

**ROBERT BRUCE ON THE NATURE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER, AND
PREPARATION FOR ITS OBSERVANCE**

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Introduction

On 21 June 1630 revival fell upon the Kirk of Shotts in Lanarkshire, Scotland. It was during a communion season, a “holy fair”, when by all accounts the Spirit of God descended in power bringing as many as five-hundred souls to saving grace.¹ Communion seasons among Scottish Presbyterians were earnest events of intense piety and spiritual fervor. They often lasted from several days to a week with various ministers and dignitaries offering exhortations and prayers in preparation for the culminating event of the Lord’s Supper. Such leading lights of the Scottish Second Reformation as David Dickson (1583-1663), Robert Blair (1593-1666), and John Livingstone (1603-1672) were among the notables present at Shotts. Perhaps the most admired “Worthy” at hand was a seventy-five year old minister, the highly esteemed Robert Bruce. He was formerly of St. Giles Church in Edinburgh, but for the past thirty years had served in exile for conscience sake. According to biographer D. C. MacNicol, “Master Robert preached with all his wonted majesty and authority, and administered the sacrament.”² Leigh Eric Schmidt in his *Holy Fairs*, a study of the impact of Scottish communions on the eighteenth-century Revival period in America, says that Bruce’s “venerable presence at Shotts contributed substantially to that meeting’s success.”³

The famous communion revival at Shotts serves not only to highlight the stature of one of Scotland’s greatest Reformation ministers, but also to illustrate his enduring legacy. It is ironic that Robert Bruce’s participation in this last memorable moment in his

¹ John Gillies, *Historical Collection of Accounts of Revival* (1754; repr., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 198.

² D. C. MacNicol, *Robert Bruce: Minister in the Kirk of Edinburgh* (1907; repr., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 181.

³ Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communions and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 22.

ministerial career concerns an event that was so dear to his heart. During his very early and youthful days at St. Giles, Bruce preached five sermons on the Lord's Supper. Less than a year later they were published with his reluctant approval.⁴ The sermons have since achieved status as a theological and devotional classic of Scottish literature. First published in the Scots dialect in 1590, the sermons were later produced in English in 1614 under the title by which they are best known today, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper*. Three years later the work was reissued with eleven other sermons preached by Bruce at St. Giles as *The Way of True Peace and Rest* (1617). In 1843, William Cunningham (1805-1861) edited the Scots text of the sixteen sermons and published them along with a life of Robert Bruce by Robert Wodrow (1832-1906).⁵ The five sermons on the Lord's Supper have since reappeared in English first in 1901 under the editorial work of John Laidlaw,⁶ and again in 1958 as *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper* edited by Thomas F. Torrance. Christian Focus Publications issued a second edition of Torrance's work in 2005.

The Mystery of the Lord's Supper, along with the other accompanying sermons, is Bruce's only literary composition. Yet the work on the sacrament has received the highest of recognition. Thomas F. Torrance calls Bruce's sermons, "[T]he very marrow of our sacramental tradition in the Church of Scotland." He continues:

Ever since they were first delivered in the Great Kirk of St. Giles, Edinburgh, in February and March, 1589, their doctrine has passed into the soul of the Kirk, building up its faith

⁴ Bruce's reluctance is intimated in his dedicatory epistle to King James VI which introduces the first edition of his published sermons.

⁵ William Cunningham, ed., *Sermons by the Rev. Robert Bruce, Minister of Edinburgh with Collections for His Life by the Rev. Robert Wodrow* (Edinburgh: The Wodrow Society, 1843). It should be noted that in Cunningham's edition the *Sermons* and Wodrow's *Life of Bruce* each have their separate pagination.

⁶ John Laidlaw, ed., *Robert Bruce's Sermons on the Sacraments: Done into English with a Biographical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1901).

and informing its worship at the Table of the Lord, in spite of the fact that comparatively few editions of the Sermons have actually been published for three hundred years.⁷

The purpose of this essay is to assess Robert Bruce's classic statement on the nature of the Lord's Supper and the preparation for its observance. To this end a sketch of Bruce's life will be presented along with an exploration of the historical context of his sacramental sermons as a product of the Scottish Reformation period. Bruce's view of the Lord's Supper will be assessed with regard to four points: 1) the sacrament as a sign and seal; 2) the presence of Christ in the sacrament; 3) the significance of the sacramental actions; and, 4) the role accorded to conscience and self-examination in coming to the Lord's Table. Finally, the enduring significance of the sacramental sermons will be presented.

The Life of Robert Bruce

Robert Bruce was born to Scottish nobility at the Airth Castle in Stirlingshire during the year 1554. His father, Sir Alexander Bruce, was Laird of Airth and descendent of Robert the Bruce (1274-1329), king of Scotland. Alexander married Janet Livingston, the great-granddaughter of King James I (1394-1437), who bore him five sons and two daughters. Robert, the second son, became heir of the Bruce estate when his elder brother, William, died.

The Bruces of Airth were hostile toward the emerging Protestant faith and sought educational nurturing for Robert in institutions of strong Romanist persuasion. St. Salvator's College of St. Andrews University was such an institution from which Robert graduated with his Bachelors in 1571 and Masters of Arts in 1572. Robert's father,

⁷ Cited in the Preface to: Robert Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper: Sermons on the Sacraments preached in the Kirk of Edinburgh by Robert Bruce in A.D. 1589*, ed. and trans. Thomas F. Torrance (London: James Clarke and Co. Limited, 1958), 7.

envisioning the legal profession for him leading to a life of prowess and privilege, sent him to study abroad in France and eventually at the University of Louvain in Belgium. Upon his return to Scotland, Robert was granted the family estate at Kinnaird and was well positioned by his father for an illustrious career in the halls of power and influence.

On the night of 31 August 1581 Robert Bruce's life changed dramatically. Bruce's journey to the Reformed faith is not entirely clear.⁸ What is clear, however, is that a spiritual struggle came to a solitary climax for the twenty-seven year old lawyer in the "new loft chamber" of Airth Castle. Bruce describes it thusly:

At last it pleased God...to cit me inwardly, judicially in my conscience, and to present all my sins before me in such sort that He omitted not a circumstance, but made my conscience to see time, place, persons as vividly as in the hour I did them. He made the devil to accuse me so audibly that I heard his voice as vividly as ever I heard anything, not being asleep but awake. And so far as he spake true, my conscience bare him record, and testified against me very clearly...Always so far as he spoke true, I confessed, restored God to His glory, and craved God's mercy for the merits of Christ: yea, appealed sore to His mercy, purchased to me by the blood, death, and passion of Christ.⁹

For MacNicol this was the moment of Bruce's conversion.¹⁰ Ian H. Murray, student of the Scottish Reformation, is not so sure, arguing that it is more likely the resolution of his call to the ministry.¹¹ Be that as it may, MacNicol's comment is fitting: "There are crises in life wherein every lesser obligation, however sacred, is swallowed up in this one supreme summons of Christ, 'Follow Me.' This crisis Master Robert recognized that he had to meet."¹²

⁸ Diarist James Melville recorded that John Knox spent the final year of his life at St. Andrews in Edinburgh (July 1571 to August 1572). He reportedly preached on a weekly basis and taught the Book of Daniel. MacNicol suggests that Bruce, by then in his Master's studies, would have likely come under Knox's influence: "Bruce would of course be drawn inevitably to hear John Knox." MacNicol, 19-20.

⁹ Cited in MacNicol, 25.

¹⁰ MacNicol, 18, 28; Robert Wodrow likewise regards this as Bruce's conversion. He says, "[T]he Lord took an effectual way of dealing with his conscience, in the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, shed down abundantly upon his soul." See Robert Wodrow, *Collections as to the Life of Mr. Robert Bruce, Minister at Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1843), 5.

¹¹ Ian H. Murray, *A Scottish Christian Heritage* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 41-42.

¹² MacNicol, 23.

It was two years before Bruce could seriously broached the subject with his parents of studying for the ministry. His father relented. But his mother resisted until he forfeited his claim to the Kinnaird estate. Without any further hindrance, Bruce entered the University of St. Andrews to study theology under the redoubtable Reformer, Andrew Melville (1545-1622). Bruce reports:

It was long before I could get leave to go, my mother made me such an impediment. My father at last condescended, but my mother would not, until I had denuded my hands of some lands and casualties I was infelt [in possession] in: and that I did willingly; cast my clothes from me, my vain and glorious apparel, sent my horse to the fair, and emptied my hands of all impediments, and went to the New College [of St. Mary's at St. Andrews].¹³

Bruce was befriended by upper classman James Melville (1556-1614), nephew to Andrew, whose diary relates Bruce's student days.¹⁴ His qualities were soon recognized among his peers when he joined a study group on Romans and soon ascended to its leadership in the exposition of Hebrews. After four years of study, Andrew Melville presented Bruce to the General Assembly in 1587 at Edinburgh as a potential candidate to fill the pulpit formerly held by John Knox at the city's famous St. Giles Church.¹⁵ A sermon on Ephesians 6 brought an immediate call which at first he declined, but later accepted at the urging of others.¹⁶ In 1587, Bruce assumed the ministry at Scotland's most prestigious church without the benefit of ordination.

