



The response of the Free Church of Scotland to the First World War, 1914-1919. MTh(R) thesis.

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**The Response of the Free Church of Scotland to the First
World War, 1914-1919**

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1. Introduction

When the British Government declared war on Germany on 4th August 1914, every major Presbyterian denomination in Scotland¹ supported this decision. These Scottish churches shared in the popular assent to Britain's entry into the conflict, charged with a sense of moral rectitude in opposing the military might of Germany when the German army had marched into neutral Belgium, an action integral to its strategic attempt to defeat France before sweeping eastwards to overpower Russia and so avoid a war on two fronts.² That a political decision to respond militarily to German aggression should in any way be connected with a religious understanding of the conflict might seem remote to a 21st century secular mindset. Yet, as Philip Jenkins surmises in his groundbreaking book, *The Great and Holy War*, "religion is essential to understanding the war."³ He argues that religion gives the historian an understanding of what prompted people to go to war; what was hoped to be achieved by the war; and what kept people at war. These three elements: motivation for war; achievement through war and assiduity in war can be detected in the religious language used by ecclesiastical leaders of the 'Christian' nations of both sides of the conflict in their justification for the involvement of fellow nationals in the War that cost some ten million lives. That every major Christian denomination in Great Britain participated in the First World War through active support of the military objectives in defeating Germany and its allies indicates the convergence of church and state *qua* religion and politics in seeking to uphold international justice when treaty obligations, such as the Treaty of London, had been violated by a dominant power.

¹ 'Major' denominations referred to in the thesis are: the Church of Scotland, United Free Church of Scotland, Free Church of Scotland; the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

² Great Britain had recognised Belgian neutrality according to the Treaty of London, 1839. An invasion of Belgium by a hostile power would endanger Britain's island defences hence the strategic element in Britain's response to Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality.

³ P. Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War*, Oxford, Lion, 2014 p.5.

The role of religion, and of Christianity in particular, in the context of a doctrinally conservative denomination engaging with theological issues arising from war should be investigated, with the Free Church of Scotland as a benchmark for such a study. That a study of the Free Church of Scotland - a small Presbyterian denomination - in relation to a war defined as “Great” should be undertaken presupposes the importance of religion as a contributing factor in understanding the conflict from small as well as large religious institutions. Thus, the theological and moral aspects of the War relating to divine causation of war, the nature of salvation in the context of death in battle, eschatological interpretation of the War and spiritual comfort and revivification as a result of warfare should be analysed through the spectrum of a denomination facing up to the challenges that war presented in these areas, challenges that the Free Church sought to meet with a robust determination to maintain its traditional confessional teaching. Such an investigation is the more pertinent in the context of the innovative and theologically liberalising positions taken by some within Scotland’s two leading Presbyterian denominations, the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland, particularly in response to the increasingly mechanised warfare in the trenches in which death on a hitherto unprecedented scale was being experienced, with the churches challenged to provide meaningful comfort to the bereaved.

As the War progressed, the Free Church of Scotland’s contribution in theological output and provision of spiritual oversight through Christian literature and through the provision of chaplains, alongside other larger denominations, indicates the direct involvement of a religious dimension in the conflict. Such contribution must be assessed within the wider discussion of the spiritual impact of the churches on the combatant troops in particular and on society in general; the Free Church as a denomination fully engaged in spiritual activity

within the military and civilian *corpus* should be included in such debate. Thus, from the perspective of the religious element of the War as a key component in understanding the War in its many dimensions of cause, conduct and consequence, the input of the Free Church of Scotland should not be ignored.

1.1. Caveat

In assessing the particular Free Church dimension to the First World War, a number of problems exist in relation to a comprehensive analysis, both in terms of the availability of primary source material relating to the denomination and in the paucity of historical research on the role of the Scottish churches' involvement in the War in general. Thus, in the century following the outbreak, conflagration and cessation by armistice of the First World War there have been few studies of that war's impact on the Presbyterian churches in Scotland. This has followed a general pattern across Great Britain of historiographical marginalisation of ecclesiastical influence in the War⁴ and the minimising by secular historians of the influence of ecclesiastical figures and Christian belief throughout the War. Where particular studies have focused exclusively on the role of the churches in the First World War, the Free Church of Scotland is omitted. Thus, for example, David Coulter's essay on Scottish Presbyterian Chaplaincy on the Western Front⁵ focuses almost exclusively on the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland (with one small reference to the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland) but nothing on the Free Church. Indeed in that collection of essays which lays claim to being "the most complete study of the subject to

⁴ A. Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, London, SPCK, 1978, pp. 1-2 notes that up until the time of research in the late 1970s no definitive full length study of the Church of England in relation to the First World War had been written in England.

⁵ D. Coulter, "Garrisoning the nation's soul: Calvinism, Douglas Haig and Scottish Presbyterian chaplaincy on the Western Front", in Michael Snape and Edward Madigan (eds), *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War*, Farnham, 2013, pp.75-93.

date” marking “a major advance in the historiography of the British army, of the British churches and of British society during the First World War”⁶ the omission of the Free Church of Scotland renders such a claim less than complete.

Where studies do include the smaller Scottish Presbyterian churches (notably James Lachlan Macleod’s studies of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland), again, there has been minimal research undertaken involving the role of the Free Church of Scotland within that particular ecclesiastical genre. For example, when Macleod discusses the theologically revisionist responses within the mainstream Scottish churches to the question of the destiny of the souls of soldiers after death on the battlefield he focuses exclusively on the Free Presbyterian Church as retaining a solidly ‘orthodox’ Confessional position regarding salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Such a selective singling out of one denomination ignores the fact that the Free Church of Scotland held the same unswerving theological position as the Free Presbyterian Church contrary to that of those who argued for salvation through death in battle.⁷

From the evidence above, one sees that much contemporary published work on the War largely ignores the Free Church of Scotland, despite the fact that from congregations in the denomination’s heartland - the Highlands and Islands - a proportionally large (in relation to the rest of Great Britain) number of troops was recruited.⁸ When one considers that the Free Church’s magazines, *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland* and its magazine

⁶M. Snape and E. Madigan (eds), *The Clergy in Khaki* Aldershot, Ashgate 2013, Introduction page.

⁷ See J. L. Macleod, “Greater Love Hath No Man Than This: Scotland’s Conflicting Religious Responses to Death in the Great War,” in *The Scottish Historical Review*, Volume LXXXI: No. 211: April 2002 pp. 70-96.

⁸ W.C.Mackenzie, *The Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, Edinburgh, The Moray Press, 1949, p.287.

“for the young people of the Free Church of Scotland”⁹, *The Instructor*, were replete with contemporary comment on the War, this oversight necessitates the filling in of the gap in Scottish ecclesiastical contribution to the War. This is deemed all the more necessary bearing in mind that these magazines were direct links between the denomination and its lay and clerical constituency and yet have been rarely consulted in historic surveys of the Scottish churches and the War,

Where we do find the Free Church of Scotland mentioned within the Scottish context, the denomination is given sparse attention.¹⁰ Thus, where historians have consulted *The Monthly Record* in order to highlight comparison with British nonconformist reaction to the War, the evidence presented of the Free Church’s involvement in the War is negligible. For example, in Derek Murray’s Memorial Paper, *High Calvinist Reactions to the First World War*, only eight references from *The Monthly Record* are found.¹¹ Moreover, Donald Macleod notes in his article on Highland churches in the First World War that “few historians of the First World War have deigned to consult *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*” adding that “that is their loss.”¹² This absence of any significant secondary focus on the Free Church of Scotland in its direct involvement in the First World War is, in many respects, surprising. After all, contemporary sources, in addition to Free Church material, reveal the involvement of the Free Church throughout the course of the War.¹³ Thus, while national newspapers in Scotland focus particularly on the General Assemblies of the three leading

⁹ *The Instructor*’s designated nomenclature.

¹⁰ D. Macleod, <http://www.donaldmacleod.org.uk/dm/the-highland-churches-and-the-first-world-war/> (accessed 20 September 2015).

¹¹ D. Murray, *High Calvinist Reactions to the First World War* n.p, United Board History Project, 2016.

¹² D. Macleod, *op cit*.

¹³ *The Scotsman* and *The Glasgow Herald* newspapers carried *verbatim* reports of Free Church responses to the war during General Assembly debates between 1915 and 1918. Proceedings were reported side by side with those of the Church of Scotland and United Free Church Assemblies.

Scottish Presbyterian denominations, local newspapers such as *The Highland News*, *The Stornoway Gazette* and *The Ross-shire Journal* report on such aspects as Free Church chaplains serving at military camps in Britain, Holland and at the Western Front; obituaries to Free Church servicemen killed in battle and comments on the Free Church's attitudes to wartime Sunday labour and the trade in alcohol.

Furthermore, accessing a breadth of material from a particular Free Church perspective also presents difficulties. There are few extant wartime documents that are distinctly denominational *à propos* the Free Church of Scotland. While *The Monthly Record* and *The Instructor* provide a treasure trove of material in relation to the War there is a dearth of additional documentation pertinent to academic research. Notwithstanding this shortage, the availability of extant Free Church committee reports provide invaluable evidence in their overview of denominational involvement in practical and moral matters. For example, those of the Highlands and Islands Committee comment on such matters as chaplaincy, Gaelic literature for troops and alleviation of hardship caused by the War while those of the Committee on Religion, Morals and Temperance make pronouncement on such issues as sabbatarianism and Roman Catholicism in relation to divine judgement on the nation as a cause of war. Notwithstanding these official documents, there are few surviving items of lay material. For example, correspondence from either troops at the Front or from lay people at home indicating a distinctly Free Church connection is sparse. Moreover, no diary accounts of the War from recognised Free Church troops have been forthcoming, although the prodigious correspondence of Free Church chaplains contained in both Church magazines does allow for a meaningful depth of research into the conduct of one aspect of Free Church involvement in the War. Furthermore, while war-related sermons of Church of Scotland and

United Free Church clergy were printed at the time of war, only one Free Church sermon specifically relating to the War has been located in print.¹⁴

While public pronouncements on the causes, course and outcome of the War are evident in the highest court of the church - the annual General Assembly - and reported in secular print and in *The Monthly Record* there are a number of crucial qualifications to sources from other courts of the Church. Thus, for example, in the examined records of Kirk Sessions kept during the period of the War, there are few items minuted regarding any aspect of the conflict. Instead, matters of church discipline, communion seasons, "ante-nuptial fornication," requests for baptism and the induction of ministers and elders to congregations cover the vast majority of business recorded. The great conflagration involving congregational members and adherents, with concomitant deaths in battle, is rarely mentioned in these documents.¹⁵

Nevertheless, despite the lack of Free Church related primary sources relevant to the subject and the lack of an integrated inclusion of the denomination within wider studies of ecclesiastical involvement in the War, the historian is not completely bereft of relevant documentation sufficient to present an overview of the denomination's response to the conflict. Significantly, the war-related contributions of Archibald Macneilage as editor of *The Monthly Record* until September 1917 provide much insight into a Free Church lay mindset on the many aspects of the denomination's thinking and action during the War. Moreover,

¹⁴ A sermon delivered by Rev. Samuel Lyle Orr in connection with the death in battle of Rev. James Orr, Shettleston Free Church, reported in *The Ardrrossan and Saltcoats Herald*, 17 August 1917.

¹⁵ Seven Kirk Session Minute Books covering the period of the war and the immediate aftermath were consulted. Only one Kirk Session - that of Nairn Free Church - includes any item in its minutes specifically relating to spiritual matters in relation to the war: the holding of prayer meetings on account of the war crisis. Four of the seven Kirk Sessions make no reference to any aspect of the War.

committee reports give a wider spectrum of analysis from the denomination from both lay and clerical Free Church commentators. Furthermore, the few letters from identified Free Church sources in local and national newspapers on topical war issues provide useful information from lay Free Church men and women, while the inclusion of obituaries in these newspapers can be examined profitably in relation to that denomination's wartime theological, spiritual and practical contribution.

1.2. Historiography

Any study of the Free Church and the First World War must be subsumed within the wider historiographical discussion concerning the impact of the War on the alleged decline of Christianity within Great Britain (including Scotland) and in Europe. The background to this debate is necessary in order to give context. When war broke out in August 1914, the predominant nations involved could still be referred to as 'Christian.' In particular, Protestant Christianity in its various forms largely defined the traditions and culture of Great Britain and Germany, with Christian rhetoric uttered by theologians and churchmen underpinning much of the justification and conduct of the War from both sides of the conflict.

Notwithstanding the directness of the Christian church's involvement in the War, through speeches, sermons and published works, the churches' impact on the War and the War's impact on the churches have been much debated amongst historians. Of particular focus is the alleged decline of the Christian faith in Great Britain and Europe as a result of the slaughter in battle particularly after 1916. It is asserted, for example, that as a result of the carnage of the Battle of the Somme (July to November 1916) a loss of Christian faith in

Britain was incurred with a concomitant decline in church attendance: the War producing a turning point in the Christian faith, the impact of which is seen in the continued decline of Christianity to this day.

As far as Scotland is concerned, the War has been deemed to have produced a negative impact on the Christian faith and the churches. Thus, Stewart Brown, for example, argues that the First World War had a devastating effect on the major Scottish churches in relation to an expected revival of Christian faith and in relation to their theological understanding of salvation by faith alone. Brown writes that the initial expectation of the Scottish churches in 1914-1915 was that such a revival and an enhanced moral rectitude would happen in Scotland through a “solemn purification by fire;”¹⁶ instead, he argues, the experience of trench warfare actually diminished the Christian faith amongst the troops and so quashed any hopes the churches had of a religious awakening.

On the other hand, historians such as Michael Snape have countered such a negative view of the War’s impact on the Christian faith in Great Britain arguing that the “religious experience of British soldiers in the First World War cannot be characterised in terms of an overall loss of faith.”¹⁷ Whether Brown’s or Snape’s hypotheses on the relationship between the experience of war and Christian faith stand up to scrutiny within the narrower confines of the Free Church of Scotland should be examined according to the extant denominational evidence available. Of particular focus is the extent to which the Free Church of Scotland can be viewed as being a relevant denomination in its contribution to the war effort in terms of

¹⁶ See S. Brown, “A Solemn Purification by Fire” in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol 45, no.1, 1994 pp.1-23..

¹⁷ M. Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, London, Routledge, 2005, p.194.

its spiritual impact primarily but not exclusively on its own constituency: whether those within the armed forces or non-combatant personnel.

2. The Free Church of Scotland at the Outbreak of War

In 1914 the Free Church of Scotland was a small branch of the Scottish church relative to the two largest Scottish Presbyterian denominations. Whilst at its formation in 1843, as a result of secession from the Church of Scotland over the issue of the Establishment Principle,¹⁸ the Free Church comprised over 2700 congregations within 87 Presbyteries, covering the whole of Scotland,¹⁹ by the time war broke out there were only 160 Free Church congregations within 12 Presbyteries. These Presbyteries covered mainly the north-east Highlands, north-west Highlands and Islands, Inverness-shire, Perthshire and Scotland's two largest cities, Glasgow and Edinburgh, mainly through Highland migration.²⁰ While no officially published statistical records for Free Church membership exist for this period, one estimate gives Free Church membership in 1905 to be 70 000;²¹ that such a figure would not be significantly different at the outbreak of war is most likely the case. In contrast, the Church of Scotland, at the outbreak of war, had 1744 congregations within 84 Presbyteries across every region of Scotland; the number of members being over 700 000;²² while the United Free Church, contained 1556 congregations within 64 Presbyteries; the membership being over 255 000, covering the whole of the country.²³ Thus, in terms of statistics alone, the Free Church might appear a minor church in Scottish Presbyterianism with a minimal role in contributing to a

¹⁸ The Establishment Principle, by which the spiritual independence of the Church from State control was embedded in the Westminster Confession of Faith, had been challenged by the asserted right of patronage by landowners who had, since the early 18th century, 'presented' ministers of their own choosing into congregations, irrespective of the wishes of the congregation. After a ten year struggle, during which the civil courts upheld the right of patronage, 474 ministers (out of c. 1200 ministers) within the Church of Scotland left that denomination to form the Church of Scotland Free (soon changed to the preferred name of 'Free Church of Scotland').

¹⁹ Statistics for Free Church Presbytery and Congregation numbers at the time of the Disruption are found in *Ecclegen.com/fasti/* (accessed 30th August 2017).

²⁰ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, September 1914 p.172.

²¹ J. D. MacMillan, "Free Church of Scotland, post-1900" in *A Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, N. Cameron (ed), Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1993, p.338.

²² *The Church of Scotland Year Book 1915*, Edinburgh, R and R Clark Ltd, n.d.

²³ *United Free Church of Scotland Reports to the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland 1915*, Edinburgh, T and T Constable, 1915.

theological understanding of the War and in offering practical involvement to the spiritual well-being of troops and non-combatants. That such a numerical inferiority in relation to the much larger Presbyterian denominations did not hinder the Free Church from participating in theological debate and in the provision of spiritual comfort for its and other constituents should be investigated.

When one considers its doctrinal isolation, at the outbreak of the War, from other Scottish Presbyterian denominations - those mentioned above plus the Free Presbyterian Church - again this must be factored into any examination of the Free Church's impact on the War. While its separation from the Church of Scotland was historic, its separation from the United Free Church and the smaller Free Presbyterian Church was of more recent concern. Two ministers and c. 14 000 members and adherents had seceded from the Free Church in 1893 over the issue of a Declaratory Act passed in 1892 which, *inter alia*, allowed for "diversity of opinion...on such points in the *Confession* as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed Faith therein set forth." While the Act did state that "the Church retains full authority to determine, in any case which may arise, what points fall within this description, and thus to guard against any abuse of this liberty to the detriment of sound doctrine, or to the injury of her unity and peace"²⁴ there was no indication within the Act as to which doctrines might fall under the category mentioned. When the Act passed by a substantial majority at the 1893 Free Church General Assembly, Rev. Donald Macfarlane, Raasay and Rev. Donald Macdonald, Shieldaig seceded to form the Free Presbyterian Church. Thus, in 1893, the Free Church of Scotland had experienced its first secession; a second fissure in

²⁴ Free Church of Scotland Declaratory Act, 1892, cited in G. Collins, *The Heritage of Our Fathers*, Edinburgh, The Knox Press, 1974, p.92.

1900 would see the Free Church lose most of its ministers and congregations, further isolating itself from fellow Scottish Presbyterians.

This decline in Free Church presence in Scotland as a whole can be attributed to the vast majority of the Free Church ministry and congregations entering into union with the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Movement towards union had been progressing since the early 1860s when informal discussions between the two denominations were taking place. That union was formalised on 30th October 1900 at a General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, with the two denominations forming the United Free Church of Scotland. The decision was overwhelmingly supported by a majority of 616 commissioners - only 27 commissioners (10 ministers and 17 elders) voted to oppose the Union with 643 commissioners supporting it. Only 27 Free Church clergymen (including two retired men and one minister incapacitated through ill health) throughout the whole of Scotland remained outwith the Union. Principal Robert Rainy, one of the leading proponents of Union, had forecast that the minority would exist as a denomination for only five years.²⁵ Notwithstanding this assessment, in 1905 the position of the minority as the legitimate Free Church of Scotland was vindicated by a House of Lords' judgement. A subsequent property settlement followed this legal finding. By the Churches (Scotland) Act of June 1905 the Free Church was entitled to property where evidence could be shown that a congregation had one third of the members and adherents who had remained within the Free Church on 30th October 1900.²⁶ A subsequent Executive Commission appointed by Parliament recommended the specific division of funds and properties between the Free

²⁵ G. Collins, op cit, p.108.

²⁶ See the sub-section of the Churches (Scotland) Act in A.Stewart and J.K.Cameron, *The Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1910*, Edinburgh, William Hodge, 1910, p.316.

Church and the United Free Church. As a result, over 130 properties were allocated to the Free Church.

Thus, at the outset of the War, a mere 9 years after the settlement with the United Free Church in the Free Church's favour, and after a bitter five year legal battle with the United Free Church, the Free Church of Scotland had been reduced numerically and geographically and separated from both the increasingly liberal, evangelical United Free Church and Church of Scotland and from the conservative Free Presbyterian Church. The proximity of dispute between fellow Christians would provide a test of the Free Church's willingness and resolve to co-operate with these other denominations in the war effort; the extent to which the Free Church was willing to overcome these impediments during a time of national crisis when the country as a whole was fully committed in conflict with the Central Powers should be examined. Its engagement with the theological, moral and spiritual issues of the War and its preparedness to engage in co-operation with other denominations, irrespective of doctrinal differences, should also be investigated to ascertain the effectiveness of the Free Church of Scotland in providing a clear understanding of a theological perspective on war and in its role within the wider church in giving spiritual leadership at a time of when the exigencies of war challenged the certainties of doctrine concerning the salvation of the soul.

3. Theological Responses to the War

3.1. Causes of the War

When historians analyse the causes of the First World War, such scrutiny involves a close examination of the international relations of the major European powers and the heightening of tension that led to the outbreak of war in August 1914. Relevant factors that are attributed to the causes of the War include the formation of defensive alliances and ententes and how these diplomatic agreements were tested through such developments as Balkan nationalism and its impact on Austro-Russian relations, imperial and naval rivalry between Great Britain and Germany and of German military desire to maintain supremacy against possible threats from Russia and France to Germany's political integrity.

However, when we survey the response to the outbreak of the War from Free Church pronouncements, and indeed compare such a response with the other main Scottish denominations, there is a marked absence of any in-depth analysis of political reasons for war. Instead there is a solid core of theological, spiritual and moral explanation given in terms of the identifying of German Higher Criticism as engendering the judgement of God as well as divine wrath directed at Great Britain for alleged moral and spiritual laxity particularly in aspects such as Sabbath breaking,²⁷ excessive alcohol consumption and the widespread enjoyment of leisure activities amongst all classes. Furthermore, the perceived decline of Protestantism in favour of greater Roman Catholic emancipation is also cited as a contributing factor in the opprobrium of God against the nation necessitating war as divine chastisement for such 'evil.'

²⁷ The designations "Sabbath," "Sabbath breaking" and "Sabbath desecration" will be used throughout this thesis as befitting contemporary usage.

Yet, the decrying of theological liberalism in Germany on the one hand, and of the moral and spiritual laxity within Great Britain on the other hand, is wholly absent from any official Free Church sources during the years of greatest political tension in Europe prior to August 1914. Only after the outbreak of war do we find comments from the Free Church connect such theological and moral ‘aberrations’ as salient causes of divine displeasure resulting in general European conflagration. One has to bear in mind that such theological developments as Higher Criticism had been widespread in Germany since the early 19th century yet there is no evidence of any Free Church attribution of divine wrath upon Germany necessitating war as judgement prior to 1914. Moreover, the targets for Free Church condemnation in moral and spiritual decline highlighted after the outbreak of war, were no new phenomena in British society; certainly there is no pre-war evidence of any comment from Free Church laymen or clergy associating such societal ills with divine judgement necessitating war. It is only when war breaks out in August 1914 that we see a welter of analysis from Free Church commentators on the causes of war centred on theological, moral and spiritual reasons.

From a military and theological perspective, the pre-war silence of a theologically conservative and patriotically loyal denomination to developments in Germany is surprising. Militarily, Germany had been expanding its Navy since 1898: a naval arms race with Britain accelerated in 1906 with the construction of the British battleship, the *Dreadnought*. National pride in the Royal Navy as the great defender of the British Isles and the British Empire was evident in the jingoistic language used in relation to the perception of Germany as Britain’s greatest threat to its Empire (the popular slogan, “we want eight and we won’t wait” referring to the public demand that eight Dreadnoughts be built, epitomised the perception in Britain of Germany as a threat to its island and Empire). Moreover, Germany’s

rapid industrialisation, begun after German unification in 1871 and accelerated under Kaiser Wilhelm II, was integral to the notion that military might was essential to a successful German foreign policy. Yet, there is no evidence of any Free Church condemnation of German militarism as evincing divine wrath as would be manifested after war was declared.

Such a threshold of anti-German sentiment evident only at the outbreak of war is further detected in the Loyal and Dutiful Addresses to King George V given at the Free Church General Assemblies in May 1913 and in May 1914 (in both instances during the time of increased European tension). In these Addresses, the complete absence of any condemnation of Germany for its liberal theology or for its militarisation is evident. Instead, in the case of the 1913 Address, Germany was referred to as a “great and friendly nation” with King George V given “heartiest congratulations” on the “happy effects” produced by his presence at the “august festivities” at Berlin (a reference to his attending the marriage of Princess Viktoria Louise, daughter of Kaiser Wilhelm II, to Prince Ernest Augustus of Hanover in May 1913). The Address commented that the King’s presence in Germany was significant “as powerfully tending to foster and maintain kindly relations between the two nations.”²⁸ Indeed, at the General Assembly in May 1914, again, there was no reference to the threat of war or to German theology or divine judgement against British moral and spiritual decline. Instead, of chief importance was comment on the unrest in Ireland with an expression of sympathy for “our fellow-Protestants there.”²⁹ While it must be borne in mind that such Addresses were largely the work of Moderators as individuals, nevertheless there is no

²⁸ Act anent Address to his Majesty the King. (No. 1 of Class II.) Edinburgh, 27th May 1913. Retrieved from <https://freechurch.org/assets/documents/2014/Acts1910-1919.pdf> (accessed 28 August 2016). .

²⁹ Act anent Address to His Majesty the King. (No. 1 of Class II.) Edinburgh, 26th May 1914. Retrieved from <https://freechurch.org/assets/documents/2014/Acts1910-1919.pdf> (accessed 28 August 2016).

evidence of any contrary position held within the Free Church during the immediate pre-war period.

The absence of any condemnation of German liberal theology as endangering the peace of Europe through incurring the judgement of God is consistent across the denominational spectrum in Great Britain. In the Church of England for example, Charles Bailey, writes of a “general prewar Germanophilia” as evidenced by a Conference attended by over 100 Anglican and German theologians in Berlin in 1909 where “common ties of blood, culture and religion that united the two countries” were stressed.³⁰ Furthermore, the birth of modern ecumenicism through the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, where churchmen gathered from Great Britain, America and Europe, including Germany, seemed to augur a seminal moment for international cooperation, certainly from an ecclesiastical perspective.³¹

In the three largest Scottish Presbyterian denominations, again, there is no indication of any pre-war Germanophobic sentiment sufficient to justify divine wrath through war. For example, Stewart Brown notes that few within the Scottish Presbyterian churches were prepared for a general European conflict: many within the churches regarded the problems in Ulster as of greater danger to peace than developments in south east Europe.³² This focus on Ireland as the powder keg for conflagration is borne out across the Scottish Presbyterian spectrum: the Free Church being consistent with contemporary Scottish comments given from other Scottish denominations. The political crisis brought about by the Home Rule Bill

³⁰ C. E. Bailey, “The British Protestant Theologians in the First World War: Germanophobia Unleashed” in *Harvard Theological Review* 77:2, 1984, p.198.

