

“A Pillar and Buttress of the Truth”

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Inaugural Address March 11, 2021

By Jonathan L. Master

Members of the Board of Trustees, esteemed delegates, fellow-faculty members, students, and friends: It is a great privilege to speak to you today on this occasion, and I need to begin by conveying to you the gratitude I feel in delivering this address. A few years ago, I would never have envisioned this privilege. I had known of Greenville Seminary for over twenty years. I believed in what it stood for, and I had the privilege of meeting and befriending several members of the faculty. But there remained a sense in which I was, to quote an alumnus of the seminary with whom I just had lunch, somewhat out of the orbit.

Because of this, I owe a deep debt to a friend of mine and a trustee of the seminary who could not be with us today. Ian Hamilton persuaded me to enter the orbit of Greenville Seminary in a more concrete way as the presidential search process was just getting started.

As the search process moved forward, it did not take me long to realize that the key historical commitments of the seminary were ones that I shared. Even more remarkably, the educational philosophy, so carefully cultivated for over thirty years, was exactly in keeping with my own. The historical models to which the seminary's founders looked were largely the models from which I drew the most inspiration. I learned that our founding documents were modeled directly on those of Old Princeton. And the type of men we looked to as our models in seminary education were men like Archibald Alexander and Samuel Miller at Old Princeton, and those men just south of here at Ainsley Hall, the founding generation of the seminary David Calhoun calls, *Our Southern Zion*.¹

When looking at these institutions and the great men who served them, we can see key threads: a deep commitment to the inerrancy and authority of scripture, a joyful agreement with the Westminster Standards, and a commitment to serve the people of God. These

institutions were, at their core, guided by biblical doctrine and aiming at service to the church.

We revere the legacy of these places and of the greater and godlier men who have come before us (their portraits quite literally cover the walls of our institution), and we share that same approach in our own day: looking to the Bible and serving the church. This extends not just to the content of our instruction, but to our entire philosophy of pastoral preparation. When designing the curriculum and planning the schedule, the question before us always is and always must be: What does God's Word say about pastoral ministry? What are pastors supposed to be doing?

When we look to the New Testament, the work of the elder—both teaching elder and ruling elder—is clear, and our philosophy of seminary education is nothing more than a formalized attempt at working back from these unwavering principles in order to best serve the church, preparing men to be “approved workmen” who “rightly handle the Word of truth.”²

But today I would draw your attention not just to the description of godly pastoral ministry, but rather to a description Paul gives of the church. After explaining the purpose of his letter—“that you might know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church”—Paul then goes on to describe the church in this way: “the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

What does it mean to call the church “a pillar and buttress of the truth”? These words themselves are architectural metaphors, and they indicate that the church is meant to support and bolster—we might say, to

THE AUTHOR: In 2020 Dr. Jonathan L. Master succeeded Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. as president of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

1. David Calhoun, *Our Southern Zion: Old Columbia Seminary (1828-1927)* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012).

2. Both of these phrase are taken from 2 Timothy 2:15.

stiffen—the truth. Like a great set of classical columns on an ancient building, the true church acts a support of true teaching, of true ideas. The church is called to teach the truth of scripture, of course; but the church is also called to support the truth in general. In the midst of prevailing lies, the church, her officers, and any institution that serves her, must always stand on the side of the truth.

This is no small thing, because the fallen human project—what Augustine called, “the City of Man”—is always engaged in an assault on the truth. This assault manifests itself in different ways throughout different eras of history, but it is always with us.

In the Garden of Eden, Satan, whom the Bible calls “The father of lies” brazenly questions the clarity and authority of God’s Word to Adam with his question, so pregnant with deceptive implications, “Did God actually say?”. He follows up with direct lies about God’s command and God’s purposes and about the consequences of sin. Underneath it all is what we might call, The Big Lie. It is the lie that says that our desires, our name, our goals, our conclusions, ought really to be elevated above the Word of God. It is a familiar refrain: man is in charge, the captain of his own soul; man’s will and word is above the will and word of the Creator.

The story continues: Cain, whom the New Testament tells us, “belonged to the evil one” offers improper worship, murders his own brother, and founds a city the very name of which mocks God.

Lamech takes two wives in contradiction of the God-designed pattern in the garden and boasts about his many murders, telling his wives to “Listen to my voice;” and “Give heed to my speech.” This is all set against a background of great technological and artistic development—music, animal husbandry, and bronze- and iron-working. But as one commentator puts it, [This is] “Humanistic culture without God. It is egotism and pride centered in man.”³ And as we see, this man-centered culture, based ultimately on boastful lies, is also cruel and unyielding in its hatred of other men.

After the flood, men gather together to “make a name for themselves” and to “build a tower to the heavens.”⁴ As the great kingdoms of man rise and fall in the scriptures, they always seek to exalt themselves in some fashion—to make a name; to gain supremacy; to overthrow or sideline God. This Big Lie necessitates a series of supporting lies.

3. Francis A. Shaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time: The Flow of Biblical History*. Quoted from James Montgomery Boice, *Two Cities, Two Loves* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996), p. 46.

