MacPherson, the Skye bardess, regretted the fact that MacLeod's successors were not

taking the same uncompromising stand against alcohol -

Oir thionndaidh esan rian a shluaigh
gu stuan' mar bha e fhéin.¹⁶⁰

(For he turned the disposition of his people to an abstemiousness like his own.)

Smoking and Dancing

Some Evangelicals did not regard indulgence in snuff or tobacco as unseemly. John MacRae chewed tobacco,¹⁶¹ while Francis MacBean carried a supply of snuff into the pulpit in his waistcoat pocket, a habit which was abandoned only a year or two before his death.¹⁶² Finlayson of Lochs also used snuff.¹⁶³ On one occasion MacDonald of Ferintosh offered some snuff to an Army Major who was a fellow traveller. The officer replied, rather haughtily, that he was not given to these minor vices. MacDonald retorted: "Of course not, the major vices better suit your taste."¹⁶⁴

Evangelical clergy tended to look upon music and dancing as worldly pursuits. (Roderick MacLeod believed that even shinty should be stamped out.)¹⁶⁵ The earlier Evangelicals were more broad-minded, and when Johnson and Boswell crossed to Raasay in 1773, MacQueen of Kilmuir joined in the chorus of a Gaelic song, "The tighim fodham éirigh".¹⁶⁶ While they were in Raasay, Boswell wrote, "We had a Highland song from Malcolm; then we danced a reel to which he and Donald MacQueen sang."¹⁶⁷ During his second visit to Saint Kilda, MacDonald of Ferintosh noted that dancing took place on the island: "Though the people are naturally fond of these exercises, yet as they are not connected with those habits of dissipation and debauchery, which, alas, prevail too much in other places, and which oblige ministers of the Gospel, for that very reason, to lift up their voices against them, they are with them but comparatively harmless amusements".¹⁶⁸ To MacDonald, it

was not dancing as such that was sinful, but rather the vices which might accompany it. Remembering the great evangelists' restrained comments on dancing in Saint Kilda, it is interesting that Evander MacIver informs us, "I used to see as merry dancing in Dr. MacDonald's house as anywhere, when many folks thought it was a sin to dance".¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, John Morrison, the leading Evangelical layman in Harris, and a friend of MacDonald, "thundered against balls".¹⁷⁰

Culture and Traditions

While dancing was still a feature of Saint Kilda society in 1827, the life of the people appears to have become marked by a new solemnity, after ten years of the Evangelical ministry of Neil MacKenzie. A visitor to the island made this discovery: "Spiritual songs (have) in great measure superseded all ordinary vocal music of a worldly character. Dancing is also now regarded by them as a frivolous amusement, and has ceased to be practised even during their more joyous festivals, such as marriage or baptism".¹⁷¹ However, Neil MacKenzie's son indicates that his father encouraged the islanders during the winter, "to cultivate the art of reciting their ancient stories and of singing their pathetic Gaelic songs".¹⁷²

The Moderate clergy are often thought of as showing a greater awareness of the cultural life of their parishioners than their Evangelical brethren. But we have seen that Neil MacKenzie did not disapprove of the traditional lore and songs of the inhabitants of Saint Kilda. MacIntosh MacKay, who had been licensed by the Presbytery of Skye, had been parish schoolmaster at Portree, and was later to be minister in Harris, was a friend of Sir Walter Scott. One day in 1829 he showed Scott his own newly published edition of the Gaelic poetry of Rob Donn, "some of which seems pretty as he explained it",¹⁷³ commented the famous novelist.

As well as endeavouring to deepen the spiritual life of the people of Saint Kilda, Neil MacKenzie was also anxious to improve their material conditions. He extracted a promise from the islanders that the traditional manure pit would be removed from the near vicinity of their houses. He encouraged them to use beds and blankets instead of the holes filled with heather in which they had previously slept.¹⁷⁴ He also introduced proper tables and chairs, glass for the windows and improved agricultural implements. Under his supervision stone dykes were erected and the land drained.¹⁷⁵

Evangelical ministers attempted to stamp out beliefs and practices which in their estimation were of a superstitious nature. The "Gruagach" was one of the beings which appears among the superstitions of the Scottish Gael. It was defined as "a female spectre of the class of Brownies, to whom the dairy-maids made frequent libations of milk".¹⁷⁶ MacQueen of Kilmuir opposed such customs. He went to the little island of Trodday where this belief was prevalent, to persuade the people of the folly of allowing such superstition to continue. He informed Boswell and Johnson that when he was settled in Kilmuir "the belief of witchcraft or charms was very common, in so much that he had many prosecutions before his session against women, for having by these means carried off the milk from people's cows". He had announced from the pulpit that any of the women of his congregation was free to take milk from his cows, "provided they did not touch them." MacQueen felt that his campaign had been successful - "He disregarded them; and there is not now the least vestige of that superstition."¹⁷⁷

One of MacQueen's successors was of the opinion that the minister of Kilmuir had been rather optimistic in his conviction that such superstitions had been rooted out. "He might then have succeeded for a time in doing so,"

wrote Archibald Clerk, "but it is known that many believed in the Gruagach's existence, long after that Reverend gentleman's death."¹⁷⁸ Highland Moderates also were suspicious of superstitious beliefs which survived many centuries after the coming of Christianity. Even the broad-minded Norman MacLeod of Saint Columba's prefaced a Gaelic article on "The Superstitions of the Gaels in Bygone Centuries" with the sentence: "It is pleasing to note that ancient foolish superstitious practices which were common among our countrymen in days gone by, are not being forgotten."¹⁷⁹ A century and a half after MacLeod wrote his pieces of outstanding prose, the traditions and superstitions of the past have not quite passed into oblivion. w ?/

Evangelical ministers have been condemned because with certain notable exceptions, they displayed a lack of interest in the culture and traditions of the Highlands. By their disapproval of the singing of songs and the telling of tales as symptoms of a worldly spirit, they are said to have contributed to the decay of Gaelic culture. Calum I. MacLean has argued that the coming of "Evangelical Calvinism" was only one of the influences affecting traditional culture, pointing out that many ancient tales have been collected in recent years in the island of Raasay, which for more than a century has been a fortress of Evangelicalism.¹⁸⁰

The Exercise of Discipline

Evangelicals are usually said to be stricter than Moderates on questions of church discipline, particularly in matters concerning Sabbath observance. During the time that Moderate clergy were in the majority in the Presbytery of Skye, it was claimed that on the Sabbath day the inhabitants "would carry home water, bake bread; and if reprov'd for doing so, they would attempt to justify themselves by referring to what they saw ministers' servants do on that day".¹⁸¹ John Morrison of Harris recalls in verse his own conduct

in the days before his conversion -

B' fhear truaillidh mi do ghnàth
air na Sàbaidibh naomh.¹⁸²

(I was a constant desecrator of the holy Sabbaths.)

Alexander MacLeod of Uig "made some poor fishermen who had been cast on shore in his parish, and who on Sunday had ventured to bake some bread for themselves, to stand up before the congregation and receive public rebuke for Sabbath breaking".¹⁸³ Joseph Mitchell, who visited Uig manse in 1838, confirms the truth of this account, and observes that the "cutty stool" was very much part of the discipline of the church. He recounts the experience of a young man who had recently emigrated to Canada "rather than endure the ignominy" of being publicly rebuked for a sexual offence.¹⁸⁴ MacLeod no doubt felt that it was necessary to exercise a strict discipline in order to counteract the effects of the easy-going Moderate ministry of his predecessor.

Donald MacQueen, one of Roderick MacLeod's elders, told the Presbytery of Skye about the custom which obtained in the parish of Bracadale: "It is not the practice to exercise discipline, by making delinquents stand before the congregation, and admonishing them publicly. A fine is usually exacted, and they are admonished privately before the session".¹⁸⁵ While discipline may have been as strict as at Uig, the method of administering it appears to have been considerate.

A strict adherence to regulations concerned with Sabbath observance was one of the features of the ancient Celtic Church. A tract entitled "Cáin Domnaig" (The Law of the Lord's Day), opens by giving a list of prohibitions: "It shall be without beginning a journey, without selling,

without covenant, without suing, without giving of judgment, without cropping of hair or shaving, without washing, without bathing, without any unrighteous deed, without aimless running, without grinding of corn, without baking, without churning, without splitting of wood, without house-cleaning, without load on ox or horse or man, without any work which is the due of servitude, without going by any one outside the boundary of the district in which he resides, except for a proper reason".¹⁸⁶ One could almost imagine Alexander MacLeod, centuries later, compiling such a code. In fact, most of the prohibitions outlined above, suitably up-dated, would be accepted by most Presbyterians in the Western Isles today. The Sabbath code of the Celtic Church also included a positive aspect, for it states: "It is permitted to go to Communion and baptism, and to a physician, and to a fire and to water, and to a milking-place, and to provide food for guests."¹⁸⁷

Catechetical Instruction

The case of Donald MacLean of the Small Isles, already considered in the chapter on the Moderates, shows that even among Moderate clergy catechising was looked on, in theory at least, as an integral part of a parish minister's duties. The new Evangelicals laid greater stress on catechising among the minister's pastoral responsibilities. When Neil MacKenzie came to Saint Kilda, he was alarmed by the deficiency in religious knowledge among the islanders. On Wednesday evenings he held special meetings to explain the Shorter Catechism, "clause by clause, and almost word by word". To test the progress of his parishioners, he held regular meetings for catechising, at which he encouraged the people to ask him questions.¹⁸⁸ When Robert Finlayson was minister of the Parliamentary Church at Knock he visited and catechised the families in the area, "the first time that a Clergyman had

been seen discharging this duty among the people".¹⁸⁹ However much the minister of Stornoway might have wished to undertake diets of catechising, the parish had been too large to cover. During the ministry of Finlay Cook, at Cross, he held two or three catechetical sessions in the various villages in the parish.¹⁹⁰ Roderick MacLeod was in the habit of gathering the people in the different hamlets in his scattered parish for catechising.¹⁹¹

The Sacraments

Teignmouth was aware that a differing viewpoint concerning the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion was a frequent cause of dissension in the pre-Disruption Church of Scotland. "Whilst one party in the Church are charged with being too indiscriminate and lax in their admission of persons to the ordinance, the ministers of the other are said to drive their parishioners from the table by their terrifying representations and vigorous requisitions."¹⁹² In John Morrison's poem, *Moderate* contrasts the attitude of his party towards the sacraments with that of the Evangelicals.

Their Crìosd: òlaibh gach aon dheth.

Ach their sibhse, na òlaibh,

mun tig breitheanas dìtidh

eadar sibh agus tròcair.¹⁹³

(Christ says: Drink ye all of it, but what you say is,
Do not drink, lest the judgment of condemnation come between
you and mercy.)

The question of the sacraments, and who were to be admitted to church privileges was a cause of bitter conflict between Evangelicals and Moderates in the island Presbyteries during the twenty year period before the Disruption. At the very centre of this controversy was Roderick MacLeod, and the "Bracadale Case" was to command attention of the commissioners to the General Assembly

on numerous occasions between 1824 and 1840. Looking back over those tempestuous years, at the Inverness Assembly of the Free Church, Dr. Candlish recalled: "Let us, I say, remember the days when this man, year after year, was brought up before the General Assembly in Edinburgh, until the lawyers got tired of his case - until even those who delighted in litigation were right sick of the very name of Mr. MacLeod of Bracadale, and it became a current joke in the Parliament House, that he was the bagged fox of the Moderates, to be let out and hunted when they were tired of repose".¹⁹⁴

When Roderick MacLeod became an Evangelical his views in regard to the sacraments underwent a radical alteration. Alexander Beith expressed the change in this way: "He adopted the sentiments prevalent among the religious people of the country on the question regarding the ordinances, those who were entitled to administer them, and those who ought to be admitted to them".¹⁹⁵ From this point of view Evangelicalism in Skye was a grass-roots movement which flourished among the common people before ministers became associated with it.

At the General Assembly of 1824 James Souter of Duirinish expounded the problems with which the Presbytery of Skye was confronted. Soon after MacLeod's admission to Bracadale, the Presbytery received information that almost all those who applied for baptism had their petition rejected.¹⁹⁶ Donald MacQueen, one of the Bracadale elders, admitted in his testimony to the Presbytery in 1831, when the situation was still unresolved: "The practice of the Minister is to administer the ordinance of baptism only to the children of communicants".¹⁹⁷

The intransigent stand taken by Roderick MacLeod dissuaded some of his parishioners from seeking baptism for their children. Murdoch MacKinnon of Balmeanach acknowledged that he had held back from approaching the

minister or the Kirk Session "by seeing that others, who seemed to be more qualified, did not obtain that privilege". Alexander Matheson of Ullinish did not venture to ask for baptism for his child, because "he considered Mr. MacLeod's preaching as calculated to keep him from coming forward".¹⁹⁸

MacLeod of Bracadale went as far as to deprive of church privileges those who had been admitted to communicant membership by Kirk Sessions in other parishes in Skye. Prominent among those rejected was Captain Martin MacLeod of Drynoch who had been a communicant in the parish of Sleat, but the minister of Bracadale declined to baptise his child, although the Captain had a certificate, duly signed by the minister and two elders of his former parish.¹⁹⁹ This conflict between the minister and Captain MacLeod was eventually to result in the formation of a small Episcopalian congregation in Skye. Martin MacLeod left the Church of Scotland as a result of the baptism dispute, and subsequently built an Episcopalian chapel. The largest number of communicants in the new congregation was ten, in 1847.²⁰⁰

Roderick MacLeod also refused privileges to those who had been admitted during the incumbency of his predecessor, the saintly John Shaw. Angus MacRae of Totarder had first been admitted to the Lord's Table in the parish of Duirinish some thirty-one years before, and had communicated regularly during Shaw's ministry in Bracadale. "During that period, he was employed by Mr. John Shaw in some duties usually performed by Elders in a parish".²⁰¹ When he applied to MacLeod for a token, this was denied him. The minister of Bracadale went as far as to refuse Communion to the Royal Bounty missionary at Minginish.²⁰²

During a protracted debate at the 1826 Assembly, a leading Moderate spokesman, Dr. Cook, expressed his abhorrence at the fact that only seven

children had been baptised during the two and a half years Roderick MacLeod had been minister of Bracadale. "Why, Sir," he cried, "is not this an awful state for a Christian parish to be in?"²⁰³ MacDonald of Ferintosh, who by that time had visited Bracadale on two or three occasions, defended MacLeod against critics who misunderstood his motives: "In conversing with Mr. MacLeod, he has told me, that he had many people in his parish very ignorant in spiritual things, and whose conduct was very inconsistent with that of those who ought to apply for Gospel privileges: in consequence of this, he considered it his duty to instruct the people, so far as he could, and I have occasion to know, that he has been acting on this plan for eighteen months at least".²⁰⁴

At the General Assembly in the following year Thomas Chalmers made an important contribution to the Bracadale debate - indeed, it was reckoned by admirers to be the best speech he had so far delivered before the Assembly.²⁰⁵ He appreciated why Roderick MacLeod held such rigid views on sacramental matters: "He wants, by means of his strict baptismal administration to keep up the distinction between the Church and the world."²⁰⁶ (The minister of Bracadale had written to Chalmers in May 1826, defending his stand on admission to ordinances.)²⁰⁷ Chalmers pointed to a dilemma which faced those who might support MacLeod on other points of doctrine. In dealing with "the pious" on the one hand, and "the profligate" on the other, there was little disagreement. "But the great majority of our species," contended the Evangelical leader, "are neither the profligate nor the pious; and the whole problem lies in the right treatment of these - the whole difficulty is with this intermediate, and, I believe, in every district of our land, with this larger class of parishioners".²⁰⁸ Examining the posture adopted by MacLeod of Bracadale, he posed the question: "Does he allow of no middle

class in society between criminals on the one hand, and Christians on the other?"²⁰⁹

The previous September MacLeod had communicated to Chalmers his concern about those whose lives did not match their profession being permitted to Church privileges. "The ordinances of the Gospel," he wrote, "when administered in purity are like wells and pools of water in Baca's valley, affording comfort and refreshment to the ransomed of the Lord in their journey towards Zion. But so far is the case in contrary at this day, that I know many of the Lord's people who will on no account drink from them, knowing that they are polluted."²¹⁰

What qualifications did Evangelical ministers desire in candidates coming forward for baptism or communion? Donald MacQueen told the Presbytery of Skye that Roderick MacLeod had made it clear in his pulpit addresses that for a candidate to be acceptable, "in the sight of God he must be a converted man, and in the sight of the Church, he must exhibit a profession of the Gospel, and a walk becoming it". When interrogated about his own views, MacQueen confirmed that he was in full agreement with the minister. He also declared that in certain circumstances, if the Kirk Session had intimate knowledge of a candidate, he might be admitted if they were convinced of his sincerity, even if his knowledge of certain points of doctrine seemed deficient.²¹¹ When Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry was asked what criteria he applied in accepting or rejecting candidates for baptism, he replied, "My rule is, an intelligent knowledge of the doctrines of our religion, with conduct conformatory to that; abstinence from gross sins, and the observance of family duties."²¹² He hotly denied that he was influenced by his cousin, the minister of Bracadale: "I do not hang to the sleeve of Mr. MacLeod in my religious opinions."²¹³

Francis MacBean's views on the Sacraments were similar to those of Roderick MacLeod. He refused baptism to a parent in Kilmallie who appeared to have given satisfactory answers about family worship, Sabbath observance, and the atonement. Yet MacBean would not grant him baptism because "he sees nothing about him, which his judgment recommends him as a believer".²¹⁴ The difference between this controversy and the Bracadale case was that MacLeod had the support of his elders, whereas the rest of MacBean's session regarded as duly qualified those to whom their minister denied ordinances. John Finlayson of Ness, who was married to a sister of Roderick MacLeod, like his brother-in-law, would baptise only the children of Church members.²¹⁵

There exists a fairly full account of Captain Martin MacLeod's interview in the presence of the Kirk Session of Bracadale. In testing his religious knowledge the session first asked MacLeod, "What is God?" The reply came from the Apostles' Creed, rather than the Shorter Catechism: "God is the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." "How did God create man?" was the next query, but the Captain refused to answer further questions, although he expressed willingness to repeat the Creed and the Ten Commandments.

MacLeod was asked whether he was in the daily habit of engaging in private prayer, and whether he conducted family worship. The Kirk Session enquired if it was his practice to catechise his family, including the servants. The retired Army officer was also asked: "Do you swear at any time?"²¹⁶

The Presbytery of Skye set up a committee to examine applicants for baptism whom MacLeod had turned down. They found the qualifications of all satisfactory, with the exception of two "who did not exhibit that degree of knowledge that was requisite".²¹⁷ This last remark is suggestive, in that

it reveals that while the Moderates of the Presbytery adopted different criteria from those applied by MacLeod in deciding which candidates were suitable, at the same time they also set a standard which all candidates did not attain.

In Sutherland the rise of Evangelicalism had brought with it a readjustment in the views the people held about the Sacraments. Fewer people now became communicant members. In the parish of Clyne, out of a population of 1756, there were only 65 communicants. In Tongue the statistics were 45 out of 2000, Creich 90 out of 2562, in Assynt 80 out of 3161, and in the parish of Farr the total number of communicants amounted to 65.²¹⁸ The same kind of transformation took place in parishes in the islands. Robert Finlayson exercised an Evangelical ministry in Lochs from 1831, and when in November 1842 he presented a list of those who had communicated when the sacrament had last been dispensed in the parish, the number came to only 23.²¹⁹ The population of Lochs at the 1841 census had been 3316.²²⁰ It had been the custom of Finlayson's predecessor to invite "all and sundry" to the Table.²²¹ During the ministry of John Shaw at Bracadale there were 250 communicants on the roll. When Roderick MacLeod held his first communion service there were less than ten who received tokens.²²² By 1840 only "about 20" regularly took communion in Bracadale parish.²²³

The difference between a congregation with a Moderate minister and one presided over by an Evangelical pastor is well illustrated in the case of the island of North Uist. In the area covered by the parish church of Kilmuir, where the Moderate Finlay MacRae was minister, out of a population of 3,400,²²⁴ the average number of communicants was 490.²²⁵ Contrast this with the district of Trumisgarry in which a Parliamentary Church had been erected, and where the Evangelical Norman MacLeod was settled. The population

was 1100, but the number of communicants varied between 12 and 20.²²⁶ The minister of Trumisgarry admitted that there were others who would have been acceptable to the Kirk Session, had they come forward for Communion, but he added: "I did not like to force the thing upon them against their own sense of duty".²²⁷ In Sleat, with a Moderate tradition, where the population amounted to 3000, the average number of communicants was 200.²²⁸ In Barra, virtually untouched by revivals and Evangelicalism, there were some 65 Protestant families, with an average of 70 communicants.²²⁹

In 1820 an investigation carried out by the Associate Synod concluded that indiscriminate communion was general throughout the Highlands. "All flatter themselves," reported the Committee, "with the hope of everlasting happiness. There are hardly any heads of families who are not communicants, and this, with their good works, is to save them."²³⁰ Peter Grant, the religious poet, averred that of old many Gaels had based their hope of salvation on the fact that they had been admitted to the sacraments:

Ach baist' is pòsadh is suidh' aig òrduighean,
b'e sud an dòchas a bha 'nan ceann.²³¹

(But baptism and marriage and sitting at ordinances formed
the source of the hope in their minds.)

While it was claimed that the number of unbaptised children in Bracadale placed it in a unique position, Alexander Beith, who had been a member of the Assembly investigating committee, discovered that the situation was even worse in some neighbouring parishes.²³² Dr. Samuel Martin affirmed that in 1847 there were between 400 and 500 unbaptised persons in the parish of Snizort, with perhaps 300 in Bracadale. "But," he admitted, "there are many grown-up persons unbaptised all over the island."²³³

In Chapter Five it will be noted that one of the results of Hebridean

revival movements was a reluctance on the part of those affected to come forward to receive ordinances. In Uig, where originally there had been between 800 and a thousand communicants, only six people partook of the sacrament when Alexander MacLeod held his first Communion in 1827.²³⁴

Archibald Clerk of Duirinish complained that there was in practically all the parishes in Skye "a set of men who regard 'sealing ordinances' as of very little importance - who seem to think that their efficiency depends to a great extent on him who administers them, and thus will receive them from a person whom they approve of in every respect, but will, on no account, receive them from a person to whom they have an objection, however trivial." They objected to the presence of even one person whom they considered to be in an unconverted state at the Table. "Through the influence of these men (among whom there are some lay-preachers) aided by others who ought to have known better, the majority of the people have been brought to regard the sacraments, especially that of the Lord's Supper, with a degree of horror which causes almost all of them to avoid partaking of it." In 1831 there had been 350 communicants in Duirinish - previously the number had been as many as 800-900. But when Clerk celebrated the sacrament in 1840 only 35 sat at the Lord's Table. It had almost become "a proof of piety" if one did not receive the ordinances. Coll MacDonald of Portree reported that in his parish also the number of communicants had greatly diminished "from a kind of delusion among the people."²³⁵

Fencing the Table

The custom of "fencing" the Lord's Table before the dispensing of the sacrament was prevalent throughout Presbyterian Scotland until fairly recent times. While the practice has died out in most mainland parishes, it remains a component part of Communion services in the majority of island

congregations. "The fencing of the table was ... designed to help the communicant in the exercise of self-scrutiny".²³⁶

Alexander MacLeod of Uig appears to have been more severe than his Evangelical colleagues in listing the sins which excluded intending communicants from partaking of the sacrament. Duncan Matheson was present on one Communion Sabbath when MacLeod fenced the Table with such strictness that the minister of Knock "was convinced that he debarred everyone in the congregation". Matheson continued: "He debarred me, and my opinion is that he debarred himself at last."²³⁷ Finlayson of Lochs obviously felt that fencing could be carried to excess. At a Communion service, when a colleague had fenced the Table in a rigorous manner, Finlayson began his prayer before dispensing the sacrament with the words: "Lord, make the fence around Thy Table so high as it will keep out the swine, but let it not be so high as to keep out the sheep."²³⁸

John MacRae displayed skill and graciousness in encouraging downcast communicants. On one occasion as he fenced the Table, he said: "Is there one soul here who cannot see the mark of Christ on himself? One who is like a sheep with a broken leg, unable to follow God's flock? Alas! you feel you cannot follow, but your wistful glance is after the flock. Come forward, poor trembler, and sit at your Lord's table. That wistful look is an inerrant token of your belonging to Christ."²³⁹

Question Day

In many Hebridean congregations the Communion season still stretches from Thursday to Monday. The traditional pattern is as follows: "Thursday is called the fast day, Friday the examination day, Saturday the preparation day, Sabbath the Communion day, and Monday the day of thanksgiving."²⁴⁰

Kenneth MacDonald elucidates what took place at Friday's "Fellowship" or "Question" meeting - "The minister opened by praise, prayer, and reading a portion of scripture. He then called on anyone of the communicants to give a passage of scripture for the consideration of the brethren. The original idea was that the man who gave the question had a difficulty of doubt in connection with the state of his own soul and that he brought forward the passage with a view to have his difficulty removed."²⁴¹

(Nowadays the service tends to resemble a testimony meeting.) The presiding preacher "gives a brief exposition of the text, in order to lay it open to those who may be called upon to speak to it."²⁴² A century and a half ago, after about half a dozen of those present had spoken, "the minister presiding recapitulates the substance of what has been brought forward by the various speakers; and, should any of them have stated any thing which he conceived to be not according to sound doctrine, he points it out and corrects it."²⁴³ In the twentieth century Hebridean Church the senior minister assisting at Communion generally "opens" the question, while his junior colleague is usually asked to give the closing summary.

While the Friday "Coinneamh-cheist", or Question Meeting, is now an accepted part of island Church life, it was an import from the Highland mainland, having existed among Evangelicals in Ross and Sutherland long before its introduction into the Western Isles. (It is thought to have been introduced into the north from the Lowlands.)²⁴⁴ The first Question meeting to be held in the Outer Hebrides was convened in Stornoway in 1825 or 1826. Presiding at this historic meeting was Francis MacBean, and he was ably assisted by John MacRae, at that time parish schoolmaster of Uig.²⁴⁵

It was at such meetings that the "Men" (Na daoine) came to prominence. MacInnes describes them as "a definitely recognised, but ecclesiastically

unofficial order of evangelical laymen, who won public veneration by their eminence in godliness and supernatural endowments; and to whom alone was accorded the privilege of speaking at the public Fellowship Meetings which were held on the Friday during a Highland Communion season."²⁴⁶

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God," and "To be spiritually minded is life and peace", are cited as examples of the kind of verse which might be suggested for discussion on Question Day. If the first of those texts were selected, the speaker who has raised the subject for investigation might state, "I am desirous to hear the opinion of the brethren on the nature of the new birth, and the marks of it."²⁴⁷

Some of the characteristic sayings of the "Men" have passed into the religious tradition of the Western Isles. Alexander MacLeod of Ung na Cille, one of the Evangelical leaders in Skye, felt that there was a wrong emphasis at a meeting in which he participated. "We have been hearing a great deal today about saving faith, its actings, and its fruits; and it will be well for us to give good heed to what has been said, and to seek more of the faith we have been hearing of. But is not there a risk lest, in thinking so much about precious faith, we lose sight of its great Object? This only would I say to you, Was faith crucified for you? or were ye baptised in the name of your faith?"²⁴⁸

Sometimes a note of bitter criticism marred Question meetings when speakers censured those both lay and clerical, with whom they were in conflict. Angus Morrison, Gaelic teacher at Gress, was one of those who were distressed when fault-finding began to raise its ugly head at meetings held at Communion time in Lewis.²⁴⁹ When Finlayson of Lochs was closing the Question at one Friday meeting, he urged the brethren to be careful in

what they said about their fellow communicants, reminding them of the mistake made by Eli when he wrongly interpreted the reason for Hannah's lips moving.²⁵⁰

Finlayson also appears to have had an aptitude for correcting any dangerous sentiments which had appeared in the course of discussion on Question Day. At one meeting, during which one of the speakers had looked back pensively to a previous generation, when people were more earnest in their spiritual lives and more ready to attend services, the minister of Lochs reminded the congregation that their concern was with the present, according to the command: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain." (In the Gaelic Bible the last phrase could be translated as "the things that belong to the present.")²⁵¹

Evangelical ministers were anxious to correct what they regarded as erroneous views of the sacraments which they found existing among their new parishioners. Alexander MacLeod was shocked to discover that the Reformation had had so little effect upon the population of Uig that there were some who still believed that there were seven sacraments.²⁵² A visitor to the Hebrides in the early part of the nineteenth century has placed his impressions on record: "I am sorry to say, that many of the Highlanders imagine that the virtue of baptism consists in the water after a blessing has been prayed for on it by the clergyman."²⁵³

As well as instructing their congregation by preaching, catechising, and the exercise of church discipline, some Evangelical ministers used the printed word to disseminate their views on the sacraments. Alexander Beith, who had been minister in Glenelg, published a Gaelic catechism dealing with the nature of baptism.²⁵⁴ Swanson of the Small Isles produced a Gaelic pamphlet, addressed directly to parishioners who were of the Catholic faith. One of the beliefs against which he argued was the view that unbaptised

infants were excluded from heaven, pointing out that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets had not been baptised.²⁵⁵ He also attacked baptismal regeneration, giving Simon Magus as an instance of one who had been baptised, but who still remained "under the power of the evil spirit."²⁵⁶

Although the people of the Highlands tend to be more interested in doctrinal questions than those in the remainder of Scotland, the Gaelic-speaking areas have produced few theologians of international repute. One significant exception is John MacLeod Campbell, who had been deposed for heresy by the General Assembly of 1831, but who "was received with great kindness by the people", when he visited Skye the following year. The welcome he was accorded was as a result of their respect for his father.²⁵⁷ Campbell, who was a Gaelic speaker, was a cousin of Roderick MacLeod, and during his tour he wrote to his father from his lodgings in Isle Ornsay: "I find Mr. Roderick looked up to in this house; and I presume I shall find it the same with all who have any claim to seriousness in religion."²⁵⁸

When MacLeod Campbell preached at Tormore one of his hearers was the Moderate Alexander MacIver of Sleat. After the service, MacIver approached the preacher with the comment, "Mr. Campbell, I never understood so much of your views before, having had them only second hand; and now, in the strength of God, I will inquire more into them."²⁵⁹ When the deposed minister moved to Roderick MacLeod's parish, the response was not so cordial. He preached on the second chapter of Luke to a congregation of about four hundred, and many showed their opposition to his views by refraining from standing during the prayers, and by refusing to join in the singing. Writing of the lay leaders in Skye Campbell informed his father: "Holding that Christ had died for all seemed to them so fundamental an error as to poison necessarily all my teaching." He continued, "My intercourse with my cousin,

Roderick MacLeod, was no exception; yet there was a deep solemnity about him for which I was very thankful. I could not say that there was anything captious whatever there was of darkness in his opposition."²⁶⁰

It is interesting to speculate what kind of theology would have evolved from a merger between the teachings of MacLeod Campbell on atonement and assurance, and the Calvinism of the Men of Skye. But MacLeod Campbell's doctrines were rejected among his own people. In Lewis also the tenets of Calvinism held sway by the time of the Disruption. One who grew up in the Disruption era has left a record of the impact that the doctrines which he had heard from the pulpit made upon his young mind: "The Atonement was for the elect; the men for whom Christ died could not but be saved; those for whom He had not died could not but be lost. The work of the Spirit was as restricted as the sacrifice of the Son, and so the numbers of the saved and the lost were fixed beyond possibility of increase or decrease. Even as a boy I grieved over these harsh beliefs, this narrowing down of grace and of salvation. But I fear I had no sympathisers."²⁶¹ In the Western Isles it was the theology of Roderick MacLeod, rather than that of MacLeod Campbell which the majority were to follow.

* * * * *

Evangelical ministers who laboured in Hebridean parishes in the first half of the nineteenth century came to value the support and assistance which they received from like-minded teachers. The work of such schoolmasters was to give an impetus to the Evangelical movement. In the next chapter an examination is made of the societies which sent teachers and missionaries to the Western Isles.

CHAPTER THREE. NOTES AND REFERENCES

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4. J. Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, p. 185.
5. J. Erskine, *Sketches and Hints of Church History and Theological Controversy*, II, pp. 303-309.
6. *Christian Instructor*, Feb. 1833, p. 92.
7. *Lay Member, An Account of the Present State of Religion throughout the Highlands of Scotland*, p. 65.
8. *Christian Instructor*, op. cit., p. 93.
9. R. MacCowan, *The Men of Skye*, p. 54.
10. W. MacKenzie, *Skye: Iochdar-Trotternish and District*, p. 137.
11. FES, VII, p. 172.
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13. W. Forsyth, *In the Shadow of Cairngorm*, p. 103.
14. *Lay Member*, op. cit., p. 61.
15. W. Forsyth, op. cit., p. 103.
16. FES, VII, p. 16.
17. *Report of the Proceedings in the Case of Rev. Roderick MacLeod, 1826*, p. 13.
18. D. Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica*, p. 404.
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28. J. Munro, A Brief Review of the Late Decision in Reference to the Conduct of the Rev. John MacDonald.
29. D. Gillies, The Life and Work of the Very Rev. Roderick MacLeod, p. 5.
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31. T. Brown, Annals of the Disruption, p. 8.
32. A. Stewart, Account of the Late Revival of Religion, p. 11.
33. J. Bellamy, True Religion Delineated, p. 3.
34. A. Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
35. D. Gillies, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
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37. G.D. Henderson, Heritage: A Study of the Disruption, p. 60.
38. FES, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
39. E. MacIver, Memoirs of a Highland Gentleman, p. 167.
40. W.J. Couper, Scottish Revivals, p. 114.
41. J. MacLeod, Scottish Theology, p. 213.
42. F.C. Monthly Record, Oct. 1899, p. 224.
43. Leóghasach, Cuimhneachan air Aodhairean Móra, p. 6.
44. SP, Letter from Rev. Alexander Simpson to James Adam, Feb. 5, 1823, GD46/17/63.
45. Ibid. Letter from Rev. William MacRae to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, Dec. 23, 1823. GD46/17/62.
46. D. Morrison, The Morrison Manuscript, p. 373. Alexander MacLeod was aware that the revival movement had already begun before he arrived in Lewis. Following a visit to the island in January, 1824, before his settlement, he wrote to Mrs. MacKenzie: "I have heartfelt satisfaction of giving you good tidings of great joy. Through the whole Island there is a great thirst for religious instruction and information." During his stay in Lewis, he had conversed with "many of those who underwent religious impressions". (Letter to Mrs. MacKenzie, Feb. 5, 1824. GD46/17/65.)
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48. Ibid. Letters from Rev. Duncan Matheson to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth. Nov. 24, 1829. GD46/17/78. May 6, 1830. GD46/12/38.
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51. SP, Letter from Sir Robert Peel to J.A. Stewart Mackenzie, July 27, 1830. GD46/12/39.
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60. Ibid., 1825, p. 32.
61. Ibid., p. 33.
62. Ibid., p. 27, p. 130.
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64. J. Munro, op. cit.
65. J. MacLeod, By-Paths of Highland Church History, p. 25.
66. SP, Letter from Francis MacBean to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth. Nov. 11, 1829. GD46/17/78.
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76. SP, Letter from Rev. John Cameron to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, Dec. 14, 1827. GD46/12/36.
77. *Ibid.* Letters from Rev. Alexander MacLeod to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth. July 31, 1829. GD46/17/78, March 19, 1844. GD46/12/48.
78. Lord Teignmouth, *Sketches of the Coasts and Islands of Scotland*, I, p. 228.
79. *Ibid.* p. 229. But even preachers who were regarded as Moderates made pointed remarks in the course of a sermon designed to stir the conscience. In one of his printed Gaelic sermons Norman MacLeod of Saint Columba's refers to sin as "a plague that destroys both the body and the soul". In conclusion he appeals to his readers: "Awake - arise out of your ruinous sleep - and call upon God." (N. MacLeod, *Cion fath agus Leigheas na Plàigh*, pp. 31-33.) By 1824 one writer expressed this opinion: "Some years, and the line of difference which divided the two parties in our church, in so far as regarded their preaching, was wider than it is at present." (*Christian Instructor*, Jan. 1824, p.17.)
80. I.D.L. Clark, 'The Moderate Regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752-1805', *Scotland in the Age of Improvement*, p. 202.
81. W. Forsyth, *op. cit.* p. 101.
82. FES, VI, p. 352.
83. A. Gillies, *Marbhrann do Mhr. Ruairidh MacLeòid*, p. 27.
84. D. Gillies, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
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86. M. MacKay, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
87. A. Beith, *A Highland Tour*, p. 116.
88. M. MacKay, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.
89. J. Boswell, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
90. A. Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
91. J. Noble, *Religious Life in Ross*, p. 279.
92. J. Greig, *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands*, p. 129.
93. N.C. MacFarlane, *Apostles of the North*, p. 99.
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106. Ibid., p. 96.
107. Ibid., pp. 155-165.
108. Ibid., p. 57.
109. Ibid., p. 193.
110. H. Miller, The Cruise of the Betsey, pp. 47-48.
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113. Ibid., p. 130.
114. Quoted by J. MacLeod, Scottish Theology, p. 206.
115. J.H.S. Burleigh, A Church History of Scotland, p. 328.
116. The Christian Instructor, Jan. 1824, p. 18.
117. E. MacIver, op. cit., p. 167.
118. Ibid., p. 168.
119. D. Beaton, op. cit., p. 6.
120. M. MacKay, op. cit., p. 25.
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126. N.C. MacFarlane, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
128. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
129. J. MacPherson, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-79.
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131. N.C. MacFarlane, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33. A fuller outline of this graphic sermon appears in G.N.M. Collins, *Big MacRae*, pp. 100-102.
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157. L. MacKenzie, *Sermons preached at Lochcarron*, p. 10.
158. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
159. NSA (*Inverness-shire*), p. 299.
160. M. MacPherson, *Dàin agus Orain Ghàidhlig*, pp. 235-236. Alexander Kennedy, master of MacDiarmid's Institute in Skye at the time of the Disruption, wrote: "Mr. MacLeod, the minister of Snizort, has been very successful in persuading the people to diminish the consumption of spirits, and also of tobacco, and the use of both is upon the decrease." (*Poor Law Inquiry Scotland Appendix, part ii, p. 385.*)
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184. J. Mitchell, *Reminiscences of My life in the Highlands*, I, p. 237.
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187. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
188. J.B. MacKenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
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190. D. MacKay, *op. cit.*, p. 42. Cook was informed by one of his new parishioners at Cross that he did not know what was involved in a diet of catechising, while another told him that he had had five children baptised, "but that not one question was ever asked concerning his own salvation". (D. Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica*, p. 296.)
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192. Lord Teignmouth, *op. cit.*, I, p. 124.
193. J. Morrison, *op. cit.*, II, p. 155.
194. F.C. General Assembly Records, 1845, pp. 113-114.
195. A. Beith, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
196. Report of the Proceedings in the Case of Rev. Roderick MacLeod, p. 13.
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198. *Ibid.*
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200. D. MacKinnon, *Annals of a Parish*, p. 37.
201. C. of S. General Assembly Papers, *op. cit.*

202. Report as to the State of Missions, 1834, p. 13. CH1/2/159.
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213. Ibid. p. 28.
214. F.C. General Assembly Proceedings, 1849.
215. W. Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, I, p. 236.
216. C. of S. General Assembly Papers, *op. cit.*
217. Ibid.
218. Anon. *Sutherland and the Sutherlanders*, p. 12.
219. Lewis Presbytery Minutes, Nov. 1842, CH2/473/2.
220. Sir J. MacNeill, *Report on the State of the Highlands and Islands*, p. xxxix.
221. D. Beaton, *Noted Ministers of the Northern Highlanders*, p. 216.
222. R. MacCowan, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
223. NSA (Inverness-shire) p. 298.
224. Church Sites, III, p. 23.
225. NSA, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
226. Church Sites, *op. cit.* p. 28.
227. Ibid., p. 28.
228. NSA, *op. cit.*, p. 321.
229. Ibid., p. 298.

