



Reviews



***Unity and Diversity: The Founders of the Free Church of Scotland*, Sandy Finlayson, Fearn: Christian Focus, 2010, pp. 310, ISBN 978-1845505509. £8.99**

In the bowels of the libraries of many Presbyterian seminaries and colleges can be found J. A. Wylie's *Disruption Worthies* (1881). Its handsome binding is no doubt dusty and its pages brittle and yellowed, but it retains nonetheless a certain Victorian parlour table dignity. Herein, Wylie sketches the careers and convictions of the 'worthies' – the leaders of the almost five hundred ministers who forsook the Church of Scotland in 1843 on the principle of the spiritual independence of the church. The genre of theological biography provides the means by which Wylie justifies the controversial birth of the Free Church of Scotland, defends its continued existence, and promotes its evangelical ethos.

Sandy Finlayson's *Unity and Diversity: The Founders of the Free Church of Scotland* should be considered as heir to James Wylie's long forgotten work. Even the original's lithograph of the stern-faced 'worthies' has been reproduced on the cover! *Unity and Diversity* will therefore be welcomed by those interested in Scottish church life and theology. Indeed, it should be welcomed by all students of English-speaking Protestantism in the Victorian era, given the far-reaching effects around the Protestant world of the Disruption – which the Swiss theologian Karl Hagenbach considered 'the most remarkable religious event of the century' in Britain (*A Text-Book of the History of Doctrines* [1862], §285) – and the Free Church's subsequent life.

Given that much of the Free Church's influence at home and abroad was funnelled through powerful personalities, it is entirely appropriate that Finlayson follows the method of *Disruption Worthies* in giving chapter-length biographies of its founders. The religious character of the Victorian Free Church is amply conveyed through the accounts of the selected ten: Thomas Chalmers, Robert Candlish, William Cunningham, Hugh Martin, Thomas Guthrie, James Begg, Andrew Bonar, John 'Rabbi' Duncan, Alexander Duff, and John Kennedy.

Finlayson's sketches conveniently fall between the brief entries of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, or the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, and book-length studies. Indeed, as many of the figures lack full studies elsewhere, *Unity and Diversity* helpfully fills a niche for those engaged in research on the Scottish church in the nineteenth century.

Although avoiding Wylie's hagiographic tone, Finlayson offers very sympathetic descriptions of these Free Church 'worthies' that aims to commend to the modern church their biblical and confessional fidelity, zeal for evangelism and mission, and social conscience. He emphasizes that the unity of the ten founders on the verities of Bible and Confession, as well as their common evangelical piety, did not preclude diversity of opinion on secondary theological matters, nor differing responses to the burning social and religious issues of the day such as urbanization or mass evangelism. Hence the title: *Unity in Diversity*.

To a large extent, Finlayson does succeed in portraying the Free Church founders as holding forth a compelling Christian vision for church and society, aspects of which could inform and challenge the church today. The writing is lively and readable, and the research is sound. The inclusion of primary material from journals, letters and periodicals like *The Scotsman* lends a contemporary feel to his descriptions. Throughout, he rightly draws attention to several important facts: the magnetic personal influence of Thomas Chalmers upon a whole generation of Scottish Presbyterians; the trendsetting place the Free Church's theological scholarship had in English-speaking evangelicalism; and the Free Church's location at the forefront of various Victorian religious controversies such as biblical authority, science, parish reform, and worship. Scholars will not find any new research in *Unity in Diversity*, but what is synthesized here will prove to be most useful.

What ultimately sets apart *Unity and Diversity* from *Disruption Worthies* is that the former's point of reference is not just the 1843 Disruption but also the 1900 union between the United Presbyterians and the majority of the Free Church. Finlayson, who teaches at a conservative Presbyterian seminary in the United States, charges that the United Free Church was achieved only because 'principles

were replaced by pragmatism, and faithfulness by expediency' (291). Accordingly, he is keen to finger perceived unfaithfulness to the founding biblical and confessional principles of the Free Church. In particular, he singles out for criticism A. B. Davidson and William Robertson Smith on biblical inspiration and authority; the decline of exclusive psalmody, the church union movement; and Robert Rainy and the 1892 Declaratory Act. (Rainy, interestingly, was included in *Disruption Worthies!*) Quite apart from Finlayson's personal theological convictions, what is unconvincing about this course of argument is that his own selection of Disruption 'worthies' resists his polemic. For example, Robert Candlish and Alexander Duff were enthusiastically pro-union, and Duff even came down on Robertson Smith's side during the protracted heresy hearings. Andrew Bonar, despite opposing union with the United Presbyterians, seemed to value evangelical orthodoxy over confessional orthodoxy – a position many scholars would interpret as consistent with his mentor, Chalmers. So it would seem that within the unity of the Free Church founders was more theological diversity than Finlayson cares to admit! His (at times) rather overbearing attempt to prove the opposite should hopefully not detract from what is a very useful and engaging book.

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The King James Bible After Four Hundred Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences, edited by Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 378, ISBN 978-0521768276. £25.00

The flurry of publishing which has greeted the 400th anniversary of the 'King James Bible' (KJB) has resulted in an embarrassment of riches, to the point that a full reading around the subject matter would involve a significant investment of time. For those who are limited in that