From the moment Bruce assumed the pulpit at St. Giles until the end of his life, his career was intertwined with the machinations of King James VI (1566-1625) of Scotland. The first half of his twelve year tenure in Edinburgh can be regarded as a

¹³ Cited in Murray, 43.

¹⁴ See Robert Pitcairn, editor, *The Autobiography and Diary of Mr. James Melvill* (Edinburgh: The Wodrow Society, 1842), 26, 147-148.

¹⁵ Murray says, "The building at this period was actually divided into four parts: the Great Kirk, the College Kirk, the Upper Tolbooth and the East or Little Kirk, and so accommodated four distinct congregations. The preacher in the Great Kirk ranked as the senior minister of Edinburgh." Murray, 68, n12.

¹⁶ MacNicol, 40.

period of ascendancy for Bruce. He was elected moderator of the General Assembly in 1588 and again in 1592. James VI, who attended St. Giles regularly, engaged him in conversation and correspondence and brought him into his trust by appointing him a Privy Counselor in 1588. On an extended visit overseas to acquire his future wife, Anne of Denmark, the king credited Bruce with helping maintain order in his absence. In 1590 Bruce anointed Anne, Queen of Scotland. Upon his marriage to Martha Douglas, Bruce reacquired the Kinniard estate and adjacent lands near Larbert. It was during this time from February to March 1589 that Bruce preached his five famous sermons on the Lord's Supper which were dedicated to James VI when published the following year.

The king's favor, however, would not last for Edinburgh's leading minister. King James VI ascended to the throne of Scotland at age one in 1567 when his mother Mary Queen of Scots abdicated. Tutored by noted Protestant scholar George Buchanan (1506-1582), he was raised to be a devout Presbyterian. However, by the time he tasted the power of his office, it was political pragmatism rather than principled Presbyterianism that guided him. The Kirk party in due course reaped his distain because of one issue in particular. James VI believed there should be no authority higher than his own.¹⁷ He came to reject the notion of Presbytery and to embrace Prelacy where he could appoint bishops as he wanted. Bruce, and others like him, was seen as an obstacle to the divine right of kings. On one occasion it is said that the king was disturbing worship at St. Giles by talking during the sermon. Bruce reportedly addressed him from the pulpit saying, "When the lion roars, all the beasts of the field are at ease: the Lion of the tribe of Judah is now roaring in the voice of the Gospel, and it becomes all the petty kings of the earth

¹⁷ The king's view of monarchical supremacy is expounded in two works which he wrote: *True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and *Basilicon Doron* (1599).

to be silent.”¹⁸ James soon regarded Bruce’s ministry of the word as nothing more than bewitching “the people with his harangues.”¹⁹ Andrew Mellville’s famous rejoinder to the monarch illustrates the impasse that developed between Kirk and King:

Sire, we will always humbly reverence your Majesty in public, but having opportunity of being with your Majesty in private, we must discharge our duty, or else be enemies to Christ. And now, Sire, I must tell you, that there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the head of the Commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the Head of the Church, whose subject King James VI is, and of whose kingdom he is not a head, nor a lord, but a member; and they whom Christ hath called, and commanded to watch over His Church, and govern His spiritual kingdom, have sufficient authority and power from Him so to do, which no Christian king nor prince should control or discharge, but assist and support, otherwise they are not faithful subjects to Christ.²⁰

Such things did not set well with the King of Scotland.

Two episodes in particular brought Bruce’s tenure at St. Giles to an end. In 1596, Bruce was falsely implicated along with other Reformed ministers in promoting a riot on 17 December against papal encroachments in Scotland. He subsequently fled Edinburgh to escape the king’s wrath. Upon his return the following year Bruce was greatly hamstrung with conditions placed upon him by the king. MacNicol notes that the riot was “really a small affair” but King James used it to advance his prelatial agenda.²¹ The second episode concerns the Earle of Gowrie, John Ruthven (1577-1600), staunch supporter and rising leader of the Protestant cause. In 1600 the Earle and his brother had a private audience with King James at the Gowrie estate. In the aftermath of the meeting the two brothers lay dead with only the king and his attendants as witness to what had happened.²² Although James pleaded self-defense against an assassination attempt,

¹⁸ Cited in Murray, 47.

¹⁹ Murray, 47.

²⁰ John Howe, *Scots Worthies*, [http://www.reformation-scotland.org.uk/scots-worthies/andrew-melville/\(1/1/10\)](http://www.reformation-scotland.org.uk/scots-worthies/andrew-melville/(1/1/10)).

²¹ MacNicol, 88, 89.

²² The basic theories regarding the Gowrie affair are: 1) the Gowries plotted to kill or kidnap the king and died in the process; 2) the king assassinated the Gowries to eliminate their opposition; 3) the event precipitated from an unpremeditated brawl.

doubts regarding his story persisted. The king ordered the ministers of Edinburgh to offer public thanksgiving for his deliverance from treason. Bruce and four others in conscience could not unless more convincing evidence exonerating the king's complicity was presented. Consequently, James banished them from Edinburgh and ordered them not to preach in Scotland upon pain of death.

From 1600 until his death in 1631, Robert Bruce lived in exile. He immediately went to France, but after a year was allowed to return to his home in Larbert. Edinburgh, however, was decidedly off-limits. As the church in Larbert was void of a pastor, Bruce helped rebuild it at his own expense and ministered regularly in the pulpit. This led to his arrest and subsequent exile to Inverness of the highlands in the barren north on 18 August 1605. Here he would be far removed from centers of influence in a lawless, unforgiving territory dominated by inter-clan bloodletting and Romanists particularly hostile to the Reformation. Bruce nevertheless survived the ordeal. In 1613 his son, now influential in the justice system, arranged for his parole and return to Larbert where he enjoyed a fair amount of freedom to preach albeit in out of the way places. When his beloved wife died around 1620, he was left with no one to attend to his affairs in Edinburgh on his behalf. Upon entering the city to conduct personal business, he was arrested for breaking curfew and ordered back to Inverness in 1622.

If his first exile in Inverness was a season of sowing, during his second he witnessed a harvest of righteousness. Murray calls these two years of his second exile to Inverness "one of the most significant periods of his life."²³ MacNicol sees divine providence at work:

²³ Murray, 52.

[Bruce] did not know that the wrath of man should praise God, and that he was ordained to be a pioneer apostle of the north. Nor did the King know, when he sent the great preacher to Inverness, that he was embarking on a policy which should bring peace to the mountains and the glens, not through extermination, but through the instilling of a new principle of love.²⁴

In short, MacNicol says, “On this second visit the effects of Bruce’s preaching were remarkable.”²⁵ To be sure Bruce endured great hardship which included even an attempt on his life. Yet the Lord was please to anoint his ministry with such grace that reports soon emerged of remarkable conversions. The fruit of his exile labors in Inverness would last well beyond his years.

In 1624 Robert Bruce was allowed to return to his home in Larbert around which he spent the remainder of his days. A year later James VI of Scotland, now also James I of England since 1603, died. Under Charles I (1600-1649), Bruce was able to preach with greater freedom and even allowed to return occasionally to Edinburgh. But he never assumed his former and rightful station at St. Giles. Nevertheless, during these latter years he was a virtual legend. Wherever he preached throngs would gather. It is little wonder that such a harvest of souls would be recorded at the Kirk of Shotts in June of 1630 during Bruce’s presence at the communion season.

At a second family home at Old Monklands on 27 July 1631, the seventy-five year old Robert Bruce had enjoyed breakfast with his daughter when his became ill. He requested she read Romans 8 for him as he could not see the pages of Scripture. As she read, he recited much of the chapter with her until they arrived at the finale regarding security in the love of Christ when he asked that his fingers be set on those words. Bruce

²⁴ MacNicol, 145.

²⁵ MacNicol, 155.

said, “God be with you my children. I have breakfasted with you, and shall sup with my Lord Jesus this night.”²⁶ That he did!

Young colleague John Livingstone said of Bruce, “No man in his time spake with such evidence and power of the Spirit: no man had so many seals of conversion; yea, many of his hearers thought that no man since the apostles spake with such power.”²⁷ He furthermore notes: “He was both in publick and private very short in prayer with others, but then every sentence was like a strong bolt shott up to heaven.”²⁸ It has been said regarding Bruce’s legacy: “It was largely under Bruce’s leadership that the Scottish Reformation found stability. His sermons on the Lord’s Supper brought together Reformed doctrine and evangelical application in a way that helped to shape and became characteristic of Scottish Reformed tradition.”²⁹

The Historical Context of the Five Sermons

The sermons of Robert Bruce on the Lord’s Supper fall within the purview of the Reformation in general, and the Scottish Reformation experience in particular. Before his perspectives are addressed, it is important to say something of the influence of Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) of Geneva, and his Scottish disciple and counterpart, John Knox (circa. 1514-1572).

The Reformation in General

In 1544 John Calvin published his Reformation manifesto entitled *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*. In Calvin’s view, four issues in particular require immediate

²⁶ Cited in Murray, 57.

