



James K. Cameron symposium 1

Professor James Cameron: Introduction by a late-coming beneficiary

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The three papers which follow this one were delivered in some form on June 17, 2011 in the presence of Professor James Cameron and his wife, surrounded by a number of those who had been his students, and who came to the gathering in St Mary's College, St Andrews to show him gratitude and respect. Professor Andrew Pettegree also spoke, but his talk was more of the nature of the reminiscences of students and an account of the development of the Reformation Studies Institute in the School of History at St Andrews. The papers that *are* published here by three Professors in Reformation History and Theology are each of a different genre, but are quite complementary. One is a memorandum of personal formation by a great teacher-supervisor from a grateful former doctoral student (Bruce Gordon), another is an account of Humanism and Reformation by the honorand's son (Euan Cameron) whose own professorial interests nicely dovetail with those of his father, and another is a full account of the afterlife of the Negative or King's Confession of 1581, by a pupil and now senior colleague (Ian Hazlett), quite in the spirit of James Cameron. What I shall contribute in this short introduction, is in part a summary of Professor Cameron as encountered through some of his notable writings. It is an impressionistic account of 'Cameron-reception' at more of a distance than was the case with the others, but I hope it is worthwhile for all that.

Unlike the others who spoke at our symposium in honour of Professor Cameron, I first came to know him through his writings: it was the 'print version' I first appreciated. During my early days of teaching Scottish church history, circa 2004, and glad to be keeping the tradition of teaching that subject alive, yet needing something

incisive and insightful to give a balanced account of the life, work and significance of some prominent Covenanter or two, I stumbled upon “The Piety of Samuel Rutherford” by James K. Cameron. This told me among other things that even among the Covenanters one could detect the hum of the twin engines of Gospel and learning in the service of humanity. As one who was already familiar with the doggerel certainties of Rutherford’s epitaph in St Andrews Cathedral graveyard, this seemed good for me to learn. Rutherford’s piety, Professor Cameron explained, was in accordance with Question 21 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which teaches that Jesus Christ ‘continueth to be God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.’ Professor Cameron commented:

This continuity of the human nature as well as the divine is, I believe, Rutherford’s justification in part for his presentation of the Jesus of his faith in essentially human terms and for the expression of his piety in ways that evoke some of the deepest of human emotions. This characteristic was significantly noted in his own day by an English merchant visitor who has left us an interesting glimpse of the two ministers of the town. They represent the two facets of contemporary Scottish Calvinism. He wrote “I went to St Andrews where I heard a sweet majestic-looking man, [Robert Blair, one of the ministers of the Parish Church] and he showed me the majesty of God. After him I heard a little fair man [Rutherford] and he showed me the loveliness of Christ.”¹

It could be just as easily said about Rutherford’s predecessors of two generations back, Johnston and Howie, as James Cameron presented for all to see in his fine edition of their letters² that they were not simply Erasmian or ‘Knoxian’: they were both. These two epithets should not be viewed in opposition, as some unfortunate retrojection of the critical/fundamentalist alternative. Even the fiery diary of James Melville speaks of Knox himself returning to wrestle with the book that had helped to seal his own conversion, Balnaves’ treatise on justification,³ at the end of his life, as though coming back to the

simple evangel. Knox asked: ‘Why not just preach the gospel? Yet what is that? It asserts the dignity and the wickedness of human beings like a stern surgeon, it gives hope and comfort too.’

Professor Cameron traced this continuing tradition of immersion in truth and its claims even as far as George Hill, the teacher of Thomas Chalmers in the late 1700s, who counseled that ‘It is by [...] patient exercise of criticism that a student of divinity is emancipated from all subjection to the opinions of men, and led most certainly to the truth as it is in Jesus.’⁴ Such humanism can be said to have encouraged the Reformation theological message, that man be man and God be God. That there was *human* wisdom which came from far back in the past, Aristotle included, that was mediated textually and needed to be read contextually, in the light of scholarship and subsequent interpretations.

Then I came across Professor Cameron’s edition of the First Book of Discipline of 1560,⁵ made accessible and comprehensible by his hand. Again I found measured judgement: this was not Christian socialism or the democratic manifesto; the continuity of Knox and Melville’s polity. Then there was a suggestive article on the Cologne Reformation⁶ and how it inspired the reform movement associated with Archbishop John Hamilton, best known for his semi-Reformed catechism of 1552, whose efforts would give way to, or (arguably) usher in, the new Knoxian paradigm in the late 1550s.

