

Scotland and The Great Awakening of 1742-1743.

1. The Scottish Context.

The revivals of 1742-3 followed 80 years of decline in the church. With the Restoration of Charles I in 1660 came the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Some 2000 “Puritan” ministers in England were ejected and 400 in Scotland had to leave their pulpits and become Nonconformist. As the famous preachers passed away such as Rutherford and Dickson, something of their fiery and zealous heritage went with them. The Stewart monarchs were set on eradicating Presbyterianism and the years from 1660 – 1690 were years of great persecution of the Covenanters culminating in “The Killing Time” of 1679-1689.

By 1690 the church had lost the presence and power of the Spirit of God.

Congregations dwindled and the force of Calvinism in society was reduced to a trickle.

1707. The Act of Union led to an embracing of “Britishness.”

It was also the century of the Age of Reason. New anti-Christian philosophies were replacing the old certainties founded on revelation. Kames, Hume and Adam Smith.

(See A Herman, *The Scottish Enlightenment* p 64, 67 for descriptions of the changes in attitudes to Christianity.)

18th century Edinburgh was in the grip of the Scottish Enlightenment.

This was a time of uncertainty. The overthrow the Protestant Hanoverian dynasty was being planned by Charles Edward Stuart, “Bonnie Prince Charlie” and attempted in 1744-45.

In addition the harvests of 1740 and 1741 failed and there were near famine conditions.

2. The State of Church and Society.

Passionate convictions of any kind were frowned upon. Preaching was reduced to moral homilies. The abandonment of personal faith led to a decline in moral standards.

“*Ungodliness is our universal, our constant, our peculiar characteristic*” said Wesley.

Formalism, coldness of heart, indifference to religion and worldliness reigned everywhere.”

3. Signs of Hope.

There were some evangelical ministers who maintained the old puritan theology, believing God for a new spring-time of revival to come. They held to the convictions of an expanding kingdom of God when there was no sign of it.

a. Thomas Boston reprinted an evangelical book “*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*” in 1719.

The General Assembly banned it in 1720. However it had a huge impact in promoting the evangelical gospel.

b. People in Scotland still told the inspiring stories of the martyrs from the 1600s, stirring faith.

c. The optimistic faith of Calvinism which had been lying dormant began to break out again.

4. The Calvinist Faith.

a. A focus on the sovereignty of God. Calvinism proclaims the controlling plan of God behind all events – a doctrine of immense optimism.

See Isaiah 11: 9-10. Matthew 28: 18-20. Malachi 1: 11.

b. A focus on the power of the risen Christ as Mediator. Calvin: “*The mediatorial work of Christ did not come to an end at the death and resurrection. That work for the gathering and perfecting of his church continues and its ultimate success rests securely upon the position which Christ now occupies.*” Puritan Hope, p 88. See Romans 14: 9, Matt 28: 18, Eph 1: 22.

c. An emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the one who brings the spiritually dead to life.

d. The belief that the kingdom of Christ will “*spread and triumph through powerful operations of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the church in revivals.*” Puritan Hope p 51.

5. Signs of Revival.

a. 1720s. The Moravian revival in the estate of Count Von Zinzerdorf in Saxony came first.

This became a prayer and evangelistic movement. Wesley was greatly influenced by it.

b. 1735. Under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, New England revival broke out. He recorded what happened in great detail.

- c. In 1735 In Wales Howell Harris and Daniel Rowlands were converted. In England George Whitefield was converted – three of the main tools of God in the coming awakening.
- d. In 1737 Whitefield was preaching in London to crowds with great effect.
He wrote “*There was no end of people flocking to hear the word of God.*”
- e. 1738. The conversion of John Wesley in London.

The tide had turned.

By 1739 it was beyond question that a great revival had begun in England. The crowds grew so that outdoor preaching became necessary. In Feb 1739 Whitefield preached to a crowd of 10,000 in London. He began a travelling ministry that took him all over Britain and Ireland and to the 13 American Colonies several times in his passion to see people saved. (Think of transport then!) Physical side effects accompanied the awakening everywhere coming from deep conviction of sin. There was much debate about this – should groans, shouting and swoonings be permitted? The decision was made to allow them for fear of quenching the Spirit.

6. The Awakening Spreads to Scotland - Cambuslang.

News of the awakening in America came to Scotland and fed the hopes of those praying for revival. Writings of Jonathan Edwards were eagerly devoured.

Whitefield visited Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1741 and preached but with no great effect.