³¹ *ibid.*, p.198.

³² S.Brown, *op cit.*, p.83.

of 1912, whereby a bicameral Irish Parliament would be set up in Dublin, had been vigorously opposed by Irish Protestants. Armed militia formed by Ulster Unionists to defend the Union of Ireland with Great Britain were counteracted by a militia of Irish Volunteers. Political civil war loomed; however Scottish Protestants, including the Free Church of Scotland, regarded the crisis as more a religious than political one; rhetoric in support of this contention is evident in various communications on the matter. Thus, in the July 1914 edition of *The Monthly Record*, the expectation of military conflict was cited in response to the escalation of the arming of Ulster Loyalist and Irish Nationalist forces. The editor, Archibald Macneilage, argued that the “ancient feud of Rome...against the power of Protestant Britain” being “still a very live, very dominating issue” would result in “red fields” signalling the “last struggle for mastery.”³³ Similar prognostications of military conflict based on the religious dimension of the crisis are found within the Free Presbyterian Church immediately prior to the outbreak of the First World War. In its August 1914 *Magazine* there was no mention of Higher Criticism or of political tension in the Balkans during the summer of 1914. Rather, there was a call for a Day of Humiliation “in view of the proposed Home Rule for Ireland as a menace to the civil and religious liberties and peace of the three kingdoms” with a concomitant plea in the Synod’s Loyal Address to King George V, that the King not “set the great seal” in approving Home Rule which, the Free Presbyterian Church argued, “may lead to bloodshed.”³⁴ Moreover, at the Church of Scotland Assembly on May 28 1914, a letter was sent to the “Protestants in Ireland” expressing the sympathy of the Church during the Home Rule Crisis. During the business relating to the sending of the letter,

³³ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, July 1914, p.127.

³⁴ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, August 1914, p.163.

Professor W. P. Paterson spoke of the foreboding of a “civil war” with Ireland on the “brink of national catastrophe.”³⁵

Thus, the Free Church of Scotland, in line with other Scottish Presbyterian denominations, prioritized the crisis in Ireland as of primary concern in relation to possible armed conflict in which the Scottish churches felt a moral obligation in, at the very least, giving sympathetic support to Ulster Protestants. This position, together with the Free Church’s pre-war silence on any condemnatory comment on theological developments within Germany or of lax morality at home as causing divine displeasure sufficient to bring the judgement of war, is wholly consistent with the wider denominational spectrum in Great Britain. Thus, the Free Church can be seen to be within the mainstream of British churches in its absence of any linking of theological aberration or moral deficiency with divine wrath necessitating war prior to 1914.

Notwithstanding the Free Church’s uniformity of attitude with other denominations in this absence, the Free Church can be deemed to have been out of step with the Free Presbyterian Church in relation to divine judgement through war. James Lachlan Macleod argues that when war did break out in August 1914 this was “exactly what Free Presbyterians expected.” Macleod asserts that the Free Presbyterian Church had been consistently “issuing Jeremiads” against “national apostasy and backsliding” since the inception of the church as a denomination. Macleod cites pre-war evidence from *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* in which the expectation of divine judgement against Britain for moral and spiritual failings is expressed. While the precise wordings of such comments did

³⁵ *The Layman’s Book of the General Assembly of 1914*, Edinburgh, J Gardner Hitt, 1914, p.150.

not mention war, Macleod argues that such expressions as “visit this land in judgement” (contained in the August 1896 edition) and “temporal and eternal judgements” (contained in the August 1899 edition) mentioned in relation to national sins, are strong evidence that “consequently, when a cataclysm like the Great War struck, it is hardly surprising that they [the Free Presbyterian Church] would see it in this context.” Macleod further supports his contention by referring to Rev. Donald Macfarlane’s comments in 1905 in relation to the Russo-Japanese War as a divine judgement for Russia’s treatment of the Jews; Macleod argues that on that basis, “since *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* had been warning about the nation’s sins and their consequences since its first edition in 1896, the Free Presbyterian line on the Great War was to be expected.”³⁶

In contrast, the Free Church of Scotland’s “line on the Great War”, from the pre-war evidence above, was not expected. Notwithstanding this pre-war silence on the growing European crisis, when Great Britain did enter the War, a plethora of theological and moral explanations for war was forthcoming from every major Scottish denomination. However, in order to examine more fully the Free Church’s explanation for the War (and, as the War progressed without any seeming cessation of conflict, reasons for the War’s prolongation) one does need to explore the consistency of Free Church theological and moral argument and the extent to which such explanations were shared across the main Scottish Presbyterian denominations. Thus, while one cannot neatly differentiate between the theological and moral genres, it is necessary to examine the theological underpinning of the cited morality of war against Germany and the associated arguments that claimed to identify the moral and spiritual decline of Great Britain as incurring God’s judgment in war.

³⁶ J.L.Macleod, “‘*The Mighty Hand of God.*’ *The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Great War,*” *Bridges*, Volume 12, pp.24-25

Moreover, attention needs to be given to the arguments used which associated German theological liberalism with the outbreak of war; and, in addition, to the arguments used to explain a higher purpose in war through national purification. Furthermore, one needs to examine the response of the churches to the unprecedented death rate amongst military personnel as the conflict progressed and to examine the extent to which the Free Church of Scotland differed from the other Scottish Presbyterian denominations in its theological and humanitarian response to the scale of casualties of war.

3.2. Moral Justification of War

When the British Government declared war on Germany the Free Church of Scotland lost little time in making direct pronouncements on what were considered the salient causes of the conflict. A special Commission of Assembly was held on Wednesday 26th August 1914 in response to the outbreak of hostilities. Worship was conducted with a pointed reference to war; thus, for example, the singing of Psalm 68: verses 28-32 included a call to God to “scatter the people who delight in war” a sure allusion to the Church’s view of German militarism; with Isaiah 63 being read in the context of an errant people of God returning to him after God’s punishment for their spiritual apostasy: an allusion to the Church’s viewpoint on spiritual apostasy in Great Britain. Thus, as early as the first month of the War, we see the Free Church formulating a theological hypothesis for war based on a scriptural underpinning emphasising God’s judgement on Germany for its aggressive militarism allied to the adoption and promotion by German theologians of Higher Critical textual interpretation (thereby allowing a just war theory to be adopted by Free Church theologians). Moreover, the War being viewed as God’s means of calling the British people back to Himself and from the spiritual quagmire of an apostate lifestyle characterised by

moral laxity would be a constant message given in public and written pronouncements by leading Free Church spokesmen from both the clergy and laity.

This dual emphasis on God's judgement, on the one hand, against Germany for her militarism and her liberal theology and, on the other hand, as God's judgement against Britain's moral and spiritual decline was repeated by Free Church leaders throughout the War. For example, when one examines the Loyal and Dutiful Address of the Free Church General Assembly to King George V, in May 1915, there is a marked emphasis on British patriotism, German military aggression and Britain's involvement in war as just. The War was attributed to Germany's "mad ambition and the lust of conquest." Indeed, the acknowledgement that many young Free Churchmen had "fallen" in battle, and, as such, was a reason for "deep sorrow," was cited as an incentive to "strengthen...the undying resolve" to continue the fight against Germany.³⁷ Of particular significance in connection with this statement of resolve were the highlighted principles of "service," "sacrifice" and "sacred cause" which the Address associated with "the defence of truth, justice, civilization, and Christianity itself, against the whole generation of anti-Christ and the Rulers of the Darkness of this world."³⁸ The religious connotation of involvement in war is striking. Terminology normally associated within the context of Christian duty towards God was being used of the Church's stance against Germany thus justifying involvement in the War as a religious duty. Gone were any Germanophile statements as evidenced in previous Assemblies. Instead there appeared a wholesale turnaround in revulsion against Germany and the justness of the British cause in war.

³⁷ Act anent Address to His Majesty the King. Edinburgh 19th May 1915 Retrieved from <https://freechurch.org/assets/documents/2014/Acts1910-1919.pdf> (accessed 28 August 2016).

³⁸ Ibid.

Such a concentrated denunciation of Germany for its aggression in battle continued at the same Assembly. While the Moderator, Rev. John Macdonald of Rosskeen Free Church in Easter Ross, revealed a rather myopic view of the political causes of the War as simply the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (he made no mention of the wider political tensions in the Balkans nor of the acceleration to war facilitated by the various Alliances and Ententes formed prior to 1914) he claimed that the real cause of the War lay much deeper than mere politics. He conceded that Britain was unprepared for war, while asserting the fact that Germany was prepared for war, and therefore guilty of aggression as particularly evidenced in Germany's treatment of Belgium. The violation of Belgian neutrality (through the German invasion of Belgium in August 1914) was cited as sufficient moral justification for Britain to be involved in war that is "just and righteous."³⁹

This verdict on the moral justification for Britain's involvement in war was echoed in official pronouncements from all major Protestant denominations. For example, the editorial of the official Church of Scotland publication *Life and Work*, September 1914, spoke of the War as a war of aggression viz.: "a war forced upon us, a war which could not have been avoided by Great Britain without dishonour and the breach of the nation's plighted word. It is therefore a righteous war...because we are doing right we have good reason to trust in God."⁴⁰ Moreover, in a pastoral address given at the United Free Church Assembly on 25th May 1915, Rev. Dr. George Reith echoed the sentiments above when he referred to the justification of Britain's involvement in the War being: "to uphold justice and good faith in international relations, to right grievous wrongs and overthrow a standing menace to the

³⁹ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1915, p.80.

⁴⁰ *Life and Work*, November 1914, p.260.

peace of the world.”⁴¹ This moral justification of Great Britain’s involvement in the War was echoed in the monthly *Magazine* of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in which the argument for international justice was made with the assertion that “we are fully convinced that our cause is a thoroughly good, just and Christian one. We entertain no doubt as to the justice of the cause, and feel sure that our soldiers and sailors are suffering and dying in an honourable conflict.”⁴²

Again we see a convergence of views on the morality of war through a shared reproach of the German militaristic mindset and, therefore, the justified response of a defensive resistance from Great Britain and her allies. In the November 1914 edition of *Life and Work* there appeared a scathing attack on the teaching of the late 19th century German politician Heinrich von Treitschke and his influence over his fellow countrymen. His militaristic ideals on gaining power and contempt for feebleness as “a sin against the Holy Ghost” were condemned. The Editor expressed the view that Germany wished not only to be world conquerors but to be “the authors of a new religion...a religion of the superman...a religion in which might is right...a revived paganism.” He condemned the thinking of General von Bernhardi in his book *Germany and the Next War* in which the German soldier declared that “the be all and end all of a State is power;” and condemned Germany for putting self-interest “foremost in all things - a consistent evolutionist in theory.”⁴³

Thus, from the comparative evidence above it can be seen that the Free Church of Scotland’s attitude to the morality of Britain’s involvement was consistent with that of the

⁴¹ G. Reith, *Reminiscences of the United Free Church General Assemblies, 1900-1929*, Edinburgh, The Moray Press, 1933, p.169.

⁴² *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, January 1915, p.326.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.323.

main Scottish Presbyterian churches in relation to the resisting of an aggressive power through self-defence and in upholding international treaties in the name of justice.

3.3. Higher Criticism

When we consider the theological pronouncements on the causes and course of the War divergence between the Presbyterian denominations is evident. The perception of the War as a result of divine wrath both against Germany for its fostering of theological liberalism and against Britain for its reception of such teaching was seen consistently in the public comments made by Free Church spokesmen in the formative years of the War. We have already noted the reference to Higher Criticism as a factor deemed to have incurred God's judgement in war, as early as 26th August 1914, a mere three weeks after the outbreak of war. This averring of a theologically liberal criticism of the biblical text as a prime cause of war was evident in the Church's September 1914 edition of *The Monthly Record* when its editor, Archibald Macneilage, published his pronouncement on the outbreak of the War. In his editorial, Macneilage briefly highlighted Higher Criticism as a causative factor for God's divine judgement in war. He devoted one short paragraph emphasising the justness of war against the Kaiser when he considered the rise of German militarism to be a "godless cult of the sword" and as a "fit counterpart" to the "pernicious Higher Criticism which has so plentifully exhaled from German universities during the last forty years."⁴⁴ In his next editorial contributions, both in October 1914, Macneilage gave a much extended discussion directly connecting Higher Criticism with German militarism as a reason for God's intervention in war and as a warning against such theological liberalism being favoured by

⁴⁴ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, September 1914, p.159.

many in “the Presbyterian Church and Nonconformist England.”⁴⁵ Macneilage argued that the decline in religious observance in Germany, coupled with the progress of Higher Criticism, explained the cruelties of war conducted by Germany and “lies” spoken by Germany as to its justification for going to war and its war aims (although Macneilage gave no explanation of what these “lies” are in detail). He suggested that Germany had cleverly hidden its true intentions for the outbreak of the War: those of world domination. In Macneilage’s assessment of the link between Higher Criticism and the nature of German militarism, he made the emphatic statement that “Krupp’s cannon factory is a related phenomenon to Pfleiderer’s⁴⁶ infidel lecture room.”⁴⁷ Thus, in summary, Macneilage argued that the consequences of a theology that denies biblical truth, had a direct bearing on the conduct of Germany’s self-justification for war, on the spirit and practice of German militarism, and her duplicity in her avowed aims.

This same emphasis on the link between the development of theological liberalism in Germany and its favourable reception in Great Britain as incurring the wrath of God through war is evident in Rev. John Macdonald’s moderatorial address at the 1915 Free Church General Assembly. Included within his assessment of the causes of God’s wrath, Macdonald argued that the “idol of German Higher Criticism” had had a pernicious effect in Britain, with churches being influenced by liberal theology and the word of God no longer deemed necessary to be taught in British schools due to the importation of German ideas that excluded the necessity of “religious teaching” from the “higher grade schools.” Thus,

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, October 1914, p.182.

⁴⁶ Otto Pfleiderer, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Berlin, 1875-1894.

⁴⁷ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, op cit., p.182.

Macdonald asserted that such an omission of “the one Book” had had a detrimental effect on the character of youth absent from their forefathers.⁴⁸

The above posited links between Higher Criticism and German militarism, and between Higher Criticism and its favourable reception in British churches as incurring God's wrath in war were a minority position within the Scottish Presbyterian. Only in the Free Presbyterian Church do we see a similar connection between German theological liberalism and divine judgement expressed through war. This connection between theological liberalism, militarism and divine judgement was, in effect, stated far more emphatically in the Free Presbyterian Church than in the Free Church. This is evident in successive monthly comment in that denomination's *Magazine* when, between September 1914 and January 1915, the editor, Rev. James Sinclair, repeatedly stressed such a link, summarised in the statement in the October 1914 edition that,

we are bound to conclude from all that we know of it that the modern theology of Germany has presented no bar to the cold, proud, cruel Prussian militarism which dominates that country to-day, but must have provided the vacuum in which that despotic murderous system lives and moves Germany.⁴⁹

In both the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, however, there is nothing from their official pronouncements on the War to indicate any perceived link between theological liberalism and divine judgement. Indeed the notion of German initiated Higher Criticism as a factor in the causes of the War was dismissed in the May 1915 edition of *Life and Work*. The editor commented that

even the Higher Criticism, in which Germany led the way, has been thought by some people to be a moving cause of the calamity of the War. We ought to be warned off such ground. We have not wisdom enough to walk on it. Those who

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, June 1915, p.80.

⁴⁹ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, October 1914, pp. 206-207.

imagine that they can read the inner meaning of every Providence and trace God's intentions through every event, would be sadly at a loss if they were asked to explain the methods of the War Office or the strategy of the Grand Fleet. Professing to be acquainted with the management of God's universe, they are ignorant of the reasons for human actions that are happening under their eyes.⁵⁰

It is not difficult to understand the reluctance from those within the two major Scottish Presbyterian denominations to ascribe Higher Criticism as a cause of divine judgement in war. Scottish divinity students had studied at German theological seminaries during the late 19th century and imbibed the teaching of German higher critical scholars. Moreover, the reception and promulgation of the teaching of Higher Critical approaches to the Bible had been evident in the works of Free Church and Church of Scotland ministers and academics in the late 19th century. Free Church scholars such as Professor George Adam Smith, who would enter the Union of 1900, had written biblical critical works as early as 1888 in the first of his two-volume series on Isaiah; he would continue to promote his biblico-critical scholarship both in his teaching at the Free Church (Trinity) College, Glasgow and in further commentaries on Old Testament prophets.⁵¹ Notwithstanding the severing of links between Scottish and German theologians, as Stewart Brown points out,⁵² once war was declared nevertheless, the biblico-critical understanding of Scripture remained in Scottish divinity colleges and pulpits: to ascribe such theology as inciting God's wrath sufficient to allow war in judgement appeared incongruous to those who advocated its discipline. Conversely, the Free Church of 1914, which upheld "Disruption Calvinism...based on uncritical interpretations of the Bible"⁵³ and contained men who had remained outwith the Union on the grounds of

⁵⁰ *Life and Work*, May 1915, p.132.

⁵¹ I. Campbell, "Fact not Dogma": George Adam Smith, Evangelicalism and Biblical Criticism in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 18.1 (Spring 2000) pp.3-20.

⁵² S. Brown, op cit., p.84.

⁵³ A. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland, 1874-1900*, Edinburgh, The Saint Andrew Press, p.220.

adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith could, at the very least, tolerate a hypothesis that argued for the judgement of God against what was deemed a pernicious biblical hermeneutic.

3.4. Divine Judgement against National Apostasy

The associating of divine judgement against Germany for its militarism, its violation of Belgian neutrality and for its espousal of Higher Criticism, was further directed by Free Church commentators against Great Britain for perceived national apostasy. Very soon after the outbreak of war, Free Church clergy and laymen expressed unanimity in that regard. At the special Commission of Assembly of the Free Church on August 26th 1914 the recognition of an apostatizing nation incurring God's wrath was expressed throughout. At the inception of the meeting, Rev. Finlay Macrae, Moderator, spoke of the "mysterious dispensation" of divine origin in the "national crisis" and stated that "it became them to humble themselves before God with confession of their sins."⁵⁴ There followed a resolution proposed by Principal J D McCulloch which *inter alia* moved that the Assembly "appoint a day of humiliation and prayer to be observed by all the congregations of the Church; and in connection therewith, to urge on the people the duty of seeking to recognise the overruling hand of God in this afflictive dispensation upon the nations involved."⁵⁵ In speaking to this particular part of his resolution, McCulloch indicated his view that the moral laxity perceived in the nation was something he feared far more than the Kaiser and the German army, this view indicating the strength of opinion that national apostasy required national humiliation before God for divine wrath to be averted from the country. That McCulloch's resolution met with

⁵⁴ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, September 1914, p.163.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.163.

unanimous approval from the commissioners indicates, at the very least, the belief within the Free Church that apostasy was a clear contributing factor in the cause of the War.

In similar vein, in the same edition of *The Monthly Record* as the Commission proceedings were reported, Archibald Macneilage opined that the lax morality of the British people directly contributed to the judgement of God. Citing the plethora of football matches, theatre going, alcoholic consumption and Sabbath desecration in cities and villages, Macneilage considered such activities as having contributed to a “day of reckoning.”⁵⁶ He further wrote that while the War was just, nevertheless, at the same time, he argued, it was a judgement of God against Great Britain for her spiritual waywardness. Macneilage based his argument on the premise that as war was an aspect of divine judgement and that “it is placed by the Holy Spirit on the same plane as Pestilence (*sic*) and Famine (*sic*) therefore “all these are servants of the Most High to punish men for transgression and forgetfulness, if not open denial of God.”⁵⁷

Such a direct connection between divine judgement and national culpability emanating from the Free Church was not confined to that denomination. Indeed, when the responses from other Scottish Presbyterian denominations are analysed, a variable treatment of the subject is proffered. By far, the most detailed comment of all denominations, including the Free Church, came from the Free Presbyterian Church. In the first three editions of its *Magazine* after the declaration of war, the theme of divine chastisement for national sin was highlighted. In its September 1914 edition, the editor gave a lengthy denunciation of the sins of the nation that had, he argued, brought about divine wrath through war. He listed such

⁵⁶ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, September 1914, p.159.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.165.

aberrant practices as lack of respect for the Bible; the abandoning of the fear of God; the dishonouring of the authority of Jesus in Church and State; innovations in worship; and the desecration of the Sabbath Day. He concluded with the rhetorical question, “Shall not the Lord take just vengeance for these things?”⁵⁸

Again, in the following edition in October, the editor wrote of “no ordinary judgement” having fallen on the nation but concluded that “no judgment, however severe, will have a lasting and beneficial effect, unless God's Spirit convince us of our sins and give us true repentance.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, in the November edition, a 700 word article referring to “the religious aspects of the War as a divine chastisement” was indicated. In a sweeping synopsis of European transgressions against God, Great Britain was singled out for having “greatly fallen” from the “highest place among the nations” in relation to God’s blessings such that “the Lord cannot allow this to go unpunished.”⁶⁰

Thus, in relation to the immediate response of the Free Presbyterian Church to divine judgement in war as a result of national apostasy, the Free Church was consistent in its direct connection, albeit in less volume than that of her fellow conservative denomination. Such proximity of views on this matter reveals a shared belief held by these two denominations regarding the connectedness of war with divine judgement so soon after the outbreak of hostilities,

⁵⁸ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, September 1914, p.167.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, October 1914, p.239.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, November 1914, pp.247-248.

This position was reflected by both the Free Church and Free Presbyterian Church in the first anniversary of the War. Britain's culpability in the crisis was asserted, with divine judgement being considered the consequence of national apostasy, with the concomitant call for national humiliation and a return to God's word. At the Free Church Commission of Assembly held on August 11th 1915, the connecting of spiritual apostasy with divine anger through war is evident. The first anniversary of the War produced a reflective conviction from Rev. John Macleod, Inverness, that the "signs of the times" should lead the Commission to "their conviction that national sin has called forth national judgement and calls for national repentance and humiliation before God."⁶¹ Macleod elaborated on his categorisation of "national sin" as including "the canker of Rationalism (*sic*) and Ritualism (*sic*)...in the public life of Great Britain" with "the national sense of national responsibility to God" not being "what it was." He concluded his attack on the spiritual climate of the nation when he alluded to the lack of awareness in the country of the "religious aspects of the public crisis."⁶²

In the same vein, the Free Presbyterian Church, maintained the conviction that national sin had brought judgement on Great Britain through war. This view is expressed in the August 1915 edition of its *Magazine* when the editor wrote that "we do not expect Germany to conquer, but we can plainly see that God is chastising us by her instrumentality for our iniquities, our worldliness, our infidelity, and our neglect of Gospel truth" with a reminder that "the Lord is angry, otherwise the bloody sword of war would never have been unsheathed." The article concluded with a call to confession of sins and to genuine

⁶¹ Ibid., September 1915 p.159.

⁶² Ibid, pp.158-159.

repentance: "let there be a turning from foolish and frivolous ways - from everything contrary to God's Word and injurious to the soul's good."⁶³

As the War progressed the Free Church maintained its claim of the War being a consequence of divine wrath against the country for her "national sins." This can be seen, particularly in the Church's constant comments made against the trade in alcohol as being deleterious to the moral and spiritual welfare of British troops and in incurring the wrath of God against the nation. Thus, for example, the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis, in early 1917, wrote to the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George; the MP for Ross-shire, John Macpherson; and to the local and national press expressing its concern regarding the practical and spiritual effects of the prevalent sale of alcohol during the time of war. In particular, the Presbytery saw such trade as "leading directly and indirectly to sins which cannot but provoke the Lord."⁶⁴ Similarly, in the same month, *The Highland News* reported a meeting held in Inverness Free North Hall, under the heading of "Punishment for Sin." The meeting, held under the auspices of the Free Church, was reported to have contended that "The Most High God is speaking to the nations with the voice of judgements" and that just as "individual sins call for individual repentance, national sins call for national repentance." Of particular focus in the identification of such "sins" was "the operations of the traffic in strong drink."⁶⁵

While the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian Church were most vociferous in their connecting national apostasy to divine judgement in war, the two main Scottish Presbyterian Churches were less consistent in that claim. Certainly, as Stewart Brown notes,

⁶³ *ibid.*, August 1915, p.128.

⁶⁴ *Minute of the Free Presbytery of Lewis*, 3 April, 1917.

⁶⁵ *The Highland News*, 28 April 1917.

commentators from the Church of Scotland and United Free Church did see the War as a divine providence to raise the nation from selfish materialism and to return to “Christian character and values.” Brown notes the chorus of optimism during the first months of the War from clergymen of these two denominations that war was ensuring that self-sacrifice was superseding material pleasures, with the reality of God now entering the hearts of the British people when before only a superficial frivolity in pursuit of pleasure had been uppermost in their minds.⁶⁶ Similarly, Peter Matheson notes the “very common view” held amongst these denominations at the start of the War that “Britain had been sinking with the rest of Europe” in a morass of “decadent and frivolous materialism” and that the War would raise the nation to the higher ideal of self-sacrifice.⁶⁷

This claim of moral pruning of the nation through war was evident in the Church of Scotland. In its September 1914 edition of *Life and Work*, in a long editorial on “Christ and the War,” the editor concluded that the War is a “necessary evil” with Christ showing, by the War, the need to “improve every lesson for life in which God’s mercy comes out of these evil days.” He argued that God, who was sovereign in the War, was forgotten “in prosperity” and insulted “in our luxury and ease” with the conclusion that “it were not too great a price to pay if the War brought the nation back to God.”⁶⁸ The rather oblique reference to national apostasy was given more in terms of moral improvement rather than a direct correlation between sin and divine judgement.

⁶⁶ S. Brown, op cit., p.87.

⁶⁷ P.C.Matheson, “Scottish War Sermons 1914-1919,” *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* Volume XVII - Part III, 1971, p.207.

⁶⁸ *Life and Work*, September 1914, p.258.

Again, in its December 1914 edition the aspect of divine chastening was mentioned without a fulsome call to national repentance of iniquity against Scripture. Thus, in response to the call of King George V for a Day of Humiliation and Prayer, the editor responded by writing that “we must join penitence with petition” and that “If God help us, we shall bless His name; and if He be pleased to chasten us, we shall still bless His name.”⁶⁹

The evidence presented from representatives of the two largest Scottish Presbyterian denominations indicates a sharp note of difference between the Free Church (and Free Presbyterian Church) in the identifying of divine judgement against national sin as a necessary precursor to divine restoration of the nation through repentance. The emphasis on apostasy as sin worthy of judgement was absent from sermons and writing referred to by Brown and Matheson. Instead, a moral awakening of the human condition was stressed, as Matheson notes, more in keeping with a Social Darwinian emphasis on the progress of the individual rather than any turning to God in repentance for sin.⁷⁰

Notwithstanding this divergence from the approach found in Free Church comment, one does detect some examples from the Church of Scotland and United Free Church of convergence of attitude with Free Church pronouncements in the connectedness between national apostasy and divine wrath leading to war. Thus, at the United Free Church Commission of Assembly held on August 12, 1914 a Resolution “To the People of the Church” was passed: this Resolution stated clearly the connection between national sin and divine judgement in war:

⁶⁹ Ibid., December p.359.

