

PLAGUE AND HUMILIATION: THE ECCLESIASTICAL
RESPONSE TO CATTLE PLAGUE IN MID-VICTORIAN
BRITAIN¹

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An outbreak of rinderpest occurred in Britain in 1865 following the importation of diseased cattle from Estonia. Serious economic and long-lasting political consequences resulted from the epizootic, which occurred at the height of the Victorian 'golden age' of farming. It lasted two years in England, but only one in Scotland, where it did not affect the Highlands and islands. Rinderpest or cattle plague is caused by a viral infection that spreads swiftly in susceptible herds, a survival rate in 1865 of 20–30% being a good average in Britain.² It arose prior to the beginning of the development of germ theory, when the causes of epidemic disease were disputed, and belief in miasma as well as contagion as causal factors persisted. Effective control measures similar to those used in epizootics today were eventually imposed by the Privy Council.

This study is concerned with the ecclesiastical response to the epizootic, in particular in Scotland. In it an attempt is made to look beyond the more tangible facts and results of the plague outbreak to the attitudes and beliefs of people affected, as reflected in one form of cultural activity. Such elements are equally valid subjects of historical enquiry,³ which in this case have been relatively neglected.

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² J. Gamgee, *The Cattle Plague* (London, R. Hardwicke, 1866), p. 51.

³ M. Shortland (ed.), *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1996), p. 16.

The Scottish Ecclesiastical Context, and the Biblical Background

The proportion of Scots who were church adherents rose during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Protestant churches generally were characterised by amalgamation, rather than schism as earlier.⁴ Overall, the evangelical ethos that emphasised personal piety and salvation predominated during the middle decades, strict Calvinism being strongest in some of the dissenting churches, especially in the north and west of Scotland where in the Free Church it persisted after declining in the 1870s elsewhere in Scotland.⁵ An increasing indifference to religion prevailed in some communities in the 1860s and 70s, provoking self-analysis on the part of Presbyterian churches.⁶

A. C. Cheyne described the nineteenth century in terms of a series of revolutions that affected the church as profoundly as other spheres of human activity and thought.⁷ One important development in theology was the application of critical historical and literary methods to the study of the Bible, initially following the writings of German scholars. During the 1860s, acceptance of the need for a new, more questioning approach became evident: whereas even in 1865 all new Church of Scotland, United Presbyterian and Free Church ministers were still required to profess complete acceptance of the faith as formulated in the 1640s, in the decades following some freedom in interpretation of the same creeds was allowed.⁸ Professor A. B. Davidson, of New College, Edinburgh, was one early exponent of historical criticism. In 1863 during Davidson's inaugural address, Rev. W. G. Blaikie (Free Church) pointed out the need for biblical statements to be reconciled with contemporary science.⁹ This change of attitude evident in some aspects of theology did not apply elsewhere: the lowly place of many 'hewers of wood and drawers of water', for instance, was just part of the 'inexorable law of Providence' according to Blaikie.¹⁰ Social criticism by the Scottish churches had barely begun in the 1860s. Protestant churches in this decade, then, seem to have been characterised by both acceptance of the status quo in church and society, a laissez-faire attitude and unquestioning complacency, and by the beginnings of a movement away from tradition and dogma, and a wish for cooperation and progress within the churches.

In the 1860s the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland came under the authority of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, a situation that persisted until 1908 despite restoration of the Hierarchy in 1878.

⁴ C. G. Brown, *The People in the Pews* (Glasgow, Economic and Social History Society of Scotland, 1993), p. 9.

⁵ A. L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland 1874–1900* (Edinburgh, Saint Andrew Press, 1978), p. 5.

⁶ D. J. Withrington, 'The churches in Scotland, c.1870–c.1900: towards a new social conscience?', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol. XIX (1977), pp. 155–68: 155.

⁷ A. C. Cheyne, *The Transforming of the Kirk* (Edinburgh, Saint Andrew Press, 1983).

⁸ A. C. Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1999), p. 186.

⁹ Cheyne, *Transforming of the Kirk*, p. 39.

¹⁰ D. C. Smith, *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest* (New York, P. Lang, 1987), p. 192.

In 1866 Scotland had three vicariates, and there were 184 Catholic clergymen in as many churches/chapels or stations in Scotland, four bishops, and two schools.¹¹ In Cupar, market town of east Fife, for instance, William Grady in 1866 conducted regular Sunday and weekday Masses, although there was no Catholic church building,¹² and a school had opened with 25 children. Some divisions existed within the Scottish Roman Catholic Church, perhaps especially in Glasgow based on immigrant Irish or Scottish provenance. Operation of ecclesiastical matters at that time was geographically uneven, and presumably difficult, certainly compared with the Presbyterian churches with their well-ordered organisational structure.

Nineteenth-century readers of the Bible could have been in little doubt as to the Judaic-Christian view of the plague. God inflicted plagues on Egypt, for instance, including an epizootic, in an attempt to force Pharaoh to free the Israelites: 'the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain'.¹³ Other instances show that illness was believed to be God's response to individual or collective misdemeanours. In the New Testament, Christ healed sickness or affliction through forgiving the sins of the sufferer: those of the man sick of the palsy in Matthew's gospel, for instance; although the story of the blind man told by John indicates that the connotations of miraculous cures of disability were sometimes more complex.¹⁴

English Churches

The Church of England reacted at an early stage to the epizootic. Queen Victoria in September 1865 approved a special prayer to be used in all churches in England. It asks God 'in whose hand is the breath of every living thing' to compassionately regard his servants whom he has visited with a 'grievous murrain among our herds and flocks'. While acknowledging transgressions deserving of chastisement, God's mercy is sought—'stay, we pray Thee, this plague by Thy word of power'—reference also being made to the pestilence 'with which many foreign lands have been smitten', the cholera epidemic that threatened Britain at the time. The prayer ends by thanking God for 'these Thy acts of providence over us'.¹⁵ The instruction to use it apparently initiated much controversy in the press, and amongst scientists and clergy, and even gave rise to ridicule on the part of some French journals.¹⁶

¹¹ *The Catholic Directory: Ecclesiastical Register and Almanac For the Year of Our Lord 1866* (London, Burns, Lambert and Oates, 1866).

¹² Pers. comm., Dr Paula Martin, Apr. 2005.

¹³ *The Holy Bible [. . .] Authorised Version* (Coldstream, 1846), Exodus IX:3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Matthew IX: 2; John IX.

¹⁵ S. A. Hall, 'The cattle plague of 1865', *Medical History*, Vol. 6 (1962), pp. 45–58: 45.