However, he had a profound influence on William McCulloch, the learned and studious minister at Cambuslang, five miles south east of Glasgow. Some of McCulloch’s congregation were also influenced. McCulloch went home and started preaching about the new birth. In January 1742 a weaver and shoemaker in the congregation presented a petition to McCulloch requesting a weekly midweek sermon. Thursday evenings were set aside.

McCulloch’s son had been a trader in the North American colonies and he sent his father letters describing the awakening there which McCulloch read, along with printed sermons from America, to his congregation. (The quickest route to America was to sail from Glasgow.)

In Feb 1742 McCulloch held three days of prayer meetings. 90 families attended. Events in America and England were discussed and prayed over. On the third day, following the sermon, several people cried out in anguish. 50 parishioners kept McCulloch up all night under conviction of sin and seeking his help. This was the beginning of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Soon McCulloch was preaching every night and the most insistent cry became “*What shall we do to be saved?*” There was weeping, moaning and violent contortions as people were convicted of sin.

By April 1742 McCulloch believed that 300 had been saved, out of a parish of 900.

They were mainly weavers and coal miners. The weavers set their bibles up on their looms and read as they worked. (Scotland was a highly literate society thanks to John Knox’s influence.)

By Sept 1742 McCulloch estimated those saved as 500. Huge numbers of people travelled to see what God was doing. Despite the manifestations the atmosphere was one of great solemnity. Rev Alexander Webster wrote “*solemn, profound reverence overspread every countenance.*” Brian Edwards, *Revival*, p133.

It was much spoken against. There was much mockery and opposition. Many came to see “*the falling.*”

7. The Cambuslang Revival – George Whitefield’s Visits and the Two Great Communion.

June 1742. Whitefield visited Scotland at McCulloch’s invitation (the 2nd of 14 visits to Scotland.)

He preached a, Original sin, b, Justification by faith, c, Regeneration - with passion, humour and drama, often facing abuse both verbal and physical. He wrote “*The awakening in Scotland is unspeakable. God seems to awaken scores together. I never was enabled to preach so before.*”

Puritan Hope p 119. People could be heard praying and praising all night.

Whitefield visited again for two special Communion Seasons – events of four days.

Friday was the Fast Day (4 preachers) Saturday, the Day of Preparation (4 preachers)

Sunday, Communion – The Feast, (15 preachers) Monday, the Day of Thanksgiving (5 preachers.)

(See Pollock, *Whitefield* p 202-5 for Whitefield’s own descriptions. Also see Fawcett, on the beginnings of the revival, p 106-111, on Whitefield p 114-116, on the second communion p 119-120.)

July 1742. 20,000. **August 1742.** The crowds had swelled to between 30,000 and 40,000.

(Numbers judged by the offerings. See Fawcett p 118.)

The “Preaching Braes” can still be seen at Cambuslang. They are now part of a public park.

8. The Revival Spreads.

Sunday 16th May 1742. A similar work of the Holy Spirit started in Kilsyth where James Robe had been ministering for 29 years. Following the setting up of prayer societies in his congregation on this particular Sunday a spirit of mourning and conviction came over the congregation and over 30 were awakened – about 20 locals and 10 visitors.

“An extraordinary power of the divine Spirit accompanied the word preached” wrote Robe.

3rd Oct 1742. James Robe recorded that there were 1,500 communicants. (In a parish of 900)

A great spirit of friendship and unity prevailed.

Both Robe and McCulloch kept detailed records. In 1751 McCulloch reported that 400 awakened in 1742 continued as believers. He interviewed and wrote down the experiences of 105 of them intended for future publication. Arthur Fawcett used much of these contemporary accounts in his 1971 book, “The Cambuslang Revival.” Robe died in 1753. McCulloch died in 1771.

The revival spread to Muthil, Crieff and Auchterarder in Perthshire and to Baldernock and Cumbernauld, Kirkintilloch, Gargunnoch and in the far north of Scotland, Easter Ross, Golspie.

There are accounts of these in “Restoration in the Church, Reports of Revivals 1625-1839” (Christian Focus) published in 1839 and now reprinted. This includes a letter by Wm McCulloch written in 1751 (p 19-20) and James Robes’ comments on manifestations and “the falling.” P 17-18. For Muthil, Crieff and Auchterarder see p 41.

8. Effects of the Revival.

- a. A missionary movement began to take the gospel to the Highlands of Scotland. There was no Gaelic bible till 1800 so this was a real spiritual desert but God followed the evangelists with many outbreaks of revival. The Gaelic speaking parts of Scotland had repeated visitations of God through the 1800s.
- b. There was a great increase in prayer and praying societies.
- c. The evangelical party became the leaders and shapers of the church in Scotland for the next 150 years.
- d. A heart for foreign mission developed and the end of the 1700s saw the creation of the Missionary Societies.
- e. A passion for social justice, abolishment of slavery, prison reform and care for the poor flowed from the Great Awakening.