⁷⁰ P.C. Matheson op cit., p.207.

While we regard the conflict, on our part, just and necessary, it becomes us to recognise that the grievousness of war come upon us requires that we seek out, and confess before God, national sins and shortcomings, that we may learn righteousness when his judgements are in the earth.⁷¹

In similar vein, in a pastoral address prepared by Rev. Dr George Reith for the people of the United Free Church to mark the first anniversary of the War, Reith noted the “common shame” of all nations involved in the War with the admission that “it is not so easy to deny responsibility for the whole conditions out of which war arises.” The address concluded with a “call for penitent confession and a renunciation of our faults, for acknowledging of God’s chastening hand in the calamities which came upon Europe and for a new consecration to His will as revealed in Christ.”⁷²

Reith’s focus of divine judgement directed towards Great Britain as sharing in the sins of “all nations” was negated towards the end of the War by the Church of Scotland minister, Rev. H. J. Wotherspoon, in a published address entitled, “The War and the Sin of the World.” Wotherspoon argued that the sin that has invoked divine judgement was not the sin of individuals but the “sin of the world.” He rejected the argument “in which it is possible for example to ask of what Britain has to repent...it is the world which has need to repent...the whole world has come into judgement and we with it...”⁷³ Thus, whereas Free Church commentators such as Principal J. D. McCulloch, Archibald Macneilage and John Macleod, along with Reith, directly associated divine judgement with national sins in Great Britain, Wotherspoon did not single out British culpability in invoking divine wrath through war.

⁷¹ *Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland*, September 1914, p.385.

⁷² *United Free Church of Scotland Reports to the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland 1915*, Edinburgh, T and T Constable, 1915 p.97.

⁷³ H. J. Wotherspoon, *Some Spiritual Issues of the War*, London, Robert Scott, 1918, pp.17-18.

When one summarises the matter of national apostasy as a cause of war meted out by a God of judgement, Free Church spokesmen present a consistency of certainty within the denomination that the War is no mere judgement on Germany for moral and theological aberration but that Great Britain, though fighting for a righteous cause, has been brought to war to repent of national sins. Inasmuch as this contention is matched by other Scottish Presbyterian denominations there is general unanimity, albeit with Wotherspoon's caveat (above). Furthermore, the Free Church's identifying of moral laxity in the nation as linked to divine intervention in war was also a shared sentiment across the denominations. However, where the Free Church shared with the Free Presbyterian Church in identifying such laxity with divine judgement in war in order to call the nation to repentance, such consistency was not uniform in comment from the Church of Scotland and United Free Church. While some commentators from these latter denominations did equate national apostasy with divine judgement through war, others did not connect moral weakness with sin as deserving divine judgement; rather there appears a positive interpretation of God's visiting the nation in war to bring moral improvement through an evolutionary process to facilitate human progress towards the strengthening of the moral fibre of the nation.

3.5. Sabbath Desecration

As alluded to above the matter of Sabbath desecration as a cause of divine displeasure befitting war as judgement was held to rigidly within the Free Church. Indeed, of all the Scottish Presbyterian Churches pronouncing on God's controversy with Great Britain, we see the Free Church and Free Presbyterian Church shared in an unequivocal stance on the nation's pre-war 'Sabbath desecration' as a cause of divine wrath resulting in war and a reason for the prolongation of war whilst, according to these churches' pronouncements,

the sanctity of the Sabbath continued to be flouted within the nation even during the conflict. Thus, for example, Rev. John Macdonald, Moderator of the 1915 Free Church General Assembly, revealed an absolute conviction in his assertion that “the desecration of the Lord’s Day was a decided cause of the Lord’s wrath.”⁷⁴ He argued from Scripture that as Sabbath observance was a sign of covenant faithfulness in Israel and, as such, characterised Israel’s “greatness,” so no nation could be blessed if God’s commands were disobeyed. Scotland, he argued, is particularly identified as having once known “glory” through Sabbath observance but that noticeable change had occurred to lessen such a national attribute. Macdonald mentioned such examples of desecrators as railway companies, Government ministers holding political rallies on the Sabbath, and Sunday newspapers.

This correlation of perceived Sabbath desecration and divine judgement was consistently observed throughout the various channels of denominational comment throughout the War, whether through the denomination’s *Monthly Record* or through the courts of the Church. Archibald Macneilage, for example, in an editorial referring to the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George’s addressing his constituents on the Sabbath, berated him for his “Sabbath-breaking” on the basis that such transgression “is a sin of the age and a prime cause of the Divine (*sic*) judgements now abroad.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis cited the involvement of civilian work on the Sabbath as part of the war effort to be a violation of God’s laws “as calculated to hinder rather than help our progress, prosperity and prospects as a nation.”⁷⁶ Such criticism of activities within the Home Front during the War

⁷⁴ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1915, p.80.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, April 1915, p.47.

⁷⁶ *Minutes of The Free Presbytery of Lewis*, 3rd April 1917.

was also expressed in the Free Church Presbytery of Inverness in its correlation of Sabbath desecration with national evils to be repented of.⁷⁷

The issue of the continuation of the War as a result of Sabbath desecration, as indicated in the findings of the two Presbyteries above, was maintained in further comment from individual Free Church clergy. Thus, for example, in an article in the February 1917 edition of *The Monthly Record*, Rev. D Macdougall argued that Sabbath work in British shipyards was prolonging the War. He contended thus: “are there not evidences which warrant us to come to the conclusion that the Lord of the Sabbath is over-ruling the efforts of our enemies in taking toll of us for our breaches of His law?” Macdougall based his hypothesis on the argument that “we would have as many ships at the end of the year if we gave God’s law its place in all our efforts.”⁷⁸

Likewise, we find the convener of the Committee on Religion and Morals, Rev John Macleod of Urray Free Church, Muir of Ord, during the presentation of the Committee’s Report to the 1917 General Assembly, describing as “an unfortunate thing” two “foremost ministers of religion in Edinburgh” (the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland) “giving approval of Sunday concerts to relieve the tedium of life for the colonial soldiers.” Macleod condemned the attitude of the above churchmen for their approval of Sunday work on allotments as “a grievous and terrible mistake.”⁷⁹ During the debate which followed, such a forthright stance on the war effort and the Sabbath was echoed by Rev. James Henry of Burghead who did not believe that munitions work on Sunday “is either a

⁷⁷ *Minutes of The Free Presbytery of Inverness*, 30th January 1917.

⁷⁸ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, February 1917, p.26.

⁷⁹ Cited in *The Stornoway Gazette*, 1st June 1917.

work of necessity or mercy or a good way of winning the War.” Furthermore, he argued that he did not believe that “tilling the ground on the Lord's Day to be a good way of obtaining an abundant harvest.”⁸⁰

The Free Church was not alone in its ascribing Sabbath desecration as a factor in divine judgment through war and, concomitantly, its deleterious effect on the war effort. The Church's claim that Sabbath desecration in Great Britain was a direct factor in divine wrath in the cause of the War and the prolongation of the War was also expressed within the Free Presbyterian Church. Thus, in the November 1914 edition of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, the editor wrote that

Sabbath profanation has become a crying sin - a sin calling for judgment upon a godless, presumptuous people. The Lord cannot allow this to go unpunished, and there may be more disasters on sea and land if our authorities will not show more reverence to God's holy day of rest...⁸¹

The same claim of divine censure on Britain through Sabbath desecration was evident in the course of the War. Thus, for example, in a lengthy address on the Fourth Commandment, Rev. D Macfarlane, Dingwall, commented that

It would be expected that when God's judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world would learn righteousness; but instead of that we as a nation are getting more hardened and more wicked. It is not by sinning against God that we can expect victory over our enemies, for so long as we continue in that evil course, it is not only the Gentiles and their allies that fight against us, but God Himself is fighting against us, and will continue to do so till we are brought to repentance and reformation.⁸²

Such a direct attribution of God's judgement through war because of “Sabbath desecration” was absent from the main Scottish Presbyterian Churches. While both the United Free

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 1st June 1917.

⁸¹ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, November 1914, p.248.

⁸² *ibid.*, June 1917, p.49.

Church and Church of Scotland expressed strong condemnation of breaches of the Lord's Day as evidenced in such aspects as the printing of newspapers on Sunday, they offered no direct correlation between such practices and God's judgement against Great Britain. The nearest we find in the Church of Scotland to any ascription of Sabbath desecration as invoking God's judgement in war is a comment from the Convenor of the Committee on the Lord's Day, Sir M Stewart, at the General Assembly of May 1915 when, in linking the "war abroad against tyranny" with the "war at home against Sunday desecration" he declared that "national disregard of Sunday was a national peril."⁸³ However, two years later, the same Convenor admitted to the War making "inroads on strict Sabbath observance" as "inevitable" while regretting "that the tendency of permissible relaxation was to lessen reverence for the Day of rest."⁸⁴ Similarly, at the United Free Church Assembly of that year, the Report of the Committee anent Church Life and Work upheld the sanctity of the Sabbath but no reference was made to divine judgement against the breaking of the Sabbath.

When summarising the issue of the Sabbath and the War there appears a denominational divide between the Free Church and Free Presbyterian Church, on the one hand, and the Church of Scotland and United Free Church on the other hand concerning the direct connection between Sabbath desecration and divine judgement in war. While the latter two Churches limited their pronouncements to making pleas to their respective church members to refrain from any practice that would detract from the sanctity of the Sabbath, the former denominations were dogmatic in their assertion that the abuse of the Sabbath by the British people was a factor in God's judgement on the nation through war.

⁸³ *The Layman's Book of the General Assembly of 1915*, Edinburgh, J Gardner Hitt, 1915 p.65.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1917 p.62.

3.6. Roman Catholicism

Divine judgement on Britain as a result of theological error and moral laxity is further alluded to within the Free Church in relation to Britain's official relations with the Papacy; such a position stemming from the denomination's antipathy to Roman Catholicism. Thus we find Rev. John Macdonald, in his Moderatorial address at the May 1915 General Assembly identifying apathy in the nation towards Britain's Protestant "testimony and constitution" as "reckoned among the causes of the Lord's wrath against us."⁸⁵ He identified a perceived dilution of Protestantism in Britain through the Government's accommodation with the Papacy as demonstrated by an official visit to the Vatican by the diplomat, Sir Henry Howard. In December 1914 Howard was appointed "His Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary on a Special Mission to His Holiness the Pope." This appointment re-established full diplomatic relations with the Vatican for the first time since 1558. Macdonald regarded such diplomatic relations with the Vatican as "treating our constitution as a scrap of paper"⁸⁶ an allusion, no doubt, to the reference made by the German Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, to the Treaty of London, 1839, by which Britain had guaranteed Belgian neutrality and which neutrality Germany had violated in August 1914. Hollweg had referred to that Treaty as a "scrap of paper" to the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey on August 4th 1914 to justify a German invasion of Belgium. Thus, Macdonald appeared to be accusing the British Government of the same disdain to nationally agreed obligations as Germany had shown to Belgian neutrality.

This foray into the diplomatic domain of British Government policy was supported by the Free Presbyterian Church in its condemnation of the appointment of an envoy to the Vatican

⁸⁵ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1915, p.80.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 80.

and its consequent repercussions for Britain's war effort. In its *Magazine* of February 1915 its headline article condemned both the appointment of the Papal envoy and King George V's letter of greeting to the Pope, Benedict XV. Again, as with the Free Church pronouncements, the grave consequences of divine judgement were presented: "we are bound to conclude that new national guilt has been incurred by our State, which will call for its own chastisement."⁸⁷

Where we see further convergence of the Free Church's stance with the Free Presbyterian Church's position *vis à vis* the Vatican occurs in relation to Benedict XV's "Peace Note" issued on 1st August 1917. Pope Benedict had stated in his proposals his "complete impartiality in relation to all the belligerents as is appropriate to him who is the common father and who loves all his children with equal affection" with a forthright advocating of the cessation of military conflict for diplomatic resolution of the conflict.⁸⁸ Whilst the reaction of the Free Presbyterian Church was a sustained attack on the Pontiff's claim to impartiality in the conflict, a position reckoned as "an unholy neutrality"⁸⁹ the Free Church's stance was less vigorous but equally condemning. Archibald Macneilage's reaction to the Peace Note was to claim that it was "in the interests of the Central Powers" and that the Allied Powers would be "foolish" to heed any such proposals.⁹⁰

The positions of the Free Church and Free Presbyterian Church were consistent with both the British Government and all other allied powers which ignored Benedict's proposals,

⁸⁷ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, February 1915, p. 370.

⁸⁸ Pope Benedict XV's Peace Proposal, August 1st 1917.

https://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Pope_Benedict_XV's_Peace_Proposal (accessed 13 December 2016).

⁸⁹ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, September 1917, p.165.

⁹⁰ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, September 1917, p.105.

although for different reasons. By the secret Treaty of London (1915) the Triple Entente powers of Great Britain, France and Russia had sought to wrest Italy away from her alliance with Germany by agreeing to territorial and diplomatic concessions for Italy. Article 15 of the Treaty concerned the Entente powers' pledge to support Italy's refusal to allow the Vatican to have any diplomatic role in the pursuance of peace or the conduct of the War.

Notwithstanding the demonstration of condemnation of the British Government's co-operation with the Vatican from the Free Church, there was a mixed stance within the denomination on Roman Catholicism and, particularly, in its attitudes to relations with predominantly Roman Catholic states and, indeed, Roman Catholic individuals such as Belgian refugees, most of whom expressed allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church.

This is seen, for example, in the comments made by Archibald Macneilage in his editorials in *The Monthly Record* during the early months of the War. He wrote, on the one hand, disparagingly of Roman Catholicism, referring to that tradition as "Romanism, that ancient antagonist of Heaven" which, he claimed, was "doubtless one factor in the shattering of the European situation." In the same editorial he referred to Belgium as "an ancient haunt of monks and Mass-mongering" with the city of Louvain a "seat of a Romish university."⁹¹ Yet, on the other hand, in commenting the following year, on the contemporary issue of Belgian refugees in Scotland, Macneilage spoke of them as "fellow men and members of an allied nation." Notwithstanding this avowal of national allegiance between Great Britain and Belgium, Macneilage was not averse to casting aspersions on the motives of the Roman Catholic Church from taking advantage of Scottish Protestant charity towards the refugees;

⁹¹ *ibid.*, October 1914, p.182.

he advised that “all true-hearted Evangelical Protestants” who were involved in giving aid to the Belgian refugees would “take all lawful means to prevent abuse of their charity in the interests of the Church of Rome.”⁹²

Moreover, at the General Assembly of May 1915, Macneilage, one of two members of Assembly who addressed a deputation from Glasgow Corporation pleading for church involvement in aid-giving for these refugees, spoke unequivocally of the duty of Protestants to come to the assistance of the Belgian refugees. In his address, Macneilage, along with Rev John Macleod, Inverness, was unhesitating in mentioning that these refugees were of the Roman Catholic faith, and made no adverse comments regarding such ecclesiastical affiliation. However, he warned that the presence of so many Roman Catholic refugees should not prevent the remembrance of the plight of Protestant Belgians to whom the “first claim of our people” was paramount.⁹³

This ambivalent attitude to Roman Catholicism was echoed in the Free Presbyterian Church. Whilst the latter included Belgium in its catalogue of national offences against God citing its “Romish idolatry” as causing a “controversy” with God⁹⁴ there was not the same disdain for individual Belgian Catholics nor of the nation in its heroism against the invading German forces. This was evident in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine’s* reporting on the Free Church General Assembly of 1915 when the above meeting of Glasgow Corporation with the Free Church regarding Belgian refugees was merely reported without any adverse comment on

⁹² *ibid.*, June 1915, p.78.

⁹³ *ibid.*, June 1915, p.83.

⁹⁴ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, November 1914, p.247.

the religion of the refugees. Similarly, the actions of Belgian resistance against German invasion and breach of Belgian neutrality were commended albeit with a caveat:

Belgium, though almost wholly a Roman Catholic country, has proved herself incomparably more honourable than Germany, with her nominal rationalistic Protestantism. If she had been possessed of the same perfidious spirit she would have also broken the treaty, and allowed the Germans to pass through her territories, in the expectation of future material recompense. But instead of that, she stood in the breach, and made choice of complete devastation with untold sufferings rather than moral perfidy and shame. Whatever her previous national shortcomings, she has acted a heroic, self-sacrificing part that can never be forgotten.⁹⁵

Thus, there appeared within the Free Church an ambivalence towards Roman Catholicism brought about by the exigencies of war. On the one hand, the Free Church along with the Free Presbyterian Church, sought to maintain its Reformation status in its theological opposition to Roman Catholicism and used such a position to attribute Roman Catholicism as a contributing factor in divine judgement in war. Moreover the Free Church's Confessional position regarding the Papacy as the Antichrist⁹⁶ was instrumental in its condemnation of Britain's diplomatic association with the Vatican, again a position shared by the Free Presbyterian Church. However, on the other hand, moral antagonism against Germany and its actions in war, particularly against neutral Belgium, and the resultant refugee crisis caused the denomination to soften its anti-Catholic rhetoric, a position mirrored by the Free Presbyterian Church. Nevertheless, the confessional position towards the Papacy and its Reformation heritage ensured that statements of support for Belgium as a wronged nation and for its refugees contained a measure of warning against Papal intentions and a reminder of Protestant values. There appears, therefore, from Free Church spokesmen, a recognition

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.246.

⁹⁶ The Free Church position on the Papacy was held rigidly according to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*: Chapter 25:6 "There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; [but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God.]"

of the duty of Evangelical Protestants to provide aid to Roman Catholic Belgian refugees irrespective of the latter's ecclesiastical allegiance, while, at the same time, a recognition of a higher duty to help fellow Protestants and a continuous suspicion of the motives and allegiance of the Vatican.

3.7. **Armageddon: Eschatological Interpretations of the War**

As evangelical Christians in Great Britain sought to understand the causes of the War from a spiritual perspective, some sought to explain the place and purpose of the War in relation to the second coming of Christ. Eschatology - and in particular, premillennialism - had, as Philip Jenkins observes, reached a zenith by the time the War broke out in 1914, as theologians grappled with the spiritual meaning behind the "sweeping changes" in culture, demography, and mass technology that were occurring from the late 19th century.⁹⁷ That a premillennial view of eschatology - the view that the second coming of Christ would occur before his thousand year reign in order that Christian believers be delivered from the corruption and evil of a degenerative world - should attract some within evangelical Christianity, may be explained by the societal changes mooted by Jenkins above, changes which led some to see the world steeped in a crisis of faith and unbelief that only the coming of Christ could remove.

Embedded within this apocalyptic scenario was the prospect of a cataclysmic battle; Revelation chapter 16 speaks of a final battle between demonic forces and God at Armageddon - the war to end all wars when the forces of evil will be defeated by God, a defeat that will precede the destruction of Babylon, the symbol of all that opposes the reign

⁹⁷ P. Jenkins, op cit., p.137.

of Christ. As the war of attrition progressed beyond 1914, swallowing millions of casualties through ever increasing sophisticated weapons of mass destruction of human life, the name, 'Armageddon', appeared in sermons, pamphlets and articles of different denominations and in secular writing. For some, as now, the word, 'Armageddon' became a synonym of the conflict in Europe - a byword for the horrors of trench warfare. For example, when the United States entered the War in April 1917 the *New York Tribune's* headline proclaimed: "America in Armageddon" with a leading front page editorial stating that "the United States this afternoon formally entered Armageddon."⁹⁸ However, for some within the evangelical corpus the name 'Armageddon' spoke of the definitive battle that would put an end to the destructive power of evil and herald the reign of Christ. Indeed as the War progressed and involved British troops in seeking to expel Turkey from Palestine, apocalyptic imagery reached fever pitch with the capture of Jerusalem in December 1917 and General Allenby's final victory over Turkish forces in September 1918 at Megiddo - the site of the battle of Armageddon as mentioned in Revelation 16:16. Millennial theology, then, which had become widespread in evangelical Christianity before August 1914, persisted through the war as some theologians sought a biblical answer of hope for the church in response to the perplexities of a war of unprecedented slaughter.

Millennial discussion had not featured widely in the theological thinking of the Free Church before the War. Certainly, there had been a flurry of millennial debate within the early Free Church in 1846-47. Rev. David Brown, Free Church minister of St. James, Glasgow, had rejected premillennial theology in his work *Christ's Second Coming: Will it be Premillennial?*⁹⁹

⁹⁸ *New York Tribune* April 7th 1917 <https://www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/ww1declarations.html> (accessed 4 November 2016).

⁹⁹ D.Brown, *Christ's Second Coming: Will it be Millennial?*, Edinburgh, John Johnstone, 1846.

A year later, Rev. Andrew Bonar, Free Church minister in Collace, Fife, countered Brown's thesis when he made a case for premillennialism in his work "*Redemption Drawing Nigh*."¹⁰⁰ Notwithstanding these works of two "giants" of the Free Church there appeared no publication of eschatological theology within reformed evangelical writing in Scotland until late 1914 with the publication of *Armageddon*, a two part discussion of the War in relation to the coming of Christ, written by the Free Presbyterian Church minister, Rev. John R. Mackay (who would later join the Free Church in 1919). Mackay had preceded his discourses with a short article in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* of September 1914 when he asserted that "I feel strongly persuaded that [this war] is none other than that War of Armageddon."¹⁰¹ In the same edition of the *Magazine*, the editor is prepared to cite "sound interpreters" of eschatological doctrine that "the present struggle" was "the beginning of the great Battle of Armageddon." In response to this position, he expressed "thankfulness" that "the end of that Battle is the beginning of millennial peace and prosperity" with the imminent prospect of the return of Christ following Armageddon.¹⁰²

Mackay's reckoning the War as Armageddon was further developed in his later discourses based on a biblical hermeneutic of the Book of Revelation in relation to world history up to the time of the outbreak of war in 1914; such an interpretation formed the basis of responses published in the Free Church *Monthly Record*. As early as January 1915 two articles appeared in relation to Mackay's discourses: a short commendation by Archibald Macneilage (acknowledged by the publishers of the discourses in the pamphlet) and an extensive review of Mackay's work by Rev. William Mackinnon, Minister of Gairloch Free

¹⁰⁰ A. Bonar, *Redemption Drawing Nigh*, London, James Nisbet and Co., 1847.

¹⁰¹ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, September 1914, p.196.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.167.

Church. It is Mackinnon's engagement with Mackay's views on the War as Armageddon which are most instructive. While there was an expression of admiration for Mackay's work, Mackinnon had no hesitation in questioning Mackay's biblical hermeneutic when he rejected the direct parallelism Mackay gave of the symbolism in the Book of Revelation with actual historic events leading up to and including the outbreak of war. Thus, for example, Mackinnon rejected the argument Mackay gave when the latter argued that the drying up of the Euphrates in Revelation 16:2 was fulfilled in the "drying up of Turkish power" with his assertion that just as Armageddon immediately followed the drying up of the Euphrates so the "great European war" followed the weakening of Turkey's power.¹⁰³ Mackinnon refuted this on the basis of Revelation 16:12 that "Kings of the East" will come immediately after the drying up of the Euphrates. Mackinnon saw no evidence of any Eastern (Christian) Kings emerging "in opposition to Mohammed."¹⁰⁴

Further Free Church comments alluding to an apocalyptic interpretation of the War are found in August 1915 during the throes of the Gallipoli Campaign. The attack on Turkish forces was interpreted by MacNeilage as a foreboding of greater devastation on the basis of biblical prophecy. He argued that the process of driving Turkey out of Europe followed the prophetic interpretation of "latter-day troubles of life and resting kind" when God would "accomplish terrible things in righteousness." While no direct Scriptural reference was given for such an interpretation, it is clear that Macneilage considered the conflict against Turkey as the progression of the apocalyptic crusading motive in the early Middle Ages in the defeat of "Mohammedanism" as a prelude to the Battle of Armageddon and the end of the

¹⁰³ J.R.Mackay, *Armageddon: Two Discourses on the Great European War*, Inverness, Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company, 1915, p.22.

¹⁰⁴ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, January 1915, p. 8.

world.¹⁰⁵ This emphasis on the War as a precursor of Armageddon is supported in comment found in the United Free Church as seen in an address at the United Free Church General Assembly of 1915, when Sir Alex Simpson spoke of “this rehearsal of Armageddon.”¹⁰⁶

This focus on eschatology during the first year of the War was further emphasised in a review Macneilage gave of a pamphlet written by Robert McKnight, Principal of Reformed Presbyterian Seminary, Pennsylvania, refuting premillennial doctrine. Macneilage supported McKnight’s doctrine by citing the historic differences between Andrew Bonar and David Brown, the latter whom McKnight credited with indebtedness for his views.¹⁰⁷

There is no indication within the pages of *The Monthly Record* or any other Free Church publication or sermon in support of premillennial views: Macneilage’s supportive stance on David Brown’s rejection of Andrew Bonar’s eschatology and William Mackinnon’s refutation of the War as biblical Armageddon were never questioned within the pages of *The Monthly Record*.

This can be witnessed when, three years after the initial flux of eschatological debate within the pages of *The Monthly Record*, the same William Mackinnon continued to reject the equating of the War with the Battle of Armageddon. Mackinnon’s penchant for eschatological interpretation appeared again in *The Monthly Record* of January 1918 when he summarised the War as between anti-Christ and the Church, arguing that, while the prevailing conflict was not Armageddon *per se*, nevertheless “the spirit which is to stir up the Armageddon battles is here” thus indicating, in his opinion, that the War was precursor to

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, August 1915, p.135.

¹⁰⁶ *The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland*, July 1915 p.286

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 157-158.

the “last struggle between anti-Christ and the Church,”¹⁰⁸ thus signalling a consistency of thought opposed to the view that the War was an immediate portent of the return of Christ.

Thus, in contrast to the Free Presbyterian Church’s firmly held position as to the divine purpose of the War as an eschatological event leading directly to Christ’s return, the Free Church’s position was consistently much more cautious. While commentators within the Free Church were prepared to argue for the War as within the revelatory purposes of God in moving towards Armageddon, no ascription of the war as Armageddon is posited.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.11.

4. Inter-Denominational Relations with Respect to the War, 1914-1919

The outbreak of war presented the Free Church with the challenge of co-operating with the two major denominations with which it had major theological and ecclesiological differences. Its disruption from the Church of Scotland in 1843 and its bitter separation from the United Free Church in 1900, with the recent civil dispute with that Church over property which lasted until 1905, made the prospect of denominational co-operation uncertain.