4. This is recorded in Genesis 11.

As an example of this, we might think of Nebuchadnezzar, that great ancient king, who declares: “Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Dan. 4:30). He was responsible for his creation and success; his identity, name, glory and majesty was the most important thing in the world.

Psalms 2 diagnosis it this way: “The peoples are devising a vain thing. The Kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and his Anointed, saying, ‘Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us!’” (Ps. 2:2-3). The Big Lie followed by the overthrow of God’s Word, God’s Law, and God’s Anointed.

Where does the church stand in the midst of the City of Man, this city of lies? *As a pillar and buttress of the truth.*

As the City of Man builds and rebuilds based on lies, the true prophets always oppose it. We might remember, for instance, Micaiah ben Imlah. In the face of two kings, four hundred false prophets who functioned as the religious establishment, and one particularly assertive prophet waiving around a set of iron horns in a strange parody of a Deuteronomic promise, Micaiah nonetheless speaks the truth, unwelcome though it was. We might say that the fellow ministers in his denomination were against him; a prominent minister was making specious biblical arguments, and two kings held his earthly freedom in their hands. Undaunted even when being dragged into prison, Micaiah’s posture toward the truth can best be summarized by his first words as recorded in 2 Chronicles 18: “As the LORD lives, what my God says, that I will speak” (2 Chron. 18:13).

This bold commitment to proclaim only the truth of God’s Word must be coupled with the refusal to compromise the truth for the sake of cultural gain. When the godly king Jehoshaphat is confronted by Jehu son of Hanani this is the point of contention. In trying to find a way to advance the cause of God’s people, Jehoshaphat had allied himself with the deceitful king, Ahab. Jehu rebukes him: “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?” (2 Chron. 19:2).

That posture of unintimidated commitment to speak the truth of God’s Word and to refuse compromise with lies is echoed in the New Testament accounts of the apostles, especially in that of the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians, Paul describes his ministry this way: “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raise up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

We see this same kind of work on display in the book

of Acts, when Paul is described alternately as "reasoning" "persuading" and "speaking out boldly" (Cf. Acts 19:8). And it is no surprise that Paul describes the pastoral office as consisting of these same types of activities—proclamation of the truth, correction of error, and adherence to sound doctrine in season and out of season.

Let us consider for a moment what this means for pastors today. Those entrusted with the leadership and care of Christ's church, ordained as under-shepherds, must endeavor to teach and lead in such a way that the truth is elevated, promoted, and freely taught. Pastors do not have liberty to lie, nor are they justified in shaving off the hard edges of the Word of Truth, the Bible. Without question this requires courage. This is why the apostle Paul, in saying farewell to the Ephesian elders among whom he had spent so much time and with whom he had exerted such effort for the truth, reminds them that he did not "shrink back." Shrink back from what? "From declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

We are tempted to shrink back from the Bible today because there is always pressure. At a personal level, we instinctively know what topics rub people in our own generation the wrong way, so we often tend to avoid them. We know that teaching about eternal conscious punishment in Hell is unpalatable to many in our corner of the world and moment in time; we understand that biblical teaching about marriage and sexuality cuts against the grain of our culture today, making us, in many cases, nothing short of pariahs.

The pressure points—the little lies—differ depending on the time and location. In the Jewish world of the first century—the days of the Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry—the Sadducees, amongst all the Jewish groups—achieved the most success in Roman society. Why? Because they shaved off the most offensive aspects of biblical truth. In their case, they denied the bodily resurrection as well as angels. After all, those were two truths that trumped anything Rome could threaten. Anyone believing in bodily resurrection could not be intimidated by the threat of Roman execution. And having a conviction about angels meant that even the most secure prison could, if God so chose, be opened by one angelic visitation.

Accepting the lies of the prevailing culture did win the Sadducees wealth, ease, and superficial influence over the Roman rulers of Judea. But our Lord Jesus Christ harshly condemned them. "Woe unto you..." And, "You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29).

In our own day, Edward Feser, the eminent philosopher, has identified the animating intellectual lies as being a kind of new Gnosticism. Gnosticism, both in the first centuries of the church and today, begins with a lie about creation. He writes, "The Gnostic mentality is... one of *radical alienation* from the created order. It sees that order as something to be destroyed or escaped from rather than redeemed."⁵

But the goodness of creation is affirmed repeatedly in the Bible. When Paul refutes false teaching, he explicitly says that it is based a misapprehension of creation: "For everything created by God is good and is to be received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:4). This is true of food, of marriage, of the creation of male and female in God's image.

Gnosticism does not stop with a rejection of creation. It also creates an alternate understanding of revelation. Again quoting from Feser: "It holds that the truth *cannot* be known from the appearance of things or from any official sources, but has been passed along 'under the radar' and is accessible only to the initiated. The Gnostic epistemology is what today would be called a 'hermeneutics of suspicion.'" Feser goes on to state therefore that, "The Gnostic mindset [new and old] sees reality in starkly Manichean terms, as a twilight struggle between the sinister forces that rule this evil world and those who have been 'purified' of it and armed with gnos̄is." He goes on to liken this to a word which is used to describe the enlightened today: "woke" (Feser, *ibid.*).