²⁷ W. K. Tweedie, ed., *Select Biographies* (Edinburgh: The Wodrow Society, 1845), 306.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 307.

²⁹ I. R. Torrance, “Robert Bruce,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, eds. Nigel M. De S. Cameron, David F. Wright, David C. Lachman, Donald E. Meek (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 104-105.

attention. He targets worship, gospel, sacraments, and government. Regarding his

Reformation agenda he says:

We maintain, then, that...those heads of doctrine in which the truth of our religion, those in which [1] the pure and legitimate worship of God, and those in which [2] the salvation of men are comprehended, were in great measure obsolete. We maintain that the use of [3] the sacraments was in many ways vitiated [impaired or made defective by the addition of something] and polluted. And we maintain that [4] the government of the church was converted into a species of foul and insufferable tyranny.³⁰

Concerning the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in particular, Calvin criticizes Rome's propensity for "ceremonies devised by men" that are placed on par with "the mysteries instituted by Christ."³¹ He denies Rome's system of seven sacraments while acknowledging only baptism and the Lord's Supper as true sacraments instituted by Christ. For Calvin, "[T]he Holy Supper was not only corrupted by extraneous observances, but it's very form was altogether changed."³² He exposes the sacrificial nature of the Roman Mass calling it an "excommunication"³³ and a "theatrical exhibition",³⁴ insisting the Lord's Supper "was not only corrupted, but nearly abolished."³⁵ He claims that the priest "offers a sacrifice to expiate the sins of the people" and asks, "Who authorizes men to convert *taking* into *offering*?"³⁶ Furthermore, Calvin sees an uncomfortable comparison between the Roman view of the sacraments and paganism. He insists the Roman Mass "differs in no respect whatever from magical incantations." He continues:

For by breathings and whisperings, and unintelligible sounds, they think they work mysteries. As if it had been the wish of Christ, that in the performance of religious rites his word should be mumbled over, and not rather pronounced with a clear voice....Christ

³⁰ Henry Beverage, ed., *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters* (1844, repr., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), I:125.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I:137

³² *Ibid.*, I:137.

³³ *Ibid.*, I:138.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I:137.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I:167.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I:138.

does not mutter over the bread, but addresses the apostles in distinct terms when he announces the promise and subjoins the command, ‘This do in remembrance of me.’³⁷

He also reveals what is perhaps his major complaint—the Word divorced from the sacrament. He observes how “people are entertained with showy ceremonies, while not a word is said of their significance and truth. For there is no use in the sacraments unless the thing which the sign visibly represents is explained in accordance with the Word of God.”

Calvin, furthermore, regards the Scriptures as a sufficient guide for the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper claiming, “What Christ commanded to be done, and in what order, is perfectly clear.” He asks, “[W]hat resemblance is there between the Mass and the true Supper of the Lord?”³⁸ Calvin’s program for reform³⁹ had sought to eradicate the idea of the Supper as a sacrifice from the people’s mental universe. He restored the cup to the laity, discarded extraneous ceremonies that had “multiplied out of measure”, condemned the “fiction of transubstantiation”, and abolished consequent actions like carrying the bread about in a worshipful manner. Calvin insists, “We have revived the practice of explaining the doctrine and unfolding the mystery to the people.”⁴⁰ He further explains, “While the sacrament ought to have been a means of raising pious minds to heaven, the sacred symbols of the Supper were abused to an entirely different purpose, and men, contented with gazing upon them and worshipping them, never once thought of Christ.”⁴¹

³⁷ *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, I:138.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I:137.

³⁹ See *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, I:167-169.

⁴⁰ *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, I:169.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I:168.

The Scottish Reformation in Particular

John Knox clearly voices the same concerns as Calvin. His critique of the Roman Mass and his recognition of the need to recover the integrity of the Lord's Supper are essentially Calvinistic. Knox would later spend considerable time in Geneva under the tutelage of Calvin. He adopted the Genevan vision for reform and self-consciously transported it to his homeland. Under Knox's leadership and influence the Reformation's sacramental theology was brought to Scotland. The work of Robert Bruce would arise from within this environment a generation after Knox.

After he was released from the galleys in 1549, Knox made his way to England where, with the aid of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), he was appointed preacher of the church at Berwick. Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall (1474-1559) of Durham was unhappy with Knox's denunciation of the Roman Mass, and summoned him to give account of himself. Knox's statement on the Mass was presented in Newcastle on 4 April 1550, and subsequently printed as his *Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry*.

According to Knox, his stated purpose in the *Vindication* is "to gif a reasone why so constantlie I do affirme that Masse to be, and at all tymes to haif bene, Idolatrie, and abominatioun befor God."⁴² Knox's argument is based on two syllogisms. First he says that all worship forms of human invention without the benefit of God's command are idolatry. The Mass is of human invention and is therefore idolatry.⁴³ He refers to the disobedience of King Saul,⁴⁴ as well as the innovations of Nadab and Abihu, and insists

⁴² David Lang, ed., *The Works of John Knox* (Edinburgh: The Banatyne Club, 1854), III: 33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, III:34.

⁴⁴ Knox argues, "Disobedience to Godis voice is not onlie when man doith wickitlie contrarie to the preceptis of God, but also when of gud zeal, or gud intent, as we commonlie speak, man doith any thing to

that neither the “pre-eminence of the persone” nor “the intent” of the celebrant “is acceptit befor God.”⁴⁵ Knox also addresses a Romanist objection based on the Jerusalem Council in which they insisted that “the Apostles commandit the Gentillis to absteane from certane thingis, whairof thai had no comandement of God.”⁴⁶ For Knox, however, “the Apostles had the express commandement of Jesus Chryst” and the “Spreit of tueuth and knowledge working”⁴⁷ in them to grant such instruction to the church. The Papists did not.

In his second syllogism, Knox insists that all worship to which is added a wicket opinion or otherwise defined by false doctrine is an abomination. The Mass is encumbered with wicked opinion and thus is an abomination.⁴⁸ The wicked opinion to which Knox refers is the claim that the mass is “a Sacrifice and oblatioun for the synnis of the quick and the deid: so that remissioun of synnis” is affected by the action of the Priest.⁴⁹ For Knox, however, “Idolatrie is not onely to wirschip the thing whilk is not God, but also to trust or leane unto that thing whilk is not God, and hath not in it self all sufficiencie.”⁵⁰ He counters the Papist with reference to the work of Christ as finished and complete,⁵¹ and notes that Paul called for only one sacrifice—that of self.⁵² Knox sees “no congruence” between the Mass and the Lord’s Supper.⁵³ In the Lord’s Supper worshipers are indebted to God; in the Mass God is indebted to the people. Knox

the honour or service of God not commandit by the express Word of God....[T]his callit Samuell Idolatrie.” See 1 Samuel 15:23. *Works*, III: 37.

⁴⁵ *Works*, III:38.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, III:45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, III:45.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, III:52.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, III:54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, III:54.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, III:63.

⁵² *Ibid.*, III:55.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, III:64.

explains, “The Supper of the Lord is the gift of Jesus Christ, in whilk we suld laude the infinite mercies of God. The Masse is a Sacrifice whilk we offer unto God, for doing whair of we alledge God suld love and commend us.”⁵⁴ The whole of Knox’s argument is summarized as follows:

The Masse is nothing; but the inventioun of man, set up without all autoritie of Godis Word, for honoring of God; and thairfoir it is Idolatrie. Unto it is addit a vane, fals, deceivable, and maist wicket opinioun; that is, that by it is obteanit remission of synnis: And thairfoir it is abominatioun befoir God.”

Returning the Lord’s Supper to its biblical simplicity was one of Knox’s primary reforming interests. For example, while still in England he took exception to the 1552 revision efforts of the *Book of Common Prayer* by Cranmer and Nicolas Ridley (1500-1555) which called for the practice of kneeling when receiving the elements of the Lord’s Supper. For Knox this implied adoration of the elements and left the door open for Papal encroachment. Besides, in Berwick he had developed a simple New Testament liturgy of the Table based only on Jesus’ example and Paul’s teaching.⁵⁵ The church could not require kneeling when the New Testament taught only sitting. Knox biographer W. Stanford Reid says, “[S]ince Christ himself did not kneel but sat at the Last Supper, that was all that was required of a Christian, since he should follow only Christ’s example.”⁵⁶ Knox’s complaint led to a compromise solution with the printing of the so-called “Black Rubric”, an addendum added to the already revised and printed Edwardian *Book of*

⁵⁴ *Works*, III:65.

⁵⁵ See W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 77. Here Reid sketches Knox’s Berwick liturgy. He says, “As we know from a fragment of a liturgical outline of his service, after the preaching of a sermon based on chapters 13 to 16 of the Gospel of John, he offered a prayer for faith followed by the reading of Paul’s account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17-31. He then ‘fenced the tables’ by warning unrepentant sinners to refrain, and by calling on true believers to partake. He followed this with a prayer of confession and a promise of forgiveness read from the Bible. Then after praying for the congregation, he presumably distributed the elements to the communicants who sat at tables to receive the ordinary leavened bread and wine.”

