

Reformed Presbyterian Criticism of the 1859 Ulster Revival's Impact on Worship and Church Order

By Daniel Ritchie¹

I.

The 1859 Revival has often been seen as the high point in Ulster's religious history,² having been portrayed by evangelicals as a dramatic outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which led to mass conversions and widespread societal reformation.³ As a result of the Revival, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (P.C.I.) gained 10,636 new communicant members and the bulk of the Revival's converts.⁴ Yet not all orthodox Christians were entirely comfortable with what took place during the awakening, causing various clergymen to offer critiques of the movement. Some of these critics were to be found in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, or, as they are often known, the Covenanters. This group has its roots in the Second Scottish Reformation (1638–1649), and with the Cameronians, who maintained a witness for the principles of the Second Reformation against what they saw as the antichristian tyranny of Charles II and James II. The removal of the Stuarts at the Glorious Revolution 1688–9 did not satisfy the Cameronians, as they dissented from the Revolution Settlement due to their continued insistence upon the perpetual obligation of the National Covenant of Scotland (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643). Since the new established Church of Scotland did not officially recognise the descending obligation of the covenants, the Covenanters remained aloof from it.⁵ In Ulster, the remaining Covenanters were ministered to by the Revd David Houston; he had earlier been deposed by the Route Presbytery for continuing

to adhere to the covenants, while other Presbyterians had defected from these attainments.⁶ By the time of his death in 1696, Adam Loughridge surmised that Houston's

"The public career of the Revd Isaac Nelson," who was a nineteenth-century Irish Presbyterian clergyman, abolitionist, anti-revivalist and home rule politician. The author is a member of Dromara Reformed Presbyterian Church (Covenanter) in Co. Down, Northern Ireland.

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2. Ulster refers to the nine counties which make up the northern province of Ireland. What is now Northern Ireland consists of six of these counties.

3. David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster society 1740–1890* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 153.

4. William Gibson, *The year of grace: A history of the Ulster Revival in 1859* (Edinburgh, London and Belfast: C. Aitchison et al, 1860), 404.

5. Adam Loughridge, *The Covenanters in Ireland: a history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland* (2nd edn, Belfast: Cameron Press, 1987), 5–8.

6. Peter Brooke claims that the mainstream Presbyterians in Ulster abandoned the covenants in the 1670s. See Peter Brooke, "Controversies in Ulster Presbyterianism, 1790–1836" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1980), 32. David Houston's relationship with James Renwick receives some mention in Alexander Shields's biography of the martyr. See Alexander Shields, *The life and death of that eminently pious, free and faithful minister and martyr of Jesus Christ, Mr James Renwick: with a vindication of the heads of his dying testimony. Written by the learned and famous Mr Alexander Shields, then preacher of the gospel in the fields. Whereunto is subjoined, the manner of admission, or ordaining of ruling elders, by Mr James Renwick; and some of his many religious letters. Diligently compared with the original, and never before published* (Edinburgh: John McMain, 1724), 101, 127. However, for a discussion of the fraught relationship which Houston had with the covenanting societies in Scotland, see Robert Simpson, *Life of the Rev. James Renwick, the last of the Scottish martyrs* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1843), 124–9, 152. Although Houston was highly

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ministry had united the covenanting societies and had isolated them from other Presbyterians in Ulster.⁷ However, it is important to understand that the Covenanters did not view themselves as separatists, who forsook one church to form another in a schismatic fashion. On the contrary, writing in 1858, the Revd Josias A. Chancellor concluded, "It was no secession from other churches, but simply continued adherence to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, that gave the Reformed Presbyterian Church a distinct existence in Ulster, nearly two hundred years ago."⁸ Nevertheless, it was not until 1757 that the first Covenanter minister was ordained in Ireland, as the Revd William Martin received ordination at The Vow (a town-land near Ballymoney), Co. Antrim. Martin was initially subject to the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, until the ordination of the Revd Matthew Lynn in 1763 made the formation of an Irish Reformed Presbytery a possibility, only for the Presbytery to collapse in 1779.⁹ However, the Presbytery was reconstituted in December 1792, and the denomination grew to such

esteemed by Renwick and Michael Shields, Simpson argues that in October 1695, the United Societies disowned any who countenanced Houston due to his laxity of discipline. *Ibid.*, 129. For an account of Houston's disputes with the Route Presbytery see J. S. Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Comprising the civil history of the province of Ulster from the accession of James the first: with a preliminary sketch of the progress of the Reformed religion in Ireland during the sixteenth century. And an appendix, consisting of original papers*, ed. W. D. Killen, 3 vols. (Belfast: William Mullan, 1867), ii, 328–31.

7. Loughridge, *Covenanters in Ireland*, 11–13. James Seaton Reid concurs that Houston was the principle architect of Reformed Presbyterianism in Ireland, but was less complimentary in his analysis of Houston's role: "This self-willed and unstable preacher, by his irregular proceedings, laid the foundation of that schism in the Presbyterian Church in Ulster which still subsists; and he is claimed as one of the earliest witnesses to the peculiar opinions of the Covenanting or Reformed Presbyterian Church that appeared in the North of Ireland." Reid, *History*, ii, 331.

8. [J. A. Chancellor], *Review of a tract entitled "Tekel. The Reformed Presbyterian Church and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, weighed in the balance of truth."* Reprinted, with some alterations from the "Covenanter" (Belfast) for October, 1858 (Londonderry: The Sentinel Office, 1858), 3.

9. Loughridge, *Covenanters in Ireland*, 19–23.

10. *Ibid.*, 28, 55. This year marks the two hundredth anniversary of the Irish Covenanting Synod.

11. Peter Brooke, "The grand principle of magisterial restraint in matters of religion: a dispute in the Reformed Presbyterian Synod in Ireland, 1830–40," accessed September 6, 2010, <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/pbrooke/p%26t/Northern%20Ireland/rpsynod>.

12. *Ibid.* *Banner of Ulster*, 30 Aug. 1842.

13. R. L. W. McCollum, "John Paul and his contribution to the shaping of Presbyterianism in the nineteenth-century" (M.Th. diss., Queen's University Belfast, 1992), 167–9. Cf. Brooke, "Grand principle."

14. John Paul, *Creeeds and confessions defended, and attacks made of Covenanters, Seceders, &c. repelled, in a series of letters addressed*

an extent that a Synod was constituted in May 1811, consisting of four Presbyteries.¹⁰

II.

The question might arise as to why it is important to consider the Reformed Presbyterians' views in relation to the 1859 revival? By looking at the Covenanters' response to the movement, we are able to see how the most conservative Presbyterian denomination in Ireland, whose roots predate the emergence of evangelicalism, responded to an outburst of intense religious excitement. This is especially relevant to modern confessional Presbyterians, as the Reformed Presbyterians were renowned for their strict adherence to the Westminster Confession. Moreover, the Covenanters are one of the few groups in modern Northern Ireland who still maintain the confessional position on worship, and a *cappella* exclusive psalmody is probably the feature by which the denomination is most clearly distinguished from other orthodox Presbyterians.

Yet the years preceding the 1859 revival were not easy times for the Covenanters in Ireland, as they were torn apart by a prolonged controversy from 1830–40. This was fought out between the Revd Thomas Houston of Knockbracken, near Belfast, and the Revd Dr John Paul of Loughmourne, near Carrickfergus. Paul was probably the greatest Irish Reformed theologian of the nineteenth-century, or, at the very least, one of the best polemic writers of his day.¹¹ He was widely recognised beyond the bounds of the Reformed Presbyterian communion as a theological colossus, especially due to his role in defending the principle of subscription to creeds and confessions of faith and for his strenuous, yet scholarly, opposition to the Arian party within the General Synod of Ulster (G.S.U.) during the 1820s.¹² Paul's reputation for orthodoxy, however, could not spare him from the ire of Houston when the latter suspected that Paul was deviating from the Westminster Confession. Professor Robert McCollum has argued that from as early as 1819 Paul had adhered to views respecting the civil magistrate's role *circa sacra* and on the duty of rulers to extirpate heretics which were at odds with the teachings of the Calvinistic Reformers, the Westminster divines and the early Covenanters.¹³ There does appear to be some grounds for this, because, despite Paul's condemnation of the idea of an authoritative toleration of heresy, he did say that, "in the Reformation period, the circumstances of the times might justify a degree of severity, which in the present age might be highly criminal; so we might expect that modern Covenanters would be much more mild than their forefathers."¹⁴

Although Paul's views were not censured by the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland (R.S.P.I.) in the years immediately subsequent to the publication of his *Creeeds and confessions defended*, his opinions did not escape the watchful eye of Thomas Houston. The decisive event in elevating Houston to the role of controversialist and the champion of the covenanting cause came in 1830, when he accepted the intimation of the Synod to publish and circulate a periodical throughout the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Accordingly, in December 1830 Houston issued the first copy of his new periodical, which he entitled the *Covenanter*.¹⁵ While initially received with applause as a forum for promoting Reformed Presbyterian distinctive principles, the *Covenanter* quickly generated controversy when Houston began publishing articles on civil magistracy in March 1831.¹⁶ In these writings Houston advocated the traditional interpretation of the Westminster Confession as sanctioning the use of civil penalties against idolaters and heretics.¹⁷ However, the stern manner of his presentation, and the frequency with which he set forth his opinions, has caused later commentators to fault Houston for alienating many people within the denomination who would otherwise have been sympathetic.¹⁸ Paul certainly did not take kindly to his teaching, and he wrote to the *Belfast News-Letter* in an attempt to distance himself from the views propounded by Houston.¹⁹ It would also appear that the R.P.S.I. was nervous about what Houston was teaching, as it resolved that "the Synod do not hold themselves responsible for the contents of the 'COVENANTER' [...] and the responsibility of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod is, IN NO WAY INVOLVED IN ITS PUBLICATION."²⁰ Sadly, the breach between Houston and Paul eventually became too great to be resolved amicably. Consequently, in 1840 a deadlock was reached, and the Eastern Presbytery issued a *Declinature* against the various decisions of the R.P.S.I. on the question of civil magistracy, and thus declined the authority of the Synod.²¹ The five ministers and twelve elders who withdrew later constituted themselves as the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Synod (E.R.P.S.) on 18 October 1842, which oversaw the Belfast and Derry Presbyteries.²² Despite never growing beyond ten congregations, this denomination maintained a separate existence until 1902 when the E.R.P.S. officially united with the P.C.I., although half its congregations dissented from this decision and returned to the Reformed Presbyterian Church.²³ While the two communions did not officially reunite, by 1859 much of the tension of earlier years had died down, as friendly relations were restored between the previously warring

factions.²⁴ The significance of this for the Covenanters' response to the revival is that having moved on from an earlier internal controversy and the pain of a distressing schism, they now had much more time on their hands to attack rival denominations. As we shall see, the excesses associated with the 1859 revival in Ulster were to provide the Reformed Presbyterians with ample ammunition against their main ecclesiastical rivals—the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

III.