There was this ecumenical interest in James Cameron’s research on the Reformation: Christian truth was no either/or, nor a bland common denominator, but truth in all its splendour. As he noted about Howie’s Letter XI, *De reconciliacione Hominis cum Deo*,⁷ a work in which ‘Howie’s debt to Olevianus and his Covenant theology is clearly evident’,⁸ yet where Calvin is admired for his modeling his theology around the ancient fathers:

And that I might speak of methods, it seems to be most right to judge that since the epitome of the whole religion of Christianity is the Apostles’ Creed, and written clearly with divine order: then theology cannot be more fittingly or rightly treated than if all things are directed to the method of the Apostles’ Creed, which he [Calvin] thought in his Institution must be followed.⁹

Reading the correspondence of these two is a delight, not least in seeing how from a common starting point they came to very different conclusions about the respective merits of Episcopal and Presbyterian church government. One senses how theology and learning could ground a culture. Also, the range of correspondents and others mentioned in passing in the letters make one realize how esteemed Scottish theology was, how internationally connected, the standards of its Latin raised by the efforts of George Buchanan and others in the previous generation. Through enforced exile or career opportunism the theologian exports to France and then to the Low Countries during the first half of the seventeenth century included Melville, Boyd ('the Scottish Melancthon'), John Cameron, and John Forbes.¹⁰ The standards were such that the Scottish contribution both to the Synod of Dort and then to the Westminster Assembly was disproportionate to the size of the nation. To this day the holdings of the four ancient Scottish University Libraries' Special Collections taken together show how much the republic of letters in that Protestant Golden Age included the great minds of our Scottish universities, even if numbers of masters at each place were comparatively low.

There was of course a special place in Professor Cameron's affections for St Andrews. "The Refoundation of the University in 1579"¹¹ is another example of his ability to communicate pithily and with verve. Here I learned that the 'New College' of St Mary's was intended as an anti-seminary to counter the Jesuits and their seminaries, and theology became the only discipline taught there after fifty years when other subjects (mathematics and law) had previously also flourished. It started with only eight students who would receive teaching from four or five masters, three of them devoted to Semitic languages or Old Testament. At least that was the theory, in the event student numbers almost immediately doubled. These details speak volumes about the priorities of that educational endeavour in the Scottish Reformation.

Professor Cameron's interests extended seamlessly to the '*afterlife*' of the Reformation. This is not so much the self-conscious '*Nadere Reformatie*' of the Dutch, nor the 'Long British Reformation' (1540–1640) as represented by recent scholarship on the subject, which in stretching the Reformation back in time and forward might

lead to dissipating the significance of ‘1560 and all that’. If anything the Second Reformation took place within the first generation of the Scottish Reformers in that explosive period of 1560–90. For even if one regards Melville’s career as a glorious failure, there were more who quietly succeeded where the figurehead was cut down. One could speak of a Melvillian rise (1580s) and fall (mid-1590s). The new method of Ramism mattered for preaching, but, as Steven Reid has argued,¹² one did not escape Aristotle however humanist one’s educational formation. Aristotle as read in the Renaissance helped people be better scholars of Greek among other things. Calvinism embraced low and high churchmen (e.g. Johnston and Howie) and those who disagreed on the ‘free will issues’ of Arminianism and the matter of a covenanted *nation*. What one then gets is a consolidation of Reformation theology and piety in the 1640s, compressed into the form of the Confession and the tales of Covenanting worthies – a package that would go on inspiring. (Or for those who were unimpressed and uninspired at least would fill a space so that, sadly, little more could be added there, like a disused, rusting car filling the garage. Theology would become a thing of the past, to the extent it was meaningful, a set of settled questions.)

