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James Wodrow, John Witherspoon and the Negotiation of Moderatism in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland

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Abstract

John Witherspoon is well known for his career as principal of the College of New Jersey after his years as a parish minister in Ayrshire, but other Evangelical ministers in the eighteenth-century Church of Scotland are now acknowledged not merely to have had spiritual priorities but also to have responded to and participated in the Enlightenment project. Their Moderate counterparts, however, are still often characterised as essentially irreligious, or at least unspiritual, intellectuals and power players. This article examines James Wodrow (1730–1810), parish minister of Stevenston, Ayrshire, and his relationships with John Witherspoon and other Ayrshire and Renfrewshire ministers, both Evangelicals (or Popular party adherents) and Moderates. It suggests that Wodrow represented, in one person, the imprint of a Moderate stamp upon a Covenanting and Evangelical heritage; that his friends, and his own modus operandi, *illuminate a spectrum of Moderate theology and practice in late eighteenth-century Scotland, rather than a single blueprint; and that there was perhaps a greater proximity between Moderates and Popular party divines than is sometimes represented. It draws on the long and rich correspondence between Rev. James Wodrow (1730–1810) and his friend, the Unitarian banker, Samuel Kenrick (1729–1811) of Bewdley, Worcestershire.*

Keywords: *Moderates*; *Evangelicals*; *Popular party*; *Ayrshire*; *theology*; *James Wodrow*

When John Witherspoon travelled to Ayrshire in spring 1784 on his journey through Britain to raise funds for the College of New Jersey at Princeton, he was a returning celebrity who was, according to Rev. James Wodrow, parish minister of Stevenston on the north Ayrshire

coast, 'well received every where except at Glasgow where some of his acquaintances declined speaking to him'. In fact, Wodrow said, Witherspoon had been 'frightened by the apprehension of being mobbed', perhaps for the same reason that he certainly did suffer some rebuffs—his visit to Britain took place so soon after the end of the War of American Independence, an independence whose founding document Witherspoon, famously, had signed.[1] He was not, however, short of admirers wishing to meet with him. Wodrow went on to write: 'I did not get into his Company tho' I wished it much having once lived in habits of intimacy with him weakened tho' not broken by our different views & conduct in Ch courts.'[2]

Wodrow's relationship with John Witherspoon, viewed from Wodrow's perspective, offers an interesting lens onto Moderatism in later eighteenth-century Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. These were counties that, as Colin Kidd has argued, might be said to have possessed their own religious microclimate, in the sense that theological and ecclesiastical divisions were more contested there than they were elsewhere in Scotland by this time.[3] Wodrow's letters, together with local presbytery and synod records, shed light on his own significant role in local doctrinal disputes. In one person, Wodrow represented the imprint of a Moderate stamp upon a Covenanting and Evangelical heritage. This article attempts to demonstrate

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1 On Witherspoon's decision to support American independence and the mixed reception of his decision in Scotland, see Ned C. Landsman, 'Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity in Scottish Evangelical Culture', in Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (eds), *Scotland and America in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1990), 29–45; Richard B. Sher, 'Witherspoon's *Dominion of Providence* and the Scottish Jeremiad Tradition' in ibid., 46–64; Gideon Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2017), 1, 3.

2 Letter 86, James Wodrow [JW] to Samuel Kenrick [SK], 7 December 1784, in Martin Fitzpatrick, Emma Macleod, and Anthony Page (eds), *The Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence, 1750–1810, Vol. 2 (1784–1790)*, (Oxford, 2024), 132. The Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence is held by the Dr Williams's Library, London, at MSS 24:157. Dr Williams's Trust has given permission for it to be transcribed, edited and published in full, which is in progress: *The Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence, 1750–1810, Vol. 1 (1750–83)*, eds Martin Fitzpatrick, Emma Macleod, and Anthony Page (Oxford, 2020) [hereafter W-K, I]; *Vol. 2 (1784–90)*, eds Fitzpatrick, Macleod, and Page (Oxford, 2024) [hereafter W-K, II]. Volumes 3 (1791–99) and 4 (1800–10) will follow. Citations to letters in volumes 1 and 2 below include page numbers in that volume; citations to letters from 1791 onward simply refer to the letters themselves.

3 Colin Kidd, 'Enlightenment and Anti-Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: An Ayrshire-Renfrewshire Microclimate', in Jean-François Dunyach and Ann Thomson (eds.), *The Enlightenment in Scotland: National and International Perspectives* (Oxford, 2015), 59–84; Colin Kidd, 'The Fergusson affair: Calvinism and Dissimulation in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Intellectual History Review*, 26 (2016), 339–54; Colin Kidd, 'Satire, Hypocrisy and the Ayrshire-Renfrewshire Enlightenment', in Gerard Carruthers and Colin Kidd (eds.), *The International Companion to John Galt* (Glasgow, 2017), 15–33; Colin Kidd, 'Anti-Calvinism and the Ayrshire Enlightenment', in Gerard Carruthers (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Robert Burns* (Oxford, 2024), 216–29.

that proposition; to argue that his friends, and his own *modus operandi*, illuminate a spectrum of Moderate theology and practice in late eighteenth-century Scotland, rather than a single blueprint; and to suggest that there was perhaps a greater proximity between Moderates and Popular party divines than is sometimes represented.

One traditional view of the Scottish Church in the eighteenth century tended to divide a spiritual Evangelical or Popular party from an intellectually rational and secularly political Moderate party, but more recent writing has suggested that it is inaccurate to see the Evangelicals as uninvolved in and not shaped by Enlightenment concerns.[4] Certainly John Witherspoon's teaching from a wide spectrum of authors in his Princeton career is well known, to the extent that, as Ned Landsman observed, historians have debated how to reconcile the robustly Calvinist pre-1768, Church of Scotland Popular party leader with the apparently humanistic post-1768 New Jersey moral philosopher.[5] His own explanation is that Witherspoon's 'commitment to orthodoxy remained firm and unyielding. It was orthodoxy itself that changed during the eighteenth century', as the Evangelicals, themselves instrumental in contributing to the shaping of the transatlantic Enlightenment, were in turn informed by it.[6] Thomas Ahnert has argued that Presbyterian belief was always rooted in reason as well as faith, and, while his concern is with Moderate culture, this explains why it should not be surprising that Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland both responded to and participated in the Enlightenment project. John Witherspoon, for instance, defended natural religion as apologetically important alongside revelation and insisted that religion was rationally grounded.[7] Nor was this only a characteristic of ministers in the Popular party, but also of their Calvinist congregations. Presbyterianism was inherently a devolved form of

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4 E.g. D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989); Ned C. Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740–1775', in John Dwyer and Richard B. Sher (eds.), *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1991), 194–209; Jonathan M. Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism: The Life and Thought of John Erskine* (New York, 2011); Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805* (New Haven, 2014).

5 Landsman, 'Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity', 29. See also, for instance, Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York, 1971); and Ronald Lyndsay Crawford, *The Lost World of John Witherspoon: Unravelling the Snodgrass Affair, 1762 to 1776* (Aberdeen, 2014), which should be compared with Ronald Lyndsay Crawford, *Scotland and America in the Age of Paine: Ideas of Liberty and the Making of Four Americans* (Aberdeen, 2022), 272–319.

6 Landsman, 'Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity', 30.

7 Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment*; Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society', 196; John R. McIntosh, 'Eighteenth-Century Evangelicalism', in David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott (eds.), *The History of Scottish Theology, Vol. 2: The Early Enlightenment to the Late Victorian Era* (Oxford, 2019), 92; James Foster, 'Literate Piety: John Witherspoon and James McCosh', in David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott (eds), *The History of Scottish Theology, Vol. 2: The Early Enlightenment to the Late Victorian Era* (Oxford, 2019), 112–118; Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, 29, 32–40.

church practice, resulting in one of the major tensions between the Moderate and Popular parties (the dispute over patronage),[8] and there was widespread reading and discussion of seventeenth-century theological polemic in mid- and late eighteenth-century Scotland.[9]

This article examines the other side of the traditional view of the two Scottish church parties, the characterisation of Moderates as essentially irreligious, or at least unspiritual, intellectuals and power players. 'The Moderate clergy who dominated the Kirk from the 1750s were polite men of letters, benignly Christian but undogmatic and free from cant and enthusiasm. They were … smooth, internationally-respected orators, and … better known for their achievements in the liberal arts than for strictly pastoral or theological work.'[10] More recently, it has been debated whether they can be considered fundamentally Calvinist, Arminian, or Arian, given the shortage of theological writing they produced.[11] Here, it is suggested that we should think in terms of a range of Moderate theology and practice, including a conception of Moderatism that embraced genuine piety, although it might rest on a more questioning, expansive and liberal theology than the more orthodox Calvinism of the Evangelicals. Henry Sefton observed in 1983 that 'Few Churchmen have been so roundly and so frequently abused as the Moderate divines of the Church of Scotland.'[12] This is no longer the case, since the work of Richard B. Sher and many others on the intellectual achieve-

8 Alasdair Raffe, 'Presbyterianism, Secularization, and Scottish Politics After the Revolution of 1688–1690', *Historical Journal*, 53 (2010), 317–37; Martin Fitzpatrick, 'The Enlightenment, Politics and Providence', in Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), 64–98.