Such uncertainty was seen as early as 1st September 1914, when the Free Church Presbytery of Glasgow approved a request from Glasgow Cathedral (Church of Scotland) that Free Church representatives be appointed to attend a special service of intercession on the 6th of September. The said request was “read and approved” with the Presbytery agreeing to appoint William Conway, Moderator and Mr. Walter Rounsfell Brown to attend the service. However, a letter from the joint committee of the Established Church and the United Free Church for co-operation in daily services of intercession during the war was rejected: the Presbytery agreed to inform the correspondent that “the duty of intercession during the present crisis is being universally observed in the Free Church congregations and in all their meetings.”¹⁰⁹

Indeed, in an editorial in the June 1915 edition of *The Monthly Record*, Archibald Macneilage had written that prior attempts made by the other denominations for united services in connection with the War had been resisted by the Free Church on the grounds that to have participated in them would have compromised the position of the Free Church on its stance on purity of worship because, as he asserted, any such participation would involve

¹⁰⁹ *Minutes of the Free Presbytery of Glasgow*, 1st September, 1914.

compromise “when the methods in which the services were to be conducted were not in harmony with her declared testimony for the purity and simplicity of New Testament worship.”¹¹⁰ Indeed Macneilage went further in September 1915 when he reiterated the “evil” of removing denominational barriers for the sake of public unity when the worship and doctrine practised in these services were compromised. He stated the position that would become commonplace in arguments against such worship that “denominational testimony” was a “commanded duty and anything which savours of compromise in respect of that duty is to be resisted by those who love the truth and are under obligation to maintain a denominational testimony in harmony with the Divine Word.”¹¹¹ Such a stance revealed that, despite a time of national crisis through the exigencies of war, the Free Church would not abandon her principles in the name of ecclesiastical partnership where the distinctive testimony of the Free Church was challenged in doctrine and worship. Men from all denominations might fight alongside each other in military unity; spiritual unity would not be so easily attained.

Notwithstanding the obstacles to such unity from a Free Church perspective, isolationism was not the default position of the denomination. In the same article written by Macneilage concerning the refusal to compromise its position on worship in united services, he asserted that the Free Church had “stood apart.... not because she was unsympathetic [to united services].”¹¹² Indeed, during the week of General Assembly of the three Churches, business of the three major General Assemblies had been suspended for one hour on Thursday 20th May, 1915, for the purpose of holding a joint meeting of intercession held in the United Free

¹¹⁰ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1915, p.78.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, September 1915, p.151.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.78.

Church Assembly Hall in New College, Edinburgh. In accordance with Free Church practice the meeting was conducted with Psalms only being sung *a cappella*.

The reaction to the united service from within the Free Church and outwith the denomination revealed a positive appreciation of the Free Church's involvement with the United Free Church and Church of Scotland both prior to and after the service. Thus, prior to the service, on Thursday 20th May the Clerk of the Free Church Assembly, Rev. Professor Kennedy Cameron, intimated on the floor of the Assembly that the Free Church had been asked to participate in the joint service of intercession to be held in the United Free Church Assembly Hall. Cameron noted that "he had seen the programme and there was nothing in it to which any member of their Church could object. It was very satisfactory that the three Assemblies could meet together in this way, and he hoped the results would be fruitful." The report of this announcement in *The Scotsman* newspaper included the parenthetical response of applause after Cameron had made his statement of support for the service.¹¹³

The response of denominational and secular commentators immediately after the joint service indicated collective support for such a worship meeting of the three denominations. Within the Free Church, Archibald Macneilage referred to the service as vindicating the "catholicity of the Free Church mode of worship" with such catholicity the basis for further acts of unity by the "Churches of the Reformation." On that basis, Macneilage reported the invitation made by the Free Church Moderator to the other churches asking them to join in a petition to King George V for him to appoint a National Day for Humiliation and Prayer.¹¹⁴

Moreover, in the same edition of *The Monthly Record* a "J McN" commented at length on the united service with the opinion that the holding of the service indicated an

¹¹³ *The Scotsman*, 19th May 1915.

¹¹⁴ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1915 p.78.

incontrovertible demonstration of the removal of inter-denominational differences for the sake of spiritual unity in the face of the escalating military conflict. Thus, he noted that the proposal to hold “a common meeting for intercession regarding the war...could not be disregarded.” Furthermore, he spoke of the three Assemblies meeting as “one body” and declares that, with Psalms only being sung, “no one could complain that the promptings either of piety, patriotism or catholicity were wronged.”¹¹⁵

The impact of such “spiritual unity in the face of the escalating military conflict” was acknowledged by Rev. John Macleod,¹¹⁶ Free Church chaplain serving in France at the time of the united prayer meeting. He wrote of “many” at the Front being “deeply moved by the unique meeting” surmising that that gathering “proved to all that the prayers of all believers in Scotland are at present in our direction.” Furthermore, Macleod was convinced that the united prayer meeting would be inspirational to those troops “who are ready to die for the cause to which we love and labour for.”¹¹⁷

The optimistic response to such ecumenicity in the major Scottish Presbyterian churches was echoed in newspaper comment thus indicating a convergence of secular and denominational support for what appeared to be a turning point in Scotland’s Presbyterian relationships. Thus, *The Glasgow Herald’s* editorial remarked on the united intercessory meeting as evidence of the War’s positive effect on mitigating interdenominational strife for the sake of “the national cause.” The editorial was exultant in the apparent effects that the war had on healing interdenominational strife:

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.97.

¹¹⁶ Minister of Urray Free Church, Muir of Ord (not to be confused with Rev. John Macleod, Free North Church, Inverness).

¹¹⁷ *The Instructor*, July 1915, p.222.

who would have thought that ten years after the bitterest of Scottish ecclesiastical controversies, members of the Free Church should be found sitting side by side with their brethren of the United Free and Church of Scotland? Few things could more clearly demonstrate how effectively the war has bound together all classes for the advancement of the national cause.¹¹⁸

In similar vein the editor of *The Scotsman* newspaper wrote of the War having a positive impact on Scotland's ecclesiastical scene, remarking that

there is no limit to the influence which the war exercises on the religious life of the nation. Who could have dreamed of the Free Church and the United Free Church meeting together for prayer so soon after their days of conflict? The war has let loose a spirit of unity and conciliation which will transform the Churches. The Kaiser is an instrument working out religious revival. Thus does God make the wrath of man to praise Him.¹¹⁹

Notwithstanding the verdict of secular and Free Church comment concerning the joint service as indicating, to them, a new spirit of denominational co-operation in light of the demands on spiritual unity that the War placed on the major Scottish Presbyterian denominations, not every Presbyterian in Scotland acceded to such a judgement. The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland was scathing in its response to the service on the basis that purity of worship had been violated within the act of worship. The editor of *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Rev. James Sinclair, challenged the assertion made by the Free Church Moderator that the Free Church was justified in participating in the joint service on the basis that "the whole service was conducted in accordance with the Scriptural simplicity for which the Free Church bears testimony." Sinclair refuted this justification, arguing that the singing of the National Anthem at the service was a violation of such "Scriptural simplicity" on the basis that it was neither a Psalm nor "an inspired song." Moreover, he condemned the Free Church for sharing in fellowship with members of the other

¹¹⁸ *The Glasgow Herald*, 30th June 1915.

¹¹⁹ *The Scotsman*, 19th May 1915.

denominations because of their inherent rejection of “the Divine Authorship of Holy Scripture” through their having “set at nought that authorship by rationalistic criticism.” Sinclair concluded that the Free Church could have held a prayer meeting in their own Assembly Hall.”¹²⁰

Such negative criticism of the Free Church’s stance on participation with the Church of Scotland and United Free Church was not confined to the Free Presbyterian Church but increasingly was seen within the Free Church itself. The immediate note of positive reaction within the Free Church to the united service of May 20th 1915 was not indicative of a general spirit of ecumenical co-operation across the denomination as the War progressed. We see this transpire firstly at Presbytery level, then in Archibald Macneilage’s own revised statements on such inter-denominational co-operation and subsequently at General Assemblies of the Free Church to the extent that the Free Church never again participated in a joint service with another denomination in a similar format to that of the united meeting of May 20th 1915 for the reasons that the Free Presbyterian Church had alluded to regarding theological differences with the other denominations.

Thus, at Presbytery level, as early as 30th July 1915, the Free Church Presbytery of Lewis reacted negatively to a letter from Rev. Donald Maclean, Clerk of the Highland Committee of the Free Church, asking for co-operation of Free Churchmen on a proposed joint service with the Church of Scotland and United Free Church of Scotland “in connection with the losses sustained by families of the Lewis (sic) and other parts in the War.” The response of the Presbytery was unanimous in its opposition to this proposal, although the Minute of

¹²⁰ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, July 1915, p.88.

Presbytery gave no reason for this rejection. The wording was simply given that "it was unanimously agreed that no good purpose be served by such a meeting and the Clerk was instructed to inform the Reverend Donald Maclean that the Presbytery could not take (*sic*) with the other churches in this matter."¹²¹

In similar vein, the Free Church Presbytery of Inverness, whilst having sanctioned and participated in a united prayer meeting with the other two main denominations in the town of Inverness, contained members who expressed clear evidence of misgivings about such a gathering. For example, Rev Angus Mackay of Kingussie expressed his doubts about the meeting, arguing that "any such meeting should have been conducted in the respective halls instead of one hall." In agreeing with Mr. Mackay, Rev Kenneth MacRae of Fort Augustus surmised that "they ought to keep to their own halls and churches for that sort of thing."¹²²

At Assembly level, there appeared a gradual disinclination to be involved in both national events of intercession involving other denominations and indeed a resistance as a result of theological principle to co-operation with the other denominations where Free Church distinctives were considered to be breached. One aspect of joint denominational activity which permeated discussion within the Free Church concerned National Days of Prayer and Fasting to be participated in by all denominations in Great Britain. Thus, for example, in the Report of the Religion and Morals and Public Questions Committee at the May 1915 Free Church General Assembly, the matter of National Repentance was highlighted. The Report argued that whilst the War had been ongoing for eight months there had been no act of national repentance for national sins forthcoming. The Report did admit that King George V

¹²¹ *Minute of the Free Presbytery of Lewis*, 30th July 1915.

¹²² *Minute of the Free Presbytery of Inverness*, 5th June 1915.

and the Archbishop of Canterbury had appointed the first Sunday of the year as a day of intercession and prayer in every church in the land. However, the Report dismissed such a call based on Scriptural argument. Its first objection lay in the fact that the Imperial Parliament (*sic*) had not been involved in sanctioning such a Day, when in Scripture it was recorded that when a fast day in Nineveh was called that was proclaimed “by the decree of the king and his nobles.”¹²³

Secondly, the Report argued, again with reference to Nineveh, that whereas the king and his nobles, dressed in sackcloth as an indication of humility and repentance, called on the people: “Let them all turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands”¹²⁴ there had been no corresponding emphasis of confession of sin and repentance in the call for National Prayer and Fasting. Thirdly, the call to hold a National Day Prayer and Fasting on the Sunday “on the joyous memorial of Christ’s resurrection” was considered to be an “arranging for extraordinary duties to interfere with ordinary, or for one duty to shuffle out another” and thus was deemed anomalous to the Sabbath distinctive.¹²⁵

Indeed, the subsequent Commission of Assembly held on 30th November 1915 might have suggested a softening of the stance of the denomination on co-operation with the other main Presbyterian denominations. An extract minute of the Commission indicated that a united voice on the matter of national repentance with the other denominations was possible; the language of the minute suggests a desire to co-operate as can be seen in the

¹²³ Cited in Jonah 3:7 (The King James Version will be used for Scripture references throughout the thesis, that version being the one used in the Free Church and the other Scottish Presbyterian denominations at the time of the war).

¹²⁴ Cited in Jonah 3: 6-8.

¹²⁵ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1915 p.102.

response to a letter from the Moderator of the Church of Scotland to the Free Church Commission appointing Saturday 1st January 1916 as a day of humiliation and prayer. This communication was welcomed by the Free Church commissioners. The same Commission repeated the earlier position of the denomination regarding its opposition to the Sabbath being used as a national day of prayer and fasting and called on the other evangelical churches in Scotland to call on the King to accede to this request.¹²⁶ *The Monthly Record* for January 1916 noted that both the Presbytery of Inverness and the Presbytery of Glasgow instructed congregations within their presbyteries to observe Saturday 1st of January as the day for humiliation and prayer.

Such a semblance of inter-denominational co-operation was seen to be a flimsy reality when at the Free Church General Assembly of May 1916 a request from the Church of Scotland for a joint prayer meeting in the United Free Church Assembly Hall *as per* the previous year was rejected by the Assembly. The initial reason for non-participation was mooted by the Clerk of Assembly, Rev. Prof Kennedy Cameron, who argued that insufficient time had been given to the Free Church by the Clerk of the Church of Scotland in the latter's invitation to participate in the prayer meeting (the letter of invitation had been received on the Tuesday, the day prior to the consideration of the invitation and also the day of the joint prayer meeting). However, such a reason for declining the invitation can be seen to be a smokescreen for the much deeper cause of resistance, namely the theological differences existing between the Free Church and United Free Church of Scotland. The appointment of Professor George Adam Smith as Moderator of the United Free Church Assembly in May 1916 was the catalyst for Free Church antipathy towards participating in the joint prayer

¹²⁶ *Minutes of the Free Presbytery of Edinburgh*, 30th November 1915.

meeting. Smith's liberal critical approach to the Bible, an approach which sought to eliminate the "dogma of verbal inspiration" in favour of interpreting Scripture according to the "present age" was considered the same Higher Critical theological anathema that was the chief cause of the War arising from Germany.¹²⁷ Any involvement with the United Free Church would, according to Professor Cameron, have to be tempered by the Free Church taking "some means of making it known to the world that they were not to be regarded as compromising their position in the least in regard to their testimony which was clear and outspoken."¹²⁸

It is striking to note that notwithstanding the theological differences between the Free Church and the other main Scottish Presbyterian denominations, a joint service had been conducted in 1915; however the same differences that existed in 1915 precluded Free Church co-operation in any such services a year later. Undoubtedly, the public profile of George Adam Smith was a significant factor in reassessing the stance of the Free Church Assembly *vis à vis* united acts of worship. Moreover, the *verbatim* report in *The Monthly Record* which included the mentioning of applause on four occasions from Free Church commissioners at the decision not to participate would indicate an agreement opposed to cooperation on the basis of theological difference. Nevertheless, such a position was not one of unanimity within the denomination. Professor Cameron did admit that the committee involved in dealing with the invitation "differed somewhat in opinion" regarding the response to the request, while acknowledging that "it was open to members as individuals

¹²⁷ R. Riesen, "George Adam Smith," in N. Cameron (ed), *A Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1993, p.780.

¹²⁸ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1916, p.81.

to go over and join in the meeting.”¹²⁹ Moreover, one commissioner, Rev James Henry, Burghead, is recorded as saying that he “thought it a hardship if they could not join their brethren at this joint prayer meeting. He would not compromise his principles one bit by attending the meeting.”¹³⁰

Public response to the declining of the invitation to participate in the joint prayer meeting was mixed. For example, a scathing censure on the Free Church Assembly’s decision was communicated in *The Highland News* from ‘Observer’ (*sic*) who wrote of the “most terribly reprehensible action of the Assembly” in its decision. The letter opined that “this will show the world the nature of Free Church principles and their value in promoting charity and Christianity among men.” He continued: “perish the principle that would bar one from joining with another or with any Christian Church in an approach to the Mercy Seat.”¹³¹ Such a rebuke was met one week later by ‘Watchman’ (*sic*) who argued that the time constraints of a four-day Assembly prevented such an invitation being accepted. Notwithstanding this repetition of Professor Kennedy Cameron’s argument above, ‘Observer’ indicated personal denominational bias when he alluded to United Free Church hypocrisy in the matter of intercessory prayer. He alleged a discrepancy in sincerity for such prayer when he contrasted the United Free Church Assembly’s “clamouring for an Intercessory War Service while when the motion for a Day of Humiliation and Prayer came before the [United Free] Presbyteries some ministers characterised it as a day of idleness and as encouraging laziness.”¹³²

¹²⁹ *ibid.*, page 81.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*, page 82.

¹³¹ *The Highland News*, 3rd June 1916.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 10th June 1916.

The decision of the Free Church Assembly of May 1916 not to be represented officially at a joint denominational prayer meeting signalled the closure of co-operation with the other major denominations in any official worship capacity at Assembly level; no discussion of further cooperation is evident in Assembly Reports of 1917 or 1918; there was no Free Church representation at the Joint Meetings of the Church of Scotland and United Free General Assemblies on May 23rd 1917 or on May 22nd 1918.

The heightened tension caused by the appointment of George Adam Smith as Moderator of the United Free Assembly of 1916 contributed to the curtailing of inter-denominational relations from the Free Church. However, any prospect of a full, vigorous co-operative spirit from the Free Church towards the major Scottish Presbyterian denominations during the War was always going to be tempered by the legal vicissitudes arising from the Free Church's relations both with the United Free Church and, more particularly, the Church of Scotland. As early as May 1915, when the semblance of an ecumenical spirit of inter-denominational co-operation in relation to the War was indicated by the Free Church General Assembly's permitting Free Church representation in the joint prayer meeting, there was no let-up in stressing the Free Church's claim¹³³ as the true spiritual and ecclesiastical representative of the Church of Scotland as it was reformed in 1560. At that same Assembly, the Free Church's position as to its claims were set out by Professor Colin Bannatyne, Convener of the Claim of Right Committee. Bannatyne argued that the War had, far from "throwing into the background the importance of the distinctive testimony of the Free

¹³³ This claim was based on the Claim of Right, adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1842, which repudiated the intrusion of ministers into congregations irrespective of the wishes of the membership. While recognizing the State's jurisdiction in temporal matters, the Claim rejected State interference in matters spiritual. Those who seceded from the Church of Scotland in May 1843 did so on the basis of the Claim of Right, asserting their legal right as the true successor of the Reformation Church of Scotland.

Church, showed their vital importance.”¹³⁴ He based his premise on the need for the Free Church to maintain its distinctive theological testimony in the face of the “modern enlightenment” that “was tending to make earth more an outfield of hell than it ever was.”¹³⁵ This strong allusion to the theologically liberalising developments in the Church of Scotland indicated the determination within the Free Church not to loosen its legal stance *vis à vis* the Established Church, particularly when, in his report, Bannatyne referred to the Free Church’s standing on “confessional truth in accordance with the word of God” that “the Church of Scotland had always stood for.”¹³⁶

The same tenor of steadfast holding to its Claim of Right is evident in each successive Free Church Assembly throughout the War. Thus, in 1916, in Professor Bannatyne’s absence, the Vice Convener of the Claim of Right Committee, Mr. John Macleod of Inverness, gave the report in which the loosening of the Church of Scotland’s adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith was posited as indicative of its departure from its biblical and subordinate standards, thus justifying the Free Church’s continued claim as the rightful church of the Reformation maintaining reformation principles. The Report cited the “framework of the Reformation continuously broken down”¹³⁷ through the failure of the “other Churches” to stem the advance of Roman Catholic influence in the nation. Moreover, the suspension, through the War, of union negotiations between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland, as mentioned in the Report was, nevertheless, considered immaterial in relation to the Free Church continuing to express grave concern for the doctrinal position of the Church of Scotland should these negotiations resume and be successful.

¹³⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, 22nd May 1915.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1916, p.101.

Macleod referred to the outline of plans for Union which failed to express the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity or of the person of Christ. The Report fears that should such a union happen then the endowments of the Church of Scotland - still adhering to the Westminster Confession of Faith - would be shared with a Church which “stood for indefinite liberty of change.”¹³⁸ Such a theological compromise was considered by the Committee to be of national concern during the time of war.

During the debate on the Report it was clear that Free Church distinctives precluded any wholesale co-operation with the Church of Scotland when such distinctives were perceived to be threatened by theological compromise. Archibald Macneilage spoke of the testimony of the Free Church as “a testimony against the Established Church as at present constituted.” He further stated that since the Disruption of 1843 “the grounds of objection to the practices of the Established Church had grown in a marvellous degree” while commenting that “the Established Church must adhere to Presbyterianism and not ape Episcopacy or rank Popery. Corruptions in worship were inevitable and necessary forerunners of corruption in doctrine.” Applause from the floor of the Assembly in response to Macneilage’s comments was noted as was the supportive response from Rev Roderick Macleod, Knock, Lewis who said he was “very glad that the Free Church had not taken part in the joint prayer meeting.”¹³⁹

During the 1917 Free Church Assembly the Claim of Right Committee Report maintained its concern over Union, arguing that ambiguity in Trinitarian theology, should union take place, was a threat to the national interest and that the Free Church “as Christians and patriots we

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.101.

¹³⁹ *Glasgow Herald*, 27th May 1916.

owe a duty to Church and State during these perilous times.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, there was no let up the following year in the pursuit of the Free Church’s claim to be the historic church of the apostles and the Reformation when, again, the Claim of Right Committee asserted its moral right to represent the “Orthodox and Free Church of the first century and a half of post-Reformation Scotland.”¹⁴¹

Thus, throughout the period of the War the Free Church of Scotland never loosened its ecclesiastical identity on matters of theological principle. Indeed, the Free Church’s insistence on a purity of worship according to Scripture and formulated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and its rejection of liberal interpretations of Scripture adhered to within the other two major Scottish Presbyterian denominations can be seen to have prevented co-operation with the other two major denominations when such cooperation was seen to compromise the scriptural distinctives held by the Free Church.

Notwithstanding this position, the Free Church did not abandon co-operation with the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church when such distinctives were not considered part of the activity embarked on by the denomination. Thus, for example, we see the Free Church seeking inter-denominational co-operation with respect to alleviation of financial hardship in Highland fishing communities as a result of the war. In the Highlands and Islands Committee Report at the May 1915 Free Church General Assembly, the Committee reported on the financial consequences of the outbreak of the War on the fishing and crofting communities in the Highlands. Whilst the Committee noted, positively, the huge response of those involved in the fishing industry in volunteering to enlist, it remarked that the resultant

¹⁴⁰ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1917, p.72.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, June 1918, p.100.

effect of such patriotism was the collapse of the fishing industry. In addition to the cessation of actual fishing, the consequent loss of revenue for Lewis girls involved in the herring industry nationally as fish-gutters was estimated at between £50,000 and £60,000. Together with the failure of the potato crop on the islands, the Committee had sought co-operation with the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland to persuade the Government to provide financial assistance to those areas in the Highlands where financial and economic distress was prevalent and attested by “authoritative sources.” Despite initial co-operation among the three churches at committee level the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church did not pursue the matter further, leaving the Free Church to act independently in its pursuit of Government intervention. The Committee reported that the Government responded favourably to the Free Church’s intervention and that the Free Church could be justly “rewarded” in securing temporal benefits not just for Free Church people but for “the population at large” within vulnerable Highland communities.¹⁴²

Further co-operation is evident in the publication of Gaelic spiritual material for Gaelic speaking troops. In the summer of 1915 a meeting was held in Edinburgh when representatives of the three major Presbyterian denominations resolved to make a public appeal for funds to print a booklet of Gaelic sermons to be distributed to Gaelic speaking soldiers and sailors.¹⁴³ Seven months later, *The Highland News* reported that under the auspices of the Church of Scotland, the United Free Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland a booklet of Gaelic religious poetry had been issued and widely distributed, with the hope that “these may edify and comfort our brave soldiers in His Majesty’s service.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² *ibid.*, June 1915, p.90.

¹⁴³ *The Highland News*, 28th August 1915.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 16th March 1916.

This booklet, entitled, *Mil Nan Dàn* (“The Honey of the Poems”),¹⁴⁵ contained 26 poems “for Gaelic-speaking Highlanders”¹⁴⁶ thus further emphasising the inter-denominational nature of the publication. Furthermore, the editorial reported that a Gaelic translation of the National Anthem had been included in the booklet, with the comment that this was included in the form of service for the Free Church’s Day of Intercession on 2nd January 1915.

The role of the Highlands and Islands Committee in inter-denominational co-operation *vis à vis* the War effort is evident in its proactive involvement in deputations to various Government departments: the War Office, the Admiralty, the Board of Trade and the Secretary for Scotland. The Committee’s representation on five such deputations indicated the integral part played by the denomination in seeking to uphold Free Church and Presbyterian influence in a non-sectarian *modus vivendi*. Its involvement with British non-Anglican and Presbyterian Churches from across Great Britain, and significantly, with the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland, revealed the determination of the Free Church to engage with Government alongside fellow Christians irrespective of theological differences where these differences did not impinge on matters concerning the conduct of the war. Thus, for example the Highlands and Islands Committee reported at the May 1917 General Assembly regarding its inter-denominational work in supporting “the claims of the Non-Anglican Churches for equality of treatment of the Ministers in the Army, an increase of Presbyterian chaplains in the Navy, and railway facilities for travelling for ministers supplying pulpits throughout the War.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, both in terms of its participation with other denominations and its pressing for Non-Anglican and Presbyterian equality with

¹⁴⁵ With no explanation, the second edition of the booklet, accessed for this thesis, omits the United Free Church’s name in the list of publishers.

¹⁴⁶ *Mil nan Dàn*, Free Church of Scotland and Church of Scotland, n.p., n.d.

¹⁴⁷ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1917, p.58.

Anglican chaplains, the Highlands and Islands Committee was an active participant. Indeed, in assessing the sympathetic response given to the Free Church's involvement in these inter-denomination deputations the Committee argued that its influence in "certain parts of the country merits the consideration of those in authority."¹⁴⁸

Indeed, the evidence of Free Church involvement with the other major denominations where theological distinctives played no part in cooperative ventures (while at the same time such distinctives were maintained in preventing activities where compromise was deemed unacceptable) is seen in the Deliverance of the Free Church Claim of Right and Public Questions Report of 1918.¹⁴⁹ As has already been noted, the Report of that year was unambiguous in its claim to represent the historic reformed Church of Scotland. Indeed, in the deliverance to that same Report that claim was emphasised in the likely response of the Free Church to any Union which would have to involve "legislative sanction." That response itself would be through the legislative process to determine the rights of the Free Church which "stood for old-fashioned Presbyterianism." Yet, in the subsequent paragraph of the deliverance the Assembly accepted a motion from Professor Kennedy Cameron that the Free Church appoint two representatives to join with a deputation from the Church of Scotland and United Free Church meeting with the Government to oppose the Education (Scotland) Bill of 1918's proposals for a national endowment for Roman Catholic and Episcopal schools. Thus, on the one hand, we see the Free Church preparing to go to civil law to maintain theological distinctives to the material detriment of the two major denominations should they form an ecclesiastical union, while, on the other hand the Free Church was quite

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.58.

¹⁴⁹ In 1918 "Public Questions" was added to the Claim of Right Committee.

prepared to co-operate with these same denominations when the perceived danger to Scotland's Protestant heritage was at stake through civil authority.