⁵⁶ Reid, 97.

Common Prayer in which unseemly implications for kneeling were denied. Knox supported the compromise as a temporary solution until further Reformation could be achieved. Reid notes, “That Knox, as well as a good many of the other reformers, regarded as extremely important the complete change of the Roman Catholic Mass into a properly celebrated Lord’s Supper, appears over and over again.”⁵⁷

Knox’s influence over and contribution to the three primary documents of the Scottish Reformation must not be underestimated. The *1560 Scots Confession* produced by a committee of six including Knox and subsequently approved by Parliament was a monumental achievement. Of its twenty-five heads, articles XXI-XXIII were dedicated to the sacraments. It specifically denies the Papal doctrine of the Eucharist when it says, “Not that we imagine anie transubstantiation of bread into Christes body, and of wine into his naturall blude, as the Papistes have perniciouslie taucht and damnable beleaved.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, it agrees with the critique of Calvin and Knox of the Roman Mass when it affirms:

[W]e flee the doctrine of the a *Papistical* Kirk, in participatioun of their sacraments; first, because their Ministers are no Ministers of Christ Jesus....And secondly, because they have so adulterate both the one Sacrament and the uthar with their awin inventions, that no part of *Christis* action abydes in the originall puritie:...Adoration, Veneration, bearing throw steitis and townes, and keeping of bread in boxis or buistis, ar prophanatioun of *Christis* Sacramentis.”⁵⁹

John Laidlow confirms that Bruce’s sacramental theology is that of the *Scots Confession*.

In the Preface to his 1901 edition to Bruce’s sermons he says, “The Author’s formal standard was the Scottish Confession of 1560.”⁶⁰ MacNicol agrees when he states:

⁵⁷ Reid, 77.

⁵⁸ *Scots Confession, 1560 and Negative Confession, 1581 with Introduction by Professor G. D. Henderson* (Aberdeen: Church of Scotland Committee on Publications, 1937), 85.

⁵⁹ *Scots Confession, 1560*, 89.

⁶⁰ John Laidlow, ed., *Robert Bruce’s Sermons on the Sacrament: Done into English with a Biographical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1901), vi.

Master Robert Bruce, who was a theologian and a student of history of the Church, bases his teaching upon the sacrament on this [Scots] Confession....In his Five Sermons upon the Lord's Supper the view represented by that strong composition, the Scottish Confession of 1560, is laid down with much vigour of intellect and variety of illustration.⁶¹

The *First Book of Discipline* produced later in 1560 discusses the Sacraments under its second head. It openly acknowledges its debt to Geneva with regard to Scotland's developing liturgy of the Table when it says, "And albeit the order of Geneva, which now is used in some of our Churches, is sufficient to instruct the diligent Reader how that both these sacraments may be rightly ministered, yet for an uniformitie to be kept, we have thought good to adde this as superabundant."⁶² The "order of Geneva" in reference here is the *Form of Prayers and Ministrations of the Sacraments etc. used in the English Church at Geneva; and approved by the famous and godly learned man, John Calvyn (1556 and 1558)*.⁶³ The *Form of Prayers* had its initial origin in Knox's short lived ministry in Frankfort-am-Main. It was used in full when Knox assumed the pastorate of the English speaking congregation in Geneva. After Scotland's initial Reformation, the General Assembly of 1562 embraced some of its liturgies including that of the sacraments for use in the Church of Scotland. In 1564, it received full approval with the inclusion of the Psalter and became known as the *Book of Common Order*.

MacNicol describes its liturgy of the Table:

The manner of the Lord's Supper, as set forth in the Book of Common Order, was simple and direct. This Book of Common Order prescribed no ritual, but offered guidance for the conduct of divine service. It was not permitted to receive the sacrament kneeling, nor to kneel in public prayers.⁶⁴

⁶¹ MacNicol, 72-73.

⁶² James K. Cameron, *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1972), 91.

⁶³ *The First Book of Discipline*, 91n5; Cf. William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship: Its Development and Forms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 121-123.

⁶⁴ D. C. MacNicol, *Robert Bruce: Minister in the Kirk of Edinburgh* (1907, repr., Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 74.

These three influences in particular shaped the sacramental universe of the Reformation in Scotland: the *Scots Confession* (1560), the *First Book of Discipline* (1560), and the *Book of Common Order* (1564). Consequently, Bruce's treatment of the Lord's Supper is an exposition of a tradition. That tradition is rooted in Scotland's Reformation symbols, which in turn are the product of a Calvinistic piety, Knox's experience, and their mutual critique of the Roman Mass. If the generation of Calvin and Knox required a polemic, Bruce's generation was ready for a classic statement on the devotional aspect to the Lord's Table. Laidlow insists, "The doctrine of the Sacraments expounded in these discourses is that of the Reformed Church. That doctrine has never been better stated."⁶⁵ Laidlow continues, "He had evidently taken his stand on the more generally accepted Reformed view which had already appeared in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), in the XXXIX articles (1563), and which was yet to be more clearly stated, immediately after his time, in the Westminster Standards."⁶⁶

Assessment of Bruce's Sermons on the Lord's Supper

Robert Bruce's ministerial credentials were at best irregular. Although he began preaching at St. Giles Church in 1587, he was not ordained until 1598. It is ironic that the man who wrote Scotland's classic statement on the Lord's Supper did not initially possess the proper authorization for its administration. The first time he served the Lord's Supper at St. Giles, he was a reluctant participant. An attending minister invited Bruce to sit next to him. After serving several tables, he excused himself and left.

⁶⁵ Laidlow, vi.

⁶⁶ Ibid., vi; MacNicol affirms the same: "Bruce occupies the ground of the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) and of the Thirty-nine articles (1563), which was afterwards defined in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646). Cf. MacNicol, 72.

Apparently the minister's departure was a ruse and Bruce was "entrapped." John Livingston relates the story:

When, therefore, the eyes of the elders and the whole people were on him, and many also called out, he did go on, and celebrated the communion to the rest with such assistance and motion, as had not been seen in that place before, and for that cause he would not thereafter receive in the ordinary way the imposition of hands, seeing before he had the materiall of it, to witt, the approbation of all the ministry, and had already celebrated the communion which was not, by ane new ordination, to be made void.⁶⁷

Thomas E. Torrance in his introduction to *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper* believes Bruce's sermons were delivered "after he had been induced to administer the Sacrament himself."⁶⁸ Although not ordained in these early days, Bruce nevertheless enjoyed the approbation of the church, his colleagues, and members in his performance of these duties.

The Sacrament Considered as Sign and Seal

Bruce's fundamental understanding of the Lord's Table concerns the means by which believer's are united with Christ. In a comprehensive opening statement in his first sermon on the sacraments in general he insists:

There is nothing in this world, or out of this world, more to be wished for by everyone of you than to be conjoined with Jesus Christ, and once for all made one with him, the God of glory. This heavenly and celestial conjunction is procured and brought about by two special means. It is brought about by the means of the Word and preaching of the Gospel, and it is brought about by means of the Sacraments and their administration. The Word leads us to Christ by the ear; the Sacraments lead us to Christ by the eye: of the two senses which God has chosen as most fitting for the purpose of instructing us and bringing us to Christ.⁶⁹

The accomplishment of this union, however, is not the result of mere formal participation in the sacrament. For Bruce, there is no conjoining to Christ if not affected by the Holy

⁶⁷ The story of the circumstance of Bruce's first communion at St. Giles is related by John Livingston and is included in W. K Tweedie, *Select Biographies*, 305-306; Cf. Robert Wodrow, *Collections as to the Life of Mr. Robert Bruce, Minister at Edinburgh*, 15-16.

⁶⁸ Thomas F. Torrance, "Introduction," in: Robert Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper*, ed. Thomas R. Torrance (1958; repr., Geanies House, Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publication, Inc. 2005), 19.

⁶⁹ Bruce, 30.

Spirit. He says, “[T]here is no doctrine either of the simple Word or of the Sacraments, that is able to move us if Christ takes away His Holy Spirit.”⁷⁰

The prevailing use of the term “Sacrament” for the ordinances of the church is regarded by Bruce as unfortunate, as it is perhaps the source of much of the church’s confusion regarding the Table.⁷¹ That the Latin church regarded the word “Sacrament” to mean “mystery” may be true enough in part, but Bruce prefers the biblical language: “If they had kept the Apostle’s words, and called the Sacraments ‘signs’ and ‘seals’, all this controversy, strife and contention would probably not have occurred.”⁷² Thus for Bruce his working definition is as follows:

I take the word Sacrament as it is taken and used today in the Church of God, for a holy sign and seal that is annexed to the preached Word of God to seal up and confirm the truth contained in the same Word, but in such a way that I do not call the Seal separated from the Word, the Sacrament.⁷³

With such opening remarks Bruce demonstrates his agreement with the Scottish sacramental tradition as is stated in its Reformation symbols. The *Confession of Faith* stresses the sacraments as signs and seals, their ancillary relationship to the Word, and their function in conjoining believers to Christ. It states:

[They are] instituted of God...to exercise the faith of his Children, and, be participation of the same Saramentes, to seill in their hearts the assurance of his promise, and of that most blessed conjunction, union and societie, quhilk the elect have with their head *Jesus Christ*...[W]ee assuredlie believe...that in the Supper richtlie used, *Christ Jesus* is so joined with us, that hee becummis very nourishment and fude of our saules...[T]his unioun and conjunction, quhilk we have with the body and blude of *Christ Jesus* in the richt use of the Sacraments, wrocht be operatioun of the haly Ghaist, who by trew faith carryis us above al things that are visible, carnal, and earthly, and makes us to feede upon the body and blude of *Christ Jesus*, quhilk wes anes broken and shed for us, quhilk now is in heaven, and appearis in the presence of his Father for us.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Bruce, 31.

