

HIGHLANDERS AND RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA IN THE NINETEENTH  
CENTURY  
THE ROLE OF THE REV DR MACKINTOSH MACKAY (1793-1873)

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*INTRODUCTION*

Religion was a critical aspect of both the identity and culture of the Highlanders in the nineteenth century, and distinguished people like Macintosh Mackay were far more influential than present day historians tend to suggest. Mackay was probably the most noted Gaelic scholar of his time and his sermons in Gaelic – long and perhaps tedious as they may seem to us — were important, often being published both in Gaelic and translation. His role in the Highlands in the decade after 1843 was enormous. His willingness, therefore, to move to Australia in his late fifties astounded his contemporaries. His purpose in moving was not wholly clear although letters from the prominent leader of missionaries Alexander C Duff suggest some possibilities. In Australia, where he travelled extensively trying to establish centres for Highland services, he became involved in matters relating to the Union of Presbyterian churches and in the — at the time unsuccessful — attempt to establish a college in Sydney, dedicated to St Andrew, to provide theological and philosophical training to Presbyterian youth. Neither was resolved before he returned to Scotland in 1861. His departure did not leave the Highlanders in Australia without a minister able to preach in Gaelic, but it did mark a moment at which support for the language diminished.

*THE SCOTTISH BACKGROUND*

On 18 May 1843, 450 ministers formally walked out of the Assembly of the Church of Scotland, rejecting the structure the Established Church of Scotland required. Briefly in the Scottish Presbyterian church there were no bishops, and an individual was technically called to minister in a parish after preaching there twice and being invited by a majority of the male parishioners. Unfortunately, in the eyes of the state, this was overridden by the rights of the patron of the parish, who could put forward someone unacceptable to the parishioners and insist on his choice. The parliamentary legislation that supported the Scottish church structure put the funding of minister, church and parish needs, such as charity and schooling, into the patron's hands. Those who walked out rejected this.

Religion was so critical a part of the social and cultural life of Scotland and other European countries at this time that the Disruption was not only a drama — one historian has described it as ‘the most spectacular ecclesiastical event in modern Scotland’—but a traumatic event that remained significant for many decades.<sup>1</sup> At the time, Cockburn wrote ‘as soon as...people saw that principle had really triumphed over interest, he [The moderator] and his followers were received with the loudest acclamations.’ Cockburn concluded: ‘What similar sacrifice

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<sup>1</sup> Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) p. 25.

has ever been made in the British empire.’<sup>2</sup> J. H. Merle d’Aubigny praised the Scottish religion, stating ‘the doctrine found within the Church of Scotland is neither an abstract dogma nor an obsolete formula. It is spirit and life. These minds so quick and penetrating, these intellects so moulded by public life and civil liberty.... There is more real theology- that is to say knowledge of God – in Scotland than in Germany.’<sup>3</sup>

The sacrifice in 1843 was indeed considerable. When the ministers walked out, they abjured their salaries, could no longer remain in their manse or use the local church. They had, however, foreseen this and had planned for a ‘sustentation’ fund that anticipated the laity making voluntary contributions and what may amaze 21<sup>st</sup> century people – they were thoroughly vindicated. The issue was ‘voluntaryism’ – the refusal to accept state control of the church and insistence that while authority in both church and state was legitimate, the state could not judge ecclesiastical matters which were the sole responsibility of the church. The imposition of ministers on incompatible churches was known as intrusion, and the opponents as non-intrusionists. In different parts of Scotland different groups swung in large numbers behind the ministers.<sup>4</sup> In the Lowlands it may have been mainly the rising middle classes, but in the Highlands it was the alienated peasantry who in many places supported the change *en masse*.<sup>5</sup> All recent reassessment has argued that this Disruption was one of the most important events in modern Scottish history.<sup>6</sup>

The aftermath of the Disruption saw the creation of a new church in Scotland that was independent of secular control. The laity came forward with funds to replace the support that the ministers had lost. They raised the money to build new churches and schools and maintain the ministers. In the Highlands it appeared to be the resistance of the lesser people, most of whom had no vote in political matters, to the dominance of the elite who were setting aside the interests of the community for their own advantage. The conflict was bitter in some areas. The people persisted despite, as Merle d’Aubigny commented in 1848, the refusal of ‘oppressive’ landlords in some places to permit a site 30-foot square to be used for the erection of new churches. In that case services were held on the seashore or on ships.<sup>7</sup>

While the devastated Highlands might not be able to contribute much, the wealthier urban Lowlands artisans and middle classes provided enough to enable the new church to flourish. Sufficient new churches appeared to provide for the people. The Free churchmen, however,

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Thomas Cockburn, Lord Bonaly d1854 – writing in the *Edinburgh Review*; quoted in David Daiches, *Edinburgh* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p. 207-8.

<sup>3</sup> J H Merle d’Aubigny, *Germany England and Scotland or Recollections of a Swiss minister* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1848).

<sup>4</sup> Stewart J Brown and Michael Fry (eds.), *Scotland and the Age of the Disruption* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), throughout, esp pp. 82-92.

<sup>5</sup> Taken from Allan W. MacColl, *Land, Faith and the Crofting Community: Christianity and Social Criticism in the Highlands of Scotland 1843-1893* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Brown and Fry, *Scotland and the Age of the Disruption*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Merle d’Aubigny, *Germany England and Scotland*, p. 92.

did not give up the idea that national recognition and state support were legitimate but refused state interference which they described as encroachment.<sup>8</sup>

### *MACKAY AND THE HIGHLANDS BEFORE THE DISRUPTION*

One of those who walked out, the Reverend Dr Mackintosh Mackay<sup>9</sup>— said to be tall, handsome, dignified, reticence— was a key, if secondary, figure in these critical events but possibly the man already most capable of assessing the Highland position. He had been a minister in the Highlands since 1825 and had travelled extensively across the area.