The occasion on which I at last first met Professor Cameron was in early 2005 when as library representative for Divinity I took delivery of his generous gift of volumes of the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*¹³ for St Mary’s College Library, in easy reach of students and staff of St Mary’s. Now, all reference works age, but some age more slowly than others and the *TRE* is one such, produced in the days before on-line reference tools. (It has been available on-line only since 2009.) It is the nearest thing to all one could ever need to know in one 36-volume place. The commitment to the width of the Christian tradition throughout history and across continents received a decades-long labour of love. Its internationalism yet clear location in the values and concerns of the European Reformation with chief editors (and Professor Cameron with them) as those well placed to see back to biblical and early origins and forward to the present day. This is something which perhaps could only have been achieved at the end of the last century. Scholarship in 2012 might well be wider, more contextual, more open, but it is arguably less learned and magisterial.

As well as being one of only four British co-editors (Richard Hanson in the early stages, then Stuart Hall and Brian Hebblethwaite were the others), Professor Cameron also contributed three articles to the *TRE*: “Edinburgh, *Universität*”; “Knox, *John*”; and “Presbyterianer”, which reflects well the man’s interests in education and the Reformed church. The last of these three is a rich piece of research, taking into account Presbyterianism across many lands.

In the concentration on Kirk Sessions of Elders and the General Assembly, something of the role of Presbyteries seems to go missing. Perhaps the point is that the weekly so-called ‘Exercise’ where ministers and other ‘learned men’ met together was originally for the purpose of in-service training (or, to put it more theologically, ‘prophecy’) from bible study, as had been the model in Zurich. In some sense the intermediate level of jurisdiction, the Presbytery or ‘eldership’ as court was in some ways a ‘hi-jacking’ of these. But ‘the eldership’ also had its roots in providing oversight for small congregations. The truth might be that ‘eldership’ combined the roles of congregational kirk session and common presbytery, until the latter needed to be seen as a distinct regional alternative to re-nascent episcopalianism, and any already existing ‘exercises’ were called in to help the disciplinary task in 1580–81.¹⁴ True, as James Kirk wrote, ‘any parallel between the Scottish kirk session and presbytery, on the one hand, and the Genevan consistory and venerable company of pastors, on the other, is at best only accidental, since the second Book of Discipline recognised one local or district court, not two, and it permitted the inclusion of elders on presbyteries’.¹⁵ The upshot of that was that with theologically untrained people making up a large part of any Presbytery, practical and interpersonal matters, viz. discipline, became its *raison d’être*. The appointment of two or three Presbytery elders for life was likely ballast against episcopalianism. It also meant that discipline was the third distinguishing mark of the church.¹⁶ The function of Presbyteries was to a considerable degree that of overseeing the ministers of Word and Sacrament. It is perhaps significant that Professor Cameron’s discussion of the change introduced by Melville away from visitors to ‘elderships’ was placed in small print in the article “Presbyterianer” with a regretful comment to conclude: ‘the exercise as a gathering for bible study on the Zurich model is hardly recognized as a staging post

between local kirk session and provincial synod',¹⁷ although the fact that the Second Book of Discipline was given legal standing in 1592 is bravely acknowledged.

Yet what might Reformation history as covering an era which seems to many to be the epilogue to the Middle Ages rather than the start of the modern world (which seems to have come only after the seventeenth-century wars of religion and their repercussions in the middle to later part of that long century) have to teach us? Why would modern society, church or theology want to take its bearings from *that*?

This problem was addressed in a contribution to *Reformatio perennis* titled "Scottish Calvinism and the Principle of Intolerance".¹⁸ There Professor Cameron demonstrated the irony that the execution of Thomas Aikenhead in 1697 would not have happened but for the 1661 Act of the Restoration Parliament,¹⁹ which enacted a severe blasphemy law, so as to make it a capital offence both to rail against God and the Trinity and to deny God and the Trinity. Blasphemy had never been so punishable during the times of Knox. Now I'm not sure that Aikenhead was punished for having deviant, *private* convictions: the fact is he did not care to keep them to himself: blasphemy was a public offence because it could damage the public. But the story of a law designed by the nemesis of the covenanting Reformed to deal with Quakers being turned against free-thinkers by the heirs of the covenanting Reformed is a fascinating one.