Although this article focuses on some of their criticisms of the movement, it would, however, be a mistake to think that the Covenanters were entirely opposed to the 1859 revival. Notwithstanding their commitment to Reformed orthodoxy, the Covenanters did not encourage a cold formalism in matters of religion. When commenting on the 1857–8 revival in the United States,

to the anonymous author of "The battle of the two dialogues" (1819) in *Works of the late Rev. John Paul, D.D., of Carrickfergus. With a memoir and introduction by the editor*, ed. Stewart Bates (Belfast: Shepherd and Aitchison, 1855), 381–2. For Paul's thoughts on authoritative toleration in distinction from passive toleration, see *ibid.*, 385–9.

15. Loughridge, *Covenanters in Ireland*, 65.

16. *Ibid.* For the articles in question see *Covenanter*, Mar., Apr., June 1831. Robert McCollum has argued that some of these articles were also written by the Revd Hans Boggs and John Stewart, both of whom died in 1837. McCollum, "John Paul," 174.

17. Edward Donnelly, "Thomas Houston of Knockbracken," *Bulletin of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland*, 33 (2009): 65.

18. Loughridge, *Covenanters in Ireland*, 65. Donnelly, "Thomas Houston," 65.

19. Brooke, "Grand principle," *Belfast News-Letter*, 18 Nov. 1831.

20. *Abstract of the proceedings of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland, at a meeting held in Moneymore, July, 1831* (Ballymena: George White, 1831), 13.

21. *Minutes of the annual meeting of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland, held at Moneymore, July, 1840* (Belfast: Paul Kelso, 1840), 9–10. Loughridge, *Covenanters in Ireland*, 67. Cf. *The judgment of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland, upon the controversy relative to the magistrate's power circa sacra, between the Rev. Thomas Houston, one of its members, and the Rev. Dr Paul, and others, who have renounced its jurisdiction, and set up a separate communion* (Belfast: Paul Kelso et al, 1842). The *Declinature* was signed by the Revds John Paul, William Henry, John Alexander, Clarke Houston and John Nevin. It was also signed by the following ruling elders: James Adrian, James Kinnear, John McCracken, Andrew Blakely and John McVicker.

22. J. P. Marcus, *Outlines of church history, with special reference to the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Londonderry: Johnston, Hunter & Co. et al, 1869), 91.

23. Loughridge, *Covenanters in Ireland*, 67. Stephen Steele, "Thomas Houston: Covenanter and evangelical" (M.A. diss., Queen's University Belfast, 2009), 17–18.

24. Loughridge, *Covenanters in Ireland*, 67. *Minutes of the annual meeting of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland, held at Londonderry, July 12, 1853* (Belfast: William Johnston, 1853), 12.

they were glad to report that “the work has proceeded with much less outward excitement than was found at former periods of revivals in America—as in the days of Edwards and Whitefield.”²⁵ However, a significant proviso was added to this when the author argued that “THE WILDEST ENTHUSIASM IS MORE RATIONAL IN RELIGION THAN INDIFFERENCE.”²⁶ Thus Covenanters were reluctant to dismiss excited scenes as entirely delusional, even if they could not wholeheartedly endorse them. Rather than dismissing revivals attended with undue excitement as wholly spurious, they recognised that human imperfection and sin was often mixed up with genuine religious movements.²⁷ Their response to 1859 was, at least initially, consistent with this viewpoint. Evidence of this can be seen in the resolutions which the R.P.S.I. adopted on Friday 8 July 1859 in response to the religious awakening:

1.—That without expressing any opinion with respect to the circumstances originating this movement, or the manner in which it may have been conducted in some quarters, Synod cannot but regard it as a reason for the most devout gratitude to the God of all grace, that there are so many and indubitable indications of increased earnestness in spiritual things, and delight in religious exercises, on the part of multitudes of professing Christians; and that there are also indications of many persons hitherto utterly careless, or ungodly and wicked, having been awakened to a concern for their souls, and the necessity for reformation—many, it is to be hoped, having undergone a saving change.

2.—That it is not surprising there should be marks of human imperfection on any work in which man is engaged, as an instrument to any extent, in this world. Where there are errors, irregularities, and extravagances in any district, there is greater reason why the Gospel ministers should interfere, so far as may be consistent with right principle, so as to endeavour to give a proper tone and direction to this movement.

3.—That it should be ever remembered, that even strong convictions of sin do not amount in themselves

to conversion, and may never issue therein; and that it is desirable that ministers should set the whole truth on these and kindred subjects before their several congregations, especially at the present juncture—not forgetting how it is written, “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.”

4.—That there can be no impropriety in uniting with evangelical Christians of any denomination in exercises of praise, prayer, and reading the Bible, and every encouragement should be given to all who manifest a desire for such exercises, so long as Scriptural order and purity in such acts of worship are strictly adhered to.

5.—Synod recommended to ministers and elders to set more distinctly before them as the great end of all their labours, the conversion of immortal souls; and recommend furthermore to ministers, congregations, societies, families, and individuals, increased earnestness, fervency, and perseverance in pleading the great promises of the Gospel dispensation, and in wrestling with our covenant God, that the Spirit may be poured out from on high on the churches, and also on every barren field of earth, so that all may be made speedily fruitful, and every desert made to rejoice and blossom as the rose.²⁸

According to the report on the Synod in the *Belfast News-Letter* these resolutions were proposed by the Revd Robert Nevin of Clarendon Street, Londonderry, seconded by the Revd Josias Chancellor of Bready, and unanimously adopted by the Synod.²⁹ The resolutions had been preceded by a discourse to the Synod the previous evening on “Religious awakening and revival” (based on Isaiah 32:15) by the Revd James Kennedy of Newtonlimivady (now Limivady, Co. Londonderry), and by an address on the Friday morning by Thomas Houston on “the position and present duty of the ministers and members of the Covenanting Church in relation to promoting the revival of religion.”³⁰ While supportive in tone, the resolutions expressed concerns relating to the prevalence of extravagance, the conflation of conviction with conversion, and the introduction of innovative worship elements into ecumenical revival meetings. Nonetheless, these resolutions do demonstrate that, although cautious and qualified in their support for the movement, the Reformed Presbyterians were not outright opponents of the Revival like some P.C.I. ministers, the Revds Isaac Nelson, William Dobbin and William Hamilton, as they believed the Revival did result in real conversions and, initially

25. Anon., “Revival of religion in the Church,” *Covenanter*, Apr. 1858, 88.

26. “Revival of religion in the Church,” 89–90. Emphasis original.

27. “Revival of religion in the Church,” 89–90.

28. *Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland, held in Belfast, 27 June 1859* (Belfast: Johnston and McClure, 1859), 18–19.

29. *Belfast News-Letter*, 9 July 1859.

30. *Belfast News-Letter*, *ibid.*

at least, the moral reformation of society.³¹ The Revd Joseph Alexander Moody's comments to Chancellor in November 1859 appeared indicative of the Covenanters' initial reaction to the revival: "All history is just a record of human imperfections but on this account we are not to reject the work of God although it should be mixed up with the mismanagement of man or confound the cause of righteousness with the errors of the Evil One."³²

Nor was this merely an expression of support for a genuine revival in the abstract, as various Covenanter ministers had been active in supporting the 1859 Revival. For example, in the spring of 1859, the Revd James Dick of Kellswater claimed that "[t]he very first thing I did in the spring when all expected me to preach against the Revival was to defend it from the assaults of Montgomery &c."³³ Moreover, Thomas Houston preached a revival sermon at Ballymacashon (near Killinchy, Co. Down) on 24 July.³⁴ And, despite later becoming one of the Revival's prominent critics, Josias Chancellor claimed to have been one of the Revival's most earnest supporters. Indeed he continued to classify himself as such even when he was making his critiques of the movement:

When the awakening commenced in Ulster, last summer, no one hailed more eagerly the prospect of a Revival, or more readily entered into any suitable arrangements for its advancement, than I endeavoured to do. To this movement my feelings and conduct have not in the least been altered.³⁵

The fact that Chancellor preached at a revival meeting in Second Strabane Presbyterian Church is evidence that he was even prepared to go outside the bounds of his own denomination in order to support the advance of the awakening.³⁶ Even the P.C.I. minister of Donaghedy, the Revd F. J. Porter, who clashed with Chancellor over the validity of lay-preaching, admitted that, "[a]t the outset, Covenanters were alive to the necessity and importance of the work. I shall remember with thankfulness the help I had from elders and members of that persuasion, in the most stirring times."³⁷ However, he blamed Chancellor for quenching the zeal of the Bready Covenanters, who "assuming an apathetic phase, they stood partially aloof" as "they were taught to do so by their minister."³⁸ Perhaps even more surprising was the conduct of James Kennedy, who scarcely a year earlier had indulged in the most scathing criticism of the P.C.I.³⁹ His preaching at an open-air meeting had led to prostrations among the crowd, while he and the Revd T. Y. Killen had consented to permit a female to address a meeting in Ballykelly.⁴⁰ Thus, the *Covenanter*

in October 1859 admitted that some Reformed Presbyterians had attended revival meetings, and assisted in leading them, while various "members of the Covenanted Church" were subjected to bodily prostrations.⁴¹ In light of such conduct in promoting the awakening, even to the point of participating in what would normally have been considered aberrant practices by Reformed Presbyterian standards, it is hardly surprising that Covenanter ministers recognised that a genuine revival had taken place in 1859.⁴² Hence, Chancellor was willing to admit "[t]hat a real Revival has, to a certain extent, taken place, I gladly and thankfully acknowledge."⁴³ Moreover, in September 1859 the *Covenanter* rejoiced in the awakening which was presently advancing in Ulster, observing that "grossly irreligious and immoral

31. Anon., "Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening," *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 274. Cf. Stephen Steele, "'Houston, we have a problem.' Thomas Houston: Covenanter and evangelical," *Reformed Theological Journal*, 25 (Nov. 2010): 71. For more on the P.C.I. ministers, see Daniel Ritchie, "Presbyterian opposition to the 1859 Revival in Ulster" (M.A. diss., Queen's University Belfast, 2010).

32. Joseph Alexander Moody to Josias Chancellor, Convoy, Donegal, Nov. 1859 (Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Reformed Theological College, Belfast, Chancellor Letters).

33. James Dick to Josias Chancellor, Kellswater, 17 Dec. 1859 (Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Reformed Theological College, Belfast, Chancellor Letters). Dick is referring to the Arian leader, Dr Henry Montgomery of Dunmurray, Belfast.

34. Minute Book of the Eastern Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland 5 August 1845 - 7 August 1867, 24 July 1859 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Records of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, CR5/5/B/4/1/4).

35. J. A. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching and hymn-singing unwarranted in the church. In reply to the Rev. F. J. Porter and Dr Marcus Dill* (2nd edn, Londonderry: The Sentinel Office, 1860), 3.