¹⁶ F. Garden, 'God's Law Fixed' (London, Rivingtons, 1865); D. Moore, 'Prayer and Providence' (London, Rivingtons, 1866), Pamphlets 3/1730 *Sermons*, N.L.S.

C. T. Longley, Archbishop of Canterbury, had requested the Privy Council to advise the Queen to appoint a day of national humiliation in the light of the continuing plague, but this was refused because of economic considerations, not all of the country being afflicted, and since it was felt that use of the prayer would suffice. Individual bishops then directed their dioceses as they saw fit, and many churches apparently did hold their day of humiliation and prayer, as and when suited. Not all did: one argument was that as supreme governor of the Church, the Queen alone could command such a day, and she had declined to do so.

Evidence from one collection of twenty-three sermons preached in connection with the epizootic suggests that special services were held in England on Sundays or weekdays appointed by the diocese, and on some Sundays before the appointed dates, ranging from early October 1865 until at least March 1866.¹⁷ Most texts were based on Old Testament readings, as in a sample of humiliation day sermons preached during the Indian Mutiny in London,¹⁸ and range from 'Behold the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle which is in the field' (Exodus IX:3) used by an anonymous rural preacher to 'The miracles of prayer' (Matthew 21:22) used by Pusey in the Cathedral Church of Christ, Oxford.¹⁹ Other elements were included in at least some of the special services: the Litany, administration of Holy Communion, and alms-giving. One preacher referred to the Church Fast Day, but the extent of any fast, if observed, is unclear.²⁰ Instructions for the observance of a fast in 1849, however, included: seclusion, self-examination, confession of sin, resolution of amendment and intercession for others.²¹ Prayers might have been read from the *Book of Common Prayer*. Praise could well have included psalms, but by the mid-1860s hymn singing was well established in English churches, with musical accompaniment provided either by gallery musicians, or a harmonium or organ installed during the previous three decades.²² However, the solemnity of the occasion may have demanded the 'sombre penitential exclusion of choir and organ', as at Westminster Abbey during an 1832 humiliation day.²³ Particularly appropriate for services in 1866 would have been the ten-verse hymn Rev. J. M. Neale wrote especially for the cattle plague.²⁴

The sermons preached on appropriate texts must have been an important element of the services, and evidently many were concerned with the justification

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ B. Stanley, 'Christian responses to the Indian Mutiny of 1857' in W. J. Sheils (ed.), *The Church and War, Studies in Church History*, Vol. 20 (1983), pp. 277–89.

¹⁹ Anon., 'The Cattle Plague' (Oxford, Parker, 1866); E. B. Pusey, 'The Miracles of Prayer' (Oxford, Parker, and London, Rivingtons, 1866), *Sermons*, N.L.S.

²⁰ B. F. Smith, 'Prayer and the Cattle Plague' (London, Macmillan, 1866), *Sermons*, N.L.S.

²¹ J. Wolffe, 'Judging the Nation: Early Nineteenth-Century British Evangelicals and Divine Retribution' in K. Cooper and J. Gregory (eds), *Retribution, Repentance, and Reconciliation, Studies in Church History*, Vol. 40 (2004), pp. 291–300: 298.

²² I. Bradley, *Abide with Me: the World of Victorian Hymns* (London, SCM, 1997), p. 26.

²³ O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Pt. 1 (London, A. & C. Black, 1971), p. 37.

²⁴ E. A. Towle, *Letters of John Mason Neale D.D.*, (London, Longmans, Green & Co, 1910), p. 365. One verse reads: 'Pity then Thy guiltless creatures, who, not less, man's suffering share: for our sins it is they perish: let them profit by our prayer.'

and need for petitionary prayer, presumably in view of the prevalent atmosphere of criticism in some quarters of the nation at large. 'A Plain Sermon preached in a village church' sums up the general view that 'the Lord sends disease in punishment of sin'.²⁵ Other reasons for affliction might, however, include: to try our patience, increase faith, correct what is amiss, and as a response to our growing contempt for God's laws – 'the self-sufficiency, self-reliance, self-laudation which characterise us in our living only for time and for ourselves'.²⁶ National sin was regarded by some as equally culpable, such as the idolatry perpetrated by the national treasury in financing a Roman Catholic Church seminary,²⁷ or the general forgetfulness of God while his gifts, such as peace and prosperity, were enjoyed.²⁸ One preacher pointed out that the nation's duty consists in individuals examining themselves, thus covering all eventualities, and like others touched on the notion of the 'primary' cause (God) and 'secondary' causes – the '*laus* by which all the movements and productions and changes of the natural world are effected [...] the *rules* by which [God's] power operates'.²⁹ Despite the rules, prayer was still seen as essential, together with all practical application of knowledge. A note of caution advised unreserved prayer only when asking for spiritual grace; where temporal gifts or alleviations were concerned, one should pray reservedly, always adding 'Thy will be done'.³⁰

Scottish Churches

English ecclesiastical reactions to the epizootic had not gone unnoticed in Scotland, and when the Commission of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland met in March 1866, one speaker suggested that since 'the people of this country were anxious that all bodies of the Christian Church should follow the precedent that had been set them in England', that it was time 'to invoke the Divine blessing for the mitigation or removal of the plague'.³¹ Much discussion followed regarding the best time to hold a 'diet of solemn public humiliation and prayer',³² bearing in mind the date already suggested by another local church – United Presbyterian, by implication – and the likely opinions of the Episcopalians and the Free Church: co-operation was apparently seen as an ideal. Thursday 29 March was finally chosen as the day. Nowhere does the motion mention the fact that this was Maundy Thursday. Those debating the issue were

²⁵ Anon., 'Cattle Plague', *Pamphlets*, N.L.S., p. 5.

²⁶ Ibid., J. G. Cowan, 'The Cause and Cure of the Cattle Plague' (London, Skeffington, 1866), p. 10.

²⁷ Ibid., H. McNeile, 'Confession without amendment or Dissembling with God' (Liverpool, Howell, 1866).

²⁸ Ibid., Anon., 'Cattle Plague'.

²⁹ Ibid., J. G. Cowan, p. 4.

³⁰ Ibid., M. F. Sadler, 'Will God interfere?' (London, Bell and Daldy, 1866), p. 18.

³¹ *The Scotsman*, 8 Mar. 1866, quoting Dr Nisbet, p. 5.

³² Ibid., p. 5.

well aware of the import of the season, one speaker reminding them that statutes of the Kirk forbade the recognition in any way of Good Friday. In due course the resolution was forwarded to the ministers of every church, each being expected to raise the matter at the next meeting of the Kirk Session (K.S.).

