
George Gillespie and the Westminster Assembly¹

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1. Background

The early part of the seventeenth century was a period of turmoil in Church and state in Scotland. The Reformed Church had been established in Scotland in 1560 in Edinburgh. The *Scots Confession* of 1560 and the *First Book of Discipline* drawn up the same year effectively set out the doctrine and practice of the Protestant Faith in the Scottish Church. By an Act of Parliament, the Reformed Church was accepted as ‘the only true and holy Kirk of Jesus Christ within this realm.’ It is true to say that this did not formally establish Presbyterianism as the form of Church government in the nation. However implicit that form might have been, the whole question of what form of Church government should prevail was a battleground in Scotland over the following century. The reality is that there was an ebb and flow for ascendancy in the period between Presbyterianism and the episcopal form of Church government. Within the Scottish context the reason for this lay in the person of King James VI (King James VI and I after the union of the crowns in 1603). King James became a strong advocate of the divine right of Kings, something which he saw as being more consistent with the episcopal order of things. This was to lead to an escalation of conflict perpetuated by his son Charles I and Charles’s son (Charles II).

James (born in June 1566) was King of Scots from 1567 to 1625 and, at the union of the crowns (1603) also became King of England and Ireland. He became King of Scots as James VI in 1567, when he was just

1. Revised form of a lecture originally given at a meeting of the Scottish Reformation Society, Inverness Branch, 14th November, 2016.

thirteen months old, succeeding his mother Mary Queen of Scots. Regents governed during his minority, which ended officially in 1578, though he did not gain full control of his government until 1581. In 1603, James succeeded the last Tudor monarch of England and Ireland, Elizabeth I, who died without issue. He then ruled the united kingdom of England, Scotland, and Ireland for twenty-two years, often using the title King of Great Britain, until his death in March 1625 at the age of 58.

It is true to say that James was a thorn in the side of the Reformed Church in Scotland. As early as 1584 the Parliament passed the so-called 'Black Acts' which legitimised the 'royal power over states and subjects within this realm.' It mandated the discharge of 'all jurisdictions and judgements not approved by Parliament,' and 'assemblies and conventions' without his sovereign approval. It compelled Scottish subjects to acknowledge diocesan bishops as their ecclesiastical superiors. The Black Acts sowed confusion and were resented as despotic. However, in 1592 the so-called 'Golden Act' (*Act for abolisheing of the actis contrair the trew religion*) mandated the Presbyterian Church, recognising the jurisdiction of Synods, Presbyteries, and Sessions. It approved propositions in the *Second Book of Discipline* (1578) which outlined the functions of these courts. However, James still moved to reintroduce episcopacy, though for the greater part the Church remained committed to Presbyterianism. On a rare visit to Scotland in 1617 (his last visit to Scotland) he set in motion a process which led the following year to the imposition of the Five Articles of Perth which were so obviously episcopalian. These Acts required, (1) that the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ should be received kneeling; (2) that it might be administered to the sick privately; (3) that baptism could be administered in private houses; (4) that children eight years old should be presented to the bishop for confirmation; and (5) that the Birth, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord, and the sending of the Holy Ghost be commemorated on the appointed days (i.e. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost). Though ratified by Parliament in 1621, these Articles were deeply unpopular and they were finally abolished by the Church when it next met in Assembly seventeen years later (1638).

This is more or less how things stood at the end of James's reign. The friction continued after the accession of Charles I. Particularly with the encouragement of the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, after 1633, Charles proceeded to try and impose a full-blown episcopacy in Scotland. By 1636 he had produced a *Book of Canons and Constitutions*