36. Anon., "Religious movement in Ireland," *Christian Witness and Church Member's Magazine*, Sep. 1859, 392.

37. F. J. Porter, *The prophet deceived. Lay teaching not lay preaching. An epistle to an enemy of revivals, who thinks himself a friend; being an analysis of a pamphlet styled "Lay preaching"* (Londonderry: The Standard Office, 1860), repr in *A history of the 1859 Ulster Revival*, ed. Stanley Barnes, 7 vols. (Gilford: Whitefield College of the Bible, 2006), iv, 314.

38. Porter, *The prophet deceived*, *ibid.*

39. See [James Kennedy], *Tekel. The Reformed Presbyterian Church and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland weighed in the balance of truth* (Londonderry: The Sentinel Office, 1858).

40. T. Y. Killen, "Ballykelly," in *Authentic records of Revival, now in progress in the United Kingdom. With an introduction by Horatius Bonar, D.D.*, ed. William Reid (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1860), 100-01.

41. Anon., "Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening," *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 273.

42. "Thoughts on revival. No. II," 278.

43. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 15.

practices appear to be, in many places abandoned for the time, and multitudes are aroused to a sense of the paramount importance of a personal interest in religion.”⁴⁴ The Reformed Presbyterians clearly welcomed the stimulus which the Revival gave to evangelism, the conversion of the worldly and to the moral reformation of society. However, the employment of the words “for the time” in the above quotation reveals a lingering suspicion that the fruits of the 1859 Revival would not last long. And so in March 1860 the *Covenanter* published an article on “The Spirit’s work in reviving religion” which argued that while officers and members of the Covenanted Church were bound to be zealous in

44. Anon., “Thoughts on revival of religion: no. 1—state of religion in the churches requiring revival,” *Covenanter*, Sep. 1859, 255.

45. Anon., “The Spirit’s work in reviving religion,” *Covenanter*, Mar. 1860, 103–04. Cf. Anon., “The signs of the times, as bearing on the testimony for truth. (By a committee of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod, Ireland.)” *Covenanter*, Aug. 1860, 228.

46. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, pp 344–5. Cf. Charles Hodge, *The constitutional history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1839–40), ii, 65.

47. J. A. Chancellor, *The prophet un-deceived: or, a gentle dissection of “The prophet deceived”* (Londonderry: The Sentinel Office, 1860), repr in *A history of the 1859 Ulster Revival*, ed. Stanley Barnes, 7 vols. (Gilford: Whitefield College of the Bible, 2006), iv, 344–5. Cf. Porter, *Prophet deceived*.

48. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 3.

49. See Westminster Confession XXI.

50. Philip Benedić, *Christ’s churches purely Reformed: a social history of Calvinism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 490.

51. In article XXXIV of the Thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, it is maintained that the church does have the authority to invent religious ceremonies: “It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word. Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely, doth openly break the Traditions and Ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, (that others may fear to do the like,) as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the Magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren. Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, Ceremonies or Rites of the Church ordained only by man’s authority, so that all things be done to edifying.” “Articles of religion,” accessed December 30, 2010, http://anglicanonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html.

52. Thomas Houston, *Divine psalms against human paraphrases and hymns. Review of a sermon by the Rev. William Johnston on “Psalms and paraphrases”* (Belfast: G. Phillips and sons, 1861), 8–10.

53. Anon., “Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening,” *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 276. Anon., “Hymn-singing and the Revival,” *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, July 1861, 223–5. C. J. Marrs, “The 1859 religious Revival

promoting revival, great care needed to be exercised lest they lapse into a form of evangelical latitudinarianism which promoted unity at the expense of truth.”⁴⁵

Their unwillingness, however, to entirely reject 1859 as a counterfeit revival means that the Covenanters should be viewed as being among the Revival’s moderate critics who, despite having significant reservations, viewed the awakening as at least partially good. Following the example of Charles Hodge, the Princeton divine and critic of the First Great Awakening, Chancellor did not believe that criticism of revivals should be left to the outright opponents of such movements.⁴⁶ Instead, when responding to F. J. Porter’s claim that he was an enemy of 1859, he argued that the real friends of revivals were those who withheld their countenance from the evils and irregularities that accompanied the awakenings; in so doing, they were the ones who were promoting the true work of God from unbiblical aberrations.⁴⁷

IV.

Reformed Presbyterians were critical of the Revival’s impact upon worship, especially in relation to psalm-singing and lay-preaching. Chancellor claimed that it was the movement’s impact upon “the Scriptural order and purity of God’s worship” which led him, as one who initially supported the awakening, to become openly critical of 1859; such was the importance that Covenanters placed upon the maintenance of biblical worship.⁴⁸ The Reformed Presbyterians adhered to what is now known as the regulative principle of worship; this is the view that God can only be properly worshipped in accordance with his own commands. Therefore, if something is not commanded in Scripture to be observed as an element of worship (either by explicit precept, legitimate historical example or valid logical deduction), then it is forbidden.⁴⁹ Adherence to the regulative principle is one of the identity markers that distinguishes the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions from other forms of Protestantism, such as Lutheranism and Anglicanism.⁵⁰ The latter groups embrace the normative principle; this is the idea that unless something is prohibited in worship, then it is acceptable.⁵¹ Covenanters, in common with various other branches of Presbyterianism, believed that this principle necessitated the exclusive use of the biblical Psalter in praise, and that the employment of hymns of merely human composition, lacking Scriptural warrant, was a violation of the regulative principle.⁵² However, in both Ulster and Scotland, the 1859 Revival gave great encouragement to the singing of uninspired hymns.⁵³ Thus, Chancellor lamented, “I am sorry to say it must be granted that an unprecedented

thirst for hymns has been recently created, and an immense impulse given to their indiscriminate circulation."⁵⁴ Moreover, Houston observed that the Revival had led to a rapid increase in the purchase of hymnbooks, far outstripping the biblical Psalter in terms of sales.⁵⁵ This thesis was corroborated by a Belfast Anglican, the Revd Charles Seaver, who observed that "[m]illions of little books of hymns" were sold during the awakening.⁵⁶ But the most impressive evidence in favour of the thirst that the Revival created for hymns are the statistics presented by Marcus Dill, who said:

In the wholesale department of a bookseller's home in Belfast, formerly the average sale of Psalm books was 200 in the three months; during the same time last summer there were 1800 sold; of Hymn books, since the Revival commenced there have *been* upwards of 20,000 sold in three months, and of Hymn sheets, as many as 200,000.⁵⁷

It would be hard to imagine that many of these did not fall into the hands of Presbyterians. Indeed, in 1859 Henry Cooke expressed his concern before the General Assembly that "one of the greatest dangers to the young generation at present was a set of namby-pamby hymn books, which are now stuck into everybody's hands."⁵⁸

Houston also claimed that the conduct of P.C.I. ministers during the Revival had served to legitimize uninspired hymnody, as their participation in the ecumenical, union prayer-meetings sometimes led to them taking part in "singing vapid, and, in some cases, erroneous hymns."⁵⁹ We find ordained Presbyterian ministers, such as the Revd Robert Knox, leading hymn-singing at a union prayer meeting in Belfast, and the Revd Tommy Toye appears to have employed hymns in Great George's Street.⁶⁰ It is significant that when both Houston and Chancellor wrote in defence of exclusive psalmody in the years immediately subsequent to 1859, they were writing in defence of a position that had been attacked by P.C.I. clerics, such as the Revd William Johnston and the medic, Dr Marcus Dill. This was in spite of the fact that total psalmody was the official view of the P.C.I. In 1859 the General Assembly's position was that "[t]he metrical version of the Psalms of David used in Scotland and by this Church is the only psalmody authorized by the General Assembly."⁶¹ This statement leaves no room for serious debate on the issue, as exclusive psalmody is the view that the psalter is the only authorised manual of praise to be used in the church. Since the P.C.I. adopted the psalter as its only authorised praise manual, then the P.C.I.'s official position was

that of exclusive psalmody. Houston was quick to seize upon this: "[h]ow, after making such a profession, ministers and congregations of this body can consistently claim the right, and boast of the liberty, of introducing uninspired compositions into the church's psalmody, we are unable to determine."⁶² Nevertheless, it should be noted that not all pro-Revival P.C.I. ministers embraced uninspired hymnody, because John Edgar and Henry Cooke united with Houston to write prefaces to an apology for the Davidic Psalter.⁶³

In terms of the actual debate, Chancellor argued that the burden of proof on this issue lay with the proponents of hymnody, as all agreed the book of Psalms had been given to the church in the Old Testament and had been commanded to be sung in the new dispensation. This being the case, those who wanted to introduce uninspired songs of praise needed to produce biblical warrant to substantiate the opinion that God has commanded (not permitted) humanly composed hymns to be sung by the New Testament church.⁶⁴ Chancellor claimed that although the New Testament clearly sanctioned certain alterations in worship, such as the replacement of circumcision with baptism, the Passover with communion, the changing of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week, and the abolition

in Scotland: a review and critique of the movement with particular reference to the city of Glasgow" (Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 1995), 171.

54. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 28.

55. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 4.

56. Charles Seaver, *The Ulster Revival: a paper read before the conference of the Evangelical Alliance at Belfast, September 22, 1859* (London: James Nisbet, 1859), repr. in *A history of the 1859 Ulster Revival*, ed. Stanley Barnes, 7 vols (Gilford: Whitefield College of the Bible, 2006), v, 54.

57. Marcus Dill, *A defence of Christian liberty in psalmody* (Londonderry: The Standard Office, 1860), 10.

58. Anon., "Rev. Dr Cooke's views of church psalmody," *Original Secession Magazine*, Nov. 1859, 370.

59. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 5.

60. *Belfast News-Letter*, 7 July 1859. Thomas Hamilton, "The Rev. Thomas Toye, of Belfast," in *Irish worthies. A series of original biographical sketches of eminent ministers and members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, ed. idem (1875; Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2000), 120.

61. *Book of the Constitution and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with a directory for the administration of ordinances* (Belfast: McCormick and Dunlop, 1859), 67.

62. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 4.

63. *The true psalmody; or, the Bible psalms the church's only manual of praise* (3rd edn, Belfast: J. Johnston, 1867). Cf. Cooke's remarks in the P.C.I. General Assembly on the subject. Anon., "Rev. Dr Cooke's views of church psalmody," *Original Secession Magazine*, Nov. 1859, 369–70.

64. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 21.

of the ceremonial and sacrificial worship of the Jewish Temple, nonetheless, there was no evidence that Christ or the apostles altered the matter of the church's praise or demanded the cessation of biblical psalm-singing. He believed that the opposite was the case; appealing to various New Testament passages, Chancellor asserted that Christ and the apostles merely reiterated the commands to utilise the book of Psalms in divine worship.⁶⁵ In light of this, Chancellor surmised that adherents to the regulative principle could not embrace the opinion that the New Testament provided authorisation for man-made hymns:

Our Lord and his Apostles recognise the existence of a standing and sufficient collection of inspired songs when they speak of "the Book of Psalms" [...] There is neither precept nor example in the New Testament for the use of other songs. Neither the Apostles nor Prophets added to the previous collection. There is no command given to any man to prepare additional hymns, nor promise of assistance while engaged in the attempt. We have Divine authority for the perpetual use of the songs of inspiration, but where is the warrant for any other?⁶⁶

65. *Lay-preaching*, 22. Chancellor appealed to Matthew 26:30, Ephesians 5:19, James 5:13 as examples of psalm-singing in the New Testament, and referred to Luke 20:42 and Acts 1:20 as evidence that the New Testament writers recognised the biblical Psalter as a distinct book of praise.