Because of the stark differences between the enlightened and everyone else, there is no place for dialogue or humility when dealing with others. "The Gnostic mindset is not interested in such common ground or tolerant of such differences" (Feser, *ibid.*).

Feser writes: "As Voegelin famously put it, modern forms of Gnosticism 'immanentize the eschaton'... they relocate the final victory of the righteous in *this* world rather than the next, and look forward to heaven on earth" (Feser, *ibid.*).

You can no doubt connect the dots yourselves in following their analysis. Feser identifies new modern gnosticisms: Marxism, National Socialism, and even Critical Race Theory as fitting these criteria (Feser, *ibid.*). These totalizing and corrosive philosophies reject creation, reject revelation, and have an alternate, this-world eschatology. The Big underlying Lie, coupled with a rejection of God and His Anointed. The script of the City of Man hardly changes.

5. Edward Feser, "The Gnostic heresy's political successors," Friday, January 8, 2021 <http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2021/01/the-gnostic-heresys-political-successors.html>.

The appeal of abandoning the Bible in the face of the prevailing City of Man is always strong, but Jesus has harsh words for those who compromise on the truth, for modern day Sadducees within the church. He unequivocally states: “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” (Luke 9:26).

The world of our day, like the world of Jesus’ day, the world of yesterday and tomorrow, has no sympathy for the fullness of God’s Word. Our culture today wants to stand in judgment over the truth of God’s Word and over anyone who seeks to follow it. As Martin Luther’s hymn reminds us, “For still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe.”

By obediently tethering our minds to the Word of God we are setting ourselves up for persecution and derision. This is no surprise. Jesus Christ said to his disciples: “If they hated me, they will hate you also” (John 15:18). And the apostle Paul writes: “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Yet the church must stand for truth. It is her calling, her identity, and that can never be negotiated.

What does this mean for the seminary? How would the assertion that the church is a pillar and buttress of the truth shape our formal and organized efforts to prepare the next generation of pastors? I would suggest two obvious implications, though many more could no doubt be given.

First, such a seminary would have to *transparently* stand for the truth. In recent history it has frequently been the case that the seminaries led the assault on the truths and truthfulness of scripture. We can even see this trend continuing right before our eyes today as institutions abandon or, in many cases, obfuscate their doctrinal commitments. This is not the time to duck and find cover. If we perish, we perish, but we stand on the Word of God.

We are people of the Bible, committed to the open presentation of the truths of the Word of God. This devotion to biblical teaching leads us to transparent doctrinal commitment. We hold to the teaching of our Westminster Standards, and these doctrinal convictions are clearly presented, and are shared by all who teach here, and all who serve on the Board.

Since these convictions are publicly shared and tightly held, we are restricted in a certain sense; but there is great liberty in transparency and in the unity and cohesion that only doctrinal commitment can provide.

In this seminary, we must never seek clever strategies

for doing an end-run around the convictions we publicly hold. As the apostle Paul says of his own ministry, we are: “not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God, but by the manifestation of truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:12).

Along with transparent commitment to the teaching of scripture and to a confession which summarizes that teaching, we must never be caught up in mere self-promotion or self-perpetuation. Something bigger is at stake. We stand for truth, always on guard against doctrinal error, but also on guard against the siren song of spin, of cover-ups, and of minimizing doctrinal decline. Transparency about the truth must be our governing approach as we serve that pillar and buttress of the truth.

And this goes hand in hand with accountability. Since we serve the church, those who serve here must have the church as their first source of accountability. The seminary classroom is no place for a man who seeks an independent audience, or who occupies his role because of broad celebrity status. It is not for a man who wants to build a brand or to escape the messy realities of church accountability. Our lives as Christians should always be centered around a faithful local church. This is a place for those who are ordained by and thus subject to the oversight of a local congregation and a regional church. We believe that church structure matters—it’s in our name and it must be embedded into our culture.

The churches to which we are accountable must themselves be confessionally transparent and committed to the inspired and inerrant Word of God as their authority. They ought to be structured around the rule of elders at a local and regional level—men who themselves are accountable to one another and to the doctrinal standards to which we hold fast.

We do not have to look far to see that much of what passes as Christian leadership within evangelicalism is unbounded, untethered, and unaccountable. But a seminary serving the church and thus serving the truth must never become that way, and individual professors must never become that way. We are servants of Christ and His Church. The seminary is not bigger or more necessary than the church it serves. Our men must be those who have served the church with joy and distinction and whose seminary instruction is the overflow of their commitment to Christ and to His church, a pillar and ground of the truth. This accountability is part of what it means to stand for the truth.

Alongside these basic commitments, we dare not miss the fact that the majority of requirements for service as an officer in Christ’s church are requirements of

character. These can be hard to measure, but must always remain preeminent in our thinking. As Dr. Pipa so frequently said, "We are a seminary, not just a graduate school of theology."

I want to state clearly that we are not here to grant credentials to a professional class of pulpiteers and counselors. Our aim is to cultivate, shape, and prepare men for the ministry of the gospel. All of our literature begins with an emphasis on "personal piety" and is designed to lead to a ministry of "prayer-filled Christ-likeness" and "experimental preaching." These may be antiquated terms to some, but they are biblical, and thus timeless, ideas.

