Being a postgraduate student of James K. Cameron
A talk given in St Mary's College

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It is impossible for me to stand here this afternoon in this room in this building, or to walk through the gate, bearing the opening words of John's Gospel, leading into St Mary's quadrangle without reflecting on the transformative experience of being a doctoral student of James Cameron. I would like to use my time this afternoon to share with you a personal sense of what it was like to study with him, and how as a mentor he shaped me both intellectually and professionally.

The other evening my parents-in-law asked me how I came to study with Jim Cameron. It was twenty-five years ago and I was completing a master's degree, writing on some Latin sermons of Meister Eckhart. I knew I wanted to study the Reformation, in part because my own Reformed Protestant upbringing had taught me a narrative that the Reformation had sprung out of the ground. It owed nothing to the corrupt church of the Middle Ages. I wanted to learn about the transition, about the roots of the Reformation in medieval culture. In those pre-internet days I searched university catalogues. The best piece of good fortune came in the midst of a conversation with a friend in which I mentioned that I found the Scottish Reformation fascinating. My friend shared with me his copy of *The First Book of Discipline*, which I read carefully. I was astonished. Not only did it open to me the world of the sixteenth century, but with its introduction and extraordinarily expansive notes I came to appreciate the remarkable web of connections that linked Scotland to the Continent. James Cameron's work taught me about the bonds between medieval and Reformation Christianity.

I wrote to Jim Cameron asking whether he might consider me as a postgraduate student. I outlined, probably in an inchoate manner, my range of interests. I also wrote to a number of other universities. The first reply came from St Andrews. I remember well the day I received it. It was an elegant, full and carefully considered letter. It did several things at once that I would some come to appreciate as characteristic of Jim. It was learned and wise whilst thoroughly encouraging. He made me feel not only that I wanted to take up the field of study, but that I could.

We met for the first time twenty-five years ago almost to the day. I was working in London as a research assistant and travelled north. I came into his office, which was guarded by a set of double doors that gave the impression of being an air lock. The office was full of books and papers and I soon learned that Jim could quickly identify and lay his hands on any one of them. Most memorable was the portrait of Savonarola that hung over his desk. Jim greeted me warmly and showed me a chair in front of the fireplace. I could not help noticing a piece of paper on the floor that over the years would migrate around the office as necessary. In bold letters it read, 'Move the car'.

Come the academic year of 1986 I had my first meeting of the term. I believed that my topic would be the Scottish Reformation. Jim indicated that this was promising, but that there was something I must understand. The Scottish Reformation, he said, must be viewed from Mont Blanc, not Calton Hill. The only way to approach the subject was through a thorough understanding of the theology, ecclesiology and political cultures of the Continental Reformation. What Jim was demanding was daunting – a disciplined regime of reading and study. I began to realize something I would only fully appreciate years later – that Jim had such an understanding of the subtle ways in which late-medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation thought are connected. A particular study required for a doctorate could only be useful if grounded in the broader aspects of the field. Working with Jim was to be brought into the extraordinary world of humanist scholarship, the contours of Catholic and Protestant thought and the complexities of institutional reform.

This is the point I wish to emphasize. What I discovered in the autumn of 1986 was how this invitation contained high expectations

and a gracious sense of sharing. He set out how our relationship would work. We would meet every two weeks and I would report on what I had been reading. The goal was to have the intellectual framework of the thesis by Christmas. The meetings were magical. Indeed, I would talk about my reading and he would offer suggestions, but that was only the beginning. He opened the door to the scholarly life. We would discuss aspects of sixteenth-century culture. One example that came to me recently was a full and engaging discussion of John Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper and its implications for his teaching on the church. Jim was always eager to talk about books he was reviewing or his editorial work for the *TRE*. On one occasion, a year or so later, he invited me to sit with him as he corrected a translation from Latin of a work by Hugo Grotius. There was never the sense that the meetings were perfunctory. Time and knowledge were generously shared, limited only, on occasion, by the need to move the car. It was an apprenticeship. Jim was teaching me about how to be a scholar in the widest sense.

Jim always listened and took your ideas, comments and reflections seriously. There was not an ounce of condescension, no ritual humiliation to establish the hierarchy. Jim, I know from many St Mary's students, was a brilliant and inspiring teacher. This was true of him as a supervisor. Why? Because he took what you understood, worked with it, and showed the way forward. When one of our conversations turned to conciliarism and I had read as widely as I could (including Jim's own thesis), he directed me to the volumes of J. D. Mansi and showed me how to read them. The second point relates to Jim's love of scholarship and fervent belief in rigorous standards. These are standards he applied to his own research and writing and he expected of others. To be his student was to learn that lesson very clearly.