9 Luke Brekke, 'Heretics in the Pulpit, Inquisitors in the Pews: The Long Reformation and the Scottish Enlightenment', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 44 (2010), 79–98; Valerie Honeyman, '*That Ye May Judge for Yourselves*': *The Contribution of Scottish Presbyterianism Towards the Emergence of Political Awareness Amongst Ordinary People in Scotland Between 1746 and 1792* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Stirling, 2012).

10 Brekke, 'Heretics in the Pulpit', 83; cf. Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), 19. Although see Ann Matheson, *Theories of Rhetoric in the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Sermon* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1979), 397–98: 'The Moderates, therefore, far from being despised for their ecclesiastical tepidity as they so often are, are rather to be commended for anticipating the imminent signs of danger for established religion in the increasing secularization of society and for advancing (in the common aims of religion and society) what seemed to them to be the only viable solution to the inevitable divergence of religion and society.'

11 Colin Kidd, 'Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55 (July 2004), 502–19, at 505–7; cf. Stewart J. Brown, 'Moderate Theology and Preaching', in David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott (eds), *The History of Scottish Theology, Vol. 2: The Early Enlightenment to the Late Victorian Era* (Oxford, 2019), 69–83.

12 Henry Sefton, '"Neu-Lights and Preachers-Legall": Some Observations on the Beginnings of Moderatism in the Church of Scotland', in Norman Macdougall (ed.), *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland, 1408–1929* (1983), 186–96, at 186.

ments of that group of clergymen, but they are perhaps still viewed without much sympathy in terms of their spirituality, despite Friedhelm Voges's 1985 evaluation of the considerable common ground between Moderate and Evangelical thinking in the later eighteenth century. Similarly, Donald Greene warned against assuming that Anglican latitudinarians in England necessarily diverged widely from orthodoxy, while R. K. Webb explored the phenomenon of 'rational piety'.[13] Martin Fitzpatrick emphasized the theological and political differences, while acknowledging the similarities, between Moderatism in Scotland and Rational Dissent in England, examining the correspondence between Rev. James Wodrow of Stevenston, Ayrshire, and his great friend, Samuel Kenrick, as a case in point.[14] This article too emerges from that rich collection of letters.

The Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence is a corpus of nearly three hundred letters written between 1750 and 1810 by Wodrow and Kenrick.[15] They had met as students at Glasgow University in the 1740s, and they began writing to each other around 1748, continuing until Wodrow's death in 1810. Kenrick, a Welsh Dissenter, was a tutor to a wealthy family in Renfrewshire till 1765, following which he joined his brother in a banking and tobacco business in Bewdley, Worcestershire, where he lived for the rest of his life. James Wodrow was parish minister for almost all of his career in the small town of Stevenston, near Saltcoats (which in fact formed part of his parish) in north Ayrshire. He was not one of Professor William Robertson's inner circle of colleagues in and around Edinburgh from the 1750s, so he was not a 'Moderate' in that strict sense.[16] But if he is measured against the markers of Moderatism suggested by Sher in 1985, he fits the mould rather well.

Aside from the Moderates' acceptance of the Patronage Act of 1712, reflecting their attitude to the relationship of the state to the Church,[17] these features of Moderatism were their moral

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13 Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1985); Friedhelm Voges, 'Moderate and Evangelical Thinking in the Later Eighteenth Century: Differences and Shared Attitudes', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 22 (1985), 141–57; Donald Greene, 'Latitudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the "Man of Feeling" Reconsidered', *Modern Philology*, 75 (1977–8), 159–83; R. K. Webb, 'Rational Piety', in Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), 287–311.

14 Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Varieties of Candour: Scottish and English Style', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 7 (1988), 35–56; Fitzpatrick, 'The Enlightenment, Politics and Providence'.

15 See note 3 above.

16 Ian D. L. Clark, *Moderatism and the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland*, 1752–1805 (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1963); idem, 'From Protest to Reaction: The Moderate Regime in the Church of Scotland', in N. T. Phillipson and R. Mitchison (eds.), *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* (Edinburgh, 1970), 206.

17 See Fitzpatrick, 'The Enlightenment, Politics and Providence', 88 for a discussion of Thomas Hardy, *The Principles of Moderation Addressed to the Clergy of the Popular Interest in the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1782), which emphasised patronage as the only substantial difference between the two church parties.

preaching (rather than holiness preaching);[18] their explicit or silent dislike of enforced subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith; their favouring of 'politeness' rather than emotionalism and 'enthusiasm'; and their occasional political preaching in support of loyal causes such as the British government's wars against the American and French Revolutions. As Sher points out, these traits are not far from those identified in John Witherspoon's own analysis in *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* (1753), his satire on Moderatism:[19] 'beneath the exaggeration lay a considerable amount of truth about Moderatism'.[20] Ahnert adds to these marks scepticism regarding natural religion and an appeal to the passions and affections to govern human conduct.[21] Wodrow, too, favoured reason over doctrinal strictness (or 'bigotry'), allegiance to colleagues over confessional subscription, and politeness over 'enthusiasm', although he also favoured deep scriptural knowledge and could write and preach movingly in a manner calculated to appeal to the heart as well as to the mind.[22] What he is best known for now, for instance in the work of Martin Fitzpatrick and Florence Petroff,[23] are his political arguments on the conservative side of the British debates on the American and French Revolutions against the opposing arguments of his friend Samuel Kenrick in sympathy with the revolutionaries. He was also deeply involved below the surface in Ayrshire ecclesiastical politics when heresy accusations were flying around. He therefore fits the pattern, as Luke Brekke has argued.[24] The following discussion will first demonstrate in more detail Wodrow's identification with Moderates and Moderate values, before turning to complicate that picture with evidence for his divergence from partisan Moderatism and for the influence on him of his Covenanting and Evangelical heritage.

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18 These might be distinguished by means of their primary focus—moral preaching primarily facing society, holiness preaching being more preoccupied with God. On Moderate thinking regarding moral and ethical sensibility, see Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, 73.

19 Presumably a play on Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (London, 1711). William Wishart was accused in 1734 of 'being better acquainted with Lord Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* than with his Bible'. Sefton, '"Neu-Lights and Preachers-Legall"', 193. Wishart became Principal of the University of Edinburgh in 1736.

20 Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 58–9.

21 Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment*, 94–121.

22 Letter 64, SK to JW, 13 August 1778, in W-K, I, 422.

23 Fitzpatrick, 'Varieties of Candour'; Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Heretical Religion and Radical Political Ideas in Late Eighteenth-Century England', in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (1990), 339–72; Martin Fitzpatrick, *The Life of Friends in an Age of Revolutions: James Wodrow and Samuel Kenrick* (Friends of Dr Williams's Library Sixty-Ninth Lecture, 2016); Florence Petroff, «*Le miroir atlantique. L'Écosse et l'Amérique Dans La Crise Impériale: Regards Croisés et Identités Hybrides au Sein du Monde Britannique (1765–1783)*» (Ph.D. thesis, University of Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis, 2020); Florence Petroff, 'The Scots' Response to the American Revolution: A North British Vision of Empire, Constitution, and Representation', *Eighteenth-Century Scotland. The Newsletter of the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society*, 35 (2021), 9–12.