66. *Lay-preaching*, 22.

67. William Johnston, *The psalms and paraphrases. A sermon preached in Townsend Street Church, Belfast, on Sabbath evening, 17th March 1861* (Belfast: C. Aitchison et al, 1861), 6.

68. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 11.

69. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 11.

70. *The Psalms of David in meeter. Newly translated and diligently compared with the original text, and former translations: more plain, smooth and agreeable to the text, than any heretofore* (1673), "A Puritan preface to the Scottish Metrical Psalter," accessed December 30, 2010, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/prefacescottishpsalter.htm>. Cited in Houston, *Divine psalms*, 11.

71. Hugh Hanna, *A whole Bible in the worship of God. A sermon by the Rev. Hugh Hanna advocating the above principle in relation to psalmody, in refutation of the Rev. Drs. Cooke, Edgar, Houston, and several American divines* (Belfast: C. Aitchison et al, 1861). J. D. Crawford, *Hymn singing in public worship unscriptural, and opposed to the law and practice of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. A reply to the speeches of Rev. J. Macnaughtan and Rev. T. Y. Killen* (Belfast: Allen & Johnston, 1875). Robert Nevin, *The hymn question. A review of the speeches of the Rev. J. Macnaughtan and the Rev. T. Y. Killen, at a meeting of the Belfast Presbytery on the 19th April* (Londonderry: The Standard Steam Printing Works, 1875).

72. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 23. William Johnson, *The psalms and paraphrases. A sermon preached in Townsend Street Church, Belfast, on Sabbath evening, 17th March, 1861* (Belfast: C. Aitchison et al, 1861), 10–11.

However, convincing as Chancellor's arguments may have sounded to exclusive psalmody's adherents, the issue was complicated by the position of those who believed that hymn-singing was authorised in the New Testament. For instance, Houston refers to an argument, put forth by William Johnston, in which an appeal is made to the "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" of Ephesians 5:19 as biblical proof for the divine warrant to compose worship songs.⁶⁷ Houston, however, dismissed this argument as being crudely facile; he responded by pointing out that the terms were all used in Scripture to refer to biblical psalms, a reality which he claimed should be apparent to "a person even slightly conversant with the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint, and other ancient versions."⁶⁸ Since it could not be proved that the text in question was referring to uninspired hymns, Houston considered it a "mere waste of words" to spend any great amount of time refuting Johnston's argument.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, he deemed it necessary to cite several earlier Reformed theologians in favour of his position, including a 1673 preface to the Rouse/Scottish Metrical Psalter, signed by John Owen and twenty-five other Puritan divines, which said, "to us *David's Psalms* seem plainly intended by those terms of '*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*,' which the apostle useth."⁷⁰ While it is beyond the parameters of this article to judge the merits of the exegetical arguments pro or contra total psalmody, it may be the case that the proponents of hymnody within the P.C.I., having tolerated this innovation during the Revival, were now desperately seeking biblical justification for a practice which the standards of their church did not authorise. To have condemned hymnody, while offering wholehearted support to the Revival which was the means of spreading its employment, would have impaled such revivalists on the horns of an excruciating dilemma. Because how could they consistently condemn the use of hymns without condemning the Revival as well? Thus it was not surprising that various revivalist ministers, including the Revds T. Y. Killen, Hugh Hanna and John Macnaughtan, became apologists for hymns.⁷¹

Aside from the ostensibly Scriptural arguments for hymns, revivalists also put forward a number of emotive and pragmatic arguments against total psalmody. In opposition to the argument that the psalms were unsuitable for the young and the unlearned, Houston contended that the same logic would preclude the use of the New Testament itself, since many things contained therein were difficult for the young and unlearned to grasp.⁷² Chancellor took particular umbrage at Dill's view that the psalms were unsuitable for Christian worship. He cites Dill as saying:

I am constrained [...] for the sake of truth, and in the light of the Christian dispensation, to maintain that there are many of the Psalms unsuitable for the song of the Christian Church, and only adopted to the use of that dispensation and ritual which have waxed old and vanished away.⁷³

In response, Chancellor highlighted the gospel-centred nature of the Psalter, and defended the imprecatory psalms (such as Psalm 137) from the accusation that they manifested a spirit of personal revenge, arguing, to the contrary, that such psalms serve to reveal a righteous abhorrence of wickedness and set forth the just retributions of divine government.⁷⁴ Furthermore, he viewed the idea of Christians raising objections to the psalms as fundamentally wrong. Chancellor believed that such objections were based on infidel suppositions: "Objections against the Psalms! Have Paine, and his impious 'Age of Reason,' not yet departed from our midst?"⁷⁵ As far as he was concerned, those who dared to moralise against the divinely inspired psalms were comparable to profane infidels, who had succumbed to a most destructive rationalism. Moreover, he reasoned that if such objections were to be accepted, then the psalms would have to be expunged from the Bible and never even read in public worship. And so such complaints against the Psalter were tantamount to questioning the very inspiration of Scripture itself.⁷⁶ The revivalist's sentimental argument that the psalms did not contain the name of Jesus was also dismissed with merciless logic.⁷⁷ Chancellor maintained that, on the basis of such reasoning, objectors may as well remove the book of Esther from the biblical canon, since the name of God does not occur therein. He then went on to establish the Christological value of the Psalter, which demonstrated the weakness of suggesting that the absence of the word Jesus negated the Psalter's usefulness in Christian praise.⁷⁸ In opposition to revivalist suggestions that the *Scottish Metrical Psalter* was comparable to a human composition, Houston responded by saying that the logic of this argument would preclude the Bible being translated into English, since no translation of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures was perfect.⁷⁹ His point was that one did not have to possess a perfect translation of the Psalter in order to sing the word of God, because an English rendering of the psalms was still the (mediately) inspired word (immediate inspiration was confined to the original Scriptures).⁸⁰ Despite recognising the existence of archaic words and expressions, which he did not believe represented an insurmountable difficulty to the continuance of psalm-singing, Chancellor was sufficiently satisfied

with the accuracy of the Scottish Psalter, expressing his view that "it is incomparably the purest and best of its kind, and we have reason to be devoutly thankful for it."⁸¹ Moreover, he was able to appeal to the testimony of the Anglican minister William Romaine to substantiate the view that the Scottish Psalter was one of the best translations of the psalms in English.⁸² Houston, likewise, appealed to the Puritans John Owen, Thomas Manton and Matthew Poole, among others, who had signed the preface to the Scottish/Rouse Psalter in favour of the view that "[t]he translation which is now put into thy hands cometh nearest to the original of any that we have seen."⁸³ Moreover, he quoted the famous Scottish evangelical Robert Murray McCheyne in favour of the view that the Scottish Psalter "is truly an admirable translation from the Hebrew, and is frequently more correct than the prose version."⁸⁴

Reformed Presbyterians also maintained that hymns served as a vehicle for spreading heterodox dogmas, even if Dill and other apologists for hymnody wished to restrict singing to ostensibly orthodox songs.⁸⁵ Since the psalms were the inerrant word of God, Chancellor reasoned it was not possible for them to be a means of spreading doctrinal error. Conversely, he maintained that hymns were first employed in public worship for the purpose of inculcating the people with Gnostic,

73. Dill, *Christian liberty*, 3. Cited in Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 18.

74. Ibid., 20, 23. Cf. Dill, *Christian liberty*, 3.

75. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 25. Cf. Dill, *Christian liberty*, 4–5.

76. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 25.

77. Dill, *Christian liberty*, 8.

78. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 25. Considering that the word Jesus is an English translation of a Greek word, its absence from the English Bible's translation of the Psalter is not difficult to explain. This is due to the fact that the English Psalter is a translation of the Psalms out of the original Hebrew. Since Jesus is not a translation of a Hebrew word, it would only occur in an English Psalter if the psalms were translated out of the Greek Septuagint (LXX).

79. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 14–15. Dill, *Christian liberty*, 9. Johnston, *Psalms and paraphrases*, 8–9.

80. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 15.

81. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 25.

82. Ibid. See William Romaine, *An essay on psalmody* (London: n.p., 1775), 135. Chancellor's quotation differs slightly from the original, though the substance of the quote is retained.

83. *The Psalms of David in meeter. Newly translated and diligently compared with the original text, and former translations: more plain, smooth and agreeable to the text, than any heretofore* (1673), "A Puritan preface to the Scottish Metrical Psalter," accessed December 30, 2010. <http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/prefacescottishpsalter.htm>. Cited in Houston, *Divine psalms*, 15.

84. R. M. McCheyne, *Daily bread, being a calendar for reading through the word of God in a year* (Dundee: William Middleton, 1847), 14. Cited in Houston, *Divine psalms*, 15.

85. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 19–20.

Arian and other heretical opinions.⁸⁶ Similarly, Houston claimed that hymns were introduced in the third-century by the heretic Paul of Samosata, whose purpose in employing them was to teach “fundamental error” that “glorified himself.”⁸⁷ Houston also considered the revivalists’s hymns to be overly sentimental in nature, and quoted with approval Henry Cooke’s condemnation of such “namby-pamby” hymns.⁸⁸ Of course, given their commitment to the regulative principle, one wonders just how much weight the likes of Chancellor and Houston could place on such circumstantial arguments, because if uninspired hymnody was divinely authorised then the heterodoxy or sentimentalism of certain compositions should have had no bearing on the employment of hymnody *per se*. However, they could have thought that these type of arguments may have been of value in convincing those who were wavering on the psalmody issue of the corrosive effects of hymnody.

86. *Lay-preaching*, 30.

87. Thomas Houston, *Plymouthism & revivalism: or, the duty of contending for the faith in opposition to prevailing errors and corruptions* (2nd edn, Belfast: C. Aitchison, [1874]), 30. The famous church historian Philip Schaff concurs with Houston’s assessment concerning Paul of Samosata and hymnology. See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian church*, 8 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1867), i: *from the birth of Christ to the reign of Constantine*, 289–90.

88. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 5. Cooke said this at the P.C.I. General Assembly meeting in 1859, at which he and the Revd John Rogers cautioned against hymn-singing among Presbyterians. Anon., “Rev. Dr Cooke’s views of church psalmody,” *Original Secession Magazine*, Nov. 1859, 370.

89. Houston, *Divine psalms*, 24.

90. Cf. Finlay Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian heritage* (Belfast: Publications Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1985), 133.

91. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 30.