I did have a table of contents by Christmas, but it was for a thesis that was never written. It concerned the late-medieval episcopacy and its relationship to the emerging reform movements. Having directed me towards the Continental sources, Jim was entirely happy that I should remain there. My interest in episcopal authority was transformed into the study of church discipline. My area of interest, however, remained the Swiss churches. Although Jim had allowed me to formulate the topic, his fingerprints were everywhere. He insisted that such a project

was viable only through extensive archival research, and this meant acquiring an ability to read sixteenth-century Alemmanic. In the often hands-off world of doctoral supervision in Britain during the 1980s Jim was eager to ensure that his students were well prepared for the task at hand. His own experience in archives and libraries on projects such as the letters of Johnston and Howie had required great technical skill. The question that emerged from my work was one which very much engaged Jim: the role of discipline in the formation of the Reformation churches.

Further, and I think this is central to his whole understanding of ecclesiastical history as a discipline, Jim challenged me to think about my work theologically. This perspective had several dimensions. He understood the formal theology of the Reformers in itself and how it was transmitted through various media in the sixteenth century. But he was also deeply appreciative of the work of scholars such as Robert Scribner. As I worked through my sources it became clear that the relationship between clergy and parishioners formed the core of my study. Jim pushed me to think about the connections and differences between oral and written cultures, pedagogy, liturgy and what we might broadly call popular culture. Through his work on Scotland and broader European Calvinism, as well as through his understanding of the Lutheran churches, Jim challenged and pushed me to think comparatively. Mine was in many respects a local study, but he was clear that it should not wander down the path of exceptionalism. The conduct of the clergy in the rural areas of Zurich (my subject) reflected a wider reality of the sixteenth-century Reformation.

Yet at the same time Jim was instrumental in helping me to consider what was distinctive about the Zurich Reformation. With his profound knowledge of late-medieval theology and ecclesiology, including his work on conciliarism, he opened my eyes to the very question that had engaged me from the start – the roots of the Reformation in the medieval world. In examining the formation of the Zurich church, its institutional structures and vision of Christian ministry it became clear that its foundations lay with the reform legislation of the Council of Basel and late fifteenth-century reforms proposed in the Diocese of Constance. Together with the ways in which the late-medieval devotional and liturgical texts were appropriated by

the Swiss Reformers a picture began to emerge. Personally, it was this intellectual question, very much at the heart of James Cameron's finest scholarship, that was so influential.

I would like to touch briefly on two other aspects of working with Jim Cameron. During the two years of research that I spent largely in Switzerland he was a regular correspondent. Many will know how working in libraries and archives abroad can be an isolating experience. This is no doubt less the case in our age of social networking. Jim wanted to know how I was getting on with my work. I still have those letters. It meant a great deal to know that my supervisor was truly concerned about my intellectual and personal welfare. That was Jim.

Secondly, Jim was a formidable editor. We know of his outstanding achievements in editing texts such as the first Book of Discipline, but he brought the same degree of rigour to the reading of chapters. Written work was always turned around promptly and returned heavily annotated. Jim could readily spot an ill-formed sentence or a flabby argument. I cherish one particular marginal comment; 'This sentence would be improved by the insertion of a verb'. To return to what I said earlier, the work remained your own; Jim did not force you into positions, but made you defend your argument and articulate it lucidly.

I have dwelt at some length on the subject of James Cameron as supervisor because it was and remains one of the most important relationships of my life. Now I teach ecclesiastical history in what is in many ways a very different world. Yet I think that Jim remains a model. He embodied in the very best way the Scottish professoriate of the ancient universities. His range was extraordinary, from the world of late-medieval religion to contemporary Scottish church history. He was a scholar of Neo-Latin literature and his work on the letters of Johnston and Howie and on the world of education in post-Reformation Scotland has found a new audience with the revival of interest in the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century history, theology and philosophy. Jim's pioneering work is very much in evidence.

We can look back at Jim's scholarship with gratitude. His edition of the first Book of Discipline established a foundation for all future work on the Scottish Reformation. The humanist world of the *alba amicorum*, one of Jim's great passions, was yet another way in

which he placed Scottish culture in its broader European context. This continued with his investigation of Scottish students wandering through Continental universities and academies. The list continues: the failed reforms of Hermann von Wied of Cologne and the covenantal theology of Samuel Rutherford. The breadth of his interests was reflected in the Festschrift prepared for him by colleagues and former students. In addition, Jim's long years of service on national and international academic bodies put St Andrews on the map and developed the intellectual and scholarly contacts he so deeply prized.

Jim Cameron's life has been so rich in scholarship and teaching. He has inspired and trained, having expected much but given more. I shall not try to sum up in a sentence. Rather, I have the honour to stand here on behalf of your many students and say thank you.