24 Brekke, 'Heretics in the Pulpit', 85–6.

Wodrow's most important friends were of a similar disposition. Professor William Leechman (1706–85), one of the precursors of Moderatism in the Church of Scotland, was his mentor and father figure, and himself the subject of a heresy process at the time of his appointment to the chair of divinity in Glasgow in 1743, following his ministry in the parish of Beith, Ayrshire, where he was succeeded by John Witherspoon. Wodrow had arrived at the University of Glasgow in 1741 at eleven years old, having lost his father at the age of four, as the fifteenth of sixteen children. He began to attend divinity lectures in 1744; he graduated in 1750, but he remained at the university as keeper of the library until 1753, continuing to attend divinity lectures voluntarily. Wodrow remained in close contact with Leechman for the rest of the principal's life. His wife, Louisa, was the niece of Bridget, Leechman's wife, and the Wodrows' sons, Gavin and Patrick, lodged with the Leechmans as students in Glasgow. When Leechman came under sustained attack from Professor John Anderson in the 1780s over the financial management of the university, both he and his wife often confided in Wodrow;[25] and during the principal's short final illness in the last months of 1785, Wodrow visited often and attended his bedside along with a small circle of friends and relatives.[26] He was named as one of five executors of Leechman's estate, and he received a large bundle of sermon and essay manuscripts from Bridget Leechman with a request that he prepare the sermons for publication, a responsibility he undertook very conscientiously. (Profits from the edition were to belong to him, but he clearly cared deeply about his mentor's legacy for its own sake too.)[27]

He wrote a long biographical essay on Leechman prefixed to volume 1, in which he summarised at length Leechman's lectures for divinity students on the evidences for Christianity, which were delivered every second year during his tenure of the divinity chair, alternated with lectures on the composition of sermons. Evidencing Christianity was an important concern for Moderate churchmen in the second half of the eighteenth century, notably in view of what is sometimes a tendency towards a simplistic 'Moderate-lax, Evangelical-conscientious' characterisation (indeed, Wodrow himself described the Moderates as 'the conscientious friends of religion and learning').[28] In the light of attacks on the faith in Britain as well as on the Continent, Moderate scholars such as George Campbell and James Beattie, as well as Evangelicals, taught and published lectures on this subject.[29]

Leechman's lectures evidencing Christianity, as summarised by Wodrow, are striking doctrinally for jumping straight from the life of Christ on earth to his work in heaven without

25 See Letters 91–8, 6 Feb.–21 July 1785, W-K, II, 149–92, *passim.*

26 Letters 106, JW to SK, 1 and 27 December 1785, W-K, II, 223–26, 229–31.

27 Letter 108, SK to JW, 27 December 1785, W-K, II, 236; Letter 136, JW to SK, 28 May 1788, W-K, II, 374.

28 James Wodrow, 'The Life of Dr. Leechman, With Some Account of His Lectures', in James Wodrow, ed., *Sermons, by William Leechman, D.D., Late Principal of the College of Glasgow, to Which is Prefixed Some Account of the Author's Life, and of His Lectures, by James Wodrow, D.D., Minister at Stevenston* (2 vols, London, 1789), I, 1–102, at 30. Cf Voges, 'Moderate and Evangelical Thinking in the Later Eighteenth Century', 148–50.

29 Letter 99, JW to SK, 5 August 1785, W-K, II, 195; Wodrow, 'Life of Leechman', 37–8, 79; George Campbell, *Dissertation on Miracles* (London, 1762); James Beattie, *Evidences of the Christian Religion* (Edinburgh, 1786).

attending at all to his crucifixion and resurrection. As Kidd has noted, Moderate clergy were often 'silent on the great themes of Calvinism', especially that of substitutionary atonement, rather than explicitly opposed. Stewart J. Brown adds to that the Reformed doctrines of unconditional atonement, limited election and irresistible grace, though both he and Fitzpatrick point out the common Moderate emphasis on the Reformed doctrine of providence at work in the world.[30] Yet there was also a range of doctrinal opinion among Moderates. While they often emphasised a general atonement and eternity in heaven, few wrote about the need for salvation from eternal wrath. However, Wodrow discussed the final end of the lost with another old friend, the biblical scholar Rev. James Macknight, in summer 1785: 'He [Macknight] seems to be fully perswaded that the lost will be raised with Corruptible Bodies of Flesh & blood which will be consumed in the gen^{l}. conflagration– & that this will constitute the cheif part of the distinction of the Day of Judgment.'[31] Greene's distinction between latitudinarian temperament and liberal theology is important: a resistance to exclusion did not necessarily equate to an individual holding other than orthodox theological views.[32]

Sher places William Leechman with his predecessor and supporter, Francis Hutcheson, along with Patrick Cuming, James Oswald, George Turnbull, Robert Wallace and George and William Wishart, as antecedents of the Moderates. Many of them, including Leechman, had studied with William Hamilton at Edinburgh (who happened to be the grandfather of Louisa Wodrow). Led by Hamilton, in reaction to the fierce polarity and bloodshed of the later seventeenth century, they prioritised restraint and reason over doctrinal strictness. Wodrow's father Robert (1679–1734), the Calvinist church historian, on the other hand, called them 'Neu-Lights' and thought them Arminian.[33] While, as Sher points out, this generation did not

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30 Kidd, 'Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History', at 503; Brown, 'Moderate Theology and Preaching', 77–80; Fitzpatrick, 'The Enlightenment, Politics and Providence', 93–5; and, for their counterparts, John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740–1800* (East Linton, 1998). On providence, see also James Wodrow, *The Measures of Divine Providence towards Men and Nations, Suitable to Their Behaviour: Illustrated and Applied to the Present State of the British and French Nations: In Two Sermons: Preached at Stevenston, on the National Fast, February 27th, 1794* (Edinburgh, 1794).

31 Letter 99, JW to SK, 5 August 1785, 199. Wodrow's meditation on heaven at the time of Leechman's death is discussed below. See also Eugene Heath, 'Alexander Gillies and Adam Smith: Freemasonry and the Resonance of Self-Love', *Scottish Historical Review*, 103 (2024), 289–317 at 310 n. 134 on the issue of general versus limited atonement.

32 Greene, 'Latitudinarianism and Sensibility', 176 n. 55.

33 Sefton, '"Neu-Lights and Preachers-Legall"', 190, cf. 188–94. Sher's list of names more or less matches Robert Wodrow's in this passage from *Analecta* quoted by Sefton. On the charge of Arminianism and, more broadly, on the discomfort of the Moderate literati with doctrinal subscription, as no longer appropriate in the age of Enlightenment, see Kidd, 'Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment, and the Moderate Interpretation of History'; Donald Macleod, 'The Significance of the Westminster Confession', in David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott, *The History of Scottish Theology, Volume II: The Early Enlightenment to the Late Victorian Era* (Oxford, 2019), 1–13.

see eye to eye with the younger, Moderate ministers' support for church patronage or their 'ultra-liberal, elitist vision of politeness and enlightenment', their theology and aversion to doctrinal strictness were important for the Moderate generation.[34] Leechman himself, as professor of divinity and then principal of Glasgow University, was particularly influential in shaping Moderate divergence from Calvinism, emphasising the virtue and civilisation of the Christian life, and pressing for 'moderation' in one's passions.[35]

Two further vital influences on Wodrow's own formation as a Moderate clergyman were both Ayrshire ministers—John Warner (1713–86) of Kilbarchan and Alexander Fergusson (1689–1770) of Kilwinning and Dalgarven. Both were close friends of Samuel Kenrick as well as Wodrow. Warner was Wodrow's cousin, seventeen years his senior.[36] Wodrow included him in a list of Leechman's friends, who were, he wrote, 'clergymen well known in the west of Scotland, and admired for talents, and a spirit, similar to Mr Leechman's, though the exertion was confined within a narrower sphere than his'.[37] Fergusson, meanwhile, was minister in the parish where Wodrow completed his probation for the ministry between 1753 and 1757—he was often affectionately referred to by Wodrow and Kenrick as 'the abbot of Kilwinning' or simply 'the abbot', because his charge was the Abbey Church of Kilwinning.

Around the same time as the controversy focused on Francis Blackburne's anti-subscription *Confessional* (1766) in England,[38] Wodrow's friend Fergusson, at the age of nearly 80, was the subject of a heated heresy process in 1767–69 because of a letter he had sent to a local Evangelical minister in reply to a sermon criticising some Moderate ministers for lacking 'heart affection' and failing to teach some key Calvinist doctrines. In his letter, Fergusson dismissed the orthodox doctrines of original sin and atonement and declared that men should only subscribe to any established confession of faith 'in so far as it is agreeable to scripture'.[39] As Wodrow observed, it was an 'illnatured tho' smart Letter' that had 'afforded a

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34 Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 152–3. Though none of them, as Sefton points out, tried to have the terms of subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith altered. Sefton, '"Neu-Lights and Preachers-Legall"', 194.

35 Anand Chitnis, *Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London, 1976), 69; Fitzpatrick, 'Varieties of Candour', 37–8; Raffe, 'Religious heterodoxy and intellectual pluralism in Scotland'.