It isn't enough to refute false doctrine and to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" if this is not accompanied by "great patience and instruction." In the midst of what Paul knew would be difficult times—times of error and apostasy and cultural opposition and Gnosticisms old and new—he wrote, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all" (2 Tim. 2:24a). He goes on to describe the godly minister as, "able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those in opposition" (2 Tim. 2:24b).

Personal piety, rightly understood, expresses itself in this type of kindness, patience, and humility, trusting that "the sacred writings" themselves "give the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 3:15b).

We aim to cultivate preachers who model this kind of humble confidence in God's Word, and whose hearers—the sheep under their care—bear this kind of fruit in love.

To truly serve the church we must be people of the truth. In a world of new Gnosticism at the academic level, and cultural therapeutic deism at the popular level, the church and the seminary which serves her, must represent A Place for Truth. We must cultivate men who, to use Solzineitzin's noble phrase "live not by lies."⁶

As most of you know, this ceremony was initially scheduled for last fall. The delay and the travel restrictions which still persist have meant that many friends who wanted to be here were not able to attend. None of this seems ideal, but, as I reflected on the timing, I concluded that I am glad to be speaking to you nine months into my new role instead of three months into it. This extra time has afforded me the opportunity to take stock of the work of Greenville Seminary in a way that three months of experience would not have. What I have witnessed brings me great encouragement.

By God's grace, this is a place, like the faithful seminaries of the past, which has dedicated herself to serving

the church by holding fast to God's Word. This is a place committed to the truth—the truth of the Bible, and to the One who is Truth Incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This commitment has led us to intentional confessional transparency and ecclesiastical accountability at every level.

At Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary we aim to serve faithfully and joyfully, confessing our hope in the face of the lies of the City of Man. We do this with confidence, knowing that the one who has begun a good work in His church will carry it to completion in the Day of Christ Jesus. We are acutely aware that, in the midst of the City of Man, the church glorifies God as a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Today, if nothing else, I want to publicly express to both God and to all of you the immense privilege I feel in having your support in *this* role for *this* endeavor.

In the words of the psalmist, may this be a place, where "One generation commends God's work to another" (Ps. 145:4); a place where we act in courage, as we make disciples of the One to whom, "all authority in heaven and on earth is given." May this be a place where we serve that pillar and buttress of the truth, the church of the living God. ■

6. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Live Not By Lies." The entirety of this Solzineitzin address can be accessed at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03064220408537357>.

In Brief: Death of the Rev. Dr. M'Crie. The following appeared in *The Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, new series, No. XLIV, Vol. IV, No. VIII (August, 1835), pp. 572–576. It has been edited for spelling and editorial notes. While a biography was later published, it is of interest as a period notice of the death of M'Crie. Thomas M'Crie (1772–1835) was a minister of what became the Original Secession Church, writer and historian, most famous perhaps for his *Life of John Knox* (1811). M'Crie's anonymous contribution to the *Instructor* on the Marrow Controversy appeared in the previous issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

DEATH OF THE REV. DR. M'CRIE

This deeply-lamented event took place at his own house, Salisbury Place, Newington, on Wednesday the 5th instant, about half-past twelve o'clock; and we most cordially concur in the sentiments of the Editor of the Scottish Guardian on the occasion, that by means of it "the church has sustained a loss similar to that which is suffered in the sudden and unlooked-for death of Dr. Thomson; and that as there was none upon whom the mantle of the one fell, there is but little hope of a successor to the spirit of the other. His spirit was one of deep discernment, of wisdom, and of counsel. His mind was not of this superficial and agitating age, but had the riches and repose of the olden and studious times. How delightful it would have been, how to instructive the church and the world, to have received a full record of the dying thoughts of so great and good a man! They might have been a lesson and comfort

1. "He was taken ill about five o'clock in the afternoon of that day; between ten and eleven he fell into a stupor, from which he never revived, and expired on Wednesday, about half-past twelve o'clock, in the 64th year of his age and 40th of his ministry." *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, part third (1835): 132. "On Tuesday, the 4th of August, after having returned home from visiting some of his people, he was seized in the afternoon with a sudden and severe attack of pain in the bowels. Medical advice having been procured, he obtained some relief; and to the anxious inquiries of his friends, he said he was better, and had no fears of any immediate danger. Shortly afterwards, he fell into a slumber, which soon assumed a very alarming character. He had gradually and insensibly sunk into a stupor, out of which it was found impossible to awaken him. Dr Abercromby, on being sent for, pronounced his recovery hopeless. The disease had all the symptoms of apoplexy; and during the whole of the trying night which followed, he neither spoke, nor gave signs of being sensible of what was addressed to him. In this state he continued till next day, Wednesday the 5th of August 1835, when, about half-past twelve at noon, surrounded by his friends and many of his beloved flock, who had collected to witness his last moments, without a groan or a struggle, his spirit entered into rest. At his death, he was in the sixty-third year of his age, and the fortieth of his ministry." *Life of Thomas M'Crie* by his son the Rev. Thomas M'Crie (1840; Philadelphia: Young, 1842), p. 339.

to many. But God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts. It has pleased Him to give us a lesson in a different way." He had, we understand, been complaining for some days; but was so far from being seriously indisposed that he not only preached the whole of the preceding Sabbath, but went out on Tuesday and took his usual forenoon's walk. That afternoon, however, about five o'clock, he was taken alarmingly ill; and between ten and eleven, fell into a stupor, from which no medical means had any effect in recovering him.¹ He was a native of Dunse in Berwickshire, being born there in 1772; and was ordained in Edinburgh,—which was ever afterwards the scene of his stated labors—in 1795; so that he was in the sixty-fourth year of his age, and the fortieth of his ministry.