230. Address by a Committee of the Associate Synod, pp. 21-22.
231. P. Grant, *Dàin Spioradail*, p. 116.
232. Church Sites, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
233. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
234. D. Beaton, *Diary and Sermons of the Rev. Alexander MacLeod*, p. 7. Young converts who did not come forward to the Lord's Table later regretted not becoming communicants. "Pungent conviction towards the evening took hold of some of them for not obeying Christ's command." (*Ibid.*, p. 9.)
235. NSA *op. cit.*, pp. 354-355. (For Portree, see *ibid.*, pp. 232-233.)
236. G.N.M. Collins, *Big MacRae*, p. 47.
237. K. MacDonald, *Social and Religious Life in the Highlands*, p. 98.
238. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
239. G.N.M. Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
240. Lay Member, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.
241. K. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
242. Lay Member, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
243. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
244. J. MacInnes, 'The Origin and Early Development of the Men', *MSCHS*, VIII, p. 18.
245. J. MacLeod, *By-paths of Highland Church History*, p. 23.
246. J. MacInnes, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
247. Lay Member, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
248. W. Taylor, *Memorials of the Life and Ministry of Charles Calder MacIntosh*, p. 19.
249. N.C. MacFarlane, *The "Men" of the Lews*, p. 91.
250. J. MacPherson, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57. At a Question meeting in Uig former Gaelic teacher, John MacLeod, was asked whether he had any criticism to make of another of the "Men". He replied: "'Se mo bheachd-sa gum feumadh na chagailt féin a bhith air a sguabadh roimh chagailt neach eile de na bràithrean." - It is my opinion that my own fireside would first require to be swept before that of any of the brethren. (G. Beaton, *Dioghlumean 's na h-Achaibh*, p. 25.)

251. Ibid., p. 56. John Morrison of Harris referred to the humanity of Christ and to his need for human sympathy and companionship in the Garden of Gethsemane on a certain occasion when he "spoke to the Question." Finlay Cook, in closing the discussion said that Christ had no need of the prayers of men. Morrison, in speaking of the incident, said: "The Cook struck me a blow with the cleaver, and threw my flesh to the dogs." (J. Morrison, *Dàin Iain Ghobha*, I, p. liv.)
252. D. Beaton, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
253. J. Hall, *Travels in Scotland by an Unusual Route*, II, p. 427.
254. A. Beith, *Leabhar Cheistean mu Nadur a Bhaistidh*, 2nd edition, Glasgow, 1840.
255. J. Swanson, *Aideachadh a Chreidimh Chatholaich agus Diùltadh Teagasg a phapa*, pp. 12-13.
256. Ibid., p. 13. Swanson had a fine command of written Gaelic. The grammar and orthography in his pamphlet are superior to that which appears in Beith's catechism. When Hugh Miller heard Swanson's young daughter speaking Gaelic, he wrote: "I remembered, as I listened to the unintelligible prattle of the little thing, unprovided with a word of English, that just eighteen years before, her father had had no Gaelic." (H. Miller, *The Cruise of the Betsey*, p. 114.)
257. D. Campbell, *Memorials of John MacLeod Campbell*, p. 88.
258. Ibid., p. 96.
259. Ibid., p. 98.
260. Ibid., p. 101.
261. R. Campbell, *The Father of St. Kilda*, p. 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

EDUCATION AND EVANGELISM

Sibhs' tha cur Bhìobull 's luchd-teagaisg fìrinneach
 dh'ìomnsaidh Innseanaich fada thall,
 nach cuir sibh pàirt dhiubh 's gach eilean Gàidhealach,
 oir 's truagh gu bràth dhuinn ma bhios sinn caillt'.¹

(You who sent Bibles and faithful preachers to Indians in distant parts, will you not send some of them to every Gaelic-speaking island, for we shall be eternally wretched should we be lost.)

The plea of Peter Grant was one which found an echo in the hearts of many in the early years of the nineteenth century. Others saw the contradiction in sending missionaries to remote areas of the world, when there were thousands in the Highlands and Islands in need of religious instruction. In 1811 Colin MacKenzie, minister of Stornoway, put his thoughts in writing: "I have often wondered, that when the inhabitants of foreign and distant regions of the earth have become so generally the object of pity and commiseration, and vast sums of money were collected, in order to enlighten their darkness, and to convey to them the means of salvation through Jesus Christ, that our own countrymen, almost in similar circumstances, and foremost in time of danger in defence of their country, were totally overlooked, and allowed to remain in their native ignorance, and wretched state of sin and misery, except as far as a few sermons in the year could prevent."² By 1800 the Northern Missionary Society had been established in the capital of the Highlands for the support of missions overseas, when it could be argued that parts of the north-west of Scotland needed similar religious provision. The first three decades of the nineteenth century were to see a rapid expansion of educational and evangelistic activity within the Highlands and Islands.

The Edinburgh Gaelic School Society

On December 10, 1810, a circular was distributed among a number of influential individuals residing in and around the city of Edinburgh, who belonged to several different religious denominations. The letter contained the following message: "Several gentlemen propose to meet to-morrow in the Royal Exchange Coffee-house, to talk over the present state of the Highlands, and the importance of some measures being taken in order to instruct the population in the Gaelic language."³

The projected meeting took place as arranged, and after discussion it was decided to form "The Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools".⁴ Few who were present at the inaugural meeting could have envisaged that this new body was to make such a profound impression upon the social and ecclesiastical life of the Highlands and Islands. Even those who have made a study of Highland Church history have not always given the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society the attention it merits. John MacKay, in his excellent survey, "The Church in the Highlands", reserves a mere paragraph for the work of the Society. John MacLeod does not exaggerate when he comments: "These schools played a great part in the Evangelising of the Highlands and in working the revolution that made them to such an extent the citadel of old-school Evangelical Presbyterianism."⁵

In terms of strict chronology the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society was not the first to take an interest in the educational needs of the Scottish Highlands, but for several reasons it is logical that this body should appear at the beginning of this chapter. The Evangelical influence of this society was more marked and apparent than that of any other institution labouring in the Highlands. The Edinburgh Society stimulated others to consider the needs of the Gaelic-speaking areas, and it acted as a model for later societies.

Because of the significance of the Gaelic School Society and the fact that it has not received the prominence it deserves, it will be necessary to provide a fairly detailed treatment of its structure and operations. In the first chapter reference has already been made to parochial schools, and to those controlled by the SSPCK and the Royal Bounty Committee.

The Founders

In an article which was published in the "Christian Instructor" in 1817, those who were instrumental in establishing the Society are particularised as "some pious, patriotic, and enlightened Christians about Edinburgh".⁶ One writer links the formation of such institutions as the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society with the settlement of Gaelic speakers in Lowland towns. "By the first quarter of the 19th century," declares Kenneth MacKinnon, "the migration of Gaels to the cities had resulted in colonies of urban Gaels now well accustomed to English urban life-styles and with sufficient means to promote charitable efforts in their homelands."⁷ But if we omit one or two prominent individuals, the founding fathers of the Edinburgh Society were interested Lowlanders, rather than exiled Gaels anxious to improve the spiritual lot of their fellow-countrymen.

One of the original patrons of the Gaelic School Society, who was certainly a Highlander by birth, was Alexander MacLaurin (1740-1820), the son of a teacher in Comrie, Perthshire.⁸ MacLaurin had come to Edinburgh in 1767 as a postmaster, and much of the fortune which he had diligently acquired was employed in producing Gaelic works, such as a translation of the last part of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress". He attended the preparatory meetings prior to the formation of the Society, and at his own expense, prepared a "Guide to the Reading of the Gaelic Language" for use in schools.⁹

When he died he bequeathed the sum of £1000 to the Society.¹⁰

But the leading lights in the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society were of Lowland origin. Edinburgh Baptist minister, Christopher Anderson, who was the signatory of the circular convening the first meeting, acted as Secretary during the first ten years of the Society's existence. By all accounts he was "a most zealous, active, and excellent man". Anderson was succeeded as Secretary by a Highlander, Alexander Stewart of Dingwall, better known as minister at Moulin during the Perthshire revival. The idea of establishing such a society was said to have been the brainchild of Dr. Charles Stuart.¹¹ An Edinburgh physician, he was at one time minister of the Established Church of Cramond. He left the Church of Scotland when he adopted Baptist principles. He was a joint-founder of the "Missionary Magazine".¹²

The names of prominent Evangelical ministers of the Church of Scotland appear among the members of the first Committee of the Gaelic School Society, for example, Thomas Jones of Lady Glenorchy's Church.¹³

The interdenominational nature of the Society is underlined by the fact that the names on the first committee included that of Thomas MacCrie, the leader of the Old Light Anti-Burghers, and George Paxton, who, when the Society was formed, resided in Edinburgh as Professor of Theology of the Anti-Burgher Church.¹⁴ Another director of the Gaelic School Society was John Aikman, minister of North College Street Congregational Church in Edinburgh. "He was fully prepared to enter into the reviving spirit of the times, taking part in the very first efforts for introducing the Gospel into places destitute of it." A layman closely associated with the Society from its formation was that remarkable figure, John Campbell, the Edinburgh ironmonger, who became a foreign missionary.¹⁵

Alexander MacDonalld sang of his beloved Gaelic language -

Mhair i fòs,
 is cha teid a glòir air chall
 dh'aindeoin gò
 is mìoruin mhóir nan Gall.¹⁶

(It continues yet and its glory shall not become lost despite the vilification and the great ill-will of the Lowlanders.)¹⁷

But in the case of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society we have a body founded and dominated by Lowlanders which conveyed untold benefits upon the people of the Highlands and Islands by teaching them to read the Scriptures in their native language.

The Need

Several features in the life of the Highlands in the first decade of the nineteenth century pointed to the necessity for establishing an association to set up schools where Highlanders could be taught to read their own language.

- 1) From investigations carried out by the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society it had become abundantly clear that the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Highlands were unable to read or write their native tongue. Christopher Anderson, one of the Society's founders mentioned previously, had visited the Highlands in 1810, and had been "struck with the ignorance and inability to read of the native population."¹⁸ Ministers in the Hebrides reported to the Gaelic Society that very few of their parishioners had been taught to read. In the parish of Kilmuir, in Skye, 2718 out of a total population of 3056 were illiterate in 1811. Only 100 of the 3000 inhabitants of the island of Harris could read,¹⁹ while the position in North Uist was little better, with only some 200 being able to read out of a population of about 4000.²⁰ Even in

the less rural parish of Stornoway, 2800 out of a total population of 4000 could not read.²¹ It was to alleviate this disturbing situation that the Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools was established.

- ii) Another factor which acted as a stimulus to the formation of the Edinburgh Society was "the Translation of the Sacred Scriptures into Gaelic, and their publication under the patronage of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge".²² The New Testament had first been translated into Scottish Gaelic in 1767,²³ but it was not until 1801 that the whole of the Old Testament translation appeared.²⁴

But although the Bible was already available in Gaelic by 1807, there were few Highlanders who were able to make use of it. What happened was that "the Gaelic Bibles lay in the depots unopened, and not unfrequently a single Bible was all that could be found in a large district."²⁵ In the early part of the nineteenth century there was only one copy of the Scriptures in the parish of Sleat, and in Kilmuir there was only "one tattered Bible."²⁶ As late as 1821 the single copy of the Scriptures to be found in the little island of Boreray, near North Uist, was an English New Testament.²⁷

In 1819 the Gaelic School Society's annual report carried an account by the Postmaster of Stornoway which revealed the insufficiency of biblical knowledge among the inhabitants of the outlying districts of the parish in which he resided. "About three years ago," he wrote, "a man collected a number of them on a Sabbath-day, and read to them a part of the Gospel according to Luke. (I was present.) When he was done, an old man, then about 80 years of age, having heard frequent mention made of our Saviour, he asked how long it was since that man (meaning our Saviour) was in life?"²⁸

- iii) Other schools had been opened in the Highlands and Islands before 1811, but because of the scattered nature of the population, the education system was far from satisfactory. It was not the intention of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society to compete with the parish schools, or with those set up by the SSPCK, but rather to complement the work of other bodies. Despite the efforts of other schools, they were "wholly inadequate to the necessities of large districts of country where many thousands are perishing for lack of knowledge."²⁹ Sometimes the schoolmaster appointed to a parish school was unacquainted with the native language of the people. In North Uist, with a population of four thousand, there was only one parish school.³⁰ Because ordinary schools charged fees, most island parents were unable to send their children to them. There were two schools in Benbecula in 1819, "but as both required pecuniary support, and as the people were unable to give it, they were consequently ill attended."³¹
- iv) Geographical considerations meant that the benefits that the existing schools brought to the people of the Highlands and Islands were restricted. The more isolated the area, the greater was the problem. The first report issued by the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society outlined the difficulties which faced those seeking to bring educational facilities to the north-west of Scotland. "Rapid rivers, extensive arms of the sea, and high mountains, intersect the Main Land, while the seas which surround the Islands are unusually stormy, if not dangerous." It was revealed that there were 200 islands in the Hebrides, 78 of which were inhabited all the year round. Others might carry a population in the summer only - presumably the temporary inhabitants were fishermen, those engaged in the kelp industry, or islanders at summer shielings. One parish might contain six, eight,

or even ten islands. Large islands were connected to parishes which were already extensive in area. Within the parish of Portree, for instance, were the islands of Raasay and Rona, containing a thousand inhabitants.³²

Correspondents provided the Society with specific instances of the hardships caused by the geography of the Western Isles. The Postmaster of Stornoway reported the difficulties faced by the inhabitants of Tolsta - "Their local situation prevented their receiving any benefit from Parish School or Parish Church. Having no roads, and several waters which are sometimes impassable, between them and it, it is very seldom they can attend."³³ Alexander Nicolson of Barra, writing on June 4, 1819, pointing out that there had not been a parochial school in his island for some time, continued: "The Parish of Barra consists of eight inhabited Islands, separated from one another by wide channels, some many miles broad, strong currents, and boisterous seas."³⁴ In 1811 there was no parish school in Kilmuir.³⁵

- v) The originators of the Gaelic School Society were also aware that there were many parishes in the Highlands which covered such a wide area that there were thousands of potential worshippers who were unable to attend the parish church, and who heard the Gospel preached on very few occasions during the year. Their schools would be a means of bringing the Gospel to the inhabitants of outlying districts by enabling them to read the Bible in their own tongue, thus supplementing the work of the parish ministry. In the heavily populated island of Raasay, services were held only once a month.³⁶ The minister of the Small Isles reported that he might be delayed for as long as seven weeks by inclement weather before being able to officiate in Canna.³⁷ There were other islands

in the Hebrides which were even more neglected as far as religious ordinances were concerned. The island of Scarp, off the west coast of Harris, contained sixteen families, but the Royal Bounty missionary at Tarbert "seldom visited them, being at a great distance, and navigation dangerous."³⁸

- vi) A fundamental weakness in the other schools which operated in the Highlands and Islands lay in their attitude towards the Gaelic language. Reviewing their first ten years as an institution, the Directors of the Gaelic School Society stated: "It is well known that it was long a favourite political maxim, that, to subjugate the Highlands, it was necessary to obliterate their language; and it seems to have been under the influence of this opinion, that in all the Schools established by the Venerable Society for propagating Christian Knowledge, the English was the language primarily taught."³⁹ In 1765 the SSFCK had declared that "the people of the Highlands cannot be taught to read in their native tongue", adding that "their knowledge of the Scriptures must depend on the progress of the English tongue."⁴⁰ As we shall see at a later stage, the founders of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society resolutely set their faces against such an unenlightened policy in regard to the native language of the Highland people. At the General Assembly of 1824, Norman MacLeod of Campbeltown, later of Saint Columba's, Glasgow, remarked: "Much it is to be regretted that in the Act of Parliament, for parochial schools, a knowledge of the Gaelic language was not made a sine qua non in the qualification of teachers for schools in the Highlands."⁴¹

The Objective

From the time of its foundation, the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society had one clear aim in view: to teach the inhabitants of the Gàidhealtachd to read the Bible in their native tongue. At its inaugural meeting it

was decided that its "sole object shall be to support proper teachers for instructing children and adults, in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, to read the Sacred Scriptures in the only language which they understand."⁴²

The philosophy behind the operations of the Society was defined in three principles:

1. That the language which a person can be most easily taught to read, is the language which he himself is accustomed to speak.
2. That the most desirable end to be attained by learning to read is to be able to read the Word of God.
3. That wherever the people cannot come to the School, it is necessary to take the School to the people.⁴³

At different times during its history attempts were made to persuade the Society to widen its aims. From the beginning there were critics of the first principle. The Directors were cognisant of the fact that there were those who were "sceptical, to use no stronger term, about the propriety of preferring in your schools the Gaelic to the English language."⁴⁴ Looking back over twenty years of activity, they recalled the doubts that some had expressed about the feasibility of their scheme when it was started: "There were not a few who looked upon your enterprise as extravagant, and some even regarded it as hopeless. No attempt had previously been made to teach the Highlander to read in his native language."⁴⁵ All along the Directors resisted suggestions that English and other subjects be included in their curriculum. The fact that their language was now given a status, and not discouraged and condemned as in the past, must have made an impression on the people of the Highlands, giving them a new confidence in their culture and way of life.

The second principle brings to our notice something of the religious

emphasis of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society. Because of its concentration on the teaching of the Bible to the exclusion of all other subjects, the Edinburgh Society was naturally more of an evangelistic agency than the auxiliary associations originating from Glasgow and Inverness, which fall under observation below. Its objective was as much evangelistic as it was educational. One reason why the Directors resisted all efforts to introduce other subjects into the curriculum was a fear "lest the reading of the Gaelic Scriptures, which has hitherto been your principal, should gradually become a secondary object, and be neglected for those other branches of education by which the temporal interests of the learners might be more directly advanced."⁴⁶ The ways in which the schools set up by the Society were a means of spreading Evangelical Christianity throughout the Presbyteries of Skye, Uist and Lewis will be considered later in this chapter. John R. Glass of Duirinish gives the qualifications for which he looked in a suitable Gaelic teacher: "Let him be a man devoted to his profession - a lover of souls - who will grudge no pains or labour in his work. Let him be a man of prudence, and one who will be able to use authority."⁴⁷

The third principle which guided the operations of the Society was also a significant one. At its first meeting it was decreed that "the Society shall maintain Circulating Schools."⁴⁸ This was in imitation of the system which had proved so successful among another Celtic people, in Wales, and which was most appropriate for an area in which the population was scattered over an extensive area, and in which communications were generally difficult. By moving their teachers from place to place the Society were able to make the best use of the resources at their disposal in terms of finance and personnel. At the General Assembly of 1824, Norman MacLeod of Campbeltown paid tribute to the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society as "a society whose labours are, in every point of view, adapted to the peculiarities

of the country and the wants of the people."⁴⁹

The Programme

According to the regulations of the Society, a school was to be established for a minimum of six and for a maximum of eighteen months in any one district, after which the teacher would be transferred to another needy area. If we trace the movements of Fergus Ferguson, one of the Society's teachers, we can see how limited man-power was put to efficient use. In 1819 Ferguson was stationed at Edinbane, in the parish of Duirinish.⁵⁰ By 1822 he had opened a school at Teangue in Sleat.⁵¹ At the start of 1823, his name appears as being in the little island of Sandray, south of Barra.⁵² (He apparently did not go to Sandray, but opened the school in Barra instead.) 1824 found him at Langinish in Barra,⁵³ but by the following year he had been transferred further north to Strond in Harris.⁵⁴ In 1826 he was in charge of a school at Scarista, Harris,⁵⁵ and he then spent a further two sessions at Strond.⁵⁶ In 1829 the ubiquitous Ferguson appears in the Society's records as teaching in Arran,⁵⁷ but by 1831 he was back in the area covered by this survey, at Sconser, in the parish of Portree.⁵⁸ Later that year Fergus Ferguson moved to the island of Berneray, where he was still teaching in 1833.⁵⁹ During the period from 1819 to 1833, approximately 450 pupils had passed through his hands. The early regulation about the maximum term of service in one district being eighteen months appears to have been waived when there was an area of special need. John Munro spent the years 1821-1827 at his station at Coll in the parish of Stornoway.

The Society anticipated that before a school was opened the inhabitants would build their own school, and buildings were to be as large as possible, to allow for the greater attendance on the Sabbath, and "because crowding the Children into a small space injures their health, destroys order, and

greatly hinders their progress in learning."⁶⁰ Alexander Simpson wrote regarding the school in Balallan, Lochs: "The people have built an excellent house for the scholars."⁶¹ A reporter from the "Scotsman" praised the Gaelic school at Roag, Skye, which was held "in a cottage in which there was both air and light amidst all its humility."⁶² Hours of opening were to be those most convenient for the inhabitants.⁶³ An evening class was arranged for interested adults, and on Sunday, classes were to be held in the morning, afternoon, and evening.⁶⁴ The morning class was for children, the afternoon one for adults, such as servants, whose duties prevented them from attending during the week, and the evening class took the form of the teacher reading the Scriptures to all who cared to attend.⁶⁵

The Society laid down a code of discipline for its schools. Each month those who had attended well were to be given reward cards bearing the Gaelic words, "Airson featheamh gu maith aig an sgoil." (For good attendance at school.)⁶⁶ Punishments were not to be severe, but lying was to be reproved and those guilty of the offence were to have a card with the inscription, "Airson breug a dheanamh" (For telling a lie) hung round their necks for a suitable period.⁶⁷ Biblical verses condemning lying were to be read to the class to encourage truthfulness.

The salary which the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society paid its teachers in 1811 was £12.50.⁶⁹ In 1827, when the school year was extended, the salary was increased to £25.⁷⁰ In 1825 the academic session had been changed. "Instead of two vacations of three and two months, your Schools now assemble during the whole year, with the exception of the months of September, which the Teachers are at liberty to employ in visiting their friends."⁷¹ Previously the terms had been regulated by the requirements of the agricultural year, but now sessions were to close in May and re-open in June, so that teachers were

transferring from one station to another at the best season of the year.⁷²

As we have seen, the Society was founded by a group of men who were almost all Lowlanders, and from the beginning it was dependent on funds from Lowland sources. By 1817 the Directors had to report that their operations were somewhat confined owing to "the low state of the funds of this Institution."⁷³ From that point congregations and individuals from the islands began to make their contribution to the funds of the Society. In 1818 Angus Nicolson, a Stornoway merchant, sent £6.85, which had been contributed by prominent townsmen,⁷⁴ and Simon Fraser forwarded £7.15, the proceeds of a collection taken at the parish church of Stornoway.⁷⁵ The following year Alexander Simpson of Lochs sent £3.55 from his parish, and the Isle of Skye Auxiliary collected the encouraging sum of £42.⁷⁶

In 1824, when an appeal for additional funds was launched, Hebridean parishes played a small part, despite the poverty of the people, in assisting the Society. £18.35 arrived from Lochs, and £2.60 from one of the districts in Stornoway.⁷⁷ During 1826 areas within the Western Isles contributed as follows: Uig - £16, Barvas - £10.40, Carloway - £4, Snizort - £4.42½, Bracadale - £7, South Uist - £6.92½, and Benbecula - £7.25.⁷⁸ These contributions are indicative of the value which the people of the islands placed upon the work of the Gaelic schools. During 1830 Highland parish collections amounted to £29.45, and the Barvas Auxiliary sent £6,⁷⁹ but these sums seem small when we consider that the total bill for teachers' salaries during that year amounted to more than £1811.⁸⁰ On December 6, 1831, Alexander MacLeod of Uig requested that a teacher in one locality within his parish be continued for another year, adding that "a poor man in that district declared lately, that should the directors demand one of his cows, he would readily give one before he would part with the teacher."⁸¹ This took place when the Uig revival was at its height. One effect of the religious

awakening was to open the hearts of the islanders who contributed from their meagre means towards the work of educational and religious bodies.

Prominent Evangelical Christians took an interest in the affairs of the Society. One of the first Life Members of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society was Charles Simeon, who had contributed the statutory ten guineas.⁸² A few years later Zachary MacAulay became a Life Member.⁸³ John MacLeod Campbell was also connected with the work of the Society. A collection for the Gaelic schools taken after a sermon preached by MacLeod Campbell in 1828 amounted to over £50.⁸⁴

Progress

Reports transmitted to the Society by teachers, parish ministers and other individuals, bore testimony to the advancement which pupils had made in learning to read the Gaelic Scriptures. The first Gaelic school in the Outer Hebrides was established at Bayble in the parish of Stornoway. On the opening night the teacher had only three scholars, the next night there were 20, and gradually the roll increased to 66.⁸⁵ "At seven in the morning, he began regularly, and in the winter, at that hour, by candle-light; dismissed at nine or ten, and assembling at ten or eleven, he continued till four in the afternoon. The school commenced again about five, when it continued till ten at night, and occasionally even to twelve."⁸⁶ On Christmas Day, 1811, the Bayble teacher, Angus MacLeod, wrote that on the previous Sabbath he had had an audience of more than three hundred listening to him reading the Bible.⁸⁷

From various parishes throughout the islands reports came in of the enthusiasm with which the people greeted the new schools. In April 1813, John Shaw of Duirinish informed the Secretary: "You can hardly conceive what an interest is excited by the School; not a moment is the Teacher

allowed to himself; even when obliged to come to his house for refreshment, people will be at him to receive instructions: he is employed, almost without intermission, from seven in the morning till ten or eleven at night."⁸⁸

At Barvas a desire for a record of perfect attendance made even the weakest pupils turn out in the coldest weather, "for fear of having an O, as they say."⁸⁹

At Boisdale in South Uist it was said that pupils "are so much afraid of losing a day, that their parents can scarcely on any account keep them away."⁹⁰ In Canna Gaelic classes were held at one end of the Catholic chapel; in the other end an English school was in progress. Sometimes boys from the English school made an excuse to go through to the other end, in order to "steal" a Gaelic lesson.⁹¹

Pupils flocked to the Gaelic schools in great numbers, as can be seen from the report submitted by the Bayble teacher. By 1828 the Society was operating 85 schools, attended by over 5000 scholars.⁹² The school at Barvas had 220 pupils, 130 of them adults, including many over the age of sixty.⁹³

In Catholic communities Gaelic schools were welcomed as warmly as they were among Protestants. In 1812 Neil MacLean of the Small Isles had written to the Society: "I have considerable doubts whether the introduction of any person of a different persuasion as a Teacher would be encouraged or countenanced, even if he should profess to teach nothing but the reading of the Scriptures 'without note or comment.' - It might, however, be thought worth a trial."⁹⁴ But subsequent events proved that the minister's appraisal of the situation was over-pessimistic. The following year a teacher was stationed in the island of Muck, with 60 pupils, all under the age of twenty.⁹⁵ In December, 1813, the teacher reported from Canna, "The Roman Catholics here make no scruple in learning any thing I request - any portion of Scripture."

He made honourable mention of the encouragement given by the parish priest to the work of the school.⁹⁶

In the predominantly Catholic islands of South Uist and Barra the resident priests also wrote in glowing terms of the work of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society. In 1818 Father Angus MacDonald of Barra praised the teacher based in his parish for "his assiduity and attention in the discharge of his professional duty."⁹⁷ The Catholics of South Uist supported the society by giving quantities of potatoes to Major James MacDonald "who will give the Society money in lieu of the produce." Father John Chisholm had appointed two men from each farm in the district to make the collection, and in church he asked his congregation to contribute liberally to the work of the Society.⁹⁸

By 1844 some 90,000 pupils, both children and adults, had been taught by the teachers employed by the Gaelic School Society. It was estimated that it had cost an average of 65p to teach each pupil to read the Scriptures in Gaelic.⁹⁹ In every island scholars entered into their work with a refreshing eagerness, and clergymen who examined the school marvelled at the progress which they had made in a relatively short time. When John Shaw of Duirinish visited a school in his parish, he reported that pupils "pressed me to hear from them more Psalms, and portions of Scripture than I had time for."¹⁰⁰ When he examined a school at Hustal in Bracadale he found ten of the scholars reading the New Testament "with a distinctness and propriety that surprised me," although only two of them had been able to read a word of either Gaelic or English when the school had opened twelve weeks before."¹⁰¹ By 1824, 60 out of the 106 inhabitants of Saint Kilda were able to read the Scriptures, as a result of a Gaelic teachers being located on their island.¹⁰²

What accounts for the success of the Gaelic schools and for the warm receptions which they received from the people of the Highlands and Islands?

- i. The Directors of the Society believed that one reason for their success was the fact that the schools were restricted to teaching the Scriptures in the native language of the people. From the outset it had been decided that "the Gaelic language only shall be taught".¹⁰³ Far from being a barrier to the learning of English, it was thought that the work of the Gaelic schools would encourage pursuit of other subjects. "We are satisfied," the Directors asserted in the first Report, "that the reading of the Gaelic will implant the desire of knowledge, as well as improve the understanding; and thus you ensure both the extension and the use of the English language."¹⁰⁴

As the years passed, the wisdom of teaching only Gaelic came to be realised - in 1820 James Souter of Duirinish wrote of the Society's schools: "Their value, which at first was underrated, from Gaelic only being taught in them, is now duly estimated."¹⁰⁵ (Although Souter is ridiculed in Hebridean tradition on account of the quaintness of his acquired Gaelic, it appears that he was a supporter of the language.) Reviewing the operations of the Society in 1829, the Directors made the claim: "So far as the mere instrumentality is concerned, we owe our success mainly to the use of the Gaelic language."¹⁰⁶ It was probably due to the progress made by the Gaelic schools that the Committee governing the General Assembly schools when they came into being "resolved to make the ability to read Gaelic, a prerequisite to the study of other branches,"¹⁰⁷ and by 1826 the SSPCK had directed "that in districts where Gaelic is the vernacular language, the pupils shall be taught to read Gaelic previously to the study of English."¹⁰⁸ For many years the people of the Highlands and Islands had been taught that their language and culture were barbarous and uncivilised. The significance which the Society gave to Gaelic must have had a psychological effect on the minds

of the people, for the native language was for the first time given a status and dignity which previously English had enjoyed in Highland education. This must have produced a new confidence among the ordinary people in their native culture and way of life.

- ii. Another element in the success of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society was the fact that teachers were forbidden to comment on the passages being read in class, and were not permitted to be preachers of any denomination. The seventh resolution passed unanimously at the formation of the Society in 1811, reads: "That the Teachers to be employed by this Society shall neither be Preachers nor Public Exhorters, stated or occasional, of any denomination whatever."¹⁰⁹ Adherence to this rule meant that there would be less danger of friction arising between the teachers and the minister of the parish in which schools were situated. It also ensured that in areas with a majority of Roman Catholics the Society would not be accused of proselytising. In 1822 Father Angus MacDonald of Barra communicated with the Society: "As a Catholic clergyman, I return thanks to the Society for their liberality of sentiment, set forth in their instructions to their Teachers, in confining these instructions to teaching alone, abstracting from controversial points, and giving trouble to such as are of a different persuasion, at same time affording equal advantage of education."¹¹⁰ At certain periods controversy was to surround the seventh resolution, when there were teachers who went beyond their remit by commenting on a passage, or by engaging in preaching, but this will be treated in a later section.
- iii. The character and dedication of the teachers employed by the Society was no doubt also responsible for the progress made by the schools. Lord

Teignmouth states that teachers were examined "as to their piety and qualifications by the Edinburgh Committee".¹¹¹ Different correspondents testified to their energy and diligence. In 1819 William MacRae of Barvas praised one of the teachers in his parish for his industry, which had "in a great measure overcome the untoward reluctance of some to send their children to school."¹¹² John Bethune, Royal Bounty Missionary at Tarbert, Harris, spoke highly of the teacher at Kyles Stockinish: "His character and abilities have gained the respect and attachment of the inhabitants."¹¹³

- iv. Credit must be given to the resident clergymen, both Moderate and Evangelical, who gave their whole-hearted support to the work of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society. An article on the benefits bestowed by Gaelic Schools, which appeared in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor of May 1817, includes the comment: "It is proper here to remark, that the countenance and co-operation of the Highland clergy have, in no small degree, contributed to the production of the happy results we are now contemplating."¹¹⁴ Finlay MacRae of North Uist adopted a laudable method in encouraging his parishioners to learn to read. "For upwards of twelve months," he informed the Society, "I got some of the best readers from the schools to attend in the church every Sabbath, to read some portions of the Scriptures to the people for almost an hour before divine service commenced; which I found serviceable on two accounts, because it gave an opportunity to those who cannot read to acquire more knowledge of the Scriptures, and excited emulation among the Scholars, as there were several prizes given to those who read best."¹¹⁵ Alexander Simpson of Lochs examined the schools in his parish every month.¹¹⁶ Ministers from the islands sent regular reports to the Society on the progress of the schools, and suggested districts which would benefit from the services of a teacher.