36 Wodrow, 'Life of Leechman', 9.

37 Ibid.

38 See Anthony Page, *John Jebb and the Enlightenment Origins of British Radicalism* (Westport, CT, 2003), 59.

39 *Scots Magazine*, 29 (April 1767), 171–5. See also Colin Kidd, 'The Fergusson Affair: Calvinism and Dissimulation in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Intellectual History Review*, 26 (2016), 339–54. On the irony of the Moderates' use of the principle of *sola scriptura* to defend themselves against accusations of heterodoxy, see Kidd, 'Anti-Calvinism and the Ayrshire Enlightenment', 218, 219; but it was a well-established argument by this time. See Christian Maurer, 'Early Enlightenment Shifts: Simson, Campbell, and Leechman', in David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott (eds), *The History of Scottish Theology, Vol. 2: The Early Enlightenment to the Late Victorian Era* (Oxford, 2019), 45–6. Fergusson was surely

little amusement to his friends', but the ageing Fergusson had then been 'foolish' to publish it in the *Scots Magazine* and include an added appendix that clearly stated (in Wodrow's words) 'that a man may subscribe the confession of faith conscientiously & yet not believe every article contained in it'.[40] Witherspoon's *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* had mocked Moderate churchmen who 'sneer[ed]' and gave 'sly hints' that they did not fully believe the Westminster Confession.[41] According to Wodrow, Fergusson published this appendix 'against the Advice of everybody'.[42]

Wodrow played a central role in the defence of his cantankerous old friend against the charges of the opposition of John Witherspoon and other orthodox Popular Party clergy in the region. Popular Party members of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr attempted to send the case to the General Assembly for trial, but in the event, the General Assembly did not need to intervene, because the April 1769 meeting of the Synod was held in Ayr rather than Glasgow, where it was easier to rally Moderate troops, and it was 'the most numerous that ever met in that place'. They voted narrowly to refer the matter back to the Irvine Presbytery; whereupon Wodrow, his orthodox friend and neighbour Robert Dow, and the moderator of Irvine Presbytery, John Robertson, met with Fergusson and 'took a declaration of his sentiments on the point of the Satisfaction in two scripture passages without varying a word from them'. The Presbytery then 'dismissed the whole process against him'.[43]

Wodrow wrote a detailed account of these proceedings for the *Scots Magazine*, and the debate continued in print, but Fergusson died in February 1770, retaining 'his Spirit vivacity & oddities to the last'.[44] In fact, Wodrow 'frequently regreted' that Fergusson's case had not come before the General Assembly 'after all the pains we had taken to have a wise & moderate one chosen'.[45] If it had, with 'our friends' travelling from 'distant parts of the Kingdom' for the purpose, Wodrow was confident a Moderate majority of sixty would have condemned 'the spirit of Heresy prosecution by a public sentence of the Church'.[46]

This spat between Fergusson and Witherspoon and other members of the Ayrshire clergy and laity is well known. It is perhaps less well known that the Presbytery of Irvine 'threw the

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familiar with the heresy processes against John Simson fifty and forty years before his own (for Arminianism and Arianism, respectively), and with John Taylor's *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin* (1740), in its fourth edition by 1767.

40 Letter 45, JW to SK, 25 January 1769, in W-K, I, 295.

41 John Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics, or, the arcana of church policy, being an humble attempt to open up the mystery of Moderation. Wherein is shewn a plain and easy way of attaining to the character of a moderate man, as at present in repute in the church of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1753), 13.

42 Letter 45, JW to SK, 25 January 1769, in W-K, I, 295; *Scots Magazine*, 29 (April 1767), 171–5.

43 Letter 46, JW to SK, 1 May 1770, in W-K, I, 301.

44 *Scots Magazine*, 30 (October 1768), 556–8; *Scots Magazine*, 30 (November 1768), 610–12; Kidd, 'Fergusson Affair', 348–51; Letter 46, JW to SK, 1 May 1770, in W-K, I, 302.

45 This included Wodrow corresponding with such Moderate leaders as Hugh Blair in Edinburgh. Letter 99, JW to SK, 5 August 1785.

46 Letter 46, JW to SK, 1 May 1770, in W-K, I, 301.

whole weight of the management' of the case, as Wodrow said, upon him. He was assisted with advice from John Warner and others, but he himself wrote

> all the Papers presented to the Synod & Assembly ^Presby of Ed^{r} . &c^ besides innumerable private Letters about it & the restraining the Abbot from his fury & imputatience against his adversaries which would ruin the best cause.[47]

Wodrow and his colleagues thus both skilfully used the presbyterian structure and processes of the Kirk to defend Fergusson against the heresy charges made to the Presbytery of Irvine and the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr in October 1768 and managed the overheated, elderly Fergusson.

To Warner and Fergusson should be added Wodrow's close friendship with William M'Gill, minister of the second charge in Ayr, who wrote A *Practical Essay on the Death of Jesus Christ*, which Wodrow helped him to publish in 1786. As Martin Fitzpatrick has shown, the repercussions from the publication of M'Gill's book once more caused difficulties for Wodrow's desire to combine Enlightenment candour with practical prudence, pursuing a Moderate approach of 'modest persuasion' rather than heated controversy. He was partly motivated by his natural inclination to help a friend in financial crisis and poor health, but he clearly also sympathised with M'Gill's intellectual purposes.[48]

In A *Practical Essay*, M'Gill explained the nature and significance of the crucifixion by a careful reading of the New Testament texts, in which he emphasised the humanity of Christ at the expense of his deity; his example and inspiration to his followers at the expense of the Calvinist doctrine of his atonement; and God's pardon and mercy at the expense of his wrath and justice. While he introduced his lengthy discussion of the doctrine of Christ's death in Part II of the book by asking how 'the death of Christ, or the effusion of his blood, tends to put away the guilt of sin, or to save us from the punishment and condemnation which it deserves', an entirely orthodox framing, his conclusion was that the crucifixion was primarily evidence of resurrection to an afterlife and an inspiration to follow the teachings of Jesus, without which 'we can neither be reconciled to GOD by his death, nor saved by his life'.[49] As Wodrow noted to Kenrick in 1784, having read the book in manuscript:

> There is … little obnoxious in it but the Heresy of Ommission excepting indeed in some of the notes which picture the Absurdity and inhumanity of the common oppinion on the subject with too much severity & woud certainly irritate.[50] These I advised him either to suppress altogether or soften let him publish where he will because I realy dissaprove of the bitter spirit of

47 Letter 45, JW to SK, 25 January 1769, in W-K, I, 296.

48 Fitzpatrick, 'Varieties of Candour', 39–40.

49 M'Gill, A *Practical Essay on the Death of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh, 1786), 234, 545–50.

50 In 1786, after the book's publication, Wodrow noted that 'all the obnoxious Strictures against the common Oppinions about the Satisfaction' had been 'struck out by my advice', except M'Gill kept 'one single note … as somewhat curious from the History of Carolina'. Letter 125, JW to SK, 23 November 1786, 325.

> controversy in all parties. But there is probably nothing in the book that woud give ground for a prosecution in our Church courts as every thing coud be easily defended on the common oppinion of the human nature of X [Christ] yet … there is not the least hint of any thing else & the whole strain of the book calculated to raise the Suspicion perhaps the Hue & cry of S-c-n-sm.[51]

M'Gill had also, as Wodrow advised, softened some of his language:

> He is the Son of Man, 'tis true: But, do you find any thing in him inconsistent with the character of the Son of God? I hope not. Certainly the Apostles had as little apprehension of any such thing, as their blessed Master, or they would not have so minutely related this secret passage [Gethsemane], known to no many but him and themselves.[52]

However, the *Practical Essay* was indeed read by orthodox critics as implicitly both Arminian and Socinian,[53] and, together with the anti-subscription appendix to M'Gill's published sermon on the centenary of the Glorious Revolution in 1788, it was attacked by the sermon of a neighbouring Evangelical minister, William Peebles in 1788.[54] M'Gill's own robust response led to heresy charges, so that Wodrow was again galvanised into presbytery, synod and Assembly politicking in defence of a friend, while simultaneously trying to persuade his friend to accept a peaceful compromise. Once more, M'Gill's friends had advised him to ignore attacks on his heterodox theology, but, like Fergusson, they were unable to restrain him. After debates in the synod and Assembly, the case was referred back to the Presbytery of Ayr.[55]

Wodrow's strategy demonstrated his experience and skill in using institutional church politics to protect his friend: to 'protract the matter somehow' until after the Synod met in Glasgow, then to try to elect friendly elders in Ayr so 'as [to] terminate the matter' there.[56] At length, Wodrow and others brokered a compromise. He wrote letters to M'Gill, stressing

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51 Socinianism. Letter 84, JW to SK, 22 October 1784, 103–4.