CHARACTER AND WRITINGS

We gladly avail ourselves of two articles that have appeared, the one in the *Edinburgh Courant*, evidently written by a discriminating as well as an attached friend; and the other in the *Scottish Guardian*, by the Rev. C. J. Brown of Anderston Church, Glasgow, who knew well how to appreciate both his talents and his worth.

"Christianity and Europe," says the latter, "have lost, in the death of a Scotchman and fellow-citizen, one of the noblest defenders of the one, and of the other's most illustrious ornaments. It is not easy, indeed, for those who knows [*sic* knew] him familiarly in Edinburgh, all at once to grasp the extent of their loss, or the probable duration of his fame. In the easy intercourse of life, his homely wisdom, his calm piety, the humorous cheerfulness of his temper and conversation, which neither bodily pain nor mental vexation seemed capable for a moment of disturbing; his unaffected kindness to others, almost in the proportion of their having nothing about them which could gratify ambition or vanity in return; the cautious, and prudent, and painstaking adaptation of his finer sympathies to all the varieties of distress that came under his eye—we think but of these, for we were privileged to be the daily witnesses of them, and they were points of character which won at once and irresistibly on every heart amongst us that now deplores in him a departed friend. But what will Europe—what will America feel, when they hear that he who kindled the torch of his mighty genius at the light of the first Reformation, and who had sent round from country to country, and from church to church, a call for the general rekindling of that light, in the very midst of his last and most resolved effort, has had that torch for ever quenched by a premature and sudden death? The fame of other writers must be content to hang on the taste they bred or the taste they followed, but that of the historian of the Reformers of Scotland, of the martyrs of Italy and Spain, and of Calvin, must brighten with every fresh triumph of a cause destined in the course of time to embrace the whole earth."

"It were idle to attempt enumerating all the labors of his capacious mind and indefatigable industry—the wonder is that any physical powers could have held out so long under such an incessant pressure. Times past and times present—interests the most remote and interests close at hand—counsels to churches and nations, and counsels to the humblest members of a humble flock—correspondence with the living, and fatiguing researches into the cross lights and casual glances at forgotten facts, in the letters of the long departed dead—languages dead and living—opinions old and new; parties, schools and sects of all times and descriptions—well may we stand aghast at the contemplation of demands so manifold and various on the time and thoughts of this withal thoroughly domestic man and faithful Christian minister. But he had been early consecrated for his work, and was trained for it in a severe but most efficient school. When first setting out from his home in Berwickshire, as we have heard him tell, his pious mother accompanied him, took him into a field off the road, knelt down with him by the hedge-side, and solemnly devoted her son to God.² And the Lord heard and accepted her gift. In his wise Providence, He placed him early and kept him long in that school of obscurity and perplexity and trial in which so many of the Church's most faithful defenders have been nurtured. His Roman mind was, perhaps, constitutionally strung against yielding to obloquy, or meanly purchasing ease by trimming to popular errors—errors then very latent, but not so latent as to escape his sagacious ken, and now, as he predicted, full-grown and palpable. Perhaps no man with so unblemished a character, ever fell so low in general contempt as our townsman did when excommunicated from the religious body to which he belonged,³ and set adrift on the wide world, with a wife and family, because his judgment was too acute not to see the whole mischief involved in the *new light* doctrines of the body that expelled him, and his honesty too downright for a moment to conceal the convictions of that judgment. He was actually the only evangelical minister in Edinburgh who was not asked to join the Committee of the Bible Society when first instituted here, so blind were we all to his true character, and to the sterling value of his opinions. But more than Roman courage was required for the result. Christian faith led him boldly to take his own course, heedless alike of the smiles and frowns of the world around him. Upheld and led by that unerring principle, his fame has, in the course of less than thirty years, so grown with his usefulness, that, in both respects, he has left all his former despisers infinitely behind."

"Viewing Dr. M'Crie," says Mr. Brown, "as a Christian man, we look back on one the whole tenor of whose life gave evidence of deep, and elevated, and humble piety. His personal character was not only irreproachable, but eminently exemplary. If his profession was high and peculiar, it was borne

out by his life. What he taught so ably and eloquently from the press and the pulpit, his conduct exemplified. He was often brought into circumstances fitted to put the strength of his Christian principles to the test; and he as often showed, that neither personal ease, nor reputation among men, was so dear to him as the service of Christ and a good conscience. We should add here, what could not fail to make his character and example the more influential, that he was a person of the most amiable, and every way winning manners in the intercourse of private life. [In private life, indeed, Dr. M'Crie was far more bland and amiable than strangers might have been led to infer from the sternness of his principles on controverted points of ecclesiastical polity. In the family circle, and in all the relationships of social life, none displayed more than he did of the milk of human kindness. None could behold without esteeming the unaffected simplicity of his character, his benevolence, his unostentatious piety, his homely wisdom, the uniform cheerfulness of his temper and conversation, which neither bodily pain nor mental vexation seemed capable for a moment of disturbing.]