It was sometimes claimed that some of the Moderate clergy did not always favour the establishment of Gaelic schools. In Harris the Moderate clergy "frowned down all attempts at educating the people, and the Gaelic schools and their teachers were the object of their especial hate. Indeed some of these teachers underwent persecution that would not discredit ancient Popery." Instead of taking them to the General Assembly, "They managed the matter at home."¹¹⁷

- v. An important ingredient in the success of the schools operated by the Gaelic School Society was the way in which they were adapted to meet the peculiar situation of the area which they served. Unlike the other schools in the islands, no fees were charged, and in districts where money was scarce, this concession helped to make literacy available to those who would otherwise have been deprived. Of Saint Kilda it was said that "they have not a coin in circulation among them."¹¹⁸ Because of the poverty of the people, even payments in kind would not have been easy.

Lord Teignmouth noted that all the pupils were expected to contribute was a quantity of fuel in turn. He adds a remark which many would challenge: "The non-payment of fees is the only objectionable part of the system; for the payment of fees enhances the value of the education in the estimation of the contributors, and can be justified only by the occasional extreme poverty of the people."¹¹⁹

The other schools which existed in the islands remained stationary, and in the case of the parish schools they were so far from the outlying districts that their value was restricted. (This fact has already been touched on in the introductory chapter.) The parish school of North Uist, was some twelve miles from Sand, the most heavily populated area in

the island.¹²⁰ In the parish of Duirinish there were four districts, each with a population of four to five hundred, which did not have a school.¹²¹ The Society overcame geographical difficulties by bringing the schools to the people, even in the remotest parts of the Highlands, and in small isolated islands. When a school was removed from a district, it was anticipated that those who had learned to read would be willing to instruct others, and there is evidence to show that this did happen. When the school at Glen Brittle had officially closed, the children promised "to assemble every Sabbath, under the direction of the more advanced in age and education, to practise what they have already acquired."¹²² When a teacher was transferred to another area, one of the adults who had attended the night school was expected "to preserve and continue the benefits procured."¹²³

The Effects

The influence of the Gaelic schools on the religious life of the Highlands and Islands was considerable. Within the Presbyteries of Skye, Uist, and Lewis their role during the formative years of Hebridean Evangelicalism was of great consequence.

- a) According to reports from all quarters, the Gaelic schools had a beneficial effect upon the morals of the people of the islands. The excellent character of the teachers influenced the pupils. "The teachers are exemplary in their conduct," wrote Robert Finlayson of Lochs, "and active in communicating religious knowledge,"¹²⁴ The school at Glen Brittle in Skye had been open scarcely a fortnight, "when an oath would not be heard from one of the Scholars, nor could they suffer the too common vice of swearing to escape in others, without manifesting their abhorrence."¹²⁵ Father Angus MacDonald of Barra acknowledged the effect

of the Gaelic school in one part of his parish: "Cursing and swearing are almost banished from that part of the country."¹²⁶ The experience of John Bethune of Tarbert was similar - "Swearing is becoming less general."¹²⁷

The most noteworthy evidence for the moral influence of the schools comes from Donald Stewart, factor of Harris. In 1824 he reported that there were seven schools in the island, attended by 500 pupils. He had a farm on the border of Harris and Lewis, and he calculated that some 400 sheep had been stolen annually, before the coming of the schools. But for the past three years there had been very few cases of theft, and cursing and swearing had become a thing of the past. As estate factor and Justice of the Peace, he knew the situation in the island well. This improvement in the conduct of the islanders, said Stewart, "I attribute solely to the effects of your Gaelic schools".¹²⁸

Lord Teignmouth, who paid two visits to the islands, confirmed the impression given by permanent residents - "The moral and religious improvement of the natives of Skye has advanced lately, and it is not a little attributable to the operations of the Gaelic schools."¹²⁹ He also stated: "In no part of Scotland have the Gaelic schools proved more salutary than in Lewis."¹³⁰

- b) A respect for the sanctity of the Sabbath is still a feature of the religious life of the islands. An increasing reverence for the Lord's Day dates back to the formation of the Gaelic School Society, and to the revivals which affected the Western Isles from 1805 onwards. Again, there is ample contemporary evidence for the influence of the Gaelic schools in this respect. Teachers held meetings on Sunday in districts that were far from the parish church. Malcolm MacLeod of Snizort wrote:

"They are also engaged on Sabbath evenings with their scholars and people of the districts in religious exercises."¹³¹ An observer gave this picture of the effect of the school at Gress in Lewis: "It is truly pleasant to see the happy change amongst them, especially on the Lord's Day, which formerly was generally spent in idle conversation, but now they meet regularly with MacLeod (the teacher) every Sabbath, and spend the day as they ought in reading."¹³²

Lady MacKenzie of Seaforth reported that during two years' residence in Lewis she had discerned a change in the way the Sabbath was kept.¹³³ From other islands similar accounts were given - by John Nicolson of Minginish, Skye,¹³⁴ John Lees of Sand, North Uist,¹³⁵ and Father Anthony MacDonald of the Small Isles, in a letter written in 1821: "I can testify that a wonderful change has been produced on the habits of the people; their improvement in morals is most visible and striking; formerly they devoted the Sabbath entirely to idle conversation or frivolous amusements, as they had nothing of a serious nature to engage their attention, but now they regularly attend Divine Worship."¹³⁶

- c) The Gaelic schools stimulated interest in the Scriptures in communities in which there had previously been very few, if any, copies of the Bible. The old man of over eighty, mentioned on page 4, who previously knew nothing of the Gospel, was now a constant attender at the Gaelic Sabbath school.¹³⁷ The first teacher sent to the Outer Hebrides, Angus MacLeod of Bayble, reported to the Society in 1812, "There was a Lady speaking to me, three weeks ago, telling me how strange it was to her, to see so many Psalm-books in church, the Sabbath before, when formerly there was none to be seen, excepting the Minister's and her own, and other two."¹³⁸ Alexander MacLeod of Uig related how, after all the copies he had received

for distribution had been given out, children burst into tears when there were no Bibles left for them.¹³⁹ MacIntosh MacKay, writing a few years after the Disruption, held the view that in South Uist there was a greater desire for religious knowledge than in the island of Barra, because "Gaelic schools, particularly, have been permitted to operate more in South Uist than in Barra."¹⁴⁰

A list of the parishes which received copies of the Scripture for distribution from the Society, with the numbers distributed, shows how it stimulated Bible knowledge. In 1824 and 1825, to select one period, the parish of Barvas was granted 200 New Testaments for dissemination, Bracadale received 100 Bibles, 200 Testaments, and 100 portions of the Scriptures, Duirinish 20 Bibles, Lochs 100 Bibles, 100 Testaments, and 100 portions, North Uist 100 Bibles and 100 Testaments, South Uist 50 Bibles and 100 Testaments, and Uig 200 Bibles, 300 New Testaments, and 200 portions.¹⁴¹ By 1833 the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society had circulated 159,300 books throughout the Highlands and Islands, including 67,700 Bibles, New Testaments, or Psalm Books.¹⁴² The writer of the article in the Christian Instructor in 1817, to which reference has already been made, asserts: "The efficacy of Scriptural knowledge in improving the manners and habits of the people, has been fairly put to the test through the medium of the Gaelic schools."¹⁴³

- d) The work of the Gaelic schools provided a stimulus to prayer meetings and family worship, both of which are still part of the spiritual life of the Hebrides. In Saint Kilda about a third of the heads of families "take the occasional privilege of praying publicly in our small congregation, on Thursday and other evenings."¹⁴⁴ But it was in the realm of family religion that the effect of the schools was most noticeable.

In the little island of Soay, off the coast of Skye, the Scriptures were now read in every home, and it was reported in 1819 that "family worship, which was altogether unknown there, is now attempted by some of those poor people."¹⁴⁵ A man in Garra confided to the Gaelic teacher "that he had received more instruction from his son's reading about Christ, at his own fireside, than he had ever known before."¹⁴⁶ Alexander MacLeod of Uig reported that there were families, to whom the Bible had been a sealed book, who now heard the Scriptures read by their children.¹⁴⁷ One man in Barvas gave a neighbour's boy a lamb in payment for coming to his house, each morning and evening at the time of family worship, to read a passage of Scripture.¹⁴⁸ At the time of the Disruption, one minister in Lewis (probably Alexander MacLeod), told the Society "that now, throughout his wide and populous parish, scarcely a family can be found, in which the worship of God is not regularly maintained, and that this blessed change he ascribes, in a great measure, under God, to the labours and example of your pious teachers."¹⁴⁹

- e) In the chapter on revivals in the islands in the first half of the nineteenth century consideration will be given to the part played by Gaelic schools in stimulating religious awakenings. Again, individual teachers had a spiritual influence on their pupils. MacLeod of Uig, whose parish was most affected by the revival movement, wrote that his teachers "bear testimony, in their lives and conversation, that they themselves have felt the power of the truth."¹⁵⁰ In 1843 Donald Murray, later to become a Free Church minister, who acted as inspector of schools for the Society, told of one teacher whose "labours have been blessed to some," and of another who had been "instrumental in awakening some in this dark corner."¹⁵¹ An informant from Skye stated: "There are a number of serious persons in the district of Vaternish, in the parish of

Durnish (sic), who were first awakened to a sense of divine things by the instruction and example of the Gaelic Society's teachers."¹⁵²

In 1844 the Directors of the Society expressed the opinion that the revival movement in the Highlands was not "a passing excitement". The island of Harris experienced "some drops of the spiritual shower".¹⁵³

At the centre of the North Uist revival was Norman MacLeod, who had been a Gaelic Society teacher.¹⁵⁴ In the 1844 Report the Directors of the Society stated: "With scarcely an exception, the fourteen schools in Skye all shared in the outpouring of the Holy Ghost."¹⁵⁵

- f) According to the regulations of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society, the teachers whom they employed were strictly forbidden to engage in preaching. From time to time teachers were dismissed for breach of this rule, which sometimes caused a sharp disagreement between the Gaelic teacher and the parish minister. There must have been a temptation for a zealous teacher to stray beyond his remit, and not restrict himself to reading. In districts which were far from the centre of the parish, and the people seldom heard a sermon preached, a teacher might be tempted to give an exposition of the passage which he read to the people when they gathered for the Sabbath meetings. Even in the parish of Stornoway there were old people in the peripheral areas who, when the Society was formed, had not heard a sermon for twenty years.¹⁵⁶ If the teacher felt that the minister of the parish did not preach what an Evangelical regarded as "all the counsel of God", he might feel that he ought to bring to the inhabitants of his district what he considered to be the genuine Gospel.

The first teacher to be carpeted by the Society was John Beaton, who had opened a school in Kilmuir. The parish minister, Donald Ross, did

not doubt the diligence of the teacher, but brought to the attention of the Society the fact that "he had been in the habit of going beyond the line of his instructions, in addressing the people, at considerable length, upon religious subjects."¹⁵⁷ An interview was held with Beaton, but he could not accept the restriction placed upon him, and he was dismissed from the service of the Society. Christopher Anderson, one of the Society's secretaries, carried out an on-the-spot investigation. On his visit to Skye he met Lord MacDonald, who expressed his support for the Gaelic schools, "provided that the Teachers kept strictly to the office of teaching".¹⁵⁸ No doubt, as a proprietor, Lord MacDonald had a vested interest in maintaining religious harmony among the population on his estate. "It is a woful truth," asserts one source, "that some pastors in Skye have discouraged and discountenanced the Gaelic Society's teachers."¹⁵⁹ The conduct of teachers like John Beaton was one reason why Moderate ministers were sometimes less enthusiastic about Gaelic schools. In 1832 the Presbyteries of Mull and Lewis made official protests to the General Assembly about the behaviour of teachers, especially those in charge of Gaelic schools - who did not attend church services but expounded the Scriptures at independent meetings.¹⁶⁰

In the island of Lewis, in particular, teachers of the Gaelic School Society were accused of fostering a spirit of separatism. Writing in 1823 to the proprietress, Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, William MacRae of Barvas complained bitterly about the conduct of those whom he called "the fanatics". He singled out John MacLeod, who had come to Lewis as Gaelic Society teacher at Galson, but who had been discharged because of breaking the rule about preaching. Another former teacher, Neil Murray, who had been similarly dismissed, was also mentioned as one "who perambulates through the country disseminating wild and unscriptural doctrines".¹⁶¹ Both MacLeod and Murray still taught schools, being maintained by the people of Galson and Lionel.

When John MacLeod died he left half his worldly possessions to the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society.¹⁶²

Another Gaelic teacher who offended the parish minister was Murdoch MacPherson, who had taught in the parish of Stornoway. When the teacher was transferred to Ness, John Cameron wrote to Finlay Cook, reminding him that MacPherson had "absented himself from my public ministrations, he had a child born to him which is now more than twelve months old and never applied to me for baptism."¹⁶³ He cautioned Cook not to admit the teacher to church privileges, but in the minister of Cross MacPherson appears to have found a pastor closer to his own theological viewpoint. A year after receiving Cameron's warning letter Finlay Cook informed the Society: "I need not say any thing respecting your teacher; let his diligence and efficiency speak for themselves."¹⁶⁴ Here we have an instance of how a Gaelic teacher could set an example to others in influencing them to avoid the services of those ministers whose preaching was not evangelical. In preparing the minds of islanders for the Disruption such dissenting teachers had considerable importance.

When the regular examination of schools was carried out by the Presbytery of Lewis in 1832, John Cameron of Stornoway raised a complaint against three teachers in his parish who "never attend public worship in Parish Church, they are expounders during divine worship, keep hundreds from church, they are vile schismatic disaffected persons." He added, "Much disaffection and insubordination is the consequence of the countenance which is given to those men by those in authority here and Edinburgh ministers."¹⁶⁵ Cameron quite plainly had Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth in view in his reference to "those in authority here".

Francis MacBean, superintendent of the Gaelic schools in the 1820s, who has already been mentioned as a leading figure in the early history of Evangelicalism in the Hebrides, disagreed with the regulation regarding preaching,

which also applied to him. In 1829 he wrote to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, "In consequence of the representations and complaints of those whom I regard as ungodly ministers in which some of your Lewis ministers have no small share, the Directors have made such proposals for my future conduct in the Highlands and Islands as I cannot accede to."¹⁶⁶ He resigned as superintendent, and in the 1830 Report the Directors thanked him warmly for his services, indicating that a difference of opinion had arisen between them, because MacBean desired "a greater latitude in his intercourse with the people during his annual visits to your Schools."¹⁶⁷

Complaints against Gaelic teachers were invariably brought to the attention of the Society by Moderate ministers. The Evangelical minister of Uig complimented the Directors of the Society for "dismissing many groundless complaints which are transmitted to them against some of their most pious and useful Teachers, without any satisfaction to the accusers."¹⁶⁸

It was at the time of the Disruption that the neutrality of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society was most at risk. The Society dispatched a circular, explaining that their teachers might belong to any denomination, and in the past had included Baptists and Independents in their number.¹⁶⁹ The memorandum sent to teachers in February, 1844, asked them to exhibit "great caution and circumspection in the present time in reference to Ecclesiastical controversies."¹⁷⁰ Where the sympathies of the Gaelic teachers lay was revealed by the fact that to a man they joined the Free Church. By 1865 Sheriff Nicholson could write about the regulation forbidding preaching: "This rule has not been rigidly observed."¹⁷¹ After the Disruption, despite the valiant efforts by the management of the Gaelic School Society to remain impartial, "rumour got abroad that the Society was wholly under Free Church subservience."¹⁷² At the Annual General Meeting in 1846, two Free Church ministers, Beith and Elder,

vetoed two Church of Scotland nominations. As a result the Established Church formed its own society.¹⁷³ Spokesmen for the Church of Scotland claimed that Gaelic Society teachers had become "not only Scripture readers, but lay preachers and expounders of the Word of God."¹⁷⁴

As an educational institution, the work of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society had its limitations. Its aim was a restricted one: to teach the inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands to read their own language, in order that knowledge of the Bible might be spread among the Gaels. The schools did not teach people to write, although it was hoped that having learned to read, scholars might pursue further subjects in other schools. But as a means of evangelism the Gaelic schools played a crucial role. They did much to spread Evangelical religion throughout the Hebrides. During 1828 the Committee of the Society were delighted to learn that "among the more pious parts of our Highland population your schools are known by the name of Sgoilean Chrìosd"¹⁷⁵ ("the schools of Christ").

The Gaelic Schools provided Evangelical leadership in the islands in those eventful years in the first half of the nineteenth century, and thus paved the way for the Disruption. On December 5, 1836, during the ministry of Robert Finlayson, five men were nominated for the eldership in the parish of Lochs, three of whom were teachers. They were Finlay MacKay, Gaelic teacher at Cromore, John Shaw, Gaelic teacher at Dalmore, and Murdo MacKenzie, teacher of another school at Ranish.¹⁷⁶

Glasgow Gaelic School Society

In 1812 a society similar in objective to the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society came into existence in Glasgow. The original intention was that it should act as an auxiliary to the Edinburgh Society, but it soon began to operate independently.¹⁷⁷ The auxiliary Society regularly sent an annual

subscription of £300 to the Edinburgh body.¹⁷⁸ The big difference between this society and the parent body was that its curriculum embraced not only the teaching of Gaelic, but in addition, English reading, writing and arithmetic.¹⁷⁹ The first secretaries of the Society were Stevenson MacGill and David Carment, the latter of whom was to become one of the spokesmen for Highland Evangelicalism.¹⁸⁰

The Glasgow Gaelic School Society commenced operations by opening two evening schools for Highlanders in the city, one in the High Street, the other in the Gorbals. The Society looked forward to an expansion of its activities "till every son and daughter of the families of our Countrymen be able to read, in their most lonely dwellings, the words of divine truth".¹⁸¹ By 1824 the Glasgow Society managed 48 schools.¹⁸²

Teachers in the employment of the Glasgow Gaelic School Society were required to obtain a certificate of competency to teach English, Writing and Arithmetic. Twice yearly, or at least annually, a teacher must present a certificate signed by the Presbytery, or by the minister of the parish together with two heritors, tacksmen or elders.¹⁸³

Inverness Education Society

On December 17, 1818, an educational society was set up within the Highland area. This body was given the title, "The Society for the Education of the Poor in the Highlands".¹⁸⁴ As was the case with similar societies, titled gentlemen appear among the honorary office-bearers. The first president of the Inverness Society was Sir Hector MacKenzie of Gairloch. Among the ordinary directors of the Society were such prominent Evangelical ministers as Donald Martin, Inverness, formerly of Kilmuir in Skye, and Alexander Stewart, of Dingwall and Moulin.¹⁸⁵

The principal purpose of the Inverness Society was defined as "to

communicate moral and religious instruction, by means of schools, to the inhabitants of the Highlands".¹⁸⁶ Like the Glasgow Auxiliary of the Edinburgh Society, it taught English, writing and arithmetic, as well as Gaelic, but it is plain that its aim was also primarily a religious one. By 1821 the Inverness Education Society supervised 33 schools which were attended by 918 children.¹⁸⁷ By 1824 it supported 75 schools.¹⁸⁸ Like the Edinburgh Society it favoured the use of Gaelic in education: "Our instructions must be clothed in the vernacular language of the people."¹⁸⁹

In common with the other bodies already discussed in this chapter, the Inverness Society was a means of introducing Evangelical laymen to isolated areas of the Highlands which had been hitherto virtually untouched by Evangelicalism. Thomas Noble may be cited as an example of a teacher of the Inverness Society who exerted an Evangelical influence in a remote island. In July, 1827, MacDonald of Ferintosh visited the green island of Pabbay, Harris, and examined Noble's school. John MacDonald noted with approval in his journal: "The school-master seems to do credit to his profession, and be a blessing to the people, in promoting their moral and religious improvement."¹⁹⁰ Thomas Noble, who later went to live in Glendale, is given a niche in MacCowan's work on Evangelical laymen, "The Men of Skye".¹⁹¹

John Cameron, who became minister of Stornoway in 1825, taught in the Inverness Society's Central School. He also acted as inspector for the Society, and it was in this capacity that he had first visited Lewis.¹⁹²

General Assembly Schools

In 1824 the Church of Scotland embarked on an ambitious educational scheme when it began to open schools in the Highlands and Islands. The General Assembly's Committee for Increasing the Means of Education and Religious Instruction was partly stimulated by the success of the Edinburgh

Gaelic School Society.¹⁹³ The "Moral Statistics" published by the Inverness Education Society had clearly demonstrated that much still required to be done in giving educational opportunities to the people of the Highlands. Gaelic schools were non-denominational, and thus were not subject to the authority of Presbytery or Assembly, and that could prove a bone of contention. At times there had been antagonism between the Gaelic teacher and the parish minister because of theological differences. Norman MacLeod of Campbeltown made a strong case at the General Assembly of 1824 for an increase in the number of schools and catechists under the jurisdiction of the Church of Scotland, adding that if they were provided, "I would smile at the dreaded inroads of a degrading fanaticism."¹⁹⁴

It was probably felt that the curriculum of the schools which had been established since 1811 was somewhat circumscribed. General Assembly schools which were set up in the Western Isles included Gaelic, English, Writing, Arithmetic, Book-keeping, Geography, Mathematics and Latin in the list of subjects taught, although it was seldom that one school covered the whole range of topics.¹⁹⁵

By 1827 there were 24 schools being operated under the patronage of the General Assembly's Committee, with the age of pupils ranging from five to 40 years. From the 23 schools which made returns it was calculated that 681 pupils were being taught Gaelic, 1433 English, 763 Writing and Arithmetic, 26 Latin and 21 Mensuration and Mathematics.¹⁹⁶ These statistics show that the teaching of Gaelic did not receive the same emphasis as in the schools touched on above.

Candidates for the post of General Assembly teacher in the Highlands and Islands were originally examined as to their knowledge of Gaelic by Robert Anderson.¹⁹⁷ This investigation contrasted with the situation in parish

schools where a knowledge of Gaelic was not regarded as an essential qualification for teachers. In Gaelic-speaking districts, the Gaelic language was to be taught in Assembly schools for the first six months before English was introduced.¹⁹⁸

One of the regulations of the General Assembly's Committee ordained that no Assembly school was to be established in a parish in which there was no parochial school. However, no General Assembly school was to be situated so near a parish school as to have an adverse effect upon it. A "well-aired and lighted school-room" was to be provided for pupils, with the requisite forms and tables. The master was to be provided with a dwelling house consisting of two rooms, with a kaillyard and sufficient land for the maintenance of a cow. The teacher was also to be given a sufficient supply of fuel. Assembly schools were to be permanent where the number of pupils justified this provision, but in areas where numbers were smaller, schools might be set up on an itinerating basis.¹⁹⁹

The religious atmosphere surrounding the operation of the General Assembly schools is manifested in some of the regulations governing them. The schools were to be opened and closed each day with prayer. The younger pupils were taught the Mother's Catechism, while the more advanced scholars were given a daily lesson from the Shorter Catechism with Proofs. The Bible was read each day as a school-book, and pupils were asked to read and repeat Psalms and Paraphrases, or portions of Scripture.²⁰⁰

Almost all the annual subscriptions contributed to the work of the General Assembly schools came from Lowland sources, but parishes in the islands also made their contribution. In 1826 it was reported that a parochial collection amounting to £4 had been made in Uig, which always took the lead among Hebridean parishes in making contributions to evangelistic and

educational causes.²⁰¹ The following year the parishioners contributed £4²⁰² with £5 in 1829-30.²⁰³ In the 1838 report Uig again appears among the contributors with £2.²⁰⁴ Lochs with a collection of £4,²⁰⁵ South Uist with £11 in two successive years,²⁰⁶ North Uist with £11,²⁰⁷ Harris with £12,²⁰⁸ and Barvas with £13²⁰⁹, were other parishes which arranged special collections during those years.

One of the most outstanding contributions which the General Assembly Schools made to the religious life of the Highlands and Islands was in the encouragement of Sunday Schools. The Inverness Education Society had reported in 1824 that "the system of Sabbath school teaching so approved of in the south, is almost unknown in the Highlands".²¹⁰ General Assembly teachers were expected to conduct Sabbath evening schools "of a devotional and catechetical description".²¹¹ These schools were particularly valuable in remote areas where the distances involved rendered attendance at the parish church impossible. At Sollas in North Uist it was reported that "the Teacher holds a Sabbath evening school, there having been but few sermons at this distant station since the school was opened in January last".²¹² Because teachers had to undertake religious duties, it was the Committee's practice "to subject every candidate to a strict examination on his knowledge of the truths of religion, and to require from him satisfactory testimony to the general fitness of his character for the duties of a religious instructor".²¹³

There is evidence to show that teachers in General Assembly Schools were granted a greater degree of freedom than those in Gaelic Society Schools in the instruction of their pupils in the truths of Christianity. In 1840 Roderick MacLeod of Snizort gave an account of the work of Donald MacDonald, teacher of Uig, describing him as "attentive to his charge; circumspect in his conduct; setting a godly example before his pupils".²¹⁴ Of the school at Baleshare, a small island near North Uist, it was reported: "Great attention is paid also, to the religious instruction of the children."²¹⁵

In 1832, there were nine General Assembly Schools in districts where Roman Catholics were in the majority. Two of the schools in areas where there was a Catholic population were situated at Balivanich in Benbecula, and Kildonan in South Uist.²¹⁶ The Committee noted with pleasure the attendance of Catholic pupils: "Without any apparent remembrance of the religious distinctions that subsist betwixt them, the Roman Catholics are well pleased to be instructed along with the Protestants in all the literary branches."²¹⁷ It is hardly surprising to learn that pupils of the Catholic faith had "declined to be instructed in the Protestant catechisms".²¹⁸

On the eve of the Disruption there were 12 Assembly Schools in the Western Isles, half of them in the island of Skye. The Skye schools were located at Roag, Flashader, Tormore, Kyleakin, Uig and Carbost. Lewis had only one such institution, at Cross. In addition there were General Assembly Schools at Sollas and Baleshare (North Uist), Balivanich (Benbecula), Kildonan (South Uist), and Tarbert (Harris). In those 12 schools about 900 pupils were being educated.²¹⁹

General Assembly Schools were another means whereby laymen of a high intellectual calibre who were in sympathy with the Evangelical party in the Church of Scotland were introduced into island parishes. That many of the Assembly teachers were Evangelicals is revealed by the fact that almost half the teachers seceded from the Establishment at the time of the Disruption.

Parish Schools

Reference has already been made in the introductory chapter to the parish schools which existed in the Hebrides at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In this section parochial schools will be considered in the context of the Evangelicalisation of the Western Isles.

The Seaforth family were able to transform the ecclesiastical face of Lewis by presenting Evangelical clergymen to vacant parishes. In a similar fashion, when there was a vacancy in a parish school, the proprietress appointed teachers of Evangelical sympathies, and this had a not insignificant effect in helping to make the island of Lewis a bastion of Evangelicalism by the time of the Disruption.

One such Evangelical parish schoolmaster who served in Lewis was Malcolm Nicolson, who was born at Braes in Skye in 1792. He had the advantage of a university education, and after teaching for some time in his native island, he was transferred to the parish of Barvas.²²⁰ Nicolson composed Gaelic hymns and assisted congregational singing by holding psalmody classes.²²¹ He clashed with William MacRae, the Moderate minister of Barvas, who wrote to him on December 13, 1831, forbidding him to act "as a Public Instructor to the people of the Barvasses or to any others within the bounds of this Parish."²²² A report on schools in Lewis presented to the General Assembly complained that Malcolm Nicolson had "signed the Formula, but never attends public worship, against every remonstrance exhibits himself as a public instructor or expounder on the Sabbath evenings to an assemblage of people in the vicinity of the Church. Instruction is requested how to proceed against this schismatic schoolmaster."²²³ Although Nicolson and the Barvas minister were in dispute, MacRae's son, Charles, went direct from the parish school to Edinburgh University, where he had a distinguished academic career.²²⁴

The parish of Uig, the first in Lewis to have an Evangelical ministry, also had a succession of Evangelical parish teachers. John MacRae taught in the parish school when the Uig awakening was at its height: "He was of immense value to Mr. MacLeod of Uig during the five years revival in that parish."²²⁵ MacRae was appointed to Uig on the personal recommendation of

Alexander MacLeod and Francis MacBean. MacLeod told Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth of MacRae's progress as a student, adding: "His piety also ranks high in the opinion of all his Christian acquaintance."²²⁶ Alexander MacColl, who became Free Church minister in Lochalsh, was parish schoolmaster at Uig when the Disruption occurred, and acted as a pro-Free Church propagandist. Others who served at Uig and later became Evangelical pastors were Peter MacLean and John Finlayson.²²⁷

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The forerunner of several missions which were active in the Highlands and Islands in the first half of the nineteenth century was "The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home", which was formed in Edinburgh on January 11, 1798. The Directors of the new society consisted of a dozen laymen, leading figures being James and Robert Haldane.²²⁸

The Society "was instituted from a conviction in the minds of the members, that sufficient means of religious instruction were not enjoyed in many parts of the country".²²⁹ The Directors rejoiced at the "number of faithful ministers" serving within the ranks of the Church of Scotland, while at the same time they regretted that some preachers of the Established Church taught men "to build their hopes of salvation on their own good works."²³⁰ The founders of the SPGH belonged to more than one Christian body, and they desired the Society to remain non-denominational in character for "they had no plan of forming a new sect, but wished that Christians of all denominations should join in seeking to promote pure and undefiled religion."²³¹

One of the first missionaries appointed by the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home preached in the area covered by this survey. Alexander MacKenzie was sent as an itinerant to the northern Highlands, and in 1799

the Directors recorded: "Having completed this route, he was sent to the Western Isles, where he now labours with some appearance of success."²³²

There was opposition within the Established Church to lay preaching, and the Society was further weakened by internal controversy, when in 1808 the Haldane brothers were baptised by immersion.²³³

Paisley Society for Gaelic Missions

From 1810 onwards not only did bodies which were anxious to improve the spiritual condition of the Highlanders set up schools to educate the people and give them access to the Gaelic Bible, but in addition the Highland area was looked upon as a suitable field into which to send missionaries to preach the Gospel. "Many of the pious respectable, and liberal inhabitants of Scotland, have been in the habit of supporting the Bible Society, from its commencement, and Foreign Missions for a still longer time; but it was not till lately that their attention was properly turned to the inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands of their own country; thousands of whom are perishing for lack of knowledge."²³⁴

On March 31, 1817, the Paisley Society for Gaelic Missions was founded. The sole aim of the Society was "the diffusion of Divine Knowledge", and in furthering this cause, missionaries were required to carry out their duties "without propagating politics of any kind, or partiality for any religious name or party". Office-bearers and missionaries were to be men who held "what is generally known by evangelical sentiments". While "the piety, the zeal, and the prudence" of prospective preachers were to be attested by the religious denomination to which they belonged, the Society was to have the last word in accepting or rejecting them.²³⁵

The Paisley Society was formed and maintained by clergy belonging to denominations outwith the Church of Scotland. During its first year of operations its missionaries were Alexander MacKay, pastor of a Congregational

Church in Arran, who was employed mostly in Argyll, Malcolm MacLaurin, a preacher in connection with the Congregational Union, who had been sent to the district around Fort William, James Dewar, Congregational Church, Nairn, and Alexander Dewar, Congregational Church, Avoch.²³⁶ Malcolm MacLaurin had conducted missions in Skye, North and South Uist, Harris and Lewis by 1820.²³⁷ For many in the Outer Hebrides this would perhaps have been their first taste of Evangelical preaching. Two of the itinerant missionaries visited Lewis, probably in the summer of 1824, and reported that "many of the inhabitants flocked to hear the word of salvation, and appeared to hunger and thirst after righteousness."²³⁸ The above information gives yet another example of Evangelical preachers at work in Lewis even before the coming of Alexander MacLeod of Uig, and of signs of the beginning of revival when he had scarcely been settled in the island. When missionaries returned to the mainland they reported to the Society that "in some of the Western Isles, in which sermon is but seldom heard, there is a general concern about the salvation revealed by the gosppl."²³⁹

The Paisley Society for Gaelic Missions roused the ire of Moderate ministers, especially because of their strictures upon some of the Highland clergy. At the General Assembly of 1824, Norman MacLeod of Campbeltown attacked the outbursts of such itinerant preachers. "They act as spies sent to view the land," said MacLeod, "and return like the spies of old, bringing a slander upon our good land." The minister of Campbeltown singled out some of the points of criticism made by the missionaries: "We are accused of want of soundness of doctrine - want of correctness of conduct - want of zeal and fidelity in the discharge of our duties."²⁴⁰ Visits by missionaries from the Paisley Society to the Western Isles appear to have been sporadic, and the Society failed to obtain a foothold among the islanders.

Highland Missionary Society

In 1819 a body calling itself Highland Missionary Society was founded, operating along similar lines to the Paisley Society. The primary purpose of the Missionary Society was published as: "The Promotion of Religious Instruction in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, by providing the means for having Preachers of the Gospel sent into those Districts of the Country where they are most needed."²⁴¹ As in the case of the Paisley Society for Gaelic Missions, missionaries under the jurisdiction of the Highland Society were to avoid "propagating the tenets of a Party".

Members of the Highland Missionary Society comprised "Christians of all denominations".²⁴² Those who founded this body acknowledged that much had been achieved by other religious and educational institutions, but realised that still "multitudes seldom hear the Gospel of Salvation, and are strangers to its sanctifying and comforting doctrines".²⁴³

J.A. Stewart MacKenzie of Seaforth took an active interest in the work of the Highland Missionary Society. While other proprietors might be opposed to the introduction of preachers not connected with the Established Church, Stewart MacKenzie and his wife encouraged evangelistic efforts. On at least one occasion MacKenzie sent a donation of £10 to the Society, and in 1830 was elected President. John MacBeath was sent as missionary to Lewis, and laboured in the parish of Lochs.²⁴⁴

One of the best known missionaries employed by the Highland Society was Alexander MacLeod, tacksman of Ung-na-Cille in Skye. He had been born in Raasay in 1790, and was a relative of Roderick MacLeod of Bracadale.²⁴⁵ In 1828, he received his commission from the Society²⁴⁶ and was sent to the parish of Duirinish which was reputed to be "groaning under a Moderate Ministry".²⁴⁷ In 1833 he concentrated his evangelistic activities on the parish of Portree,

and visited the island of Raasay.²⁴³ John Morrison of Harris composed an elegy containing seventy-four verses, mourning the passing of Alexander MacLeod, who died of a fever in 1836.²⁴⁹

The Highland Missionary Society appears to have focussed its attention upon parishes in which a Moderate clergyman ministered. In 1838 a catechist employed by the Society was active in North Uist. "He officiates as a lay preacher," wrote the parish minister, Finlay MacRae, "but does not consider himself subject to the control of, and is not acknowledged by, the Established Church."²⁵⁰

Baptist Missions

The annual reports published by the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society furnished readers with a clear picture of the ecclesiastical state of the Highlands of Scotland, and of the necessity for sending more teachers and preachers to the Gaelic-speaking districts. The smaller Evangelical denominations in Scotland began to look upon the Highlands and Islands as a potential mission field.