Ecclesiastical for the Government of the Church of Scotland. This savagely prescribed excommunication for any who denied the supremacy of the king or the authority of bishops in the Church. It practically swept away the Presbyterian order and brought in Anglican services and liturgy. The latter was in the end a crux when in 1637 an attempt was made to impose a ritualistic style of liturgy commonly known as ‘Laud’s Liturgy’. This occasioned a revolt in St Giles in Edinburgh most commonly associated with Jenny Geddes and her stool (‘Villain, dost thou say mass at my lug!’). The reaction to all this in Scotland, against Charles’s high-handedness, brought George Gillespie to the fore in a notable way. Charles ordered to be burned all copies of George Gillespie’s critique of the Articles of Perth, *A Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies obtruded upon the Kirk of Scotland* (1637). This was Gillespie’s first work of substance (a book of 217 tightly-printed pages in the 1846 edition). The book, apparently, was ‘too corrosive a quality to be digested by the Bishops’ weak stomachs’!² These were challenging days for a Church concerned to be Presbyterian and Reformed. And the Lord raised up three men (in particular) in those days to face such challenges. The men in question were Alexander Henderson, Samuel Rutherford, and George Gillespie.

2. 1638 and all that

1638 was a notable year in the experience of the Reformed Church in Scotland. Resistance ran high to the king’s attempted unwelcome impositions upon the Church. Representations were made but the king’s intransigence led early in 1638, primarily under the leadership of Alexander Henderson (1583-1646), a minister, and Archibald Johnston of Wariston (1611-1663), a lawyer-elder, to a *National Covenant* being prepared as a bond of unity in defence of the Reformed Church and its spiritual liberties, with an appeal to the people for support. And how well it was supported that year! The king was forced to agree a free Assembly, which met at Glasgow in November 1638. This Assembly revoked the Five Articles of Perth and other such episcopalianising impositions on the Church. Perhaps it should be noted that 1638 in a sense was the culmination of a significant period of spiritual awakening the Lord sent to Scotland with notable revivals. As someone has written: ‘The years of 1625-1638 were oppressively bleak, but they were also years in which the Spirit of God moved in amazing ways. Under the preaching and ministering of such men as David Dickson, John

2. John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (Edinburgh, 1871 [1775]), p. 192.

Livingstone, Robert Bruce, and Alexander Henderson, God blessed His people with extraordinary times of spiritual refreshing.’ 1638 is sometimes described as Scotland’s ‘Second Reformation’. But it was the 1638 Assembly that saw the rise to prominence of George Gillespie within the Church. Though just seven months after his ordination, Gillespie was asked to preach a sermon during the sittings of that Assembly.

3. George Gillespie – who was he?

Gillespie was born in Kirkcaldy in Fife early in 1613. He was the son of the parish minister there, John Gillespie (1580-1627), and his wife Lilius Simpson. By reputation John Gillespie was ‘a thundering preacher.’ George’s mother regarded her son as ‘soft and dull.’ Perhaps he was not much into normal boyish pranks! George’s father did not approve her attitude and anticipated great things for him in the work of the Lord in Scotland. Maybe he was simply a serious and ‘bookish’ boy. Certainly as he progressed academically he had a brilliant career at St Andrew’s University where he had gone up to study in 1629, aged 16. It is quite clear that he was early persuaded by the Presbyterian and Reformed doctrine, practice and Church government for, though pursuing a call to the ministry he would not submit to ordination by a Bishop. He did serve for a few years as a chaplain to landed gentry. We have mentioned already the prominence he came to in 1637 with his book against the ‘English Popish Ceremonies’. Typically, in defiance of the episcopalian establishment, he was finally ordained in the parish of Wemyss in Fife in April 1638. Two years later he accompanied other divines, Alexander Henderson, Robert Blair and Robert Baillie, with the Scottish Commissioners who went to London to negotiate a peace with Charles I. In 1642 he was translated to High Kirk in Edinburgh (St Giles). The previous year he had produced a book entitled *An Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland* making clear his commitment to Presbyterian Church government in the Kirk and against the supremacy of the state (or the king) over Christ’s Kirk.³

3. It has to be said that the much of the written material produced by George Gillespie related to Church government and policy. His writings are carefully worked and closely argued, and display extensive biblical learning and knowledge of reformed and theological literature. His works (except for *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming* (1646)) were reprinted in 1846 in two volumes with an extended memoir by W. M. Hetherington (afterwards Professor of Systematic Theology at the Free Church College in Glasgow, 1857-65). These volumes were reprinted by Still Waters Revival Books (Edmonton) in 1991 and may, indeed, still be available for purchase.