Mackay was a Gaelic scholar and in oversaw 1828 the publishing of a Gaelic Dictionary, as well as the *Songs and Poems of Robert Mackay* (Rob Donn) in 1829, for which the university of Glasgow made him LLD. His initial appointment to Laggan (28 September 1825) had placed him in the heart of Highland life.<sup>10</sup> William Forbes Skene, later Historiographer Royal for Scotland whose *Celtic Scotland, a History of Ancient Alba*<sup>11</sup> has been described as the most important contribution to Scottish history written during the 19th century, had in 1825 boarded with him and found it crucial to his understanding.

On 19 April 1832 Mackay moved to Dunoon where he stayed to 1843, presumably recommended by George Campbell, sixth duke of Argyll who was patron there; a Whig, but a man who introduced a bill to the Lords which would have helped the non-intrusion movement. Dunoon put him closer to Glasgow as James Ewing, provost of Glasgow and prominent merchant and banker, (recently described as ‘the highly influential evangelical West Indies merchant, who attributed Scotland’s commercial prosperity, enlightened clergy and industrious artisans to Knox’)<sup>12</sup> had promoted what had been a modest Highland clachan into a convenient destination for visitors by sea from the growing industrial centre.<sup>13</sup> This kept

<sup>8</sup> Most clearly articulated for Australia in Rowland S. Ward, *Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia 1846-2013* (Melbourne: New Melbourne Press, 2014), pp. 15-17.

<sup>9</sup> Born 1793. He married Frances, daughter of Francis Burer of Edinburgh, in February 1828. They had one child who died in infancy.

<sup>10</sup> Mackay was born in the parish of Eddrachillis, Sutherland. His father rented the farm of Duartbeg and was a captain in the Reay Fencibles. His mother was the eldest daughter of Rev Alexander Falconer, minister of Eddrachillis. Mackintosh was born in November 1793. After receiving an elementary education at home, then conducted in the parish school of Tongue and afterwards in an academy at Ullapool, he entered college at St Andrews in 1815. In 1820 he entered the theological hall at Glasgow. He also attended ‘partial sessions’ both in Edinburgh and Aberdeen. During the recess between his college sessions, he was employed as a teacher successively at Bowmore, Laggan and Portree. He was licensed to preach in 1827.

<sup>11</sup> William Forbes Skene, *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alba* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> S. K. Kehoe, *Creating a Scottish Church: Catholicism, Gender and Ethnicity in Nineteenth century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Groome (ed.), *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland: A survey of Scottish Topography statistical, biographical and historical in six volumes* (Edinburgh: Thomas C. Jack, 1882-5).

MacKay in touch with the politics of the wider problem and the pressure for emigration. The indications are that he was already active in the Highlands in areas other than his own synod.

In the first meeting of the Free Church assembly in 1843 he reported on the Highlands in the county of Sutherland and its seventeen parishes. Eleven ministers there had joined the Free Church but few people remained in the parishes, and the establishment had not administered the sacrament of the Lord's supper.<sup>14</sup> The Free Church general assembly that met in Inverness in August 1845 showed solidarity with the ordinary laity. Mackay, who was a fairly conservative man, found himself in some conflict with James Begg, another minister who preached in the Highlands and was far more outspoken, and Robert Candlish, who was a distinguished theologian. He described their speeches as heretical. Nevertheless, he and Begg worked together in 1851 when the Destitution committee sent them to London to lobby against large scale clearance and emigration.<sup>15</sup>

In his own time, MacKay, who often preached in Gaelic, was much admired as a preacher; indeed, some of his sermons are still being reproduced today in Presbyterian magazines.<sup>16</sup> We are told that in 1843 his fragmentary diary shows that in five months he preached 77 times, including in 25 places beyond his own charge.<sup>17</sup> Before the Disruption he had published more than one of his sermons to his flock, especially in relation to the structure of the church and patronage.<sup>18</sup> He held the standard Free Church position that '...no earthly King must rule the Church; but that it must be ruled by the Word of God, according to the will and laws of its Great King and Head, Jesus Christ.' The Address, which was published at Greenock in 1840, made the position of those about to walk out clear. In it, he is attempting to persuade ordinary people to petition parliament.

The Church of Scotland is at this day placed in a very trying situation. And when you hear of the church you are not to think that this means the Ministers and elders of the Church, it means all the Members of it; and I hope to show you, in few and easy words, the reasons you all have, as Members of the Church, and as professing Christians, for petitioning Parliament on this subject. You all understand the meaning of Patronage — a certain person having a right, by the law of the land, to appoint a Minister to a Parish. But must the parishioners receive any minister just because the Patron has appointed him? Many think that they must. But that is not the law of the Church; nor has it been the law of the land...'

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<sup>14</sup> Anonymous, *The United Secession Magazine* 11, p. 645.

<sup>15</sup> MacColl, *Land, Faith*, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> See for instance, *Free Presbyterian Magazine* (2014): p. 36 on the Breastplate of Righteousness and on Christian Warfare.

<sup>17</sup> John Grant, Alexander Duff, Alexander Cameron, and James Hamilton, *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands* (Edinburgh: J Greig and Son, 1877). The account of Mackay is by John Kennedy.

<sup>18</sup> Mackintosh MacKay, *Address to the parishioners of Dunoon and Kilmun* (Greenock: J. Hislop, 1840); Mackintosh Mackay, *A practical exposition of the first ten verses of the fifth chapter of the Gospel by Matthew: in forty-one sermons; preached in the parish church of Dunoon, MDCCCXL-XLII* (Edinburgh: William Whyte and Company, 1845). For a brief survey the Scottish Sermon in the period see: Ann Matheson in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901*, eds. Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 152-168.