In 1823 the Home Missionary Society was set up. Four years later it joined forces with the Baptist Highland Mission, operated by the Scotch Baptists, to form "The Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland".²⁵¹ The number of missionaries on the payroll of the Society varied between 18 and 30.²⁵² In 1830 James Haldane was Secretary of this missionary society.²⁵³

The Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland added the significant words "chiefly for the Highlands and Islands", to its title. The object of the Society was simply stated: "the dissemination of the Gospel of Christ in Scotland".²⁵⁴

When John Cameron of Stornoway sent a letter to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth in December 1827, he made reference to "the swarm of dissenters", seven in number, who had come to Lewis before the time of his settlement, "to pounce upon the poor people like crows on carrion." However, when Cameron arrived on the scene they had left the island. Four dissenters had since come to Lewis, three of whom had subsequently departed from the island. "But the fourth remains under your patronage," accused the minister of Stornoway - another instance of Mrs. MacKenzie supporting Evangelical religion. This preacher was probably John MacIntosh, whom Cameron calls "the Baptist".²⁵⁵ In 1833 John MacIntosh was based at Lochgilphead.²⁵⁶

By the 1820s itinerant Baptist preachers had visited North Uist, but this mission does not appear to have made a lasting impact.²⁵⁷ It was in the island of Skye that the Baptist Church laboured with the greatest success. Baptist missionaries had landed on the island at an early stage in its Evangelical history. Shortly after Farquharson's visit to Skye in 1805, a native of Sutherland had begun a regular prayer meeting in Snizort. Some two years later a Baptist missionary came to preach and won over to his theological viewpoint eleven members of the fellowship, who later received believer's baptism. The others who had been in the habit of attending the meeting no longer joined with those who had adopted Baptist principles.²⁵⁸ A Baptist chapel was erected at Uig about 1812.²⁵⁹

By 1827 there were two Baptist mission stations in Skye, one in the parish of Snizort, and the other in Strath. The former had 60 members, while at the latter 20 had been baptised. James MacQueen laboured at Broadford in Skye from about 1824, but because the situation was not as promising there as it had been previously, by 1833 he had been transferred to Lochcarron, although he still visited Strath and Sleat from time to time.²⁶⁰

James Miller was stationed at Uig in Snizort, although he too experienced difficulties. In 1833 the Mission Committee reported, "For many years there has been a church at Uig, and for some time there was an appearance of much good being done; but of late these prospects have been clouded, and although the people continue to attend, few or none seem to be brought under its influence."²⁶¹

In May 1836, James MacQueen was again appointed to Broadford,²⁶² although the area for which he was responsible extended as far as Sleat, Lochalsh, Applecross and Gairloch.²⁶³ His services attracted between 100 and 300 people - numbers being higher when there was no service in the parish church of Strath.²⁶⁴ A Sabbath school, taught by a member of the Baptist congregation was attended by 40-60 pupils, of whom only the teacher's family belonged to the Baptist denomination.²⁶⁵ By the time of the compilation of the New Statistical Account, the parish minister of Strath wrote: "From the firm attachment of the people to the Established Church, only sixteen converts have been made, and of these six are not natives of the parish."²⁶⁶

In April 1836, Angus Ferguson became minister of the Baptist congregation at Uig. Attendance at his church could sometimes reach 200.²⁶⁷ By 1840 the Baptists had about 30 people in full membership, and were said to "have been making some converts".²⁶⁸ By that time Roderick MacLeod had been translated from Bracadale to Snizort and the arrival of that popular Evangelical minister probably prevented further defections from the Established Church.

Alexander Nicolson makes a rather curious statement about the activities of the Baptist mission in the parish of Snizort. "About the year 1837" (sic), he writes, "the Baptists had established themselves in this parish, attaining such an ascendancy as to curb the Revivalist movement there for a space."²⁶⁹ On the contrary, Baptists would be more likely than many members of the

Established Church to support revivals, and their presence would stimulate rather than retard such spiritual movements.

Secession Church Missions

The figure of Francis MacBean looms large in the early years of Evangelicalism in Lewis and Harris. He had attended classes for a theological course in Edinburgh, but did not apply for licence to the Established Church. Instead he joined the Original Secession Church. He was given a roving commission as missionary to the Highlands and Islands. Among the areas he visited were Lochaber and Sunart on the Highland Mainland, and Harris and Uist in the Outer Hebrides. He spent a considerable time in Lewis, as noted in the chapter on Evangelicals.

At one time it looked as if MacBean would set up a Secession congregation in the island of Harris. Roderick MacLeod of Bracadale was involved in the controversy regarding the Sacraments at that time, and it appeared that MacLeod would either secede from the Established Church, or be deposed from his charge. Eventually the tide turned in favour of the minister of Bracadale, and the anticipated secession did not take place. MacBean had indicated that Roderick MacLeod would come to Harris to assist at Communion services if his case went against him. Francis MacBean and John Morrison, the Harris ecclesiastical leader, quarrelled over this question, and the result was Morrison's satirical verses, "Seisean Shrannda" and "An Sgiobaireachd".²⁷⁰

MacBean began conducting regular open air services at Tarbert, Harris, in May 1836. At Tarbert he preached to congregations of 200-300. In all there were five stations in the parish of Harris where MacBean held meetings. At that time he was also said to officiate at services in Lewis and Uist.²⁷¹ Despite a promising beginning, Francis MacBean's congregation was short-lived,

and at the time of the Disruption he was to become a minister of the Free Church.

The United Associate Synod set up a Committee for Gaelic missions. In a paper which was published in 1820 there are frequent quotations from the annual reports of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society, showing how the Edinburgh Society was again instrumental in turning attention to the spiritual needs of the Highlanders. The Synod resolved to "take measures for affording a more abundant and regular supply of the means of religious and moral improvement to the destitute inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands."²⁷² The report accepted the veracity of the claim made by a traveller to the Highlands: "Many of the ministers of large parishes do not exercise becoming zeal and diligence in preaching the Gospel."²⁷³ The Committee commented: "While too many of the Protestant clergy are thus inattentive to themselves and their ministry, the Catholic priesthood are very active, and, in many cases, too successful."²⁷⁴

Members of Committee believed that in the Hebrides the fields were "ripening rapidly for the harvest". A member of the Committee had received a letter from a minister in Skye - probably John Shaw - who spoke of the people being "really desirous of scriptural knowledge".²⁷⁵

The Committee, whose Convener was James Peddie, with John Brown as Clerk, proposed that a "Committee of Missions into the Highlands and Islands" be established. The declared object of the Committee was two-fold: to train "pious" Highlanders to preach the Gospel in their native language, and to employ itinerant missionaries. Missionaries were to be under the direct authority of the Associate Synod.²⁷⁶

The United Secession Church affected the religious life of the islands in a minor way. In 1824 the Committee for Missions was about to send John

Sinclair to labour in the island of Lewis.²⁷⁷ It is likely that he is included by John Cameron of Stornoway among "the swarm of dissenters" who were active in Lewis when he arrived there.

In 1820 the Mission Committee published an address to the people of the Highlands in which they gave the following assurance: "Think not, that in training up and sending amongst you Gaelic Preachers, of piety and talents, we have adopted these measures for the purpose of making you separatists from the Church of Scotland, or of luring you to unite with the Secession Church, that body of professing Christians to which we belong."²⁷⁸ The other evangelistic bodies discussed above also repudiated any suggestion that missionaries were to act as recruiting agents for a particular denomination.

While the contribution of the missionary societies towards the Evangelicalisation of the Western Isles was not as striking as that of the educational bodies, they had a part to play in the development of Hebridean religious life.

- 1) The activities of missionary societies were often spasmodic and did not always meet with success; nevertheless, they were the means of bringing people in the Hebrides in contact with the Gospel as preached by Evangelicals. In some parishes, such as Strath in Skye, one of the strongholds of Moderatism, it was probably the first time that many islanders had heard a message with an Evangelical emphasis.
- ii) Missions sent to the islands itinerant preachers who were often critical of the creed and conduct of Established clergymen. At the General Assembly of 1826, during one of many discussions of "the Bracadale case", David Carment told the commissioners: "Sir, there are a great many Dissenters got into Skye; and you know the charge brought against us

by Dissenters; (I do not admit the charge to its full extent); they say our ministers do not pray in their families; (I suspect, after all, we are not such a praying people as we once were); we are not active in pastoral duties, and we are rather lax in our discipline."²⁷⁹ No doubt the preaching of dissenting missionaries assisted in spreading the censorious attitude in regard to religious issues which existed in some parts of the islands in the twenty years before the Disruption.

iii) The presence of dissenting missionaries in the Hebrides also meant that islanders were in touch with denominations in which patronage did not exist, and in which congregations had freedom to elect the kind of minister whose views were in accord with their own. In the island of Harris, where Francis MacBean was active, a protest was made against a minister of whom the people did not approve being presented to the parish. A group of parishioners in 1834 asserted "their spiritual privileges at the induction of a new incumbent and were foiled in the attempt."²⁸⁰

Robert Finlayson of Lochs was able to write in 1833: "There is not a single dissenter from the Established Church in any part of the Lewis Island. Preachers from dissenting associations have laboured among the people of Lewis for many years; but they all failed to unite a single individual to their own society."²⁸¹ In Skye on the other hand, Baptist missions made some progress. But for the fact that Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth settled Evangelical ministers in four out of the six parishes in the Presbytery of Lewis, dissenting preachers might have found the people of Lewis more receptive to their message. Evangelical ministers appear to have given little encouragement to preachers from the smaller denominations. "Your favourite Mr. MacLeod (of Uig) will not countenance them," wrote Cameron of Stornoway to Mrs. MacKenzie.²⁸² In regard to his own parish, Cameron

stated: "The people, though fickle, have an attachment to the Established Kirk."²⁸³ The same words could no doubt have been written of many of the parishes in the Western Isles in the ten years before the Disruption. Even those who had voted with their feet and ceased to attend services in the parish church, still claimed some affinity with the Establishment.

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Earlier in this chapter it was discovered that there was a close connection between the work of the Gaelic Schools and the religious revivals which affected many parishes in the Western Isles during the first half of the nineteenth century. These spiritual awakenings were of such importance for the progress of Evangelicalism in Skye and the Outer Hebrides that they merit separate and detailed treatment. Hebridean revivals form the theme of the next chapter.

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101. Ibid., 1820, p. 19.
102. Ibid., 1829, p. 18.
103. Ibid., 1811, p. v.
104. Ibid., p. 51.
105. Ibid., 1821, p. 24.
106. Ibid., 1829, p. 20.
107. Ibid., 1826, p. 13.
108. Ibid., p. 14.
109. Ibid., 3rd Report, 1814, p. v.
110. Ibid., 1823, p. 40.
111. Lord Teignmouth, Sketches of the Coasts and Islands of Scotland, I, p. 68.

112. EGSS, Annual Report, 1820, p. 15.
113. Ibid., 1823, p. 14.
114. Christian Instructor, May 1817, p. 283.
115. EGSS, Annual Report, 1826, p. 11.
116. Ibid., 1818, pp. 6-7.
117. F.C., Home and Foreign Missionary Record, May 1847, p. 92.
118. EGSS, Annual Report, 1822, p. 10.
119. Lord Teignmouth, op. cit., p. 67.
120. EGSS, Annual Report, 1811, p. 6.
121. Ibid., 1812, p. 18.
122. Ibid., 1818, p. 10.
123. Ibid., 1811, p. 31.
124. Ibid., 1832, p. 16.
125. Ibid., 1818, p. 11.
126. Ibid., 1819, p. 16.
127. Ibid., 1823, p. 16.
128. Ibid., 1824, p. 37.
129. Lord Teignmouth, op. cit., p. 153.
130. Ibid., p. 212.
131. EGSS, Annual Report, 1824, p. 39.
132. Ibid., 1815, p. 14.
133. Ibid., 1816, p. 35.
134. Ibid., 1819, p. 17.
135. Ibid., 1821, p. 21.
136. Ibid., 1822, p. 41.
137. Ibid., 1819, p. 14.
138. Ibid., 1812, p. 34.
139. Ibid., 1826, p. 9.
140. F.C. Home and Foreign Missionary Record, July 1847, p. 149.

141. EGSS, Annual Report, 1826, p. 9.
142. Ibid., 1833, p. 34.
143. Christian Instructor, May 1817, p. 284.
144. EGSS, Annual Report, 1827, p. 15. (Although MacDonald of Ferintosh and Neil MacKenzie, resident SSPCK missionary, are given the credit for introducing Evangelical religion to Saint Kilda, the contribution of the Gaelic teacher should not be overlooked.)
145. Ibid., 1819, p. 18.
146. Ibid., 1815, p. 16.
147. Ibid., 1824, p. 17.
148. Ibid., 1829, p. 35.
149. Ibid., 1843, p. 22.
150. Ibid., 1827, p. 13.
151. Ibid., p. 14.
152. M.G.L. Duncan, History of Revivals of Religion, p. 347. In December, 1841, Finlayson of Lochs informed the Society: "I am acquainted with a few, who are apparently impressed by the truth, and they date the beginning of these impressions when reading the Scriptures in the Gaelic Schools." (EGSS, Annual Report, 1842, p. 31.)
153. EGSS, Annual Report, 1844, p. 14.
154. Ibid., p. 17.
155. Ibid., p. 15.
156. Ibid., 1819, p. 13.
157. Ibid., 3rd Report, 1814, p. 14.
158. Ibid., p. 31.
159. Duncan, op. cit., p. 347.
160. C. of S. General Assembly Papers, 1832. CH1/2/155.
161. SP, Letter from Rev. William MacRae to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, Dec. 23, 1823. GD46/17/62. In his letter MacRae claimed that the inhabitants of Galson had "signalled themselves more by their idleness, theft and disorderly conduct" since John MacLeod went to reside among them than before his arrival. In tradition, MacLeod appears as a good influence upon the people. Alexander MacLeod of Uig gave a glowing account of the former teacher's Christian witness. (EGSS, Annual Report, 1833, pp. 29-30.)
162. EGSS, Annual Report, 1833, pp. 29-30.

163. SP, Letter from Rev. John Cameron to Rev. Finlay Cook, June 21, 1836.
GD46/12/36.
164. EGSS, op. cit., 1832, p. 19.
165. C. of S. General Assembly Papers 1832.
166. SP, Letter from Francis MacBean to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth.
GD46/17/78.
167. EGSS, op. cit., 1830, p. 21.
168. Ibid., p. 17.
169. Ibid., 1844, p. 19.
170. Ibid., p. 33.
171. A. Nicolson, Report on the State of Education in the Hebrides, p. 85.
172. C. of S. Home and Foreign Missionary Report, 1846, p. 286. (See also P. Arkley, Letter to Rev. Alexander Beith, pp. 4-5.)
- C. of S.
173. The "Ladies' Auxiliary in Support of Gaelic Schools", founded by members of the Church of Scotland following the internal dispute within the Edinburgh Society had 24 schools in 1849, but by 1867 the number had fallen to ten. (J. Scotland, The History of Scottish Education, p. 244.)
174. C. of S. op. cit., p. 286.
175. EGSS, Annual Report, 1828, pp. 16-17.
176. Lochs-in-Bernera C. of S. Kirk Session Minutes, Dec. 5, 1836.
In 1848 the Gaelic School Society, which reported a deficit for the year of £262, maintained 11 schools in Lewis, two in Harris, one in North Uist, two in Benbecula and South Uist and ten in Skye. (EGSS Annual Report 1849, pp. 20-21.)
177. M. MacLeod, op. cit., p. 316.
178. EGSS, Annual Report, 1814, (3rd Report) p. 65.
179. Inverness Education Society, Moral Statistics, p. 19.
180. Christian Instructor, July 1814, p. 53. Carment was the son of a schoolmaster in Caithness, and did not speak Gaelic during his youth. Like Swanson of the Small Isles, he became a fluent Gaelic preacher, studying the language while acting as tutor to the family of George Munro, minister of South Uist, and afterwards as a teacher in Skye. (Anon., Biographies of Highland Clergymen, p. 52.)
181. EGSS, op. cit., p. 65.
182. Inverness Education Society, op. cit., p. 19.

183. Christian Instructor, op. cit., p. 54. The Glasgow society began life as an auxiliary of the Edinburgh body, and in 1838 there was an abortive attempt to combine the work of the two societies. Approached by the Glasgow society, the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society raised several points which might make amalgamation difficult. The Edinburgh teachers received a salary of £25, while the Glasgow society paid their teachers only £14 per annum. Prospective teachers of the Edinburgh body underwent "certain examinations", and it was envisaged that the teachers who came over from the Glasgow society would be similarly examined before being employed. But perhaps the greatest stumbling block involved the differing curricula of the two societies. The Edinburgh secretary wrote: "We are pledged to teach exclusively in the Gaelic language." The obstacles in the way of union proved insurmountable, and the proposed merger did not materialise. (EGSS, Annual Report, 1838, p. 27.)
184. Christian Repository and Religious Register, Feb. 1819, p. 123.
185. Ibid., p. 124.
186. Ibid., p. 123.
187. Christian Instructor, Jan. 1821, p. 60.
188. Ibid., Nov. 1824, p. 777.
189. Ibid., p. 775.
190. SSPCK, Annual Report and Sermon, 1827, p. 132.
191. R. MacCowan, The Men of Skye, p. 189. This teacher remembered in Berneray in the saying: "Cho fiosrach ri Noble a bha ann am Pabbay." (As erudite as Noble who was in Pabbay.)
192. Christian Instructor, op. cit., p. 778.
193. The Witness, Feb. 23, 1861.
194. Christian Instructor, July 1824, p. 497.
195. Committee for Increasing the Means of Education, Annual Report, 1831. pp. 22-23.
196. Ibid., 1827, p. 8.
197. Ibid., 1826, p. 4.
198. Ibid., 1830, p. 21.
199. Ibid., 1827, p. 28.
200. Ibid., 1832, p. 5.
201. Ibid., 1826, p. 6.
202. Ibid., 1827, p. 34.
203. Ibid., 1830, p. 31.

204. Ibid., 1838, p. 55.
205. Ibid., 1826, p. 6.
206. Ibid., 1826, p. 6; 1827, p. 34.
207. Ibid., 1827, p. 34.
208. Ibid., 1828, p. 52.
209. Ibid., 1830, p. 30.
210. Inverness Education Society, op. cit. p. 22.
211. Committee for Increasing the Means of Education, Annual Report 1830, p.8.
212. Ibid., 1827, p. 27.
213. Ibid., 1830, p. 8.
214. Ibid., 1840, p. 28.
215. Ibid., p. 30.
216. Ibid., 1832, p. 28.
217. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
218. Ibid., p. 7.
219. Ibid., 1842, pp. 38-40.
220. N.C. MacFarlane, The Men of the Lews, p. 264,
R. MacCowan, op. cit., p. 168.
221. J.N. MacLeod, Bàrdachd Leòdhais, p. 234.
222. C. of S. General Assembly Papers, 1832, CH172/155
223. Ibid.
224. N.C. MacFarlane, op. cit., p. 265.
225. N.C. MacFarlane, Apostles of the North, p. 13.
226. SP, Letter from Rev. A. MacLeod to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth,
Aug. 22, 1827. GD46/17/73.
227. N.C. MacFarlane, The Men of the Lews, p. 59.
228. J. MacKay, The Church in the Highlands, p. 227.
229. SPGH, Account of Proceedings, 1798-1799, p. 2.
230. Ibid., p. 3.

231. Ibid., p. 2.
232. Ibid., pp. 59-60.
233. J. MacKay, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
234. V. Ward, *Free and Candid Strictures on Methodism*, p. 6.
235. *Christian Instructor*, Oct. 1817, p. 217.
236. Ibid., Oct. 1818, p. 269.
237. Highland Missionary Society, Annual Report 1820, p. 8.
238. Ibid., 1824, p. 11.
239. Ibid., 1820, p. 11.
240. *Christian Instructor*, July 1824, p. 496.
241. Highland Missionary Society, Annual Report 1824, p. 4.
242. Ibid. Regulations, p. 3.
243. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
244. SP, Letter from Robert Simpson to J.A. Stewart MacKenzie, Feb. 25, 1830. GD46/12/12.
245. R. MacCowan, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
246. J. Morrison, *Dain Iain Ghobha, I*, p. 204.
247. R. MacCowan, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
248. Ibid., p. 35.
249. J. Morrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-235. In 1824 the Highland Missionary Society had sent a student missionary to the island of Raasay. He was learning Gaelic, and his competence in the language increased during his stay. He was given permission by the Presbytery to preach in public. (Highland Missionary Society, Report 1824, pp. 12-13.)
250. Commissioners, Religious Instruction, Scotland, 3rd Report, p. 165.
251. G. Yuille, *History of the Baptists in Scotland*, p. 73.
252. Ibid., pp. 73-74.
253. Ibid., p. 74.
254. BHMS, Annual Report, 1833, p. 4.
255. SP, Letter from Rev. John Cameron to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, Dec. 14, 1827. GD46/12/36. One of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society's correspondents in 1830 was John MacIntosh. "Missionary, Stornoway". (EGSS Annual Report 1831, pp. 13-14.)

256. BHMS, op. cit., p. 15. Dugald Sinclair, Baptist minister at Lochgilphead from 1815 to 1830, engaged in evangelistic missions which took him as far as the island of Lewis. (G. Yuille, History of the Baptists in Scotland, p. 70.)
257. Lay Member, An Account of the Present State of Religion Throughout the Highlands of Scotland, p. 75.
258. Ibid., p. 61.
259. Commissioners, Religious Instruction, Scotland, 3rd Report, p. 141.
260. BHMS, op. cit., p. 11.
261. Ibid., P. 12.
262. Commissioners, Religious Instruction, Scotland, op. cit., p. 130.
263. Ibid., p. 131.
264. Ibid., p. 128.
265. Ibid., p. 131.
266. NSA, Inverness-shire, p. 312.
267. Commissioners, Religious Instruction, Scotland, op. cit., p. 142.
268. NSA, op. cit., p. 294.
269. A. Nicolson, History of Skye, p. 372.
270. J. MacLeod, By-paths of Highland Church History, p. 26.
271. Commissioners, Religious Instruction, Scotland, op. cit., p. 166. The group of dissenters who presented a petition deploring the conduct of John Bethune, minister of Berneray, were accused by the Presbytery of Uist of having "received Baptism for some of their children from a denomination different from this Church." (Uist Presbytery Minutes, April 1, 1842. CH2/361/2.)
272. Associate Synod, Address to the Inhabitants of the Highlands and Islands, p. 7.
273. Ibid., p. 16.
274. Ibid., p. 17.
275. Ibid., p. 27.
276. Ibid., p. 38.
277. Highland Missionary Society, Annual Report 1824, p. 12.
278. Associate Synod, op. cit., p. 7.
279. Report of the Proceedings in the Case of Rev. Roderick MacLeod, p. 35.

280. J. Morrison, op. cit., I, p. xliv.
281. NSA, Ross-shire, pp. 167-168.
282. SP, Letter from Rev. John Cameron to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth,
Dec. 14, 1827. GD46/12/36.
283. NSA, op. cit., p. 139.

CHAPTER FIVE

TIMES OF REVIVAL

During the first half of the nineteenth century the majority of parishes within the three Presbyteries of Skye, Uist and Lewis experienced revivals of religion which were to alter the spiritual complexion of the Western Isles. The island of Skye, which so often acted as a bridge between the Evangelicalism of the Highland mainland and the Church in the Outer Hebrides, was the first area to be affected by the religious movement which before 1800 had caused a revolution in other districts in the north of Scotland. In 1805 a revival began in Skye¹, to be followed some seven years later by another period of intense religious activity, when several hundred people were said to have been converted.² Roderick MacLeod of Bracadale and Snizort, who died in 1868, "was privileged to witness three revival movements in Skye" during the years of his ministry.³

On the eve of the Disruption James Buchanan in his treatise on the Holy Spirit touched on the remarkable movement in Uig in Lewis, which had begun by 1824: "This interesting revival has continued steadily to grow down to the present time".⁴ The Uig revival extended to other areas in the island, such as Ness, Lochs and Point.⁵ About the time that the Lewis awakening was at its height, the island of Harris, which had close geographical connections with Uig, was affected by an Evangelical movement.⁶ In the 1840s there was another revival in Harris,⁷ and at the same time some districts in North Uist,⁸ and even the remote island of Saint Kilda, were being shaken by a religious awakening.⁹

There is little evidence of revivals having taken place during the period under review in areas where most of the inhabitants were adherents

of the Roman Catholic Church. The one exception was the parish of the Small Isles, where John Swanson ministered in the years before the Disruption.¹⁰ The neighbouring parishes of Strath and Sleat in Skye are usually mentioned as the two districts upon which the revival movements made the least impression. Not only were they geographically isolated from the northern parishes in which the religious awakening originated, but they were regarded by Evangelicals as strongholds of a Moderatism which dismissed such movements as manifestations of an extravagant fanaticism.

The Means of Revival

1. In considering the different ways in which the spirit of revival spread throughout the Hebrides in the period from 1800 to 1850, a pre-eminent place must be given to the Gaelic School Societies, and in particular the body which was established in Edinburgh in 1811. A separate chapter (Chapter Four) deals with the influence of these societies, and similar educational and evangelistic agencies, on nineteenth century church life in the Western Isles. Looking back in 1847, MacIntosh MacKay claimed that there had been a marked improvement in the religious condition of the Scottish Highlands during the preceding twenty-five or thirty years. "As a means," he remarked, "I attribute it very much to the Gaelic School Society's operations."¹¹

One of the regulations governing the operations of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society prohibited any of the teachers whom they engaged from preaching. The relevant rule laid down quite distinctly: "That the Teachers to be employed by this Society shall neither be Preachers nor Public Exhorters, stated or occasional".¹² In detached communities, where there were scattered townships far removed from the parish church, there must have been a strong temptation for teachers to disregard this regulation, especially if they were of the opinion that the minister did not preach an undiluted Evangelical

Gospel. In 1820 John MacLeod was transferred from the Gaelic school in Waternish in Skye to Galson in Lewis.¹³ John Souter of Duirinish had described MacLeod as "assiduous and successful in the discharge of his duty",¹⁴ but he fell foul of another Moderate minister, William MacRae of Barvas. John MacLeod was distressed that the people of Ness lived at such a distance from Barvas that they were unable to attend church services, and began to conduct meetings where he gave an exposition of the Scriptures. The parish minister reported his irregular conduct to the society, who dismissed him from his post. MacLeod still continued to preach, and was in the forefront of the Lewis revival.¹⁵

Other Gaelic teachers were deeply involved in nineteenth century revival movements. A leading figure in this category was Norman MacLeod, teacher at Unish in Skye, an old soldier who had served under General Abercromby during the Egyptian Campaign.¹⁶ In the 1844 Report of the Gaelic School Society, Roderick MacLeod gives an account of a revival which had its origin at the Unish school. Having taught at that particular station for a period of three years, Norman MacLeod met with the people of the neighbourhood on the last day of session. He read the eleventh chapter in the Gospel of Mark, and apparently delivered an expository address based on the parable of the barren fig-tree. (The fact that the teacher might give a commentary on a passage of Scripture without causing offence shows that by the 1840s the Society's strict rule proscribing preaching was not always enforced.) "He in conclusion," wrote Roderick MacLeod, "adverted to his three years' residence with them, and asked, now that he was about to leave them, what fruit they had brought forth".¹⁷

Norman MacLeod's searching words were instrumental in sparking off a revival among his listeners, and instead of leaving the following day as

he had anticipated, he remained in the district for a further sixteen days . As news of the awakening spread throughout the island, people flocked to the services which were held from all the parishes in Skye, with the exception of the distant areas of Strath and Sleat. Meetings continued for two months until they had to be discontinued because the harvest season was so far advanced. Further revivals broke out at Geary, in Waternish, where Murdoch MacDonald was teacher, and at Glendale in Duirinish.¹⁸ The following year it was reported that almost all the fourteen schools in Skye had been touched by the movement.¹⁹

In the Society's annual report for 1844, reference is also made to the part played by Gaelic teachers in the island of Lewis in spiritual awakenings in that Presbytery. The Secretary of the Gaelic School Society reported: "Many of you will no doubt cherish a pleasing recollection of the statement made at your meeting in May, by one excellent and honoured minister in Lewis - that now, throughout his wide and populous parish, scarcely a family can be found, in which the worship of God is not regularly maintained, and that this blessed change, he ascribes in a great measure, under God, to the labours and example of your pious teachers".²⁰ The parish minister quoted above was in all probability Alexander MacLeod of Uig.

About the same time Gaelic Society teachers were enthusiastic participants in a religious movement which was sweeping through parts of North Uist. Duncan Campbell of the Faith Mission, whose name is so intimately linked with twentieth century Hebridean revivals, has written, "It is a recognised fact that Uist had never known revival. The writer has searched the records of spiritual awakenings in the Highlands and Islands, but failed to find any mention of Uist".²¹ While it is undoubtedly true that standard works on Highland revivals - for example, MacRae's "Revivals in the Highlands and

Islands" - contain no references to North Uist, an examination of contemporary sources reveals that there were revivals in that island on more than one occasion from the 1840s onwards. (In the following section we shall see that evangelist Finlay Munro had made converts there even before that date.) In January 1844, Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry furnished an account of a revival which had affected North Uist, and in which one of the Society's former teachers had played a crucial role. "Persons of all ages and sexes are affected", wrote the minister, "but the majority of them are within the period called the prime of life".²² The teacher at the centre of the revival was probably Norman MacLeod, already alluded to in connection with the Skye awakening. Many years later, in 1880, Dr. Thomas MacLauchlan informed the Free Church General Assembly that "a remarkable religious movement" had appeared in North Uist, where a lay evangelist, Donald Stewart, was active - another example of a revival coming to Uist.²³ Harris and Eigg were mentioned in the 1845 Gaelic School Society report as places where revivals had occurred, the latter being the island in which the movement had lasted the longest.²⁴

2. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century the Western Isles proved an attraction to itinerant preachers, some of whom participated in revival meetings in Lewis, Uist and Skye. In the autumn of 1797 James and Robert Haldane had conducted a preaching tour through the northern counties of Scotland, and as far north as the Orkney Islands. Shortly afterwards, "The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home" was established by the Haldanes, and missionaries began to be sent to different parts of Scotland.²⁵ There was solid opposition in the Establishment to the concept of lay preaching, and in 1799 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland passed an Act, which, among other things, attacked the activities of the itinerants of the Haldane society. Ministers were not to be permitted to employ

untrained or unqualified preachers in their services.²⁶ In his introduction to the Journal of the 1797 tour, James Haldane had defended the practice of lay-preaching.²⁷

Although the Haldane brothers did not personally visit the Western Isles on their tour of the North of Scotland, one of the Haldanite missionaries has earned a special niche in the religious history of the Hebrides, namely John Farquharson. After six months in one of the Haldane classes in Dundee, Farquharson was sent to preach in Breadalbane, because his tutors considered that he did not have the ability to benefit from further study. He went from place to place reading the Bible and preaching, and in 1802 the district was in the throes of a revival.²⁸

In 1805 Farquharson preached in Skye. According to one tradition he landed on the island by chance, because the ship on which he was sailing to America had to seek shelter in the harbour of Uig.²⁹ Another version makes his arrival in Skye not quite so fortuitous.³⁰ At an open air service the missionary preached to a large audience. One account gives his text on that memorable day as John X:9, "I am the Door"³¹ while another strand of island tradition makes his theme Revelation iii:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock".³² Donald Munro, the blind catechist, was converted as a result of Farquharson's preaching, and the subsequent transformation in his way of life was to have far-reaching consequences for the rise and progress of Evangelicalism in Skye.³³ It has been claimed that not one of those who were converted under the ministry of Munro lapsed when the wordly catechist became an ardent Evangelist.³⁴ Donald Martin of Kilmuir, according to one version, was converted to Evangelicalism through attending the services of Farquharson, the itinerant preacher.³⁵

Another lay preacher who visited the islands at times of revival was

Finlay Munro. He began his career as a teacher with the SSPCK at Latheron in Caithness, but soon after 1820 he became an itinerant. As Farquharson was said to have come ashore by chance at Uig in Skye, so Munro landed unexpectedly at Ness in the north of Lewis from a London lobster smack.³⁶ In Hebridean tradition many stories are related about Munro's preaching tours in Lewis and Uist. A grace which he offered when given hospitality at a house in Ness was said to have led to the conversion of Marion MacRitchie, later to be known as "Mor Bheag an t-Soisgeil" (Little Marion of the Gospel). On one occasion Munro issued an invitation to all to attend a service on the summit of Muirneag in Lewis, when his text was Isaiah xxv:6, "And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things".³⁷ As a result of evangelist Munro's mission in North Uist "many excellent Christians were raised up in the parish".³⁸

3. Native-born ministers and catechists, particularly those who had experienced conversion after entering their office, became leaders in the revival movement. While acknowledging the impact of outside influences on Highland religious movements, Hunter writes, "The revivals very soon developed an impetus and produced a leadership of their own".³⁹ Donald Martin, minister of Kilmuir, and Donald Munro, the SSPCK catechist, have already been referred to as being among the few influenced by Farquharson's mission in 1805. Martin was transferred to a mainland charge before the coming of the 1812 revival, but he assisted in paving the way for the establishment of Evangelicalism in Skye by engaging Munro as his catechist, by securing the services of an Evangelical school-master, and by arranging for the circulation of the scriptures, so that Kilmuir became "a centre of light for the whole island".⁴⁰

In the 1812 awakening Donald Munro was the central figure. Some of

those who were converted through the preaching of the blind catechist were to become lay leaders in Skye and in other islands. Included in their number were Malcolm Nicolson, who became parish teacher in Barvas; Donald MacDonald, who served as catechist in Kilmuir and Duirinish; Angus Munro, who was Gaelic teacher in Snizort;⁴¹ Neil Stewart, who went as catechist to North Uist;⁴² John MacSween, who taught in Islay,⁴³ and Donald MacQueen, who spent ⁴² seventy years as catechist in Bracadale and Duirinish.⁴⁴

Roderick MacLeod became an Evangelical while missionary minister at Lyndale, and subsequently he was closely associated with revival movements in Skye. MacIntosh MacKay makes reference to "a moral and religious seething in Skye", in the years before the Disruption, and he attributes this spiritual excitement to the work of the Gaelic schools, and the preaching of MacLeod.⁴⁵ Roderick MacLeod preached to enormous crowds at Fairy Bridge at the time of the revival which affected Skye in 1842.⁴⁶

In the island of Harris John Morrison, the blacksmith poet, assumed the leadership of the revival movement in that part of the Western Isles. He is said to have been converted when MacDonald of Ferintosh visited Harris in 1822, and in 1828 he became an SSPCK agent.⁴⁷ Accompanied by a Gaelic teacher, Morrison held open-air prayer meetings, one of which was said to have drawn a congregation of two thousand worshippers. At another meeting he was assisted by a catechist from an area which was experiencing revival - probably Uig in Lewis - and that service marked the beginning of a religious movement in Harris.⁴⁸ A minister who visited Harris a few years after the Disruption, wrote of John Morrison, "This man was honoured of the Lord to be useful to many at the awakening with which this district was blessed several years ago."⁵⁰

4. MacInnes has contrasted the revival movements which affected the Highlands in the period from 1688 to 1800 with certain types of modern "revivalism". "The parish minister," he contends, "was in all cases the evangelist of his own parish. With his elders, he planned and conducted the mission."⁵¹ Apart from the earliest known revival movements, these words might be applied to the Western Isles in the half century covered by this chapter. In Skye, Lewis and North Uist there were ministers who had a hand in encouraging the spirit of revival.

The practice of Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth in presenting ministers belonging to the Evangelical party to parishes in Lewis has been considered in Chapter Three. One outcome of Mrs. MacKenzie's choice of Evangelical clergy was that there were ministers in Lewis who favoured revivals, and who helped to stimulate them by their preaching. April 21, 1824, is a red-letter day in the history of Evangelicalism in Lewis, for it was on that date that Alexander MacLeod was admitted to the parish of Uig.⁵¹ By 1829 he was able to write to his friend, Donald Sage, "Appearances throughout the island furnish very cheering evidences that there is plainly a revival."⁵² In contrast to their Moderate predecessors, the new breed of Lewis ministers welcomed signs of revival.