Examination of some K.S. and other minutes for March 1866 demonstrates more than anything their apparent unreliability as records of church activities. Minutes of thirty-three churches (Church of Scotland, Free Church, United Presbyterian, and Episcopalian) in part of east Fife, from St Monance to St Andrews on the coast, and inland to Springfield, Creich, Kilmany and Forgan, show that just over one quarter (27.3%) record the prescribed humiliation day.³³ It is unlikely that many ministers of any denomination would actually have disregarded the orders of higher courts, especially in view of public concern due to the severity of the plague, so it can only be assumed that for some reason it was not deemed worthy of mention. Many smaller churches especially did not hold many K.S. meetings – Creich, for instance, recorded none in 1866 – so their business must have been conducted informally, possibly before or after Sunday services. Nearly half had no K.S. meeting during the relevant period in March. Eight others did hold meetings in the second half of March, but still apparently did not discuss the special instruction. In the case of two Cupar churches, however, the parish minister himself (rather than the Session Clerk) recorded the fact that Diets of Worship were held on that day for ‘the removal of the grievous plague upon Cattle’.³⁴ Was there some element of unwillingness, or disapproval in some sessions, or was it simply viewed as another fast day, too commonplace to mention? Records from Rathillet, near Cupar, suggest that the latter may indeed be the case.³⁵ Their K.S. minutes note arrangements for four celebrations of communion in 1866, but only mention the usual pre-communion fast in May, when a Wednesday ‘day of humiliation’ is recorded – coincidentally following the national, prescribed event. Was this element of familiarity, then, extended to the national event?

Humiliation, Prayer and Fasting

Traditionally, fast days were familiar in the Church of Scotland, being held on a weekday in preparation for the sacrament of communion on the following Sunday. Farm workers were given a day off – ‘no work being the Parochial Fastday’ and ‘All at Church Fast Day’ are typical entries in a local farm diary from 1825 and 1828.³⁶ Such occasions by the 1860s were days of special penitence, rather than actual fasting.³⁷ National days of fasting, humiliation and prayer

³³ K.S. Minutes from the 33 churches are held in the Special Collections Dept, St Andrews University. Library (St.A.U.L.S.C.).

³⁴ *K.S. Minutes*, Cupar Parish, 29 May 1866, St.A.U.L.S.C.

³⁵ *K.S. Minutes*, Rathillet U.P. Church, 27 May 1866.

³⁶ Greigston Farm Diary, 1824–1833. Owned by Mr and Mrs T. Grant, Greigston, by Cupar, Fife.

³⁷ A. K. H. Boyd, *Twenty Five Years of St Andrews*, Vol. I (London, Longmans, 1893), p. 99.

were unlike these parochial events: appointed by the Crown on the advice of Government, they applied to the whole country and were observed by a range of denominations. In 1866 there had been no shortage of precedents: 1832 (because of the cholera epidemic); 1846 and 1847 (Irish famine); 1849 (cholera); 1854 and 1855 (Crimean War); and 1857 (Indian Mutiny). Such days continued to be held, for instance the national Day of Prayer in January 1915, soon after the start of World War One. More recently but farther afield, a day of fasting was proposed by Archbishop Mahoney of Los Angeles in 2006, with respect to planned immigration legislation.³⁸

War and disease in plague form seem to have prompted most of these responses: events with potentially widespread fatal consequences which ordinary citizens were powerless to avert. In the case of plague in 1866, as twenty years earlier with potato blight, prior to scientific understanding there was a need for a means of explaining and coming to terms with the disaster.³⁹ Fear and feelings of helplessness doubtless reinforced the tendency to rely on religious tradition, in the form of communal penitence and confession. For many, Christian belief in the benign wisdom and power of Providence would render further explanation superfluous. Representative individuals such as members of the royal family were in the earlier 1800s sometimes held responsible, and thus deemed culpable, for the sins of the nation;⁴⁰ national suffering was also seen then and later as the price paid for a range of collective misdemeanours, or the sum of individual sin, punishment for which could not be deferred beyond the present.

Although humiliation days may have been popular with the majority of the people, governments after 1830 became cautious about prescribing humiliation days following criticism.⁴¹ Queen Victoria was also reluctant to sanction them, not believing for instance that the Crimean War was a divine judgement upon a sinful nation. Public opinion finally triumphed on that occasion,⁴² but no united response to the cattle plague was permitted in England the following decade. The Scottish churches, however, were free to react as they wished.

Neither the relevant motion of the Church of Scotland General Assembly Commission, nor those K.S. minutes that do mention the humiliation day, say anything of what the special service should, or did, entail. A fuller entry than most states:

Sed aprovd the Evening of Thursday 29th. inst. for Fasting & Humiliation, – and appointed Public Worship to be observed by the Congregation in the Church commencing at Seven O'clock – in acknowledgment of the Divine

³⁸ *The Tablet*, 8 Apr. 2006, p. 31.

³⁹ P. Gray, 'National humiliation and the Great Hunger: fast and famine in 1847', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 22 (2000), pp. 193–216.

⁴⁰ Wolffe, 'Judging the Nation', p. 293.

⁴¹ Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p. 490.

⁴² O. Anderson, 'The reactions of Church and Dissent towards the Crimean War,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 16 (1965), pp. 209–20: 215.

Hand in the Cattle Plague and to entreat that this Judgement may be turned away from the land.' R. Anderson Mod^r. John Wilkie, Clerk⁴³

Consideration of what normally constituted established church services at that time, and of what further might have been entailed in a diet of humiliation and prayer, allows some insight into this intriguing question.

Letters from the same edition of *The Scotsman* newspaper that reported the Commission motion reveal that some ministers had 'for many weeks offered up prayers for the removal of the plague'—as ordered by the Queen in Council, according to another.⁴⁴ However, repeated use of one official prayer as in England was unlikely, for two reasons. Read prayers were not then, as now, the norm in the Kirk, though one minister stated that in the 1850s the opening and closing prayers in some churches never varied from year to year, and in 1859, this practice was condemned.⁴⁵ Since 1690 the Church of Scotland has had the right to govern its own affairs, independently of the Crown or any secular court, unlike the Church of England. Suggestions made by the Privy Council in ecclesiastical matters were therefore inapplicable in Scotland, although the Scots clergy and people might concur and react accordingly. Prayer was thus on two counts likely to have been extempore.