Even during the last few years, though battling with physical weakness, Professor Cameron while writing less made it count. I remember him telling me after a chapel service at St Salvator's of a review he had just finished of Alec Ryrie's book on the Scottish Reformation. On reading it I saw praise where praise was due and this encouragement was made explicit. The criticisms were 'quiet', supplements of a sort of 'but also remember this ...' nature. Much was achieved with skillful economy of words. For example: 'When rebellion came it was led and its outcome was determined not by a majority of waverers who pursued self-interest, but by a tenacious minority who were ruled by their consciences.'²⁰ Here he was standing up for the contribution of ideas and doctrine, about Lutheranism's appeal notwithstanding factors of political power and historical

accident. The failure of half-way solutions before full Reformation (e.g. the Cologne Reform; Hamilton and his catechism) and the fact that the supreme practicality of the First Book of Discipline was built on Hamilton's measure and Hermann von Wied's Consultation – these were enduring themes, even when no longer 'fashionable'.

The name of James Cameron is upheld in the University of St Andrews' Reformation Studies Institute, where the 'James Cameron Faculty Fellowship' is given each year to a visiting scholar with research interests in the field of Early Modern religious history. Professor Andrew Pettegree spoke warmly of this on the day of our gathering. This has been an invaluable arrangement. In the flourishing of Reformation History across South Street, Divinity has not lost out, but has rather been enriched. And that is how Professor Cameron liked it. In his presidential address to the Ecclesiastical History Society, "The Renaissance Tradition in the Reformed Church of Scotland",²¹ he demonstrated how the intense austere piety of the likes of Elphinstone and John Mair, as the great Scottish Catholic scholar of the undivided church John Durkan had portrayed it, was preserved in the work of the best of the Reformed Protestants.

And that is just it: there is in the work of James Cameron something 'old style', a privileging of the significance of ideas and theological ones at that, as well as an attention to 'Ciceronian' elegance and clarity of writing style. Nobody doubts that something was gained for History from Whig, Marxist, *Annales* School and New Historicism. But many of the things that mattered to the theologians and literate church people of the past in their hearts and minds (which moved their bodies) should also matter to us, to the Church and to the nation: texts and ideas, and the stories of real people which lent these flesh and motion.

Notes

- 1 “The Piety of Samuel Rutherford (C. 1621–1661): A Neglected Feature of Seventeenth Century Scottish Calvinism”, *Nederlandsch Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 65 (1985): 153–59, 159.
- 2 *Letters of John Johnston, c. 1565–1611 and Robert Howie, c. 1565–c. 1645* (collected and edited by James K. Cameron; Edinburgh; London: published for the University Court of the University of St Andrews by Oliver & Boyd, 1963).
- 3 Henry Balnaves, *The Confession of Faith* (revised and with a preface by John Knox; Edinburgh: Thomas Vautrollier, 1584). Republished in *The Works of John Knox* (ed. David Laing; Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), III:431–542.
- 4 George Hill, *Lectures in Divinity* (3 vols.; Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, 1825), I:443 f. Quoted in James K. Cameron, “The Church of Scotland in the Age of Reason”, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 58 (1967): 1939–51, 1951.
- 5 *The First Book of Discipline* (with introduction and commentary by James K. Cameron; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1972).
- 6 “The Cologne Reformation and the Church of Scotland”, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 30 (1979): 39–64.
- 7 *Letters of Johnston and Howie*, 293–98.
- 8 *Ibid.*, xlv.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 294.
- 10 See also G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1957).
- 11 *The Alumnus Chronicle of the University of St Andrews* 71 (1980): 3–10.
- 12 Steven J. Reid, *Humanism and Calvinism: Andrew Melville and the Universities of Scotland, 1560–1625* (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History; Farnham; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011).
- 13 Gerhard Müller, Horst Balz, and Gerhard Krause, eds., *Theologische Realenzyklopädie [= TRE]* (36 vols.; De Gruyter: Berlin, 1976–2004).
- 14 James Kirk, ed., *The Second Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1980), 105.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 113.

- 16 Scots Confession, XVIII.
- 17 *TRE*, XXVII:344.
- 18 B. A. Gerrish, ed., *Reformatio perennis: Essays on Calvin and the Reformation in Honor of Ford Lewis Battles* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Pickwick Press, 1981), 113–28.
- 19 T. Thomson and C. Innes, eds., *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland, 1127–1707* (12 vols.; Edinburgh, 1814–75), VII:16.
- 20 Review of A. Ryrie, *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation*, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58 (2007): 571–73, 573.
- 21 D. Baker, ed., *Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History* (*Studies in Church History* 14; Oxford: Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1977), 251–70.