From the start, Mackay held that religion in the Highlands was no mere clerical movement. On the contrary there were many ‘Men’ (the term used for the majority of the elders) who were not highly educated but committed, and actively participated in the meetings of the congregation and the preparation of communion. He observed that:

the principles of the Church were rivetted on the souls of the people and taught from generation to generation. The church is the constant subject of conversation and prayer...never since the first light of the Reformation dawned on the land of our fathers has there been such a universal religious movement over the whole of the Highlands and Islands.

He was not the only minister who appreciated this. Indeed, it was recorded that in one place the Elders in a band ‘came forward to their minister with this message: ‘Sir, you must now declare to us what your resolution is. Are you to remain in the Establishment or join the faithful band who are about to quit it? For if you are to remain, we, as a body, have come to the resolution of never submitting ourselves, from this day to your ministry.’<sup>19</sup> People walked sometime fifty miles to communion – and as many as 6,000 might assemble.

By 1843 he had been working as a minister for nearly twenty years and, as he argued later to the Parliamentary Select committee on Sites, he was convinced that there had been an increase of religious knowledge in the Highlands in that time because of the better teaching of the Gaelic schools and perhaps because of evangelical preaching, which he believed improved the morals of the people.

### *MACKAY AND THE HIGHLANDS AFTER 1843*

MacKay was highly regarded by his fellows and played an important part in the development of the Free Church, mainly in the Highlands but also in the wider church. On 2 June 1849, he was unanimously elected Moderator of the Free Church General Assembly at Canonmills, Edinburgh.<sup>20</sup> In 1850 when he was severely ill, he was instrumental in helping the Ladies Associations to be formed.

Mackay was critical to the Free Church’s effectiveness in the Highlands. Having overseen the building of a free church in Dunoon, he became central to developments in the Highlands as a whole, and particularly in efforts to build new churches to replace the ones now lost to them. He spent much time sailing about the Islands and the Western Highlands in a yacht known as the ‘Breadalbane’, which Lady Effingham gave him for this purpose. He was also involved in making known the ways in which proprietors in some areas were evicting tenants who adhered to the Free Church. His preaching increased and the places where he preached became ever more numerous.<sup>21</sup> He became convener of the Free Church Assembly’s Highland

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Brown, *Annals of the Disruption: with extracts from the narratives of ministers who left the Scottish establishment in 1843* (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1884). pp. 649-50.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, *The Spectator Archive* (2 June, 1849).

<sup>21</sup> Grant, Duff, Cameron, and Hamilton, *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands*.

Committee, and the Free Church's Highland Destitution Committee. He was also appointed Convener of the Free Church General Assembly's Home Mission. He was indefatigable in his zeal. He reported many stories of the commitment of the Highlanders to religion in that period. On one occasion, having led a large congregation from 11 am to 7pm, he had departed somewhat fatigued and later discovered the congregational service had continued without him until after midnight.

Mackay was profoundly sympathetic to the increasing social and economic problems of the Highlands and actively engaged in the amelioration of destitution. The response of the Presbyterians to the social crisis has been widely debated.<sup>22</sup> Many see the central issue as the doctrine of providence where the causes of famine were concerned, as well as whether or not people or the state should provide philanthropic assistance or encourage emigration.<sup>23</sup> Was or was not the situation the positive expression of the will of God? Should or should not the church attempt to remedy the crisis? Mackay was in no doubt when it came to crisis and thought that not enough private philanthropy was appearing. People should not die of hunger.<sup>24</sup> Mackay actively sought a way to solve the crisis. He was attempting to make their plight better known – for instance, attempting through Lady Pirie to get Dickens to include some material on this in his *Household Words*. In his evidence to the Commons select committee on Sites in 1847, he emphasised the problem of the proprietors' absence from their properties and ignorance of their tenants' needs and approaches. He criticised the consolidation of small holding into sheep farms and blamed the landlords for prejudiced views of the Highlanders and for causing destitution through evictions, seeing the need for state intervention.<sup>25</sup> In 1853, just before he left for Australia, in the Highland Committee report to the Free Church General Assembly of that year, he could barely conceal his anxiety about the effects: 'there is indeed strong temptation to enunciate our own judgements...when we see such controversies waged between the rich on the one hand and the poor on the other.'<sup>26</sup>

As editor of the Free church's Gaelic publication *An Fhiannuis*, he promoted the idea of a new wave of true religion.<sup>27</sup> Schools in the outlying districts of the Highlands were established by the Free Church; thus departing from the previous scheme of patronage, presumably part of Mackay's overall plan for domestic improvement in the Northern area which was then falling into 'extreme spiritual destitution.'<sup>28</sup> His friend Duff, who saw the missions as 'our Israel', wrote 'my heart goes much into your schemes for the Highlands, indeed the cause of God is one whether at home or abroad.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See MacColl, *Land, Faith*, especially pp. 21-7.

<sup>23</sup> MacColl, *Land, Faith*, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> MacColl, *Land, Faith*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>25</sup> MacColl, *Land, Faith*, pp. 27-9.

<sup>26</sup> MacColl, *Land, Faith*, p. 51-2.

<sup>27</sup> See Brown, *The Annals of the Disruption*, p. 665.

<sup>28</sup> For the way the Free church saw this, see *the Free Church Magazine* 185, pp. 15-6.

## MOVE TO AUSTRALIA

MacKay's attitude to migration as a solution to the Highland problem was for some time equivocal. In 1851, when he was sent to London to lobby against parliamentary sanction for emigration policies, Mackay said there was 'No necessity whatsoever, the very idea is monstrous.'<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, he ultimately became involved in assisting the formation of an association of noblemen with Prince Albert as patron to assist poor Highlanders in Australia — which suggests some modification to his opposition.