5. Theology of Death

As the War progressed, the massive scale of death of servicemen in battle, particularly on the Western Front could not be ignored by a public which read daily lists of casualties in national newspapers and which knew, from first hand experience in tightly knit communities, of friends, family and neighbours killed in action. As the shocking scale of death penetrated the homes, villages, towns and cities across every part of the country, the churches were being challenged to bring comfort to the bereaved through the bewilderment of the carnage that affected every community in Scotland. Such a role within the communities of the country was always central to the Church and, certainly within evangelical Scottish Presbyterianism, a clearly defined confessional theology which promised the saved in Christ eternal life in heaven and upheld the Confession's teaching that, in relation to the rest of mankind that "God was pleased... to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin."¹⁵⁰ However, the effects of the ever-increasing death toll through battle on a scale unprecedented in modern warfare challenged the orthodox position of such a theology of salvation. Resistance to a dogmatic confessionalism within Scottish Presbyterianism in the mid to late 19th century converged with assaults on biblical orthodoxy from German theologians in the late 19th century to weaken the commitment to such Confessional doctrines as limited atonement, justification by faith and the eternal destiny of the soul after death.

The Free Church's response to the colossal scale of death in battle must be considered in light of the challenges to traditional, confessional theology which presented to some within certain sections of Scottish Presbyterianism (and, indeed, in other denominations across

¹⁵⁰ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter III:7.

Great Britain, including the Church of England) a harsh, definitive assigning of a serviceman's eternal destiny irrespective of his sacrifice in battle. All denominations shared the same pastoral position in the need to bring spiritual comfort to the bereaved and to troops at the Front. Whether for ministers who preached regularly to their congregations seeking to discern the times through the prism of Scripture; whether for these same preachers who sought to bring the comfort of Scripture in their pastoral visits to families bereaved of loved ones killed in battle; or whether for laymen who sought to interpret the times through their own knowledge of the doctrines of their faith, the need to address the matter of the soul after death was a real issue impacting these denominations in their transmission of a theology that addressed the eternal destiny of the soul. Those churches, including the Free Church of Scotland, which had blessed the armies marching to the Front soon faced an unprecedented human catastrophe in the scale and manner of death.

The Free Church's persistent support for the War must be examined especially in relation to its strict adherence to its Confessional standards underpinning doctrines concerning the eternal destiny of the soul, doctrines which were being challenged by some within Scottish Presbyterianism who sought to honour British war dead with a salvation commensurate with loyalty to King and country irrespective of any profession of faith prior to death. It is appropriate, therefore, that such deviation in traditional, confessional theology on which the Scottish churches had anchored their doctrine for nearly 300 years should be outlined initially through an overview of the innovations in theology adopted by a growing number within the Church of Scotland and United Free Church before we examine the Free Church's responses to such changes. These responses should examine both the consistency of Free Church theological response *vis à vis* the liberalising trends of other denomination and the

frequency and nature of response from the Free Church compared with that of the Free Presbyterian Church (the denomination closest to the Free Church in terms of adherence to doctrine and practice).

The mounting scale of casualties on land and sea prompted a growing number within the Church of Scotland and United Free Church - clergy and laymen - to deviate from a confessional teaching on the doctrine of unmerited salvation through faith in Christ and in the doctrine of the final, eternal state of believers and non-believers after death. Chapter XXXII of the 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith (held as the subordinate standard of doctrine for each of the main Presbyterian churches in Scotland - Church of Scotland, United Free Church, Free Church of Scotland and Free Presbyterian Church) - taught of the eternal destiny of souls being either to heaven or hell with no intermediate state.¹⁵¹ Moreover, the same Confession delineated (in Chapter XXXIII) an eternal distinction between the “elect” and the “reprobate,” with the elect receiving eternal salvation whilst the reprobate were “cast into eternal torments.”¹⁵² This doctrinal position, in effect, the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, with those justified receiving salvation unto eternal life and with those outside of God’s electing grace doomed to eternal punishment, was being challenged by some within the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church and in popular responses to the deaths of comrades and of loved ones. This challenge was a result of the perceived need to bring spiritual comfort to the bereaved through an assurance that a loved one killed in battle would be rewarded with honour in heaven as well as honour on earth; such a position is evident in sermons, articles, letters and poems of that period.

¹⁵¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXXII.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, Chapter XXXIII.

This challenge to a traditionally held, confessional position on death and its aftermath has to be viewed within the broader theological and scientific developments of the late 19th century. As has been mentioned earlier, the development and absorption of Higher Criticism by liberal theologians within Scottish Protestantism had led to the questioning of the literal interpretation of Scripture. This, together with the rise of evolutionary theories of the origins of mankind, combined to undermine the rigidity of much of the Church's teaching on such tenets as heaven, hell and salvation through Christ's penal work on the cross. Indeed, this theological drift from a conservative, evangelical understanding of Scripture encapsulated in the Westminster Confession of Faith was no instant transformation. For much of the previous century, what Professor A. C. Cheyne refers to as "the Confessional Revolution"¹⁵³ was happening within Scottish Presbyterianism whereby a changing perspective on the Westminster Confession was challenging traditional, orthodox tenets. Such a "Revolution" is epitomised in the teaching of Rev. John McLeod Campbell, condemned by the Church of Scotland in 1831 for his denying the Confessional doctrine of Limited Atonement. Further inroads into the Confession's teaching on the atonement can be detected in the pre-1900 Free Church. Cheyne refers to a speech given by Principal Robert Rainy at the World Presbyterian Alliance in Philadelphia in 1880 when Rainy gave "thinly-veiled approval" to the developing disinclination within Scottish churches to follow a judicial interpretation of the Atonement in favour of a growing preference for one which recognised a benign Father receptive to "the claims which all men have on Him as His children and can never cease to have."¹⁵⁴ In the same speech, Rainy spoke of the "current theology" being "more calm, more catholic, more considerate, more human...dealing with the perplexities...rather than

¹⁵³ A.C. Cheyne, *The Transformation of the Kirk*, The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1983, pp. 60-85.

¹⁵⁴ *Reports of Proceedings of the Second General Council of the Presbyterian Alliance, Philadelphia, 1880*, cited in A.C. Cheyne, op cit., p.76.

uttering the trumpet tones of confidence and enthusiasm.”¹⁵⁵ Such a drift from a confessional basis of the Atonement which emphasised the penal, judicial aspect of Christ’s work in salvation towards a more human-centred direction is certainly evident in the writing of some theologians within the Church of Scotland and United Free Church after the outbreak of war. With the onslaught of multiple casualties in war through advanced military technology, some Scottish clergy and laymen were prompted to abandon the reformed doctrine which limited the atonement to the elect only; their theology concerning the soul after death was radically altered in order to bring comfort to the bereaved and comfort to those engaged in battle irrespective of any combatant’s profession of faith in Christ at his time of death.

This change in a theological direction of salvation is seen in relation to the focus on sacrifice in battle as a salvific act deserving of eternal life. As the War progressed the notion of sacrifice in battle was more and more being equated by liberal scholars with the sacrifice of Christ and thus a meritorious action earning eternal life for the one who had given his life in battle. Such a position rested, initially, on the perspective of the War being fought as a holy war in which Great Britain was viewed as being on the side of Christ, with Germany opposed to righteousness. Thus, for example, Alexander Whyte, United Free Church Professor of Divinity at New College, Edinburgh exhorted British troops to “put on the whole armour of God, in which divine armour alone they can hope to fight successfully and conclusively the spiritual campaign that has been set them by the Lord of Hosts.”¹⁵⁶ This “good v evil” scenario lent itself to viewing death in battle by British troops as an act of sacrifice for the cause of righteousness. War sermons from Church of Scotland and United Free Church

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.80.

¹⁵⁶ A. Whyte, *Not Against Flesh and Blood*, Edinburgh, Oliphants, 1916, pp.11-12.

clergymen illustrate this position. Thus, as early as August 1915, in an anniversary sermon to mark the first year of the War, W Nichol Service, Church of Scotland minister of the West Kirk, Greenock, identified the “sacrifice of life” of a soldier in battle with the sacrifice of Christ, citing the well-used text (John 15:13) of Christ’s vicarious sacrifice: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” concluding that those who have given their lives in conflict “get to the very standpoint of Him who was crucified.”¹⁵⁷ Likewise, W P Paterson, Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh University argued that divine justice negated the denial of heavenly reward for those who “suffered for human progress”; rather, Paterson spoke of the will and power of God both to save lives and, in Isaianic prophetic terms to give those who have suffered in war “to see of the travail of their soul and to be satisfied therewith.”¹⁵⁸

In many of the popular views of the immortality of the soul we see this equation of a soldier’s sacrifice in battle with the sacrifice of Christ being expressed within the army (including military chaplains) and within the poetic contributions of lay individuals; such sentiments clearly obviated any need for the personal faith stressed by the church in Scotland since the Reformation. The language of vicarious sacrifice was evident early on in the War. For example, two brothers, Hector and Malcolm Macleod of Stornoway, were accorded the highest accolade for their having made the “great sacrifice” with the accompanying statement of certainty that “they died for us. They are not lost but gone before.”¹⁵⁹ Similarly, in a letter¹⁶⁰ written by a nurse to the mother of Lieutenant Alastair

¹⁵⁷ W. J. N. Service, *War and the Peace of God*, Glasgow, James Maclehose and Sons, 1915, p.147..

¹⁵⁸ W. P. Paterson, *In the Day of the Ordeal*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1917, p. 85.

¹⁵⁹ *The Highland News*, 1st April, 1915.

Buchan (brother of the author and politician, John Buchan and son of Rev. John Buchan, United Free Church Minister), we read that

it is indeed a cruel war and yet no one could die more nobly than your son and it must comfort you a little and almost make you proud to know that he gave his life for others even as Christ did and his shall be Christ's reward. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.¹⁶¹

Expressions of certainty of the deceased soldier's immediate entry into heaven are frequently seen in military as well as lay comments on the passing of servicemen in death. Thus, for example, we find an R.A.M.C. sergeant recollect that, "I have heard a minister say that each soldier killed or dying of wounds is as true a sacrifice for his dear ones as Christ's on Calvary."¹⁶² Likewise, in a notice regarding to death of Private John Macleod of Raasay, Macleod's captain wrote of his having "served his King and Country and in doing so is not lost but goes to await all his loved ones where no sorrow or trial may enter."¹⁶³ In similar vein a captain in the R.A.M.C. reported to the YMCA questionnaire given at the end of the war that: "It is apparently taken for granted by many that all 'good fellows' who die for their country will go to heaven, but there is a future judgement for the cruel and specially for the German War Lords."¹⁶⁴

Moreover, in war poetry one finds similar sentiments concerning the immediate passage of a deceased soldier's soul into heaven irrespective of personal faith. Scottish newspapers published regular poetic contributions in which the assurance of salvation was given to

¹⁶⁰ The words of this letter were expressed *verbatim* written some months before by a nursing sister to the father of Donald More who died in a casualty clearing station in April 1917. That letter was published in the *John O'Groat Journal*, 13th April, 1917.

¹⁶¹ B.Reid, Letter to Helen Buchan 13th September 1917, held in the John Buchan Museum, Peebles

¹⁶² D. S.Cairns, *The Army and Religion*, London, MacMillan, 1918, p.44.

¹⁶³ *The Highland News*, 13th October, 1917.

¹⁶⁴ D.S.Cairns, *op cit.*, p.19.

individual soldiers by their death in battle. One such poem, written by Delicia Chisholm, captured the opinion expressed in particularly sentimentalised language appealing to assured salvation through sacrifice in battle:

But those who fell at Duty's hand
 Who on her bosom closed their eyes
 Forever God shall not despise
 But lead unto the Great Beyond
 They sleep on Duty's snowy breast
 While this we ask, and this alone
 That God may guide our brave, our own
 To Paradise, the blest.¹⁶⁵

Such popular sentiment and theological deviation from the tenets of the Faith as contained in the Westminster Confession were the backdrop for the response of the Free Church of Scotland in its quest to bring spiritual comfort in the face of death while maintaining the traditional, confessional position on the doctrine of salvation through faith and not by works - works that would include the sacrificial giving of one's life in battle. How the Free Church kept to its teaching while dealing with the reality of multiple death in battle must be considered, then, in light of the challenges faced from those who considered the impact of traditional doctrine insufficient to provide the comfort required at a time of unprecedented death in conflict at the hand of the perceived enemies of God.

The response within the Free Church of Scotland to the massive scale of death in battle and, concomitantly, the theological innovations that appeared particularly from 1915 onwards presents difficulties in providing a comprehensive analysis. Certainly, the paucity of extant material of Free Church origin on the issue, coupled with the fact that there has been no study of the Free Church's position regarding death in battle during the Great War, present

¹⁶⁵ *The Highland News*, October 27th, 1917.

difficulties in securing a full assessment of the denomination's stance on the matter. Notwithstanding the problems, the available sources do provide sufficient evidence to assess the consistency, volume and provenance of the Free Church's response to the sea change in key doctrinal aspects challenging the subordinate standards of all the major Scottish Presbyterian denominations.

When examining the responses of Free Church spokesmen one must examine the theological nature of the particular responses to the liberal teaching concerning the deaths of soldiers in battle and detect whether indeed such responses comply with or deviate from the Westminster Confession of Faith and, at the same time, assess the extent to which Free Church comment was consistent within its own constituency relative to that of other denominations. Of particular focus must be the Free Church's reaction to the counter-confessional teaching of death in battle as a means of redemption through sacrifice, as equating with the sacrifice of Christ. Additionally, the matter of prayer for the dead in the context of death in battle (proposed by some Scottish clergymen) should be investigated in relation to the Free Church's response.

As with much Free Church participation in ecclesiastical affairs, *The Monthly Record* provides the bulk of evidence in which to base a critical examination of the denomination's reactions. In relation to the growing vogue not only in Scotland but across Great Britain of challenging reformed teaching and practice in relation to the dead, Archibald Macneilage, in an editorial in *The Monthly Record* of January 1916 condemned the Church of England's newspaper, the *Church Times* for advocating salvation through death in battle and for prayers for the dead. Macneilage deplored the stance taken by the paper for "the renunciation of all sound ideas

concerning Sin and Atonement” and concluded that should such teaching persist then *The Church Times* would have to “part company” with the Bible, the Prayer Book and the Hymn Book. Macneilage offered much gratitude to British soldiers who had “forfeited their lives for home and country” but asserted that “there is blood which cancels guilt and opens paradise, but it is not hero blood, not patriot blood; it is the blood of the Son of God....”¹⁶⁶

Indeed, Macneilage made no further comment on the theological innovations prevailing from other denominations until September 1916 when he condemned the practice of praying for the dead at a memorial service conducted by “a prominent United Free Church minister.” In a diatribe against such services, he attacked the form of worship used as that “which cause lovers of Evangelical doctrine and the souls of men to tremble.” Furthermore, he castigated those who flouted traditional teaching concerning the destiny of the dead as having “no sense of the value of the immortal souls who are listening to them.”¹⁶⁷

Consistent adherence to a Confessional position on the doctrine of salvation is clearly evident among Free Church spokesmen, albeit almost exclusively from lay representatives. Macneilage’s contribution was echoed in the comments provided by another layman, J Forbes Moncrieff, whose views on the doctrinal controversy were published in the March 1916 edition of *The Monthly Record*. Moncrieff gave his opinion on the prevalent attitudes regarding sacrificial death in battle as a means of securing salvation. He decried the “superficial” and “sentimental religion” portrayed by “ministers and people of the present day.” Although he conceded that “soothing and comforting words are all very well,” and “at times are best” he argued that “when these are altogether substituted for faithful and

¹⁶⁶ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, January 1916 p.3.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, September 1916, p.134.

unpalatable truths of Scripture, souls will perish and Christ's cause will languish." Moncrieff connected his argument to what he described as the revival of the medieval belief of the Crusades that "death on the battlefield brought...eternal merit and eternal glory."¹⁶⁸

Further evidence of the consistency of doctrinal approach within the Free Church is seen in *The Monthly Record* of January 1917 in a letter with the name 'Layman' appended. Again the predominance of lay involvement is evident in the doctrinal controversy over the destiny of the dead in battle. "Layman" berated Church of Scotland ministers who appeared to have abandoned the Church's teaching on the sacrificial merits of Christ's death as alone being sufficient for salvation when he made reference to "several laymen" but no ministers who have challenged such doctrinal deviation from the Westminster Confession.¹⁶⁹

Further evidence of internal consistency within the Free Church is seen in the reaction from Archibald Macneilage to a pastoral letter sent in the name of the Church of Scotland and United Free Church Assemblies in May 1916. The letter had implied that the cross that the soldier bore in battle was as efficacious as the Cross of Christ, as expressed in its key statement:

At times it may appear as if Christ had ceased to influence the lives of men, as if the Cross had been dethroned. The truth is far otherwise. This is the day of Christ as never before in all the world's history. You war not against flesh and blood only, but against principalities and powers and darkness. The Cross is laid on myriads of human lives and is borne with heroic courage or patient endurance.¹⁷⁰

Macneilage argued that "men there are who tell the soldiers in the great War (*sic*) that their cross is the same kind and essence as the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." He applauded the

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, March 1916, p.38.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, January 1917, p.9.

¹⁷⁰ Cited in *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, March 1917, p.25.

Moderator of the Free Church Assembly (Rev. Angus Mackay) refusing to sign the letter “to his lasting honour”: Macneilage’s reformed theological stance is indicated in his assertion that

to suggest that the splendour of the self-sacrifice of the patriot soldier or sailor may be put on a level with the surpassing glory of the Cross of Jesus Christ is not to exalt the creature but to debase and dishonour him in whom it hath pleased the Father that all glorious living fulness of grace and glory and perfect bliss for sinful men should dwell.¹⁷¹

While the joint Church of Scotland / United Free Church Assemblies’ pastoral letter of 1916 at the very least inferred the denial of the crucifixion of Christ as unique in its salvific purposes, there was no hint of any repudiation of a christo-centric atonement in the pastoral letter sent out by the Free Church General Assembly in May 1916. The pastoral letter “to Free Church soldiers and sailors” stated that:

Every living member who has the ear of the Eternal is always praying for you, that the Holy Spirit may apply His precious word with power to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ in His atoning death and redeeming love as the only way of salvation for “Except a man be born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”¹⁷²

Thus, from the mixed body of lay and clergy commissioners, a firm confessional statement on the negation of salvation by any other means other than the death of Christ was stated in full conformity to comments on the doctrine of salvation made by individuals within the Free Church of Scotland.

When obituaries to fallen soldiers of Free Church connection were published (chiefly in *The Instructor* magazine) again, there is no evidence of any deviating from a confessional position on death. Every individual soldier mentioned as a fatality of war was accredited with good character, bravery in battle and a live connection with the Free Church - no

¹⁷¹ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, March 1917, p.25.

¹⁷² *ibid.*, August 1916, p.130.

uniform reference was made to the soldier's eternal salvation through death in battle; only those who had made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ prior to death were accorded the surety of eternal life. Thus, for example, in an obituary for Angus Frank Gray of Lairg who died at Beaumont Hamel on 13th November 1916, in addition to the regular notes of courage in battle and the esteem of his fellow soldiers, a *verbatim* note written by Gray to his mother on the eve of his death was cited to indicate the state of his soul prior to death: "The Lord knoweth what is best for us, and His will be done." The compiler of the obituary alluded to Song of Solomon 2:7 ("until the day break and the shadows flee away") to indicate Gray's bodily resurrection when Christ returns because of what Gray had written: "some words which take us into the secret place of his soul."¹⁷³ In another obituary in which there was comment on the spiritual as opposed to the moral character of the deceased, again the doctrine of salvation by faith was expressed. In commenting on James Campbell's Christian faith, the writer - a "J.C.M." - cited a letter Campbell had written to the mother of a soldier fallen in battle. Campbell's spiritual language was deemed to befit one whose faith was active: "... having been faithful in the few things to his disposal, we trust he has entered the joy of his Lord, resting in His favour, and bountiful reward." The various evidences of faith in Campbell prompted the writer to conclude that "remembering that 'his works do follow him' may we be able to say, [quoting from Psalm 21:4] 'He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest it to him, even length of days for ever and ever.' "¹⁷⁴

Whilst the contributions of Free Church clergy to the doctrinal controversy are largely lacking one of the few Free Church clergymen to address the issue of immortality of the soul after battle was Rev. Kenneth Macrae during his ministry in Lochgilphead. Macrae's diary

¹⁷³ *The Instructor*, February 1917, p.80.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, February 1918, pp. 81-82.

writings gave strong evidence supporting the Church's adherence to a biblico-confessional position on death. Thus, in response to his brother George's death at Arras, Macrae was assured of his brother's soul in heaven, not because of his having died in battle but because of "his faith in a Saving Redeemer."¹⁷⁵

Macrae's position on the eternal destiny of the soul was seen in his brief but forthright condemnation of the deviations from Confessional doctrine on death publicised in Norman Maclean's and J Sclater's work *God and the Soldier*. Maclean, a Church of Scotland Minister and Sclater, a clergyman from the United Free Church, produced a work which repudiated much of what they described as "traditional answers" to the questions of the destiny of the soul after death.¹⁷⁶ They argued that "a voluntary death for an ideal is an expression of faith, and by faith are men saved." The authors asserted that a God of justice would not allow for the "moment of passing" being the "moment of eternal settlement."¹⁷⁷ Moreover, they argued for prayers for the dead. In an astonishingly frank rebuttal of the position of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Chapter XXI refers to prayer to be offered "for all things lawful and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter but not for the dead")¹⁷⁸ Maclean and Sclater argued that prayer for the dead was legitimate on the basis that "prayer can help the dead. For prayer is the unloosening of the Divine energy. And the dead are as the living, within the fold of the one enveloping God."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ I.H.Murray (ed), *Diary of Kenneth Macrae*, Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980, p.112.

¹⁷⁶ N.Maclean, and J.R.P. Sclater, *God and the Soldier*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1917 p.182.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.187.

¹⁷⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXI.

¹⁷⁹ N.Maclean and J R P Sclater *op cit.*, p.214.

The response of Macrae to what he perceived as Maclean's and Sclater's forthright denunciation of reformed theology reveals much concerning the consistency of Free Church upholding of confessional doctrine when he states that in his short life he had "seen the transition from orthodoxy to the most deplorable heresies conceivable."¹⁸⁰ Yet, notwithstanding Macrae's avowed Confessional adherence, support for his reaction to the book and its counter-Confessional teaching is not detected in any other Free Church clergyman or layman other than in a pseudonymously ascribed short paragraph in *The Monthly Record* of August 1918 in which "Watchman" (*sic*) referred to Maclean and Sclater's advocacy of prayers for the dead, as "Romanist practice." No depth of doctrinal argument or analysis was provided; rather, a sweeping statement was given that such prayers "violate the clear and consistent doctrine of the Reformed Churches."¹⁸¹ Certainly it might be expected that a more thorough riposte against Maclean and Sclater's theological stance would have been promoted by the Free Church of Scotland in either its official organ through a systematised theological response or in its General Assembly. However, the contribution of "Watchman" above was the only printed response found in *The Monthly Record* and no mention of the doctrinal tenets found within *God and the Soldier* is found in the subsequent Free Church General Assembly of 1918, thus revealing the weakness of the Free Church's leadership in their failure to provide a sustained engagement with the theology of those who derided the Westminster Confession's doctrine on the destiny of the soul after death.

Such weakness of Free Church leadership in addressing fully the theological innovations in relation to the eternal destiny of the soul was compounded by the detailed theological

¹⁸⁰ I.H. Murray, *op cit.*, p.131

¹⁸¹ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, August 1918, p.133.

arguments of the Free Presbyterian Church in response to the doctrinal statements of Maclean and Sclater. In contrast to the paucity of the Free Church's contribution, Rev. J Sinclair provided a 1000 word systematised argument countering the notion of the possibility of salvation for souls in hell. Using Scripture, Sinclair rebutted the idea of the universality of the Fatherhood of God as posited in *God and the Soldier* averring the "special election" of God and the retort of Jesus to his Jewish opponents when he declared that God was not their Father (John 8:44). Furthermore, the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus was cited, where, in hell, the rich man was condemned eternally, to counter the argument of Maclean and Sclater that God "tries to win His children" in hell. In summarising the theology of death of Maclean and Sclater, Sinclair pointed to their bowing to the "desires of the human heart" and therefore being "inconsistent with God's revealed purposes and truth."¹⁸²

One sees further evidence of the weakness of the Free Church in defending Confessional doctrine in the denomination's minimal response to the promotion of the doctrine of purgatory from some within the Church of Scotland and United Free Church. Professor W P Paterson, Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh University had, since 1914, been advocating an intermediate state between heaven and hell, refuting the traditional, confessional position on the eternal destiny of the soul, arguing that "those who are scarcely saved," have a "further discipline designed to make them meet, by the strengthening of their faith and the ennoblement of character for entering the full inheritance of the blessed."¹⁸³ Maclean and Sclater echoed this teaching three years later in *God and the Soldier* when they stated categorically that the Church "must propound not only a doctrine of heaven and of hell but

¹⁸² *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, April 1918, pp.399-400.

¹⁸³ W.P.Paterson, *In the Day of the Ordeal*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1917, p.127.

also a doctrine of an intermediate state.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, Maclean would later, in his autobiography, refer to a conversation he had in 1917 with a soldier who was training for the ministry “of one of our smaller churches anchored in the backwater of an unalterable creed.” In that conversation, Maclean argued for the “reasonableness of an intermediate state.”¹⁸⁵ Indeed, only once in the Free Church’s *Monthly Record* do we find any counter-statement to the proclaiming of purgatory as a theological antidote to the precipitous nature of death at the Front for those who had not yet confessed Christian faith. Rev. Alexander Stewart¹⁸⁶, in his editorial of December 1918, responded to a sermon preached by the minister of New Kilpatrick Parish Church, Rev. John Dickie, who had proclaimed an intermediate state for those whom he described as “neither good enough for heaven nor bad enough for hell.” Stewart described such teaching in various ways: “a distortion of orthodox belief; “unsettling and unprotestant (*sic*) teaching” with a concluding statement averring confessional doctrine that ““orthodox belief puts a value on Christ’s atonement.”¹⁸⁷ As with Rev. Kenneth Macrae in his evidential confessional orthodoxy so with Rev. Alexander Stewart: these ministers are isolated examples of Free Church clergymen being directly involved in the theological response to the exigencies of trench warfare.

Such a dereliction of responsibility from the clergy of the Free Church of Scotland in defending articles of reformed doctrine subscribed by all the major Scottish denominations must, at the very least, indicate the failure of the denomination as a whole to take a strong,

¹⁸⁴ N. Maclean, and J.R.P. Sclater, op cit., p.206.

¹⁸⁵ N. Maclean, *The Years of Fulfilment*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1953. p.204

¹⁸⁶ Rev. Alexander Stewart took over the editorship of *The Monthly Record* in December 1917 after Archibald Macneilage’s retiral through ill-health the previous month. He had been admitted to the Free Church, from the Free Presbyterian Church, in 1905.