52 M'Gill, *Practical Essay*, 37.

53 Kidd, 'Enlightenment and Anti-Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', 77; Kidd, 'Anti-Calvinism and the Ayrshire Enlightenment', 225–6; A. McNair, *Scots Theology in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1928), 96–7.

54 William M'Gill, *The Benefits of the Revolution: A Sermon, Preached at Ayr, on the 5th of November, 1788, by William M'Gill, D. D. To Which are Added, Remarks on a Sermon, Preached on the Same Day, at Newton Upon Ayr; Very Necessary for All the Readers of Said Sermon* (Kilmarnock, 1789); William Peebles, *The Great Things Which the Lord Hath Done for This Nation, Illustrated and Improved; in Two Sermons Preached on the 5th of November, 1788* (Kilmarnock, 1788).

55 Minutes of the Presbytery of Ayr, 1768–96, 15 July 1789, National Records of Scotland [hereafter NRS], CH2/532/8, ff. 452–4; *Proceedings of the Very Reverend the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, held at Ayr on the 13th & 14th April 1790, Relating to Some Late Publications of the Rev. Dr. William Mcgill, With the Final Decisions in That Cause* (n.p., 1790).

56 Letter 149, JW to SK, 5 August 1789, W-K, II, 429.

that much depended on his displaying the 'meekness & Gentleness of Christ'[57] in his answers to the doctrinal questions put to him. Meanwhile, ahead of the next meeting of the Synod in Ayr, Wodrow encouraged the appointment of 'proper Elders' to outnumber the 'fools & bigots', though he was frustrated by a 'lukewarmness & even a timidity' on the part of his fellow Moderates.[58] Finally, Wodrow himself participated in a committee appointed by Synod to help M'Gill draft an apology, which stated that he was 'extremely sorry' that his attempt at a 'wholly practical' study of Christ's death had caused offence.[59] In this document, M'Gill admitted that some ideas in his *Death of Christ* may 'appear improper' and certain expressions 'ambiguous and unguarded' on doctrinal points. For that he was 'heartily sorry' and declared his belief in the 'great articles, as they are laid down in the standards of this church'.[60] While Wodrow would have preferred a clear ruling against the charge of heresy, politics was the art of the possible, and he clearly played an important role in crafting this act of damage control. He wrote to Kenrick that he and other 'sensible men in both parties' were satisfied with the compromise, while 'the bigots and zealots' were outraged.[61] There was clearly a spectrum of practice here among both Moderates and Evangelicals, with substantial antagonism being articulated and acted upon at both extremes and a more pragmatic diplomacy being exercised by others. It is also worth noting that Wodrow's Moderate friends were represented both among those who, like Fergusson and M'Gill, felt the need to argue explicitly in favour of heterodox positions and those who (much more like Leechman and himself) preferred to remain silent in public on controverted points.[62]

Finally, Samuel Kenrick himself, James Wodrow's lifelong correspondent and intimate friend, was an important influence on Wodrow's leaning towards 'rational Christianity', even if there were important theological as well as political differences between them.[63] Kenrick had been sent to Glasgow University on a scholarship from Dr Williams's Library for Dissenting students ineligible to matriculate at Oxford University or graduate from Cambridge, originally with the intention of a career in Presbyterian church ministry like many of his relatives. However, at some point in the 1740s, it seems that his increasingly heterodox theological

57 'Now I Paul myself beseech you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ', 2 Corinthians 10:1.

58 Minutes of the Presbytery of Ayr, 1768–96, 30 September 1789, NRS, CH2/532/8, ff. 457–62; Minutes of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, 1761–1803, 13 October 1789, NRS, CH2/464/4, ff. 243, 247–9; Letter 151, JW to SK, 9 November 1789, W-K, II, 436–38.

59 Letter 154, JW to SK, 2 June 1790, W-K, II, 451–52.

60 For William M'Gill's 'declaration and apology', see *Proceedings of the Very Reverend the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, Held at Ayr on the 13th & 14th April 1790, Relating to some Late Publications of the Rev. Dr. William M'Gill, with the Final Decisions in That Cause* ([Glasgow], 1790), 6–7, 10, 12.

61 E.g. see James Ramsay, A *Clear, Scriptural Detection of Satan* (Glasgow, 1790), in which a Seceding author protested against the latitudinarianism demonstrated by the Presbytery of Ayr in their handling of the affair. On Wodrow's work on behalf of M'Gill during these events and his assessment of them, see Fitzpatrick, 'Varieties of Candour', 42, 47–8, 50.

62 Wodrow, 'Life of Leechman', 30–4.

63 Fitzpatrick, 'Varieties of Candour'.

views turned him away from that career, and he worked first as a tutor in a Renfrewshire family and latterly as a banker and tobacconist in business near Birmingham with his brother and other partners. He was enamoured of Joseph Priestley's writing and preaching and became a convinced Unitarian. Frequent and lengthy discussions of theological questions and publications in the correspondence show Wodrow to have been a man who knew his own mind and who did not go so far as Kenrick did but who was certainly attracted to the ideas of the early Socinians in sixteenth-century Europe. When Kenrick asked him directly about the pre-existence of Christ, Wodrow answered revealingly but carefully:

> For myself it is one of the few theological points about which after sufficient enquiry I have formed no decided opinion. Like many other disputed points, It is of little consequence to X^{ty}. The Credit of our Sav^{rs}. religion and its Influence on Mankind stands on his Father['s] Authority. In his Name He ever spoke & acted & never in his own. This I think is acknowledged by all rational Xians. The S-c-ians[64] appear to me to have a considerable advantage over all the other sects in urging the Example of X upon his followers as a motive to virtue & also in stating his Resurrection or future Life as a direct proof of ours.[65] Yet on the other hand it may be said That whatever He was before he came into the World He emptyed himself & became one of us[66] but I dont know if this is sufficient to place the above motives & proofs on the very same ground.[67]

He went on to say that, although it seemed to him that the 'general strain' of the New Testament was 'undoubtedly' in favour of the Socinian interpretation, there were 'a few passages in the Gospel of John' that would 'naturaly lead a Bible Xian' to believe that Jesus had 'been with God before he appeared in this world'. Hence his caution about 'form[ing] a decided opinion' on the issue. Otherwise, he considered that the 'Arian scheme' was stronger 'in point of reason & Philosophy viz that it is much more congruous to our conceptions of our Lords Exaltation to the Supremacy of the Universe or of the Church of God in heaven & earth'. Since the question of Christ's pre-existence was open to debate, and since it did not affect his essential status as the Messiah who had been resurrected and exalted, Kenrick's hero Joseph Priestley

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64 Socinians professed the unity of God and rejected the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. They held that Jesus was a human prophet who became exalted following his crucifixion but remained subordinate in status to God. Joseph Priestley provided a concise twenty-eight-page case for Socinian unitarianism in *A General View of the Arguments for the Unity of God; and Against the Divinity and Pre-Existence of Christ, from Reason, from the Scriptures, and from History* (Birmingham, 1783).

65 Brekke, who shows Wodrow's leaning towards Socinianism with less complexity, ends his quotation of Wodrow's letter at this point. 'Heretics in the Pulpit', 86.

66 Cf. Philippians 2:5–8: 'Christ Jesus. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'.

67 Letter 79, JW to SK, 15 April 1784, 72–3.

should show less attachment to his own 'nostrums or prejudices & more gentleness to those of others'; he did not show 'sufficient candour to see or feel the weight of what is advanced by his antagonists'.[68] Wodrow showed a similar capacity for nuance in his political sermons: as Fitzpatrick has pointed out, his two published sermons, both on the French Revolution, are loyalist but not straightforward defences of British policy.[69]

As a young clergyman in the 1750s, Wodrow subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith, as required since 1711 by the Church of Scotland, when he was ordained in the parish of Dunlop, and again when he moved to Stevenston in 1759.[70] It may be, however, that, like other Moderate clergy, Wodrow focused on the tenth article of the first chapter of the Confession, which declared that the Bible was the supreme authority in all religious controversies; and the fourth article of the thirty-first chapter, which stated that 'all councils and synods … may err … therefore they are not to be made a rule of faith or practice, but to be used as an help in both'.[71] William Dalrymple, minister of the first charge in Ayr and close colleague of William M'Gill, had argued in 1766 that in light of these articles in the Confession, the 'wisest and best' ministers would 'think it their duty' to 'propose their own interpretations' of scripture.[72] The 'Sequel of Mr Fergussons affair', as Wodrow termed it, was a debate in the pages of the *Scots Magazine* in 1769–70 over the doctrinal formula signed by Church of Scotland ministers at their ordination. The articles were pseudonymously published, but their authors may have included Fergusson himself and also John Warner.[73] Wodrow had helped a young friend, John

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68 Letter 79 JW to SK, 15 April 1784, 73–7; Letter 125, JW to SK, 23 November 1786, 324. For SK's own gently self-mocking epithet for Priestley, 'my favourite hero', see Letter 127, SK to JW, 18 January 1787.