How he was persuaded at nearly sixty to go to Australia remains a mystery. He did have relatives in Australia: two brothers and two sisters. We may therefore assume that he was well informed about the state of Australia although this does not explain his decision to accept an appointment there. There was surprise at the time. The Rev. A. C. Geikie thought it strange — 'a great Gaelic scholar, an antiquary, a collector of articles of *vertu*.' It has been suggested that J D Lang had recommended him as far back as 1841 — and in 1842 it was suggested that he was involved in formulating and plan for suspending and deposing Lang — but that was before the Disruption.<sup>31</sup>

In 1852 it seems he met the colonial committee of the Free Church and said he was willing to go if required. Duff, who was powerful in this context and known to all, probably encouraged him. The next year the Scottish Free Church passed a resolution to send a number of Free Church ministers to Australia to make Australia, and especially Victoria, the ground of a great missionary effort. While the General Assembly was sitting in Edinburgh, on 13th April 1853, it was determined to send twelve ministers to Victoria, ten of them young men recently licensed, and the other two ministers of experience, especially chosen to help the Colonial Church in organising and consolidating its forces. These were the Rev. Adam Cairns, D.D., of Cupar, Fife, and the Rev. MacIntosh Mackay, LL.D., of Dunoon. Duff wrote in May 1853 that he rejoiced 'more than I can tell that the Lord has so clearly opened up your way towards Australia.' In July Duff wrote further that he 'most earnestly trust that the object you have so much at heart may be fully accomplished.' It seems that he may have been sent to organise Church Union. It has also been suggested that he hoped that the fortunate in Australia might send money back to the Highlands to support their less fortunate brethren. There was also the issue of establishing an institution that might provide for the religious education of potential ministers at university level. It was not related to the missions associated with the Indigenous population.<sup>32</sup> While he agreed to go, Mackay remained active in Britain for much of 1853, arriving in Victoria on 3 January 1854.

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<sup>29</sup> Correspondence from Alexander Duff to Mackintosh McKay, 15 May 1851, MS-BV3269.D8, University of St Andrews Library Department of Special Collections, University of St Andrews Archives, St Andrews, Scotland.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Douglas Ansdell, *People of the Great Faith: Highland Church 1690-1900* (Stornoway: Acair, 1998), p. 149.

<sup>31</sup> Barry John Bridges, *Ministers, Licentiate and Catechists of Presbyterian church in NSW 1823-1862* (Melbourne: Rowland S Ward, 1989), p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Anna Johnston, 'Antipodean heathens: the London missionary society in Polynesia and Australia 1800-1850', in *Colonial Frontiers: Indigenous European encounters in settler societies*, ed. Lynette Russel (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

His suitability was undoubted. The partly separated communities of Highlanders in Australia many of whom spoke little English needed a spokesman. It was to these that Gaelic speaking Mackay would particularly appeal. These migrants shared the rigorous religious approach that characterised them in Scotland. The church was critical to their identity and as Eric Richards observed: ‘Strict observance was demanded, and the congregation venerated the minister with gifts and salutations.’<sup>33</sup> It is widely accepted that in their patterns of behaviour the Presbyterian affiliation was critical.<sup>34</sup>

*PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA: THE POSITION IN AUSTRALIA BEFORE THE DISRUPTION*<sup>35</sup>

Mackay arrived to a church that had been in confusion for many years.<sup>36</sup> By the time of the Disruption in 1843, the Presbyterian church in Australia was already severely divided.<sup>37</sup> In NSW there had been considerable friction between the dissenting members and John Dunmore Lang.<sup>38</sup> The Presbyterian church had had no minister before 1824 when Lang arrived and thereafter its history as Prentis observes is very complex.<sup>39</sup> In 1832 a regional church court,

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<sup>33</sup> Eric Richards, ‘Scottish Networks and Voices in Colonial Australia’, in *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Angela McCarthy (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 150-182; Rowland S. Ward, ‘Spiritual movements in Scottish Gaelic communities in Australia 1837-1870’ in *Reviving Australia: Essays on the History and experience of Revival and Revivalism in Australian Christianity*, eds. M. Hutchinson and S. Piggin (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), pp. 75- 96 .

<sup>34</sup> Lindsay Proudfoot and Dianne Hall, *Imperial Spaces: Placing the Irish and Scots in Colonial Australia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> The best overarching work is Rowland S. Ward, *The Making of an Australian Church; the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia* (Melbourne: New Melbourne Press, 1978); closer in time is Rev James Cameron, *Centenary history of the Presbyterian Church of NSW* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1905).

<sup>36</sup> There are various general histories. The earliest, Cameron’s *Centenary History* gives useful dates and shows how the problems were glossed over for public presentation. B. J. Bridges, *The Presbyterian Church in NSW 1823-65* (University of St Andrews, PH D thesis, 1985); for the members B. J. Bridges, *Ministers, Licentiate and Catechists of Presbyterian church in NSW 1823-1862* (Melbourne: Rowland S. Ward, 1989); Rowland S. Ward, *The Bush Still Burns: The Presbyterian and Reformed Faith in Australia* (Melbourne: New Melbourne Press, 1989); Ward, *The Making of an Australian Church*.

<sup>37</sup> See for example, Malcolm Prentis, ‘The Presbyterian Ministry in Australia, 1822- 1900: Recruitment and Composition’, *Journal of Religious History* 13, no. 1 (June 1984): pp. 46-65.