¹⁸⁷ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, December 1917, p.139.

principled stand in the face of challenges to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* from a section of the Scottish churches. Thus, while the extant Free Church material reveals an inner consistency of doctrine, there is less consistency in a wholesale concerted denominational response to challenges to Confessional doctrine from some within other denominations with which it had historic differences in the application of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Contrasted, then, with the sermonic and scholarly contributions from some within the Church of Scotland and United Free Church advocating salvation through such anti-confessional tenets as salvation through sacrifice in battle, prayers for the dead, and an intermediate state between heaven and hell, the output from the Free Church on the core doctrines on death was limited. Indeed, as has already been alluded to in the relative responses of the Free Church and Free Presbyterian Church to the question of prayers for the dead, the Free Church played a lesser role than the Free Presbyterian Church in defending historic confessional teaching. In order to determine more fully the relative strengths of those Churches closest to each other in relation to consistent adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith further examination of the theological output of the two denominations is required. Thus, the frequency of contributions from both denominations regarding theological aspects concerning death in battle and also the nature of comments on particular aspects of theological liberalism challenged by both denominations should be analysed. Moreover, the failure of any joint statement of Confessional defence from the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian Church against attacks on reformed doctrine must be probed in order to determine why denominational isolationism prevailed in the face of doctrinal challenges to Confessional standards.

As the War progressed the regularity of the Free Presbyterian Church's contributions to the ongoing theological views on the death of soldiers in battle far outweighed that of the Free Church. Particularly through its *Magazine*, the Free Presbyterian Church appeared as more pro-active than the Free Church and as the leading denomination holding forth the tenets of the Westminster Confession of Faith in relation to the doctrine of the eternal destiny of the soul after death. This is evident in the relative volume of contributions on the doctrine from both denominations' main organs of communication. Indeed, while raw statistics alone cannot fully verify or deny the strength of doctrinal loyalty in a denomination adhering to confessional standards, nevertheless such a numerical index does, at the very least, indicate priorities in emphasis regarding theological importance. Thus, for the period September 1914 to December 1918, while the Free Church's *Monthly Record* presented a mere five articles and comments on the theological aspects of death in battle, *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* recorded almost three times that amount: fourteen instances of comment of varying lengths. Moreover, a difference in source provenance is detected: whilst the majority of Free Church comment given is from laymen, the entire Free Presbyterian contribution is from its clergy.

The disparity between the two denominations is evident in the regularity of comment found in both denominations' magazines. The Free Presbyterian Church's first comments on the War in relation to death in battle were published in October 1914 in a sermon by Rev. James Sinclair who spoke of those going into battle being "quite unprepared for death and judgement;"¹⁸⁸ and more particularly in an anonymously penned comment that "all the fine heroism of the battlefield, while it thrills our blood, is not to blind our eyes to the great

¹⁸⁸ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, October 1914, p.211.

announcement made by the Lord Jesus Christ, 'Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven;'"¹⁸⁹ However, it was not until January 1916 that the first Free Church pronouncement on this subject is found in Archibald Macneilage's rebuttal of *The Church Times'* stance on salvation through death in battle. Thereafter, while *The Monthly Record* contained no further comment until 1917 in the January and March editions - in both cases dealing with the topic of the eternal destiny of those who gave their lives in battle - the *Free Presbyterian Church Magazine* produced a further three articles in 1915 and two in 1916 - a mixture of content relating to sacrifice in battle and prayers for the dead. The Free Church made one response to the argument for prayers for the dead, in August 1918, while, in contrast, *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* contained six articles in total between 1915 and 1918 relating to the subject.

Indeed, the response from the two denominations regarding the key doctrinal deviations from the Westminster Confession's teaching (and, at the same time, the subordinate doctrinal standards of the major Scottish Presbyterian Churches) on the destiny of the soul after death must be examined further in order to elucidate the differences between the Free Church and Free Presbyterian Church in their public statements on a theological understanding of the souls of the dead in battle. While extant Free Church sermons on these issues are lacking the respective magazines of the two denominations should be examined to gain an understanding of relative prominence given to doctrine in relation to Britain's war dead and seek to draw conclusions.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.240.

In such a comparative study it is necessary to examine any similarities and differences in the nature and depth of arguments used; and the direction of reactive force against whom or what the writer is engaged. Thus, in connection with the notion of salvation through death in battle the Free Church *Monthly Record* gives three instances - one published letter, and two editorial items - all written by laymen of the denomination.

In examining the three Free Church submissions given in *The Monthly Record* on salvific sacrifice in battle general themes emerge. There is, on the one hand, the acknowledgement of the bravery and courage of those going into battle yet at the same time the disavowal of any salvific consequence of having given one's life for one's country. This response was summarised in the editorial of January 1916 in which Archibald Macneilage expressed "gratitude and respect" to the "valiant sons of Britain" but could not allow "the honours of Christ" to "deck" the "victorious brows" of the soldier in battle.¹⁹⁰ Scriptural evidence (Hebrews 9:26¹⁹¹) was used, fleetingly, to support his position in his defence of the salvific effects of Christ's blood over and against the blood of servicemen in battle. Similarly, the views of "Layman" (*sic*) a year later expressed the same balance of appreciation of the courage of the British soldiers and sailors but averred that they "would be the first to admit that their sacrifices had no virtue in regard to their eternal destiny."¹⁹² As with Macneilage above, a brief quotation from Scripture (Isaiah 64:4¹⁹³) was used to support his stance that man's righteous acts *per se* could not gain salvation. In like manner, Macneilage's editorial of March 1917 commended "our gallant soldiers and sailors" and the "splendour of the self-sacrifice of the patriot soldier or sailor" but argued that such heroism in battle could not

¹⁹⁰ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, January 1916, p.3.

¹⁹¹ "But now in the end of the world he hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

¹⁹² *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, January 1917, p.9.

¹⁹³ "But we are all as an unclean thing and man's righteousnesses are as a filthy rag."

compare with the “surpassing glory of the Cross of Christ.”¹⁹⁴ Two Scripture references were given (Galatians 6:14¹⁹⁵ and Hebrews 10:29¹⁹⁶) in an extended exegetical fashion to highlight the efficacy of the cross of Christ alone for salvation.

When we examine examples of Free Presbyterian responses to the eternal destiny of combatant souls we find degrees of similarity to Free Church comment in their attitudes to servicemen in battle but a far deeper theological analysis through a greater extensive use of Scriptural exegesis. Thus, in Rev. James Sinclair’s leading article on the text “Greater love hath no man than this...” he described as “one of the noblest actions” the sincerity and generosity of a man who gave his life “for the protection of his country” but such heroism, Sinclair maintained, “cannot satisfy God’s pure justice or make amends for a past sinful life.” However, in contradistinction to the pithy exegetical submissions in the Free Church’s *Monthly Record*, Sinclair produced a carefully structured argument of over 1650 words citing five Scripture passages alongside an extensive interpretation of John 15:13 to refute the contention that “if a man lays down his life for his country he has proved he is a true Christian.”¹⁹⁷ Similarly, in a subsequent leading article found in the *Magazine*’s March 1917 edition, Sinclair provided an extensive (almost 2000 word) refutation of Professor David Smith’s arguments for the purification of the souls of those who “have died in battle with no profession of faith in Christ.” Scriptural references were again profuse, indicating a carefully

¹⁹⁴ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, March 1917, p.25.

¹⁹⁵ “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

¹⁹⁶ “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”

¹⁹⁷ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, October 1916, pp. 201-204.

argued hermeneutic approach that extended far beyond anything produced in the Free Church's *Monthly Record*.¹⁹⁸

Although the Free Church exhibited a limited challenge to the theological innovations concerning the destiny of those who died in battle, nevertheless, as has been seen, the denomination was resolute in its Confessional soteriology. Notwithstanding this confidence, we see Free Church personnel struggle to comprehend fully the providential purposes of God in removing, by death, young men in the prime of life. Thus, for example, in relation to the death of the Rev. James B Orr¹⁹⁹ (the only serving Free Church minister to be killed in action) in France on 31st July 1917 several responses portrayed a grappling with divine providence. In Orr's memorial service conducted by his namesake, Rev. Samuel Lyle Orr, the text from Psalm 42 verse 7 ("Deep Callesth to Deep") was used as a springboard for a wrestling with providential purpose in Captain Orr's death. Lyle Orr spoke of "the deep of God's mysterious ways overhead" and that "God's purposes have crossed our brightest hopes and expectations in removing in one awful moment with one fell stroke a respected, honoured, beloved and useful man...concerning whom the hopes of the Church...rose to a high measure." After a lengthy eulogy of Captain Orr's life as a soldier and minister, followed by a statement regarding his "exemplary life" not being prolonged Lyle Orr interjected with the brief statement: "these are the things that astonish us." Further reference to the "mysteries of God" and the "strange ways of the Most High" led Lyle Orr to hold fast to the sovereignty of God over and above his perplexity at such divine providence. Finally, in surmising that two other young ministers - one from the Church of Scotland and the other

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*, March 1917, pp. 401-404.

¹⁹⁹ Orr was minister of Shettleston Free Church who had enlisted in the Glasgow Highlanders as a Private in September 1914 and later, in 1915, given a Commission as Captain in the Royal Scots Fusiliers (source: *Ayrshire and Saltcoats Herald*, 10th August 1917). .

from the United Free Church in Ayrshire - were killed on the same day as Captain Orr, Lyle Orr asked rhetorically if God had “a controversy with the Church as well as the commonwealth?” and, with a further additional struggle with comprehension of providence, asked “was He removing in bulk the picked men of the nation, the men who, fearless in the war area (*sic*), would have been fearless in the spiritual conflict raging in the present day?”²⁰⁰

Rev. James Orr’s death in battle certainly evoked a similar wrestling with divine purpose from a fellow clergymen who had studied with him at the Free Church College. An “A.R.”²⁰¹ began an obituary to Orr with the statement, “there is something wrong somewhere surely when such lives of bright promise are swept away into the unseen from this world of darkness and conflict where they are so much needed.” Although the writer directed the “something wrong” to man for his being “out of touch with God” rather than directing blame at God, nevertheless, the aspect of providence in permitting the loss of life of his friend still led him to exclaim, “Oh, the mystery, the unspeakable tragedy of it all.”²⁰²

It was not only in reaction to the death of James Orr that the matter of divine purpose in death was raised. In *The Monthly Record*, in a “Appreciation” of the life of Lance-Corporal Donald Macpherson of Sleat, Isle of Skye, a “J.N.” (*sic*) asserted that “such a beautiful life should have ended on the bloody fields of France is a mysterious Providence” and quoting

²⁰⁰ *Ayrshire and Saltcoats Herald*, 17th August 1917.

²⁰¹ This is either Alexander Renwick or Alexander Ross, both of whom studied at the Free Church College with Orr between 1909 and 1913.

²⁰² *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, September 1917, p.107.

from 2 Samuel 1:19 (from the lament of David on the death of King Saul and his son Jonathan) exclaimed, “The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places.”²⁰³

The highlighting of the mystery of divine providence in death was, in many ways, most assertive in the aftermath of the sinking of H.M.Y. *Iolaire* in sight of Stornoway harbour on 1st January 1919. 174 Lewismen and seven men from Harris, all troops returning from the War, were drowned. Many of these were from Free Church congregations. In response to the tragedy, Rev. Kenneth Cameron, minister of Stornoway Free Church wrote of the “sore visitation...wrapped in mystery” but that “out of the darkness is heard the voice of Him whose way is in the sea.” Thus, while there appeared much sorrow at what Cameron refers to as the “heavy cup of unlooked for sorrow”²⁰⁴ he did acknowledge divine sovereignty in the mysterious purposes of God even in such a loss.

The struggle with overwhelming grief alongside the mystery of providence in the death in battle of young men in their prime was tempered in the Free Church with the overarching belief in the sovereignty of God. This is particularly evident in the wartime diary entries of Rev. Kenneth Macrae.²⁰⁵ For example, he noted the response of a mother concerning her two sons at the Front who had expressed much anguish at the “hideous desolation caused by this war” and having “cried out asking the Lord if he had forgotten all.” Macrae, having sent the mother a letter in response, concludes that the woman said that “it brought peace to her troubled heart.”²⁰⁶ Again, in relation to the death of his brother, George, at Arras,

²⁰³ *ibid.*, June 1917, p.77.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, February 1919, p.23.

²⁰⁵ Macrae never intended his diary for publication, hence his comments on vital spirituality suggest a reliability lacking in many post-war accounts of the time.

²⁰⁶ I.H.Murray (ed), *op cit.*, p.106.

Macrae alluded to the sovereignty of God “who does all things well.” As far as his own faith was affected by his brother’s death, Macrae indicated no loss; rather he wrote of the God-given strength to bear his bereavement and concluded with the doxology, “to His name be the praise!”²⁰⁷ Macrae maintained his belief in the sovereign will of God in the apportioning of life and death: in response to the death of a young acquaintance in Mesopotamia, Macrae quoted from Jeremiah 25:31, “Truly the Lord has a controversy with his people.”²⁰⁸ Moreover, in his bidding farewell to a colleague about to go the Front, Macrae pleaded that “the Lord would spare him from this awful war for we need him greatly.”²⁰⁹ Such a pleading for divine protection was evident again at the time of the Ludendorff offensive. Macrae invoked God’s enabling to “our armies to stand firm against this awful rush” adding further pleading that God would “stretch his covering wings about my dear brother.”²¹⁰

Thus, from the different Free Church reactions to the death of combatants, there appears, on the one hand, an acceptance of the sovereignty of God in the taking, in death, of young men in the prime of life yet, on the other hand, a perplexity regarding the mystery of providence in such circumstance.

No such struggles with the purposes of God in death are detected in the Free Presbyterian Church. In the January 1917 edition of its *Magazine*, the editor exhibited no wrestling with divine providence in death. In a string of biblical examples (Genesis 18:25; Romans 8:28 and 2 Corinthians 4:17) relating to God’s sovereign purposes he argued that those bereaved through war must accept that “God is infinitely wise and just and good, and therefore

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.111.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.116.

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.118.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.131.

cannot err in any of His ways”²¹¹ The same forthright acceptance of God’s purposes even in the most immediate of bereavements was seen in the July 1917 edition of *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*. Whilst few obituaries for individual soldiers were included in its *Magazine* over the entire course of the War, where particular cases were referred to - such as in relation to the deaths of two step-sons of Rev. Alexander Macrae of Portree - there was no allusion to the mysteries of providence; rather an invocation that God would “uphold and comfort such as are cast down and grieved in their minds” with the concluding reminder that the voice of death calls “young and old” to “prepare to meet thy God.”²¹²

In summing up the subject of the theology of death, whilst Free Church compliance with Confessional teaching on the soul after death remained consistent in the face of contrary opinion from theologians of other Scottish Presbyterian denominations, the overall contribution from the Free Church in defence of traditional orthodox teaching was weak. This is borne out by the fact that few Free Church clergy engaged directly with the theological challenges posed by sermons and published works disputing traditional theology. In very few instances do we find Free Church clergy responding to the public pronouncements made by clergy of other denominations on salvation through death in battle. Free Church chaplains’ voices were silent on the theology of death; Free Church clergy prepared no systematised argument for the retention of the Confession’s teaching on the relevant doctrines compared with Free Presbyterian clergymen in their prolific output. No Free Church Moderator referred to any of the innovative theological doctrines in any moderatorial address; while responses from Free Church laity were either confined to a few individuals such as Archibald Macneilage or provided anonymously. Where clergymen from

²¹¹ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, January 1917, p.322.

²¹² *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* July 1917, p.122.

the Church of Scotland and United Free Church combined in their presentation of a deviant doctrine to that of their respective Church's Confessional standards, no attempt was made by any in the Free Church to join forces with the Free Presbyterian Church in any expression of solidarity against the innovative theology emanating from ecclesiastical and theological opponents. Indeed where we see comment made by Free Church spokesmen on the theology of death it was in the form of a reactive response directed both at the teaching itself and at the denomination from whence such teaching emanated.

The limited extent to which clergy within the Free Church of Scotland responded to the changing theological views of death in war is one of the great anomalies of the Church's involvement in the War. While the denomination held firmly to the Westminster Confession of Faith as its subordinate standard of doctrine; and whilst the denomination had emphatically assessed the War as having its roots, under God, in theological and spiritual considerations, few within the denomination addressed the theology of the destiny of the soul after death. This anomaly is particularly contrasted with the considerable volume of comment in Free Presbyterian sermons and articles, which, as James Lachlan Macleod has highlighted, reveals the leading position of the Free Presbyterian Church within Scotland in refusing to alter its theology of salvation and death when many around were adopting new theology to adapt to the confluence of scale of death and the theological liberalism of the age. That the Free Church of Scotland, sharing the same Confessional stance with the Free Presbyterian Church on salvation and death, should, likewise remain rigid in its adherence to its traditional position is not disputed. Rather, its failure to address with any depth of theological argument, or provide any sustained defence against the doctrinal innovations coming from the within the two major Scottish Presbyterian denominations indicates a

weakness in leadership within the Reformed, conservative Presbyterian church in Scotland in upholding the tenets of traditional Scottish Reformed theology in relation to the matter of the soul at death.

6. Chaplaincy

The role of Free Church chaplains in relation to the British Army and, to a lesser extent (due to the relative smaller number of armed personnel) the Royal Navy, must be considered within the larger framework of historiographical interpretation of British forces' chaplaincy in the First World War. Such interpretation has been highlighted by Michael Snape in his assessment of the role and impact of British army chaplaincy in the First World War. Snape argues that British historiography has been "burdened with myth, misrepresentation and misunderstanding."²¹³ He highlights the causes of such "myth, misrepresentation and misunderstanding" as rooted in a combination of fictionalised accounts of conflict written in the 1920s and 30s which heavily criticised the role of Anglican chaplains; and a groundswell of anticlericalism amongst the Protestant working class in England. Snape highlights Robert Graves as chief amongst the main antagonists criticising the effectiveness of chaplains during the War, as evidenced in Graves' various editions of *"Goodbye to All That"* (first published in November 1929) in which Graves condemned Army chaplains in brutal fashion for lack of courage and lack of respect amongst the troops. In a broad overview of popular misconception of chaplaincy he argues that the disenchantment that followed the First World War (a negative perception that highlighted the futility of loss and the apparent incompetence of generals) encompassed, too, the negative attitude towards the chaplains of the Anglican Church. Snape highlights the popular argument that since the Church of England had so enthusiastically welcomed the War it was therefore complicit in the ensuing slaughter; and any positive impact on the troops was minimal save for a few notable exceptions. Moreover, Snape argues that because the Non-Conformist chaplains are not even mentioned in post-war comment then this indicates that they were regarded as utterly

²¹³ M.Snape, Church of England Army Chaplains in the First World War: 'Goodbye to 'Goodbye to All That.,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 62, No. 2, April 2011, p.318.

irrelevant by commentators. Furthermore, such an omission, together with the popular misperceptions of Anglican chaplaincy, Snape continues, owes more to “literary contrivance” than historic fact.²¹⁴ Only the Roman Catholic chaplains, Snape surmises, have emerged in any positive light through their perceived positive impact on their own co-religionists through a deep spirituality and bravery alongside the combatants.

Such hostility, Snape avers, was not responded to with any degree of official rebuff from the Church of England. Indeed, as Snape continues, “more striking still, there was even a dearth of denominational histories of chaplaincy work.”²¹⁵ During the 1930s, with the promotion of pacifism in Great Britain, to have sought to defend their wartime record was a difficult challenge for former First World War chaplains. Indeed, as Snape argues, it was not until 1983 that a shift in historiography emerged with the publication of Michael Moynihan’s *“God on Our Side: the British Padres in World War One.”* In that work, Moynihan sought to redress the imbalance of negative and derogatory comments on British army chaplains through the use of letters and diaries of six First World War chaplains (five Anglican and one Roman Catholic), arguing that the line taken by Graves *et al* “is scarcely borne out by the accounts that follow.”²¹⁶

In light of the above historiographical debate, the role of Free Church of Scotland chaplains must be weighed in relation to their impact on the troops to whom they were sent to give spiritual care to. Given that, as with the Church of England, the Free Church enthusiastically welcomed the War, one must assess whether, in fact, the conduct of Free Church chaplains

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.318.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.335.

²¹⁶ M.Moynihan, *“God on Our Side: the British Padres in World War One,”* London, Secker and Warburg, 1983, p.12.

justifies any criticism of its impact on the British forces. Such evidence regarding that impact will include letters and reports from Free Church chaplains; observations on the effectiveness of the chaplains from troops, commanding officers and others with a direct connection with Free Church chaplains of their own and different denominations; as well the broader role the chaplains played in communicating with families, congregations and the sending Church itself. Notwithstanding the critics' assessment of Non-Conformist chaplains as irrelevant, this study will examine whether Free Church chaplains played a role within the greater orbit of clergy involvement with the British forces. Moreover, an analysis of Free Church involvement in chaplaincy work during the First World War must take into account the novelty of Free Church clergy involvement in military conflict and the extent to which Free Church chaplains mirrored the activities of other denominations' chaplains both at the Front and behind the Front at Base camps. One must also be aware of the wholesale omission of any discussion of the Free Church of Scotland as a participatory denomination in any academic work of chaplaincy. Thus for example, in Neil Allison's work on the United Board (comprising of Baptist, Congregationalist, and Methodist Chaplains)²¹⁷ and in James Lachlan Macleod's work on Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland Chaplains²¹⁸ no comparative mention of Free Church chaplains is made.

Whilst, numerically, the Free Church of Scotland was small compared with the other main Scottish Presbyterian denominations and with Scottish and English Non-Conformist churches, one cannot dismiss its involvement in the War as irrelevant. The Free Church's overcoming of significant hurdles to its participation as a fully recognised denomination by

²¹⁷ N.Allison, *The Clash of Empires, 1914-1919*, n.p., United Navy, Army and Air Force Board, 2014.

²¹⁸ J.L.Macleod, ' "Its own little share of service to the national cause:" The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland's Chaplains in the First World War,' *Northern Scotland* xxi (2001) pp.79-97.

the Army Chaplains Department, for example, indicates its determination to be fully integrated within the Presbyterian body active in chaplaincy work. This is evident, firstly, in the Free Church's proactive work in ensuring such official recognition particularly when a number of barriers existed at the outset of the War to its direct participation in such chaplaincy.

One such barrier was the historic development of official recognition of Presbyterian chaplains within the British Army. Whilst there existed an Army Chaplains' Department formed in 1796 to provide Anglican chaplains for the British Army, it was not until 1858 that the first Presbyterian army chaplains were commissioned. Indeed, Presbyterian chaplains were not numerous prior to 1914 due to the fact that the British army itself was small (the Royal Navy being considered the main defence for Britain's home and overseas territories). Moreover, when in 1906, the Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane, formed a Presbyterian Chaplains' Advisory Committee, the Free Church of Scotland was omitted from this body. Only the Church of Scotland, the United Free Church, the Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian Church of England were represented. Numerically, of course, the Free Church of Scotland was very small in relation to these much larger denominations. Whilst exact figures for denominational affiliation were never recorded, one statistic sheds light on the relative size of the Free Church's military personnel relative to the other major Scottish denominations. At the end of the war the Church of Scotland conducted a census of non-Anglican Protestants in the Royal Navy. The findings concluded that just over 80% of non-Anglican Protestant sailors were Scottish Presbyterians and that of that 80%, almost 85% belonged to either the Church of Scotland or the United Free Church of Scotland. The remaining 15% comprised sailors from the smaller denominations (denominational

affiliation was not recorded in this census)²¹⁹; the inference being that Free Church affiliation was relatively small at the end of the War compared with the other Scottish Presbyterian denominations as it was at the beginning of the War.

Notwithstanding the impediment of numerical inferiority and denominational exclusion from the War Office's Presbyterian Advisory Committee, the Free Church lost no time in asserting its claims full recognition for its participation in military chaplaincy. As early as 26th August 1914, a mere three weeks after Great Britain entered the War, the Free Church of Scotland's Commission of Assembly approved a resolution submitted by Principal James McCulloch "to make offer to the War Office of ministers to act as chaplains where bodies of our countrymen are under arms." Principal McCulloch argued that the large number of Free Church men serving in the forces "necessitates chaplains of their own denomination and, in particular in Highland regiments largely composed of Gaelic speakers to whom no Gaelic speaking chaplain was ministering." McCulloch emphasised the need for such Gaelic speaking chaplains on the basis that "Gaelic was the language of their religious feelings and exercises."²²⁰

Such a *raison d'être* for such a swift statement of intent for Free Church chaplains to the forces was supplemented in debate by Major Walter Rounsfell Brown who highlighted the number of Free Churchmen who had volunteered for service, particularly focusing on the north and north west of Scotland and the Isle of Lewis, which area, Brown claimed "has seen a proportionally greater number of men in combat compared with the rest of the nation" adding the observation that many of those who had volunteered to serve belonged to the

²¹⁹ *Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, 1919, pp 316-317, p.327.

²²⁰ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, September 1914, p.163.

Free Church.²²¹ Brown's comments reflect the general transformation of popular involvement in war. Whereas before 1914, the British Army had consisted of a small number of professional soldiers engaged largely in control of the British Empire, the comprehensive theatre of war opened up in August 1914 and the infectious enthusiasm of British men to volunteer for war covered the whole of the country, with men of the Free Church of Scotland no different to men from across the land. Such a transformation of popular involvement in Britain's armed forces, in which men of the Free Church shared with those men of churches with existing chaplaincy support explains McCulloch's and Brown's urgent call for direct Free Church participation in the spiritual oversight of those troops of the denomination. Thus, the combination of the immediate popular response to the call to arms together with the perceived need for Free Church chaplains to give spiritual oversight in a manner with which Free Church members and adherents would be familiar, theologically and linguistically, gave impetus to the denomination's active quest for its own chaplains.

The combination of Free Church denominational input and Gaelic spirituality must be understood in the context of the early 20th century when all Free Church services in Lewis, Wester Ross and north-west Sutherland were conducted through the medium of Gaelic. The need for spiritual comfort to be given to Free Church servicemen in their native language was considered an urgent necessity as evidenced in the swiftness by which the Free Church's Highlands and Islands Committee sought official recognition from the War Office of Free Church clergy suitable to be appointed as military chaplains. In a minute of that Committee of 30th September, 1914 the Secretary, Rev. Donald Maclean, Edinburgh, spoke of his having

²²¹ *ibid.*, p.164.

corresponded with the War Office and having met Lord Balfour of Burleigh²²² in the Free Church Offices concerning the appointment of Free Church chaplains. Maclean informed the Committee that as a result of his negotiations “the Free Church was now recognised to be in a position to have certain ministers of her Church chosen for Chaplains to the Forces.”²²³ As a result of this official recognition six ministers were chosen by the Committee to become Free Church Chaplains: three of whom had already been chosen prior to the official recognition: Rev. John Macleod, Urray, Rev Alexander Renwick, Aberdeen and Rev. Alexander Stewart, Edinburgh; with a further three recommended at that meeting: Rev. Duncan Macdougall, Ness, Rev. Donald Begbie, Lairg and Rev. Neil McGill, Perth. Of the above, John Macleod was appointed as one of the inter-denominational bilingual chaplains for a period of six months as from 19th October 1914 and, as such, the first Presbyterian chaplain appointed outwith the two major Scottish Presbyterian denominations.²²⁴

Notwithstanding the ‘breakthrough’ in the appointment of a Free Church minister as Acting Chaplain to troops in Aldershot, namely Rev. John Macleod, and the evident inter-denominational work in which Macleod was involved in, the War Office would not grant immediate permission for Free Church clergy to be given chaplains’ commissions for the Regular Army or the British Expeditionary Force. This prohibition was communicated to Rev. Donald Maclean (on behalf of the Home Mission Committee) from the Army Council which informed Maclean that Lord Haldane had restricted Scottish Presbyterian chaplaincies to the Church of Scotland and United Free Church only. This omission rankled with Maclean who, in

²²² Alexander Bruce, 6th Lord Balfour of Burleigh, Chairman of the War Office’s Presbyterian Advisory Committee.