"As a Minister of the Gospel, Dr. M'Crie was of no common eminence. If his preaching was not distinguished for that particular kind of eloquence which has of late years become fashionable in Scotland, yet was he, in our judgment, one of the best preachers in the country. A rich and exalted tone of doctrine, deep seriousness, and affectionate, though calm earnestness, copiousness of scriptural illustration, an elegant and chaste simplicity of diction, together with fullness of practical application to the hearts and consciences of his hearers,—these were qualities which appeared prominently in his discourses. In lecturing on the historical Scriptures he was peculiarly happy, bringing to bear on the lives of Jewish patriarchs and kings, the same acuteness of perception, knowledge of the heart, and accurate discrimination of character, which shine in his biographies. If in other departments of preaching he excelled most men, in this he seemed to excel himself. How he acted in the important situation of Theological Professor, which he long filled in the excellent body of Seceders with which he was connected, we have no particular means of knowing; yet the superior character of the younger ministers generally of his connection, bears ample witness to his eminence and success in conducting their studies. [His sterling

2. See *Life of Thomas M'Crie*, p. 16.

3. M'Crie was raised in the Anti-Burgher fragment of the original Associate Presbytery, the Secession Church founded as a result of the Marrow Controversy, which had splintered over several controversies. By the end of that century a movement to reject the Establishment Principle had taken hold a majority of this denomination. M'Crie and three others were disciplined for maintaining the original principle. On the controversy that produced M'Crie's *Statement of the Difference* and his subsequent deposition and suspension from receiving the Lord's Supper, see *ibid.*, pp. 88ff.

worth, too, and the faithful discharge of his various pastoral duties, endeared him to his flock, and kept them from falling into temptation too common with sectarians, of running after more fashionable teachers, and being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Among them his loss will be deeply deplored, and they will not find it easy to supply the blank which his sudden demise has occasioned.]

“But worthy of high respect and esteem as Dr. M’Crie was, both as a Christian man and minister, he was remarkable chiefly as a writer, in which character, as his fame had extended beyond the limits of this country, so his loss will be felt, not in Scotland only, but in Europe and America. In a very high degree his lives of Knox and Melville unite the peculiar excellences of both history and biography. The history is marked by profound research, by extensive erudition, by unwearied care in the unraveling of controverted facts, by a generous candor, and by enlarged and truly philosophic reflection, pointing the mind of the reader to the great practical uses of the events narrated. The biography is characterized, not only by the same successful care in clearing up the events in the individual’s life, but by an admirable tact in laying open the springs and motives of his actions, showing their bearing on the history of the period, and, generally, portraying his character with vigor, minuteness, and accuracy. But principally are these works important for the mighty service they have done to the cause of the Reformation in Scotland. They have rescued from unmerited obloquy the character and actions of our leading Reformers: they have shown what a debt of gratitude is owing to them, under God, not only to the cause of religion, but of liberty also, and learning: they have exposed the erroneous and partial character of those statements, by means of which Hume and other historians had occupied the minds of the English, and multitudes of the Scotch also, with the idea that Knox and his coadjutors were little better than a set of rude barbarians and ignorant zealots: they have left on record, for the use of posterity, many of the noblest models of

all that is great in solid learning, ardent piety, attachment to sound doctrine, love of genuine liberty, and historic Christian fortitude: and, in a word, they have drawn a flood of light on the transactions of one of the most important periods of our history, bringing the whole also to bear on the interests of vital godliness, the spirit of which runs through every chapter of these works, commending them to the love of the Christian mind; while the elegance of the style, the extent of erudition, and the vigor of thought, cannot fail to command the attention and respect even of the mere man of the world.