That the reformed church in general regarded the word of God as paramount is reflected in the important place given to the sermon preached on the chosen text.⁴⁶ Some Scottish tracts published in 1865 and 1866, before the humiliation day, address similar concerns to those reflected in the English sermons discussed above: divine retribution for various perceived individual and national sins, primary and secondary causes of the plague, the need for humility in knowledge, and the growth of secularism. Rev. Thomson Martin of Wishaw additionally saw error in the pride taken in selectively improved cattle breeds, and the failure of the populace to recognise the divine blessing therein.⁴⁷

A normal service would have included praise: the singing of metrical psalms, and paraphrases. The first official hymnal of the established church was not published until 1870,⁴⁸ and the Free Church authorised the use of hymns in 1872. The 1860s saw organs first introduced in Scottish (non-Episcopalian) churches, and over the following three decades the majority acquired them; before then, the precentor led the congregation in singing.⁴⁹ Praise in most churches on the

⁴³ K.S. *Minutes*, Ceres Associate Session Church, 12 Mar. 1866, St.A.U.L.S.C.

⁴⁴ *The Scotsman*, 8 Mar. 1866, A Farmer and A Presbyterian's letters, p. 5.

⁴⁵ A. Scott, 'The Church from 1843 to 1881 AD', *The Scottish Church from the Earliest Times to 1881*, St Giles Lectures, First Series (Edinburgh and London, W. & R. Chambers, 1881), p. 350.

⁴⁶ A. Waters, 'Public worship in olden times' in W. Andrews (ed.), *Bygone Church Life in Scotland* (London, W. Andrews & Co., 1899), pp. 86–97: 94.

⁴⁷ H. Calderwood, (Glasgow, Robertson and Bryce, 1865); P. Drummond, (Stirling, 1866); R. Thomson Martin, (Glasgow, Gallie, 1866): *Pamphlets* A.c.9. 4/6; Misc. Religious P.c./8; Misc. Secular P.g./2, New College Library.

⁴⁸ Church of Scotland General Assembly, *The Scottish Hymnal* (Edinburgh, 1870).

⁴⁹ Bradley, *Abide with Me*, p. 38.

Scottish humiliation day in 1866 is likely, therefore, to have meant unaccompanied singing of two or three well-chosen psalms or paraphrases.

A weekly newspaper published in Cupar, *The Fife Herald*, noted that ‘the various religious denominations having agreed to observe part of Thursday, 29th. inst., as a fast, in connection with the [cattle plague], the magistrates recommend that all places of business in Cupar be closed that day from 11 to 2’.⁵⁰ Understanding what might have been involved in this fast means considering instructions written by John Knox and others, shortly after the Reformation.⁵¹

The Church of Scotland has been seen as unique amongst reformed churches in having an Order of the Fast included in its constitution,⁵² but Channel Islands churches shared this distinction at least from 1642.⁵³ The Scottish order is maybe older, and is certainly much more detailed. Public fasting was seen as a necessary partner of public supplication in the craving of God’s pardon and mercy in time of trouble, from the very earliest days of the reformed church. This was presumably an extension of the personal response as stated by the psalmist: ‘When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach’.⁵⁴ The first Scottish general fast held in 1566 was motivated by the tolerance in varying degree of Catholicism by Queen and country, and general sinfulness, but Knox’s carefully set out and justified procedures formed the model adopted for all subsequent public fasts. Fasting for specific purposes, and not routinely on certain days as in pre-Reformation times, was deemed scripturally sound: biblical authority existed for ‘fasts as forms of humiliation and penitence on account of special sins and provocations of divine mercy’.⁵⁵ The pre-Reformation tradition of absolution before Easter continued in the early reformed Scottish church with respect to reconciliation of would-be communicants, the ‘discipline’ of those under jurisdiction of the K.S., for which the spring season was particularly favoured, and in the lengthy fasts that preceded some annual spring communions.⁵⁶ The decision to hold the national day of humiliation for the cattle plague at the culmination of Lent, on Maundy Thursday, suggests that the memory of the tradition lingered longer than might have been admitted, certainly by the General Assembly: this

⁵⁰ *The Fife Herald*, 22 Mar. 1866.

⁵¹ J. Knox and J. Craig (1565), ‘The order of the general fast,’ in G. W. Sprott and T. Leishman (eds), *The Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland and the Directory for the Public Worship of God* (Edinburgh and London, Blackwood, 1868), pp. 178–91.

⁵² W. I. P. Hazlett, ‘Playing God’s Card: Knox and Fasting, 1565–66’ in R. A. Mason (ed.), *John Knox and the British Reformations* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 1998), pp. 150–91: 183.

⁵³ The Orders for Ecclesiasticall Discipline. According to that which hath been practised since the Reformation of the Church in his Majesties Dominions by the ancient Ministers, Elders and Deacons of the Isles of Garnsey, Gersey, Spark and Alderney (London, 1642), Chapter XI, Art.1, pp. 12–13, *Theological Pamphlets*, r17BX8930.S2, St.A.U.L.S.C.

⁵⁴ Psalms LXIX: 10, or ‘I humble myself by fasting, and people insult me’ (*Good News Bible*, 1976).

⁵⁵ A. Edgar, ‘The Discipline of the Church of Scotland’ in R. H. Story (ed.), *The Church of Scotland, Past and Present* (London, MacKenzie, 1891), p. 448.

⁵⁶ M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 92ff.

was surely a more propitious season than most for the coming together of church and nation under such a calamity.

As a tradition hallowed by scriptural authority, use and time, it seems unlikely that fasting would have been ignored by nineteenth-century ministers instructed to exercise solemn public humiliation and prayer. In the relevant section in the *Book of Common Order*, the lengthy Treatise sets out the biblical precedents and justification for fasting. The Order of the General Fast is concerned with practices and abstinence to be observed, and a short final section (added in 1574) lists 'certain chapters and parts of the scriptures used by the Ministers of Edinburgh and Holyrood House, in the time of God's visitation by the Pest'. However, a certain leeway was envisaged, ministers not being required to 'stick scrupulously' to these texts and prayers, but to vary them appropriately 'as God changeth His wands'.⁵⁷ Knox and Craig gave a detailed liturgy for fast day services. A morning diet of worship began with a confession read by the minister, followed by readings from Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 concerning obedience, and the lack of it. Minister and congregation were then required to prostrate themselves for fifteen minutes or more, in private silent meditation, to examine their consciences. A prayer of confession followed, ending with the Lord's prayer. The sermon was then preached on God's law, its earthly consequences, and its perfection in Christ. Another prayer followed, that recommended apparently being from Calvin's Liturgy from Geneva, written for a special fast in 1541.⁵⁸ The service concluded with the 51st psalm being sung, and the blessing. This model was repeated with different texts, prayers and psalms throughout the extended period of the fast, morning and afternoon in towns and cities; rural areas were exempted from weekday services. People were required to fast during the weekend, taking only 'bread and drink, and that with great sobriety', and no games or 'gorgeous apparel' were permitted.⁵⁹