92. *Lay-preaching*, 30–1.

93. Houston, *Plymouthism & revivalism*, 30–1. Anon., “Revival of religion in the Church: its nature, means, fruits—mistakes and dangers to be avoided,” *Covenanter*, June 1875, 166. Cf. Anon., “The revivalists,” *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, May 1876, 133–6. Jane Toye, *Brief memorials of the late Rev. Thomas Toye, Belfast. By his widow* (Belfast: S. E. McCormick, 1873), 74–5. Sandy Finlayson, *Unity & diversity: the founders of the Free Church of Scotland* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 205. Moody’s campaign was supported by clerics such as the Revds T. Y. Killen and William Johnston, with the exponent of Princetonian Calvinism, Robert Watts, acting as an enquiry room counsellor. *Witness*, 4 Sep. 1874, 1 Jan. 1875. Joseph Thompson, “The influence of D. L. Moody on Irish Presbyterianism,” in *Ebb and flow: essays in church history in honour of R. Finlay G. Holmes*, ed. W. D. Patton (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 2002), 123, 127, 133.

94. William McIlwaine, “Ulster revivalism: a retrospect,” *Journal of Medical Science*, 6, no. 32 (January 1860): 178–9. *Belfast Daily Mercury*, 19 July 1859.

95. Joseph Alexander Moody to Josias Chancellor, Convoy, Donegal, Nov. 1859 (Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Reformed Theological College, Belfast, Chancellor Letters).

96. Joseph Alexander Moody to Josias Chancellor, *Ibid*.

Despite being part of a small denomination, the Covenanters argued that exclusive psalmody was essential to the unity of the church and represented the truly catholic position. Houston said that hymns, on the other hand, were a powerful means of diffusing sectarianism and disunion in the church of Christ.⁸⁹ In light of the bitter controversy which raged in the P.C.I. over this question in the years subsequent to the awakening, Houston certainly had a point when he concluded that hymns acted as a sower of discord in the church.⁹⁰ Chancellor also warned that the tendency of hymnology was to drive out the psalms altogether. He concluded that once hymnody becomes common, “[m]en get easily wedded to human inventions, but prejudices against a strictly Scriptural worship are hard to be weeded out.”⁹¹ An explanation for this, which Chancellor offers, is that hymns often reflected the prevailing religious and cultural trends of the era in which they are written, hence they served to express popular sentiments; whereas the psalms, being given by God, challenge and purify the tastes of their singers.⁹² Given the paucity of psalm singing among conservative Presbyterians in Ireland today, Chancellor’s prediction about the long-term impact of the introduction of hymns into Presbyterian praise during 1859 appears to have been a true prophecy. Furthermore, the use of both uninspired hymns and instrumental music in worship, and the countenance given to these things by P.C.I. ministers, was one reason (among others) why Covenanters did not lend support to the revival under D. L. Moody in 1874–5, believing that it was inconsistent for psalm-singing churches to do so. Considering that this movement served to further the desire for liturgical innovations in the P.C.I., the Reformed Presbyterian non co-operation appears to have been logical.⁹³

V.

One notable feature of the 1859 Revival was the widespread practice of lay-preaching. Clergy from both the established Church of Ireland and the Reformed Presbyterians were especially critical of this.⁹⁴ Despite being favourable to the movement, Moody of Convoy told a revivalist minister that “I neither liked the name ‘Converts’ nor to hear them preach: for on the one hand they might yet give sufficient evidence of being unconverted & that at any rate it tended to break down the appointed institution of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁹⁵ Upon so doing, the revivalist “went away & told that I was against the Revival.”⁹⁶ Moreover, Dick of Kellswater looked upon the converts’ preaching as one example of “Wesleyan Methodism in all its follies

and extremes.⁹⁷ Chancellor recalled that the failure of Episcopalians and Covenanters to co-operate with F. J. Porter in permitting lay-men to preach left the P.C.I. minister indignant at their conduct to the point that he was virtually anathematizing them.⁹⁸ Yet, Chancellor was able to point out that lay-preaching was at variance with the P.C.I.'s doctrinal standards. For instance, the Westminster Larger Catechism clearly prohibited the practice:

Q. 158. By whom is the word of God to be preached?

A. The word of God is to be preached only by such as are sufficiently gifted, and also duly approved and called to that office.

Chancellor also appealed to the General Assembly's code of discipline in favour of his position.⁹⁹ Thus if Porter was going to dispute this point, he would be arguing contrary to his own ordination vows, not to mention other P.C.I. ministers whom Chancellor claimed agreed with him on this point.¹⁰⁰ Just as he had critiqued hymn-singing on the basis that it violated the regulative principle, Chancellor condemned lay preaching on similar grounds. He compared it to Old Testament examples of people offering sacrifice without divine authorization, the principle being that no man had the right to perform the duties of an ecclesiastical office when he lacked biblical authority for doing so.¹⁰¹ Additionally, the concept of allowing lay-men to preach violated some of the basic tenets of Presbyterian church government. First, no man had the right to assume the functions of the ministry unless he had been licensed and ordained to that office.¹⁰² Second, since the congregations did not elect or issue calls to the lay-men who preached during 1859, the imposition of lay-preachers upon congregations violated the inalienable right of the people to choose their own preachers. Chancellor argued that the idea of arbitrarily imposing preachers on people was something that Episcopalian bishops did, and which Presbyterians were supposed to object to. Therefore, he thought that P.C.I. clergy were behaving like the hated prelates when they imposed lay-preachers on the people:

But surely Presbyterian Bishops, who acknowledge the people's prerogative, and who wax vehement, or worse, at times, in denunciation of prelatic tyranny and assumption, will not quietly assume the right of lording it over the consciences of their hearers, by the

introduction of unknown and unauthorized teachers into their pulpits.¹⁰³

Presbyterians had long opposed the perceived tyranny of Episcopacy, so in flagging up this discrepancy in the conduct of P.C.I. ministers, Chancellor was able to accuse them of departing from historic Presbyterianism. This was obviously useful in bolstering the Covenanters' claim that they were the true heirs of the early Presbyterians. Interestingly, the American Covenanters later complained that the whole concept of itinerant revival preaching was irregular because it undermined parish boundaries, by permitting lay-preachers to invade the territory of regular ministers.¹⁰⁴ While parishes are often associated with Anglicanism, the parish system was enshrined in the Westminster formularies and its place in Irish Presbyterian history is a subject well worthy of further investigation.¹⁰⁵

97. James Dick to Josias Chancellor, Kellswater, 17 Dec. 1859 (Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Reformed Theological College, Belfast, Chancellor Letters).

98. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 6–7. F. J. Porter, *The Spirit resisted: a Revival address. With a letter on helps to the ministry* (Londonderry: The Standard Office, 1860), repr in *A history of the 1859 Ulster Revival*, ed. Stanley Barnes, 7 vols. (Gilford: Whitefield College of the Bible, 2006), iv, 305–06.

99. Ibid. Cf. *Book of the Constitution and Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with a directory for the administration of ordinances* (Belfast: Published by authority of the General Assembly, 1859), 71. For this reason, Henry Cooke was criticised for condoning things which were contrary to the Code of the P.C.I. in *Northern Whig*, 13 June 1859.

100. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching and hymn-singing unwarranted in the church*, 16–17. Idem, *Prophet un-deceived*, 339.

101. Idem, *Lay-preaching*, 11. Here Chancellor is working on the assumption that, despite the abrogation of the old covenant's ceremonies, they still set forth a moral principle which remains relevant in the New Testament age. "Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the New Testament." Westminster Confession, XIX.III.

102. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 8–10.

103. *Lay-preaching*, 8.

104. Anon., "The revivalists," *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, May 1876, 133.

105. The Westminster Assembly's *Form of presbyterial church government* says: "It is lawful and expedient that there be fixed congregations, that is, a certain company of Christians to meet in one assembly ordinarily for publick worship. When believers multiply to such a number, that they cannot conveniently meet in one place, it is lawful and expedient that they should be divided into distinct and fixed congregations, for the better administration of such ordinances as belong unto them, and the discharge of mutual duties. The

The fact that lay-agency had been employed during a season of revival was not, in Chancellor's opinion, proof that it was divinely approved. Since the Bible alone determined what was acceptable in worship, appeals to experience or empirical observation did not suffice as a justification for obtruding this innovation into the worship of God.¹⁰⁶ Defences of lay-preaching such as this were premised on the assumption that whatever took place in connection with a revival must be of God. In Porter's judgment, 1859 began and was carried on by lay-agency; thus lay-agency was deemed to be of God.¹⁰⁷ Chancellor believed that this was a *non-sequitur*; even though the Revival may be (partly, at least) a

ordinary way of dividing Christians into distinct congregations, and most expedient for edification, is by the respective bounds of their dwellings. *First*, Because they who dwell together, being bound to all kind of moral duties one to another, have the better opportunity thereby to discharge them; which moral tie is perpetual; for Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. *Secondly*, The communion of saints must be so ordered, as may stand with the most convenient use of the ordinances, and discharge of moral duties, without respect of persons. *Thirdly*, The pastor and people must so nearly cohabit together, as that they may mutually perform their duties each to other with most conveniency. In this company some must be set apart to bear office." "The form of presbyterial church government," accessed January 1, 2011, <http://www.covenanter.org/Westminster/formofpresbygov.htm#particularcongregations>.

106. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 14–15.

107. Porter, *Spirit resisted*, 295–6.

108. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 15.

109. *Lay-preaching*, 15.

110. J. C. L. Carson, *Three letters on the Revival in Ireland* (Coleraine: The Chronicle Office, 1859), 13. Cf. Killen, "Ballykelly," 202. Thomas Toye, "Great George's Street Church, Belfast" in *Authentic records of revival, now in progress in the United Kingdom*, ed. William Reid (London: James Nisbet, 1860), 117.

111. Anon., "Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening," *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 277.

112. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 5. Cf. Steele, "Thomas Houston," 25–9.

113. *Ibid.* Cf. Anon., "Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening," *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 277, where Reformed Presbyterian members are admonished for attending revival prayer-meetings instead of their fellowship meetings. For more on the subject of fellowship meetings see Thomas Houston, *The fellowship prayer-meeting: the institution, nature, history, and advantages of select Christian fellowship in Works doctrinal and practical of the Rev. Thomas Houston, D.D., Knockbracken. In four volumes* (Edinburgh: A. Elliot, 1876), ii, 267–401.

114. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 5.

115. *Lay-preaching*, 5–6.

116. *Lay-preaching*, 6.

117. *Ibid.*, 9. Anon., "Revival of religion," *Covenanter*, Sep. 1864, 290.