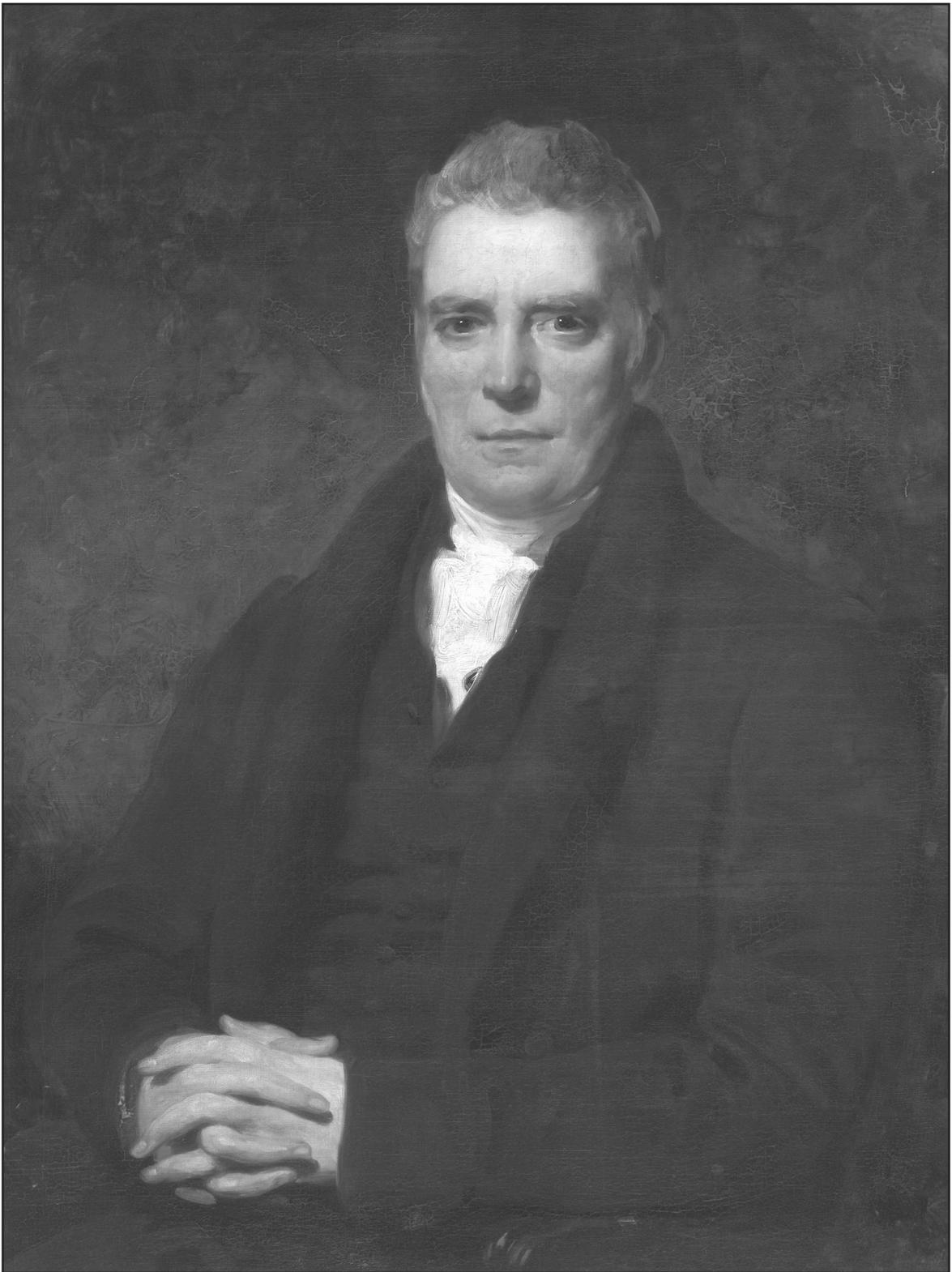
“It was long hoped that Dr. M’Crie would have continued his series of biographies in the life of the famous Alex. Henderson, who so much distinguished himself in the Assembly 1638, and was one of the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly. That this work has never appeared, is certainly much to be lamented. Those, however, who can lay their hands on a periodical long carried on under the name of the *Christian Magazine*, (we cannot refer to the particular number,) will find there a memoir of Henderson, which is known to have come from the pen of the biographer of Knox.⁴ In connection with these works, we must not omit to remind the reader, that, as much evil was done to the cause of religion in Scotland, by an eminent novelist in his caricatures, (for they deserve no better name,) of our reformers and covenanters of a later period; so Dr. M’Crie provided an admirable antidote, in an able, learned, and beautifully written review of *Tales of my Landlord*, which appeared soon after their publication, in the *Christian Instructor* for 1817, and which is well worthy the perusal of every man who would form a right judgment of the character of these times. [The lives of Veitch and Brysson, also, which he drew up from original documents, form an interesting epistle in the history of the Covenanters.]

Dr. M’Crie, however, was not the historian of the Scottish Reformation alone. He produced two admirable volumes, the one in 1827, on the rise, progress, and final suppression of the Reformation in Italy, and the other soon after on the same subject with reference to Spain,—certainly not so important as his two principal works, yet exhibiting the same great qualities of mind, and laying open many interesting facts which were very difficult of access, and so, of course, are the more valuable. For the few last years of his life he was engaged in a work which promises to be of much importance,—the life of the illustrious Calvin, of whose character and actions we possess no account of merit, connected though these were very closely with the progress of the Reformation, not in a portion of Switzerland only, but in a great part of Europe, and especially in Scotland. It will be a ground of fervent thankfulness if, as there seems reason to hope, this work has been left by its author in a state of sufficient forwardness to admit of its publication.⁵

“But there is another department of Dr. M’Crie’s writings

4. This was republished in *Miscellaneous Writings, Chiefly Historical, of the Late Thomas M’Crie, D.D.* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, 1841), and in *Lives of Alexander Henderson and James Guthrie: With Specimens of Their Writings*, by Thomas M’Crie and Thomas Thomson (Edinburgh: Printed for the Assembly’s Committee [Free Church of Scotland], 1846).