²²³ *Minute of the Highlands and Island Home Missions and Supply Committee of the Free Church of Scotland*, 30th September 1914.

²²⁴ It was not until 30th November 1915 that a Free Presbyterian minister, Rev. Ewen MacQueen, was commissioned as a Military Chaplain by the War Office.

a speech at the Free Church Commission of Assembly on 18th November 1914, argued that provision of only one Free Chaplain for the 4000 Free Church men serving in the forces was disproportionate to the chaplaincy allowance for Roman Catholic and Jewish troops.²²⁵

Despite this immediate setback in the Free Church's quest for full recognition of its clergy to act as chaplains beyond the confines of the United Kingdom, Rev. Donald Maclean wrote prodigiously to various bodies concerned with chaplains' appointments in order to secure the recognition of Free Church clergy as chaplains to the Regular Army. In the Report of the Highlands and Islands Committee submitted to the General Assembly of May 1915, the following bodies are mentioned as being in receipt of communication regarding this issue: the War Office, the Army Council, the War Office Advisory Committee on Chaplains and the Joint Committee on the Nomination of Territorial Force Chaplains. The Highlands and Islands Committee reported to the General Assembly that due to the "sympathetic interest" of some of the members of the War Office Advisory Committee, the Free Church's claim to parity with other Presbyterian denominations for the right to have its clergy appointed as Chaplains was agreed, with the upshot that Rev. John Macleod, Urray and Rev. Alexander Renwick were approved in their appointments.

The response within the Free Church to Macleod's appointment as Acting Chaplain at Aldershot is indicative of a broad denominational rejoicing at the direct involvement of Free Church clergy with the British forces. Thus, the editor of the *Instructor*, Rev. Alexander Stewart, wrote that the readers of the magazine would be "glad" to learn of John Macleod's appointment because it indicated the State's recognition of the denomination as worthy of

²²⁵ Maclean argued that the ratio of Roman Catholic and Jewish Chaplains to fellow troops was one per thousand.

being involved in chaplaincy to the troops. He also wrote that it was “only right” that Free Church ministers provide spiritual support to men from their own denomination.²²⁶

Such a positive reaction towards the direct involvement of clergy with the British troops was shared across the various Presbyterian denominations in Scotland. In the October 1914 edition of the Church of Scotland’s magazine, *Life and Work*, an enthusiastic report is given of 150 Church of Scotland ministers volunteering for active service, with the recognition of the stirring of the “patriotic spirit of the Church of Scotland ministers” being highlighted with particular emphasis on the experience of some in chaplaincy roles in previous conflicts such as the Boer War. Similar enthusiasm is evident in the United Free Church’s response to the invitation of the Army and Navy Chaplain’s Committee for twelve United Free Church chaplains to be appointed to serve with the Territorial Army. Rev. John Hall, Convener of the Home Mission Committee, commented that the response of that Committee “has been remarkable for its readiness” to comply with the invitation with a small sub-Committee co-operating to ensure that “throughout the coming time the moral and social well-being of the men gathered in camp or quartered in public buildings can be best secured.”²²⁷ Moreover, in the Free Presbyterian Church, a year later, the editor of its *Magazine* wrote of having “much pleasure” in reporting the successful outcome of negotiations of the Church with the War Office and the Scottish Advisory Committee on Chaplains in the appointment of one of its ministers, Rev. Ewen Macqueen, as an official Chaplain to the British forces in France. Mirroring the Free Church comment of the previous year, the Free Presbyterian emphasis on

²²⁶ *The Instructor*, November 1914, p.22.

²²⁷ *The Missionary Record of the United Free Church of Scotland*, October 1914, p.437.

the opportunity for spiritual oversight given to troops by its own denominational chaplain was emphasised.²²⁸

The positive response across the Presbyterian denominations in Scotland to the appointment of Army chaplains can be explained by the prevailing connections of many of the British soldiers to the Christian religion irrespective of active personal faith. Neil Allison summarises this reality when he relates that “most” men who served in the trenches had been raised within the church and Sunday School. Allison cites an incident when a United Board chaplain, David Merrick Walker presumed correctly that soldiers he met at a home base in Scotland were “Sunday School boys.”²²⁹

Thus, the Churches’ determination to provide spiritual support and moral guidance to those, at the very least, already familiar with Christian morality and doctrine, was lauded as a natural concomitant to the Church’s oversight of their flock. In this, the Free Church followed the same purpose in chaplaincy involvement as every other participating Presbyterian and non-conformist church.

Whilst the denominational and linguistic basis for the involvement of the Free Church in military chaplaincy could be perceived as reflecting a narrow particularism in Free Church participation (and therefore justifying a criticism of irrelevance beyond its immediate scope of responsibility) other factors must be taken into account to assess the relevance of Free Church chaplains with the British forces that, in fact, rejects any particularist position in relation to Free Church chaplaincy. This can be measured by examining the extent to which

²²⁸ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, December 1915, p.312.

²²⁹ N.Allison, op cit., p.86.

Free Church chaplains cooperated with chaplains of other denominations; the extent to which spiritual oversight was given to troops irrespective of denominational affiliation; and the effectiveness of such oversight in the responses of those troops under the care of Free Church chaplains.

Notwithstanding the particular denominational interest of Free Church chaplains' participation in the War there is much evidence to indicate that such particular scope was not so restrictive as to obviate any co-operation with chaplains and troops of other denominations and persuasions. We see that in the immediate participation of John Macleod in inter-denominational activities, as is evident from the prodigious correspondence he submitted both to *The Monthly Record* and to *The Highland News*.

In an article published in the November 7th 1914 edition of *The Highland News* Macleod was referred to as "acting as chaplain to the Scottish forces" and was quoted as asking for information regarding "all North Countrymen" stationed at Aldershot. Macleod indicated the already wide denominational contacts he had made with men from "the Highland counties in all the battalions" adding that "a more manly and serious body of men than the Highland regiments there is not in His Majesty's service."²³⁰

Such a broad denominational oversight was further emphasised by Macleod in a letter dated 19th October 1914 sent to Archibald Macneilage, and published in *The Monthly Record* of November 1914. In that correspondence Macleod revealed much concerning the wider issues involved in his participation as a Free Church chaplain. There is no indication, for

²³⁰ *The Highland News*, 7th November 1914.

example, of any reluctance on Macleod's part to be associated with chaplains and men of different denominations, as evidenced in his telling of his cordial relationship already established with the "Head Presbyterian Chaplain" (*sic*). Such acceptance of the Free Church as a denomination having full right of participation in chaplaincy work at home and at the Front is evident in Macleod's letter, particularly seen in his indicating his overall responsibilities amongst the "Highland troops in all the battalions." Whilst Macleod wrote of his meeting with "our own men" he also wrote of his conducting services, in English, for the 10th and 11th Battalions of the Royal Scots.

The importance of the conducting of services by Free Church chaplains, alongside a broad Presbyterian representation is highlighted in this letter and echoed in contemporary comment from other Free Church chaplains and soldiers. John Macleod noted that, on visiting Free Church men in hospital, "a few words in the vernacular made Aldershot a different place to them" whilst adding that he hoped that it would soon be possible to hold a Gaelic service. To bolster this desire, Macleod wrote of the assurance the Head Presbyterian Chaplain had given him that if 1200 "bi-lingual men" were in barracks, a regular compulsory Gaelic service would be permitted but that if there were less than that number then only a voluntary service would be possible. That not every "bi-lingual man" would be Free Church was clear from the letter as is the disappointment on Macleod's part that the probability of conducting one voluntary only service would be the most likely scenario as far as Sunday worship was concerned (on the basis that Macleod's commission was to run for six months

from October 19th 1914, the inference from his letter is that he had been able to conduct two services on the Sunday prior to that date - the 18th October).²³¹

That likely scenario became a reality. In a further letter to Macneilage dated 13th November 1914, Macleod informed him that he had conducted his first Gaelic service in St. Andrew's Presbyterian Garrison Church and a subsequent service in the Maida Drill Hall. That there were only 500 bi-lingual men in Aldershot barracks meant that such services were voluntary and, as Macleod admitted, not well attended. Notwithstanding his disappointment, he was confident that more men would attend these services "once they get to know about them." Moreover, the reference to a Gaelic speaking lieutenant who precented in these services and another chaplain offering prayer indicates the absence of denominational division in Macleod's chaplaincy work. This is borne out in Macleod's detailed account of his preaching at compulsory English language services held each Sunday when, as he informed Macneilage, he preached "at 9.40am to about 1000 Cameron Highlanders and about 400 Royal Army Medical Corps; at 10.30am to about the same number of the 10th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders; at 11.40am to Black Watch troops and 8th Battalion Gordon Highlanders; with the Gaelic service in the evening at 6.30pm" adding that "the Gaelic service may be as long as we like but the English service must not exceed an hour."²³²

The emphasis on the centrality of Gaelic as the desired medium of worship for many Free Church troops is borne out in a letter dated 8th March 1915 sent to Donald Maclean, as Secretary of the Highlands and Islands Committee. The correspondent, a John Maclean, a Free Church member interned at Groningen, Holland, writes to inform the Committee of the

²³¹ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, November 1914, p.192.

²³² *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

ongoing Gaelic prayer meetings held in the internment camp, and taken by the Gaelic speaking internees themselves due to the fact that, as Maclean stated, “ we have no special leader over us as a Gaelic speaker.”

Such a broad Presbyterian commitment is made evident in the correspondence sent by the early Free Church chaplains. Thus, John Macleod wrote in an undated letter (printed in the January 1915 edition of *The Monthly Record*) that he was now with the Expeditionary Force in France because the Secretary of War, the Earl Kitchener, had asked him “to do duty with the troops on foreign soil” and that he understood that Rev. Alexander Renwick was to replace him at Aldershot (the Free Church’s Highlands and Islands Home Missions and Supply Committee had noted in its Minute of 7th January 1915 that “Rev. John Macleod is now with the Forces in France and that Rev. A.M.Renwick, Aberdeen, is with Kitchener’s Army in Liphook”).²³³ Again, the absence of any denominational strictures on Free Church involvement with troops of varied denominations is evident, compounded by Macleod’s postscript that “all letters addressed. ‘Presbyterian Chaplain to the Scottish Troops’ will find me.”²³⁴

It was not simply one Free Church chaplain’s involvement with clergy from other denominations that indicates a tolerant spirit of co-operation from the Free Church’s active participants in chaplaincy work. Other Free Church chaplains shared the same willingness to overlook denominational differences for the sake of the spiritual needs of the troops under

²³³ .Minute of the Highlands and Island Home Missions and Supply Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 7th January 1915.

²³⁴ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, January 1915, p.3.

their care. This is seen particularly in the experience of Rev. Alexander Renwick and Rev. Duncan Macdougall.

Alexander Renwick, having been sent as Chaplain not, as Macleod had surmised, to Aldershot but to Liphook, emphasised the non-denominational aspect of the work undertaken by him with troops from different Presbyterian backgrounds. Thus, Renwick wrote of conducting Sunday services for 800 men in a YMCA hut - no specified denomination was mentioned, nor indeed any specific form of worship indicated. Moreover, he mentioned cooperation with another chaplain (again, no denomination was specified) in their serving the needs of three Scottish regiments and spoke of co-operation with a Church of England parish rector in the use of the mission church and school at Liphook to be used for Gaelic services.²³⁵ Such inter-denominational co-operation was further emphasised by Renwick the following year when he wrote of his being stationed at a field camp in Bramshot, Hampshire and cited as fellow-workers, "Chaplains from the Church of Scotland, United Free Church of Scotland and English Presbyterian Church." He further stated that whilst in England and France he had been shown "nothing but the utmost courtesy and kindness from all my colleagues of the Presbyterian, English Nonconformist and Roman Catholic Churches" adding that he had found an "evident desire to treat with the utmost respect one another's cherished convictions." He concluded by rejoicing in the lack of an "uncharitable spirit" against the Free Church despite "the bitter and unjust criticism levelled against our Church in the recent past."²³⁶ That Renwick should speak of a Roman Catholic Chaplain as a colleague and that he should focus on the benign attitudes of other chaplains to the Free Church and acceptance of the Free Church of Scotland as a relevant denomination within

²³⁵ *ibid.*, February 1915, p.17.

²³⁶ *ibid.*, May 1916, p.70.

the role of military chaplaincy indicates a willingness on his part to submerge denominational, doctrinal and credal differences for the sake of the spiritual welfare of the troops.

Such determination on the part of the Free Church to seek parity with the other main Scottish Presbyterian denominations in terms of the principle of equal right to give pastoral support to troops of their own denomination is clear, albeit that the appointment of Free Church chaplains was not for the exclusive claims of its own men. Whilst the spiritual needs of men from the Free Church were considered worthy of Free Church clergy administering to such needs, particularly in the language with which such men were familiar with, there was never any demand for restricted commitment to these men only.

Furthermore, there is no evidence that such freedom to interact with chaplains and troops from other denominations was considered sufficiently reprehensible to be proscribed by Free Church courts. Indeed, this liberty enjoyed by Free Church of Scotland chaplains was not extended to chaplains of the Free Presbyterian Church. This is borne out in the findings of the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in May 1917. The two Free Presbyterian chaplains, Rev. Ewen Macqueen and Rev. Andrew Sutherland, had both reported to the Synod of their having experienced “difficulties in the mode of worship” conducted by them for the troops under their spiritual care and their having allowed “uninspired hymns” because of the exigencies of ministering to troops from denominations which practiced such hymnody. Notwithstanding the pleadings of both men as to their personal strict adherence to “the old paths” in form of worship, with Rev. Sutherland stating that he would resign as Chaplain if the Synod disapproved of his stance, the Synod passed

the motion: "This Synod wishes it to be clearly understood that it objects to any of its ministers acting as chaplains, unless they are permitted to conduct the worship according to the public testimony of this Church."²³⁷ No such stricture was ever placed upon Free Church chaplains by the General Assembly during the course of the War, thus indicating that, as far as the Free Church was concerned, the exigencies of war were deemed sufficient to permit its chaplains to exercise a loosening of its position on such aspects as exclusive psalmody and non-instrumental music in its worship services.

The wartime practice of an accepted broad denominational co-operation in the work of chaplaincy is reflected in the popular and non-partisan support given to Free Church chaplains. On a popular, congregational level, Rev. John Macleod related the reception he received when he returned to his congregation during his first leave in April 1915. He spoke of a congregational meeting he attended, at which there was "a full house representative of all denominations in the parish and including very many indeed outside its bounds." He referred to the tangible evidence of the interest in his chaplaincy work: "their faces indicated an intense eagerness for news, and their stillness amounted to an impressive silence."²³⁸

Such local, popular enthusiasm for the work of Free Church chaplaincy is corroborated in an independent assessment of John Macleod's activities whilst on his four-day home leave in April. A report in *The Ross-shire Journal* of 16th April 1915 noted the "devotion" of Macleod in his spending the "whole of his short leave" in visiting the homes of these men who had been killed in conflict. The report added that those who met him in his work of providing

²³⁷ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, July 1917, p.92.

²³⁸ *The Instructor*, May 1915, p.179.

spiritual consolation to the bereaved “have all been comforted” and that such benign empathy “needed no spoken word of spiritual sentiment.” Further comment was given regarding Macleod’s work at the Front: “he has been doing great work among our boys at the front” who “give him their confidence.”²³⁹ Such comment, while omitting *verbatim* evidence from both the bereaved at home or troops at the Front, nevertheless does indicate an acknowledgment of relevance of the Free Church’s role on chaplaincy from a non-partisan, non-denominational perspective.

Further non-partisan observations from individuals and bodies of the relevance and effectiveness of Free Church chaplaincy are forthcoming in relation to the chaplaincy of Rev. Duncan Macdougall at the camp for interned British servicemen in Groningen, Holland.²⁴⁰ The attitude to Macdougall of Wilfrid Henderson, Commodore in overall charge of the camp, indicates the esteem in which he was held outwith his own denomination. One detects the strong support of Macdougall by Commodore Henderson in retaining him beyond the period of leave granted by his Presbytery, the Presbytery of Lewis. Thus, when Macdougall returned home from his three-month period of service, Henderson, through the Admiralty, made an urgent request for him to return to Groningen. Under such pressure the Presbytery acceded to that request. On 9th November 1915 the Presbytery granted him leave of absence for three months to return to Groningen. What is intriguing, however, is that Presbytery’s decision was given exactly a week after Henderson had sent a postcard to Macdougall in his

²³⁹ *Ross-shire Journal*, 16th April 1915, cited in *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, May 1915, p.63.

²⁴⁰ On 8th June 1915 Rev. Duncan Macdougall, Ness, was confirmed by the Admiralty in his appointment as Chaplain to the servicemen of the First Royal Naval Brigade interned in Groningen. The Brigade had been sent to Antwerp to defend the city against the advancing German Army but were only able to hold the town for a few days before being forced to retreat. Whilst 1000 British servicemen were captured, another 1500, under the command of Commodore Wilfrid Henderson, crossed into neutral Holland. Under International Law, the British servicemen were to be interned there for the duration of the War.

manse acknowledging a letter sent by him to Henderson intimating his return to Groningen. Macdougall had evidently been privy to Presbytery's decision before its actual implementation. Indeed, notwithstanding this intriguing chronology of events, Henderson's reaction indicates Macdougall's esteem as a chaplain: he thus commented "I am glad to know you are returning here and so will the men be when I tell them."²⁴¹

Such esteem can be gleaned from reports of Macdougall's work with the interned troops in Groningen. The monthly *Camp Magazine* produced by the men of the First Royal Naval Brigade reported on Macdougall's work in a positive light. Thus, only a month after Macdougall arrived in Groningen, he was highlighted prominently as participating in an "intercessory service" described in the *Magazine* as "one of the "red-letter days of our Camp life." Macdougall is cited as having "read the lesson" with a brass band having been involved in the service - a practice forbidden in Free Church worship - with the accompanying commentary that the men who attended the service attended voluntarily and conducted themselves with perfect reverence in a service of humble intercession."²⁴² Indeed, the *Camp Magazine* reported regularly on Macdougall's activities whilst he was resident there, indicating the pivotal role he played in bolstering the spiritual and social life of the interned men. In both the March and April 1916 editions of the *Camp Magazines*, Macdougall was reported to have participated in funerals of interned men and to have conducted services twice a week in Gaelic. The July 1916 *Camp Magazine* reports the extensive involvement of Macdougall beyond his conducting services and prayer meetings; he is reported as holding a Gaelic Psalmody Class, a Navigation class "for the Gaelic men"

²⁴¹ Postcard dated 2nd November 1915 Cited in Comunn Eachraidh Nis, *The Going Down of the Sun*, Stornoway, Acair, 2015, p.33.

²⁴² *Groningen Camp Magazine*, August 1915, p.2.

and providing lessons in Biblical Hebrew.²⁴³ His breadth of commitment is further recorded in the *Camp Magazine* of November 1916 regarding his participating in the Debating Society's Mock Parliament as Speaker; such a catholicity of involvement with the interned troops incurred condemnation in the Scottish Highlands. A letter in *The Highland News* from K Matheson of Dingwall objected to Macdougall's involvement in sports' activities at the camp. Matheson wrote of the "mad work of a professing minister of the gospel in introducing shinty to the interned P.O.Ws (*sic*) at Groningen" and equating his desire for Macdougall to be recalled from the camp with the wider Protestant call for Sir Henry Howard to be recalled as British envoy from the Vatican.²⁴⁴

Macdougall's response to the criticism his activities at Groningen reveals his wholistic approach to chaplaincy and his concern to be relevant to the troops interned for the duration of the War. He replied by arguing that the introduction of shinty was done "to mitigate the lack of exercise permitted to the troops." Citing the case of three Lewismen who would not participate in outdoor games played by the other internees with the result, Macdougall claimed that these three men died of consumption due to their "sitting all day in huts."²⁴⁵ Whether indeed that was the cause of these deaths is not corroborated by any medical evidence produced by Macdougall. Nevertheless, what he does highlight is both his refusal to bend to a preconceived notion of chaplaincy at home and a willingness to be relevant to the men under his care in body and soul.

²⁴³ *ibid.*, July 1915, p.2.

²⁴⁴ *The Highland News*, 5th April 1916, p.5.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 13th May, p.8.

Further evidence of the relevance and effectiveness of the work of Free Church chaplains is given in a post-war letter written on 8th March 1920 from Rev. Donald Maclean²⁴⁶ to Sir Herbert Creedy, Permanent Under-Secretary for War. Maclean wrote to support Rev. John Macleod's application to be an Assistant Presbyterian Chaplain in Scotland, citing supporting evidence from Officers and men of the 4th Seaforth Highlanders whom Macleod served as Chaplain during the War. He stated that Macleod exercised "constant and devoted services" which received "the recognition of his Officers, and were appreciated by the men, to whom they proved, according to their own testimony, of inestimable value in facing the constant dangers of these trying years." Furthermore, Maclean quoted from Lord Guthrie (whom Maclean referred to as not belonging to the Free Church and therefore his "disinterested testimony" is "all the more striking") in the United Free Church Assembly of 1917 praising Macleod based on his understanding from "high authority" to the effect that "among all the Ministers from all the Churches of Great Britain there is no man who has had greater power with the troops, Lowland as well as Highland, than John Macleod."²⁴⁷ Indeed, in the part of the speech (given during the Youth Committee Debate) omitted by Maclean in his letter, Lord Guthrie, in reference to the work of the YMCA as offering Christian service opportunities, spoke of John Macleod's seizing the opportunity to liaise with the troops within the YMCA huts and, outwith the normal time of church services, engaging with the troops:

He will go into the YMCA hut, not at the hour of service, but when everything is going on, and he will tap on the table and say, "Men, I want five minutes from you - three

²⁴⁶ Donald Maclean served as Secretary to the Free Church Highlands and Islands, Pulpit Supply and Home Mission Committee; and served as a member of the Interdenominational Advisory Committee on Army Chaplaincy Services.

²⁴⁷ Letter from Donald Maclean to the War Office 8th March 1920: held in the private papers of Rev. D.K. Macleod, son of Rev. John Macleod.

minutes for a prayer and two minutes for a word from me.” Every cup is put down, every letter is laid aside, and he is allowed to say what he has got to say.²⁴⁸

That such a speech met with applause in the United Free Church General Assembly is indicative of a recognition from outwith the Free Church of the worth and relevance of Free Church chaplaincy, certainly in the instance of one outstanding chaplain.

Notwithstanding the self-documented support of the work of Free Church chaplains from the chaplains themselves and from sources not immediately connected to the actual experience of war there is little extant correspondence from Free Church troops to indicate their appreciation or otherwise of the work of these chaplains. Written correspondence from servicemen recorded in *The Monthly Record* is largely in connection with printed material sent to the troops from Scotland. Only a handful of letters actually refer to chaplains *per se* - and in each case, relating to Rev. Duncan Macdougall in Groningen. The earliest printed letter in *The Monthly Record* written by a serviceman in relation to Free Church chaplaincy is recorded in September 1915: the anonymous Free Churchman wrote of Duncan Macdougall’s “labours of love” in relation to his work in Groningen.²⁴⁹ Again, Macdougall’s work is highlighted in correspondence recorded in the May 1916 edition of *The Monthly Record*. An anonymous writer spoke of “the willing helping hand from Mr. Macdougall” in enabling two internees to begin studies for the ministry.²⁵⁰ The following year, Macdougall’s assistance in helping Free Church students with their studies was acknowledged.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ *United Free Church of Scotland Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly*, held at Edinburgh May 1917, Lorimer and Chalmers, Edinburgh, 1917, p.201.

²⁴⁹ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, September 1915, p.154.

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, May 1916, p.74.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, February 1917, p.14.

The paucity of such correspondence in connection with Free Church chaplains is not, in itself, a sufficient reason to dismiss their relevance to the servicemen at home and at the Front. Nor should the reliability of the chaplains' reports themselves be questioned. When comparing Free Church chaplains' correspondence with that of chaplains from other denominations, one sees similarities in the tenor of the reception that chaplains received from the troops, contrary to the perception by Graves in his dismissal of such chaplains. Thus for example in a letter written by a Church of Scotland chaplain, Rev. S G Gilchrist he wrote of his relationship with the officers such that he "cannot speak too highly of them" adding that "I have found it just as easy to get on with the men."²⁵² In similar vein, G V Dunnett wrote of the reception he received from the troops whilst stationed at Salonika: "I was impressed with the welcome I got from the men who were glad at the prospect of having services and a ministry such as they had learned to love at home."²⁵³ The large body of evidence indicating the positive nature of the relationship between the troops and chaplains is cited by Michael Snape and Edward Madigan as being important in dispelling the myths about military padres that had been formerly perpetuated by secular historians.²⁵⁴

Whilst the Free Church input into this hypothesis is relatively small, nevertheless it does indicate that the chaplains of that denomination cannot be dismissed as being out of touch with the troops as Graves asserted of Anglican chaplains.²⁵⁵ Thus, from the evidence of Free Church chaplains themselves, in addition to the correspondence from Free Church troops (albeit from a small constituent base) together with the praise given to Free Church

²⁵² *Life and Work*, April 1915, p.104.

²⁵³ *ibid.*, March 1916, p.76.

²⁵⁴ M.Snape and E.Madigan, *op cit.*, p.7.

²⁵⁵ R. Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, London, Penguin Books, 2011, p.198.

chaplains such as John Macleod and Duncan Macdougall from personnel outwith the Free Church, the dismissal of irrelevance of such chaplains cannot be substantiated.

7. Spiritual Impact of War

By far, the consequences of the First World War on Christian allegiance and spiritual vitality have triggered the most searching of analyses from secular historians. From a British perspective the War is deemed to have caused a catastrophic loss of faith and decline in church attendance indicating, so it is argued, a progressive spiritual decline across the nation. Historians share in the attributing the pace of decline of Christianity in Scotland to the War. Tom Devine, for example, suggests that “it is very likely that the Great War accelerated unbelief” with the assertion that with the Scottish churches having blessed the War at its outset of hostilities, the scale of slaughter “had a devastating impact on Christian morale.”²⁵⁶ In similar vein, Stewart Brown cites the decline of Sunday School attendance (falling by c.7000 in the Church of Scotland between May 1916 and May 1917) and that after 1916 there were “few claims of religious revival in the trenches.”²⁵⁷ Such claims are based on contemporary evidence produced by both the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, particularly the voluminous “*The Army and Religion*” published in 1919.