118. The Revd James Dick of Kellswater complained of "little boys exhorting till they became quite hoarse." James Dick to Josias Chancellor, Kellswater, 17 Dec. 1859 (Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Reformed Theological College, Belfast, Chancellor Letters).

work of God, it does not mean that everything associated with it is divinely approved.¹⁰⁸ If such logic was to be accepted, then strikings, hysteria, disease, visions, supernatural messages, and stigmata would all have to be accepted as divinely accredited, since all these things were associated with 1859.¹⁰⁹ For example, Dr J. C. L. Carson employed this reasoning in order to defend the physical manifestations, which "were, in no sense of the word, mere accidents of the Revival. They were essentials, or God would not have sent them."¹¹⁰ Hence, the argument that lay-preaching was fine due to its association with the Revival proved too much. The critique of lay-preaching was also intimately linked to criticism of the standards of preaching among the clergy, as the *Covenanter* chastened those revivalist ministers who had "laid aside careful study in preparation for the pulpit" and "the faithful discriminating preaching of the Gospel" for stories about Revival scenes.¹¹¹

This is not to say that Reformed Presbyterians were opposed, on principle, to any and every instance of lay teaching. Quite the reverse was true. Chancellor was in favour of parents and school-teachers instructing the young, citing the want of biblical instruction as a reason why the Covenanting Church refused to countenance National Education.¹¹² Moreover, he argued that it was the duty of lay Christians to meet for mutual edification and instruction, which was something that Covenanters did in their society meetings for fellowship outside of public worship.¹¹³ Yet despite the zeal of men like Porter for lay-preaching, Chancellor asked what evangelical denomination had given less encouragement to the observance of fellowship meetings than the P.C.I.?¹¹⁴ Such meetings were a vital component in Covenanter spirituality, when all members of the church met upon the ground of "Christian brotherhood and equality," and where no member assumed a monopoly of instructing everyone else. It was in such meetings that great figures in the covenanting tradition, such as Alexander McLeod, claimed to have studied theology.¹¹⁵ However, as Chancellor saw it, the P.C.I. had ignored this legitimate expression of lay-agency, while its ministers now defended the illegitimate practice of lay-preaching.¹¹⁶

Covenanters were also fearful of the effects which lay-preaching would have upon doctrine. They maintained that an ability to impart sound instruction was essential to someone being qualified as a preacher.¹¹⁷ Since the lay-preachers employed in 1859 usually lacked such abilities, and even included women and children,¹¹⁸ Chancellor believed that they were spreading error and extravagance; he sought to substantiate his point by citing historical examples of lay-preaching being used to

propagate the heterodox views of the Montanists and Anabaptists.¹¹⁹ Reformed Presbyterians were not the only ones who held such views as to the effects of lay-preaching. Even James McCosh, a P.C.I. elder and professor at Queen's College, Belfast, admitted that he had been tempted to doubt the reality of the work due to the "awful scenes" of the converts' preaching.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, Henry Cooke complained to the General Assembly in September 1859 about the preaching of ignorant youths, considering it "extremely dangerous" to have them involved in such work.¹²¹ Furthermore, at the same meeting of the General Assembly, John Rogers admitted that the convert preachers had sometimes been guilty of spreading heresy.¹²² Charles Seaver, despite favouring greater lay-involvement in ecclesiastical affairs to stop the drift from the Church of Ireland and admitting the Revival owed its success to the preaching of the uneducated lower orders, also confessed that "many injudicious persons" had been employed as lay-preachers, and that convert-preachers said and did much that no one could approve of.¹²³ Moreover, Chancellor alleged that some of those who had subsequently been confined to the lunatic asylums of Ulster were there as a result of the hysteria which the lay-preachers' excited exhortations had spread throughout the province.¹²⁴

VI.

Despite identifying themselves as evangelicals, Covenanters were concerned that 1859 was promoting a form of evangelical latitudinarianism, which sought to promote a union among Christians at the expense of important articles of doctrine and practice. Hence they warned against ecumenical gatherings which countenanced aberrant worship and permitted those of erroneous sentiments to spread their dogmas.¹²⁵ This adds nuance to the Synod's fourth resolution on the Revival, as it would appear that there was a tightly defined limit to their catholicity. It is even questionable if Anglicans, Baptists or Plymouth Brethren were included in the "evangelical Christians" that they would have been comfortable uniting with. In the denomination's *Testimony* of 1868, the Reformed Presbyterians explained their rationale for rejecting evangelical latitudinarianism. It was deemed erroneous because it promoted the view that only a small number of religious doctrines mattered, while everything else was unimportant. This was rejected because it undermined the Covenanters' witness for the absolute Lordship of Christ, and, if taken to its logical conclusion, would preclude them from speaking against Erastianism and from upholding purity of worship and church discipline. Although salvation was

not deemed to be contingent upon right views of these things, the Reformed Presbyterians believed that they were, nevertheless, very important matters, which could not be set aside in a quest for evangelical unity.¹²⁶ They believed this would be counterproductive, because the inevitable consequence of such latitudinarianism was to lead people to undervalue, and eventually reject, one truth after another. Hence the only safe way to preserve the "fundamentals of religion" was not to adopt a minimalistic creed, but to uphold the maximum amount of doctrinal integrity that was humanly possible.¹²⁷ Such an approach was reflective of the traditional Covenanter teaching that true Christian unity could only be maintained by the church practicing the most complete uniformity that was possible. Anything else was a sign of declension, not progress.¹²⁸ Hence, they warned their

119. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 13–14.

120. James McCosh, *The Ulster revival and its physiological accidents. A paper read before the Evangelical Alliance, September 22, 1859* (London: James Nisbet, 1859), repr in *A history of the 1859 Ulster revival*, ed. Stanley Barnes (Gilford: Whitefield College of the Bible, 2006) v, 89.

121. *Belfast Daily Mercury*, 1 Oct. 1859.

122. Ibid. Cf. S. J. Brown, "Presbyterian communities, transatlantic visions and the Ulster Revival of 1859," in *The cultures of Europe: the Irish contribution*, ed. J. P. Mackey (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1994), 95. Peter Gibbon, *The origins of Ulster Unionism: the formation of popular Protestant politics and ideology in nineteenth century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 48.

123. Charles Seaver, "Religious revivals": two sermons, preached in St John's Church, on Sunday, 10th July (Belfast: George Phillips, 1859), repr in *A history of the 1859 Ulster Revival*, ed. Stanley Barnes, 7 vols. (Gilford, 2006), vi, 218. Cf. J. N. I. Dickson, *Beyond religious discourse: sermons, preaching and evangelical Protestants in nineteenth-century Irish society* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), 191–2. Seaver, *Ulster Revival*, 55. S. P. Kerr, "Voluntaryism within the Established Church in nineteenth century Belfast" in *Studies in church history 23: voluntary religion*, eds W. J. Shiels and Diana Wood (Oxford: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1986), 354.

124. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 16.

125. Anon., "Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening," *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 276. Anon., "The Spirit's work in reviving religion," *Covenanter*, Mar. 1860, 103–04.

126. *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Part I—historical* (Belfast: W. & G. Baird, 1868), 133–4.

127. Ibid., 134. Anon., "Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening," *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 278.

128. The first article in the Solemn League and Covenant demanded that the Covenanters endeavour to strive after uniformity in the church: "That we shall sincerely, really and constantly, through the grace of God, endeavour in our several places and callings, the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, against our common enemies; the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, according to the Word

members against the “occasional hearing” of those of erroneous sentiments.¹²⁹ It is interesting that a committee of the Synod of 1860 expressed its displeasure at the “latitudinarian spirit” displayed among those seeking to promote evangelical union and religious revival, believing that such an approach was tantamount to a detestable neutrality in doctrinal matters.¹³⁰ This meant that the type of unity which 1859 produced was not welcomed; in fact, it was even described as being the work of the devil, transforming himself into an angel of light under the guise of false charity.¹³¹ It was also alleged that 1859 was suspect because a true revival should advance the cause of the Covenanted Reformation, which was deemed to be the height of the British

of God, and the example of the best reformed Churches; and we shall endeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of Church government, directory for worship and catechising, that we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us.”

129. Anon., “Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening,” *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 278.

130. Anon., “The signs of the times, as bearing on the testimony for truth (By a committee of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod, Ireland.)” *Covenanter*, Aug. 1860, 228. *Minutes of the annual meeting of the Reformed Presbyterian Synod of Ireland, held in Belfast, June 25, 1860* (Belfast: James Johnston, 1860), 10.

131. Anon., “Scriptural marks of true revivals,” *Reformed Presbyterian*, Jan. 1860, 11.

132. Anon., “The Spirit’s work in reviving religion,” *Covenanter*, Mar. 1860, 100–01. Anon., “Scriptural marks of true revivals,” *Reformed Presbyterian*, Jan. 1860, 11.

133. Anon., “Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening,” *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 275.

134. Minute book of the Belfast Presbytery of the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Synod 1855–1908, 4 May 1858 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Records of the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Church, CR5/5/B/5/1). Cf. Geoffrey Allen, ed., *The Covenanters in Ireland: a history of the congregations* (Armagh: Cameron Press, 2010), 163, 450.

135. Minute book of the Belfast Presbytery of the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Synod 1855–1908, 9 Sep. 1859 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Records of the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Church, CR5/5/B/5/1).

136. Minute book of the Belfast Presbytery of the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Synod 1855–1908, 15 Sep. 1859 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast, Records of the Eastern Reformed Presbyterian Church, CR5/5/B/5/1).

137. Crawford Gribben, “The worst sect that a Christian man can meet: opposition to the Plymouth Brethren in Ireland and Scotland, 1859–1900,” *Scottish Studies Review* 3 (2002): 34. N. R. Railton, *Revival on the Causeway coast: the 1859 revival in and around Coleraine* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 50.

138. Cited in Gribben, “Worst sect,” 34.

139. Gribben, “Worst sect,” 34–5.

church’s attainments—something that the Ulster Awakening had failed to do.¹³²

VII.