69 Fitzpatrick, 'The Enlightenment, Politics and Providence', 93–5. For Wodrow's sermons, see note 31 above.

70 Macleod, 'The Significance of the Westminster Confession', 3; Minutes of the Presbytery of Irvine, 18 October 1759, NRS, CH2/197/6/5, records Wodrow's assent to the Confession on the occasion of his induction to the parish of Stevenston.

71 Brekke, 'Heretics in the Pulpit', 86–7.

72 William Dalrymple, *Christian Unity Illustrated and Recommended from the Example of the Primitive Church* (Glasgow, 1766), 18. This was a sermon preached before the Synod in Glasgow in October 1766. Francis Blackburne highlighted Dalrymple's argument in the third edition of his *The Confessional: Or, A Full and Free Inquiry into the Right, Utility, Edification, and Success of Establishing Systematical Confessions of Faith and Doctrine in Protestant Churches* (London, 1770), 449 n.

73 Phileleutherus, 'The Act of Assembly 1711 Unconstitutional', *Scots Magazine*, 31 (March 1769), 121–9; Philalethes [Rev. Thomas Walker of Dundonald], 'The Proceedings of the Assembly 1711 Justified', *Scots Magazine*, 31 (July 1769), 345–51; Phileleutherus, 'The Objections to the Formula of 1711 Justified', *Scots Magazine*, 31 (October 1769), 513–21; 'Criticus', *Scots Magazine*, 32 (February 1770), 57–64. If Fergusson was the 'Phileleutherus' who had responded to 'Philalethes' [Thomas Walker] in *Scots Magazine*, 31 (October 1769), 513–21, 'Criticus' may have been John Warner. In Letter 48, 31 March 1771, Kenrick observed: 'It gives me the greatest pleasure to hear these boisterous times [i.e. church disputes], have forced our worthy Warner to exert his great talents.'

Mackenzie, then the minister of Stranraer, to publish a Scottish equivalent of Blackburne's *Confessional* in 1771, in which Mackenzie argued that one could be an orthodox Calvinist, agreeing with the Westminster Confession of Faith in every article, and yet still hold that the only standard of truth should be Scripture. Wodrow told Kenrick, 'I furnished him with the Material for the Preface but the Composition is his own.'[74]

Theologically, then, Wodrow both objected to the imposition of doctrinal standards on ministers and was himself interested in Socinian ideas on the status of Jesus Christ. He was silent publicly on controversial points; he disliked heresy processes and characterised Evangelicals who pursued them as 'bigots'. William Leechman's description of the character of Christ, mediated by Wodrow, is a telling account of what Moderates meant by 'enthusiasts', their ecclesiastical rivals: 'Neither has the character of Jesus Christ one single feature of the enthusiast,—heat of imagination and temper,—melancholy, and an unsocial spirit,—exstatic devotion,—ignorance,—credulity,—vanity, or self-conceit.'[75] Wodrow was dismayed by a local enthusiasm for Evangelical priorities in his area, complaining to Kenrick in 1784:

> Our people are turned wild in their Sentiments about Patronage & the uniform decisions of the Gen[l]. Assembly in favour of the Law irritate them more & more. Yet I believe the cheif cause is a difference in their Theological sentiments with their Clergy they get Sermons more to their Tast i.e. more calvinistick in their turn, or suited to the books they are accustomed to read: at least this the case here where we have little disturbance with violent Settlements.[76]

Conversely, Wodrow's niece Mary Ann Wodrow, the daughter of his brother Robert and a close friend of Wodrow's daughter Peggy, had been brought up an orthodox Calvinist. She expressed anxiety about the Arminian theology on which her cousin had been brought up by her beloved uncle:

> I regretted the difference in our education about Religious matters she [Peggy] being led to expect happyness hereafter from our own Merit & taught to think we were only frail, not corrupted creatures alas how little hope might we have if there was no better Righteousness than our own to trust to– fain would I

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74 Letter 84, JW to SK, 22 October 1784, 118. [John Mackenzie], *The Religious Establishment in Scotland Examined Upon Protestant Principles: A Tract, Occasioned by the Late Prosecution Against the Late Reverend Mr. Alexander Fergusson, Minister in Kilwinning* (London, 1771). This pamphlet has often been incorrectly attributed to John Graham, but Anthony Page has established the authorship of John Mackenzie on the basis of Wodrow's letter (W-K, II, 118–19). The sixty-two-page preface, signed by 'Christianus', provided a detailed account of the prosecution of Alexander Fergusson for heresy. Mackenzie followed this pamphlet with a short publication titled *Subscription to Human Articles of Faith, Examined Particularly, in a Letter to the Reverend Mr Thomas Walker, Minister of Dundonald. By the Author of the Religious Establishment in Scotland, &c.* (London, 1775).

75 Wodrow, 'Life of Leechman', 44.

76 Letter 79, JW to SK, 15 April 1784, 71–2.

> have brought on this subject but was not qualified for it & Perhaps would have enjured the cause I wished to support.[77]

So far, so apparently straightforward. Wodrow may be said to have exhibited and prized the main characteristics of the Moderate party of clergymen in Scotland. Yet, this is not all there was to this rather thoughtful parish clergyman. He was also the grandson of James Wodrow (1637–1707) and Patrick Warner of Ardeer (*c.* 1640–1724), and the great-grandson of William Guthrie (1630–65), all leading Covenanters; and the son of Robert Wodrow, the church historian, a firm Calvinist (sometimes described as an Evangelical). While he disliked intensely certain characteristics of Evangelicals—the 'bigotry' of the Popular party (by which he meant their insistence on doctrinal subscription) and the emotionalism and 'ignorance' of 'enthusiasts'— he did not discuss, disparagingly or otherwise, the theology of his Covenanting antecedents or his Calvinist father, except once to assert, intriguingly but without support, that his father had 'begun to turn more liberal in his sentiments than many of his contemporaries especialy towards the end of his life'.[78] It is true that, while his father had 'heartily opposed' the teaching of John Simson, he had also 'cordially approved' of Francis Hutcheson.[79] The lines between Calvinism and what became Moderatism were not always sharp.

A Covenanting legacy that was political and emotional rather than doctrinal, as suggested by Christopher Whatley, is plausible in Wodrow's case.[80] Certainly this heritage will have lain beneath his political anti-Jacobitism and pro-Unionism (as Whatley suggests of others in this period), but perhaps this Covenanting heritage, and his father's theology—as well as his own temperamental eirenicism—may also explain his genuine friendships with Popular party men. Of John Witherspoon, Wodrow wrote to Kenrick on 7 December 1784: 'he is & always was a most excellent Preacher'.[81] Famously, Witherspoon himself had not been a conciliatory figure during his Scottish ministry. As well as having publicly rebuked the minister of Athelstaneford, John Home, for his poetry and theatrical productions in the 1750s and helping to lead the pursuit of Alexander Fergusson in 1768 as discussed earlier, he had questioned the orthodoxy of two of John Warner's *protégés* in 1767[82] at the time of their trials for licensing in

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77 Diaries of Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald, I, ff. 55–6, Smith College Libraries, Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald Papers, accessed 7 March 2023, https://findingaids.smith.edu/repositories/2/resources/548, Thanks to members of the Ayrshire Archaeological & Natural History Society who made us aware of Mary Ann Wodrow's journal.

78 Letter 65, JW to SK, 21 September 1778, in W-K, I, 428.

79 Sefton, '"Neu-Lights and Preachers-Legall"', 187.

80 Christopher A. Whatley, 'Reformed Religion, Regime Change, Scottish Whigs and the Struggle for the "Soul" of Scotland, c.1688–c.1788', *Scottish Historical Review*, 92 (2013), 66–99.