⁷¹ Ibid., 32.

⁷² Ibid., 32.

⁷³ Ibid., 33; Cf. Romans 4:11.

⁷⁴ *Scots Confession, 1560*, 83-84

Similarly, the *First Book of Discipline* states, “To Christ Jesus his holy Gospell truly preached, of necessity it is, that his holy Sacraments be annexed and truely ministered, as seales and visible confirmations of the spirituall promises contained in the word.”⁷⁵

Bruce’s legal training is demonstrated as he describes the sacrament as a *seal*. A seal for Bruce is annexed to a document—what he calls “evidence”—as its authenticating mark. The seal alone has no authority; the document alone lacks strength. Together, however, they are an imposing force. In Bruce’s analogy the Word of God proclaimed is the document or the evidence and certainly *does* possess power in and of itself. However, the bread and wine by themselves are nothing but bread and wine. But when they are annexed to the Word they become a vigorous means that God uses to stir up affections for Christ. Bruce says, “[T]here cannot be a Sacrament without it adhering to the evidence of the Word.... [T]he Word alone cannot be a Sacrament nor the element alone, but Word and element must together make a Sacrament.”⁷⁶

Bruce raises the question why the sacrament as a seal must be annexed⁷⁷ to the word since the sacrament offers nothing significantly different than is received by the word of God. He says, “It is certainly true that we get no new thing in the Sacrament; we get no other thing in the Sacrament, than we get in the Word. For what more would you ask than really to receive the Son of God Himself?” Bruce continues, “Why then is the Sacrament appointed? Not that you may get any new thing, but that you may get the same thing better than you had it in the Word.”⁷⁸ Bruce recognizes two things about the

⁷⁵ *First Book of Discipline*, 90.

⁷⁶ Bruce, 33.

⁷⁷ Bruce agrees with Calvin who says, “[W]e understand that a sacrament is never without a preceding promise but is joined to it as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing the promise itself, and of making it more evident to us and in a sense ratifying it.” See John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.14.3

⁷⁸ Bruce, 59.

sealing effect of the sacrament. First, it helps believers get a better hold of Christ than they are able by the Word alone. He says, “The Sacraments are appointed that I may have Him more fully in my soul, that I may have the bounds of it enlarged, and that he may make the better residence in me. This no doubt is the reason why these seals are annexed to the evidence of the simple Word.”⁷⁹ Second, as seals they confirm the truth of God better to the believer’s heart. He explains:

Although you believed the evidence before, yet by the seals, you believe it better....

[B]ecause it is a seal annexed to the Word it persuades you better of its truth, for the more the outward senses are awakened, the more is the inward heart and mind persuaded to believe....

The Word is appointed to work belief, and the Sacrament is appointed to confirm you in this belief.⁸⁰

Bruce devotes considerably more attention to the sacrament as a *sign*. For a sign to be a sacrament, according to Bruce, it must involve a relationship between two things: that is, the sign itself and the thing signified. To “confound” or “confuse”⁸¹ them accordingly is to “lose the relation, and so lose the Sacrament.”⁸² Bruce says, “[I]n every Sacrament, there is a relation, in order to keep the relation you must keep the two things distinct in the Sacrament.”⁸³ Bruce proceeds to develop his theology of signs by expounding four points.

First, Bruce deals with the *meaning* of a sign. A sign he says is “whatever I perceive and take up by my outward senses, by my eye especially.”⁸⁴ With regard to the

⁷⁹ Bruce, 60.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 60.

⁸¹ When Bruce speaks of *confounding* the sign and thing signified he most likely has the Lutheran view of Consubstantiation in mind. His reference to *confusing* the two regards the Romanist view of Transubstantiation.

⁸² Bruce, 34.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

sign itself Bruce means not only the *elements* of bread and wine, but the *ceremonies* by which they are distributed. He explains:

The elements of bread and wine are subject to the eye, therefore they must be signs; moreover, the rites and ceremonies by which these elements are distributed, broken and given, are also subject to the eye. There must therefore be two sorts of signs: one sort, the bread and wine, which we call elemental; another sort, the rites and ceremonies, by which they are distributed, broken and given, which we call ceremonial.⁸⁵

Furthermore, signs in the sacramental sense are more than mere representations of an event long ago. Otherwise, he says, “[A]ny picture or dead image would be a Sacrament.” Bruce rather stands in the larger Reformed understanding when he insists that the Sacrament “exhibits and delivers the thing that it signifies to the soul and heart.”⁸⁶ He says that “so truly is the Body of Christ conjoined with the bread, and the Blood of Christ conjoined with the wine, that as soon as you receive the bread in your mouth...[a]nd as soon as you receive the wine in your mouth, you receive...Christ in your soul, and that by faith.”⁸⁷ The only reason why the signs are able to deliver Christ to the believer is “the Lord has appointed” them for this purpose through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. “God has made them potent instruments to deliver the same thing that they signify.”⁸⁸

Second, Bruce identifies and explains the *thing signified* by the sign. For Bruce the thing signified is not merely the benefits, the graces, or the virtues that flow from Christ. It is rather “the very substance of Christ Himself” from which all these other things flow. He says, “It is the whole Christ, God and Man, without separation of His natures, without distinction of His substance from His graces, that I call the thing

⁸⁵ Bruce, 35.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 35-36.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 37.

signified by the signs in the Sacraments.”⁸⁹ Bruce also stresses that this very substance of Christ is received not in the mouth by the elements themselves, but into the heart by faith. This is uniquely the Reformed contribution to sacramental theology. Bruce asks, “And how do I get him? Not by my mouth. It is vain to think that we will get God by our mouth, but we get Him by faith....Therefore come to the Supper with a faithful, i.e. a believing, heart.”⁹⁰

Third, Bruce proceeds to consider “how the sign and the thing signified are coupled together.” He recognizes that this is the great point of contention between Christian bodies. Rejecting the Lutheran position of Consubstantiation, he says, “[T]he sign and the thing signified are not locally conjoined, that is, that are not both in one place.” Furthermore, he rejects the Romanist view of Transubstantiation when he insists that they “are not joined corporally; their bodies do not touch one another.”⁹¹ However, in dismissing any physical union between the sign and the thing signified, he admits that it is far more difficult to explain the nature of this “sacramental conjunction.”⁹² Bruce elaborates:

Every Sacrament is a mystery. There is no Sacrament but contains a high and divine mystery. Because a Sacrament is a mystery, then, it follows that a mystical, secret and spiritual conjunction corresponds well to the nature of the Sacrament. Since the conjunction between us and Christ is full of mystery, as the Apostle shows us (Eph. 5:32), it is a mystical and spiritual conjunction that is involved. So doubtless the conjunction between the Sacrament and the thing signified in the Sacrament, must be of the same nature, mystical and spiritual. It is not possible to show you by an ocular demonstration how Christ and we are conjoined.⁹³

⁸⁹ Bruce, 38.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁹¹ Ibid., 44.

⁹² The *Westminster Confession of Faith* would later in 1648 call this “sacramental conjunction” the “sacramental union” and note: “There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it come to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other” (27.2).

⁹³ Bruce, 45.

To shed some light on the nature of the sacramental conjunction, he compares it to the union that exists between the “the word that we hear, and the thing signified by the word.” He says, “If I speak of things past, of things to come, or of things near at hand, no sooner do I speak to you of them than the thing signified comes into your mind, doubtless because there is a conjunction between the word and the thing signified by the word.” Following Augustine, Bruce regards the sacrament as the visible word because “it conveys the signification of it by the eye to the mind.” Accordingly, every sacrament consists of two things: there exists proportion or similarity between the sign and the thing signified—as bread nourishes the body, so the body of Christ nourishes the soul; there exists a concurrence in the action of offering and receiving—the outward and inward, which is receive by the mouth of the soul, which is faith.⁹⁴

Finally, Bruce addresses how the sign and the thing signified are mutually delivered to the communicant. Central to Bruce’s position is that they are not delivered in the same way. He explains, “Make diligent note of all these, and you will find little difficulty in understanding the Sacraments.”⁹⁵ First he insists there are two *givers*: “[T]he Minister gives the earthly thing, Christ Jesus, the Mediator, gives the heavenly thing.”⁹⁶ “Do not think, therefore, that you will receive the Spirit from the hands of man; you will receive Him from the hands of Christ Himself alone. Without this inward ministry, the outward ministry is not worth as straw.”⁹⁷ Next Bruce argues that there are two *actions*. As the sign is given in an outward action by the minister, so Christ is given by “an

⁹⁴ Bruce, 48.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 55; Bruce supports this notion with John the Baptist’s comment in Matt. 3:11: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with fire*.”