If the Covenanters were fearful of the Revival promoting a false ecumenicity, they were equally afraid of the encouragement that it gave to sectarian tenets.¹³³ The issue of anti-paedobaptism had led to serious disquiet among the Eastern Reformed Presbyterians before and during the Revival. In April 1858 the Revd R. M. Henry announced to the Eastern Synod that he wished to sever his connection with the denomination, partly due to his conviction that infant baptism was unscriptural. Consequently, on 4 May the Belfast Presbytery met to dissolve the pastoral tie between Henry and the Linnhall Street congregation, as Henry subsequently became a Baptist minister. His departure was deeply regretted, as the Presbytery minutes record that Henry “possesses talents of a high order and carefully cultivated,” and recognised that he was “a devoted, labourious and zealous Pastor.”¹³⁴ The following year, on 9 September, the Revd John Galway McVicker of Cullybackey (near Ballymena, Co. Antrim) came before the same Presbytery to announce his rejection of the E.R.P. constitution, and his dissent from the church’s position on the mode and subjects of baptism. His fellow presbyters were concerned about McVicker’s hastiness, and urged him to reconsider. However, the minutes portray McVicker as one who obstinately refused to listen to counsel: “Presbytery request Mr McVicker to consult with his brethren before he takes any decided steps in the matter. Mr McVicker however, declares his mind is made up and declines any consultation.”¹³⁵ Accordingly, the pastoral tie between McVicker and the Cullybackey congregation was thus severed on 15 September.¹³⁶ McVicker was immersed in the River Maine by the revivalist Jeremiah Meneely and became the first pastor of Ballymena Baptist Church.¹³⁷ However, his theological evolution did not begin and end with baptism. It would appear that he had come to reject much else in the Reformed tradition, claiming that subsequent to his conversion “Confessions, catechisms, covenants, testimonies, etc., were as wholly stripped off me as the old skin from a serpent in sloughing time.”¹³⁸ Having adopted such sentiments, it was not surprising that McVicker resigned from the Baptists in December 1862, with his followers seceding to form Ballymena’s first Plymouth Brethren Assembly.¹³⁹

These developments would have disturbed members of the old Synod, and the *Covenanter* bemoaned the “rich harvest” of proselytes that the Baptists and Plymouth

Brethren were making among other Presbyterians.¹⁴⁰ In October 1864, when reviewing the Revd Thomas Witherow's book on infant baptism,¹⁴¹ the *Covenanter* claimed that Anabaptist dogmas were spread abroad during "what was termed the Ulster Revival" in "a season of religious excitement, when erroneous doctrines and disorderly practices received in many quarters not a little countenance."¹⁴² Indeed, James Dick had come to this conclusion in 1859, as he wrote to Chancellor complaining that the lay-preaching associated with the Revival had opened "the floodgates" to Baptists and Plymouth Brethren.¹⁴³ And so the *Testimony* of 1868 was sufficiently concerned about the diffusion of Baptist tenets to critique what they labelled "Anabaptism" for its breaking of the connection between the church in both testaments, denying believers' children their place in the visible church and the sign of the covenant of grace and for teaching that immersion was of the essence of baptism.¹⁴⁴

As concerned as they were about the spread of Baptists, the Covenanters were much more worried about the encouragement which revivalism gave to the doctrines and practices of the Plymouth Brethren, so much so that they were even willing to recommend a pamphlet written by a Baptist, Dr J. C. L. Carson of Coleraine, which exposed the heresies of the "Plymouthist sect."¹⁴⁵ They were compared to sectaries such as the Mormons and the Morisonians, and were not even regarded as fellow evangelicals.¹⁴⁶ It was feared that they may have been formed as part of a Jesuit plot to pave the way for Popery in Britain, as the dissemination of their doctrines would lead to "the ingress of a flood of Antichristian abominations."¹⁴⁷ The revival was blamed for the spread of Plymouthism, as the *Covenanter* complained that the "religious excitement" of 1859 could be traced to individuals at Kells, Connor and Ballymena who had come under the influence of the Brethren.¹⁴⁸ Although Nick Railton claims that Plymouthist views were gaining ground in Ulster before the Revival, citing a debate in the May 1857 meeting of the Synod of Ballymena and Coleraine as proof of their increasing influence, it should be noted that one of the Revival's earliest converts, Jeremiah Meneely, became instrumental in establishing the Brethren throughout Ulster.¹⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Janice Holmes has even argued that Ulster's first Brethren assemblies were established as a result the enthusiasm of 1859.¹⁵⁰ However, Plymouthism's anti-clericalism, dispensationalism, doctrinal aberrance and contempt for the historic church caused it to be viewed as heretical by Anglicans and Presbyterians.¹⁵¹ So *Covenanter* criticism of the Plymouth Brethren cannot be dismissed as narrow prejudice, as they were looked upon with suspicion

by orthodox divines and denominations. Surprisingly, in 1878 the American *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter* periodical published an article by John Brown of Iowa, who claimed that the Plymouth Brethren "are, generally, sound in doctrine, and exemplary in practice," being broadly Calvinistic in their beliefs.¹⁵² Houston, however, was far from convinced of this. He believed that the Plymouthists were unsound on a whole host of issues, accusing them of anti-creedalism, believing in eternal justification or holding that believers were justified at the time of Christ's death rather than when they exercise saving faith, forbidding the unconverted to pray, denying the full humanity of Christ, rejecting the imputation of Christ's righteousness, advocating a universal atonement, teaching that assurance was essential to faith, denying the need for repentance, believing in an imputed sanctification, rejecting the perpetual obligation of the Christian Sabbath and adopting a pre-millennial view of Christ's return.¹⁵³ Although Houston wrote against the Brethren some fifteen years after 1859, it is probable that he viewed their rise to prominence as an outgrowth of the errors of the awakening.¹⁵⁴

140. Anon., "Thoughts on revival. No. II. Duties of covenanting witnesses in relation to the present awakening," *Covenanter*, Oct. 1859, 276.

141. Thomas Witherow, *Scriptural Baptism: its mode and subjects as opposed to the views of the Anabaptists* (3rd edn, Belfast: C. Aitchison, 1864). Witherow was a minister of Maghera Presbyterian. See J. M. Barkley, *Faith of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 1840-1870 (Part I)* (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 1986), 76.

142. Anon., "Notices of books," *Covenanter*, Oct. 1864, 335.

143. James Dick to Josias Chancellor, Kellswater, 17 Dec. 1859 (Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Reformed Theological College, Belfast, Chancellor Letters).

144. *Testimony*, 127-8.

145. Anon., "Errors of the Plymouthist sect," *Covenanter*, Jan. 1863, 19-20.

146. "Errors of the Plymouthist sect," 17.

147. "Errors of the Plymouthist sect," 20.

148. "Errors of the Plymouthist sect," 17.

149. Railton, *Causeway Coast*, 49-50. Cf. Roy Coad, *A history of the Brethren movement: its origins, its worldwide development and its significance for the present day* (2nd edn, Exeter: Paternoster, 1976), 171.

150. Janice Holmes, "Transformation, aberration or consolidation? Exploring the Ulster Revival of 1859," in *Exploring change in cultural studies: Historical Studies XXIII: papers read before the 25th Irish Conference of Historians, held at University College Galway, 18-20 May 2001*, ed. Niall O Ciossain (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005), 126-7.

151. Gribben, "Worst sect," 35. Cf. A. R. Holmes, "The experience and understanding of religious revival in Ulster Presbyterianism, c. 1800-1930," *Irish Historical Studies*, 34 (2005): 382.

152. John Brown, "The Plymouth Brethren," *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, Aug. 1878, 276.

153. Houston, *Plymouthism & revivalism*, 7-26.

154. Cf. the warnings against Plymouthism juxtaposed to condemnation

VIII.

Developments in the P.C.I. after 1859 appear to vindicate the Reformed Presbyterians' concerns about the Revival's impact on worship. During the debates over hymnody subsequent to the Revival, T. Y. Killen is reported to have said that if the P.C.I. continued to practise exclusive psalmody, then "instead of being the great Presbyterian Church of Ireland, they would just sink down into a little sect of narrow bigoted

of the 1859 Revival in Anon., "Revival of religion in the church: its nature, means, fruits—mistakes and dangers to be avoided," *Covenanter*, July 1875, 196–8.

155. Cited in Nevin, *Hymn question*, 14–15. Killen is referred to as saying something similar in the *Belfast News-Letter*, 20 Apr. 1875. However, the report paraphrases him as saying the adoption of total psalmody would be tantamount to "separating themselves from all the Presbyterian churches of the world, which, with the exception of the Covenanters, all used hymns." Cf. Anon., "Dr Killen on the Reformed Presbyterian Church," *Reformed Presbyterian and Covenanter*, Apr. 1882, 101.

156. Archibald Robinson, *Review of Rev. Dr. Killen's articles on the Westminster divines: and the use of instrumental music in the worship of the Christian church* (Belfast: W. H. Smith, 1882). However, Dr Robert Allen claims that Robinson eventually backed down on the hymn question, and only opposed heterodox hymns. See Robert Allen, *The Presbyterian College Belfast 1853–1953. With an introductory chapter on academic preparation for the Presbyterian ministry in Ireland 1660–1810. And a foreword by the Rt Rev. Principal J. E. Davey, D.D. moderator of the General Assembly* (Belfast: William Mullan, 1954), 217.

157. John Wolfe, *The expansion of evangelicalism: the age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 112.

158. R. S. Tosh, "An examination of the origins and development of Irish Presbyterian worship" (Ph.D. diss., Queen's University Belfast, 1983), 52.

159. Cf. Wolfe, *Expansion*, p. 112.

160. A. R. Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice, 1770–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 118.

161. Holmes, *Heritage*, 133. J. E. Davey, *The story of a hundred years: an account of the Irish Presbyterian Church from the formation of the General Assembly to the present time* (Belfast: W. & G. Baird Limited, 1940) 56–7. D. W. Miller, "Did Ulster Presbyterians have a devotional revolution?," in *Evangelicals and Catholics in nineteenth-century Ireland*, ed. J. H. Murphy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 54. Tosh, "Irish Presbyterian worship," 171.

162. W. D. Bailie, "The 1859 Revival," in *Radicals and revivals: a tribute to W. Desmond Bailie*, ed. I. F. Smith (Belfast: Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland, 2006), 16–17. Cf. D. W. Bebbington, *The dominance of evangelicalism: the age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 87–8.

163. W. T. Latimer, *A history of the Irish Presbyterians* (2nd edn, Belfast: James Cleeland et al, 1902), 494. Cf. David McMeekin, *Memories of '59 or the Revival movement* (Hull: M. Harland, 1908), 45–6, 56–7. T. E. Warner, "The impact of Wesley on Ireland" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1954), 281. Brown, "Presbyterian communities," 102. Nevin, *Hymn question*, 9. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 30–1. W. J. H. McKee, "A critical examination of the doctrine of assurance in revivalism, with particular reference to the Revival in Ulster in 1859" (Ph.D. diss., Queen's University Belfast, 1988), 113.