5. His son described what he perceived the public would find to be the disappointing state of the manuscript Life of Calvin left by his father. *Life of M’Crie*, pp. 342ff. “The interest which the public has shown with regard to the manuscripts of Dr M’Crie, and especially his unfinished Life of Calvin, demands a particular account of the state in which they have been left. Few of these manuscripts, I regret to say, are in such a state of preparation as would render it proper to publish them. The manuscript of Calvin’s Life extends no farther than the commencement of a fourth chapter. Of the three chapters which have been fairly written out, and which may be considered fit for the press, the first contains an account of the early life of the Reformer,



Thomas M'Crie (1772–1835) by Sir John Watson Gordon (1788–1864).

which it would be unpardonable to pass by without special remark, even in this slight notice, where several things must be wholly omitted. Every one knows that this great and good man was a Seceder from the Church of Scotland. To her doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, in all its parts, he was warmly attached; and he retained his attachment undiminished to the day of his death. But he not only believed that certain serious evils had entered in and corrupted the church's administration, but deemed these sufficient to justify, nay require, his remaining in a state of separation from her communion. When that controversy arose in the Secession, which, under a peculiar name, turned upon the very question respecting the connection of Church and State, that now threatens to convulse these kingdoms, Dr. M'Crie warmly espoused what, among his brethren, rapidly became the unfashionable side, maintaining the same doctrine for which we contend at this day. He had, on this account, to bear the scorn of many, as one supposed to be suffering for a mere trifle; for the question of the magistrate's power had not then assumed the shape of an attack on existing institutions, but merely that of a difference in abstract principle. The importance of this difference was not perceived even by most in the established church. But his acute and penetrating mind saw the important practical bearings of that theory. He opened these up, together with a full defense of his own principles on the subject, in a very able paper, partly written and wholly revised by him, which appeared as far back as the year 1806. For a long time however the difference still appeared to many to be one of little importance; but in due time, what Dr. M'Crie had foreseen as not unlikely, came to pass in fact. The New Light opinions, from a variety of causes, continued to gain ground; and were at length in circumstances for ex-

bringing it down to the close of his academical career. The second commences with a somewhat detailed history of the introduction of the Reformation into France, and the sufferings of its early martyrs; and resuming the biography of Calvin at 1533, when he embraced the reformed opinions, prosecutes it to 1535, giving an account of the Preface to his "Institution of the Christian Religion," but "reserving to a future stage a more particular account of the work." The third chapter is wholly occupied with a minute account of the city of Geneva, "its external relations and internal government, and the leading facts connected with the introduction of the Reformation into the city and its territories." The fourth chapter recommences the Life of Calvin at the period when he took up his residence in Geneva, but contains only two or three pages which are occupied with an account of the Anabaptists. The whole manuscript extends to no more than 105 quarto pages." It was forty years before it appeared in print. The work was eventually published as volume 12 of M'Crie's works. *The Early Years of John Calvin: A Fragment, 1509-1536*, edited by William Ferguson (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1880). The editor prefaces the work: "No apology is necessary for offering the public this fragment. So far as it goes, it is complete; and with its three hundred notes and references to more than sixty authors, it is a valuable literary treasure."

hibiting their true character in an open and avowed attack, no longer on the principle merely, but on the very existence of the Established Church, together with all those fences and safeguards which public law has hitherto thrown around the institutions of religion.

But it was not by the force of his argument alone that Dr. M'Crie formed a powerful friend of the cause of our Establishment in this its time of need. The very testimony of such a man, living as he did in a state of separation from the Church,—his having suffered for adherence to these very principles,—his having done so at a period when the Church was so generally corrupt as to furnish a plausible argument for the essential inexpediency and unlawfulness of Established Church,—and, in a word, his continuing to adhere to the same sentiments after all that had been spoken and written against them, and though he openly said to the last, that he saw no immediate prospect of being able conscientiously to join the Church,—all these facts independently of the arguments by which in his writings he so ably defended the principle of Establishments, form a very powerful argument in its favour, and one to which, on various accounts, we are able to appeal with a peculiarly good grace.

"On the whole, in whatever light we view this eminent man—whether we look to his personal character, to his ministerial gifts and usefulness, or to his writings,—whether we connect him with the cause of the Reformation in Europe at large, with the history of the Church of Scotland in its most interesting periods, or with the present and peculiar difficulties by which she is beset, it is impossible not to regard his unexpected removal from the midst of us, at the age of sixty-four, in the full vigor of his faculties, and in the midst of his varied labors, as affording ground of deep regret, not only to his family, his congregation, his brethren in the ministry, and the whole religious connection of which he was so distinguished an ornament, but to the Church of Scotland generally, and to the interests of religion and literature at large. No longer shall the pen of this ready and heaven-taught writer be employed in removing the reproach of Martyrs and Christian heroes, showing how true religion has ever gone hand in hand with solid learning and genuine liberty, and drawing lessons of wisdom for the world's use from history sacred and profane. No longer shall we catch the inspiration of that eye which, lighted up from a brighter within, was wont to communicate to many an anxious auditor a portion of its own sacred fire. That eye is now closed in the sleep of death; and those lips, which, from Sabbath to Sabbath, dropped wisdom, and faithful reproof, and heavenly consolation, are sealed 'till the heavens be no more.' 'Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?' 'How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!'" ■