While it would have been possible to use much of this liturgy in the 1860s, the extent to which individual ministers were guided by it is unknown. The shorter section on public solemn fasting in the Directory of 1645 instructs ministers in praying 'to speak from their hearts', and texts and sermon were to be tailored appropriately for each congregation.⁶⁰ Prostration during silent meditation and prayer would have been impossible in churches with fixed seating, and many churches had acquired pews by the late 1700s.⁶¹ Kneeling in prayer could have been substituted – the outward posture demonstrating the inner humbling of the soul – following the tradition of earlier centuries, but the question of posture was a contentious issue in the 1860s: the normal practice of sitting to sing and standing

⁵⁷ Sprott and Leishman, *Book of Common Order*, pp. 187ff.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

⁶¹ D. Forrester and D. Murray (eds), *Studies in the History of Worship in Scotland* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1984).

to pray had been challenged, notably by Robert Lee, minister of Greyfriars in Edinburgh. In his efforts to reform worship, the congregation were invited to kneel to pray, and to say responses from a printed book, and to stand to sing, accompanied by a harmonium (in 1863) or the organ that replaced it—the first in a Church of Scotland church—in 1865.⁶² The intent and tenor of prayers, preaching, and praise would, however, have been the same, no matter how delivered or received.

The element of fasting in 1866 probably varied from church to church, but where services were held at noon, the main meal of the day would have been postponed, while those attending evening services may have fasted for most of the day. Employees in Cupar were given three hours off during the humiliation day: attendance at church was required. Fasting and work were to some extent incompatible, even in the 1860s.

In many respects, therefore, reactions to the call for a humiliation day in Scotland and England differed. The English services were held on varying dates, and involved elements directed at least in some cases by the bishops, including set (printed) prayers, and celebration of the Eucharist. Praise could well have included hymns, in many churches with a musical accompaniment. In Scottish churches, at least the majority held the service on one day. Prayer, apart from 'Our Father' was probably extempore, a time of silent contemplation maybe being included; the sacrament of communion would not have been celebrated, and psalms or paraphrases were used mostly—if not entirely—in praise, sung unaccompanied except possibly in a few town churches. Additionally, ministers and congregations went hungry at midday services, and many may have gone to church fasting.

Dissenting Protestants

In Scotland, as in England, not all clergymen agreed regarding the appropriate response to the cattle plague, and two of these will be considered further: Gilfillan of Dundee, and Cranbrook of Edinburgh.

George Gilfillan, minister and writer, was actively concerned with political and social issues of the day. Trained in the United Secession Church, he was minister of School Wynd Church, Dundee, which in 1847 became a United Presbyterian church. His dissenting background may have particularly predisposed him to question widely held norms, though the Scottish Seceders generally were seen as 'the steady-going reformers of the time'.⁶³ Gilfillan, however, was an extreme example of the radical wing of the United Presbyterian Church.⁶⁴ One

⁶² Ibid., D. Murray, 'Disruption to Union', pp. 79–95: 83; Bradley, *Abide with Me*, p. 38. It should be noted that Skelmorlie Church, Greenock Presbytery, also used an organ from early in 1865 (D. Kelly, Letter, *Life and Work*, Mar. 2008, p. 9).

⁶³ R. A. Watson and E. S. Watson, *George Gilfillan: Letters and Journals, with Memoir* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1892), p. 61.

⁶⁴ Pers. comm., the late Rev. Prof. William McKane, 7 Feb. 2004.

of his Sunday lectures, later printed in the *Fife Herald*, set out his objections to the humiliation day in 1866.⁶⁵ Gilfillan believed that praying for miracles was pointless; that God's judgements are mysterious, and their reasons unfathomable; fast days no longer were relevant, especially in these post-Bacon days of inductive reasoning, and were altogether unworthy of 'professed Dissenters'. He advocated moderate expectations of prayer for spiritual blessings, gratitude for what prosperity was enjoyed, and resignation to the Divine will. One remark betrays the contemporary critical influence: 'Scotland has hardly produced any great religious writer, although it has produced great preachers; nor can it, or England either, show one religious thinker to be compared to Schleiermacher'.⁶⁶ In Gilfillan's reasoning against observing the humiliation day, he stated his belief that the age of miracles was past. This may reflect Schleiermacher's contention that Christ was the final and 'absolute miracle', the culmination of God's miraculous acts.⁶⁷ Gilfillan also commented on the national fast: such fasts are 'shams', not observed for twenty-four hours but amounting only to the loss of 'one business hour'. The implication is that the city of Dundee offered a minimal observance of the fast compared to the rural community in and around Cupar.

While Gilfillan's loyal congregation probably agreed with these ideas, some at Albany Street Chapel, Edinburgh, in the Congregational Union, may have been more critical of their minister. Two sermons were preached by James Cranbrook in connection with the cattle plague: the second was in defence of the doctrine expressed in the first, which having been published in the press, caused a commotion in parts of the religious world.⁶⁸ Cranbrook justifies his stance in the preface, explaining the need to pray for clearer understanding of, and the will to conform with, the laws of nature by which God regulates the world—hence his unwillingness to pray for removal of the plague(s), and his condemnation of those who neglect the 'great laws of [public] health and well-being'.⁶⁹ The sentiments expressed were sufficiently unconventional to cause Cranbrook's resignation, despite the respect of the Congregational Union for the autonomy of its churches: one further victim of the cattle plague.

Finally, some individuals, though Christian, held opposing views to the mainstream churches. John Purvis of Kinaldy, near St Andrews, who expressed misgivings about official secular disease control measures in the *Fife Herald*, also had doubts about holding special prayer meetings for the plague, fearing many might regard them as mechanistic devices or spells to ward off evil.⁷⁰ Another

⁶⁵ *The Fife Herald*, 5 Apr. 1866.

⁶⁶ Watson and Watson, *Journal*, 13 Jul. 1863, p. 295.

⁶⁷ M. Redeker (transl. J. Wallhauser), *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1973), p. 124, quoting Schleiermacher, *Der Christliche Glaube*. This opinion can be traced back to Calvin (e.g. Institutes, Book IV, 19: 6), whose position however was less rigid than that of some later followers (pers. comm., Br. Paschal, Pluscarden Abbey, 21 Jun. 2007).