4. Another turning point – The Solemn League and Covenant (1643)

The outbreak of the English Civil War (1642) had a profound impact on the relations between Scotland and England. The Scots were largely Parliamentarians (i.e. rather than royalists – they reacted strongly to the ‘divine right of kings’ doctrine of the Stuarts). In August 1643 the General Assembly agreed (with the approval of the Scottish Estates) on a *Solemn League and Covenant*, mainly drawn up by Alexander Henderson. By this ‘Covenant’ (which was also accepted by the English Parliament) in its religious aspects ‘subscribers were to bind themselves to preserve the Reformed religion in Scotland, and to secure in England and Ireland a reform in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, according to the “Word of God and the example of the best Reformed Churches”.’ The Covenant further bound subscribers to seek the ‘extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, superstition, heresy and schism’.⁴ ‘In its civil aspects, the Solemn League pledged the preservation of the rights and privileges of Parliaments, as well as the king’s person and authority.’⁵ However, it did not *specify* that the form of government in their mind was Presbyterianism. It has to be recognised that Independency was common in England. Whether the Scots intended to be a bit ambiguous is unlikely. Subscribers also pledged not to suffer themselves to be withdrawn from this ‘blessed Union and Conjunction.’ They looked to God to turn away his wrath from the nations who thus covenanted themselves, and to strengthen them in their work.

5. The Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643-1652)

Just a couple of months earlier than the passing of the *Solemn League and Covenant* in Scotland an invitation had been received by the Scots (in June 1643) from the English Parliament to send representatives to an Assembly of Divines to be convened at Westminster. The purpose was for ‘the settling of the Government and Liturgy of the Church of England, and for vindicating and clearing of the said Doctrine of the said Church from false aspersions and interpretations.’ The Scot Robert Baillie’s description of the Assembly is telling: ‘The like of that Assembly I never did see, and, as we hear say, the like was never in England, nor anywhere is shortly like to be.’ The Assembly comprised some of the finest Puritan minds in the

4. See J. D. Douglas, *Light in the North* (Exeter, 1964), p. 32.

5. Wayne R. Spear, *Covenanted Uniformity in Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2013), p. 29.

country. Their debates were intense, learned, and spiritual, frequently with powerful flights of eloquence. A common factor throughout was the desire to produce documents altogether agreeable to the Word of God. They had no issues with the *authority of Scripture*. Although they were men of deep and extensive learning, nothing was allowed to detract from that principal concern: a faithful understanding of the teaching of Scripture as the infallible and inerrant Word of God. This of course gave their productions an authoritative and weighty character. The Assembly actively promoted the taking of the *Solemn League and Covenant* among the English people and so advanced the purpose of the whole desire of the Assembly for the 'covenanted uniformity of religion' among England, Scotland and Ireland. The Assembly essentially was English in nature, and comprised 139 divines, several of whom (including all the episcopalians, such as Archbishop Ussher) did not actually attend any of its meetings. There were also fifteen peers, thirty members of the House of Commons; and four scribes or Clerks. Though it was English in nature there were six Scottish ministers who were appointed commissioners, and nine Scottish elders.⁶

The commissioners appointed by the Scottish Church played an influential role in the Assembly though at their own insistence they were not full members. This was because they did not wish to commit, or seem to commit, the Church they represented to conclusions made in the Assembly which might be at odds with their own convictions or the position of the Scottish Church itself. The six ministers appointed were: Alexander Henderson (Edinburgh), Robert Douglas (Edinburgh) (who never took his seat), Samuel Rutherford (St Andrews), Robert Baillie (Glasgow), George Gillespie (Edinburgh), and Robert Blair (St Andrews) (who replaced Douglas). Many of the other commissioners have subsequently become well-known in recent times through the reprints of their writings, such as William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughs, Thomas Goodwin, and Edward Reynolds. In the Scottish Church the following was the order in which the various documents produced by the Assembly were approved:

- *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*,
3rd February 1645
- *The Form of Presbyterial Church Government*,
10th February 1645
- *The Confession of Faith*, 27th August 1647

6. Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh, 1985), Appendix I, pp. 546-556.