<sup>38</sup> Work on Lang is limitless. See Ian F. MacLaren, *John Dunmore Lang, a comprehensive Bibliography of a turbulent Australian Scot* (Parkville: University of Melbourne Library, 1985); D. W. A. Baker, *Days of Wrath: a life of John Dunmore Lang* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985); more recently, Noel William Wallis, *John Dunmore Lang, M.A., DD* (National Library, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Malcolm Prentis, *The Scots in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008), pp. 27-8.



called a presbytery was established, and governed the Sydney parishes. This was divided and subdivided, eventually into six suburban presbyteries. Within the metropolitan area, church parishes and buildings spread as settlement spread. In 1836, while Lang was away, a government Act for the Presbytery made it the only legal representative of the church of Scotland in the colony. Lang returned on 11 December 1837 and in 1838 established a new separate synod because he thought the church should be voluntary only.<sup>40</sup> Lang promoted emigration as a solution to Britain's problems of poverty and was soon away again. In his absence William McIntyre organised the union of the original presbytery and the rival synod Lang had established. In 1840 an act of NSW legislation designed to regulate church property saw the Presbyterian church in Eastern Australia given the legal name 'the synod of Australia in connexion with the Established Church of Scotland', and the two amalgamated synods and the Victorian church established as the one Synod of Australia which renewed its link to the Church of Scotland. This Lang was soon to denigrate as 'a mere synod of Satan.' There was more debate about its legal and moral links to the Scottish church which the majority sought to maintain. Lang was bitter about the procedure that the Synod used towards him in 1842 and had appealed to Scotland.

### *THE HISTORY AFTER 1843*

In 1844, once news of the Disruption had reached Australia (October 1844), the synod did not know which way to go and attempted to equivocate. As a result, the Established church in Scotland threatened to cut them off and the Free church said they must be off or on. In the end the existing synod maintained the link to Established church. There was, however, a protest by William McIntyre, John Tait and Colin Stewart who upheld the Headship of Christ and the spiritual independence of the Church. They withdrew to form The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (which they formally established on 20 October 1846 in the home of Mr William Buyers, 4 Hunter Street Sydney). They declared that 'A Church must honour Christ in the way she orders her life, even if it means considerable cost. She must back up her words with consistent behaviour.' They further stated that 'We are not prepared to prefer the Established Church over the Free Church for our supply of ministers. And in any event we ought to be an independent body.' While independent of the Free separate Church of Scotland the PCEA received its ministers from that source in the early years, most early PCEA members were Highland Scots. They were committed to voluntarism, although they did not link with the Free Churchmen who were arriving. Lang and his congregation also later withdrew. On March 1850 Lang set up a further synod – the synod of NSW (second of name), which survived to 1864; however, this also did not join with the Free Churchmen. The Free church sent its own ministers out after 1845. Between 1846 and 1864 there were therefore four Presbyterian groups operating in Australia. As well as the new Free church there was the original Synod of Australia (church of Scotland link) whose base was St Andrews church; Lang's General Synod of NSW whose base was the Free Church, Macquarie Street where he was moderator; and the United Presbyterian church. The Union in 1865 eventually brought

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<sup>40</sup> David Stoneman, 'J. D. Lang, Scottish rights and the introduction of the 1836 Church Act', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 15, no. 1 (2013): pp. 183-201.

the latter three groups together but not the free church.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the period from 1843-65 there were unrealised movements towards union. In Victoria in Jan 1853 the United Presbyterian Synod approached the Free Presbyterian synod. In 1854 the Victorian Established church under Hetherington approached the Free Church but the United Presbyterian synod wanted to see the doctrine that held that the state should cherish the church abandoned.

### *POSITION IN MELBOURNE*

The church in NSW and the church in Victoria were distinct. In Melbourne, James Forbes founded the Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria and co-operated with the PCEA. Melbourne had a relatively high proportion of Scots squatters and businessmen.<sup>42</sup> This meant that in Victoria there were prominent churches associated with three major Presbyterian denominations: the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Free Church, and the United Presbyterians in the later 1840s.<sup>43</sup> A Church of Scotland congregation under the Rev. James Forbes received a land grant in Collins Street (the Scots' Church site) in 1839. In 1848, Forbes left this church to establish the Knox Church congregation in Swanston Street in connection with the Free Church of Australia Felix.<sup>44</sup> Melburnians associated with Scottish voluntarism could join a local United Presbyterian Church congregation under the Rev. A.M. Ramsay, also in Collins Street, from 1847. There were thus four synods in Victoria when Mackay arrived. These were the Synod of Victoria (the established church) with 19 ministers; the Synod of the Free Church with 26 ministers; the united Presbyterian Church of Australia; and the United Presbyterians Church, with nine ministers between them.

The United Presbyterian magazine gives us an account of what was happening in Victoria at the time of Mackay's arrival. The United Presbyterian Synod has approached the Synod of the Free church about a union in 1853, although they were less sure of approaching the Synod of the Scotch Church because they had major differences over state support. When that synod approached them, they prayed about their position as a purely voluntary church, wondering about union with two bodies that accepted state grants.

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<sup>41</sup> Anonymous, 'Presbyterian Union', *Sydney Mail*, 16 Sept 1865, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/166663667?browse=ndp%3Abrowse%2Ftitle%2FS%2Ftitle%2F697%2F1865%2F09%2F16%2Fpage%2F16551247%2Farticle%2F166663667>, accessed 19 November 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Don Chambers, 'Presbyterian Church', *eMelbourne*, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM01182b.htm>, accessed 19 November 2020; see also Don Chambers, 'The Kirk and the Colonies in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century', *Historical Studies* 16, no. 64 (1975): pp. 381-401.

<sup>43</sup> R. W. Hamilton, *A Jubilee history of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria; or, The rise and progress of Presbyterianism from the foundation of the colony to 1888* (Melbourne: M.L. Hutchinson, 1888) is the earliest account.

<sup>44</sup> He placed a high value on education, founding the Scots School in 1838, the John Knox School in 1848, and the Melbourne Academy (later Scotch College, Eastern Hill) in 1851.