⁶⁸ J. Cranbrook, 'Divine Providence in its relation to Prayer and Plagues' (Edinburgh, Fullarton, 1866[?]), *Pamphlets*, N.L.S.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷⁰ J. Purvis, letter, *The Fife Herald*, 7 Mar. 1866.

was David Page, whose address as Vice-President to the Edinburgh Geological Society was later reported in the newspaper. He may have had the humiliation day in mind when stating 'so far as confession and repentance concern the individual mind, the effect is undoubtedly wholesome; but so far as they relate to general law (which rules for the whole, and not for the individual) it would be reversing all philosophical views of the enduring order of nature to suppose that they could be instrumental either in producing change or in procuring exemption'.⁷¹

Comment in the leader column of the *Fife Herald*, published on the Scottish humiliation day itself, protests against the linking of the plague with unspecified national sins in local pulpits the previous Sunday. The propriety of holding a fast day, and the right of the authorities to recommend it, are not questioned, but vague repentance for unknown sin is deemed a mockery of the Deity; the views of the Bishop of London and his call for personal reflection are commended instead.

The Roman Catholic Church

Pastoral letters held in the Scottish Catholic Archives for 1865 and 1866 from the Vicars Apostolic reveal no mention of the cattle plague. Instructions were, however, given by Bishop Strain in Edinburgh for a day of special prayers and the celebration of High Mass for the Pope, in his then-current difficulties, in October 1866.⁷² Other letters show that the Catholic clergy were very well aware of the epizootic. Examples written to Bishop Kyle at Preshome (Banffshire) include these remarks: 'The Rinderpest is causing great alarm to farmers here as elsewhere. They have cattle ready for market, but can get no one to buy them' (from Glenlivet); 'The Cattle plague still creeps towards us, and the Parish authorities have resolved that all cattle must be vaccinated I hope this prevention measure may be effectual' (Blairs, Aberdeenshire); 'We have hitherto been free from it [the cattle murrain] in this neighbourhood, but one can scarcely calculate upon continued immunity from such a virulent visitation' (Gloucestershire).⁷³ Clergyman Donald MacRae in Braemar was more immediately affected, his income seemingly being at least partially dependent on his farm and its livestock: 'I never had to pass through such a year as the present. The Farm has nearly ruined me this last year, for I have sold nothing to pay either Rent or Servants' wages, and I have moreover spent about £12 in keeping my few beasts in life [...] we had, I may say, no crop last season and our Winter is not yet over [...] An income of £100 would not have carried me clear through this year'.⁷⁴ The cattle plague therefore had consequences beyond the immediate: unable to sell beasts yet obliged to feed them indoors through the winter, this clergyman had suffered a serious loss of income and was appealing to the church to help him

⁷¹ *Herald*, 21 Jun. 1866.

⁷² Bishop J. Strain, *District Circulars*, Sep. 1866, Scottish Catholic Archives SCA/ED10/15 and SCA/SM15/11.

⁷³ Preshome letters, SCA/PL3/842/4; SCA/PL3/843/9; SCA/PL3/851/6.

⁷⁴ Preshome letters, SCA/PL/3/851/13.

out. No doubt all concurred with Bishop Strain when he answered one Blairs correspondent: 'I am sorry to hear of the cattle plague having shewn itself so near you. Pray God that it may come no nearer'.⁷⁵

Notice was taken of what was happening in the other churches. In *The Glasgow Free Press*, an organ of the Irish Catholic faction, the progress of the plague and preventative measures are reported under 'news of the day' and elsewhere. Less innocuous is their comment on the Protestant churches' 'half-holiday partially observed in Glasgow on Thursday last for the purpose of imploring heaven to stay the ravages of the rinderpest. The veterinary surgeons having failed, the theological ones have taken the matter into their hands; [. . .] One wonders if the cows in Glasgow knew that the bell ringing was for the purpose of improving their health'.⁷⁶ The ironic tone used here betrays the scornful attitude of the *Glasgow Free Press* towards this event, and strongly suggests that no such day was planned or held by the Roman Catholic Church there. This partisan and outspoken newspaper, however, was condemned two years later by the Vicars Apostolic for 'disseminating principles, diametrically opposite to those of the Catholic religion, tending to produce contempt for the Clergy [. . . and] to excite hatred among the different nationalities of which Catholicity among us is composed' and so on⁷⁷; reading of it was forbidden, effectively closing it down. Although opinions aired in the *Glasgow Free Press* certainly were not representative of most of the church, again a dissenting voice is informative about what actually happened. The Catholic reaction to the plague in Scotland clearly differed from that of the Protestant majority.

Different traditions of fasting are relevant here. Early Christians had practised both fast (abstention from food) and abstinence (partial abstention) following New Testament examples, and subsequently these became regular thrice-weekly events. The 'great' or Lenten fast in the Catholic tradition lasts forty days, and until 1917, in the western church, fasting was required on every day of Lent except Sundays, meaning that one daily meal only, with no meat, milk or egg products, was permitted.⁷⁸ During Lent, 1866, therefore, the Catholic faithful would already be fasting. The occasional fast advocated by Calvin in response to extraordinary events gave rise to the Protestant institution of humiliation days: these were obviously superfluous in the Roman Catholic Church.

Mass would have been celebrated on Maundy Thursday, commemorating the institution of the Holy Eucharist by Christ in the upper room, and penitents absolved of their sins, the rite of washing of feet carried out, and other rituals enacted in preparation for Good Friday. It seems unlikely that concern with the cattle plague would have been allowed to intrude upon this solemn and

⁷⁵ Blairs letters, SCA/BL/7/37/7.

⁷⁶ *The Glasgow Free Press*, 31 Mar. 1866, p. 4.

⁷⁷ Pastoral Letter to the Catholic clergy and laity of Scotland by the Vicars Apostolic, 28 Jan. 1866, p. 4, SCA/ SM15/4/5.

⁷⁸ *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (2nd edn, Washington DC, Gale, 2003), Vol. 5, pp. 632ff.

traditional liturgy, and equally, that if mention of the plague were made in prayers in individual churches, it would not have been then, on the first day of the Sacred Triduum that encompasses Maundy Thursday to Holy Saturday. Any prayers composed in response to the epizootic would have been included informally in the 'bidding prayers' (intercessions) said during Mass, when and as deemed appropriate by priests.