- *The Larger Catechism*, 2nd July 1648
- *The Shorter Catechism*, 28th July 28 1648
- *The Metrical Psalter*, 23rd November 1649

The *Confession* was adopted both in England and in Scotland. In England it was the Church's Confession up to the Restoration of 1660, when the monarchy and episcopacy were re-established in England. It may be deduced from the order of production of the various documents of the Assembly that initially there was a strong focus on Church Government, including office within the Church. This was a big issue in the Assembly – and for the 'covenanted uniformity of religion' among the nations – not least in view of the strong presence of convinced Independents. In the event, this whole area – the *Directory for the Public Worship* and the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* – was one in which the Scottish commissioners were heavily involved, and not least George Gillespie. This of course is consistent with their desire for uniformity of religion throughout the British Isles (if it could be achieved). The Scottish commissioners in fact took a relatively lesser part in what are now considered the more important productions of the Assembly – the *Confession* and *Catechisms*. However, what was George Gillespie's part in the discussions at the Westminster Assembly?

6. George Gillespie at the Westminster Assembly

It seems fair to say that in that generation the outstanding Reformed theologians were Alexander Henderson (1583-1646), Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), and George Gillespie, the latter one of the youngest men in the Assembly of divines (at thirty). Of these it is Rutherford who is the best-known, not least through the constant re-publication of his *Letters*, which became and continue to be a spiritual devotional classic. It may be that Gillespie remains a lesser-known character. Of course he died young and much of his early ministry was taken up with matters of Church government, Presbyterian polity, rhetoric against false practices and liturgical impositions in public worship, and the impositions of the state on the Church.

Despite being the youngest and certainly the least experienced minister among the Scottish commissioners to the Assembly at Westminster, Gillespie was in fact the most active in the debates. He contributed 167 speeches against Rutherford's 148 and Henderson's eighty-three. Gillespie was clearly so involved with the debates that he took notes throughout his presence at the Assembly (all that remains covers the period February

1644 to January 1645 on matters connected with the *Directory and Form of Church Government*).⁷ His own contributions were invariably erudite and direct but gracious. His colleague, Robert Baillie was impressed by the young man's ability. It took him by surprise: 'None in all the company did reason more, and more pertinently, than Mr Gillespie. That is an excellent youth; my heart blesses God in his behalf!' 'Very learned and acute Mr Gillespie, a singular ornament of our church, than whom not one in the whole Assembly speaks to better purpose, and with better acceptance by all the hearers.' 'Mr George Gillespie, however I had a good opinion of his gifts, yet I profess he has much deceived me: Of a truth there is no man whose parts in a public dispute I do so admire: He has studied so accurately all the points ever yet came to our assembly, he has gotten so ready, so assured, so solid a way of public debating, that...there is not one who speaks more rationally, and to the point, than that brave youth has ever done.'⁸

Gillespie attended the Assembly at Westminster for four years from 1643 to 1647. In that time he returned to Scotland only once, in January 1645. He returned then with Robert Baillie to give a report to the General Assembly of the Kirk in the Assembly proceedings and to present the *Directory for the Public Worship of God and Form of Presbyterial Church Government* which had been approved by the English Parliament. The Scots were keen that such matters as Church government should be addressed in the Assembly first so that the constitution of the Churches might be settled. The Scottish Kirk approved these documents respectively on 3rd and 10th February (1645). Otherwise Gillespie was at Westminster till the summer of 1647.⁹ After his return that year he reported to the General Assembly of the Kirk and in August that year piloted the *Confession of Faith* through the Scottish Kirk.¹⁰

In a dedication to the Assembly of divines in his robust defence of Presbyterianism, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (1646) – described as 'the *chef-d'oeuvre* of Scotch ecclesiastical theology'¹¹ – Gillespie wrote this:

7. George Gillespie, 'Notes of Debates and Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines and Other Commissioners at Westminster, February 1644 to January 1645', in *The Works of George Gillespie* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1846), Vol. 2, xv+120 pp.

8. W. M. Hetherington, 'Memoir of the Rev. George Gillespie', in *The Works of George Gillespie*, Vol. 1, pp. xxi-xxii.

9. *Ibid.*, p. xxxiv.

10. Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

11. James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1888), p. 14.

It is a mercy...that two nations, formerly at so great a distance in the form of public worship and church government, should...through the good hand of God, be now agreed upon one directory of worship, and, with a good progress, advanced as in one confession of faith, so, likewise in one form of church government; for all which, as the other reformed churches...so especially your brethren in the Church of Scotland, are your debtors. Your name is as precious ointment among them, and they do esteem you very highly in love, for your work's sake – a work which, as it is extraordinary and unparalleled, requiring a double portion of the Spirit of your Master, so you have very many hearts and prayers going along with you in it, that the pleasure of the Lord may prosper in your hand.¹²

As we have indicated, Gillespie and his Scottish colleagues (especially Rutherford and Henderson) were heavily involved in these discussions. We can here only give one or two glimpses into debates involving George Gillespie. In truth, on the matter of the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* there was a wide measure of agreement among the attending commissioners. It was not like that on the subject of Church government. There were protracted debates on that issue with the Independents. On the issue of what was indispensable to the Presbyterian system Gillespie was to maintain these points:

- The existence of the office of ruling elder; and,
- The authority of the various sorts of assemblies [congregational, classical, provincial, and national, with the subordination of the lesser to the greater.]

For the Scots, these were matters of divine right (*jus divinum*). The idea of divine right derived from the conviction that these points were both agreeable to *and prescribed by* the Word of God. It is true to say that the Scots commissioners had a higher view of the *jus divinum* of Presbytery, and of office in the Church, than some English Presbyterians and the Independents. This resulted in the more muted language on these issues in the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government*, which even then the Independents could not accept.

The involvement of the Scottish commissioners was far greater in the discussions on Church government and office in the Church than on the *Confession* and the *Catechisms*. There was a sharp difference within

12. George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming* (Harrison, Va: Sprinkle Publications, 1985 [1646]), p. xvii.

the Assembly in that the Independent and Erastian parties took serious issue on 'Church Censures' (in Chapter 30 of the *Confession*) with the Presbyterians. The Independents seemed to hold what was judged to be an untenable position in maintaining that the Church had no power of excommunication. The Erastians held that the punishment of all offences should be referred to the civil power, and that holy communion was open to all. The Erastians would have been happy to have seen the Church placed under the control of the state. They based their view of Church/state relations on the right of the magistrate to interfere in the affairs of the Church in both doctrine and government.

The Erastian party in the Westminster Assembly had a champion in John Selden, a member of the House of Commons. He was a learned man and held forth at great length with a tremendous display of learning. At one point, he was trying to demonstrate how Matthew 18:15-17 contained no warrant for ecclesiastical jurisdiction but simply concerned the ordinary practice of the Jews in their civil courts. It is said that Samuel Rutherford turned to George Gillespie and said: 'Rise, George, rise up, man, and defend the right of the Lord Jesus Christ to govern by His own laws, the Church which He hath purchased with His blood.' With every appearance of reluctance Gillespie arose and 'gave first a summary of Selden's argument, divesting it of all the confusion of that cumbrous learning in which it had been wrapped, and reducing it to simple elements; then in a speech of singular acuteness and power, completely refuted it, proving that the passage could not be interpreted or explained away to mean a mere reference to a civil court. By seven distinct arguments he proved, that the whole subject was of a spiritual nature, not within the cognisance of civil courts; and he proved also, that the church of the Jews both possessed and exercised the power of spiritual censures. The effect of Gillespie's speech was so great as not only to convince the Assembly, but also to astonish and confound Selden himself, who is reported to have exclaimed in a tone of bitter mortification, "That young man, by this single speech, has swept away the learning and the labour of ten years of my life!"¹³ It appears, however, that in fact Gillespie answered Selden's points the day *after* Selden had made his speech, though in essence this account is accurate.¹⁴

13. Hetherington, *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

14. See A.F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (London, 1883), p. 288; C. Van Dixhoorn (ed.), *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1652* (5 vols., Oxford, 2012), Vol. 1, p. 25.