There is ample evidence to show that there were the beginnings of a revival movement in Lewis even before the coming of Alexander MacLeod. Alexander Simpson, assistant to the ageing Hugh Munro of Uig, complained in February 1823 of a "religious phrenzy" which seemed to be spreading throughout the island,⁵³ and William MacRae of Barvas expressed his disgust at the activities of the "fanatics who now infest this island".⁵⁴ The title "fanatics" was also used to describe those who had caused a disturbance in

church during the ministry of Simon Fraser, pastor of Stornoway from 1815 to 1824.⁵⁵ With the arrival of Alexander MacLeod and his fellow Evangelicals, the revival movement was no longer a phenomenon existing outside the Establishment and frowned on by parish ministers. Other Evangelicals who served in Lewis between 1824 and the time of the Disruption, as indicated in Chapter Three, were Robert Finlayson of Knock and Lochs, Finlay Cook of Cross, who was succeeded first by John MacRae (MacRath Mór) and then by John Finlayson, and Duncan Matheson who followed Finlayson in the Parliamentary Church at Knock. The fuel necessary for the fire of revival was already being gathered; the preaching of Alexander MacLeod, and the new Evangelicals, was the spark needed to set the smouldering material aflame.

John Swanson of the Small Isles was another Hebridean minister who witnessed a revival breaking out in his parish. Swanson reported that the reaction of his congregation to a sermon which he preached in the course of his ordinary Sunday service, was as if the words of Scripture were being literally fulfilled: "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced and mourn".⁵⁶ From North Uist Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry informed the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society in 1844: "There is hardly a sermon or prayer meeting but some person is newly affected, and there is every appearance of the work spreading more extensively".⁵⁷ In Saint Kilda the SSPCK missionary, Neil MacKenzie, was engaged in a course of lectures in September 1841, when a religious movement began among the people.⁵⁸

This may be a convenient point at which to consider what specific themes in the preaching of Evangelical ministers were the means of awakening people to a concern about their spiritual state. (The preaching of Evangelical clergy has been considered in depth in Chapter Three.) In Saint Kilda Neil MacKenzie had called on his congregation "to unite with him in earnest

prayer for an outpouring of the Holy Ghost". On September 28, 1841, while MacKenzie was giving an exposition of the words in the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation", there were the first signs of a revival. "I pointed them to Christ," recalled the minister of Saint Kilda, "as a wise, powerful and merciful Saviour, and urged, entreated and beseeched them to come to Him for safety and protection." But the sermon which had the most telling effect upon the congregation was one on Luke xxii:14, when MacKenzie preached on "the sufferings of Christ, their duration, their intensity, and above all, the glorious and blessed end for which He endured them - to glorify God and save sinners." He has also placed on record that the central topic in his message during the time of revival was "Christ and Him crucified and the freeness of His offer of salvation".⁵⁹

In the Small Isles the parish minister was also delivering a dissertation on the sufferings of Christ when the symptoms of revival appeared among the congregation. The text chosen by John Swanson was Acts xvii:3 - "Christ must needs have suffered" - and those words made a profound impression upon the minds of his hearers.⁶⁰ Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry represented as the external means of bringing revival to North Uist, "the plain and earnest declaration of divine truth, such as man's sinful, guilty and dangerous condition, by nature and practice, and his need of regeneration, faith and repentance".⁶¹

Eye-witnesses observed that revivals often occurred under the ministry of preachers who did not appear to have notable powers of oratory. Donald Sage writes about his brother-in-law, Finlay Cook, who was minister at Cross at the time of the Lewis revival, "To native talent, or high grasp of intellect, or literary attainments, or power of oratory, he had not even the slightest pretensions". The introductory portion of his sermons appeared

to amount to little more than "a bald, uninteresting statement of gospel truisms", but eventually, as he warmed to his subject, he spoke more freely and fluently.⁶² Of the preaching of Alexander MacLeod of Uig, the pioneer of Evangelicalism in Lewis, it is stated, "Conversions were again and again traced to what friends called very weak sermons".⁶³ During the early days of his ministry, before coming to Lewis, he had occupied the pulpit of the famous Lachlan MacKenzie of Lochcarron on one occasion. MacKenzie left the church before the end of the service, and MacLeod afterwards asked him the reason for his early departure. The minister of Lochcarron replied with his customary candour, "I found your sermon so interminably long and uninteresting that I feel myself a vile wretch. I have just been thinking what a woeful future I shall have if I find eternity as dull as I found you."⁶⁴ It is of interest to reflect that William MacCulloch, minister of Cambuslang, where the great eighteenth century revival took place, was not reputed to be a talented preacher.⁶⁵ On the other hand, John MacRae was renowned for his "wonderful eloquence",⁶⁶ while Robert Finlayson was a master of allegory.⁶⁷

Unsympathetic critics of the Cambuslang revival maintained that "dread of eternal punishment" was one of the reasons for the distress of soul which many experienced during the eighteenth century religious movement.⁶⁸ According to Evander MacIver, Alexander MacLeod's preaching to his congregation at Uig contained "violent denunciations as to their future", and "wild descriptions of hell and its punishments".⁶⁹ Certainly MacLeod in the course of his sermons issued stern warnings to the unrepentant. Even when he preached on Christmas Day, 1825, on the words "Fear not", in Matthew xxviii:5, he announced that those seemingly encouraging words, "were turned vice versa to all unbelievers, and that their fears and terrors, terrors unspeakable, would never terminate through the rounds of eternal ages". His sermon on Psalm IV:22 - "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee" -

contains much comfort and assurances for the heavy-laden, but in his concluding remarks he fires a salvo at "hypocrites and self-secure sinners".⁷⁰

But Alexander MacLeod also preached on the love of God. His sermon on John iii:16 speaks of divine love as (1) a pure unmixed love, (2) an everlasting love, (3) an immutable love, and (4) a free love.⁷¹ As at Cambuslang, it was often the gracious invitation of the Gospel, rather than fear of everlasting punishment which seemed to move the hearts of those who were converted. At Fairy Bridge in Skye Roderick MacLeod preached on the words, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock". At the conclusion of the sermon he exclaimed, "Oh! it is not my fear that Christ will not accept you, but my fear is that you will not accept Christ." The congregation was so visibly arrested by these words that the preacher had to stop speaking, and some were heard to cry, "Oh! will I go away without Christ?".⁷²

5. Visiting Evangelical ministers from the Highland mainland also made a noteworthy contribution to the revival movements which brought about a transformation in the life of the Church in the Western Isles during the first half of the nineteenth century. In June 1824, on his return from one of his preaching trips to Saint Kilda, MacDonald of Ferintosh visited Uig in Lewis. "The Lord is working here," the Apostle of the North records in his journal, "and in many parts of the island."⁷³ In 1827 he arrived at Uig on Saturday of the Communion season, and preached on that day for his friend, Alexander MacLeod, and again on Sunday and Monday. MacDonald reckoned the Sabbath congregation to be at least seven thousand. He declared, "The occasion, I trust, was a season of awakening to some, and of refreshing to others, and to myself among the rest."⁷⁴ This is probably the Communion season, still remembered in island tradition, when the preacher expected on Saturday was the Moderate William MacRae of Barvas. One of the "Men"

arrived at the service, thinking that he would receive little edification from MacRae's preaching. He sat with his back to the pulpit, in a position where he could not see the minister who was engaged in conducting worship. As the preparatory service progressed he became more and more impressed, until eventually he was heard to exclaim, "Bheirinn mo mhionnan gum bheil gràs aig Maighstir Uilleam!"⁷⁵ (I could swear that the Reverend William is in a state of grace.) Unknown to the critical listener, the preacher occupying the pulpit was not the usually uninspiring MacRae but the eloquent John MacDonald of Ferintosh.

On his tour of the island of Lewis Lord Teignmouth was informed of the impact of MacDonald's visit. "A recent Sacrament," he notes, "in the parish of Uig in Lewis, exhibited a scene of much interest ... The addresses of Mr. MacDonald produced a sensation that has spread through the island."⁷⁶ As in other parts of the Highlands, revivals often began when crowds gathered for services of Communion.⁷⁷ When the Sacrament was celebrated in Uig in 1827, "the island seemed to be moved in one emotion". The same was true of 1834 when the thousands of worshippers who congregated to Uig included some from Uist and Harris.⁷⁸ MacDonald of Ferintosh also assisted during the revival which broke out in parts of Skye on the eve of the Disruption.⁷⁹

One of the latest of many books to have been written about Saint Kilda gives an account from an exiled islander of how the revival during the ministry of Neil MacKenzie commenced. But the author adds his own gloss, "The revivals had in fact been started by the Apostle of the North."⁸⁰ This comment is typical of some of the modern works on Saint Kilda, which betray the writer's lack of contact with original sources. When MacKenzie arrived in the island in 1830, despite four visits by MacDonald of Ferintosh, he could state, "For any effect which religion had upon their lives, they might

just as well never have heard of such a thing as a moral law."⁸¹ Indeed, the missionary discovered that while the inhabitants had listened attentively to John MacDonald's sermons, "they were only charmed by his eloquence and energy, and had not knowledge enough to follow or understand his arguments".⁸² Yet one of the latest books on Saint Kilda asserts that "MacDonald was able to lay his dogma over them so successfully and play upon their superstitious natures until they adopted its tyranny without question".⁸³

It has to be admitted that the minister of Ferintosh entertained high expectations regarding the outcome of his missions to the remotest of the Hebrides, and in one of his hymns he sings -

'S cha chaillim idir mo dhùil dheth,
gus an dùinear mo shùil anns a' bhàs,
nach 'eil cuid dhuibh fhuair dùsgadh,
is cuid a chaidh dhùsgadh fhuair slàint'.⁸⁴

(And I would not by any means abandon my hope, until my eyes are closed in death, that some of them received an awakening, and that some of those awakened obtained salvation.)

The evangelist noticed on one of his visits that some of the young men among his hearers "seemed to be deeply affected",⁸⁵ but it is probable that his preaching did not make a lasting impression, and the revival really began in Neil MacKenzie's ministry, some eleven years after the last voyage undertaken by the Apostle of the North.

6. The part played by the distribution of the Gaelic Bible among the people of the islands in stimulating revival movements should not be under-estimated. The New Testament was not translated into Gaelic until 1767, and the Highlanders had to wait until 1801 for a complete translation of the Old Testament to be published.⁸⁶ In 1807 the SSPCK produced a new edition of the Gaelic Scriptures

"combining serviceableness and cheapness".⁸⁷ Between 1798 and 1818, 96,500 Gaelic Bibles and Testaments were printed, and from that time more and more editions of the Scriptures in Gaelic were published by the SSPCK and the British and Foreign Bible Society.⁸⁸

The SSPCK has been rightly condemned by many writers for its hostile attitude towards the Gaelic language, but critics often omit to mention that this antagonism towards the language of the Highlands is relevant for only the early period in the history of that Society. By the end of the eighteenth century a more enlightened spirit prevailed, and the SSPCK took the leading role in having the Scriptures translated into Gaelic. At the General Assembly of 1824, Norman MacLeod of St. Columba's remarked: "Had the members of that Society never done more for the Highlands than translate and publish the Holy Scriptures in the Gaelic language, they deserve to be ranked among the most efficient benefactors of the human species".⁸⁹

The New Testament had first been translated into Irish Gaelic in 1603, with a new edition appearing in 1681. Four years later the Irish Old Testament was published. Two hundred copies of the Old Testament were sent to the Highlands for use among Scottish Gaels.⁹⁰ Before the Scriptures were translated into Gaelic it was the custom for Highland ministers to translate passages from the English Bible. This practice survived in Caithness until as late as 1868.⁹¹ In the time of Norman MacLeod, minister of Morven from 1775 to 1824, it was reported that "the clergy translated what they read to the people from the English version, with such assistance as could be derived from Bedell's Irish Bible".⁹² The minister of Saint Kilda in John Lane Buchanan's day had little formal education, but had succeeded his father as pastor because he was "judged qualified to explain the English Bible into Gaelic".⁹³ A critical observer of the "Men" of the

Highlands claimed that Catechists who translated from English to Gaelic altered the text for their own purposes, and "gradually deviated from the literal meaning of the Scriptural expression".⁹⁴

To Dr. Samuel Johnson belongs much of the credit for persuading the SSPCK of the folly of withholding the Scriptures in the vernacular from the Highlanders. When the Doctor visited Glasgow in 1773, he "had the satisfaction of being told that his name had been gratefully celebrated in one of the parochial congregations in the Highlands, as the person to whose influence it was chiefly owing that the New Testament was allowed to be translated into the Erse language".⁹⁵ Apparently some members of the Society were opposed to the Gaelic translation, "as tending to preserve the distinction between the Highlanders and the Lowlanders", but they were shown a letter which Johnson had written to William Drummond, the publisher, which "made them ashamed, and afraid of being publicly exposed; so they were forced to a compliance".⁹⁶ In 1767, when the work of translation was in progress, the great English lexicographer had again written to Drummond in the following terms, "I hope the worthy translator goes diligently forward. He has a higher reward in prospect than any honours which this world can bestow. I wish I could be useful to him".⁹⁷

By the end of the eighteenth century the SSPCK was fully committed to the production of Gaelic versions of the Scriptures. In 1795 the members were informed that the Society would be "put to a very heavy expense" in printing a new edition of the New Testament which was at the press.⁹⁸ The translation of the Old Testament, which occupied the years from 1783 to 1801, brought together such prominent Gaelic scholars of the day as Dr. Stuart of Luss, Donald MacQueen of Kilmuir, Dr. Smith of Campbeltown, Alexander Stewart of Moulin, and Dr. John MacLeod, minister of Harris.⁹⁹

There is evidence that the circulation of the Bible among the people of the Hebrides acted as a stimulus to the spirit of revival. Robert Finlayson of Lochs, in his own picturesque style, told of what happened when islanders first read the message of salvation in their native tongue: "The Gaelic Bible found its way to Lewis as the cake of barley fell into the camp of Midian, which smote their tents and overturned the camp".¹⁰⁰ One writer observed in 1847, with reference to the island of Harris, that "not a few, old and young, were led by the simple reading of the Bible to receive the truth as it is in Jesus".¹⁰¹ In 1829, when the Lewis revival was gathering momentum, a correspondent informed the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society that the effect produced by the Gaelic Bible on those who were reading it for the first time in their own language was "in many instances a frantic consternation, similar to that felt by a person discovering himself on the brink of destruction. But the frantic fever soon subsided; and in that infallible mirror in which they discovered the disease, they also discovered the consolatory efficacy of the Divine Physician's prescription".¹⁰²

As the population of the Presbyteries of Lewis, Uist and Skye became more literate through the work of the Gaelic Schools, books in prose and verse, which influenced the lives of many, began to circulate among the people. Most of this new literature consisted not of original productions by Highland authors, but of Gaelic translations of popular Evangelical writers. As well as spurring on the revival movement, these Puritan works fulfilled another function in helping forward the process which resulted in the majority of the islanders becoming Evangelical in their outlook. The "Evangelical Magazine" for December 1812 welcomed the translation of Boston's "Four-fold State" into Gaelic, adding the comment, "It has long been deemed a necessary family book in the Lowlands of Scotland; and I hope it will soon be so in the Highlands and Isles. By the benevolence of some pious

persons, we expect that it will be sold at a reduced price to the poor".¹⁰³

The writer's wish for a wide distribution of Boston's book among Highlanders became a reality. Murdo MacDonald, one of the leaders among the "Men" in the early Evangelical history of Lewis, was converted while listening to the translation of Boston being read at a meeting in Stornoway.¹⁰⁴ During the Lewis revival in the time of Alexander MacLeod, the "Four-fold State" began "to be read to groups of weeping and wondering hearers".¹⁰⁵ Lord Teignmouth told of the inn-keeper at Snizort, who acted as an agent for religious books, and who on Sunday gathered his neighbours in his home for a reading of the Scriptures.¹⁰⁶

The first work by an English divine to be translated into Gaelic was Richard Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted", which was published in 1750.¹⁰⁷ Dr. John Smith's version of Alleine's "Alarm" was the cause of a religious revival when it first appeared.¹⁰⁸ Authors like Philip Doddridge became known to Gaels in translation. Three editions of his "Rise and Progress" were printed between 1811 and 1842, with five editions of "One Thing Needful" appearing in Gaelic during the same period.¹⁰⁹

As well as the prose works of Puritan writers, the hymns of Gaelic poets appeared in print and became popular in the islands. The knowledge of these hymns spread not only through oral tradition, but also through the printed word as literacy increased. The hymns of Dugald Buchanan were the means of converting some who became leading Evangelical laymen. John Morrison, the Harris bard, gave Norman Paterson of Berneray a copy of Buchanan's spiritual songs which resulted in Paterson's conversion.¹¹⁰ Paterson took a leading part in the campaign against the Moderate John Bethune of Berneray, and was one of the "Men" of Harris when he went to live there. One Sunday

a tinker arrived at a house in Portree, where the household had no respect for Sabbath observance. He asked for permission to sing a song, and this request was granted. The "song" was Dugald Buchanan's highly descriptive, and at times frightening hymn on the Day of Judgment. As a direct consequence of listening to the hymn the head of the family was converted.¹¹¹ Two verses, with Lachlan MacBean's translation, will convey some impression of the lurid picture which Dugald Buchanan paints of the fate of the unrepentant.

Bidh iad gu sìorruidh 'n glacaibh bhàis,
 's an cridh' 'ga fhàsgadh asd' le bròn,
 ceangailt' air cuan de phronnasg laist'
 's a dheatach uaine tachd' an sròn.

Mar bhàirnich fuaighte ris an sgeir,
 tha iad air creagaibh goileach teann,
 is dibh fhearg Dhé a' séideadh chuain,
 'na thonnaibh buaireis os an cionn.¹¹²

The pains of death their souls surround,
 their hearts eternal woe consumes,
 on seas of burning brimstone bound,
 choked with green smoke and poison fumes.

Like limpets fixed on rocky bed,
 they lie on heated reefs made fast;
 the boiling billows o'er their head
 driven on by God's fierce anger-blast.¹¹³

7. So far what might be called the "religious" causes of Hebridean revival Movements have been under scrutiny. Hunter argues cogently for detecting a source of revival in "the social and psychological consequences of the

collapse of the old order".¹¹⁴ It is certainly true that revivals coincided with a period of upheaval, caused by various forces, in the life of the Western Isles, when "the old certainties gave way to growing doubts and perplexity".¹¹⁵

The rising tide of emigration did much to produce a sense of instability. What Alexander Nicolson has written about the Isle of Skye could be applied to other areas: "The cruel reality of emigration had cast its shadow over the whole island, as near and dear ones were severed, in many cases for ever, from those left behind".¹¹⁶ Emigration on a small scale had begun by the date this survey begins, but the rapid increase in population in the Hebrides, the coming of the clearances, the collapse of the kelp industry, and the distress caused by the failure of the potato crop, meant that thousands were forced by circumstances to leave their native shores. By 1851 Sir John MacNeill could maintain, "The working classes in many parishes are convinced that the emigration of a part of their number, affords the only prospect of escape from a position otherwise hopeless; and in many cases individuals have earnestly prayed for aid to emigrate."¹¹⁷ These traumatic changes had their effect on the spirit of the Gael, and "many came to feel that their sorrows could be assuaged only in the ways of religion".¹¹⁸

As the nineteenth century opened Britain was at war, and affairs on the continent of Europe were to leave their mark on the islands of the west. The number of Skymen who served in the British forces during the time of the Napoleonic hostilities was remarkable. When elected Moderator of the Free Church General Assembly in 1863, Roderick MacLeod of Snizort proudly pointed out that his native island had sent over ten thousand foot-soldiers to fight for their country over a forty year span, commencing with the end of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁹ The first two Skye revivals - in 1805 and 1812-14 - occurred at a time when the tranquillity of the island was

disturbed by so many of the young men being involved in a foreign war.

Hebridean revivals took place against the background of the disintegration of the social structure. The chiefs had become anglicized, and no longer enjoyed their former close bond with their clansmen, and the breakdown of the tacksman system brought its own results. According to Teignmouth, this system promoted "reciprocal good-will", with the tacksmen forming a bridge between "the superior landlord" and "the inferior tenants".¹²⁰ The disappearance of the tacksman, or his replacement by a stranger, was another factor leading to doubt and unease.

Magnus MacLean argued that the people of the Highlands turned to Gaelic hymns for comfort when so many sudden changes affected their land. Against such a background of unease and uncertainty, many were to turn to religion. "In the crash of the old clan system, the loosening of tribal bonds, the disintegration of long cherished ideals and traditions, the dispersion of communities, and the gloomy memories which these changes entailed, it was not at all unnatural that the Highland people, broken in spirit and fortune as they were, should find a solace in singing or reciting the sacred lays." MacLean continued: "The stern, Puritanic theology of the latter seemed to be in close harmony with their own tragic experiences, and the sentiments appealed to them."¹²¹

* * * * *

T.C. Smout has given the following account of the means by which religious revivals came to the Highlands and Islands: "The direct inspiration for the movement ... came partly from evangelical traditions still existing within the Church of Scotland, partly from the teaching of English evangelicals,

and partly from the missionary tours of Robert and James Haldane, whose 'Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home' began in 1798 a campaign of Highland conversion. Though the Highland societies, particularly that of Inverness, had some share after 1811 in spreading the movement, it was already alight a generation before they got started".¹²² As is so often the case, general statements about Highland church history may be true of the ecclesiastical life of the mainland, but are an inadequate description of what occurred in the islands. Apart from the brief mission of John Farquharson, the influence of Haldane preachers on Hebridean revivals was minimal. Smout does not give due emphasis to the influence of the Gaelic schools, for it was after 1811 that spiritual awakenings broke out in the Western Isles. (The inspiration for revivals in the islands came not from the Inverness Education Society, cited by Smout, but from the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society.) In the island of Lewis it was the influx of Evangelical ministers under the patronage of Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth that had the effect of fanning the flame of revival which was already beginning to spread among the laity.

The Characteristics of the Revival Movement

1. "There are always, in genuine revival," asserts Charles Finney, "deep convictions of sin."¹²³ In the spiritual awakenings which swept through the Hebrides in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was the testimony of witnesses that congregations were often in tears, as had happened earlier in Cambuslang. This emotionalism was first apparent in the 1812 Skye revival. In the Small Isles John Swanson commented on the excitable state of his people: "No mouth was silent, and no eye dry;; old and young mourned together, and the blooming and withered cheeks were all wet in tears. The

scene was indescribable, and I sat down mayhap to weep too".¹²⁴ In Saint Kilda "able men as well as feeble women wept and cried aloud".¹²⁵ In 1842, during the Skye revival, it was stated that sermons which in ordinary circumstances would have had no visible effect upon a congregation, made some tremble and others weep aloud.¹²⁶ When Norman MacLeod, Gaelic teacher at Unish in Skye, asked his class, in the light of the parable of the barren fig-tree what fruit his labours among them had borne, "some wept, and some cried aloud as it pricked in their hearts".¹²⁷ In North Uist "much silent weeping" was a prelude to revival.¹²⁸ When MacDonald of Ferintosh preached the Action sermon at Uig, it was said that the linen on the Communion table was so wet with tears that it had to be wrung out.¹²⁹

Alexander MacLeod had been settled in Uig for only a matter of months when there were indications of the beginning of a revival among his congregation. On July 5, 1824, MacLeod wrote in his diary, "Many young and old are in tears every Lord's Day".¹³⁰ But more than a year earlier, as we have discovered above, even before the arrival of the first Evangelical minister in Lewis, some of the phenomena associated with revival movements were noted with distaste by Alexander Simpson, who had been assistant to MacLeod's predecessor.

"The aim of the revivalist," in the opinion of one investigator, "is to create an atmosphere of contagious emotion and suggestibility in which worldly reason, the counsels of selfish prudence and material welfare are inhibited, and the audience reduced to a state of relative primitive credulity".¹³¹ According to Charles MacLean, the minister of Saint Kilda "used all the techniques of revivalism to whip up his audience and kindle a kind of hysterical fervour in their hearts".¹³² Neil MacKenzie, who gives an interesting description of his own style of preaching, would probably have found MacLean's reference to "techniques" somewhat exaggerated. "I appealed to thei

to their consciences," explains MacKenzie, "in the most pointed manner I could, describing the danger to which we are all exposed by the machinations of Satan; then turned their attention to Christ, as the only means by which we might successfully escape the snares of the evil one. Being warm with this glorious theme, and feeling more than extraordinary freedom, I urged them to flee to Him for protection and safety. When thus expatiating on the love of Christ - His ability and willingness to save, the minds of my hearers melted into unusual tenderness - their tears gushed like a fountain, they were unable to contain their feelings, and burst out into loud crying and sobbing".¹³³

2. During the Cambuslang revival there were "many peculiar physical and mental consequences",¹³⁴ and similar manifestations were recorded when the Evangelical movement spread through the Hebrides. One phase of the Uig revival became known as "Bliadhna an Aomaidh" - the year of swooning.¹³⁵ In the revival in Skye at the time of the Disruption, some people fainted, and others fell down as if they were dead.¹³⁶ Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry reported that "the bodily emotions exhibited by the impressed" in North Uist were similar to those witnessed during awakenings in Skye and other islands.¹³⁷ Neil MacKenzie faithfully narrates the reactions of those caught up in the Saint Kilda revival: "At first one noticed a movement of the hands like that of one drowning, while the breathing got quicker, and more laborious, and if they were women it often ended in their fainting".¹³⁸ In Australia an exiled Saint Kildan remembered exactly how the revival had begun: "One Wednesday night there was a meeting in the Church, and I remember Mrs. Gillies crying. There were nine or ten men in the meeting. I afterwards heard one of the men telling some who were arriving with the boats from their day's work, 'I believe the Spirit of God was formed upon our congregation tonight'."¹³⁹

MacIntosh MacKay stressed that revivals occurred at a time of transition in the religious history of Skye, "and such a period, in the popular mind, can scarcely happen without its being accompanied with extreme views, and not unfrequently with violent revulsions".¹⁴⁰ As was the case in the Cambuslang awakening, the ministers most closely associated with nineteenth century Hebridean revivals were fully aware of the dangers connected with outbursts of uncontrolled emotion. While John Swanson admitted that at the beginning of the Small Isles revival there had been "a good deal of physical excitement", he observed with obvious satisfaction that "this gradually subsided as the judgment is becoming more enlightened."¹⁴¹ MacInnes writes of the ministers who were key figures in eighteenth century Highland revivals: "They feared rather than invited ignorant mass emotionalism".¹⁴² There is evidence that the same was true of Hebridean Evangelical ministers in the nineteenth century. "Lay Member of the Established Church" accounted for "offences" which followed the 1812 Skye revival in this manner: "There were some among those who were awakened, particularly females, who became fanatical in the proper sense of the word".¹⁴³ In the island of Lewis itinerant evangelists were blamed for arousing "great and unreasonable excitements" in the years before 1824 in many whose practice did not match their profession after the emotion subsided.¹⁴⁴

Finlay Cook had been converted in his native island of Arran, during the revival there in 1812, and would have seen "crying and bodily agitation" among those affected.¹⁴⁵ Having benefitted from his early experience, he was "particularly careful to dis-countenance violent outward demonstrations of feeling".¹⁴⁶ When Fraser of Kirkhill preached at Broadford in October 1842, he stopped twice during his sermon and announced the singing of some verses of a psalm in an attempt to calm the emotions of the congregation.¹⁴⁷ Kennedy

of Dingwall recalls that his father had been dubious about the authenticity of revivals which affected different parts of the country in the period before his death in 1841, because he had always been suspicious of movements in which there was physical excitement, and had tried to curb excesses of emotion.¹⁴⁸

Those who were antipathetic towards revival movements were especially critical of emotional excesses associated with such awakenings. One writer said of the "Men" of the Highlands: "Like other people of cold climate and nature, they love the excitement of long and vehement preaching, and are capable of being roused by it to a dangerous frenzy, venting itself in scenes only short of the dreadful American revivals".¹⁴⁹

Alexander Simpson, junior, believed that the frenzied activity which coincided with the beginning of the Lewis revival had actually produced tragic results. He sent an urgent message to Seaforth's factor: "Already has one deluded woman done away with her own life, another breathed her last in a fit of despair, several are in a state of insanity, the peace of many a family is destroyed, the most dreadful doctrines are inculcated, and the most impious rites are performed."¹⁵⁰

The only personal account of the emotional state of an islander caught up in a revival is provided by MacKenzie of Saint Kilda, who quotes one of his parishioners explaining how "on a sudden his whole frame became as if about to give way, feeling a cold trembling all over his body, being eased a little by crying out; that this continued for a time, and gradually passed away. After it, he felt as if his joints had been powerless, accompanied with trembling. He remarked, that when thus affected it was highly painful."¹⁵¹

3. In the Hebrides, belief in second sight has not quite disappeared, and

it is perhaps not surprising to learn that powers of clairvoyance were claimed by some involved in nineteenth century revivals. The more fanatical of the Skye converts of 1812 "pretended to have dreams and visions, and to have received a spirit of penetration, which enabled them to foretell who should be saved, and who not".¹⁵² Clairvoyance was said to have been a feature of the Uig revival.¹⁵³ A woman who accompanied the crowds who crossed to the parish of Uig was able to predict with accuracy the text on which the preacher, Malcolm MacRitchie, was to speak the following day.¹⁵⁴ (At times of revival women had a more prominent role in the Hebridean Church than previously.) Itinerant evangelist Finlay Munro appears in tradition as having extraordinary powers of insight.¹⁵⁵

Stewart of Moulin does not appear to regard such phenomena as a necessary or even desirable part of religious life. He seems glad to be able to state that there were no examples in his congregation of people looking for comfort or guidance from "dreams or visions, impulses or impressions".¹⁵⁶

The Results of the Revival Movement

The religious revivals which affected the Presbyteries of Skye, Uist and Lewis were to have decisive consequences for the life of the Church in the Hebrides. Some of the results of those spiritual awakenings were immediately noticeable, but others were more long-term, and were to colour the thinking and practice of the Church in the Western Isles for generations to come. A number of the characteristic features of twentieth century island religion had their origin in the revivals of a century ago.

1. Many claims were made to demonstrate that revivals resulted in a remarkable improvement in the moral condition of the people. When Alexander

MacLeod came to Uig in 1824 he was disturbed to notice that "swearing, lies and stealing were very common vices in the land", although he did admit in his journal that there were "but few instances of drunkenness and uncleanness".¹⁵⁷ By 1829 he was able to write to Donald Sage about "a marked and almost incredible change in the morals of the people".¹⁵⁸ After the commencement of the Lewis revival the number of sheep which disappeared annually in the parish of Uig "wonderfully diminished". Many confessed to the minister that their consciences troubled them because in previous years they had kept stray sheep which they had found, instead of paying the customary compensation.¹⁵⁹ As a consequence of the North Uist revival in 1843 Norman MacLeod affirmed that "gross sins are abandoned - carnal levities are given up".¹⁶⁰ Following the religious revival in Saint Kilda, "injuries formerly done to persons or property were freely confessed, and where possible, atonement and restitution made".¹⁶¹

2. The custom of holding daily worship, which is still a characteristic of many parts of the Presbyterian islands, was one of the by-products of the nineteenth century revival movement. A traveller who was in the habit of visiting the island of Lewis each year reported that the people of Uig could be heard nightly at prayer from eight o'clock until one o'clock in the morning.¹⁶² From Saint Kilda Neil MacKenzie announced, "There is not a family in the island where family worship is not regularly kept up morning and evening".¹⁶³ By the time of the Disruption there was scarcely a home in Lewis in which the family altar was not maintained.¹⁶⁴ In North Uist this custom was said to be "daily becoming more prevalent" in the wake of the revival there.¹⁶⁵ In the Parliamentary parish of Knock three young apprentices took it in turns to walk five miles to Robert Finlayson's manse each night to attend family worship. While one of the trio was present

at worship, the other two worked for an additional hour to compensate for the time lost by their workmate.¹⁶⁶

3. It was a general observation that the means of grace were better attended following times of revival. In 1833 Alexander MacLeod of Uig was able to claim in the New Statistical Account that "attendance on the public ordinances of religion here is probably as punctual and full, as in any parish in Scotland".¹⁶⁷ Many in Skye who were not in the habit of attending services in their own parishes were attracted by revival meetings and walked many miles to hear the Gospel preached.¹⁶⁸ In Saint Kilda nothing but serious illness would prevent the congregation from attending services. Neil MacKenzie wrote, "After being tired exhorting them, I have repeatedly had to recommend to them three or four times to return to their homes before I could get them to do so".¹⁶⁹ The same eagerness was apparent during a revival in Harris in the 1830s.¹⁷⁰ In Skye in 1842 multitudes would gather on any day of the week, whatever the state of the weather.¹⁷¹

In the majority of congregations in the three island Presbyteries prayer meetings were held during the week. Such meetings had their origin in the time of revival. On April 25, 1836, Robert Finlayson of Lochs noted in the minutes of the Kirk Session that because of the recent revival in the parish, prayer meetings had been established at Balallan, Laxay, Luerbost, Ranish, Gravir and Loch Shell.¹⁷²

4. Nineteenth century revivals in the islands acted as a stimulant to personal religion among the people. The awakening in North Uist was marked by "secret prayer and the attentive perusal of the Scriptures".¹⁷³ In Saint Kilda those affected by the movement went to pray behind walls, in outhouses, and among the hills, and Neil MacKenzie reported that "the Bible and the other religious books, of which I have been able to secure for them a

sufficient supply, are carefully read and studied".¹⁷⁴ The desire of the islanders to learn more about religion gave a boost to the work of the Gaelic schools. In Eigg many adults began to attend classes,¹⁷⁵ and Roderick MacLeod reported from Snizort: "The whole parish is one Gaelic school this winter".¹⁷⁶ As noted in Chapter Four, congregations affected by revivals made generous contributions towards the work of religious and educational bodies outwith their own area, despite the destitution of the times.

5. It is an accepted fact that in the Hebrides there is today a greater emphasis on Sabbath observance than in other parts of Scotland. Before the spreading of Evangelical religion many were said to have been completely indifferent to observance of the Sabbath, as was the case in Perthshire before the coming of the Moulin revival, where parishioners spent Sunday evening "sauntering about the fields and woods in gossiping parties, or visiting their acquaintance at a distance".¹⁷⁷ John MacIver of Harris, not remembered in tradition as an Evangelical, reported that there had been "a powerful revival" in his parish in the 1830s, "and in consequence, the Sabbath is strictly observed".¹⁷⁸ It is probably to this revival that Alexander MacLeod, catechist of the Highland Missionary Society, refers in one of his reports, when he stated that instead of passing the morning of the Sabbath "lounging in bed", many islanders were now to be seen returning from some secluded spot, "all thoughtful, serious or going heavily".¹⁷⁹ In Saint Kilda, "Sabbath breaking" was one of the transgressions that became a thing of the past.¹⁸⁰ Peter Grant, the poet-preacher of Strathspey, reflected on the manner in which the Gaels occupied themselves on the Sabbath before the coming of Evangelicalism:

's an t-Sàbaid ghlòrthor bu chòir a naomhach'
 's tric chaith sinn faoin i bho cheann gu ceann;
 le cainnt ro dhìomhain mu thimchioll Fhianntaibh,
 's gach gnothach tìmeil a bhiodh 'nar ceann

air cruic 's air sléibhtean, 's na taighean céilidh
 bhiodh sinn le chéile a' tional ann:
 cha b'e am Bìobull a bhiodh 'ga leughadh,
 ach faoin sgeul air nach tigeadh ceann.¹⁸¹

(But the glorious Sabbath which ought to have been sanctified, we often spent from end to end in idleness, engaging in most vain talk about the Fingalians, and every worldly matter which passed through our minds, on hills and mountain sides and in meeting houses we gathered together: it was not the Bible that was being read, but an interminable romance.)

6. "The emergence of a class of lay-preacher", observes Hunter, "was one of the revivalist movement's most important features, not least because these preachers - known as na daoine, the men, in order to distinguish them from ordained clergy - constituted the first leadership of any sort to emerge from the crofting population's own ranks".¹⁸² Some of those who had been converted during revivals were the leaders of local secessions from the Established Church before 1843. When the Disruption finally came, some of the chief laymen in the Free Church in the island of Skye were "the ripened fruits of a revival which took place in Skye upwards of twenty years ago", while others had been converted in the movement which affected Skye and Ross-shire shortly before 1843.¹⁸³ After the Disruption, when many of the Free Church parishes in the islands were without a settled ministry for a long period, services were often conducted by these laymen.