Further light can be shed on Catholic participation by considering what happened in one part of England, where the Catholic Hierarchy had been restored in 1850. Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century swelled the population of Liverpool, which by the early 1900s had more Catholics than any other city in Britain.⁷⁹ North-west England was quite badly affected by the cattle plague, disease lingering in Cheshire in October 1866, supposedly due to laxity in law enforcement, and reappearing in Lancashire in December that year.⁸⁰ Alexander Goss, Bishop of Liverpool, issued annual pastoral letters in 1865 and 1866, which contain no mention of plague. He was, however, aware of the epizootic, and reacted to popular demand for the intercession of the church. Early in 1866, he published the following set of prayers in Latin to be used, then or in the future, by priests when asked by the faithful to bless their cattle, whether 'presented to you in droves or in their stalls'.⁸¹ After a six-line preamble between priest and server asking God to hear them, the following prayers could be offered:

Let us pray

O God, our refuge and strength, hear the pious prayers of thy church, thou, author of piety, and grant that we obtain speedily what we are asking for full of confidence. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray

All-powerful and ever-living God: thou hast made that the glorious blessed Antony, tested by manifold temptations, could pass unharmed through the storms of this world. So grant us, thy servants, that, by following his shining example, we may advance (in virtue), and that through his merits and intercession we may be delivered from the dangers of this life. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray

May these animals receive thy blessing (+), o Lord: may their bodies be saved and be delivered from all evil through the intercession of the blessed Antony. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let us pray

We humbly beseech thy mercy, o Lord, and pray that thou mayst grant protection to these cattle and (other) animals from all the devil's deception

⁷⁹ T. Burke, *Catholic History of Liverpool* (Liverpool, Tinling, 1910), p. 1.

⁸⁰ *The Fife Herald*, 18 Oct. and 6 Dec. 1866.

⁸¹ *Acta et Statuta*, Liverpool Synods I–VIII, 1853–69, App. II (Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King Archive, Liverpool). Translated from the Latin by Prof. Dr. B. Lang.

and power, as well as from any illness, through the power of the blessing (+) with your name. Be thou, o Lord, their defence, their support in life and their remedy in illness, and multiply thy mercy and kindness, so that thy holy name will be glorified forever. Amen.

The priest then sprinkles holy water.

Reference is made here to Anthony of Egypt (251–356), who was remembered particularly in the Middle Ages as the patriarch of monks, healer of both men and animals, and patron saint of domestic animals. In the fields and cowsheds of Lancashire, and city dairies, cattle belonging to Catholic farmers and dairymen would thus have been blessed. Such prayers—or intercessions as part of Divine Office—might well have been said on Wednesday, 17 January 1866, St Anthony’s Day.

Prayers for Plague

The blessing of animals, and indeed of anything or anyone beyond the church building, seems to be a tradition lost by the Church of Scotland, and possibly all of the Protestant churches. While praying about cattle plague may have seemed ludicrous to a section of the urban Catholic community in 1866, there was a long tradition in pre-Reformation Gaelic Scotland of asking blessings on domestic animals, for every-day activities such as herding and milking, as well as protection and healing. There are over twenty prayers for cattle-stock alone in Alexander Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica*, one of which makes clear that the Gaels regarded Calum Cille (St Columba) as the healer of cattle: the Celtic equivalent of St Antony, guardian of the Hebridean cattle.⁸² Invocation of these saints reflects the continuing perception of God as creator and owner of all animals, domestic and wild, the ‘Lord of the Animals’ of Genesis I and Psalm 50.⁸³ It is thus quite possible that in 1865 or 1866 Scottish priests also may have said prayers in church for affected cattle and communities, or asked God’s blessing on them out of doors, in keeping with ages-old tradition.

Blessings are regarded as one of the chief sacramental actions of the Roman Catholic Church, second only to the sacraments themselves in importance.⁸⁴ They are published in collections such as the *Rituale Romanum* of Pope Paul V (1614), which contains a prayer for the blessing of animals, but diocesan collections were also made, containing prayers suitable for local situations. The Goss blessings are of the latter type, clearly written in response to the immediate need, but to be saved against future contingencies. The four texts following the introductory dialogue seem to offer the priest a choice according to his needs;

⁸² ‘The white cow’ in A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, (ed. C. J. Moore, Edinburgh, Floris, 1992), no. 458.

⁸³ B. Lang, *The Hebrew God* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 81ff.

⁸⁴ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, pp. 439ff.

though, spoken in Latin, presumably few earthly listeners actually understood the petitions. They contain no reference to sin or punishment, stressing instead God's role as defender and saviour of people and animals in times of trouble. The third prayer may have been intended for cattle already ill, whereas the last asks protection from illness, for instance for susceptible herds. These prayers, involving the use of holy water, required close proximity to the creatures in question. In the early 1500s, the Confraternity of the Abbey of St Anthony's, Leith, near Edinburgh composed prayers for the blessing of 'salt and water, so that, when the animals which Thou hast freely given to human need, shall receive of the same or be sprinkled therewith, this blessing and consecration may restore them to soundness'.⁸⁵ The blessing of ill animals thus was a long-established Catholic tradition.

During the period 1865–6 when Carmichael was actively engaged in collecting Gaelic oral literature in Hebridean crofting communities, the Protestant mainland apparently had long forgotten or submerged such petitions. Were Catholic blessings, with their sacramental significance and use of sanctified water, simply disapproved of by the reformers? Or might this difference connote something deeper lying, a divergence of view regarding appropriate venues for public acknowledgement of God? At the Reformation in the Channel Islands, after services, church doors were to be kept closed: 'the doores of the Church shall be shut after the Sermon and publike prayers, to wipe away all superstition'.⁸⁶ However, the early reformers also stressed that 'no place is capable of any holiness',⁸⁷ so presumably even a church was not to be regarded as intrinsically holy, and the visiting of formerly venerated sites such as wells and shrines was discouraged (although not immediately achieved).⁸⁸ In mainly Catholic countries today, evidence of the prevailing faith is much more obvious in the landscape than in Protestant countries: roadside shrines and memorials are frequent reminders of the divine presence in the secular world. At certain periods in the past, when persecuted or merely deprived of premises, Protestant believers such as the Covenanters and new Free Church congregations after the Disruption of 1843 defiantly gathered outdoors for worship. Under normal circumstances Protestant observation and worship seem, however, to have been largely confined to the church and its immediate surroundings. According to the reformers' Book of Common Order, blessings used in church when closing a normal service, and during the marriage ceremony, are permissible. Out in the byres or fields of Protestant areas, such petitions would presumably have been unthinkable by the mid-nineteenth century.

⁸⁵ J. Smith, 'Notes on the Augustinian house of Saint Anthony, Leith', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Vol. LXIV (1929–1930), p. 289, quoting Roger's St Anthony's Monastery at Leith, etc., which cites a MS Rental Buke of Sanct Anthoni's and Newhavin, N.L.S.

⁸⁶ Orders for Ecclesiasticall Discipline, Ch. VIII, 'Of the preaching of the Word', Article 5, p. 10; St.A.U.L.S.C.

⁸⁷ Sprott and Leishman, *Book of Common Order*, Appendix to Westminster Directory, p. 323.

⁸⁸ Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, pp. 195ff.