7. George Gillespie and the Westminster *Confession* and *Catechisms*

George Gillespie and the other Scottish Commissioners were also actively involved, and had a profound influence in, debates on the *Confession* and *Catechisms* at the Assembly (though Henderson passed away and entered the joy of his Lord in 1646). Robert Wodrow (1707) says of Gillespie that ‘He was of the great men that had a chief hand in penning our most excellent Confession of Faith and Catechisms.’¹⁵ Hugh Cartwright mentions two points in which Gillespie clearly had an influence on the final terminology of the *Confession*. Chapter 1 of the *Confession* deals with the doctrine of Scripture comprehensively. It is a surprise to some that Scripture should be dealt with first in the Confession rather than the doctrine of God. However, it is logical that the *primary source* of our doctrine of God, of the Trinity, and of the God-man should be made clear. Without God’s revelation in Scripture, we are in the dark. The fifth section of Chapter 1 of the *Confession* states beautifully that:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

This is very similar language to what Gillespie uses in the (posthumous) *Treatise of Miscellany Questions*:

The Scripture is known to be indeed the word of God, by the beams of divine authority which it hath in itself, and by certain distinguishing characters, which do infallibly prove it to be the word of God; such as the heavenliness of the matter; the majesty of the style; the irresistible power over the conscience; the general scope, to abase man and to exalt God; nothing driven at but God’s glory and man’s salvation; the extraordinary holiness of the penmen of the Holy Ghost...the supernatural mysteries revealed therein, which could never have entered into the reason of men; the marvellous consent of all the parts and passages...the fulfilling of

15. *The Works of George Gillespie*, Vol. 1, p. xxxvii.

prophesies;...the conservation of the Scriptures against the malice of Satan and the fury of persecutors...yet all these cannot beget in the soul a full persuasion of faith that the Scriptures are the word of God; this persuasion is from the Holy Ghost in our hearts...¹⁶

In addition to this, the same historian has commented that: ‘Gillespie seems also to have been responsible for ensuring that in Chapter 23, *Of the Civil Magistrate*, the name of God rather than that of Christ should be used so that the Westminster Assembly would not be seen to be committing itself to the opinion that magistrates held their office from the Mediator.’¹⁷

In presenting the *Confession* at the General Assembly of 1647 Gillespie was to say: ‘the Confession of Faith is framed so as it is of great use against the floods of heresies and errors that over flow the land; nay, their intention of framing it was to meet with all the considerable errors of the present time...’¹⁸ This is as valid a comment for today, albeit the mainline Presbyterian Churches especially in the last 150 years have marginalised the *Confession* to such an extent that there is really no bulwark against heresy in the modern Scottish Church.

8. George Gillespie – a short life

Although Gillespie was minister at the High Kirk (St Giles) from 1642 he must have preached little whilst its minister as he was in London from the autumn of 1643 to the summer of 1647. Doubtless this accounts for so little by way of any of his sermonic material having been published. He did preach before the House of Lords (1645) and the House of Commons (1644), and very likely elsewhere in London during his sojourn there at the Assembly. Robert Wodrow wrote (1707) that a minister in Glasgow ‘told me that there was an English gentleman said to him, that he heard Mr Gillespie preach, and he said, he believed he was one of the greatest Presbyterians in the world.’¹⁹

As to his writings, these dealt with the issues of the day, mainly relating to the government of the Church and Church/state relations.²⁰

16. George Gillespie, ‘A Treatise of Miscellany Questions’, in *The Works of George Gillespie*, Vol. 2, pp. 105-6.

17. Hugh M. Cartwright, *George Gillespie* (Edinburgh, 2013), p. 22.

18. Ibid.

19. *The Works of George Gillespie*, Vol. 1, p. xxxviii.