7. After a parish had been visited by a religious revival, it was noticed that there often appeared an exclusiveness among converts, and they became more strict in regard to the ministers whose services they would attend, and the teachers to whom they would entrust the instruction of their children.

In 1809 Donald Ross was presented to Kilmuir in succession to Donald Martin, and the blind catechist, Donald Munro, who had been converted during Farquharson's short campaign, would not come to his church because of theological differences. The minister complained to the SSPCK, whose secretary wrote to Munro: "If, however, you still persist in refusing to attend Mr. Ross's ministrations, I am sorry to inform you that it will be impossible for you to continue in the service of the society".¹⁸⁴ Shaw of Bracadale was the only minister in Skye whom the converts of 1812 "esteemed or were inclined to hear". Evangelicals who lived too far from Shaw's church to be able to attend his services built meeting places of their own.¹⁸⁵ Alexander Beith gave as one of the results of the 1812 revival, an "abandonment of ordinances as administered by the parochial clergy".¹⁸⁶

A deputation from the SSPCK, which visited the islands in 1830, reported, "It is well known that a few years ago a great awakening took place among the people in Lewis, and so much alive are they to the necessity of religion and personal piety, that a person who does not only possess personal piety, but great devotion of character, will not be esteemed as a Teacher in the Island".¹⁸⁷ An illustration of this new strictness is found in a letter despatched to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth by a certain John MacIver, complaining of the conduct of Donald MacKenzie, teacher at Shawbost, whose behaviour was represented as a "disgust not only to professors but also to the most profane in his neighbourhood".¹⁸⁸

8. One consequence of the revival movements has influenced Hebridean Evangelicalism into the twentieth century. In 1820 a report prepared for the Associate Synod alleged that in parts of the Highlands "there are hardly any heads of families who are not communicants".¹⁸⁹ This was the situation in the parish of Uig before the coming of Alexander MacLeod, but with the

spread of revival, and after three years of MacLeod's Evangelical preaching, only half a dozen came to the Lord's table. He noted in his diary, "The whole of the unworthy communicants kept back, and a great many of our young converts did not take upon them to come forward".¹⁹⁰ The same had occurred at Moulin, another centre of revival, where as many as fifty new communicants used to come forward at one time; in the winter of 1798 only six were accepted.¹⁹¹

Following the Lewis revivals in the period from 1824 to 1835 there were many whom their ministers would admit to the Lord's table who kept back "perhaps from erroneous apprehension of the nature of the ordinance".¹⁹² Because of the reluctance of so many Highlanders to become communicant members of the Church, the Panel on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland were instructed by the General Assembly a few years ago to prepare a pamphlet outlining the problem and issuing "a direct appeal to the interested adherent".¹⁹³ The Panel had discovered from their historical researches that "under the influence of various kinds of evangelistic activity, the notion was fostered that the sacraments and other formal practices of religion take second place to the individual's personal religious experience and feelings".¹⁹⁴

Those who had been converted during revivals were disinclined to receive the Sacraments from ministers whom they did not regard as Evangelical in their theological outlook. Alexander Beith gives this as one of the results of the 1812 Skye revival, when "the people became deeply impressed with certain views as to all the ordinances, preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper".¹⁹⁵

9. "Every revival has served to furnish new candidates for the ministry"¹⁹⁶ notes Fawcett, and the nineteenth century awakenings in the Western Isles were no exception. Alexander MacLeod of Uig secured the services of a

divinity student, John Finlayson, later minister of Ness and Portree, to prepare eight of the young converts with a view to making them ready for college. Two of those who finished their course and were to become outstanding Evangelical ministers were Peter MacLean and Malcolm MacRitchie.¹⁹⁷ Angus Matheson spent one session at college,¹⁹⁸ and although Angus MacIver did not persevere with his studies, he also became one of the outstanding "Men" in the island of Lewis.¹⁹⁹

An earlier revival in the most southern of the Hebrides, the island of Arran, had also produced a crop of divinity students. Among the converts to become ministers were Angus MacMillan, Archibald Nicol, John MacAllister, Archibald Cook, Finlay Cook (minister of Cross), and Peter Davidson (who had been appointed to Saint Kilda, but accepted another post).²⁰⁰

10. Another alleged result of revivals deserves some consideration. Sorley MacLean has made a case for the "effect of the 'religious factor' in the weakening of popular resistance, and it increased in importance as the Clearances progressed. Thus the fact that there were so many more examples of resistances to Clearances in the period between 1780 and 1820 than in the period between 1820 and 1870 is partly accounted for by the spreading and deepening of the religious revival after 1820".²⁰¹

However feasible MacLean's argument may be for the Highland mainland it fits rather uncomfortably into the island situation. Resistance to evictions in Harris took place during the very period when that island was affected by revivals. The "Inverness Courier" for August 7, 1839, reported the end of the disturbance at Borge, when five arrests were made by the Sheriff and military.²⁰² Four evictions were recorded for North Uist between 1825 and 1841,²⁰³ but the only significant resistance came in 1849 at Sollas - just a few years after that district had experienced a religious

awakening. However, when some of the inhabitants of North Uist intended to take the law into their own hands by removing flour from a wrecked ship during the destitution of the 1840s, "there was about a score of pious quiet people that did not approve of the attempt".²⁰⁴ That incident might suggest that the Evangelical movement tended to make those affected by it more passive and submissive and less likely to oppose authority, as MacLean claims.

* * * * *

A number of the revivals discussed in this chapter took place in the years immediately preceding and following the Disruption. Supporters of the Free Church considered these awakenings to be a seal of divine approval upon their secession from the Establishment. A few months after the Disruption had happened, MacIntosh MacKay asserted: "I feel the strongest conviction that, never since the first light of the Reformation dawned on the land of our fathers, has there been such a universal religious movement over the whole of the Highlands and Islands as there is at this day".²⁰⁵ It is to the momentous events of May 18, 1843, and their effect on the Western Isles of Scotland, that we turn in the concluding chapter of this study.

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193. C. of S. *The Lord's Supper*, p. 5.
194. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
195. *Church Sites*, III, p. 72. Before the Evangelical movement affected the Western Isles, the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion was often accompanied by scenes similar to those described in Robert Burns' "Holy Fair". An article in the "Edinburgh Christian Instructor" for May 1817, entitled, "Thoughts on the Beneficial Effects of Gaelic Schools, and on the Present State of Religion in the Isle of Skye," includes this sentence: "It happens that among us sacramental occasions but too frequently exhibit melancholy spectacles of intoxication, riot, and sometimes even of bloodshed, as the writer of those lines could certify from personal knowledge and observation." (*Christian Instructor*, May 1817, p. 285.) The author of the article was obviously Donald Ross, minister of Kilmuir, who added that near the sacramental table booths were erected for the sale of liquor, and stands for pedlars. (*Ibid.*, p. 285) In Uig, before the arrival of Alexander MacLeod, it was said to have been the general practice "to go from the Table of the drunkard to the Table of the Lord". (A. MacIver, *The Story of a Lewis Catechist*, *Stornoway Gazette*, Dec. 25, 1971.) Merchants from Skye crossed to Harris at Communion time, and the whisky flowed freely. "After sermon, the young men and women sported over the sands of Scarista, and the evenings were devoted to dancing and drinking." (*FC, Home and Missionary Record*, May 1847, p. 92.)
196. A. Fawcett, *op. cit.*, p. 204.
197. N.C. MacFarlane, *The Men of the Lews*, p. 57.
198. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
199. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
200. J.K. Cameron, *Gaelic and English Sermons of the Late Rev. John MacAlister with Memoir*, p. xii.
201. S. MacLean, 'The Poetry of the Clearances', *TGSI*, XXXVIII, p. 296.
202. J. Barron, *The Northern Highlands in the Nineteenth Century*, II, p. 251.
203. E. MacRury, *A Hebridean Parish: North Uist*, p. xi.
204. *Church Sites*, III, p. 27.
205. *FC, General Assembly Proceedings*, Oct. 1843, p. 160.

CHAPTER SIX

THE HEBRIDEAN DISRUPTION

In the Gaelic language certain years are remembered not in numerical terms but in reference to some significant event which occurred during their course. "Bliadhna a' Phrionnsa" - the Year of the Prince - commemorates the happenings of 1745-46, culminating in the battle of Culloden, which were to have such dramatic repercussions for the life and culture of the Highlands. "Na Bliadhnachan Cruaidhe", the Difficult Years, refer to one of those periods in nineteenth century history when the harvest failed and many Gaels suffered dire distress. 1843 is remembered in Gaelic as "Bliadhna an Dealachaidh" (the Year of the Separation), when the Church of Scotland was rent by the greatest of the several schisms in its history. What happened on May 18, 1843, was to colour the life of the Church in the Western Isles for generations to come.

Adherents to Free Church - (1) Parishes

In 1843 there were some 206 ministers belonging to the Established Church of Scotland serving within the Gaelic-speaking area. Of that number almost half (101) cast in their lot with the Free Church.¹ Thus in the Highlands a higher proportion of ministers seceded from the Establishment than was true of Scotland as a whole. Throughout the country 454 ministers had joined the secessionists, while 741 remained in the Established Church.²

It has been estimated that, taking Scotland in its entirety, about a third of the population became associated with the Free Church at the Disruption.³ Thomas Chalmers was of the opinion that upwards of 800 congregations had joined the Free Church, in many instances leaving the minister in the Establishment.⁴ * Just as the 1843 Secession made greater

* (Church Sites, III, p. 128)

inroads into the ministry of the Highlands than in the rest of the country, in a similar fashion congregations in the north west did not follow the national trend. In many parishes in the three island Presbyteries the percentage of the population supporting the Free Church was very much higher than average, although the pattern is by no means uniform throughout the Western Isles.

The Presbytery in which the issue was in least doubt was Lewis. John MacRae, who had spent six years in the island as parish teacher of Uig, and a further six as minister of the Parliamentary Church at Cross, gave it as his considered view in 1847 that in Lewis 16,500 claimed allegiance to the Free Church, while only some 500 remained loyal to the Establishment.⁴ In 1855 it was calculated that ninety-five per cent of the population of Lewis were members or adherents of the Free Church, a figure which corresponds closely with MacRae's statistics.⁵ So complete was Free Church domination of the parish of Lochs that when Roderick Reid went to preach for the vacant Church of Scotland charge there in March 1844, his congregation consisted entirely of the few companions who had travelled with the minister from the town of Stornoway.⁶

The tiny minority in Lewis who did not secede from the Establishment were almost all to be found, significantly enough, in the town of Stornoway. Free Church spokesmen were able to claim that "almost literally none of the natives of the island, in the country parishes" had remained within the Church of Scotland.⁷ To the majority of the population of Lewis for many years after the Disruption the comparative few who supported the Establishment must have seemed to consist of the middle-class, and of incomers to the island. It appears, however, that some of the leading citizens of Stornoway, who might have been expected to remain in the Establishment, joined the Free Church of Scotland. The deputation from the Stornoway Free Church congregation which

approached Lewis Presbytery in November 1845, with a view to sending a call to John MacRae of Knockbain, comprised John Mackenzie, merchant, Roderick Mackenzie, town clerk, Peter MacFarlane, and Charles MacGregor, exciseman.⁸ James Cameron Lees doubted if the Established Church Gaelic congregation in Stornoway "could have exceeded a dozen" following the Disruption.⁹

In the neighbouring parish of Harris, which formed part of the Presbytery of Uist, there was a comparable abandonment of the Church of Scotland at the Disruption. Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry surmised in 1847 that at least two-thirds of the people of Harris adhered to the Free Church.¹⁰ This appears to have been a conservative estimate. By 1851 one authority declares that only about 15 families, out of a total population of over 4000 were still associated with the Established Church.¹¹ When Norman MacLeod of Saint Columba's visited the island of Berneray in the Sound of Harris, in 1847, he found that all the population of over 700, with the exception of about a dozen, had deserted John Bethune's services. "Strange to me," commented MacLeod, "that one was found to abide!"¹²

Crossing the Little Minch to the island of Skye, the denominational picture is more confused. In the period immediately following the Disruption claims and counter-claims were made regarding the relative strength of Establishment and Secession, and estimates were sometimes revised when further information became available. Begg's assertion that of the 27,000 Protestant inhabitants of Skye and Uist 26,000 had joined the Free Church is an exaggeration, based on inadequate information.¹³ On the other hand, MacIntosh MacKay's estimate of the Free Church population of Skye being "more than 4000" is over cautious.¹⁴ Fairly reliable statistics are available for most of the parishes in Skye.

In Snizort 2500 out of a population of 3200 were said to be supporters of the new denomination.¹⁵ In Bracadale about four-fifths of the people,

about 1300 in all, were considered to have followed the Free Church.¹⁶ The combined Free Church population of those two parishes alone is almost equal to MacKay's estimate for the whole island, taken at its lowest. In the mainland section of the parish of Portree about 1,100 out of a total of 2500 had seceded.¹⁷ In the islands of Raasay and Rona, the insular part of Portree parish, most of the 1000 inhabitants joined the Free Church.¹⁸ In Kilmuir the secessionists had clearly not made such a marked impact, for only 1300 of the 5000 parishioners left the Established Church in 1843.¹⁹

As was so often the case in the ecclesiastical history of Skye, the two southern parishes of Strath and Sleat were the exception to the general rule. This part of the island, as previously noticed, was least affected by the revival movements which had such an influence on the religious life of other Skye parishes.²⁰ In 1851 Donald Cameron, Free Church minister at Ardersier passed this wry judgement on the parish of Strath: "From the period of the Reformation down to the present time, it seems to have lain under the chilling influence of Moderatism."²¹ In illustration of the effect that centuries of Moderate ministry had had upon the people, Cameron referred to the case of a popular Free Church preacher who had held a service in the parish a few years previously, and had attracted an audience of only 18. He had announced a further meeting for the following day, but nobody turned up to hear him.²²

In the parish of Sleat the response to the Disruption had been little better, from a Free Church point of view. Out of a total population of 2700, only between 200 and 300 adults had joined the secession of 1843.²³

Taking the Skye parishes mentioned above together, about 7500 had abandoned the Establishment. By 1849 MacIntosh MacKay had updated his earlier calculation of the strength of the Free Church in Skye. By that time he estimated that half the population of the island were in association

with the Free Church of Scotland.²⁴

The parish of the Small Isles, which was included in the Presbytery of Skye, contained a considerable number of Catholics. It was claimed that "the Protestant population are almost unanimously adherents of the Free Church".²⁵ The island with most inhabitants, Eigg, had 500 people, half of whom were of the Catholic faith. Of the remainder, only about six adults supported the Established Church.²⁶

As happened in Skye, the success of the Free Church in Uist and Barra varied from parish to parish. In North Uist the new denomination was strongest in the area covered by the Parliamentary Church, where 950 out of 1100 had seceded.²⁷ In the area in which the parish church was situated, some 300 adults had proclaimed their loyalty to the Free Church, with a further 200 adults in the Carinish area where the Royal Bounty mission was placed.²⁸ In 1849 it was asserted that "the major part" of the population of North Uist sided with the Free Church.²⁹ The progress of the new church was reflected in the fact that attendance at the parish church was said to be about 100 on occasions, but often to be as low as ten.³⁰ When John MacRae of Knockbain Free Church preached in North Uist in April 1845, his services attracted 500-600 worshippers on weekdays with "upwards of 1,000" on the Sabbath. In Harris 2000 attended his Sunday services.³¹

Moving south we come to the island of Benbecula which at the Disruption carried a population of 2000, most of whom were Catholics. Those who followed the Free Church numbered between 400 and 500.³² In South Uist "a large number" of the Protestant parishioners had come out in support of the Free Church, while the attachment of those who still remained in the Established Church was said to be nominal.³³ At that time the parish minister, Roderick MacLean (who was aged about 77)³⁴ was seldom able to conduct services.³⁵

Adherents to Free Church - (2) Ministers

From considering individual parishes, we now turn to the ministers who were serving in island congregations when the Disruption split the Church of Scotland.

When the Established Church Presbytery of Lewis convened for the first time following the Disruption, on July 11, 1843, some familiar faces were missing from the ecclesiastical court. It was announced that Robert Finlayson of Lochs, John Finlayson of Cross, and Duncan Matheson of Knock, had all signed the deed of demission. Alexander MacLeod had sent a letter stating his adherence to the document.³⁶ All four were considered no longer to be ministers of the Established Church, and this left only Cameron of Stornoway and MacRae of Barvas as ministerial members of the Presbytery. It was not surprising that the four ministers had joined the Free Church, for their standpoint on the issues which led to the Disruption had been clear for some considerable time.

In December 1842, Finlayson of Lochs had written to Dr. Pitcairn to confirm his adherence to both series of resolutions which had been decided at the great Convocation of ministers. In that same month Duncan Matheson had revealed that he fully concurred with his colleague: "I gladly avail myself of the opportunity thus afforded me of expressing, as I do hereby express, my cordial adherence to those Resolutions, and beg that my name may be added to the Roll of adherents." Alexander MacLeod of Uig was concerned that his name had been published in error among those who adhered to the resolutions "with an explanation". He wrote again to state categorically that he was "entirely at one with my brethren who adhere without any explanation."³⁷ Donald MacRae, a probationer, had "by his actings given reason to the Presbytery to suppose that he had joined the Secession" and it

was decided that he was no longer in connection with the Church of Scotland.³⁸

On June 22, 1843, a depleted Presbytery of Skye foregathered, when there were three places conspicuously empty. Letters were sent to Roderick MacLeod (Snizort), John Swanson (Small Isles), and John R. Glass (Bracadale), summoning them to appear before the Presbytery the following month. The day appointed for the interview duly arrived, but the three secessionists did not appear, and by this action they were deemed to have left the Established Church.³⁹

As far as ministerial man-power was concerned the Presbytery of Uist was least affected by the Disruption. It was reported at the meeting of Presbytery on June 28, 1843, that Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry had signed the deed of separation. MacIver of Harris remarked that he had met MacLeod on his way to the Presbytery meeting, and the minister of Trumisgarry had made it plain that he had every intention of adhering to his previous decision.⁴⁰

None of the Royal Bounty missionaries stationed within the Presbyteries of Skye, Uist and Lewis joined the Free Church at the Disruption, although most of them were thought to belong to the Evangelical party. Indeed, some of the most vituperative language used by Evangelicals during the heated days of the Disruption period was reserved for those missionaries and ministers who were despised as renegades, because they had not seceded as expected.

In his unique pamphlet, "The Wheat and the Chaff gathered into Bundles", James McCosh divides all the Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland after the Disruption into two distinct sections. The "First Class" embodied those "who may be ranked as of the old Moderate type". The "Second Class" comprised those "who professed the same principles as the adherents of the Free Church and throughout the controversy were more or less active and forward in their advocacy and support of the Evangelical cause", but who had adhered to the Establishment when the hour of decision arrived.⁴¹

Conspicuous among the second class was Angus Martin, minister of Duirinish. McCosh describes him, with justification, as "a keen partisan of the Evangelical cause, and a strenuous assertor of anti-patronage principles".⁴² Martin was not present at the Convocation, but had sent a letter of apology, and about two months later he gave in his adherence to the first series of resolutions.⁴³ The minister of Duirinish appears to have gone through a crisis of conscience as the Disruption approached. He found the second series of resolutions unacceptable: "I cannot agree to the doctrine that the silence of the legislature may be regarded as sanctioning the decisions of the civil courts no more than the decisions of the Ecclesiastical courts." He feared that those who spoke of leaving the Establishment were acting "with undue precipitancy". He concluded: "For my part I cannot see what freedom we can enjoy in preaching the Gospel in the open field or on the mountain side that we do not at present enjoy in our parish churches."⁴⁴

In the years before the Disruption Angus Martin had taken a leading part in debates at Presbytery and Synod about the Veto Act, and other matters in which the civil and ecclesiastical power appeared to clash.

When Martin was about to be transferred from the mission of Boisdale in Uist to the parish of Duirinish he communicated with the clerk of Skye Presbytery in the following terms: "The Presbytery of Skye having resolved to proceed with my settlement in the parish of Duirinish in disregard to the Veto law I consider it my duty to state, as I hereby do, my willingness to submit myself to the said law".⁴⁵

Shortly after Martin's settlement in Duirinish the Presbytery of Skye was divided by another contentious issue. As a result of the outcome of the Stewarton case, it was moved that the two ministers holding Parliamentary charges, Roderick Reid and Henry Beatson, be removed from the roll of Presbytery.

The motion was carried, but Roderick MacLeod dissented from this decision because "it recognised the right of the Civil Courts to interfere with the spiritual jurisdiction of the Church, and is consequently Erastian and unconstitutional." Angus Martin was moderator of Presbytery, and he left the chair to enter his dissent with that of MacLeod.⁴⁶ At the Synod of Glenelg, Martin also appended his name to an Evangelical overture which pointed to the "necessity on all the members of the Church holding the views of the majority of the General Assembly to give expression to their adherence to these views".⁴⁷

There was genuine regret in the Evangelical ranks when Angus Martin held back from taking the final step of separation. In the heat of debate disappointment often changed to bitterness. Ronald MacDonald, one of the "Men", made this scathing remark on Martin's indecisive attitude: "In my opinion he is like a potato in the brim of the pot, half of which is boiled but the other half is raw."⁴⁸

There are indications that Angus Martin was in some dubiety regarding which road he should take at the Disruption, and that even after the fateful events of May 18, 1843, he may well have been undecided. The other members of the Presbytery expressed their surprise that he was not present at the meeting held on December 5, 1843, when his presentation to the vacant parish of Snizort was being considered. They were also concerned that he had not yet sent a letter of acceptance of the charge.⁴⁹ Martin offered an apology at the next meeting.⁵⁰ However, on April 9, 1844, the Presbytery of Skye again found grounds for complaint in that he had missed "several important meetings".⁵¹ When the Presbytery met later that month Martin explained that he had been indisposed, but it is not impossible that he was still, almost a year after the Disruption, considering his position.⁵²

When Angus Martin preached in the church of Bracadale, vacant after the

Disruption, he had chosen as his theme 1 John ii:19 - "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."⁵³ This choice of text might imply that Martin was clearly on the side of those who refused to desert the Establishment. But some of his actions would suggest that he was somewhat unsure of his position, both before and after the Disruption.

Angus Martin and Roderick MacLeod had been companions during their youth, and they still remained close friends despite the acrimonious atmosphere surrounding the Disruption. When Angus Martin's wife died, it was Maighstir Ruairidh who delivered the funeral oration.⁵⁴

Henry Beatson, minister of the Parliamentary Church at Stenscholl, is not remembered in tradition as an Evangelical. Nevertheless, he also appears to have been one of the many ministers who came to a cross-roads at the Disruption. It was said that he was "somewhat undecided in his aspect of that event, but ultimately remained in".⁵⁵ Evander MacIver gained the impression that even MacDonald of Ferintosh was at first "strongly opposed" to the Disruption but was "got round by the leading men" in Edinburgh.⁵⁶

Of all the ministers and missionaries settled in the Western Isles, when the Disruption occurred, the one whose attitude was most baffling was Daniel MacFie, who served the Royal Bounty Mission at Tarbert, Harris. A native of Rothesay, he was appointed to Harris in 1836.⁵⁷ Before the Disruption he had "maintained Evangelical principles".⁵⁸ The Presbytery of Uist had been informed that MacFie was about to join the secession, but he appeared in person at a meeting on June 28, 1843, and "explicitly declared to the Presbytery that he does not intend to leave the Established Church".⁵⁹ In view of this unreserved assertion the Presbytery were naturally surprised to learn some four

months later, that Daniel MacFie was no longer a minister of the Church of Scotland.⁶⁰ In fact, he had made an application to the Presbytery of Skye to be accepted as a minister of the Free Church.⁶¹ But he did not proceed with this petition, and became parish minister of Portnahaven in Islay, where he remained until 1862.⁶²

The high hopes which the Evangelical party entertained in regard to other Royal Bounty missionaries in the islands also came to naught. Donald MacDonald of Benbecula had "made a profession of Evangelical principles" before 1843, but did not separate from the Church of Scotland at the Disruption. Donald MacCallum, who was in charge of the mission of Raasay and Rona, "was always reckoned as belonging to the majority of the Church"; nevertheless he did not join the Free Church.⁶³

Neil MacKenzie had been appointed to Saint Kilda as ordained missionary by the SSPCK in 1830. He was known to be an Evangelical, and was "said to have kept the people well informed as to the course of events" during the Ten Years Conflict. "When the Disruption came, he disappointed his former friends by leaving his post and going over to the opposite party - seeking a living within the Establishment".⁶⁴ It would be unfair to imply that MacKenzie remained in the Church of Scotland for any selfish motive. Anyone who had offered his services as missionary in Saint Kilda, and had spent fourteen busy years serving the inhabitants of that remote island, can hardly be accused of seeking personal advancement.

By 1843, and even before the Disruption took place, MacKenzie had felt that his period of service in Saint Kilda was drawing to a close. He told his employers that he intended to visit Edinburgh in May: "I wish, also, to be present at the coming General Assembly. I have thought and prayed a great deal over the important question in dispute, and yet my mind is far

from seeing clearly what is my duty. I will listen to what is said, and pray for guidance. I can trust God to show me what will be most for his glory."⁶⁵

On June 4, 1844, Neil MacKenzie met the SSPCK Committee in Edinburgh. He admitted that "the excessive fatigue which he had undergone for the last 18 months, the great excitement which the state of the religious feelings of the people had occasioned, and the personal and mental exertions which he found it necessary to make, materially affected his health".⁶⁶ This, more than anything else, was the reason why he now accepted a mainland charge.

Twenty years after the event it was claimed that "at the Disruption the whole population joined the Free Church",⁶⁷ but it was three years after 1843 before the severance of Saint Kilda's links with the Establishment was complete. Neil MacKenzie left the island in May 1844, but returned for a brief visit in September the following year, when he dispensed the Sacrament to his former parishioners. It was not until August 1846, when Roderick MacLeod preached in Saint Kilda, that all the islanders formally pledged their allegiance to the Free Church of Scotland.⁶⁸

Adherents of Free Church - (3) Teachers

Many of the teachers in the Western Isles sided with the Free Church at the time of the Disruption. Again it was in Lewis that the Establishment received the heaviest blow. The Presbytery summoned all the teachers to a meeting in September, 1843, to ascertain where they stood on the Disruption question. The only teacher who appeared to confirm that he had not joined the secession was Clark, parish schoolmaster of Stornoway, for all the other teachers supported the Free Church.⁶⁹ (Throughout the country 70 out of 146 General Assembly teachers seceded.)⁷⁰

When the Presbytery of Skye met on July 12, 1843, intimation was given to the effect that three of the teachers within their bounds had announced

their adherence to the ministers who had seceded from the Church. Two of the teachers were in charge of General Assembly schools, George Morrison of Soay, and Donald MacDonald of Uig. The third was Alexander Kennedy, who taught at MacDermid's school in Borve.⁷¹ This school had been established with a £1000 bequest from Donald MacDermid, a Skyeman who had emigrated to South Carolina. The purpose of the institution was to teach children English, writing, and arithmetic, free of charge. As the trustees of the school, who supervised its management and the appointment of teachers, included Lord MacDonald's factor, and the parish ministers of Portree, Snizort, and Kilmuir, it is not surprising that they would not be in favour of a master who had abandoned the Established Church.⁷² In the case of a number of teachers it was not until some time after the Disruption that their sympathies became known. On April 1, 1845, Henry Beatson, by that stage minister of the Small Isles, appeared with witnesses before the Presbytery of Skye to prove that John Murray, parish schoolmaster at Eigg, had been following divisive courses.⁷³

In the Presbytery of Uist, Ronald Matheson, the SSPCK teacher in the island of Berneray, was accused a few years after the Disruption of being opposed to the Established Church.⁷⁴ Indeed, for a number of years following the Disruption the position of the SSPCK as a body was rather ambiguous. When John R. Glass of Bracadale wrote to the SSPCK in 1843 to enquire if the services of the female teacher and catechist in his parish would be continued were they to join the Free Church, consideration of this matter was postponed. In September of Disruption year the SSPCK discussed a letter from Alexander MacLeod of Uig in which he stated that he had been appointed by the Free Church commission to preach in Argyll, and asked for permission to take the society teacher at Shawbost with him on his tour. The letter had been received too late for a reply to be sent, but in any case the Society were still awaiting the opinion of counsel on "the Church question".⁷⁵ In 1846 the SSPCK were

told that a female teacher in Snizort and another in Portree had joined the Free Church.⁷⁶ John Lees of Stormoway reported that John MacKay, teacher, and John Corbet, catechist, had left the Established Church.⁷⁷ Of four teachers in South Uist, only the female teacher at Boisdale had seceded.⁷⁸

In 1845, Sir James Matheson, the new proprietor of Lewis, complained to the SSPCK that Angus Matheson, their teacher at Callernish, had refused to grant the candidate for the vacancy in Uig parish church the use of the school building. The teacher had written a letter which displayed "decided partisanship" for the Free Church, and "hostility" to the Establishment. Sir James asked the Society whether its regulations permitted teachers to "propagate agitation by preaching and haranguing to large masses of people".⁷⁹

By 1847 the situation had been clarified, and the SSPCK had to dismiss those teachers and catechists who were not in connection with the Established Church. In that year it was announced that the Free Church were about to add to their list of catechists seventeen who had been removed from office by the SSPCK. "Many of them are aged men of God," said one of the Free Church journals, "whose unblemished character and holy walk are fitted to be a grace and an ornament to any Church with which they might be connected, but whose advanced years unfit them for being so extensively useful as otherwise they would be."⁸⁰ In a list of ejected teachers compiled by the Lewis Free Church Presbytery in 1849, the names of three men who had been employed by the SSPCK appear. They were David Watt (Uig), Angus Matheson (Carloway) and James MacDougall (Knock) who had received employment from the Free Church as teachers.⁸¹

The Disruption not only caused disharmony in all the parishes in the Western Isles, but even led to divisions within families. Finlay MacRae of North Uist remained in the Establishment, while his brother, Donald, became Free Church minister in Poolewe and Kilmorie.⁸² In Lewis "the very children

of the minister of Barvas left their father alone in the wilderness, and worshipped in the Free Church".⁸³ It was said that the minister's family were so committed to the new denomination that they would not even join with him when he conducted family worship.⁸⁴ Angus Martin, who has been discussed above, was an Evangelical who decided against joining the Free Church. His brother, Dr. Donald Martin, became a Free Church elder, while yet another brother, Dr. Samuel, was in sympathy with the Free Church when he was in New Zealand, but altered his opinion when he returned to his homeland.⁸⁵ Viewing the Scottish religious scene from overseas, Dr. Samuel Martin had regarded the Disruption as a movement on behalf of "religious and civil liberty". He felt that the seceders had made a great sacrifice and had been unfairly treated. But on his return to Skye he turned against the Free Church, one reason being the fact that it had received financial support from a "slave-holding country", and another that it permitted men with little education to teach.⁸⁶

Reasons for Free Church Success

The question naturally arises why the Free Church gained such strong support in the Western Isles in comparison with many other parts of Scotland. Several factors may be mentioned which account for so many of the Hebrideans deserting the Establishment at the Disruption, and remaining firm in their allegiance to the Free Church despite the impediments which that denomination faced in the years after 1843.

1. To a considerable degree the Disruption which took place in 1843 was the culmination of a secession movement which was already a fait accompli in many parishes in the Western Isles. In 1847, MacIntosh MacKay, who had an intimate knowledge of Church affairs in the Hebrides, declared that even before the Disruption "there was in various parts of the Highlands, a good deal of occult dissent, and there was also open

dissent, in many other districts". When MacKay was asked to specify areas in which this withdrawal from the Established Church had occurred he mentioned "several parishes in Skye", Lewis, Harris and North Uist, "in the last not so largely".⁸⁷

When prompted to define what he meant by "occult dissent", MacKay spoke of "dissent not assuming any systematic form in its operations; where the people absented themselves from public worship, and held meetings for private edification".⁸⁸ Such gatherings had been held without a minister leading worship. He agreed that, generally speaking, the dissenters who had attended these services had joined the Free Church in 1843.⁸⁹

MacKay gives Barvas as an instance of a parish in which the majority of the people, a decade or more before the Disruption, had in reality abandoned the Established Church. Not more than 50 parishioners were in the habit of attending William MacRae's services. In the parish of Stornoway "a great proportion of the people ceased to attend the ministrations of the Establishment".⁹⁰ During the ministry at Stornoway of Simon Fraser (1815-1824), "a strong infatuation of delusion crept into the minds of some of the Lewis folk, which heresy now spread to a great number of the inhabitants of the island". Some of those affected made a public protest against Fraser's doctrine, but later asked forgiveness and appeared to have returned to the fold.⁹¹

During the ministry of Alexander Simpson of Lochs five of his parishioners caused an upheaval in the parish church on a Communion Sunday when the minister proclaimed that salvation depended upon a man being friendly and benign in his actions. The four dissentients called Simpson a murderer of souls and left the church. The result of this disturbance was a court case, and the protesters were sent to prison.⁹²

Dissent sometimes took place in other islands where there was a group of people who were opposed to the life or doctrine of a minister. This happened in Harris in 1832, when John MacIver was to be settled in the parish church. On the day of his induction a protest was made on behalf of some of the parishioners by two men named Murdoch MacLeod. One of them belonged to the island of Berneray, but he "could not change his memory with having attended upon Divine worship" in his native isle or in Harris "for years back". The other Murdoch MacLeod was said to be "a lay preacher or exhorter" and to have used his influence to dissuade islanders from attending the Established Church. The dissidents objected to MacIver's settlement on two grounds:

1. The people had a right to elect their own minister;
2. They had been informed that the presentee had passed a night in a certain house in the parish, and had "neglected to perform Family Worship there".⁹³

A virtual secession had occurred in Harris even before the controversy surrounding MacIver's settlement. One of our sources published in 1851 states: "A disruption took place in Harris six-and-twenty years ago".⁹⁴

In the island of Berneray between Harris and North Uist, Norman Paterson stood up in the church on one occasion, when John Bethune was preaching, and shouted, "Mort! Mort!" (Murder! Murder!) Paterson left the building, followed by the majority of the congregation. He was imprisoned for this breach of the peace, and later used to describe what he had done as "gìomh amaideach" (a foolish deed).⁹⁵ Norman Paterson and Neil MacLennan were the leaders of a party who had protested to Uist Presbytery about Bethune's reputation as a drunkard. When the Presbytery complained that Paterson and his friends did not attend the parish church, they wrote that they had "never received any benefit from his ministrations, as they never expect to receive,

as long as his practice is at such variance with the rules laid down in the word of God for the guidance of ministers of the Gospel in all things."⁹⁶

MacIntosh MacKay referred to North Uist as one of the Hebridean islands in which many had ceased to attend Established Church services, "but not so numerously in North Uist as in the other places".⁹⁷ In 1847 John MacLean of Tigharry is mentioned as a potential Free Church catechist, and is described as "one of a small band who, twenty years ago, seceded, or ceased to wait upon the ministrations of the Establishment".⁹⁸ After the Disruption the Free Church used to hold services in a meeting house at Sollas, built originally as a school, but where the people had met for worship because "they were not satisfied with their minister". When the Evangelical Norman MacLeod was settled in Trumisgarry, his life and doctrine were acceptable to the separatists who began to attend his ministrations. When the Disruption came MacLeod could say, "They all came out with me."⁹⁹ In 1839 the minister of Trumisgarry was accused by the Kirk Session of North Uist of admitting to Communion Archibald MacDonald, tenant, Tigharry, who had been "in the habit of attending on Sabbaths and other days the meetings of a few others who follow divisive courses".¹⁰⁰ As early as 1829 the Presbytery of Uist had informed the Royal Bounty Committee of the necessity for continuing a Mission in the Sand and Sollas district "especially when it is considered that Fanaticism and Sectarianism are making rapid progress in this extensive Parish."¹⁰¹

Dissent in Skye was closely related to the revival movement which spread through that island from the second decade of the nineteenth century. "There has since the year 1812," said Alexander Beith, "been a disposition not to attend the ministrations of certain clergymen"¹⁰² in the areas affected by the revival.