## MACKAY IN AUSTRALIA

Mackay initially went to Victoria with Dr Adam Cairns, who arrived in the colony in September of 1853 and shortly afterwards founded Chalmers' Church, Eastern Hill at the beginning of January 1854. He came as a senior minister especially for Highlanders in Melbourne. The colonial committee made him deputy 31 March 1853 with a stipend not less than £250 for three years. He seems to have started to preach immediately. The *Banner* on 10 January 1854 reported on his preaching in the Protestant Hall in Melbourne. We are told that:

hundreds in the Protestant Hall on Sabbath last, ... hung on the words which fell from the lips of the Rev. Dr, Mackintosh Mackay, whose advent on these shores has given such lively satisfaction to his Highland countrymen. Dr. Mackay preached in the morning in the English tongue, and the vacant faces that we saw here and there reminded us of similar scenes in the old kirk in the Strath of Appin, as the Highlander tried to listen to the stranger's tongue; and when the English service was over, and the few for whom this service was designed had left the church, and the preacher's voice gave forth the Psalm in their own loved tongue, the vacant stare was transformed into the earnest look, the lounge into the firm, erect, attitude of attention; and the preacher, gathering strength from a listening audience, spoke with a living voice to living men.

He did this for a mere three hours as he discarded his notes and asked that his hearers converse 'as it becometh the gospel of Christ.' Later that day in a crowded John Knox church his old college companion, Cairns,<sup>45</sup> conducted a meeting in which Mackay told 'a fearful tale of sorrow and of wrong' and of sufferings year after year. He hoped that from this, lessons for the future could be taken.

Cairns was called to Carlton St Andrews Free Church on 3 April 1854.<sup>46</sup> In September he published a letter asking for £12,000 to build and maintain a church for the Highlanders. The church was built but the debt was so heavy that the congregation then had difficulties supporting a minister. Mackay was not in agreement with them. There was conflict about the issue of union which the congregation opposed. He was also necessarily away if he was to serve the Highlanders. We are told that during the first twelve months of his ministry there, he preached 146 times and travelled 3081 miles, searching out and addressing the scattered Highlanders. What he discovered about the position in the bush distressed him. Mackay wrote of the 'past and present condition' of 'the bush' population. 'What he has witnessed of their religious disadvantages and privations has impressed him so deeply...its amount and extent demand the deepest consideration from every mind truly alive to this colony's future prospects and history.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See Don Chambers, 'Cairns, Adam (1802–1881),' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cairns-adam-3140>, accessed 19 November 2020.

<sup>46</sup> He left it on 9 March 1856.

<sup>47</sup> Mackintosh Mackay, *Sermon at Geelong* (Geelong: The Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria, 1855).

The position over Union in Victoria, which was so important to Mackay, by this time was becoming fraught as the committee to negotiate the union of denominations was in dispute over doctrinal standards and the legislative basis. William Miller, the minister of John Knox church, was opposed to Adam Cairns, who was promoting union. It was Cairns and Mackay in 1855 who said that ‘the Church must adhere firmly to the Confession of Faith.’ MacKay was concerned about sabbath desecration and the degrees of affinity in marriage but thought that innovations not demanded in the mother country were being sought which they wanted defined more clearly. They were tied up in the principle of whether the civil magistrate could interfere in religious matters. Nothing developed until 6 November 1855, when the union committee of the Free Church synod made a proposal that allowed the united Presbyterians to continue to disapprove of the answer to ‘3<sup>rd</sup> section of 23 chapter of the Confession of faith and the answer to the 191 question of the larger catechism.’ As Mackay was at this point moderator of the Free Church in Victoria, he wrote another pastoral letter in which he expressed concern about the failure to maintain due observance of the holy Sabbath – breaking the fourth commandment which he claimed was the very centre-point of the whole law of God; claiming that ‘it has long been the glory of Scotland, that its Sabbaths were hallowed and of the Presbyterian church, that wherever it has been planted it has especially honoured the day of the Lord.’

In his sermon to the synod at Geelong in 1855 he said:

I cannot but here personally avow with conviction and feeling which have been penetrating my mind the more deeply the more I have seen and felt of all the circumstances and of all the wants of this land, and of our Presbyterian population scattered over its surface that such a union would be peculiarly our strength and the continuance of our disunion, our weakness and a source of our sure and certain defeat.

In 1856 he made an overture to synod of Eastern Australia, praying for the appointment of another committee, but by this time he was committed to Sydney.

When the Jubilee of the Melbourne church arrived in the ensuing publication, he was effectively criticised for failure.<sup>48</sup> When Mackay was in Melbourne on his way back to Scotland in 1861, however, a deputation from the presbytery had waited upon him with an address.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> W. A. Sanderson, *Jubilee History of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church* (Carlton, Melbourne: Arbeckle Waddel and Fawcner, 1905), Chapter 1. The author wrote:

‘The pastor also had his own defects, very often neglecting his congregation to attend to outside matters. He had been very popular with the Highlanders in the Old Country and had great influence over them. He did not succeed with his countrymen in this new land. He was much disappointed with a large number of them who had repudiated obligations which they had undertaken when receiving aid to bring them out to the colonies under the emigration schemes in which he had taken such an interest. He also was not able to adapt himself to colonial life, owing to the fact that he was a middle-aged man when he came out here. He was a ponderous preacher, very earnest and very evangelical, so that it is not to be wondered at that the services were regarded as rather depressing and gloomy when the sermon alone on the hottest day in summer would last for about a couple of hours. The people, nevertheless, regretfully parted with him.’

<sup>49</sup> Hamilton, *Jubilee History*, p.195.

The divisions in the Australian presbytery in Victoria continued, and the Union in Victoria was not achieved until MacKay had gone to Sydney when the liberty of personal conscience and the right of private judgment were maintained.<sup>50</sup> The union of the four synods was effected on 7 April 1859 as was announced in the government Gazette 22 April.

### *MACKAY IN SYDNEY*

His failure over union in Victoria may have encouraged Mackay to move to Sydney where his union convictions seem to have been more acceptable. He was already being pressed to go to Sydney in 1855. At the beginning of 1856 he had a serious illness, and when the invitation was renewed, he accepted it and became minister of the Highland community, which was to become St George's Church in that city. Salmon in Pitt Street did not offer Gaelic and the Highlanders wanted a church of their own. St George's Church originated from the Highland section of the Pitt Street PCEA on 22 February 1854. A call, signed by 100 persons, was extended to Mackay who was inducted 12 May 1856.