⁹⁷ Ibid., 55.

inward, secret and spiritual action, which is not subject to the outward eye.”⁹⁸

Furthermore, Bruce describes two kinds of *instruments* by which the sign and the thing signified are received respectively: the hand and mouth which receives the bread and wine; and, faith which concurrently lays hold of Christ. He claims that Christ “is never received by the mouth of the body” and continues, “*As Christ, who is the thing signified, is grasped by the hand and mouth of faith, so the sign, which signifies Christ, is grasped by our own natural mouth and hand.* You have a mouth in your heads, and in your bodies, which is the proper instrument by which to lay hold of the sign; as faith is the proper instrument by which to lay hold of Christ.”⁹⁹ Fourthly, the sign and the thing signified are received in different ways. The one is taken by the hand and placed in the mouth; the other is taken by faith and enters the heart. The one is received in a natural and corporal way; the other in a secret and spiritual way. For Bruce, communicants must keep these things in mind in order not to “slip” in their understanding of the sacrament:

[D]istinguish between the outward and the inward action, between the sign and the thing signified, and keep a proportion and analogy between the inward and the outward actions. You may be quite sure that if you are faithful, Christ is as busy working inwardly in your soul, as the Minister is working outwardly in regard to your body. See how busy the Minister is in breaking the bread, in pouring out the wine, in giving the bread and wine to you. Christ is just as busy, in breaking His own Body unto you, and in giving you the juice of His own Body in a spiritual and invisible way.¹⁰⁰

The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament

Perhaps the most contentious issue in sacramental theology during the Reformation period concerned the presence of Christ at the Table. The Romanist view of Transubstantiation regarded the *substance* of bread and wine as “changing” into Christ’s very body and blood. Thus the ceremony became an oblation and the elements became

⁹⁸ Bruce, 56.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 57.

objects of worship. The Lutherans retreated from these offensive notions, but continued to insist on the real physical presence of Christ at the Table, not in the substance of the elements, but in substance “under” the elements.¹⁰¹ Then there were those who rejected the presence of Christ altogether, regarding the Table as a mere memorial celebration with devotional value. Bruce articulates a fourth position in keeping with Calvin and the Reformed tradition which could be regarded as a real spiritual presence or true communion view of the sacrament.¹⁰²

The difficulty arises in the way Bruce and the Reformed tradition speak of the physical presence of Christ at the Table as being spiritual. Bruce says:

If you ask of us...how the true Body and Blood of Christ Jesus are present, we will say that they are spiritually present, really present, that is, present in the Supper, and not in the bread. We will not say that His true Flesh is present in our hands, or in the mouth or our body, but that it is spiritually present, that is, present to our spirits, and our believing soul—yes, even as present inwardly in our souls, as the bread and wine are present to our body outwardly.¹⁰³

Elsewhere he observes that “the thing signified is of a spiritual nature, of a heavenly and mystical nature”¹⁰⁴ and therefore the union affected will be of like kind. He asks, “If the Flesh of Christ, and the Blood of Christ are a part of the thing signified, how can I call His Flesh a spiritual thing.”¹⁰⁵ Bruce insists that he is not saying that Christ’s flesh becomes spirit, or is spiritual because he is glorified in heaven, or because it is invisible. Rather, “[I]t is called spiritual because of the spiritual end which it serves for my body

¹⁰¹ See the *Augsburg Confession*, Article X.

¹⁰² This view is set forth and defended by Ligon Duncan. See his essay: “True Communion with Christ in the Lord’s Supper: Calvin, Westminster and the Nature of Christ’s Sacramental Presence,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, ed. Ligon Dunan, vol. 2 (Geanies House, Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2004), 429-475.

¹⁰³ Bruce, 139.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

and soul, because the Flesh and Blood of Christ serve to nourish me, not for a temporal life, but for a spiritual and heavenly life.”¹⁰⁶

Bruce’s understanding of the presence of Christ in the sacrament leads him to stress several key principles. The first concerns the use of “sacramental expressions”. Bruce considers such language as eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ as sacramental. He explains, “Eating and drinking, as you know, are the proper actions of the body only; but they are ascribed to the soul by a translation, by a figurative manner of speaking.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, as physical eating applies food to the mouth, so sacramental eating applies Christ to the soul. This leads Bruce to consider how Christ may rightly be applied to the soul. With this he addresses the means God uses to bring about the spiritual conjunction between Christ and the believer, and what means communicants use to get Christ into their soul. Fundamental to Bruce’s view is the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament, and the place of faith on the part of the communicant.

Bruce says:

On the part of God, there is the Holy Spirit, who offers the Body and Blood of Christ to us. On our part there must also be a means employed, or else when he offers, we will not be able to receive. Therefore there must be faith in our souls to receive what the Holy Spirit offers, to receive the heavenly food of the Body and Blood of Christ. *Thus faith and the Holy Spirit are the two means employed in this spiritual and heavenly conjunction.*¹⁰⁸

Bruce furthermore explores the implications of the presence of Christ at the Table in view of the fact that the Lord remains seated at the Father’s right hand. How can a

¹⁰⁶ Bruce, 40.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 91-92. Bruce agrees with John Knox regarding the place of faith and the Holy Spirit in the sacrament. Knox says, “[Christ] representeth unto, and maketh plane to our senses, his hevinlie giftis; and also giveth unto us him self, to be receaveit with faith, and not with mouth nor yet by transfusioun of substance. But so through the vertew [power] of the Halie Gaist, that we, being fed with his flesche, and refrescheit with is blude, may be renewit both unto trew godliness and to immortalitie.” Cf. David Lang, ed., *The Works of John Knox* (Edinburgh: The Banatyne Club, 1854), III: 75.

communicant receive the body and blood of Christ on earth if he remains in heaven? Bruce nevertheless insists, “[A]lthough there is as great a distance between my body and the Body of Christ as there is between heaven and earth, Christ’s Body is really given to me.”¹⁰⁹ Drawing upon his legal training, Bruce compares the spiritual and sacramental conjunction with legal titles. If a person has a good title to a piece of property, it is his even if he resides a great distance from it. Bruce says that in the Supper “[Christ] is given to me because His title is given to me.”¹¹⁰ He continues, “Christ is not made mine because I pluck Him out of the heavens, but He is mine because I have a sure title and right to Him...[N]o distance, however great it may be, can make any difference to my possession of Him.”¹¹¹ Again Bruce says, “Christ’s Body, then, sits at the right hand of the Father, and yet He is mine, and is delivered to me because I have the right to His Body wherever it may be.” Bruce calls the conjunction between Christ’s body and his soul a “strange ladder” and a “cord that goes between heaven and earth.”¹¹² He regards this cord and ladder that joins heaven and earth as true faith. In summary regarding his treatment on the presence of Christ, Bruce says:

This secret conjunction, then, is brought about by faith and by the Holy Spirit. By faith we lay hold upon the Body and Blood of Christ, and though we are as far distant as heaven and earth are, the Spirit serves as a ladder to conjoin us with Christ, like the ladder of Jacob, which reached from the ground to the heavens. So the Spirit of God conjoins the Body of Christ with the soul. In a word, then, what is it that gives you any right or title to Christ? Nothing but the Spirit, nothing but faith.

Bruce’s view of the presence of Christ at the Supper is primarily bound up in his critique of the Romanist view. Bruce would agree that Christ’s body and blood are present in the sacrament, but not as Romanists understand it. He would deny his

¹⁰⁹ Bruce, 92.

¹¹⁰ Bruce, 92

¹¹¹ Bruce, 93.

¹¹² Bruce, 94.

presence in the accidents or substance of the elements. Rather Christ is present to the spirits of those who believe. He is present to the faithful through his promise, “This is my body”, for it is the nature of faith to make present, things that are absent. In other words, “He is both present by faith in His promise and present by the power of His Holy Spirit.”¹¹³ However, for Bruce the meaning of “present” needs explanation. He says, “Things are said to be present as they are perceived by any outward or inward sense.... [T]he more they are perceived, the more present they are.”¹¹⁴ “Presence” for Bruce is not *proximity*. It is *perception*. Though the sun is far removed from an observer on earth, it is present through the experience of warmth and light. For the blind it is not present because it is not perceived. The deaf cannot perceive music. A fool cannot perceive the meaning of a well-told story and thus it is not present to him.¹¹⁵ Bruce concludes:

Thus it is not nearness or distance of place that makes anything present or absent, but only the perceiving or not perceiving of it.

Now, you ask, how is the Body of Christ present? In a word, as you have heard, from time to time, He is present not to the outward senses, but to the inward senses, which is faith wrought in the soul.