About 1813 a sect was formed in Skye, having as its leader a certain

Flora MacPherson, who became known as "The Prophetess". Many were influenced by her, and "her wildest reveries were looked upon as divine illuminations". The writer who narrates the progress of the movement inspired by her, records that "the distinguishing traits of her character were roaring, violent convulsions, high pretensions to inspiration, and communication with the Saviour, by which she pretended to have acquired a controuling (sic) influence over the actions of her fellow-creatures, and to have arrived at a knowledge of their present state and future destiny". Though many of those who had been caught up in this fanatical movement and had been reputed to have undergone a conversion experience had returned to their old way of life, some of Flora MacPherson's followers continued to be "patterns of piety, of zeal, and devotedness to God".¹⁰³

About 1817 the wife of the proprietor of Kilmuir granted permission to some of those who had been converted in the 1812-14 revival to erect a meeting-house, "contrary to the general wish of the clergy". The building could accommodate about two hundred worshippers, and at the services held there "two or three of acknowledged superior knowledge and experience preside alternatively". Two similar groups met outwith the patronage of the Established Church in other districts in the parish of Kilmuir, and a smaller meeting was held in Portree parish.¹⁰⁴

Causes of Dissent

i) MacIntosh MacKay was asked whether dissent in the Highlands and Islands arose from a dislike of Moderate doctrines. He replied that one reason why separatist groups were formed was "the absence of instruction in the system of teaching and preaching".¹⁰⁵ The dissenters in the island of Berneray had asserted that they received no edification from the ministrations of John Bethune.

ii) MacKay gave as another cause of dissent "the feeling which there was

against the system of Government".¹⁰⁶ The group of protesters in Harris referred to above had given the method of election of ministers as one of the grounds of their complaints.

iii) Another reason for dissatisfaction was the personal conduct of certain ministers in the islands. Those who signed the petition against Bethune of Berneray claimed that he was "a drunkard in habit and repute".¹⁰⁷ The reported behaviour of certain Moderate ministers like Simpson of Lochs was considered by some parishioners to be grounds for abandoning services in the Established Church.

Before the Disruption the majority of those who had deserted the services of the parish church would still regard themselves as members of the Church of Scotland. While Cameron of Stornoway admitted that his parishioners were "fickle", he acknowledged that they did claim attachment to the Established Church.¹⁰⁸ When the Presbytery of Uist had given their judgment that the separatists in Berneray had no legal status within the Church of Scotland, the dissenters had responded: "By baptism they were received into membership with that church. They consider its doctrines and discipline in accordance with the word of God. Some of them are in full communion with it. They are warmly attached to it, and are resolved never to abandon it as long as they can conscientiously adhere to it."¹⁰⁹ In Skye those who attended meetings outwith the auspices of the parish church still considered themselves members of the Church of Scotland, and adhered to the Confession of Faith. They would countenance the services of "such pastors as in their opinion do preach and act conformably to the letter and spirit of that standard".¹¹⁰ Many of the early converts in the island of North Uist were said to have "turned their back on the parish church (though not on the Church of Scotland)."¹¹¹

Alexander Beith wrote about the separatists in Daviot: "The truth was,

that they had got ahead of the times in which they lived. They were in heart and mind Free Church before the Free Church had existence."¹¹² The same was true of a number of parishes within the Western Isles, where the Disruption was the final decisive step in a process which had commenced, in some instances, more than twenty years before.

If the attempts by the two parties within the Church of Scotland to gain the support of the people are compared to a modern electioneering campaign, it would have to be admitted that protagonists of the Free Church position had a superior propaganda machine. Almost a year after the Disruption, the Presbytery of Lewis were still complaining in scathing terms of the conduct of the seceding ministers who were "with the aid of their numerous servile machinery of schoolmasters, catechists, pseudo Professors et hoc genus omne incessantly itinerating from town to town, from house to house, keeping up the stream of hostility against the Established Church among the poor deluded parishioners, accompanied by the most terrific denunciations against any who would revolt from the Camp."¹¹³ Among those who travelled all over Lewis just before the Disruption holding meetings to explain the issues at stake were Angus MacIver and Alexander MacColl. "These addresses," contends Norman MacFarlane, "able, clear and convincing, had much to do with the striking clearance in Lewis from the State Church in 1843."¹¹⁴ In October 1843, Donald MacRae, who had received a call from Cross congregation, was described as being on "a missionary tour" of Uist and Harris.¹¹⁵ In the campaign to win the majority of the people of the Western Isles over to the side of the Free Church the "Men" played a decisive role.

Norman MacLeod, the military veteran, has already been alluded to in the chapter dealing with revival movements in the islands. He "was sent over to Uist to hold meetings to enlighten the people on the principles contended for

antecedent to the Disruption." Finlay MacRae, parish minister of North Uist, warned his congregation against going to hear MacLeod, pointing out that "he was only an old soldier".¹¹⁶

In 1843 MacLeod visited the two parishes in Skye where Moderatism had its firmest hold - Strath and Sleat - and "received the signatures of those who were willing to adhere to the Free Church".¹¹⁷ MacCowan asserts that the reason why the 1000 inhabitants of the island of Raasay solidly supported the Free Church was the instruction, on the principles at stake in the Ten Years' Conflict, disseminated by the 'Men'.¹¹⁸

Angus MacCuish, a blind catechist from North Uist, was another of the "Men" who acted as propagandist for the Evangelical party. He was said to have travelled throughout Uist speaking on behalf of those who supported the Free Church, and also to have visited Lewis, Harris and Skye.¹¹⁹ In North Uist "stump orators, lay and clerical, poured into the parish".¹²⁰ John Morrison, blacksmith, catechist and poet, was the best-known layman in the island of Harris for many years before the Disruption. Clarke of Aberfeldy visited Harris in 1847 and discovered that the bulk of the population had joined the Free Church, "mainly owing to the influence" of Morrison.¹²¹

Gaelic satirical verses were of great propaganda value at the time of the Disruption. One of the bards who composed songs in support of the Free Church, which sometimes were of an abusive nature, was John Matheson, "the Tyrtæus of the Free Uist Campaign of 1843".¹²² A sample of what he had to say about those who refused to abandon the Establishment illustrates his use of satire:

A' mealladh 's a' dalladh an t-sluaigh;
le'n druidheachd a' bodhradh an cluas;
gadaichean agus luchd-reubainn,
tha fathast 'san Eiphit 'nan suain.¹²³

(They deceive and blind the people; by their bewitchment they deafen their ears; robbers and plunderers who are still in a state

Poems such as John Morrison's "Comhradh Eadar Soisgeulach agus Cuibheasach"¹²⁴ (A Dialogue between Evangelical and Moderate) became popular and would be employed to propagate the principles of the Free Church of Scotland. Even the mavis appeared to be employing its musical notes in support of the Free Church:

An Eaglais Shaor 'si 's fhearr,
 an Eaglais Shaor, 'si 's fhearr;
 na Moderates, na Moderates
 chan fiach iad, chan fhiach iad.¹²⁵

(The Free Church is best, the Free Church is best, the Moderates,
 the Moderates are worthless, are worthless.)

The nearest approach to an Established Church answer to the productions of John Matheson and John Morrison is found in verses by John Lees (father of Sir James Cameron Lees), composed when the parish of Uig was under Free Church domination and no ferryman would transport the member of the Church of Scotland for the induction of a new minister.

Mhuinntir Chalanais is Uige,
 reic gu faoin 'ur saorsainn uile,
 tha sibh-se an diugh man 'ur sinnsear
 's na linntean dorcha borba fuileach.

Le innleachd, feall is cleasachd dhaoin'
 fo bhòidean mi-naomh 's fo mhiormhan
 nach toir sibh aiseag thar thonn no aoidheachd
 do theachdairean sìtheil an Dia-Duine.

Ged nach eil mise 'nam fhàidh
 's dana leam gun sgath a chantainn
 nach urrainn beamachd no gràs o'n àirde
 gu bràth air 'ur gnathan fantainn.¹²⁶

(People of Callanish and Uig who vainly sold all your freedom, you are today like your ancestors in the dark uncivilised gory ages, by ingenuity, deceit and the craft of men under unholy vows and oaths, will you not give conveyance across the waves or grant hospitality to the peaceful messengers of the God-Man? Although I am no prophet, I make bold to state without fear that blessing or grace from above will never rest on your behaviour.)

Of course the songs of Morrison and Matheson had a much wider circulation, being disseminated not only orally but also in printed sources, such as "An Fhianuis", the Gaelic Free Church periodical edited by MacIntosh MacKay. Lees' verses would have been unknown outside his own immediate circle of acquaintances.

Teachers in the Gaelic schools were active in ecclesiastical affairs at the time of the Disruption, despite the non-denominational constitution of the society by which they were appointed. When the Synod of Glenelg met on July 26, 1843, a complaint was made that "teachers employed by the Gaelic School Society in Edinburgh have in place of attending to the proper duties of their office as instructors of youth assumed that of Lecturers and expounders of Scripture and distinguish themselves as active parties in promoting the recent secession from the Church."¹²⁷

In the days following the Disruption strong language was used by those on both sides of the ecclesiastical divide. MacIntosh MacKay admitted that occasionally supporters of the Free Church were guilty of using intemperate language: "I have heard expressions used by certain individuals on some occasions that I did not approve of." He added: "The Free Church has never used against others language so violent as has been used against it."¹²⁸ The Presbytery records of the Established Church in Lewis contain bitter condemnations of the Free Church, whereas the Minute Book of the Free Church Presbytery has

no censorious references to the Establishment in the years following the Disruption. In 1847, Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry stated that he did not think that he had alluded to the Establishment in his sermons more than half-a-dozen times since the Disruption, although he had been informed that the parish minister of North Uist, and the Royal Bounty Missionary at Carinish were in the habit of referring to the Free Church "in terms of condemnation or disapprobation in the pulpit". As for himself he felt that people would form a poor opinion of him if he thought "that the mere leaving of the Establishment to join the Free Church would be of any avail of itself for the salvation of the soul."¹²⁹ Forty years later a deputation from the Church of Scotland found that relations between the two denominations in North Uist were cordial, "arising very much from the excellent Christian spirit always manifested by the late Rev. N. MacLeod, Free Church minister at Trumisgarry".¹³⁰

John MacRae of Knockbain appears to have used his powers of imagery in speaking against the Established Church. Garbled accounts of his sermons reached the ears of supporters of the Establishment. He was accused of saying that the post-Disruption Church of Scotland "was a church of the devil's making, and that her ministers must be servants and children of the devil". He was said to have spoken of Moderates in their black coats, who "in adhering to the polluted State Church ... were like hens hatching eggs, till they became rotten, black and loathsome, sufficient to disgust all by their offensive smell." When confronted with those supposed quotations from his sermons, MacRae dismissed them as "pure invention".¹³¹

The personal standing and influence of the Evangelical ministers of the Western Isles must be given as another reason why so many of their parishioners followed them into the Free Church. The charisma surrounding Roderick MacLeod of Bracadale and Snizort impressed many in Skye and beyond. Lady

MacCaskill was obviously attracted by the Evangelical leader: "With the head of an Apollo, and the soul of a Saint, this Elijah of the north stands up between the living and the dead".¹³² Archibald Clerk of Kilmallie, who had been MacLeod's co-presbyter in Skye for a few years just prior to the Secession of 1843, described him as "a man revered - I might almost say worshipped - by the islanders."¹³³ To the biographer of Charles Calder MacIntosh, MacLeod was "the heroic confessor and apostle of the Isle of Skye".¹³⁴ Dr. Samuel Martin seemed to imply that something almost approaching sharp practice was involved in the way the secession had taken place in Snizort. Mr. MacDonald of Skeabost, MacLeod's father-in-law, had presided at a meeting in the parish church, when a document was read to the congregation, firstly in English, and then translated into Gaelic. According to Martin, the concluding section of the paper, which alluded to secession from the Established Church, was omitted from the Gaelic version. "The portion read," insisted Martin, "professed adherence to the Rev. Roderick MacLeod, and the desire to have him as their minister in preference to any other."¹³⁵ The implication of the doctor's remarks is that the personal influence of Roderick MacLeod was as much responsible for the Disruption in that part of Skye as were the issues involved.

In North Uist, Maighstir Ruairidh's cousin, Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry, was obviously a popular figure. Even before the Disruption, as noted above, he had been instrumental in attracting back to the Parliamentary Church a body of separatists who were holding independent services before he arrived in Uist. In 1843, 950 of the inhabitants of the Parliamentary parish of Trumisgarry followed their minister into the Free Church, leaving only a tiny minority in the Establishment.¹³⁶ While the minister of Trumisgarry had not such a strong personality as his more famous relative in Skye, it is evident that his influence among his parishioners was considerable.

The Seaforth policy of settling Evangelical ministers in vacant parishes meant that Lewis alone of the three island Presbyteries contained an Evangelical majority on the eve of the Disruption. When Finlayson of Lochs seceded from the Church of Scotland he "carried every parishioner with him".¹³⁷ Only two of the parishioners of Alexander MacLeod of Uig decided against following him into the Free Church, one of whom was a woman in her hundredth year.¹³⁸ Matheson of the Parliamentary Church at Knock "carried his entire congregation with him out of the State Church into the Free Church at the Disruption."¹³⁹

More than one writer has compared the influence of Highland ministers at the time of the great secession of 1843 to the power wielded by the clan chiefs in ancient times. Robert Buchanan's description of the position occupied by MacDonald of Ferintosh among Highlanders is no exaggeration: "The proudest and most powerful chieftains of the Celtic race never possessed such mastery over the clans, which the fiery cross, or the wild pibroch, summoned into the field in the fierce days of feudal strife, as belonged, in these more peaceful times, to this humble minister of Christ."¹⁴⁰ Cameron Lees used a similar comparison, although writing in more general terms, "All the popular ministers in Ross seceded in 1843 and their people followed them, much as did their chiefs in 1715 and 1745: the truth is the parish ministers came to occupy the same position as the Highland chief."¹⁴¹

Sorley MacLean, in an excellent paper on the poetry of the Highland Clearances has declared: "The ministers of the Established Church were economically attached to the landlord, and few of them attacked their patrons, while some of them actively supported the Clearances, preaching to the people that their sufferings were God's judgment on them for their sins, and that resistance to constituted authority was sacrilege."¹⁴² As opposition to eviction and emigration came from Evangelical ministers, it is natural that this should harden support for the Evangelical party and for the Free Church.

In 1837 Finlay MacRae of North Uist had written in the New Statistical Account: "To force the people away, has been entirely repugnant to the humane feelings of the Noble proprietor and his managers. A few years ago, when it was necessary to remove some of the inhabitants from a place where they could hardly earn a scanty subsistence, Lord MacDonald very generously afforded them assistance to emigrate to British America."¹⁴³ If MacRae had been compiling the account of his parish in 1850, his references to humanity and generosity would have aroused a feeling of scepticism and even distaste in the public at large, for in 1849 there took place at Sollas in North Uist an eviction of a particularly brutal and callous nature.

In March 1849, about 100 cottars in the Sollas district were ordered to remove by Whitsunday term.¹⁴⁴ For the past three years the potato crop had failed, and there was no alternative employment available for those who were dependent for their livelihood on agriculture. Arrears for rent for the four townships of Sollas, Middlequarter, Dunsellar, and Malaglate amounted to £624.¹⁴⁵ Lord MacDonald offered the people a free passage to Canada, but when Whitsunday arrived none of the inhabitants had removed.

On August 4, 1849, the Sheriff-substitute arrived at Sollas, accompanied by twenty men. They found the people adamant in their refusal to leave their native villages, and decided to retire. When the authorities returned there was resistance to houses being pulled down, and Archibald MacLean, Roderick MacPhail, Archibald Boyd, and Roderick MacCuish were arrested. The four crofters were charged with "mobbing and rioting", "obstructing and deforcing officers of the law" and "assaulting officers of the law whilst in the execution of their duty". Lord Cockburn was the judge before whom the accused islanders appeared in Inverness, and when the jury found them guilty by a majority, he sentenced them to four months' imprisonment. The members of the jury added a rider to their verdict, and their remarks were greeted with applause by

spectators on the public benches: "The Jury unanimously recommend the prisoners to the utmost leniency and mercy of the Court, in consideration of the cruel, though it may be legal, proceeding adopted in ejecting the whole people of Sollas from their houses and crofts, without the prospect of shelter or a footing in their fatherland, or even the means of expatriating them to a foreign one."¹⁴⁷ Lord Cockburn himself was later to refer to the accused as "four poor respectable men who had been active in a Highland Clearing in North Uist".¹⁴⁸ Cockburn held the view that the sentence which he had passed was "slight", the severity of punishment being reduced because of the mitigating circumstances.¹⁴⁹

The involvement of the two North Uist ministers, Finlay MacRae of the Established Church, and Norman MacLeod of the Free Church, in the Sollas affair calls for comment at this point. MacRae, who was married to the daughter of Alexander MacDonald of Balranald, would be considered to support the authority of proprietor and factor, and he acted as interpreter during the proceedings. However, he must be given some credit for attempting to lessen the harshness of the treatment meted out to the evicted islanders. When the ship carrying the law officers arrived at Armadale on its way to North Uist the minister, who accompanied the party, went ashore to try to persuade Lord MacDonald to postpone the proposed removal, "and had a lengthened interview, without succeeding in obtaining any modification of his views". (Incidentally, this piece of evidence reveals that Lord MacDonald was not ignorant of what was about to happen in Sollas. It is sometimes argued that proprietors, who were far removed from the scene, were unaware of the activities of their factor when a clearance took place.) When the party reached North Uist, MacRae offered himself as surety so that the people could remain on their land until the following spring, but a second sponsor could not be found. He also stood bail for those who were arrested in Sollas. One correspondent claimed that

the parish minister deserved "the very highest credit for his conduct throughout this distressing affair. He proved himself a friend of the people."¹⁵⁰ The part played by MacRae in the affair is not remembered in such warm terms in Uist tradition, and receives a rebuke in at least one satirical poem of the period.¹⁵¹

The same writer who commended the actions of Finlay MacRae also quoted the criticism of the authorities who "regretted the absence of Rev. Mr. MacDonald, the clergymen of the people (who are almost entirely attached to the Free Church), who did not appear either to counsel the people in the presence of the authorities, or to assist the latter by his presence."¹⁵² John Prebble repeats this critical judgement - reproducing the same mistake in the minister's surname - as the original correspondent when he writes: "The people of Sollas were members of the Free Church, and the absence of their minister, Mr. MacDonald, throughout the whole unhappy affair, was never explained."¹⁵³

Perhaps some explanation for Norman MacLeod's absence may be offered. One fact that seems to have been forgotten was that MacLeod's residence at this time was not on the mainland of North Uist, but at Kallin, on the small island of Grimsay.¹⁵⁴ Difficulty of communications may be one reason why the Free Church minister was not present when his parishioners were being cruelly evicted from their homes.

In a review of the first edition of MacKenzie's "Highland Clearances", A.C. Sutherland, Free Church minister of Strathbraan, makes a specific reference to MacLeod as an opponent of evictions: "To our own knowledge, Norman MacLeod of Trumsgarry fearlessly acquitted himself in North Uist, in connection with the madness of the tyrant there. Mr. MacLeod had the rare grace of being better at suffering than at speaking, of being more at home in applying all hazards his principles than expounding them."¹⁵⁵ On the last Sunday which the

Sollas people spent in their homes they "were privileged, under their distressing and persecuted circumstances to hear another impressive discourse from the Rev. Norman MacLeod, from the words - 'They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them'. At the close he gave them the soundest advice, which even those that they deem their oppressors could not but commend."¹⁵⁶ However distasteful the Free Church minister of North Uist found the behaviour of the civil authorities, he was essentially a man of peace and disapproved of violence.

It is regrettable that Prebble does not quote from any of the letters written in reply to the criticisms made of Norman MacLeod's apparent lack of activity during the Sollas affair. One correspondent, "H.A.", informed readers of "The Witness" that he had just returned from North Uist and could confirm that any charge that the Free Church minister had supported violent action was unfounded, for "he had warned the people from the pulpit against resisting the authorities". The writer went on to protest that "to ask him to accompany factors, and justices, and constables, and parish ministers, to assist them in driving away his people, is about as unfeeling and heartless a proposal as has ever come under my notice". Another letter addressed to the "Inverness Courier" verified that Norman MacLeod was a peace-maker rather than a militant, and had impressed upon his people "the Christian duty of non-resistance", otherwise there would have been more violence and opposition.¹⁵⁷

Norman MacLeod would have felt a natural affinity with the evicted crofters of Sollas, not only because they belonged to his congregation, but because he too had suffered persecution "at the hands of Lord MacDonald and his underlings".¹⁵⁸ The Free Church minister bore testimony to the character of the four accused men, representing Roderick MacPhail and Roderick Boyd in particular as "distinguished in every respect for quietness and propriety".¹⁵⁹

In Skye Roderick MacLeod's opposition to eviction and emigration was more

explicit than that of his cousin Norman. Even before the Disruption he had raised his voice against those who valued sheep more highly than men. In his report on the parish of Bracadale, compiled for the New Statistical Account in December 1840, he made critical references, on three separate occasions, to the system which produced the Clearances. Explaining the reason for the decrease in population within the parish, he stated that it was "solely to be ascribed to the system of farming which has for some time been adopted, viz. throwing a number of farms into one large tack for sheep-grazing, and dispossessing and setting adrift the small tenants".¹⁶⁰ He portrayed the people as being in impoverished circumstances, "and if their complaints are not more loudly heard, one great reason is, that the system of farming pursued has placed them in such absolute dependence on the tacksmen, as to preclude any hope of amelioration".¹⁶¹ In making miscellaneous observations on the condition of the parish, MacLeod again returned to the system of "several farms being thrown into one grazing", which he held to be "a disadvantage to its general population".¹⁶²

Some years after the Disruption Lady McCaskill visited Skye and met Roderick MacLeod. She reports that he was "an enemy to emigration; and considers that the earth ought to be cleared of the sheep, and not of the men; and he affirms that the island is capable of maintaining every soul upon it, but under different rule and government".¹⁶³ MacLeod of MacLeod referred to the minister of Bracadale and Snizort as "an advocate" of the crofting population.¹⁶⁴

James Hunter writes that the ministers who objected to the clearances "were invariably Evangelicals who felt landlords' control of church patronage to be a threat to their own position, and their views were not shared by the Moderates who occupied most Highland pulpits".¹⁶⁵ Roderick MacLeod's position had been under threat for many years owing to his stand on the question of baptism, and he was at one time under suspension for his views, and he appears

to have had little fear of the power of the landlord. A Moderate minister who made a public condemnation of a clearance was Donald MacKimon of Strath. In a letter to the press, he denounced a clearance which took place on Lord MacDonald's estate in 1854, at a time when it was under trustees.¹⁶⁶

Thomas Chalmers was of the opinion "that the great bulk and body of the common people, with a goodly proportion of the middle classes, are upon our side, though it bodes ill for the country that the higher classes are almost universally against us".¹⁶⁷ Some modern historians have challenged this assessment of the composition of Free Church support, arguing that "except in the north and west Highlands most working people failed to enter it".¹⁶⁸ Whatever may have been the state of affairs in the country as a whole, it does appear that in many areas of the Western Isles the Free Kirk was looked upon as the church of the common people.

Robert Somers claimed that the clearances had "snapped the tie that had previously, amid all reverses, united the people and their chiefs". In addition, "the social wrongs of the lower class inclined their minds to the doctrine of non-intrusion". He pictures the former leaders of the community - the proprietor, the minister, the schoolmaster and the large tacksman supporting the Establishment, while the crofting population was ranged on the opposite side.¹⁶⁹ In this view the Disruption conflict was something of a class struggle, and there is evidence from the Western Isles that the Free Church was considered to be the Church of the common people, while the Established Church was the Church of the gentry.

A visitor to the Western Isles some years before the Disruption describes the Moderate William MacRae of Barvas as "a man of intelligence and culture, and is the friend and favourite of all the educated people in the island; but he is not, it is said, evangelical enough for the taste of the country people, although much beloved for his kindness of heart and attention to their distresses and wants".¹⁷⁰ Here we have two ecclesiastical divisions delineated with the

"educated people" on the one side and the "country people" on the other. But parties were to divide at the Disruption in Lewis somewhat differently from the other islands. The proprietor, the minister, and the schoolmaster in fact supported the Free Church rather than the Establishment - the only exceptions, as we have seen, being the minister and parish schoolmaster of Stornoway, and the minister of Barvas.

In other islands the Church of Scotland could be more clearly seen as the Church of the gentry, while the Free Church was the Church of the common people. John Morrison, one of those evicted from Sollas in 1849, giving evidence to the Napier Commission, interpreted the outcome of the affair in this way: "It resulted of course in a victory for the nobles, and the defeat and utter discomfiture of the peasantry".¹⁷¹ The Disruption conflict was seen by some observers in the same terms of a class struggle. Thomas Fraser, Sheriff-substitute of Skye, made a telling remark when appearing before Sir John MacNeill's commission - "The great disparity between the conditions of the large and of the small tenants, has led to something of an antagonistic feeling between those classes, a feeling which the circumstance that the higher class are adherents of the Established Church, while the great bulk of the lower are attached to the Free Church, has not tended to diminish."¹⁷²

So far in this section the more local issues which contributed to the mass exodus from the Establishment in the Western Isles have been under scrutiny. To what extent did the wider ecclesiastical matters which caused divisions at national level influence the thinking of the people of the Hebrides in the years before the Disruption?

It has been suggested that the larger issues scarcely mattered in the Hebridean context. "The internecine conflict between Evangelicals and Moderates which led eventually to the former's secession and to the formation

of the Free Church had nothing to do with Highland affairs and was, on the face of it, of little interest to the mass of the crofting population."¹⁷³

The ministers of the Western Isles were certainly involved in the controversy surrounding such burning questions as the Veto Act, the Stewarton Case, patronage and the respective rights of civil and ecclesiastical courts. Reference has already been made to Presbytery meetings at which Moderates and Evangelicals clashed. In 1840 the Presbytery of Uist put forward a compromise motion, asking that a law be enacted which would secure the rights of patron, presentee and people. Evangelical Norman MacLeod asked that his dissent be recorded.¹⁷⁴ The effect of the Stewarton Case was the ejection of quoad sacra ministers from Church Courts, and when the Moderate members of Skye Presbytery proposed that the two Parliamentary ministers be removed, two of the Evangelicals dissented from this decision.¹⁷⁵

Generally the Synod of Glenelg dealt with fairly routine subjects which produced little friction. But during the Ten Years' Conflict the minutes of the annual meeting occupy greater space, as ministers debated the major issues of the day. In 1840 the Moderates were successful in having a motion passed which deplored the fact that the Veto Act had "occasioned a collision between the authority of the Church and that of the State", and requested the General Assembly to modify it. Roderick MacLeod, John R. Glass and Norman MacLeod made known their opposition to the motion.¹⁷⁶ The following year the Evangelicals proposed a motion which expressed alarm regarding the outcome of the Marnoch Case, when a presentee had been intruded against the will of the people.¹⁷⁷

At Assembly level, also, island ministers voted on the divisive issues of the pre-Disruption period. At the General Assembly of 1842 William Cunningham presented a motion which stated that patronage was a grievance and

the main cause of the present difficulties facing the Church. Among the 216 ministers and elders who voted for Cunningham's motion were Hebridean Evangelicals Norman MacLeod (Trumisgarry), Duncan Matheson (Knock) and Alexander MacLeod (Uig). The Procurator ruled that it was inexpedient to transmit such an overture. The 147 commissioners who supported the Procurator's interpretation included the names of John Bethune (Bernaray), Coll MacDonald (Portree) and John MacKinnon (Strath).¹⁷⁸

While ministers were giving considerable thought to the questions which divided Presbytery, Synod and Assembly, there is evidence, despite the opinion quoted at the beginning of this section, that many of their parishioners were conversant with the main issues involved.

Over a period of years before the Disruption there were instances of parishioners opposing patronage and asserting the right to call their own ministers. Already in this chapter we have alluded to an induction in 1832 when a group of separatists in Harris protested against the practice of a patron presenting a minister to a parish. Some inhabitants in Stornoway petitioned the patron to have Allan MacKenzie, the local schoolmaster, as their minister when the parish was vacant through the tragic drowning of Simon Fraser in 1824.¹⁷⁹ In 1834 Alexander MacLeod of Uig wrote on behalf of his parishioners to J.A. Stewart MacKenzie - then Member of Parliament for Ross-shire - against patronage, calling the system "unscriptural in its principle, Baneful in its consequences, ruinous to the Church, and to immortal souls".¹⁸⁰ In 1837 the people of Snizort forwarded a petition to the Home Office which contained a plea that Roderick MacLeod of Bracadale be presented by the Crown to their parish.¹⁸¹ The following year Roderick MacLeod appealed to the Synod of Glenelg against the settlement of Henry Beatson as minister of Stenscholl, on the grounds that "additional special objections" by certain parishioners had

not been heard by the Presbytery of Skye.¹⁸² In the spring of 1843 MacLeod held meetings in his parish, when "a series of resolutions, expressive of the anti-scriptural nature of the recent encroachment of the Civil Courts, and their tendency to subvert the spiritual liberties of the Christian people, and of attachments to the person and ministry of the Rev. Mr. MacLeod, the excellent and talented minister of the parish, were unanimously adopted". 950 people subscribed their names.¹⁸³

As early as 1825 Roderick MacLeod, minister of Bracadale, had sent a donation of three guineas to the newly formed Society for Improving the System of Church Patronage in Scotland. The purpose of this Society, instituted on December 28, 1824, was the purchase of rights of patronage, transferring them from a patron to the heads of families in connection with the Church. But it was not only ministers who showed an interest in the aims of the Society. In that same year Donald Munro, the blind catechist of Bracadale, contributed five shillings to the funds of the Society.¹⁸⁴ A contributor in 1827 was Hugh MacDonald of Monkstadt.¹⁸⁵ The parishioners of Uig in Lewis, who were always to the fore in supporting Evangelical agencies, collected five pounds.¹⁸⁶

John Morrison's songs reveal that the Harris blacksmith was familiar with the controversial issues which came to prominence during the Ten Years' Conflict. Comparing the propaganda value of Morrison's poems with those of the Apostle of the North, MacInnes writes: "His strictures on the Court of Session and on the folly of the British Parliament in assuming sovereignty over the General Assembly of the Church go beyond anything that MacDonald had done".¹⁸⁷

The Difficulties

The Free Church faced several difficulties and disadvantages in the Western Isles during the early years of its existence.

1. Ministers who seceded from the Establishment in 1843 were called upon to make personal sacrifices. The experience of Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry, the only clergyman in the Presbytery of Uist to enter the Free Church of Scotland, was not unique. When J.S. MacPhail compiled MacLeod's obituary at the time of his death in 1881, he recalled that he had had to endure five flittings before the Free Church manse of North Uist was finally constructed. When the Disruption occurred, Norman MacLeod occupied a small farm on which he had built a six-roomed cottage.¹⁸⁸ He had probably rented the farm and erected the cottage, because the land which went with the Parliamentary Church was comparatively small (under four acres), rather than because he was anticipating a secession, and did not wish his young family to be homeless.

After the Disruption Norman MacLeod received notice to quit from the proprietor, Lord MacDonald. The minister replied: "I trust your Lordship does not really intend to drive me, with my young and helpless family, out of my present dwelling-house." But the land was leased to another tenant, and all MacLeod received in compensation was the sum of forty pounds.¹⁹⁰ The nearest place where the minister of North Uist Free Church could receive accommodation was at Kallin in the island of Grimsay, some twenty miles from Sollas, the district where most of his services were held.¹⁹¹

In the Presbytery of Skye the seceding minister to endure the greatest privation was John Swanson of the Small Isles. His financial difficulties began as soon as he decided to leave the Established Church. Shortly before the Convocation he had stocked his glebe, reputed to be one of the most extensive in the country, with sheep and cattle. He suffered a loss of some fifty per cent when he was obliged to sell his animals, in a poor condition, soon after the separation took place.¹⁹²

MacLeod and Swanson might both have transferred soon after the Disruption to mainland congregations where the hardships facing them in the islands would have been forgotten, but the calls received were not accepted. In 1846 the Gaelic congregation at Saltcoats - where Norman MacLeod had ministered before coming to North Uist - sent a "most cordial and harmonious call" to the minister of Trumisgarry.¹⁹³ The year before, John Swanson, who confessed that he was not of a robust constitution, had received a call from the Free Church congregation at Nigg. The matter was remitted to the General Assembly, where the minister of the Small Isles showed himself willing to accept the Assembly's decision: "For myself, I have no fear, if you think fit to continue me as I am; and I may mention, that since this time last year I feel my health much improved."¹⁹⁴

When Alexander MacLeod of Uig gave his adherence to the resolutions drawn up at the Convocation, he affirmed that he was willing to accept any sacrifices in maintaining those principles.¹⁹⁵ Following the Disruption he had to move from the parish manse of Uig to a temporary dwelling house which he had built at Reef. In 1844 he wrote: "My health was much impaired by the damp and cold of the house".¹⁹⁶ Despite the difficulties, Swanson of the Small Isles could declare, "For my own part, I am quite satisfied that I did right: and now after some months of hardship and suffering, and mayhap, with no very bright prospect as to this world before me, I can still rejoice that I am out."¹⁹⁷

A cynic might argue that the ministers most likely to secede would be those with the least to lose in financial terms. Of the parish ministers throughout Scotland 289 joined the Free Church in 1843, but 681 remained in the Establishment. Of the quoad sacra ministers, who were on a lower stipend, only 71 did not secede when the crisis came, while as many as

162 came out.¹⁹⁸ As Parliamentary ministers Norman MacLeod, John Finlayson and Duncan Matheson received stipends of £120.¹⁹⁹ Pastors of the Parliamentary charges of Berneray, Stenscholl and Hallin-in-Waternish adhered to the Establishment. (Another cynical view would suggest that there was as much pressure on quoad sacra ministers to remain at their post, in the hope that they might be presented to vacant parish churches with more lucrative stipends. In fact, two of the three Parliamentary ministers who did not secede became parish ministers soon after the Disruption.)