The church's lack of success was attributed to the want of a fine building. A government site of about 500m square at 42-52 Harrington Street, The Rocks was reserved in 1857, but it was decided to purchase for £2,000 a site of some 607m square in Castlereagh Street, and to erect a building costing £11,000 in which activities could be appropriately conducted. The building was opened on 5 February 1860 when the congregation had incurred the staggering debt of £11,576, meaning that it could not pay Mackay's stipend of £600pa. He counted on getting money himself by a visit to home country but failed. This landed the church in difficulties as the issues about accepting money from the state still existed.

His main objective by 1857 may have been the erection of a Presbyterian college, for in September 1857 we have two letters from Duff sent from Calcutta that cast some light on Mackay's objectives and actions. Duff starts with his delight that MacKay was in the way of getting a Presbyterian college in Australia' but pointing out that Presbyterian schools were a necessary basis for such a college. In promoting this he held that the various Presbyterian orders that held by the Westminster standards should be united.<sup>51</sup>

### *MACKAY AND THE PLANS FOR A PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY: A CRISIS IN THE HISTORY OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN AUSTRALIA*

The University of Sydney had been incorporated in 1851, and the Act to provide for the establishment and endowment of Colleges within the University of Sydney (18 Vic no 37) was passed at the very end of 1854. This offered considerable funding from the government – if the people of Australia subscribed a certain amount, the government would match it- up to £ 10,000 or even more.

This came at a critical point in the arrangements for education for Presbyterian youth in the colony. Lang from 1824 on had been struggling to educate young men locally. The Australian college in Sydney, largely set up by Lang, had had ministers teaching and had cost

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<sup>50</sup> Anonymous, *The United Presbyterian Magazine* 53, p. 59.

<sup>51</sup> The Westminster standards dated from 1647-53 and included a confession of faith, a catechism and other rules.

£12,000. It had started well but became financially embarrassed and had to close in 1854. There had been disagreement about how they should react to Bourke's 1836 Church Act, which sought to amalgamate state and voluntary principles and provide for the building of churches and stipends for ministers depending on the size of the congregation. The preamble explains that they were to provide 'systematic religious instruction.' Lang, as he explained in 1857, had spoken to the Speaker against the preamble in 1854 and that the Speaker had spoken to the Senate of the University and the preamble had been withdrawn.<sup>52</sup> The first step was for the college to be incorporated by an act of the governor and council and for the founders or subscribers were to have raised £10,000 in endowments, £4,000 of which had to already be paid and invested in an approved manner. When these conditions were met, a sum not less than £20,000 for building and £500 annually towards the principal's salary would be provided.

This raised all sorts of problems for the different Presbyterian churches about their relations with the State and accepting support from the state. There was also the question of Union and another of a common approach to the government. In all this, J. D. Lang was busy promoting his own position. The 1854 Act had granted a portion of land to the Church of Scotland, raising the question of where this left the other Presbyterian churches. Co-operation between the different synods remained difficult as is clearly shown in the preamble to MacKay's speech to the synod of Eastern Australia. However, the synod expressed

their high satisfaction at seeing him and with the excellent and appropriate address now made to them and to state that it affords them great pleasure to find that he still so decidedly and cordially approves of and supports the union agreed to and determined on while he was a minister of this church and a member of this court and which the synod is still determined to abide by and carry out.<sup>53</sup>

In July 1857 the moderator of the Synod of Australia wrote to the moderator of the Synod of Eastern Australia inviting co-operation. The PCEA had called a meeting of the synod on 10 August, with MacKay as moderator, at which there was a bitter debate. Salmon put up a motion that 'this Synod has already condemned and petitioned against indiscriminate religious endowments as unscriptural and irrational; and whereas the same vitiating principle is contained in the Colleges' Act.' Conversely, Cameron argued that

Availing themselves of the aid offered by the Government of this Colony for the erection and endowment of a Presbyterian College, to be affiliated to the University of Sydney, involves no violation whatever of sound principle, and is in full harmony with the principles and practice of the Free Church of Scotland; and that their declining to avail themselves of the invaluable privileges connected with National University education in the land, would be unjust to the people under their charge, and in every way prejudicial to the interests of Free Church Presbyterianism in this Colony.

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<sup>52</sup> J. D. Lang, 'To the Scotch and other Presbyterians of New South Wales,' *Empire*, 7 August 1857, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/64984775?browse=ndp%3Abrowse%2Ftitle%2FE%2Ftitle%2F67%2F1857%2F08%2F07%2Fpage%2F5970528%2Farticle%2F64984775>, accessed 19 November 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Hamilton, *Jubilee History*, p. 163.

Cameron won 7 to 3. They also agreed that the first principal or professor theology should not be a minister now in the Australian colonies, a stipulation that excluded both Lang and MacKay.

Lang's views were different although they included MacKay. He wrote supposing such a Union effected, a divinity hall or theological seminary for the Presbyterian Church would form a portion of the establishment of the College having a regular staff of professors for the different departments of theological learning.

For one of those professorships the one for Oriental languages-the Baillie endowment will be available, when it falls in; the others, until endowed in a similar way, will have to be supported by voluntary contributions by the Presbyterians generally. Supposing then that such an arrangement were to be carried out, I should be most happy, as a proof of my willingness to have the right men, from whatever quarter, to be one of the requisite number of Presbyterians to subscribe so much a year each for a salary of £400 per annum for the Rev. Dr. Mackay, as Professor of Divinity for the Presbyterian Church. He is the fittest man, I conceive, in the colony for the office, if not the only one. That office might well be held, in the first instance at least, in conjunction with a clerical charge in Sydney.<sup>54</sup>

At the Established Church of Scotland's synod in October 1857, a committee to manage the establishment of a college was established. This did not remain easy. In November 1857 at an ordinary meeting of the synod of Eastern Australia, William McIntyre, claiming that co-operation was inconsistent with the maintenance of the distinctive testimony of this Church, had the previous resolution rescinded 13 to 8. MacKay, who was moderator, supported the opposition led by James Cameron. His speech was shortly published in the ongoing struggle. Because of his 'full conviction of the present being a crisis in the history of Presbyterianism in this Colony... The subject is of such importance to the future of this country, that the Author thinks it can scarcely be over-rated.' If a college was not established, he thought Presbyterianism would disappear as people drifted away from the church. In it he tried to balance the areas in which there could be joint action despite differences in theology.