20. Gillespie’s younger brother Patrick (1617-1675) published George’s *Treatise of*

John Macleod wrote that he ‘distinguished himself as a defender of the Reformed ideal of the Church’ and that he excelled as a debater. He calls him one of the marvels of the age: ‘He was one of the mighties of his age which was so fertile in massive and heroic figures in the field of Evangelical Christian Theology. He filled well his place at Westminster.’²¹

Gillespie was married to one Margaret Murray. They had four children, three boys and one girl. One of their sons, Robert Gillespie, became a covenanting minister and was at one time imprisoned on the Bass Rock (1673) for preaching at conventicles.²² A grandson, also George Gillespie, became a minister in Newark, Delaware (now USA).²³ George Gillespie did not survive long after he returned from London. He contracted tuberculosis. In 1648 he served as Moderator of the General Assembly, but shortly afterwards he became increasingly ill. He passed away at Kirkcaldy in December 1648, just a month or so short of his thirty-sixth birthday. Robert Wodrow relates that Samuel Rutherford came to see George on what turned out to be the day before he died. Rutherford said to him: ‘The day, I hope, is dawning and breaking in your soul, that shall never have an end.’ George replied: ‘It is not broken yet; but though I walk in darkness and see no light, I will trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon my God.’ Rutherford: ‘Doth not your soul love Christ above all things?’ Gillespie: ‘I love Him heartily: who ever knew anything of Him but would love Him?’ About half an hour before he died he rallied a bit and was heard to say: ‘Glory! Glory! a seeing of God! a seeing of God! I hope it shall be for His glory.’²⁴

George Gillespie’s mortal remains were interred in cemetery at Kirkcaldy. A tombstone erected by family and friends bore a lengthy inscription in Latin. After the restoration of episcopacy in 1660 the tombstone was broken up (in January 1661). The inscription was thought to be ‘scandalous’. The inscription, however, was preserved and in 1746 a plain tablet was erected by a grandson. It is explained on the stone: ‘This tomb

Miscellany Questions in 1649. This ranges over many issues of doctrinal and practical religion. Patrick was himself a prominent Covenanter and served as Principal of Glasgow University between 1653 and 1660. He was responsible for major rebuilding works at the University during the 1650s.

21. John Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh, 1946), pp. 79-80.

22. See J. Anderson, ‘The Martyrs of the Bass’, in *The Bass Rock* (Edinburgh, 1848), pp. 1-23.

23. Cartwright, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

24. *The Works of George Gillespie*, Vol. 1, p. xxxix.

being pulled down by the malignant influence of Archbishop Sharp, after the introduction of Prelacy, Mr George Gillespie, minister of the gospel at Strathmiglo, caused it to be re-erected, in honour of his said worthy grandfather, and as a standing monument of dutiful regard to his blessed memory.²⁵ The inscription on his gravestone in Kirkcaldy read: 'He was a man profound in genius, mild in disposition, acute in argument, flowing in eloquence, unconquered in mind. He drew to himself the love of the good, the envy of the bad, and the admiration of all. He was an ornament of his country, – a son worthy of such a father.'²⁶

9. Lessons from his life

We learn a great lesson from divines like George Gillespie: the normative authority of the supreme standard, the Holy Scriptures; uncompromising faithfulness to Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He was one of that godly array of divines whose all-consuming desire was for the crown rights of Jesus Christ, the God-man Redeemer and Head of his Church. He was a gift of God to the Church in Scotland. When we think of how greatly blessed and privileged the nation has been in the past, the situation today it nothing short of tragic. It relates to the displacement of the supreme authority of the Bible in Churches and in the hearts and lives of men and women. As Alexander Moody Stuart wrote in 1884 at the height of the rise of the Higher Critical movement in biblical scholarship:

The word of the Lord is pure, and out of this trial will come forth in all its brightness as silver out of the furnace. But, meanwhile, an unutterable calamity may overtake us, for our children may lose the one treasure we are bound to bequeath to them; and for long years they may wander 'through dry places seeking rest, and finding none,' before they recover their hold of the Word of Life, and regain their footing on the rock of eternal truth.²⁷

We, sadly, are in a generation in which the Church has largely lost its way in our nation and prayer is necessary for a recovery and times of revival and reformation from the presence of the Lord, that he might raise up in our day such giants of Christian conviction and piety as Henderson, Rutherford, and George Gillespie.

25. Hetherington, *op. cit.*, xxxii.

26. *Ibid.*, xxxiii

27. A. Moody Stuart, *The Bible True to Itself* (London, 1884), p. 187.