Religion and Science in the Mid-nineteenth Century

Although the day of humiliation was apparently observed by many—possibly all—Presbyterian churches throughout Scotland, how enthusiastically their congregations supported them is not known. The impact of new scientific understanding on long-held biblical beliefs may have been one important influence that affected reactions to the cattle plague. The 1850s have been characterised as a period of ‘intense spiritual anxiety and intellectual restlessness’, when a passion for science pervaded the whole of society.⁸⁹ Geology was the most popular science in the decades leading up to 1860,⁹⁰ and one that presented obvious challenges to ideas based on biblical understanding.

The epizootic occurred at a critical time with respect to germ theory, and also to ideas about evolution. In 1864, Charles Darwin was awarded the accolade of the Royal Society’s Copley Medal, and by 1866 Joseph Hooker could refer to Darwin’s new doctrine being the accepted gospel.⁹¹ The ‘gospel’ that was contained in Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859), however, did not consider the place of man in the evolutionary story—this came later, in *The Descent of Man* (1871). In the first half of the nineteenth century natural religion was widespread, following William Paley’s *Natural Theology* (required reading for Cambridge undergraduates, including Darwin, at the period), and there was no perceived religious/scientific divide in thought or subject matter; all was part of the same divine world order.⁹² One much debated issue was the mutability of species—the account of creation in Genesis was challenged by those like James Hutton who argued for evidence of slow, gradual change through geological time. While Darwin may have been convinced in the 1840s that species do evolve, his teacher and friend Charles Lyell did not finally agree until 1868, in the tenth edition of his influential *Principles of Geology*. Not least amongst the controversies Darwin finally provoked jointly with A. R. Wallace in 1858, after decades of geological and biological observations, were religious concerns voiced by scientists.

Arguments among the elite of the scientific community, however, probably had less immediate impact on ordinary people than ideas they had grown up with, and others acquired from contemporary newspapers, books, and perhaps especially the numerous periodicals of the time. Hugh Miller, geologist and churchman, from 1840 until 1856 edited the popular Edinburgh newspaper *The Witness*, writing on average 10,000 words a week on a wide variety of subjects, including at least once, ‘Mr Darwin, the Naturalist’.⁹³ Miller’s studies in ichthyology were of international importance, but he argued against gradual geological change or evolution, and

⁸⁹ G. Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1959), p. 197.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁹² D. W. Bebbington, ‘Henry Drummond, evangelicalism and science’, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol. XXVIII (1998), pp. 129–48: 133.

⁹³ Shortland, *Hugh Miller*, p. 303, citing *The Witness*, 29 Jan. 1840.

accepted the need for both natural and revealed (biblical) theology. His writings continued to be collected and published or re-published posthumously into the 1860s and well beyond. He criticised those he termed the English Evangelical Party, whom he believed lacked the moral courage to face up to new geological findings. Miller's robustly expressed views were presumably relevant to his many readers—at least some of whom were called to humiliation and prayer in 1866.

Around the middle of the century, then, science for some people apparently provided no reason to doubt the contents of the Bible; in the 1860s and 70s, some Presbyterians at least simply absorbed the new ideas: Robert Rainy (Free Church) in 1874 reportedly could conceive of no extended evolutionary ideas that could undermine natural theology.⁹⁴ Others in the decades following Darwin sought to reformulate aspects of the faith in the light of the new understanding, while some accepted certain ideas while rejecting those concerning man.⁹⁵ The plague outbreak seems to have just preceded the beginnings of separation between the two cultures of science and religion.

Some faithful Scots—the better informed and percipient—may have been concerned in the 1860s about Darwin's innovative ideas that challenged traditional biblical beliefs, and one would expect that the clergy might have been foremost amongst these. The ministers' leadership role was central in the life of nineteenth-century congregations⁹⁶, and presumably paramount under circumstances of crisis. The wording of the Assembly Commission motion about the cattle plague makes it quite clear that they acknowledged the hand of God in the calamity, and that the imperative response from the faithful was for all to humble themselves under God's righteous judgements, and to repent of sin. Generations of Scottish Presbyterians drilled in the Shorter Catechism in parish and Sunday schools knew that confession of sins was one element of prayer. Across Scotland, the people responded; no questioning of belief and tradition was outwardly evident in the observance of humiliation and prayer, and it is doubtful if in fact many who attended services on 29 March 1866 harboured inner doubts regarding the rightness and efficacy of this action.

Conclusion

In 2001 foot-and-mouth disease affected Britain, and measures similar to those that eventually halted the spread of rinderpest were imposed. Despite these, the outbreak lasted months. Involvement of the Church of Scotland included a working party that examined a wide range of relevant issues. Pastoral concerns included practical support for affected communities, although visiting was impossible; throughout Scotland congregations prayed and offered financial help; and Governmental resourcing was questioned, all while recalling the

⁹⁴ Bebbington, 'Henry Drummond', p. 135.

⁹⁵ Cheyne, *Church History*, p. 191.

⁹⁶ F. Bardgett, *Two Millennia of Church and Community in Orkney* (Durham, Pentland, 2000).

biblical basis for compassionate stewardship of land and livestock. Although pastoral care was emphasised rather than the attribution of God's righteous judgement, prayer remained an important part of the contemporary response.⁹⁷ The Roman Catholic Church responded with similar support through a network of organisations and a national relief fund. In March 2001 a letter from the eight Scottish bishops to the 500 parishes in Scotland requested the holding of special Masses or regular prayer services, as well as personal prayer, in connection with the crisis. Special services were thus a Catholic initiative at this time.

Reactions in the churches to cattle disease in twenty-first century Scotland were seemingly not so very different to those of the mid-1860s. As national disasters, epizootics still provoke reactions beyond merely practical, secular measures. In the nineteenth century, the Scottish Protestant churches presented the most united front, special effort being concentrated on one day, when they fell back on the traditional way of coping with disaster. State control, paradoxically, meant that overall the English response was less concerted, though some services in individual churches fulfilled diocesan requirements. The different Catholic tradition regarding fasting precluded a similar response, and as a somewhat insecure minority the Scottish Roman Catholic Church would doubtless have hesitated to designate blame for this national disaster, or suggest the public demonstration of contrition.⁹⁸ The seriousness of the situation was, however, recognised in practical support and prayer, possibly including the blessing of affected animals. Obedience to tradition prevailed in all the churches, which were united in the pressing need to respond to the best of their ability to this disastrous epizootic.

⁹⁷ *Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2002*, Church and Nation App. 3 (Edinburgh, Church of Scotland, 2002).

⁹⁸ Pers. comm., Br. Paschal, 8 Mar. 2005.