He urged 'Let all our teaching be based on the true religion; let us strive with one heart that it be so; and that, while not making it any part of education to enforce religious conformity upon others, but cultivating the widest toleration to all. It was thus in our Parish Schools of Scotland, and in our Parish Churches too. It is thus in our Free Church Schools, and places of worship, and Colleges also, at this day, in Scotland, while they desire most strictly still to adhere

to the law, and to the testimony. And the blessed benefits of such arrangements have not all of us seen? And deeply cognizant am I, Sir, that in the schools of the Free Church of Scotland these benefits are increasing from year to year; nor do I, by any means, affirm but they may be so in the schools of the Established Church of Scotland too. May we not freely co-operate with others in the furthering of the great work of education —with others with whom we may not in good conscience ecclesiastically unite in the still higher and more spiritual matters of faith, and of religious observance and practice?

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<sup>54</sup> Lang, 'To the Scotch and other Presbyterians of New South Wales.'

He thought that to maintain the connections with the National University of Sydney was crucial to Presbyterianism. He thought that ‘the charm and the prestige which attach to National Universities, those venerable seats of erudition and learning, can never be transferred to other institutions, but grow with the growth of the National Universities—are strengthened by their strength — become venerable with their age, and all the more powerful, from generation to generation, and from century to century.’

His most remarkable feature is his passionate belief in the overwhelming importance of universities for ever and any State. ‘Our universities we must have; and, if need be, at any price. They are a necessity. I look upon the instituting of them not only as acts of wisdom and justice, but as deeds filled with hopeful encouragement to every parent.’ He exhorted the synod ‘we must have, by the blessing of God, our National University and its colleges too; and in both, as true Presbyterians, we must each and all have our share, whatever may be our minor differences or distinctions.’ These were to be available to every rank, to every class of a country’s population.

He lost, he believed, because of threats and intimidations, but although the resolution was rescinded and a committee formed instead, the issue remained.<sup>55</sup> By early 1858 it was becoming apparent that if there was to be a college the other churches who had also set up committees at their synods — such as the synod of Eastern Australia — would need to assist so that ‘students from every section of the Presbyterian Church, and even from the churches of the Congregational body, should enjoy in common, without sacrifice of their distinctive principles, the moral and religious advantages which such an institution might be able to offer.’ Sub-committees proliferated and eventually a joint committee. The prospectus worked out which offered a liberal and open approach was published in central and local newspapers and on 6 April 1858 a public meeting was held with the Governor General (Sir William Denison) in the chair. The prospectus was approved and the committee turned to raising subscriptions.

This, however, was interrupted by a petition presented to the legislature by Dr Lang which claimed things contrary to the committee’s prospectus and which the select committee of the legislature appointed to consider it accepted. Further work resulted in the Established church’s synod agreeing to an interpretation clause in the bill to incorporate the college that covered the other Presbyterian churches. Even so the bill was delayed by political changes. When it was presented to the new parliament elected in June 1859 several members of the select committee negated the preamble and by 20 February 1860 brought the procedure to a halt and prevented the college proceeding. This was evidently because Lang had a bill to put before the House proposing something less. The division between the Presbyterians was evidently irreconcilable: on all sides, conscience prevented compromise. The question of how the Free Church would go was not clear but it was unlikely they would go with Lang. The joint committee held that ‘the principle on which their bill was rejected was so clear that they saw no prospect of having a college by Government aid.’ They believed that ‘those six gentlemen [and they include Mr John Robertson who was the new premier] who voted against the preamble were determined no college should be erected in which systematic religious instruction should be given.’ Robertson was a close friend of Lang’s so the divisions were clear. Thomas Barker, who was the convenor of the education committee of the synod, was bitter saying that the House contained so many enemies that ‘they could not get this act of

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<sup>55</sup> Cameron, *Centenary history of the Presbyterian Church of NSW*, p. 151.



justice' although the Wesleyans, Church of England and Roman Catholics had. On Monday April a meeting at which MacKay conducted the prayers it was agreed to return their money to the subscribers less expenses with an expression of the joint committee's hope that an opportunity may occur before long of again introducing a bill for the incorporation of a Presbyterian College within the University of Sydney, in accordance with the view of the joint committee. MacKay consented although he hoped for some alternative arrangement with the subscribers.<sup>56</sup> He was not to see his vision realised.

The college was indefinitely delayed. Union in 1865 removed some difficulties. The *St Andrew's College Incorporation Act*, however, did not receive the Royal Assent until 12 December 1867 and the College Council first met in 1870

### CONCLUSION

While this was proceeding, Mackay depressed by the financial problems of his church and perhaps feeling his age, resigned April 1861 and returned to Scotland in 1862.<sup>57</sup> There he moved on 30 October 1862 to Tarbert in the Isle of Harris where he continued preaching and reflecting on the Free church and Presbyterianism until his death in 1873.

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<sup>56</sup> Anonymous, 'St Andrews Presbyterian College,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 April 1860, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/28626039?browse=ndp%3Abrowse%2Ftitle%2FS%2Ftitle%2F35%2F1860%2F04%2F19%2Fpage%2F1487870%2Farticle%2F28626039>, accessed 19 November 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Grant, Duff, Cameron, and Hamilton, *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands*.