81 Letter 86, JW to SK, 7 December 1784, W-K, II, 132.

82 One of these was Wodrow's friend, Archibald Arthur (1744–97), Glasgow University librarian (1774–94) and later professor of moral philosophy. He was appointed assistant to Thomas Reid in 1780, whom he succeeded to the chair of moral philosophy in 1796 on Reid's death, having variously taught logic, botany, Latin and church history, and having catalogued some 20,000 books of Glasgow University Library. He was one of the first members of the Royal Society of Edinburgh on its foundation in 1783. Letter 114, JW to SK, 11 April 1786 W-K, II, 265–8.

1767.[83] It is not surprising that Wodrow's view of Witherspoon was unusual among his Moderate friends: as he wrote to Kenrick, 'I had not the same unfavourable oppinion of him that M[r]. Warner the abbott [Alexander Fergusson] & most of my friends had.'[84] Wodrow also wrote approvingly of John Erskine, a leading Popular party clergyman much more temperamentally similar to himself. Erskine invited him to preach in his church of Old Greyfriars in Edinburgh during the General Assembly in May 1785, a charge Erskine shared amicably with William Robertson despite their leadership of opposing parties in the Church. Although his family refused to attend church to hear the liberal Wodrow preach, Erskine not only attended himself but:

> came out of Church with me arm in arm & tho' he must have seen that my theological Sentiments … were different from his own yet when he preached in the Afternoon, every reference he made to my discourses both in his Prayers & Sermon, was calculated to convey favourable impressions to his congregation.[85]

Then there were less well-known colleagues such as Robert Dow of Ardrossan, whom Wodrow called 'a sincere Calvinist', and of whom he wrote that:

> He & I have since lived in the strictest intimacy for 29 years. I believe he thinks me the best friend he has in the World & one of the best preachers. Yet our Articles of Faith are very different, but we happen to set the same value on the Morality of the Gospel & I have heard him often say that no heresy gives him any disturbance but Antinomianism.[86]

Indeed, Wodrow's defences of his friends were not only of Moderates and the heterodox. He also wrote of Dow:

> I once said, defending him when he was blamed for preaching in a very high orthodox strain, that the innate goodness of his heart corected & sweetened all the barbarism of his System which indeed it does in both in his Sermons & his temper & behaviour to his friends.[87]

Similarly, he surmised of Kenrick's Evangelical friend, William Jesse, that he 'must be a pleasant man notwithstanding his Oddities' of character. 'No wonder he is popular. His methodistical enthusiasm & his narrow principles do not seem to sour his temper as is the case with many of his brethren in this part of the world.'[88]

Wodrow's lenient and gentle descriptions of the Buchanite sect in Ayrshire in 1784 are also striking. This was a small group led by one Elspath Buchan, who persuaded Hugh White,

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83 See also Crawford, *The Lost World of John Witherspoon*, on the lengthy Court of Session action taken against Witherspoon by the lawyer John Snodgrass and others, 1762–76.

84 Letter 86, JW to SK, 7 December 1784, W-K, II, 132.

85 Letter 99, JW to SK, 5 August 1785, W-K, II, 200.

86 Letter 125, JW to SK, 23 November 1786, W-K, II, 322.

87 Ibid.

88 Letter 121, JW to SK, 28 August 1786, W-K, II, 303.

the Relief Church minister of Irvine, of her unorthodox interpretation of Scripture (on the doctrines of the second coming of Christ and of marriage).[89] After he was removed from his pulpit and they and their followers were expelled from Irvine, they set up a community in Dumfriesshire, living with property in common. Wodrow, unsurprisingly, described them as 'a new Sect of Enthusiasts'.[90] However, he also termed them 'the honest Buchanites' and told Kenrick that a lengthy letter he had seen by one of their leaders[91] was:

> very curious & not at all the raving of a wild Enthusiast as I expected but a very able defense of the Principles of the Buchanites in a stile & manner far above the common joined with an acquaintance with the Scriptures which almost astonished me. Their opinions are not so wild as they have been represented. There are the strongest appeals to Scripture Authority & the boldest attacks immaginable on the high popular doctrines of all sects.[92]

Wodrow was critical of theological writers if he considered their polemic too aggressive, even if he sympathised with their theology. His chief criticism of Joseph Priestley was not his unitarian theology but his style of argumentation. He was unconvinced by Priestley's attempt to support 'the Socinian Hypothesis' from the history of the early church, and he thought there were even difficulties for that theology in terms of scripture that were 'not easy to be surmounted'.[93] It was Priestley's approach to making his case that disturbed him most, however. In the 1790s, when Wodrow and Kenrick had begun to disagree about the French Revolution and its adherents at home, Wodrow wrote that he thought that, in fact, he and Kenrick agreed, at bottom, about the war and the government's repression of radicalism, including the state trials for treason and sedition. 'The only difference between us', he continued:

> is the bitterness & violence of your feelings (forgive the expression) & the violent exagerated representations you give of the measures & designs of your antagonists. You have no allowances to make for their different views & situations. You are liable to an error of sentiment of the same kind towards them with that which they have been guilty of both in sentiment & in conduct to those they call reformers. You must learn a different spirit from your Master D[r]. Priestly, & apply the golden rule of a still higher Master to the present case.[94]

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89 Joy Strong and Rowan Strong, 'Elspeth Buchan and the Buchanite Movement', in James Crossley and Alastair Lockhart (eds), *Critical Dictionary of Apocalyptic and Millenarian Movements*, *www.cdamm.org/articles/buchanites* (27 April 2021); Michael D. Riordan, *Mysticism and Prophecy in Scotland in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 2015), 195–238.

90 Letter 84, JW to SK, 22 October 1784, W-K, II, 105.

91 Peter Hunter, a writer (lawyer) in Irvine.

92 Letter 88, JW to SK, 7 January 1785, W-K, II, 142, 143.

93 Letter 125, JW to SK, 23 November 1786, W-K, II, 324, discussing Priestley's *An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ, Compiled from Original Writers: Proving that the Christian Church was at First Unitarian* (4 vols, Birmingham, 1786).

94 Letter 195, JW to SK, 10 September 1794.

Similarly, a few years later, Wodrow discussed William Wilberforce's *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes of This Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity* (1797) and Thomas Belsham's *Review of Mr. Wilberforce's Treatise* (1798). He much preferred Belsham's defence of rational religion to Wilberforce's case for Evangelical Christianity—'almost as much as light to darkness'. Although in fact, he thought that 'as a Christian … the Religion of my Master has almost as little connexion with the One as with the other', he was grateful for Belsham's critique of what he thought to be Wilberforce's 'degrading but popular plausible' representation of rational Christianity. However, he disapproved of Belsham's pugnacity:

> I think Mr. B.'s book woud have been more perfect, at least woud have more of the Effect he intended by it, if it had been more conciliatory; & this would have been the case, had he kept his own Philosophical Opinions more in the dark, at least in the back ground, than he has done.[95]

Wodrow's eirenic temperament reflected something of the practice of his mentor, William Leechman, who had valued humility and sympathy over hostility and controversy.[96] After the settlement of the heresy process against Leechman in 1743, according to Wodrow:

> Some of those who had appeared his keen adversaries in the church process, lived with him afterwards on terms of sincere friendship: even the prejudices of the common people in Glasgow gradually subsided, so that he came to be considered there, as he had always been in every other place, a very acceptable preacher.[97]

And he noted in his biographical essay of Leechman that the principal had advised his students, too, to avoid both 'party' and 'metaphysical disputes'.[98] These glimpses of rapprochement and of significant nuance in both Moderate and Popular Party positioning and practice are perhaps an important counter-current to the record of stormy doctrinal disputes in Ayrshire and Renfrewshire in this period and remind us that, in fact, the quieter periods were far more typical than the exciting or disturbing heresy processes—indeed, that normal 'habits of intimacy' between ministerial colleagues such as Wodrow and Witherspoon might be 'weakened tho' not broken by our different views & conduct in Ch courts'.[99]

In fact, Wodrow's own criticism of leading Moderates for their lack of biblical knowledge is notable, and it is consistent with his applause of the Buchanite leader's 'acquaintance with the Scriptures'. Of such Moderate luminaries as Principal William Robertson and Dr Hugh Blair, he wrote:

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95 Letter 220, JW to SK, 7 December 1798.
96 Fitzpatrick, 'Varieties of Candour', 38.
97 Wodrow, 'Life of Leechman', 28.
98 Ibid., 65.
99 Letter 86, JW to SK, 7 December 1784, W-K, II, 132.