Books.

The Puritan Hope. Iain Murray. Banner of Truth. Ch 6.

Whitefield and the Great Awakening. John Pollock. Ch 28

The Cambuslang Revival. Arthur Fawcett. Banner of Truth 1971, rep 1996. (4 chapters online.)

The Lion Handbook – The History of Christianity. Section 6 –Awakening, p 436-457.

Restoration in the Church. Reports of Revivals 1625-1839. Christian Focus.

Cambuslang Testimonies. Evangelical Press / Quinta. Online.

George Whitefield speaks to us today –

“The scriptures are so far from encouraging us to plead for a diminution of divine influence in these last days of the gospel that on the contrary, we are encouraged to expect, hope, long and pray for larger and more extensive showers of divine influence than any former age hath ever yet experienced. For, are we not taught therein to pray, “That we may be filled with all the fullness of God”, and to wait for a glorious epoch, “when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas.” ”

Puritan Hope p 150.

Eyewitness Accounts from “The Cambuslang Revival” Arthur Fawcett. P 114-117.

On Tuesday, 6th July 1742 he (Whitefield) came to Cambuslang at mid-day and preached at two, six and nine at night. He wrote *“Such a commotion surely never was heard of, especially at eleven at night. It far outdid all that I ever saw in America.”* For about an hour and a half there were scenes of uncontrollable distress, like a field of battle. Many were being carried into the manse like wounded soldiers. *“Mr McCulloch preached after I had ended, til past one in the morning, and then could scarce persuade them to depart. All night in the fields, might be heard the voice of prayer and praise.”* Whitefield wrote *“I was never enabled to preach so before.”*

McCulloch invited Whitefield to assist at the annual communion services. *(These were four day events over a long weekend. Crowds gathered and ministers would help each other out as there was preaching several times each day.)*

He arrived at Cambuslang on Friday 9 July, and preached the following day to more than 20,000 people. Of the next day, the communion Sabbath, he declares that *“scarce ever was such a sight seen in Scotland.”* The sacrament was celebrated in the fields, a custom which aroused nostalgic memories of the days of persecution. Whitefield notes elsewhere that *“a brae, or hill, near the manse at Cambuslang, seemed to be formed by Providence, for containing a large congregation. People sat unwearied till two in the morning disregarding the weather. You could scarce walk a yard, but you must tread upon some.”* The place chosen was *“a green brae on the east side of a deep ravine near the church, scooped out by nature in the form of an amphitheatre, - - sprinkled over with broom, furze and sloe-bushes.”* Two wooden preaching-tents were set up along with the communion tables; throughout the long summer day, a group of ministers served the tables and preached to the multitudes. Whitefield estimated that the congregation was about 20,000.

In the evening when the sacrament was over, Whitefield preached again at the request of the ministers for about an hour and a half to the whole congregation. His text was from Isaiah 45:5 *“Thy maker is thy husband: the Lord of Hosts is his name.”* (He later commented on the rustling sound as hundreds of bible pages were turned following the announcement of his text.) This is the sermon most frequently referred to by the converts. Daniel McLarty, aged 21, *“almost cried out for joy at the sweet offer of Christ as a husband to my soul.”* He threw his arms around his friend and said Whitefield had married his soul to Christ. Margaret Borland, aged 16 responded *“I thought, willing! Who would not be willing?”* Daniel McLarty lay down on the brae filled with the love of Christ and wishing that he might die on the spot, if it should be the Lord’s will *“yet, rain coming on, I thought it was not my duty to ly still there, but went to a House for Quarters.”*

On the Monday morning Whitefield preached to a crowd almost as large as that of the Sabbath and wrote to John Cennick *“Such a universal stir I never saw before. The motion fled as swift as lightning from one end of the auditory to another. You might have seen thousands bathed in tears. Some at the same time wringing their hands, others almost swooning and others crying out.”*

The ministers made an unprecedented decision to hold a second communion that summer, five weeks later.

P 119-121. On this second sacramental occasion, 13th – 16th August, the crowds were enormous, greater than ever. *“None saw the like since the Revolution in Scotland, or even anywhere else, at any Sacramental Occasion. Some have called them 50,000. Some 40,000”* It is easier to grasp the significance of this when one recalls that the total population of Glasgow in 1740 was estimated to be 17,034.