The Significance of the Sacramental Actions

The particular attention which Bruce and the Scottish sacramental tradition gave to the sacramental actions emerged from its many deutes with Romanism and later Anglicanism. It was grounded, however, in the conviction that all worship was to be according to the Scripture. When the Church of England insisted upon kneeling to receive the Lord’s Supper, the Reformed protested that they were being conscience

¹¹³ Bruce, 139.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 139.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 140.

bound by something that had no biblical precedent or support.¹¹⁶ That the Scots insisted upon sitting at tables¹¹⁷ was seen in juxtaposition with the prevailing alternative of kneeling. This is why the *First Book of Discipline* insists, “The Table of the Lord is then most rightly ministered when it approacheth most neare to Christs own action. But plaine it is, that at Supper Christ Jesus sate with his Disciples; and there doe we judge that sitting at a table is most convenient to that holy action.”¹¹⁸ The chief end that the Reformed sacramental liturgy sought, therefore, was to replicate as closely as possible what Jesus did at the Supper. Each sacramental action was seen as important and significant. The *First Book of Discipline* again says:

That the Minister break the bread and distribute the same to those that be next unto him, commanding the rest, everie one with reverence and sobrietie to breake with other, we thinke it nearest to Christs action, and to the perfect practice, as we read in Saint Paul; during the which actions we thinke it necessarie, that some comfortable places of Scripture be read, which may bring to minde the death of Christ Jesus, and the benefit of the same. For seeing that in action we ought chiefly to remember the Lords death.¹¹⁹

Bruce clearly stands in the Reformed tradition with his practice of the Lord’s Supper. His use of the word “ceremony” describes, not the Supper as a whole, but each individual action the minister must perform in the administration of the Supper. The goal is to do what Jesus did—nothing more and nothing less:

[E]very ceremony which Christ instituted in the Supper is as essential as the bread and wine are, and you cannot leave out one jot of them without perverting the whole institution; for whatever Christ commanded to be done, whatever He spoke or did in that

¹¹⁶ The practice of kneeling continued to be a bane to the Scots for even in 1618, with the Five Articles of Perth, kneeling along with other “popish practices” was insisted upon as the only proper posture for receiving the Lord’s Supper.

¹¹⁷ Maxwell notes that the origin of sitting to receive the Lord’s Supper was in Zwingli’s Zurich. He says, “Communion was received sitting; but the Scottish practice differed from Zwinglian practice in that the people came forward and sat at a long Communion Table placed in the quire or nave. This ancient Scottish Reformed custom has almost disappeared.” Cf. William D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship: Its Development and Forms* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 84, 126.

¹¹⁸ *First Book of Discipline*, 91.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92; Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* IV.17.43.

whole action, is essential, and must be done. You cannot omit an iota of it without perverting the whole action.¹²⁰

Bruce insists that careful attention must be paid to what Jesus said, did, or commanded to be done. He says, “It is His institution that must be kept.” To add or leave out anything is to “pervert the institution.”¹²¹ He continues, “We must first say whatever He said, and then do whatever He did, for the administration of the Sacrament must follow upon the Word.”¹²²

Bruce mentions six ceremonies in particular as essential to the proper administration of the Lord’s Supper. Each of the ceremonies is as much a part of the sign as the elements because they are things to be viewed by the communicant. He explains, “Apart from the elements, there is another kind of sign in the Sacrament. Every rite or ceremony in the Sacrament is a sign, and has its own spiritual signification, such as looking at the breaking of the bread, which represents to you the breaking of the Body and Blood of Christ.”¹²³ First, Bruce notes that *sitting* at a Table is significant in contrast to standing or kneeling before an altar. He says, “It is not called the ‘Alter’ of the Lord for the Apostles calls it a Table to sit at, not an Alter to stand at, i.e. a Table at which to take and receive, not an Alter at which to offer and present.”¹²⁴ The second and third ceremonies are the *breaking* of the bread and the *pouring* out of the wine. He regards each of these as an “essential ceremony”.¹²⁵ The breaking of the bread represents “the

¹²⁰ Bruce, 35.

¹²¹ Ibid., 112.

¹²² Ibid., 112-113. John Knox regards the actions as part of his definition of a sacrament. He says in a brief statement on the Lord’s Supper dated around 1550 and appended to his *Vindication*: “First, We confess that it is ane holie action, ordainit of God, in the whilk the Lord Jesus, by earthlie and visibill thingis sette befoir us, lifteth us up unto hevinlie and invisibill thingis.” Cf. *Works of John Knox*, III: 73.

¹²³ Ibid., 76.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 67.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 76.

breaking of the Body and Blood of Christ.”¹²⁶ The pouring out of the wine signifies Christ’s blood “severed from His flesh.”¹²⁷ Together they signify that “He died for you, that His Blood was shed for you, so that this is an essential ceremony which must not be omitted.”¹²⁸ Bruce further states that “the distribution, the giving and eating of the bread, are essential ceremonies”¹²⁹ as well. He explains that the latter three ceremonies represent the “application of the Body and Blood of Christ to your soul” and insists that “every one of these rites has its own signification, not one of them can be left out without perverting the whole action.”¹³⁰

The actions of the Lord’s Supper furthermore define the boundaries within which the elements retain their consecrated power. Bruce recognized that the “bread has a power given to it by Christ and His institution, by which it is appointed to *signify* His Body, to *represent* His Body and to *deliver* His Body.”¹³¹ Thus the bread and wine are considered “holy”. However he raises the question regarding how long the power and office is retained by the elements? “In a word,” he says, “this power remains with the bread during the time of the action, during the service of the Table.”¹³² After which they return to their common place and use.

The Role Accorded to Conscience and Self-Examination

A leading feature of Reformed sacramental theology is the place of self-examination on the part of a communicant prior to the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Bruce recognizes the importance of this principle with regard to both the ministry of the

¹²⁶ Bruce, 76.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 77.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹³¹ Ibid., 75.

¹³² Ibid., 76.

word as well as the Sacrament.¹³³ Concerning this “doctrine of our trial and due examination” Bruce says:

No man can hear the Word of God fruitfully without in some measure preparing his soul, and preparing the ear of his heart to hear, but preparation is always just as necessary for the receiving of the visible Sacraments as for the hearing of the simple Word. Therefore the doctrine of preparation and due examination should be given its proper place, and is very necessary for every one of you.¹³⁴

The importance that Bruce places on this topic is demonstrated by the fact that he devoted two sermons to his text in 1 Corinthians 11:28. It reads: “But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” He recognized that Paul gives this admonition so that “we should not come to the Table of the Lord, or come to the hearing of the Word rashly, but that every one of us should come to this holy action with reverence, that we should prepare and sanctify ourselves in some measure.”¹³⁵

Central to the issue of self-examination is the conscience. Thus Bruce broaches the subject along three lines: 1) what is the conscience? 2) Why examine the conscience? And, 3) what in particular concerning the conscience should be examined?

Bruce’s attention to the conscience is remarkably Puritan. Theologian and Puritan authority J. I. Packer notes with regard to the Puritan heart and mind that since God reigns supreme there is an impulse to “know him truly” and “serve him rightly.” He continues:

But just because this was so, they [the Puritans] were in fact very deeply concerned about conscience, for they held that conscience was the mental organ in men through which God brought his word to bear on them. Nothing, therefore, in their estimation, was more important for any man than that his conscience should be enlightened, instructed, purged,

¹³³ The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1648) calls not only for “sound preaching” but also “conscionable hearing of the Word” (XXI.5).

¹³⁴ Bruce, 146.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

and kept clean. To them, there could be no real spiritual understanding, nor any genuine godliness, except as men exposed and enslaved their consciences to God's word.¹³⁶

Bruce insists that no one is without a conscience which he defines as “a certain feeling in the heart, resembling the judgment of the living God, following upon a deed done by us, flowing from a knowledge in the mind, and accompanied by a certain motion of the heart, fear or joy, trembling or rejoicing.”¹³⁷ In breaking down this definition Bruce calls the conscience a “certain feeling in the heart” because God has so ordered the heart to “smite” or “strike” a person inwardly and make “him to feel...whether he has done well or ill.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, Bruce observes that “this feeling *resembles the judgment of God*” because a well formed conscience will agree both now and on the last day with the judgment of God.¹³⁹ Bruce also stresses that the conscience becomes engaged only after a wrong is done, not before. He insists that following a deed “your conscience applies it to yourself, and gives out the sentence against you.”¹⁴⁰ Perhaps most importantly Bruce notes that this “feeling” flows from “a knowledge in the mind.” In other words, the conscience must be formed by the light of God's truth. He says, “Your heart can never feel that to be evil which your mind does not know to be evil. Therefore, knowledge must ever go before feeling.”¹⁴¹ Acknowledging that everyone's conscience possesses some light by nature which is sufficient to render eternal judgment, he nevertheless claims, “[A] slight knowledge, a doubting and uncertain knowledge, makes the stroke of the conscience slight and small...[A] holy and solid knowledge drawn from the Word of

¹³⁶ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Book, 1990), 107.

¹³⁷ Bruce, 148.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ In his classic treatment on the conscience and casuistry, William Ames defines *conscience* as follows: “The Conscience of man...Is a mans judgment of himself, according to the judgement of God of him.” See William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (1639), 1.