Covenanters, and all the great evangelical Churches of Christendom would be laughing at them."¹⁵⁵ Although some Revival supporters such as Archibald Robinson maintained the confessional view of worship, Killen's comments reveal that some within the P.C.I. were now much more concerned with identifying with broader evangelicalism than with their covenanting heritage.¹⁵⁶ Between 1790 and 1850 hymns had gained much greater acceptance among Presbyterians, especially in America, than they had previously.¹⁵⁷ In Scotland there were also moves in this direction, with the Free Church of Scotland adopting a hymn-book in 1873.¹⁵⁸ After the Revival, the P.C.I. seems to have been following this general trend.¹⁵⁹ Yet this generalization should not be thought of as an absolute, as it should be noted that Andrew Holmes claims there was evidence of hymn singing among some Old Light G.S.U. ministers and a handful of Seceder ministers in Ireland in the years preceding the union of synods in 1840.¹⁶⁰ It may be the case that 1859 served to rekindle a desire for hymns that had previously existed, but had been mortified in the interests of church unity when the synods came together. Nonetheless, subsequent to the Revival, the tide of hymns could not be turned back, and so, after a long controversy in the General Assembly, a motion to prepare a hymn book was accepted in 1896, and the book was published in 1898.¹⁶¹ Commenting on how the 1859 Revival sent the P.C.I. on a hymn-singing trajectory, Dr W. D. Bailie observed that, from 1859 onwards, paraphrases, hymns and then the American organ began to make their way into P.C.I. services, "until today almost every church in our communion has what our forebears would have termed 'innovations.'"¹⁶² W. T. Latimer believed that this was the fruit of the emotionalism of the Revival, which created a desire for modes of worship which would excite the feelings rather than instruct the mind. As the hymnody which the P.C.I. produced contained "much that is of doubtful orthodoxy," the employment of such liturgical innovations—usually associated with non-Calvinistic forms of Christianity—during the Revival did much to undermine the P.C.I.'s Reformed identity in the long-term.¹⁶³

Yet in spite of the Revival's effects upon doctrine and worship, and the Covenanters' reputation as stalwarts of Reformed orthodoxy, they did not offer outright opposition to the movement. At a *prima facie* level it appears strange that the most virulent opponents of 1859, excluding Unitarians and secularists, should have come from within the more mainstream P.C.I., while the Reformed Presbyterians played the role of moderates. How

can this apparent contradiction be explained? First, it may have been the case that the proximity of the P.C.I. anti-revivalists to the excitement and the fact they were opposing the views of the General Assembly, and the majority of their fellow-ministers, made it difficult for them to adopt the seeming balance and moderation of the Anglican and Covenanter critics.¹⁶⁴ Although difficult to objectively substantiate, W. T. Latimer argued that three quarters of the P.C.I. ministers actively supported the Revival, while less than ten per cent offered opposition.¹⁶⁵ Hence, the anti-revivalists were very much in the minority. Second, it could be argued that the Reformed Presbyterians' confessional orthodoxy kept them from the supposed excesses of the anti-revivalists, such as Hamilton's denial of common operations of the Holy Spirit or Dobbin's rejection of infallible assurance.¹⁶⁶ Yet rejection of the validity of 1859 was not contingent upon these things. In terms of common operations, McCosh had suggested that "[t]here may be bodily agitation which does not proceed from even a conviction of sin,"¹⁶⁷ while an "Orthodox Presbyterian" correspondent in the *Northern Whig* and the author of an article printed in the American *Reformed Presbyterian* periodical had suggested that terror of conscience can sometimes be caused by the imagination, without it being a true conviction of sin.¹⁶⁸ Recognising this would harmonise perfectly with Hamilton's position that the prostrations were not the work of the Spirit. In relation to assurance, Isaac Nelson did not formally reject the concept of infallible assurance, even though he denied the revivalist understanding of it.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, ostensible moderation is not a sufficient explanation as to why the Covenanters' adopted the position that they did.

One possible solution to the conundrum of the Covenanters' moderation is that their evangelicalism made them more open to the allegedly positive aspects of 1859. However, this argument fails to fully convince, as both Nelson and Dobbin identified with evangelicalism, yet they offered the most strenuous opposition to the movement.¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, the willingness of Houston and Chancellor to identify themselves with evangelicalism is important.¹⁷¹ It raises the question of whether or not it was consistent for Covenanters to identify themselves as evangelicals. The latitudinarianism of evangelicalism does not appear to sit well with adherence to confessional orthodoxy or with the Solemn League and Covenant's commitment to root out Prelatic and sectarian errors. In their defence, it could be argued that the Covenanters were only identifying with other orthodox Christians on things that they agreed on,

and their own criticism of the latitudinarianism of the Evangelical Alliance does seem to highlight that their identity as evangelicals did not automatically lead to ambivalence concerning their own distinctive features.¹⁷² Yet for them to identify with a movement characterised by such doctrinal minimalism does not appear to make sense when contrasted with the comprehensiveness of

164. Latimer, *History*, 492. Cf. Isaac Nelson, *The year of delusion: a review of 'The year of grace'* (Belfast: The Advertiser Office, 1860–1866), 263.

165. Latimer, *History*, 492.

166. William Hamilton, *An inquiry into the Scriptural character of the Revival of 1859* (Belfast: Alexander Mayne, 1866), 26, 37, 63. Westminster Confession, X.IV. David Silversides, "What was the 1859 Revival?," accessed June 29, 2010, <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.aspx?SID=430091434322>. William Dobbin, *Remarks on the assurance of faith: being a lecture delivered in the Second Presbyterian meeting-house Anaghlonne* (Belfast: George Phillips, 1864), 4. Westminster Confession, XVIII.II-III. E. D. Morris, *Theology of the Westminster symbols. A commentary. Historical, doctrinal, practical, on the confession of faith and catechisms and the related formularies of the Presbyterian churches* (Columbus: The Champlin Press, 1900), 500. M. E. Dever, "Calvin, Westminster and assurance," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st century*, ed. Ligon Duncan, 3 vols. (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2003–09), i, 313–14.

167. McCosh, *Ulster Revival*, 91. S. J. Moore said a similar thing before the P.C.I. General Assembly. *Northern Whig*, 8 July 1859.

168. *Northern Whig*, 8 June 1859. Anon., "Scriptural marks of true revivals," *Reformed Presbyterian*, Jan. 1860, p. 8.

169. Isaac Nelson, *An answer to the Rev. John Macnaughtan's defence of revivalism, assurance, and the witness of the Spirit* (Belfast: Alexander Mayne, 1867), repr in *A history of the 1859 Ulster Revival*, ed. Stanley Barnes, 7 vols. (Gilford: Whitefield College of the Bible, 2006), iv, 68–70. Isaac Nelson, *An answer to the Rev. Professor Killen's defence of revivalism, assurance, and the witness of the Spirit* (Belfast: Alexander Mayne, 1867), repr in *A history of the 1859 Ulster Revival*, ed. Stanley Barnes, 7 vols. (Gilford: Whitefield College of the Bible, 2006), iv, 29.

170. Ritchie, "Presbyterian opposition." 78. Nelson is described in the inscription below his bust as a "Learned, upright and evangelical pastor." This currently resides in Nelson Memorial Presbyterian Church, Shankill Road, Belfast.

171. J. A. Chancellor, *Jehoiada's memorial among the kings: a sermon on the death of the Rev. Thomas Houston, D.D., professor of ecclesiastical history and exegetical and pastoral theology in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, delivered at Knockbracken, April 23rd, 1882; also the address at his funeral, March 30th, 1882* (Belfast: Archer and sons, 1882), 25–7, 31–47. Chancellor, *Lay-preaching*, 5. For a thorough argument in favour of Houston's evangelicalism, see Steele, "Houston, we have a problem."

172. Anon., "Evangelical Alliance—annual conference," *Covenanter*, Nov. 1859, 313–14. Though it should be pointed out that Thomas Houston had been involved in the Evangelical Alliance, and on one occasion called upon evangelicals to "draw more closely together" in order to spread the truth and combat Popery and infidelity. At this meeting it was explained that the Alliance would consist of "[a]ll who held the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and who were content to drop denominational differences." *Banner of Ulster*, 2 Apr. 1847. *Northern Whig*, 1 Apr. 1847.

the Covenanter testimony. And it must be recognised that the Reformed Presbyterians were influenced by some of the novelties of evangelicalism, such as the temperance movement.¹⁷³ Adam Loughridge's admission of the prevalence of total abstinence in the denomination raises important questions regarding the incongruity of such a practice with the Westminster Confession's emphasis upon Christian liberty.¹⁷⁴ Thus we have one example of evangelicalism undermining the Covenanters' confessionalism. In light of this, it may be the case that evangelicalism was a significant factor behind the failure to out-rightly oppose a movement which was seemingly at odds with their confessional standards. In the long-term, it is probably fair to say that the overall position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church is now somewhat weaker than it was in 1859, though it is still much more conservative and confessional than the P.C.I. The denomination still adheres to the covenants, the Westminster Confession and *a capella* psalmody, but it has forgotten its earlier postmillennialism and covenanting principles do not appear to be

as crucial to the Reformed Presbyterians as they once were.¹⁷⁵ This raises an important question concerning the utility of the Covenanters' continued existence, because if the church is not going to stress its distinctive features, especially relating to the covenants, then how can it justify its continued existence as a communion separate from other conservative Presbyterians? In 1858 James Kennedy had little difficulty in answering this, as covenanting principles were a crucial component in the denomination's identity. However, one wonders if the same could really be said today. On the other hand, the church does continue to discourage voting for candidates without Scriptural qualifications and prohibits membership of secret societies, such as the Orange Order.¹⁷⁶ Yet with the exception of worship, it is difficult to distinguish modern Covenanters—in terms of piety and identity—from the mainstream of evangelical Calvinists. Perhaps it is time for Irish Covenanters to reconsider their relationship with evangelicalism, and to contemplate whether or not the church needs to vigorously reassert its Reformed and covenanting identity. ■

173. Elizabeth Malcolm, *Ireland sober, Ireland free: drink and temperance in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1986), 152. See Chancellor's defence of abstinence in *Testimony against social evils. By a committee of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland* (Londonderry: James MacPherson, 1868), 17–24. For Houston, see his foreword to G. H. Shanks, *Bible temperance: containing an examination of Rev. Dr Murphy's tract on "Wine in the Bible"* (Belfast: W. E. Mayne, 1869).

174. Westminster Confession XX.II. Loughridge, *Covenanters in Ireland*, 106. It must be admitted, however, that teetotalism is probably on the decline within the denomination. Even those who practice it do not necessarily do so for dogmatic reasons, but for reasons of prudence.

175. Here is a relatively recent example of the Irish Covenanters' postmillennialism: "Prophecy shows that a time is coming when the Kingdom of Christ shall triumph over all opposition and prevail in all the world. The Romish Antichrist shall be utterly destroyed. The Jews shall be converted to Christianity. The fullness of the Gentiles shall be brought in and all mankind shall possess the knowledge of the Lord. The truth in its illuminating, regenerating and sanctifying efficacy shall be felt everywhere, so that the multitudes of all nations

shall serve the Lord. Knowledge, love, holiness, and peace shall reign through the abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Arts, sciences, literature, and property shall be consecrated to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. The social institutions of men shall be regulated by gospel principles, and the nations as such shall consecrate their strength to the Lord. Oppression and tyranny shall come to an end. The nations, instead of being distracted by wars, shall be united in peace. The inhabitants of the world shall be exceedingly multiplied, and pure and undefiled religion shall exert supreme dominion over their hearts and lives so that happiness shall abound. This blessed period shall be of long duration. It will be succeeded by a time of general defection from truth and holiness, and of the prevalence of irreligion and crime. This will immediately precede the second coming of the Son of man from heaven." *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. Part I. Doctrinal and practical* (1901; Belfast: R. Carswell & son, 1912), 138–9.

176. "Covenanters and politics," accessed January 18, 2011, <http://www.rpc.org/page/moral&page=6>. *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland* (Belfast: Reformed Presbyterian Synod, 1990), 24–7, 84–8.