On the other hand, Michael Snape denies the pace of spiritual decline in Britain. He argues against the “mythology” of connecting the loss of life at the Front with loss of faith in the heart of the soldier noting that “faith in interwar Britain was remarkably robust as it was during the war years considering the impact of the War on British society.”²⁵⁸ Snape’s hypothesis counters the findings of *The Army and Religion* which had, through wide-ranging inter-denominational investigations of British troops facilitated by the YMCA, come to the conclusion of the “parlous state of religion in the British Army during the First World

²⁵⁶ T.Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000*, London, Penguin Press, 1999, p.385.

²⁵⁷ S.Brown, op cit., pp. 91-92.

²⁵⁸ M.Snape:interview in ‘*Beyond Belief, Battle of the Somme*,’ BBC Radio 4: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07h6n1q> (accessed March 28th 2017).

War.”²⁵⁹ Notwithstanding this published finding, Snape argues that the Report’s primary intention was to “build up evidence to serve as a manifesto for far-reaching, post-war church reform” with the purpose of those liberal churchmen who penned the Report to “build the Kingdom of God in the land;” and that while “the overall picture presented in the report was depressing it was not deemed irretrievable.” Thus, to suit its purposes, the Report omitted evidence from conservative evangelicals.²⁶⁰

In order to assess the experience of the Free Church of Scotland regarding the matter of the War’s impact on the spirituality of its people one must place such a study within the broader picture of the expectations of the Scottish churches at the start of the War and how these expectations were assessed within the churches throughout the period of the conflict. Indeed such a study must be placed in relation to the dichotomy between the school of thought that cites the First World War as the generator of unbelief in Great Britain - with Scottish churches sharing in that loss of faith - and the counter-argument of Michael Snape that the War did not contribute to a decline in religious faith.

The high expectations expressed in all the major Scottish Presbyterian churches of the War as having a divine purpose of spiritual renewal of the nation through the purificatory effects of warfare are clearly evident in written articles and in sermons across the denominational divide. While Stewart Brown focuses exclusively on addresses from Church of Scotland and United Free Church clergy extolling the War as offering a spiritual revival,²⁶¹ the Free Church was no different to the other churches in that assessment early on in the conflict. One of the

²⁵⁹ M. Snape, *Revisiting Religion and the British Soldier in the First World War*, London, Dr. Williams’s Trust, 2015, p.21.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.2.

²⁶¹ S. Brown, *op cit.*, p.89.

earliest evaluations of the positive aspects of the War from a Free Church perspective was given by Archibald Macneilage in his *Monthly Record* editorial of September 1914. Macneilage regarded the War as a means whereby Great Britain (“and in a marked degree, Scotland”) was being called to “consider her covenant relationship to God in Jesus Christ.” He referred to the theological heritage of the Reformation in Scotland - epitomised in the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 and its affirmation of the headship of Christ. In his assessment of the current spirituality of the nation, Macneilage considered that the nation had replaced the headship of Christ with “national dominion” - a reference to the self-absorbed pride of British wealth, intellect and race; in response he called on his countrymen to “turn unto the Lord.”²⁶² Thus the War was seen by Macneilage as a means to humble the nation into, once more, returning to God as a covenanted nation with the responsibilities of such a nation exercised in obedience to God.

The call for national humiliation within the covenantal relationship between nation and God as a consequential result of the War did not disappear within Free Church comment. The seriousness of the Ludendorff Offensive alluded to by Rev. Alexander Stewart was referred to in his parallelism of Jacob’s wrestling with God (whom Stewart spoke of as “the Angel of the Covenant”) with Britain’s striving against God.²⁶³ Stewart contended that God had been striving with “our nation” for many years “to bring us into fuller subjection to His own will.” However, as Stewart observed, despite the privileges of a covenantal relationship with God in the past, “we have not been...loyal to the Covenant” through serving “other gods.”

²⁶² *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, September 1914, pp.165-166.

²⁶³ The Spring Offensive launched by General Ludendorff on the Eastern Front from March 1918. lasted until mid July. During the height of the Offensive, Paris was within 40 miles of the German advance hence the gravity of the response by Rev. Alexander Stewart in relation to what he perceives as the spiritual need for covenant renewal from the British people.

Stewart saw the current conflict in Europe as “one tremendous struggle” with Britain’s armies being “pressed back” - a symbolic reflection of the God pressing upon the people of Britain to “repent of its sins to humble itself in sincerity before God.”²⁶⁴

The same emphasis on covenant renewal was expressed by Stewart at the close of the War when he called for “a renewal of our Covenant engagements” on the basis that the past four years of the War had revealed that the “religious state of the nation... cannot be regarded as satisfactory.” And in a swipe at the moves for church unity between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church he bemoaned the fact that “we hear little about the religious significance of the War beyond the fact that it appears to call for the coordination of ecclesiastical machinery.”²⁶⁵

The theme of the War as a means of humbling an errant nation in order that Scotland be restored to a righteousness under God was a consistent motif both in the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian Church. While ‘covenant’ was not specified in Free Presbyterian writing nevertheless the theme of the War as a chastening of the nation and, as such, a means of effecting a national return to God in order to bring about a spiritual revival was evident in the assessment of the Free Presbyterian Church at the start of the War. Such a verdict was summarised in a sermon written by Rev. James Sinclair when he wrote that: “May the Lord, in His infinite mercy, bring high and low, rich and poor, among us to humble themselves in sincerity and truth, so that we may be exalted in due time as a nation, both in a way of freedom from distress and in a way of righteousness of life!”²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, July 1918, pp.113-114.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, November 1918, pp.177-178.

²⁶⁶ *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, January 1915, p.328.

While ministers and laymen of these smaller conservative denominations viewed the War from afar as a chastening from God to revive true religion in the country, one has to consider the experience of those who were directly affected by the consequences of war in relation to first hand experience of death and suffering at the Front and at home in order to gain a broader perspective on the effects of the War on the spiritual life of the servicemen and non-combatants of Scotland in general, and those of the Free Church in particular. However, in relation to the Free Church one has to bear in mind the degree of selective reporting of spiritual experience found in the official magazines of the denomination and, at the same time, the difficulty in gauging objectivity in reported comment on the spiritual state of a soldier as a result of his experience in battle. For example, the omission of any objective reporting of conservative evangelical experience from those who compiled *The Army and Religion*, *ipso facto*, excludes any Free Church of Scotland contributions in an overall survey of spiritual experience of troops. The extant evidence in relation to spirituality is largely confined to correspondence from the Front from Free Church connected troops and Free Church chaplains and is invariably selective in its promotion of spiritual vitality in Free Church publications. Where extant diary entries are available pertaining to spirituality amongst Free Church people at home and at the Front, again there is a noticeable elevation of the spiritual impact of the War on those directly affected by the experience of war.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence from contemporary sources to evaluate the Free Church servicemen's spiritual experience whilst in service; not every chaplain reported a wholesale spiritual awakening amongst his fellow Free Churchmen; not every serving Free Church serviceman wrote of being purified by fire. Indeed, the consistency of reporting evidence of religious practices amongst Free Church troops cannot be lightly dismissed as

mere denominational bias; such evidence needs to be taken into account alongside that of troops of other persuasions and none. Thus, the measurement of the extent to which members and adherents of the Free Church of Scotland can be categorised as either experiencing accelerated decline of faith or maintaining a spiritual vitality, while difficult to assess fully or objectively, is not a forlorn exercise to assess.

The initial optimism of the War being “over by Christmas” soon faded as trench warfare contributed to the stalemate of the Western Front. The massive loss of life through the war of attrition and the accompanying military technology that injured and killed on a massive scale ensured that First World War soldiers on the “spectrum of faith” were tested to the extreme. As Geoffrey Treloar helpfully asserts, this new environment impacted those of an evangelical Christian background as much as any other Christian tradition. Young men having made a “complete break with home conditions” now encountered “deep questions about themselves.”²⁶⁷ Within that body of troops who left the certainties of home life and the accompanying Christian background were Free Church members and adherents for whom the War presented a new challenge to faith.

Allowing for the partisan nature of commentary from Free Church ministers and chaplains on the spirituality of these troops, one must examine the presented evidence of evangelical Christian doctrine and practice at both the camps and the Front: such evidence will include Bible reading, Psalm and hymn singing and the reading of Christian books to obtain spiritual comfort; also to be examined must be the language used in communicating active faith in the face of battle.

²⁶⁷ G.Treloar, *The Disruption of Evangelicalism*, London, IVP, 2016, p.134.

By far the largest body of evidence pointing to the spiritual lives of troops is contained in chaplains' reports. As has already been noted, the role of Free Church chaplains *vis à vis* troops of different non-conformist denominations under their care cannot be deemed irrelevant. The particular spiritual care of Free Church chaplains over their own 'flock' and over men from other denominations must be examined, especially in detecting observations on the spirituality of these troops and the relevance of Free Church chaplains in encouraging a deepening spiritual response to the exigencies of war. Certainly, the revealing of a self-perception of worth and value of some Free Church chaplains for the spiritual benefit of those fellow Free Church troops under their care was evident in Rev. John Macleod's own assessment of his work. In lengthy monthly reports to *The Instructor*, Macleod presented a picture of spiritual activity amongst Free Church troops. He referred to the "very unusual experience" of there being a Free Church chaplain amongst military personnel but added that such a presence was essential for "our own brothers" who "need the message we believe in and declare to young and old at home."²⁶⁸ Thus, Macleod asserted that the basis for his chaplaincy role was theological for the spiritual welfare of the troops under his oversight with especial care for men with a Free Church connection.

Notwithstanding this initial emphasis on denominational preference Macleod related his experience very much on a non-denominational basis, but with the overriding emphasis on the spiritual dimension to his work. Such a basis is demonstrated in anecdotal evidence. For example, he told of a meeting with an injured soldier in a hospital ward in Aldershot. Macleod related that the unnamed, Gaelic speaking soldier of unnamed denominational

²⁶⁸ *The Instructor*, December 1914, p.54.

persuasion had had a spiritual experience whilst on the Front. He informed Macleod of a crisis of faith whilst lying injured on the battlefield, with his overriding concern being the salvation of his soul. Macleod then related how he “tried to direct his mind to the Lord Jesus who could put him right with the past and give him a new standing before God.” Macleod then concluded by stating that he was convinced of the sincerity of the soldier’s vow that his “life would not be as of yore.”²⁶⁹

Macleod’s analysis of relevance and worth in his chaplaincy was further seen in a report submitted to *The Highland News*. Macleod wrote of a voluntary Sunday service he held for men of all ranks “from most of our hills and glens and every Highland town and village round our shores” with the perception that these men were “all so desirous to listen to the Word of God.” Macleod added a reference “to the surprise of other chaplains” to see so many men at weekly devotional meetings.²⁷⁰

As the War continued there was less of an outright, forthright description of war being instrumental in turning the hearts of troops to conversion. While John Macleod could still write in the summer of 1915 of the warm reception given by troops at the Front to chaplains “from the Highlands and elsewhere” he did not go so far as to relate any conversions as a result of the work of these chaplains. Instead he referred to the “national reserve of the Scotsman” in relation to the “things of the Spirit” but that in private “the men are most responsive”; but still falling short of describing any individual or large-scale conversion amongst the troops he had been ministering to. Macleod acknowledged that there was no diminishing in a religious dimension to the experience of the troops noting that “as far as I

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.56.

²⁷⁰ *The Highland News*, 26th December 1914.

know all the men in the regiments which I have the honour to serve possess either a Bible or New Testament,” adding that he knew that “it is used by some as their guide in the perplexities of life.”²⁷¹

Within Free Church chaplaincy we see a divergence of perspective in keeping with the broader difference of opinion relating to British Protestant clergy. The realism of the extremities of war having a detrimental effect on the spirituality of British troops was reflected on by Rev. Alexander Renwick, Free Church Acting Chaplain to the 2nd and 4th Black Watch. Writing from a casualty clearing station in early 1916 (his report was given to the Free Church General Assembly in May 1916) he stated categorically that “the idea fostered in certain quarters that a great wave of religious revival has passed over the Army is not correct” (this assessment was mirrored in the verdict of a United Free Church chaplain who wrote of conversions and revivals in the early part of the War but then added that “I fear that many people guilelessly gave the impression that these were deeper than they actually were. At least they do not exist now”²⁷²). Furthermore, Renwick’s observations (based on a 17 month period of chaplaincy at the Home and Western Fronts) led him to the conclusion that “it is usually those who have had religious impressions at home who are most receptive to the Truth out here.” He added that “the dangers and horrors of war do not of themselves make men good Christians but if a man has beforehand been well grounded in the essentials of the faith he will probably realise in times of trial more than ever before the value of his religion.”²⁷³

²⁷¹ *The Instructor*, October 1915, p.11.

²⁷² Cited in S. Brown, *op cit.*, p.94.

²⁷³ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1916, p.70.

Notwithstanding the emphasis by Free Church chaplains on the evident spiritual activity of Free Church troops as a consequence of the War, one must balance such evidence with contrary accounts of Free Church indifference to the effects of the War on matters of spiritual vitality. The realism of the observations of Alexander Renwick in his assessment of the extremities of war not being, in themselves, a cause for spiritual awakening but, for those troops already confirmed in their Christian faith, a strengthening of that conviction has already been noted. This opinion is supported by the diverse comments of Free Church servicemen involved in the conflict. On the one hand, an unnamed soldier from Lewis gave a detailed insight into the experience of a soldier far from home and undertaking the challenges of being loosed from “home conditions.” Furthermore, he wrote, too, on the experience of a Free Church soldier at the Front whose faith had remained unshaken even through near death and his experience of the antipathy to the Christian faith from fellow troops. He wrote of the dichotomy of desiring to be home and to go through the door of a building where the word of God was being preached and of his yearning to attend a home prayer meeting but having to endure a present spiritual vacuum when he expressed his dismay that “there is not much of a Sabbath to be seen out there or in the British Army.” In that vein he bemoaned the irreligion he faced in the trenches with a plea to fellow Free Church members: “Now dear friends, in your meetings remember on me (*sic*) who can hear nothing out here but ‘Take this man away; we don’t want this man to be king over us’” (Luke 19:14). Notwithstanding his immediate experience of his fellow troops not sharing his Christian beliefs, he expressed a verdict that the War had actually reinforced his faith and commitment to fellow believers. This is evident in his reminiscence of times when he was with the “children of God” and yet was “not pleased when I had the chance to be with them” but that detachment from his home and church life had now deepened his longing to

be with these people, as is confirmed when he wrote of the “dark nights of the winter” when he was “with the children of God in my spirit although my body was in the wet trenches; and I am thankful for ever to God that the Germans cannot take that away.”²⁷⁴

One particular example which supports Alexander Renwick’s observations on faith and the soldier is found in the extant (Gaelic²⁷⁵) letters of Lieutenant John Munro, from Point, Isle of Lewis. Munro was a Free Church member who, prior to the War, had intended to enter the Free Church College to train for the ministry but postponed his application when war broke out. He was killed at Wytscaete on 16th April 1918. In an undated letter written from the Front to his mother he wrote of his weakness of faith (“faith helps faith: but I do not have strength that I can share. It would just be weakness betraying weakness”) and the lack of spiritual comfort he was enduring (“It is good that there is mention of ‘fullness,’ and that comfort is not completely divorced from us in the world, but free for us even here. As for me, pitiful as I am, who knows but that the Great Physician would not send me on a journey with a box of his healing balm”). That Munro could refer to his hope in “The Great Physician” would indicate that his wavering faith was not extinguished despite his frontline experiences. This is evident as he closed his letter with his admission that although he lacked patience in the “fulfilment” of his spiritual healing he could still express a confidence that war had not removed his faith from him: “how great the contentment in soul satisfaction to follow the Saviour as the Guide towards that.” His concluding remarks further revealed a faith tried and tested by war but not defeated by it: “May God be our stay in the difficulties, our help in the face of adversity. Let us remember each other in his presence”.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, July 1915, p.123.

²⁷⁵ For the purposes of this thesis all Gaelic documents are translated into English.

²⁷⁶ J. Munro, letter to his mother in *In Memoriam, Lieut. John Munro*, Stornoway Gazette Office, n.d.

On the other hand, the experience of a Free Church adherent who later became an ordained minister in the denomination gives a different perspective from the soldiers, above, who came to the Front already confirmed in their faith. Malcolm Morrison of Ness, Isle of Lewis, spoke of his heart being “hardened” after he returned home from the Front. He had fought with the Cameron Highlanders at the Somme and related how his experience in battle, far from bringing to him any “solemn purification by fire” actually had the opposite effect. In an interview carried out in Gaelic by Comunn Eachdraidh Nis in 1979,²⁷⁷ he related that “neither bullets nor dirt or hunger or cold or anything had any effect on his life, if anything I was worse than before;” he speaks of his later conversion in spite of the war rather than because of it.²⁷⁸

That a neat, one-dimensional spiritual testimony is not always possible to detect in the experience of troops at the Front is evident in the writings of one Free Church soldier, George Macrae, brother of Rev. Kenneth Macrae, Lochgilphead. Hearsay evidence of George’s conversion was noted by Kenneth from those who corresponded with George (in one letter cited in Kenneth’s diary entry for 25th April 1917, two weeks after George’s death). Kenneth referred to a letter written by George to a female friend of his “faith in a Saving Redeemer”²⁷⁹ (a profession noted earlier that Kenneth Macrae had cited as evidence of salvation by faith and not through participation in battle). In another claim to George’s conversion, Kenneth wrote of his sister having told him of “George’s pressing men to serve

²⁷⁷ Malcolm Morrison (1894-1987) was awarded the Military Medal for bravery.

²⁷⁸ Comunn Eachdraidh Nis, *The Going Down of the Sun*, Stornoway, Acair, 2015, p.140.

²⁷⁹ I.H.Murray (ed), *op cit.*, p.112.

Christ.”²⁸⁰ yet when examining first hand accounts of George’s experience of the trenches, there is no overt indication of such conversion.

This can be detected in his last published letter (George Macrae wrote letters for publication in Highland newspapers, unlike his brother, Kenneth, who did not intend his thoughts on the War to be published) in which George Macrae omitted all reference to God or religion and instead focussed on an almost mystical longing for home. Instead of any reference to a spiritual awakening of his soul in conversion whilst in the trenches he wrote of his mind going “back to the quiet hush of the gloaming, glamorous and peaceful, and find there the knowledge of our dreams.”²⁸¹ The language George Macrae adopted is identical to that of his last letter home written on the eve of his death in which he wrote to his mother and father the valedictory line, “Till we meet again in the beautiful land of Dream and of Love...”²⁸² Whilst the omission of any overtly Christian language cannot, in itself, be regarded as wholly conclusive against a spiritual awakening through war, nevertheless when compared with the spiritual sentiments of communications from those whose faith was unaffected by war, a clear distinction is seen. George Macrae’s decidedly ethereal language would appear to coincide to some degree with the religious mysticism evident in the writing of troops from other nations and religious persuasions. This conflation of the mystical with the spiritual was certainly not uncommon during the War. As Philip Jenkins argues, “conventional belief was accompanied by a vast penumbra of...mystical belief that had a wide influence across the classes.”²⁸³

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p.114.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p.112.

²⁸² Ibid., p.112.

²⁸³ P.Jenkins, op cit., p.111.

As far as the spiritual impact of the War on non-combatant Free Church personnel is concerned, again the evidence presents a mixed picture of spiritual vitality. Church attendance is one indicator of a spiritual barometer in time of war. On the one hand there appears within the courts of the Free Church a presentation of the War as being ineffective in bringing about a spiritual revival in Scotland, and, by implication, the Free Church of Scotland. Thus, we find the Free Church Presbytery of Edinburgh reporting on 25th January 1916 of “empty pews” being a feature of Scotland’s churches with the observation that despite the “humbling experiences” the War should have brought on the people of Scotland for the past year and a half “the House of God continues to be sadly neglected by adherents of the various Churches.”²⁸⁴ Similar comment on “empty pews” is found in the March 1916 edition of *The Monthly Record* in which the editor equated such a phenomenon to the “withdrawal of God’s Spirit.”²⁸⁵ While such comments do not specifically refer to the Free Church’s experience of a lack of spiritual vitality seen in church attendance, other observations regarding particular Free Church experience would vindicate a general ineffectiveness of the War as bringing any upsurge or revival within the denomination. Thus, for example, in a response to a letter from the Religion and Morals Committee regarding the spiritual impact of the War on its people the Free Presbytery of Inverness concluded that “none of the brethren could say that there was any visible change in the state of religion. While the War may have caused a certain awe and quietness there is not so far as man can judge anything else.”²⁸⁶ Similarly, in a debate at the Free Church General Assembly on Thursday 25th May 1916, while Roderick Macleod of Knock, Isle of Lewis had reported that the prayer meetings in “the Lewis” (*sic*) were “crowded with young and old,” Archibald

²⁸⁴ Cited in *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, February 1916, p.28.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, March 1916, p.35.

²⁸⁶ *Minutes of the Free Presbytery of Inverness*, 6th February 1917.

Macneilage asked why it was that Free Church young people from the north of Scotland “were seldom seen in church” when they moved south.²⁸⁷

That there was no revival of Christian faith amongst Free Church troops as a result of their experience in the trenches, and no revival within Free Church congregations is evident from the sources examined. Thus, from a Free Church perspective, Stewart Brown’s hypothesis of an absence of revival in Scottish Churches is supported. However, the claim of “accelerated unbelief” suggested by Tom Devine, above, is inconclusive from the evidence pertaining to Free Church troops and Free Church Presbytery findings. What can be determined from that evidence is that there was no accelerated belief of a spiritual awakening amongst the majority of troops who went to battle, with Rev. Alexander Renwick’s first-hand observations on the static nature of religious conversion pertinent to the findings.

²⁸⁷ *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, June 1916, p.100.

8. Overall Conclusion

Having considered the Free Church of Scotland's response to the First World War, the matter of identity has appeared crucial in the analysis of the War's impact on that denomination. Only nine years after the Free Church of Scotland had been vindicated by a House of Lords' decision as to its legitimacy as the Free Church of Scotland, following a five year legal battle with a much larger denomination, it embarked on a campaign to assert its legitimacy as an active participant in the conflagration which encompassed every mainstream denomination in Scotland and the United Kingdom. In that struggle to establish an identity as a denomination fully participant in meeting the spiritual needs of combatant troops and non-combatant civilians, the Free Church was determined to address the question of how a denomination separated from much larger churches by doctrinal and historical division could contribute nationally without compromising its theological positions rooted in its Confessional understanding of Scripture.

Indeed, that a small, doctrinally conservative church within a limited demography based largely in the Highlands and Islands and amongst the Highland diaspora in Scotland's largest cities should have contributed to an understanding of theological interpretations of the causes and course of the War from its Confessional perspective indicates the success of that endeavour. Furthermore, the validation of the Free Church of Scotland as a denomination to be included within an overview of Scottish Presbyterian church's involvement in the War is also vindicated on both theological and practical grounds. Theologically, the Free Church's unbending doctrinal stance on, for example, salvation by faith alone and not through meritorious works such as the giving of life in battle for a just cause, indicates its refusal to compromise on a Confessional position that characterised its Reformed identity, especially

at a time when such a position was being attacked by some within the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland. Yet, its direct involvement in collaborative projects, when doctrinal compromise was not considered at stake, such as the promotion of the Gaelic language for Gaelic speaking troops of all denominations through the provision of literature and Gaelic-speaking chaplains, indicates both an ecumenical and practical demonstration of the Free Church's sensitivity to the cultural and spiritual needs of those troops at home and at the Front. Moreover, the Free Church's role in the alleviation of financial hardship amongst fishing communities caused by the disruption of war is a further example of the practical benefits the denomination gave to the wider community irrespective of denominational allegiance. Thus, the identity of the Free Church as a Reformed church having a catholicity of spirit of relevance to the Scottish people during the War is evident.

Notwithstanding this assessment of the Free Church's identity as a legitimate participant in the War, whose pronouncements and activities concerning war related matters should be valued as adding to hitherto published work on Scotland's other main Presbyterian churches, the denomination can be deemed to have shown major weaknesses in this involvement. Its refusal to participate officially in joint services, after 1915, with Scotland's leading two Presbyterian denominations can be deemed to have been insensitive at a time when national unity was considered by Government, press and public to be paramount in the fight against Germany. Certainly, the decision of the 1916 Free Church General Assembly against such involvement was not universally approved within the Free Church itself, attracting internal dissent as well as external opprobrium. Thus, its unwillingness to be so involved with Scotland's leading denominations threatened to mark the identity of the Free

Church as a church more concerned with prioritising doctrinal principles over national unity in time of war.

Further criticism can be directed against the Free Church in contradistinction to the Free Presbyterian Church in relation to the intensity and volume of public pronouncements on salient doctrinal issues such as national apostasy as a cause of divine judgement; and the eternal destiny of the soul. Both denominations shared the same theological bases for their views but the Free Church was less forthright than the Free Presbyterian Church in propagating its dearly held positions. Indeed, where there does appear comment on such matters of doctrine, the paucity of comment from Free Church clergymen is striking in relation to its even smaller Confessional neighbour. Thus, the identity of the Free Church as a strong-minded denomination eager to participate in the War in the vanguard of ecclesiastical involvement within its Confessional strictures is tempered by a weak ministerial leadership within the denomination.

Furthermore, whilst Free Church chaplains undoubtedly gave spiritual comfort to troops already secure in their faith, as witnessed in the correspondence of servicemen to *The Monthly Record* expressing gratitude for such aid, the absence of any significant increase in spiritual awakening amongst Free Church troops and civilians as a result of the War supports Stewart Brown's general contention that there was no revival of Christian faith amongst British troops. However, this is not to aver that the post-war criticism of the ineffectiveness of chaplains can be substantiated even from the perspective of the small number of Free Church chaplains. The reports of gratitude for the work of such chaplains as John Macleod and Duncan Macdougall dispel such criticism. Moreover, there is no substantive evidence

from a Free Church perspective to contradict Michael Snape's argument that the War did not produce an overall loss of faith.

Thus, the above conclusions lead to the overall evaluation of the impact of the First World War on the Free Church of Scotland as being largely affirmative with the War having energised a small, doctrinally conservative denomination to express confidence in its theology and in its participation as a Church able to provide spiritual and practical support to those directly involved in the War. However, such an affirmation must be qualified with respect to the ineffectiveness of the Free Church leadership in effecting a spiritual transformation within its own denomination and therefore sharing the experience of the Church of Scotland and United Free Church of Scotland in the dashing of their hopes for national regeneration through a "spiritual purification by fire."

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