¹⁴⁰ Bruce, 149.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

God, make the stroke of the conscience heavy.” Finally, Bruce explains that the outcome of a tender conscience will be a “certain motion of the heart” as expressed in either “fear or joy, trembling or rejoicing.”¹⁴² For Bruce the conscience was provided by the Lord “to serve the soul of man...as a keeper, a companion, a careful attendant on every action.”¹⁴³ Packer says, “The judgments of conscience thus express the deepest and truest self-knowledge that a man ever has—i.e., knowledge of himself as God knows him.”¹⁴⁴

Bruce next raises the question concerning why the conscience needs to be examined in the first place. Accordingly Bruce recognizes four reasons. First, the Lord makes his residence in the conscience. Next, even if he had not, Bruce insists that in the Lord’s omniscience he is able to peer into the “secret corners” of the conscience and thus examination is necessary. Then he stresses the important Reformation principle that the Lord alone is Lord of the conscience, of which no earthly ruler has such a privilege.¹⁴⁵ Finally, Bruce regards examination of the conscience as necessary because the soul’s health and welfare depends on it.¹⁴⁶ Desiring to provide helps for communicants in preparing for the sacrament, Bruce suggests that they focus on keeping “a steadfast persuasion of the mercy of God”, fleeing the sin that “may trouble the quietness and peace” of conscience, and studying “to do well”, that is “to do better and better continually.”¹⁴⁷ D. C. MacNicol, Bruce’s biographer, observes:

Bruce was above all things a preacher to the conscience. He brought his own conscience to bear on all his work. While he took much pains in searching the Scripture, and in preparing his sermons, which indeed bear marks of wide reading among the

¹⁴² Bruce, 151.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Packer, 109.

¹⁴⁵ The *Westminster Confession of Faith* XX.2 likewise says, “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything contrary to his Word.”

¹⁴⁶ Bruce, 156-157.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 158-160

Fathers, yet the main part of his business lay in “having his soul wrought upon to some suitableness of frame.”¹⁴⁸

The final question Bruce addresses concerns that which is to be examined in the conscience. Bruce mentions two things: 1) whether or not one is at peace with God; and, 2) whether or not one is in love and amity with his or her neighbor. He insists that the “God of heaven cannot have any fellowship or company with the soul that is always unclean and altogether defiled.”¹⁴⁹ Full sanctification or perfection is not what is in view. Rather, a communicant must evidence “some measure [of] being sanctified and made holy.” He says pointedly, “God cannot make His residence in a soul that is always a stinking dunghill.”¹⁵⁰ Specifically, Bruce counsels that the conscience should be examined with respect to the presence of faith and its consequent outcomes. He says, “If you have no measure of faith, you have no measure of peace with God.” For Bruce, faith that is true “unites the heart with God” and “must break out in word and deed”:

It must break out in word, glorifying the God of heaven, who has forgiven us our sins; it must break forth in word by giving a notable confession of those sins wherein we have offended Him. It must break out in deed in doing good works, to testify to the world that which is in your heart, to testify to the world that you who have this faith are a new person, that by your good example of life and conversation, you may edify your brothers and sisters.¹⁵¹

The second area of interest in examination is the presence of love and amity toward one’s neighbor. He says, “Love is the only mark by which the children of Christ and the members of Christ’s Body are known from the rest of the world. Love is the holy oil which refreshes our souls and makes us like God.” The importance of this evidence must

¹⁴⁸ MacNicol, 51.

¹⁴⁹ Bruce, 162.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 163.

not be underestimated. For Bruce, “Take away love, and you are not a member of His body.”¹⁵²

Such graces as faith and love are possible only by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God brings order to the mind by providing it with “a celestial and heavenly light”¹⁵³ which dwells only in Jesus. The light enables the mind to embrace not only God as Creator, but Christ as Redeemer. The consequent outcome of such light is that believers live as “children of the light.” The Spirit’s ministry touches not only the mind, but also the heart so that “a throne of Christ Jesus” is set in place and the affections are changed such that they desire him over its former idols. Bruce notes that this faith formed in the mind and heart must now be nourished. This is accomplished in two ways:

(1) First we must nourish faith begun in our souls by hearing the Word, not every word, but by hearing the Word of God preached, and not by hearing every man, but by hearing the Word preached by him who is sent. For this is the ordinary means by which the Lord has bound Himself, He works faith through the hearing of the Word, and (2) the receiving of the Sacraments. And the more you hear the Word, and the oftener you receive the Sacraments, the more your faith is nourished. Now it is not by hearing the Word, and receiving the Sacraments, that we nourish faith. The Word and Sacraments are not able of themselves to nourish this faith in us, unless the working of the Holy Spirit is conjoined with their ministry.¹⁵⁴

Significance of Bruce’s Sermons on the Lord’s Supper

This essay has sought to address the legacy of Robert Bruce as contained in his five sermons on the Lord’s Supper preached at St. Giles Church, Edinburgh, Scotland during the months of February and March 1589. An overview of Bruce’s life was presented featuring his celebrated ministry of twelve years at St. Giles followed by the near legendary stature he achieved after thirty-one years of “marginal” ministry in exile.

¹⁵² Bruce, 164.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 172; One is reminded of Jonathan Edwards’ seminal sermon nearly 150 later entitles, *A Divine and Supernatural Light*.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 178-179.

Indeed, MacNicol regards him as among “the most commanding figures in Scotland.”¹⁵⁵ Respected Scottish Theologian John MacLeod in his *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History* calls Bruce “the most outstanding of the preachers and witnesses of the first third of the seventeenth century.”¹⁵⁶ Bruce’s sermons on the Lord’s Supper were subsequently placed in historical context as the product of the Reformation in general, the Scottish experience in particular, and a man with a fertile mind and a devout heart. The sermons were assessed with respect to Bruce’s views on four topics: 1) the sacrament as a sign and seal; 2) the presence of Christ in the sacrament; 3) the significance of the sacramental actions; and, 4) the role accorded to conscience and self-examination in coming to the Lord’s Table.

There are doubtless many reasons for rediscovering, reading, and absorbing Bruce’s sermons for today. Three will be noted. First, Bruce’s place in the development and expression of Reformed sacramental theology is exceedingly noteworthy. As Laidlaw has observed, “The doctrine of the Sacraments expounded in these discourses is that of the Reformed Church. That doctrine has never been better stated.”¹⁵⁷ Bruce’s participation during the communion season at the Kirk of Shotts in 1630 illustrates his profound influence on the legacy of the Scottish communion celebration. Leigh Eric Schmidt notes the proximity of Bruce’s published sermons to his first celebration of the Lord’s Supper, which Wodrow reports was accompanied with an “extraordinary effusion of the Spirit.” Schmidt observes:

Two years after this communion, in 1590, Bruce published his *Sermons on the Sacraments of the Lords Supper* which became a standard for Eucharistic expression

¹⁵⁵ MacNicol, 7.

¹⁵⁶ John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History* (1943; repr., Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1995), 55.

¹⁵⁷ Laidlaw, vi.

among the Scottish Presbyterians. Dedicated to both the Word and the sacraments, to leading people “to Christ be the ear” as well as “by the eie,” Bruce represented an early synthesis of conversionist preaching and fervent Eucharistic piety.¹⁵⁸

Second, the whole practice of self-examination in preparation for coming to the Table is generally eschewed by many moderns as being overly morose and self-absorbed. There are those, according to Packer, who view a piety that searches the conscience as morbid introspection leading to “spiritual despondency and depression”. However, Packer, speaking of the same practice among the Puritans, responds, “No doubt it would if it were made an end in itself; but, of course, it never was.” The actual result of such piety served “to drive sinners to Christ and to teach them to live by faith in him.”¹⁵⁹ Bruce’s entire emphasis is superb in making this same point: “The more the heart is opened, the more the conscience is pacified, the more the taste of that sweetness continues and remains, the more are you assured of God’s mercy.”¹⁶⁰

Third, Bruce’s legacy not only helped shape Reformed sacramental theology, but profoundly affected Presbyterian piety for generations to come. MacLeod observes that the fruit of his Inverness labors “may be traced after the lapse of three hundred years.” Thus his exile, in effect, gave him a larger hearing than if he had remained in Edinburgh the latter three decades of his life. MacLeod continues, “When it was known that Bruce was to preach, the people of the country around would flock together to hear him.”¹⁶¹ One such person who was profoundly influenced under Bruce’s country preaching was the famed Alexander Henderson who carried the Reformation into the seventeenth

¹⁵⁸ Schmidt, 23.

¹⁵⁹ Packer, 117.

¹⁶⁰ Bruce, 195.

¹⁶¹ MacLeod, 56.

century.¹⁶² When Bruce died in 1631, four to five thousand mourners accompanied his remains to the grave. Schmidt summarizes his influence:

Bruce's participation in the meetings at Shotts in 1630 capped a long career of Presbyterian advocacy and evangelical fervency....The great Presbyterian revivalists of the 1620s and 1630s—David Dickson, John Livingston, and Robert Blair—would all look to Bruce as a spiritual father.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Ibid., 56, 66-67.

¹⁶³ Schmidt, 23.

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