The size of the crowds may be gathered from the details of the collections. The money collected in Feb-Dec 1741 was £146. For the same period in 1742 it was £1446.

From near and far, the people flocked to Cambuslang. There were 200 from Edinburgh and the same number from Kilmarnock. They must have walked, for there was only one stagecoach weekly between Glasgow and Edinburgh at this time. 100 came from Irvine and the same number from Stewarton. Strangers were also present from England and Ireland. *“Several persons of considerable Rank and Distinction who were elders assisted in serving the tables.”*

“Worship began at 8.30 on the Sunday morning and the last table was being served at sunset.”

John Bonner, 1671-1747, ancestor of the Bonar brothers of the 1839 revival, was one of the assisting ministers present. McCulloch wrote *“Old Mr Bonner, tho’ so frail that he took three days to ride 18 miles from Torphichen to Cambuslang, yet his heart was so set upon coming here, that he could by no means stay away, and when he was help’d up to the tent, preached three times with great life, and returned with much satisfaction and joy.”*

McCulloch made detailed notes on the conversion and progress of 105 people of the 400 from his congregation who were awakened in the revival. He was still recording conversions in 1748. His aim was to show the fruit of what God had done in individual lives.

In a letter of 1751 he wrote *“Setting aside all those that appeared under awakenings here in 1742, who have since remarkably backslidden, there is a considerable number of the then awakened that appear to bring forth good fruits. I have here before me at the time of writing of this, April 27th 1751, a list of about 400 persons awakened here at Cambuslang in 1742 who from that time to the time of their death, or to this, that is, for these nine years past, have been all enabled to behave in a good measure as becomes the gospel.”*

He ends the letter *“It is true, there were many ministers here from places near and remote, some of them men of great eminence. But what could these avail without the divine power and blessing? Whoever plant and water, it is God who gives the increase. Ministers are but instruments in his hands.”*

Restoration in the Church, Reports of Revivals 1625-1839 Christian Focus Publications. P 19-20.

Rev James Robe and The Kilsyth Revival of 1742-43. (A Fawcett p 126-135)

The news of the revival in Cambuslang travelled fast. The reports of bodily agonies, fainting and outcries spread like a fire. Kilsyth became the second main hub of the awakening. James Robe had been the parish minister since 1713 and he continued there till his death in 1753. Scholarly, industrious and methodical he was impressed by the necessity for publishing the fullest possible account of events in his parish. He published *“A Faithful Narrative of the Extraordinary Work of the Spirit of God at Kilsyth and other congregations in the neighbourhood”* in July 1742. A feature of the revival in Kilsyth was that it was ushered in by the setting up of several societies for prayer from 1740. One was a group of 16 children, aged 8 and upwards, who met regularly to pray in a barn. As at Cambuslang, leading up to the awakening the focus of the preaching was the new birth. Robe constantly preached on regeneration from 1740.

Robe frequently went to Cambuslang to assist his friend McCulloch. Few of his congregation went there. On Friday 14th May 1742 he returned home and was led to travel by a different route. He called in on a friend and found 12 people there in distress over their souls. From that Sunday, May 16th, his preaching was accompanied by *“an unusual power.”* People, even stout men, began to cry out in distress as Robe preached. He saw those distressed one by one after the service. There were about 30 in all – 20 from his parish and 10 visitors. The noise of the distressed could be heard from afar. The revival had begun.

Robe worked on the principle *“While the wind blows fair croud on all the sail you can.”* He preached many times in the week and saw individuals till late every night. Around 100 were awakened in the parish before Whitefield came there.

Whitefield visited Kilsyth and he wrote to a friend on Tuesday 16th June that he had preached at Kilsyth *“to ten thousand, but such a commotion, I believe you never saw, O what agonies and cries there were there.”* Ministers were kept busy from morning till night. Robe was terribly overworked but he trusted God for strength to continue and the months went on. On Sunday 3rd October they celebrated communion. The service continued without a break from 8.30 am till 8.30pm. The revival continued in Kilsyth for around 18 months from May 1742.

The number of individuals awakened in the parish in 1742-43 was over 300 out of a population of 1300. This included 75 children, the youngest, a girl of 6 who was converted while listening to the minister's sermons. There were many visitors awakened but not recorded. Cursing, swearing, drinking and stealing virtually disappeared from Kilsyth. There was intense interest in preaching and some people learned to read in order to be able to read the Bible. Most families in Kilsyth set up family worship. New societies of prayer were started involving people of all ages. Feuds and animosities were forgotten. For months the court in Kilsyth was closed.

Robert Duncan May 2012.