> Neither of them are theological Scholars nor if I am not mistaken have much scriptural knowledge.[100] From [Blair's] Sermons it appears that he is fully Master of the Morality of the NT but I apprehend of no other part of it either as a Critick or a Divine.[101]

By contrast, he continued, 'honest Dr Erskine … is much more of a Theologian than any of them'—this included James McKnight, whom Wodrow greatly admired as a biblical scholar—'& notwithstanding his Calvinistick principles, mixed with a certain portion of fanaticism not of the most amiable kind, is yet a liberal minded man in many points and has much learning & worth. He is a most indefatigable student.'[102] John McIntosh, judging Erskine's *Dissertation on the Nature of Christian Faith* (1765) to have been 'the most significant theological work produced by an evangelical Church of Scotland minister in the latter half of the eighteenth century', noted that Erskine drew on the works of William Leechman as well as more obvious fellow travellers such as Jonathan Edwards and John Owen.[103] Not only was he a notable biblical scholar, therefore, but in his scholarship he demonstrated a breadth of theological compass as Wodrow did in his friendships and Witherspoon in his teaching. Witherspoon himself published two theological works of note during his Scottish ministry, defending Calvinist doctrines: his *Essay on Justification* (1756) and his *Treatise on Regeneration* (1764).[104]

Wodrow valued traditional Scottish preaching practice (three times each Sunday), conscientious parish visitation,[105] extempore prayer,[106] the spirituality that was prepared to stand for

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100 Robertson's reputation as a parish minister in his first charge (Gladsmuir) was mixed—'he was probably more engaged with the larger issues of church policy and literary culture than he was with daily parish demands'. Jeffrey R. Smitten, 'Robertson, William (1721–1793)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Most of his sermons for which records are extant discussed texts from six of the sixty-six books of the Bible: Proverbs, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Luke, Matthew, and Acts. Jeffrey R. Smitten, *The Life of William Robertson: Minister, Historian, and Principal* (Edinburgh, 2017), 66. Wodrow was much more complimentary about him as an historian, however, and admired him also as a conversationalist and a family man. Letter 99, JW to SK, 5 August 1785, W-K, II, 196–97.

101 Letter 99, JW to SK, 5 August 1785, W-K, II, 198. Cf. Kidd, 'Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History', 503; Macleod, 'The Significance of the Westminster Confession', 9; Brown, 'Moderate Theology and Preaching'; McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland*, 25.

102 Letter 99, JW to SK, 5 August 1785, W-K, II, 199–200.

103 McIntosh, 'Eighteenth-Century Evangelicalism', 94–5.

104 See Foster, 'Literate Piety', 114–15; Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution*, 64, 66–72.

105 Letter 120, JW to SK, 9–15 August 1786, W-K, II, 296; Letter 125, JW to SK, 23 November 1786, W-K, II, 322–23.

106 Letter 108, JW to SK, 27 December 1785, W-K, II, 240, on Leechman: 'he took more pains in studying his Prayers than his Sermons so that his Excellence in that way, superiour to any other man I ever heard pray, tho' in a manner extempore when you & I heard him was yet the Effect of acquired habit'.

hours outside in the rain listening to several communion sermons on end because the parish church was not large enough to hold a communion congregation[107] and personal devotion, all characteristics we might be tempted to associate with Evangelicals of his period, though Friedhelm Voges pointed out that 'many Moderate ministers were assiduous workers in their parishes'. He queried whether they were quite so rigorous in their catechising of parishioners as members of the Popular party were; perhaps not, but Wodrow catechised every second year, and in the intervening years he visited every family and then gathered together a few households at a time to deliver a short exhortation and to pray with them.[108]

Wodrow's series of accounts of William Leechman's short final illness and the aftermath of his death are also problematic for a simplistic characterisation of Moderates as lacking in devotional warmth or love of Scripture or the Lord.[109] During his final weeks, the principal not only sent for various colleagues to bless them and pray for them, including his antagonist, John Anderson, and all the members of his own household, but he also had regular bursts of something like ecstasy, telling his wife that 'he was in a state of joy and exultation'. Wodrow reported that:

> he bore [all his discomfort] with great patience, longing for his dissolution & triumphing in the prospect of it, repeating <u>at times to himself the finest passages in the new testament. This corruptible</u> shall put on incorruption & this Mortal put on immortality. O Death where is thy sting &c,[110] Even so come Lord Jesus[111] & many others to the same purpose. … He said the promises of the Gospel were so plain that it required no stretch of mind to recollect or apply them. He confessed he was sometimes a Coward for pain but never ~~in his Life~~ was afraid of Death.[112]

In his letter announcing Leechman's death, Wodrow was still so warmed by the experience of witnessing the principal's last days and of being pressed by his widow to preach on the Sunday following the death that he repeated a lengthy segment of his sermon to Kenrick in the letter, on the text of the last verse in the Bible, 'even so come Lord Jesus!' and the happiness of heaven then for all the saints.[113] The following year, despite all the work he had intended to do on Leechman's and Warner's papers, Wodrow was unable to 'resist the temptation' to turn an intended two sermons into 'five long ones' on 'a connected Scripture view of the Sufferings & Glory of X [Christ] from the predictions of the Old Testt. & the

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107 Letter 120, JW to SK, 9–15 August 1786, W-K, II, 301.

108 Voges, 'Moderate and Evangelical Thinking in the Later Eighteenth Century', 143–4; Letter 125, JW to SK, 23 November 1786, W-K, II, 323.

109 See also Fitzpatrick, 'Varieties of Candour', 38, on Leechman's inclusion of 'warm piety' as part of Moderate religion.

110 1 Corinthians 15:53–5.

111 Revelation 22:20.

112 Letter 106, Wodrow to Kenrick, 1 December 1785, W-K, II, 223–24.

113 Revelation 22:21; Letter 108, Wodrow to Kenrick, 27 December 1785, W-K, II, 232–35, 296.

facts of the New. Test Luke XXIV 25, 26, 27'.[114] He too was capable of having 'his heart burn within him'.[115]

Wodrow's Covenanting and Calvinist heritage therefore remained a significant 'residue' in his Moderate theology and practice, as Eugene Heath has put it, writing about Alexander Gillies, another Ayrshire minister of this period.[116] Wodrow was therefore probably not alone in that trajectory, especially in south-west Scotland, so he is interesting in himself for the intersection of these theologies and values, but his career is also suggestive of the permeability of the boundaries of Moderatism in later eighteenth-century Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, and perhaps beyond. Moderate theology and practice were not necessarily homogeneous, and a range of Moderate positions may usefully be suggested, moving from those whose own theology was actually rather orthodox, reformed in doctrine while they disliked its enforcement on others via subscription, through those such as Leechman, who skated over certain doctrines considered fundamental to the faith by the orthodox, to those such as Fergusson and M'Gill, who questioned, rather than simply omitted, key orthodox doctrines such as the equal divinity of Christ with God the Father or the meaning of his death. Wodrow himself was careful in avoiding controversy on his own behalf, though actively loyal on behalf of his friends and in the cause of resistance to the enforcement of subscription; careful and nuanced in terms of his own thinking and the conclusions he was willing to draw; and eirenic in his friendships and in his admiration for scholarship and practice he admired, for instance in the person of John Witherspoon, with whom their 'different views & conduct in Church courts' did not preclude Wodrow living 'in habits of intimacy'.

This spectrum shows that there is therefore a more various and three-dimensional understanding of Moderate theology and practice to be drawn than is often acknowledged. Moreover, the evidence of harmony between Moderate and Popular party ministers presented here is a reminder that the periods of doctrinal dispute in Ayrshire and Renfrewshire in this period, though undoubtedly important (and though Wodrow himself played a more significant role in them than has been recognised), were not typical. That was partly because most Moderate ministers were either not so theologically heterodox as Fergusson or M'Gill, or not so willing to engage in public debate over their convictions, while most orthodox clergymen were not so pugnacious as Witherspoon or Peebles. It was also because there were those, like Wodrow and his friend Robert Dow, who were willing to work behind the scenes to secure rapprochement during periods of high drama and otherwise were inclusive in their friendships and respect.

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114 Letter 120, JW to SK, 9–15 August 1786, W-K, II, 296-302. Luke 24:25–7: 'Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.'

115 Luke 24:32.

116 Heath, 'Alexander Gillies and Adam Smith: Freemasonry and the Resonance of Self-Love', 291, 303.

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