Several of the seceding ministers in the Western Isles gave up stipends of a high level. Finlayson of Lochs,²⁰⁰ MacLeod of Uig,²⁰¹ Swanson of the Small Isles,²⁰² and MacLeod of Snizort,²⁰³ all received a stipend of £158 before the Disruption. In the year following the Disruption, the stipend which the Free Church was able to pay was only £105, increasing the following year to £122.²⁰⁴

2. Another obstacle which the Free Church in the Western Isles required to overcome was the lack of preachers to take charge of congregations in which the minister had remained in the Establishment, while the bulk of the people had seceded. Norman MacLeod was occasionally able to conduct services in Berneray, where there were some 700 Free Church people without a minister. He sometimes supplied the island of Benbecula.²⁰⁵ Roderick MacLeod of Snizort used to travel to Portree each Sunday evening after conducting his own service to address the Free Church people there in a thatched house.²⁰⁶ When Thomas Guthrie nominated MacLeod as his successor in the moderatorial chair at the Free Church Assembly in 1863, the retiring Moderator said to the fathers and brethren: "MacAulay sang - how Horatius single-handed, held the bridge of Rome! Roderick MacLeod

single-handed at the Disruption, held Skye for years - sole minister and Bishop of the island, preserving for the Free Church her thousands of noble and pious people by his undaunted bravery, energy and inward zeal."²⁰⁷

In 1847 there was only one Free Church minister in each of the Presbyteries of Skye, Uist and Mull. There were considered to be at that time a hundred vacant stations within the area covered by the Gaelic Committee of the Free Church.²⁰⁸ In that year, when Thomas Chalmers was asked about the provision made by the Free Church for filling vacancies in Gaelic-speaking parishes, he replied: "We have a very fair proportion of Gaelic students; we encourage them as much as we possibly can, and there are several small bursaries that are held by them. In proper time I think we may overcome the deficiency there; but I should say that the deficiency was greater in regard to the Gaelic congregations than in regard to the congregations in general."²⁰⁹ In 1843 there were about 150 stations in the Gaelic Synods where probationers could be employed, but only 31 ministers were available to do supply.²¹⁰

One method employed by the Free Church in supplying vacant congregations was the sending of deputations of ministers from more favoured areas on the mainland. Apart from "flying visits" by these deputations, Harris did not have regular clerical supply until 1847.²¹¹ The schooner "Broadalbane" did sterling work in transporting ministers on deputation work to remoter parts of the Hebrides. For example, between February and April, 1847, MacIntosh MacKay visited Eigg, Muck, Rhum, Canna, Barra, South Uist, Benbecula, Berneray, North Uist, Harris and Lewis.²¹² The ship's log for the period from May to November, 1846, showed the names of some twenty ministers who had gone on deputations for the Free Church, mostly to the Outer Hebrides. Among the preachers carried during these

months were Norman MacLeod, Trumisgarry, Alexander MacLeod, formerly of Uig, then at Rogart, Robert Finlayson of Lochs, and Alexander MacColl, former parish schoolmaster at Uig.²¹³

Where ordained clergymen were not available to conduct services, the Free Church relied to a substantial extent on the assistance of catechists. Alexander Beith outlined the qualifications required by those appointed to this office. "Every catechist", said Beith, "must be a person of approved character, and must undergo an examination; a presbytery of the Church must be satisfied that he is a man worthy of being occupied in such a way".²¹⁴ MacIntosh MacKay explained the duties of a Free Church catechist. He was called upon primarily to instruct the people in the knowledge of the Shorter Catechism, and on week-days to visit the families in the congregation. The catechist usually gathered the families in a particular township in one house, where he would teach the Catechism, read a chapter, giving an exposition of part of it.²¹⁵

On Sunday the catechist held a "reading". (In Gaelic a mission church is often still called "taigh-leughaidh" - reading-house.) At this service the Scriptures were read, and catechists were in the habit of reading a translation of a sermon to the congregation. The practice of a layman reading a translation of a sermon by MacCheyne or Spurgeon, when the resident minister is absent from home, has not yet disappeared in the islands. The Free Church issued a paper of instructions for the guidance of their catechists.²¹⁶ In the island of Harris, because of the difficulty in obtaining ministerial supply, their catechist, John Morrison, the bard, did valuable service in maintaining the means of grace.²¹⁷ In Barra a Gaelic teacher who had been unable to obtain accommodation for a school was employed by the Free Church as catechist.²¹⁸ In Catholic areas it was

discovered that catechists were not as acceptable as ordained clergy. One observer noted in Benbecula that "lay preachers and lay preaching are held here in lower estimation, from the fact that such would be held in scorn by the Roman Catholics, who never fail to make the very utmost of whatever tends to bring Protestantism and Protestants into disrepute".²¹⁹ In Benbecula, however, Roman Catholics displayed a willingness to attend services held by the Free Church on week-days.²²⁰ By 1847 the Free Church had 44 catechists, and was about to add to its list a further 17 who had been dismissed by the SSPCK because they had left the Establishment.²²¹ In 1852 the Free Church had 52, who in most cases received an annual salary of £30. Of those 26 were situated in preaching situations which did not have a minister. SSPCK catechists were granted the same salary as they had been given before the Disruption.²²²

In November 1843, the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis appointed two catechists to areas without a settled ministry. Kenneth Ross was to act as catechist in Barvas and Carloway, and Angus MacIver was appointed to Uig, which was about to lose the services of Alexander MacLeod, who had accepted a call to Lochalsh.²²³ In July 1844, Alexander MacFarquhar is referred to as "catechist and reader at Back". He was requested by the Presbytery to preach every third Sunday at Knock, whose minister, Duncan Matheson, had been called to Gairloch.²²⁴ In 1845 Donald MacFarlane was recommended as catechist for Back.²²⁵

3. When MacIntosh MacKay was interrogated about the attitude of Highland proprietors to the Disruption, he answered: "It is my own impression, and that of the people, that they have made it understood, very generally, that they are opposed to the Free Church."²²⁶ Six sites were applied for on Lord MacDonald's estates, and all had been refused.²²⁷ A relative of

Lord MacDonald had offered to build a church at Portree for adherents of the Free Church, but a site was not granted.²²⁸ MacLeod of MacLeod had been more co-operative, and had permitted the Free Church to erect "a very large church" in Duirinish.²²⁹

In 1844 Sir James Matheson purchased the island of Lewis from Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, who had always patronised Evangelical religion. Although Sir James had declined to allow the Free Church to build churches on an estate of which he was proprietor in Sutherland, he discovered that Mrs. MacKnezie had given permission for churches, manses and schools to be erected throughout Lewis, and undertook to grant all the remaining sites. "When I came into possession of Lewis," he said, "which had a large population, I found that there was no means of giving them either religious or secular instruction, except through the Free Church and the adherents of the Free Church; I therefore made up my mind at once to grant sites, contrary to what I had done in the previous instance under different circumstances."²³⁰ In March 1845, the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis heard the terms of a letter received from Matheson in reply to a communication from the Presbytery requesting sites for schools. The proprietor gave a promise to grant sites provided they were at a reasonable distance from school houses which existed for general use. In August 1846, sites were delineated for Free Church schools at Carloway, Barvas, Ness and Back. With each school the proprietor granted an acre or two of land, with grazing and fuel rights.²³¹

Until sites were finally granted for churches and manses throughout the Western Isles, the Free Church had to be content to meet in inadequate buildings, and in some places the congregation did not even have a roof over their heads. In Eigg John Swanson held services in "a low dingy

cottage of turf and stone", which he had built at his own expense as a Gaelic school before the Disruption.²³² Swanson's manse was the most unusual in Scotland - the yacht "Betsey". When the vessel finally became unseaworthy he accepted a second call from the congregation of Nigg. He wrote: "I have suffered much as a sailor minister, though I fear without much good result to others; cold, wet, and pained, I have often been at sea, often storm-bound; in unfavourable circumstances, and sometimes in manifest danger. But I have often thought as I suffered that I might well endure in the cause of religion what a poor sailor suffers for his daily pay."²³³

Finlayson of Lochs resided for two years in Stornoway following the Disruption. Because he had no church building, services were conducted in the open air.²³⁴ Roderick MacLeod "preached in the open air with the hailstones dancing on his forehead, the people wiping away the snow before they could sit down, and when the shower was past not distinguished from the ground except by their faces."²³⁵

Some proprietors were accused of persecuting certain tenants simply because of their connection with the Free Church of Scotland. In North Uist adherents of the Free Church began to erect a building without permission. 22 of those who had taken part in the project were ordered out of their lands, and nine were duly ejected. Three of those given notice to quit emigrated to America. Norman MacLeod of Trumisgarry asserted that of the three obliged to emigrate, "two of them in particular were persons who gave us the use of their houses for worshipping in on Sabbath days and weekdays, and entertained our Free Church agents when they came that way."²³⁶ Roderick MacLeod insinuated that some crofters in Skye had been evicted because of their support for the Free Church. "I am aware that industrious tenants of irreproachable character, who had bestowed much labour on their crofts, have been dispossessed of their lands for causes unconnected

with their relations as tenants to the landlord, and that such proceedings have produced feelings of great dissatisfaction on the part of the people generally."²³⁷

Some Results

As a consequence of the stirring events of 1843, features which had been noticeable as trends in the pre-Disruption Hebridean Church now took shape as the perennial characteristics of the Free Church in the Western Isles. Certain aspects of Church life which became the norm after the Disruption are to be seen, to a greater or lesser degree, in all the Presbyterian denominations in the Hebrides even in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

1. As a result of the revival movements discussed in Chapter Five, the sacraments were viewed with greater seriousness by islanders. Instead of indiscriminate Communion as had been the case in some parishes, there was a complete swing of the pendulum, and the vast majority of regular worshippers showed a marked reluctance to become communicant members of the Church. With the coming of the Disruption, this attitude towards Church ordinances tended to harden.

Statistics are available for most of the Free Church congregations in Lewis three years after the Disruption, revealing that at that stage in the new denomination's history, only a tiny minority were communicants. In 1846 the Free Church congregation in Stornoway numbered 1077, but only 17 had become communicant members. In Uig there were 45 communicants out of a total congregation of 800; in Harvas the proportion was 15 out of 600; in Knock 34 out of 830, and in Carlisle, which had been erected into a ministerial charge since the Disruption, there were 24 members in full communion with the Church in a congregation numbering 600.²³⁸ Thus, in the five Free Church parishes specified above, a mere three per cent. of the congregation were communicant members. It should be noted that

the new Church was still in process of being organised in Lewis, and some of the congregations were still without a settled ministry. Once a resident minister was active in the parish, there would be a greater likelihood of the number of communicants increasing.

In the Western Isles today many fine people who support the Church in several ways never come forward to partake of the Sacrament. "In the Free and Free Presbyterian Churches," writes Hight, "There are many people of Christian conviction who attend services regularly, are active in the life of their congregation, and contribute generously to the funds of their Church, but who, usually because they do not feel themselves yet 'ready' or 'good enough' to make formal profession of faith and take part in communion, stand aside from full membership - an attitude of mind, more common among church-going men and women in the Highlands and Islands than elsewhere in the country."²³⁹ From the estimates given for the purposes of Hight's survey, published in 1960, only 16 per cent of those connected with the Free Presbyterian Church, which is at its strongest in the Highlands and Islands, were reckoned to be communicants.²⁴⁰ In the other Presbyterian denominations the ratio of members to adherents is not so low.

At the end of 1975 about 26 per cent of those claiming connection with the present Free Church in Lewis had made a public confession of their faith by partaking of Communion. In 1965 the proportion was 21.5 per cent, which would suggest that there may be a slight change of attitude among islanders towards becoming members of the Church.²⁴¹ Even in Church of Scotland congregations in the islands, about two-thirds of those who support the Church by attending services and contributing to funds do not become communicant members. In the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Uist in 1975 approximately 34 per cent of those associated with the Church of Scotland were communicants,²⁴² while in the Presbytery of Lewis the figure

is 31 per cent.²¹³ While detailed statistics are not obtainable for the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Skye, estimates provided give the impression that the situation differs little from that which obtains in congregations in the Outer Hebrides.²¹⁴

It is interesting that of the nine Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland which showed an increase in communicant membership during 1975, eight were within the Highland area, four of them in the Synod of Ross, Sutherland and Caithness, which includes part of the territory which came within the old Synod of Glenalg. The situation in Skye remained static, but both the Presbyteries of Uist and Lewis increased in membership.²¹⁵

2. Before the Disruption, Evangelical ministers, like the three MacLeods - in Snizort, Uig and Trunisgaray - tended to exercise a stricter Church discipline than their more easy-going Moderate brethren in the Presbyteries of Skye, Lewis and Uist. When the Free Church came into existence it followed in general terms the practice of the Evangelicals in disciplinary matters. In all the Presbyterian Churches in the Hebrides discipline is more strictly administered than in the South.

After the formation of the Free Church, members, or even adherents, who were found guilty of sexual misconduct or other misdemeanours were punished by being deprived of Church privileges. In 1844 an elder in the parish of Knock who had committed adultery was deposed from office and "suspended from sealing ordinances sine die." The Free Church Presbytery of Lewis decreed that he be publicly rebuked before the congregation.²¹⁶ Public reproof in the face of the congregation is still practised in the Free Church, although the rebuke is now delivered in many cases before the Kirk Session.²¹⁷

Hebridean revivals led to the Sabbath being observed with greater meticulousness in the Highlands and Islands. The post-Disruption Church laid emphasis on the importance of Sabbath observance. In November 1844, the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis received a petition from a number of their people in Stornoway, protesting against desecration of the Lord's Day by those who called for letters at the Post Office. The petitioners asked that any Church members who disregarded the sanctity of the Sabbath in this way should be refused sealing ordinances.²⁴⁶ Today respect for the Fourth Commandment is not confined to the smaller Presbyterian denominations. The Church of Scotland in the Western Isles takes a stand against activities which would destroy the peace of the Hebridean Sabbath, and ministers, elders and ordinary members support the work of the Lord's Day Observance Society.

3. Evangelicals in the Hebrides have been accused of showing an inclination to draw a rigid dividing line between the sacred and the secular. While this tendency was one of the outcomes of the revival movement, it was at the Disruption that this separation of the spiritual from the temporal became more pronounced.

Two Established Church observers of the Disruption scene noted Evangelical attitudes to some manifestations of Gaelic culture. A.J. MacDonald, in his unpublished history of North Uist, states: "No good man would sing a Gaelic song on pain of losing his soul eternally. As for the bagpipe, the devil was in it."²⁴⁹ James Cameron Lees, who spent part of his youth in Lewis, makes a similar point: "Singing a song and playing the pipes or fiddle were classed with heinous sins and punished by exclusion from religious ordinances."²⁵⁰ There are extremes within the Celtic character, and being over-involved with the things of the present world

would be looked upon as compromise.

In the century since the Disruption there has not been any dramatic change in outlook among most people in the Western Isles. A number of Evangelical laymen and ministers do participate in local government. But few members of the Church are enthusiastic supporters of bodies like *Amh Communn Gaidhealach*, primarily because that organisation, whose aim is the preservation of Gaelic language and culture, includes the *céilidh* (an informal concert) and the *Mòd* (an annual music festival) among its activities. Most church people do not take part in the work of community associations, although there are exceptions. By maintaining Gaelic services and prayer meetings throughout the islands, the Presbyterian Churches do more to uphold the language than is sometimes realised. If the employment of Gaelic as a medium of instruction passes into desuetude within the Church, then the language has little hope of survival in other spheres.

4. Following the revivals of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, more young men of crofting stock began to offer themselves as candidates for the ministry. After the Disruption the number of ministers who were natives of the Western Isles increased significantly.

In November 1850, a Ladies' Association was founded in Edinburgh, and shortly afterwards a similar body was formed in Glasgow.²⁵¹ The full title of the Society gives an indication of its *raison d'être*: "The Ladies' Association for the Religious Improvement of the Remote Highlands and Islands in connection with the Free Church of Scotland". The first stated aim of the Ladies' Association was an important one - "The giving of assistance to promising young men in prosecuting their studies for the ministry."²⁵²

The work of the Ladies' Association began with the opening of five schools in Harris in 1851. By 1862 some 87 students who had taught at schools operated by the Edinburgh Ladies' Association had been licensed and ordained as ministers of the Free Church. The Glasgow Association, whose activities were centred on areas where Catholics were in the majority, had by 1862 assisted 16 students to enter the ministry.²⁵³ MacIntosh Mackay was responsible for the plan adopted by the Associations whereby students attended college during the winter months and taught in schools from April until autumn.²⁵⁴

The assistance and encouragement given by the Free Church after the Disruption acted as a stimulus to many young islanders to undertake studies for the ministry. No longer were candidates for the ministry to be drawn almost entirely from the banks of those whose parents - tacksmen, teachers or parish ministers - were able to pay for their education. The contribution that the Western Isles, and in particular the island of Lewis, have made to the ministry is reflected in the composition of the three island Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland in September 1976. In the Presbytery of Skye four of the ministers belong to Lewis, two are natives of Skye, and the remaining three are from the mainland of Scotland. In Uist Presbytery five of the ministers were born in Lewis, two are from Harris, two from North Uist, and one from the mainland. In the Presbytery of Lewis, no less than nine ministers are natives of Lewis, two belong to Harris, one is from North Uist, and the other ministerial member of Presbytery, who holds the only non-Gaelic charge in the island, is a Lowland Scot.²⁵⁵ In September 1976, 38 of the 128 ministers in the Free Church of Scotland were born in the Presbytery of Lewis - a proportion of almost 30 per cent.²⁵⁶

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Finlay Munro, the Highland evangelist of the early nineteenth century, provided an estimate of the spiritual temperature of the Hebridean islands in which he had laboured. "Uibhist fhuar, na Hearadh nas fhearr, ach Leòdhas na ghràidh air an do dh'èirich a' ghrian."²⁵⁷ (Uist is cold, Harris better, but my beloved Lewis - on it the sun rose.) It was a shrewd assessment. Uist was the area in which Evangelicalism made least spectacular progress, although the opinion given by one Free Church minister towards the end of the nineteenth century - that "the backbone of Moderatism was never broken in North Uist"²⁵⁸ - is an exaggeration. The Uistman is more reserved than the inhabitants of other islands, and Mackury's view is probably an accurate appraisal: "The Uist people have rejected extremism in religion".²⁵⁹ In Harris Evangelical religion found a more conducive climate, and in Skye, the island in which Evangelicalism made its earliest gains, the northern parishes gave a cordial reception to the new faith, while a different atmosphere prevailed in the south. But it was in the Presbytery of Lewis that Evangelicalism received the warmest response, and made the most lasting impression. When the Evangelical pioneer, Alexander MacLeod of Uig, accepted a call to a mainland parish in 1844, he drew satisfaction from the thought that Evangelicalism was now firmly established in Lewis. He wrote to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, who had done so much to mould the religious life of the island: "The population have got a long time, say 20 years of Gospel privileges, which have been eminently blessed to hundreds amongst them."²⁶⁰ As a result of the changes which took place during those decades, "the last-won North-West is one of the few remaining strongholds of fundamentalist Calvinism in Europe."²⁶¹

CHAPTER SIX. NOTES AND REFERENCES

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17. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
19. *Ibid.*
20. See p.
21. F.C., *Home and Foreign Missionary Record*, Feb. 1851, p. 224.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
23. *Church Sites*, III, p. 30.
24. F.C., *General Assembly Proceedings*, 1849, p. 82.
25. *Report on Refusal of Sites*, p. 19.
26. *Church Sites*, III, p. 17.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

28. Ibid., p. 23.
29. F.C., Home and Foreign Missionary Record, April 1849, p. 58.
30. Church Sites, III, p. 26. In 1851, Finlay MacRae claimed that as many as 500 attended the parish church of North Uist, although it is significant that on the Sunday before he wrote giving this information, only 21 people had come to church, bad weather being blamed for the poor attendance. 20-40 attended the Parliamentary Church at Trumisgarry at that time. (J.H. Dawson, An Abridged Statistical History of Scotland, p. 567.)
31. Ibid., p. 11.
32. F.C., op. cit., May 1847, p. 91.
33. Ibid., April 1849, p. 59.
34. FES, VII, p. 196.
35. F.C., op. cit., p. 59.
36. C. of S. Lewis Presbytery Minutes, July 11, 1843. CH2/473/2. Alexander MacLeod's letter of adherence had been delayed because he lived some distance from the nearest Post Office. (FC Lewis Presbytery Minute Book, June 23, 1843.)
37. Chalmers Collection. (New College Library.)
38. C. of S. Lewis Presbytery Minutes, op. cit.
39. C. of S. Skye Presbytery Minutes, June 22, 1843. CH2/330/4.
40. C. of S. Uist Presbytery Minutes, June 28, 1843. CH2/361/2.
41. J. MacCosh, op. cit., p. 6.
42. Ibid., p. 101.
43. Ibid., p. 102.
44. Chalmers Collection.
45. Skye Presbytery Minutes, Feb. 9, 1842. CH2/330/4.
46. Ibid., April 4, 1843.
47. Glenelg Synod Minutes, July 28, 1842. CH2/568/4.
48. R. MacCowan, The Men of Skye, p. 142.
49. Skye Presbytery Minutes, Dec. 5, 1843.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid., April 9, 1844.

52. Ibid., April 24, 1844.
53. J. MacCosh, op. cit., p. 102.
54. W. MacKenzie, Skye: Iochdar-Trotternish and District, p. 142.
55. Ibid., pp. 136-137.
56. E. MacIver, Memoirs of a Highland Gentleman, p. 211.
57. FES, IV, p. 114.
58. J. MacCosh, op. cit., p. 114.
59. Uist Presbytery Minutes, June 28, 1843. CH2/361/2.
60. Ibid., Nov. 9, 1843.
61. J. MacCosh, op. cit., p. 114.
62. FES, IV, p. 79.
63. J. MacCosh, op. cit., p. 114.
64. T. Brown, Annals of the Disruption, p. 695.
65. J.B. MacKenzie, Episode in the Life of the Rev. Neil MacKenzie, p. 38.
66. SSPCK, Minutes of General Meeting, June 4, 1844. GD95/1/9.
67. F.C., Monthly Record, Dec. 1864, p. 698.
68. F.C., Home and Foreign Missionary Record, April, 1847, p. 68.
69. Lewis Presbytery Minutes, Sept. 14, 1843. CH2/473/2.
70. Committee for Increasing the Means of Education, Annual Report, 1844. CH1/2/193.
71. Skye Presbytery Minutes, July 12, 1843. CH2/330/4.
72. NSA, Inverness-shire, pp. 294-295.
73. Skye Presbytery Minutes, April 1, 1845.
74. Uist Presbytery Minutes, April 21, 1846. CH2/361/2.
75. SSPCK, op. cit., Oct. 5, 1843.
76. Ibid., May 7, 1846.
77. Ibid., June 15, 1846.
78. Ibid., June 19, 1846.
79. Ibid., March 4, 1845.

80. F.C., Home and Foreign Missionary Record, July 1847, p. 178.
81. F.C., Lewis Presbytery Minutes, Aug. 28, 1849.
82. T. Brown, op. cit., p. 811.
83. N. MacLean, op. cit., p. 15.
84. E. MacIver, op. cit., p. 168.
85. N.C. MacFarlane, Life of Rev. Donald John Martin, p. 13.
86. Church Sites, II, p. 103.
87. Ibid., p. 104.
88. Ibid., p. 103.
89. Ibid., p. 104.
90. Ibid., p. 104.
91. D. Morrison, The Morrison Manuscript, pp. 373-374.
92. N.C. MacFarlane, The Men of the Lews, pp. 33-34. Although MacFarlane mentions only four protesters, there were actually five men involved in the disturbance - Colin Campbell, John Campbell, Alexander MacLean, Murdoch MacLean and Ewen MacAulay. In their defence it was stated that they regarded Simpson's method of celebrating the Sacrament as "antisciptural and uncanonical". Evidently the minister did not fence the Table, but issued "a general, indiscriminate, unqualified invitation to persons of every description to take their seats as Communicants at the Lord's Table". (SP, Defence for Colin Campbell and others, June 15, 1824. GD46/17/65.)
93. Uist Presbytery Minutes, May 3, 1832. CH2361/2.
94. F.C. Home and Missionary Record, March 1851, p. 266.
95. D.J. Martin, Teagasg nan Cosamhalachdan, pp. 20-21.
96. General Assembly Papers, 1842. CH1/2/186. The Presbytery accused the Berneray seceders of having abandoned not only the services of Bethune (who arrived in 1829) but even of his predecessors. This shows that dissent was no new occurrence.
97. Church Sites, II, p. 104.
98. F.C. op. cit., July 1847, p. 180.
99. Church Sites, III, p. 19.
100. Uist Presbytery Minutes, March 27, 1839. CH2/361/2.
101. Ibid., Sept. 7, 1829.
102. Church Sites, III, p. 92.

103. Christian Instructor, May 1817, p. 286.
104. Lay Member, An Account of the Present State of Religion Throughout the Highlands and Islands, p. 65.
105. Church Sites, II, p. 104.
106. Ibid., p. 104.
107. General Assembly Papers, op. cit.,
108. NSA, Ross and Cromarty, p. 139.
109. General Assembly Papers, op. cit.,
110. Lay Member, op. cit., p. 65.
111. D. MacFarlane, Memoir and Remains of Rev. Donald MacDonald, Shialdaig, p. 4.
112. A. Beith, Memories of Disruption Times, p. 238.
113. Lewis Presbytery Minutes, March 26, 1844. CH2/473/2.
114. N.C. MacFarlane, The Men of the Lews, p. 59.
115. F.C., Lewis Presbytery Minutes, Oct. 4, 1843.
116. R. MacCowan, op. cit., pp. 80-81.
117. Ibid., p. 81.
118. Ibid., p. 36.
119. D. J. MacCuish, Eachdraidh air Aonghas MacCuis, p. 14.
120. A.J. MacDonald, North Uist - A Sketch of its History, II, p. 53.
121. F.C., Home and Foreign Missionary Record, p. 92.
122. A.J. MacDonald, op. cit., I, p. 207.
123. J. Matheson, Oran mu'n Eaglais, p. 5.
124. J. Morrison, Dain Iain Ghobha, II, pp. 129-170.
125. A.R. Forbes, Gaelic Names of Beasts, etc., p. 304.
126. E. MacIver, op. cit., pp. 336-337. In the months leading up to the Disruption the Evangelical party also produced Gaelic tracts in order to circulate "sound knowledge on the Church question among the Highlanders." (The Witness, Dec. 21, 1842.) The resolutions accepted at the Convocation were printed in Gaelic under the title "Earsil - mhineachaidh do shluagh na h-Alba."
127. Glenelg Synod Minutes, July 26, 1843. CH2/568/4.

128. Church Sites, III, p. 114.
129. Ibid., p. 25.
130. C. of S., Report of the Uist Commission, p. 10.
131. Church Sites, op. cit., p. 12. A missionary said to one of the parish ministers of Strath: "The blood rushes to my face when I remember expressions I used in public in those fanatical days." (D.M. Lamont, Strath: In the Isle of Skye, pp. 94-95.)
132. Lady MacCaskill, Twelve Days in Skye, p. 22.
133. Report by Commissioners, Highlands and Islands, Appendix, p. 30.
134. W. Taylor, Memorials of the Life and Ministry of Charles Calder MacIntosh p. 2.
135. Church Sites, III, p. 75.
136. Ibid., p. 18.
137. N.C. MacFarlane, Apostles of the North, p. 67.
138. Ibid., p. 92.
139. Ibid., p. 104.
140. R. Buchanan, The Ten Years Conflict, p. 537.
141. N. MacLean, op. cit., p. 65.
142. S. MacLean, 'The Poetry of the Clearances', TGSI, XXXVIII, p. 296.
143. NSA, Inverness-shire, p. 181.
144. The Witness, July 28, 1849.
145. E. MacRury, A Hebridean Parish: North Uist, p. 9.
146. The Witness, op. cit.
147. Ibid., Sept. 19, 1849.
148. J. Mitchell, Reminiscences of My Life in the Highlands, II, p. 112.
149. Ibid., p. 113.
150. The Witness, Aug. 11, 1849.
151. A.J. MacDonald, op. cit., II, p. 28.
152. The Witness, op. cit.
153. J. Prebble, The Highland Clearances, p. 257.
154. Church Sites, III, p. 22.

155. The Celtic Magazine, VIII, p. 332.
156. The Witness, Aug. 18, 1849.
157. Ibid.
158. Ibid.
159. E. Mac Rury, op. cit., p. 10.
160. NSA, Inverness-shire, p. 296.
161. Ibid., p. 297.
162. Ibid., p. 299.
163. Lady MacCaskill, op. cit., p. 22.
164. Report by Commissioners, Highlands and Islands, Appendix, p. 25.
165. J. Hunter, 'The Emergence of the Crofting Community: The Religious Contribution 1798-1843', Scottish Studies, XVIII, p. 99. Free Church minister Donald MacRae, brother of the parish minister of North Uist expressed his opinion to clearances: "The system of expatriation now going on is one deeply to be deplored by every lover of his country and of his species, both on economic and religious grounds." (FC, Home and Foreign Missionary Record, March 1851, p. 267.)
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166. Report by Commissioners, op. cit., p. 42.
167. A.L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, The Church in Victorian Scotland, pp. 6-7.
168. Ibid., p. 7.
169. R. Somers, Letters from the Highlands, p. 66.
170. J. Mitchell, op. cit., I, p. 240.
171. Evidence taken by the Royal Commission, p. 797.
172. Sir John MacNeill, Report on the State of the Highlands and Islands, p. 35.
173. J. Hunter, op. cit., p. 103.
174. Uist Presbytery Minutes, March 25, 1840. CH2/568/4.
175. Skye Presbytery Minutes, April 4, 1843. CH2/330/4.
176. Glenelg Synod Minutes, April 15, 1840. CH2/568/4.
177. Ibid., April 22, 1841.
178. C. of S. General Assembly Proceedings, 1842, p. 309.
179. SP, Petition from Inhabitants of Stornoway for appointment of Allan MacKenzie as Minister. GD46/17/68. When the Parliamentary Church was built at Knock, some tenants petitioned to have MacKenzie as minister, while another group expressed opposition to the schoolmaster, stating that they desired "a man who would be faithfull (sic) for our souls". (GD46/12/36.)

180. Ibid. Letter from Rev. Alexander MacLeod to J.A. Stewart MacKenzie, March 14, 1834. GD46/12/63.
181. M. MacKay, Sermon Preached in the Free Church, Snizort, p. 20.
182. Glenelg Synod Minutes, 1838. CH2/568/4.
183. The Witness, Feb. 25, 1843. The Protestant inhabitants of the Small Isles were prepared for the implications of secession from the Establishment. In March 1843, they wrote to the proprietor asking if they would be granted a site for a church building if they decided to leave the Church of Scotland. (Church Sites, III, p. 12.)
184. Account of Proceedings, Society for Improving Patronage, 1st Annual Meeting, p. 5.
185. Ibid. 3rd Annual Meeting, p. 23.
186. Ibid., p. 24.
187. J. MacInnes, 'Gaelic Spiritual Verse', TGSI, XLVI, p. 346.
188. F.C. Monthly Record, Aug 1881, p. 201.
189. Commissioners for Building Churches, 6th Report, p. 20.
190. T. Brown, p. 419.
191. F.C., Home and Foreign Missionary Record, April 1849, p. 58.
192. H. Miller, The Cruise of the Betsey, pp. 47-48.
193. F.C., General Assembly Proceedings, 1846.
194. Ibid., Inverness, 1845. p. 57.
195. Chalmers Collection.
196. SP, Letter from Rev. Alexander MacLeod to Mrs. Stewart MacKenzie, March 19, 1844. GD46/12/48.
197. J. Swanson, A Leisure Hour in the Floating Manse.
198. J. Rankin, A Handbook of the Church of Scotland, p. 31.
199. A.J.H. Gibson, Stipend in the Church of Scotland, p. 31.
200. S.A. Lewis, A Typographical Dictionary of Scotland, II, p. 199.
201. Ibid., p. 573.
202. Ibid., p. 471.
203. Ibid., p. 472.
204. T. Brown, op. cit., p. 297.

205. F.C., Home and Foreign Missionary Record, April 1849, p. 58.
206. D. MacKinnon, Annals of a Skye Parish, p. 28.
207. D. Gillies, The Life and Work of the Very Rev. Roderick MacLeod, p. 100.
208. F.C., op. cit., July 1847, p. 178.
209. Church Sites, III, p. 129.
210. F.C., General Assembly Proceedings, Oct. 1843, p. 159.
211. F.C., Home and Foreign Missionary Record, May 1847, p. 92.
212. Ibid., July 1847, p. 179.
213. Ibid., Dec. 1846, p. 552.
214. Church Sites, III, pp. 91-92.
215. Ibid., II, p. 110.
216. Ibid., p. 110.
217. F.C., Home and Foreign Missionary Record, May 1847, p. 92.
218. Ibid., P. 91.
219. Ibid., p. 92.
220. Ibid., Sept. 1851, p. 46.
221. Ibid., July 1847, p. 178.
222. Ibid., Sept. 1851, p. 385.
223. F.C., Lewis Presbytery Minutes, Nov. 29, 1843.
224. Ibid., July 3, 1844.
225. Ibid., March 26, 1855.
226. Church Sites, II, p. 117.
227. F.C., Correspondence relative to Refusal of Sites, p. 5.
228. Ibid., p. 5.
229. Church Sites, III, p. 74.
230. Ibid., II, p. 32.
231. F.C. Lewis Presbytery Minutes, March 27, 1845; Aug. 5, 1846.
232. H. Miller, op. cit., p. 90.
233. J. Greig, Disruption Worthies of the Highlands, p. 136.

234. N.C. MacFarlane, *Apostles of the North*, p. 68.
235. Report by Commissioners into Condition of Crofters, Appendix, p. 1.
236. Church Sites, III, p. 24.
237. Sir J. MacNeill, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
238. F.C., Lewis Presbytery Minutes, March 26, 1846.
239. J. Highet, *The Scottish Churches*, pp. 209-210.
240. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
241. Information from Rev. Donald Gillies, Presbytery Clerk.
242. Information from Rev. Roderick M. MacKinnon, Presbytery Clerk.
243. Information from Rev. Kenneth MacLeod, Presbytery Clerk.
244. Information from Rev. J. Callan Wilson, Presbytery Clerk.
245. C. of S. Committee on General Administration, 1975 Report, p. 23.
246. F.C., Lewis Presbytery Minutes, Feb. 29, 1844.
247. Information from Rev. Donald Gillies.
248. F.C., *op. cit.*, Nov. 27, 1844.
249. A.J. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, II, p. 56.
250. N. MacLean, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
251. T. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 685.
252. F.C. Home and Foreign Missionary Record, April 1851, p. 303.
253. T. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 688.
254. *Ibid.*, p. 684.
255. C. of S. Year-Book 1976, pp. 255-259.
256. Information from Rev. Donald Gillies.
257. Traditional saying received from Rev. William Matheson.
258. E. MacRury, p. 48.
259. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
260. SP, Letter from Rev. Alexander MacLeod to Mrs. MacKenzie of Seaforth, March 19, 1844. GD46/12/48.
261. J.L. Campbell, *Gaelic in Scottish Education and Life*, p. 61.

"Fundamentalist Calvinism" is too narrow a term to cover the religion of the Presbyterian islands, as there are variations in doctrines, preaching and practice between the Church of Scotland on the one hand, and the Free Presbyterian Church on the other - despite wide areas of agreement. "Evangelicalism" would be a more satisfactory title.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century the Church in the Western Isles will probably come under greater pressure than at any time since Evangelicalism became established in the three island presbyteries. While oil-related developments have made little direct impact on the islands, compared with communities on the Highland mainland, in the coming decades attention is bound to focus on the seas to the west of the Hebrides. The Evangelical Church will be faced with the challenge of relating the message of the Gospel to a new and changing situation. There is concern about the out-reach of the Church to its young people, and another problem will be to make the Gospel meaningful to a new generation of islanders who are being affected by the standards, customs and culture of the outside world through the mass media.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Apart from traditional verses and anecdotes, little material which has a bearing on the ecclesiastical history of the Western Isles from 1800 to 1850 exists in the Hebrides. Most of the written sources are to be found in Edinburgh. Kirk Session minutes for the period are difficult to trace, and there are indications that some ministers in island parishes in the early nineteenth century neglected to preserve records of any kind. When Robert Finlayson became minister of Lochs in 1831, he discovered that no records had been kept during the previous incumbency.

Presbytery and Synod minutes contain useful information, particularly during the Ten Years' Conflict. General Assembly papers are valuable for details of cases involving Hebridean ministers which were heard before the Assembly. Those of special interest are the cases of MacLean (Small Isles), MacLeod (Bracadale), MacRae (North Uist) and Bethune (Bernera).

The Seaforth Papers contain many letters and documents dealing with Church affairs in the island of Lewis. Because of the commitment of the MacKenzie family to Evangelical religion, these papers have an important place in any study of the nineteenth century Hebridean Church.

The annual reports published by the societies which operated in the Western Isles have also proved of value. For some bodies only a few reports are available, but it is fortunate that the annual reports of the Edinburgh Gaelic School Society exist for the period 1811-1850, in New College Library and in the National Library of Scotland.

Travellers to the Western Isles - for example, Hogg, Hall, Teignmouth and Mitchell - have left a record of their impressions of island life. During their visits to the Hebrides they met some of the ministers who are mentioned in the thesis.

Sermons by Evangelical ministers have been collected, and are useful not only as guides to the style and content of their preaching, but the books published in Gaelic and English invariably include a brief memoir. The biographical material often contains snippets of illuminating information.

I should like to thank Rev. William Matheson, Celtic Department, Edinburgh University, for drawing my attention to relevant published and unpublished material which would otherwise have been overlooked.

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