

New College, Edinburgh 1846-1996

~~The Spirit of New College~~

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It is never easy to define the essential characteristics of a great and long-established institution. In the case of New College, which has not only survived the changes and chances of over one and a half centuries but displayed throughout that time a vigorous and varied intellectual life, the task is particularly daunting. It seems likely, however, that the subject can be fruitfully approached by recounting – with all possible conciseness! – the history of the place from its beginnings down to the present day, in the hope that at least some of its enduring concerns and achievements may thereby be discovered. That, at any rate, is what will be attempted in the following paper.

The history of New College would seem to fall into two clearly distinguishable epochs, divided from each other by twentieth-century Scotland's most important ecclesiastical event: the Union in 1929 of the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland. That Union led, among other things, to the merger of New College (till then a basically denominational seminary, though of remarkably catholic sympathies and unusually ambitious intellectual pretensions) with the University of Edinburgh's Faculty of Divinity, and so ushered in the era in which we still live.

Each of these broad divisions – before 1929, and after – may be sub-divided into three shorter periods of time, almost as clear and hardly less significant. Our material therefore organises itself under the following six headings: Phase 1, the eighteen-forties and 'fifties (the early Victorian College); Phase 2, from the eighteen-sixties to the end of the nineteenth century (the mid- and late-Victorian College); Phase 3, from 1900 to 1929 (the United Free Church College, from Union with the United Presbyterians to Union with the Church of Scotland); Phase 4, from the nineteen-thirties into the nineteen-fifties (the College as some of the most senior among us first knew it, before, during and after the Second World War); Phase 5, the nineteen-sixties and 'seventies (when the long-term implications of the coalescence of Church College and University Faculty became increasingly evident); and Phase 6, the tumultuous 'eighties and 'nineties, better known to others than to me, but in which I discern a mingling of promise and menace in almost equal proportions.

During the summer of 1843 — the summer of the Disruption — the leaders of the infant Free Church of Scotland had much to think about, but the need for a theological college seems never to have been far from their minds.

On the opening day of the new body's first General Assembly, a committee was set up 'for providing means for the education of students for the ministry', and only a day or two later its members expressed the view that a Theological Faculty with a curriculum equal to that of Scotland's existing Theological Faculties was absolutely essential. At the beginning of July 1843 the first three professors – Chalmers, Welsh and Duncan - were named, to be followed soon after by Cunningham. That same month saw the purchase of 80, Queen Street, Edinburgh, 'for the accommodation of a college'.

Something more splendid and commodious than the Queen Street building was, however, quickly deemed necessary; and some three years later, on the third of June 1846, Principal Chalmers laid the foundation-stone of the New College on the Mound. The end of the beginning came in November 1850, when the opening of the just-completed establishment was celebrated with a three-day jamboree of sermons and addresses: by the serving Moderator, by Principal Cunningham (Chalmers' successor as head of the College), and by each of the professors, now seven in number.

There could be no doubt as to the main purpose of the new institution. Of primary concern to all its founders was what today would be called 'ministerial formation' - by which they understood not simply instruction in the practicalities of ministry but an all-round theological education in accordance with the highest possible academic standards. Graduation in Arts, it was assumed, would precede entrance upon Theology; and with Scottish Presbyterianism's traditionally intellectual bias the leaders of the Free Church were determined that the study of the classic disciplines (Old Testament, New Testament, Church History and Systematic Theology) should be carried on at University level, with all the appropriate rigour and range. Indeed, so intense was the desire to avoid all cultural narrowness, and to create what almost amounted to an alternative University on the Mound, that the original Senate included professors of Moral Philosophy, Logic and Natural Science as well as of the strictly theological disciplines; while the thrust towards excellence found expression in the despatch of Cunningham to the States in July 1843 to investigate 'the constitution and working of the most eminent of the American theological institutions'.

At the laying of the foundation-stone in June 1846, the College's *Ur-Vater*, Dr Chalmers, expressed thoughts about its future role which were almost certainly shared by all his associates. It would, he believed, perform two principal functions. First, by its instruction of ministerial candidates in the right understanding and right handling

of the Bible, it would provide both Church and country with 'that richest blessing, the blessing of well-filled pulpits and well-served parishes'. Second, by their participation in what he called 'the warfare of argument' its teachers would 'man the towers and bulwarks of the Church' and ward off 'the inroads both of infidelity and of heresy'. Phrased otherwise, he saw the College as a servant of the Church: the educator of its students and at the same time the proclaimer and defender of Christian truth by what he called 'an academic treatment in the hands of academic men'.

The intimate connection between College and Church which Chalmers hoped for was indubitably realised. Despite all its other commitments, the Free Church from the outset willingly assumed responsibility for the New College and everything connected therewith. The generosity of Church folk made possible the purchase of the Mound site; a small group of well-wishers was persuaded to donate what was then the very large sum of £20,000 to meet the basic building costs; almost half as much again was subscribed to pay off loans and unforeseen expenses; and while students' fees contributed greatly to the College's ordinary revenue, the backbone of its finances — from the eighteen-forties right through to the end of the nineteen-twenties – was the annual collection taken in the congregations of the Free, and later the United Free, Church. As Principal Hugh Watt put it in his invaluable centenary history, 'there was distinctly evidenced in the average member a determination that no future minister would be hampered through any remediable deficiency in his equipment'. Even in today's vastly altered circumstances it might be appropriate to remind New College's staff and students of the dictum: 'Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours'.

The Church's concern for its College found expression, naturally enough, in general oversight as well as in financial support. While internal discipline on the Mound was the business of the professors, they themselves were clearly answerable to the Church courts. Nominated and elected on the floor of the Assembly, they were inducted to their charges by the local presbytery. The courses they taught, and the views they expressed, were subject to Assembly scrutiny and the possibility of Assembly condemnation. We today may be horrified at such disregard for academic autonomy; but before censuring it too severely we should bear one or two considerations in mind. In those days there was much greater agreement on essentials, both inside and outside the Church, than now. If Robertson Smith discovered the limits of professorial freedom, A. B. Davidson and Marcus Dods were allowed to express opinions almost as radical as any we know today. And of course the scholarship produced by that long-abandoned system was not markedly inferior to our own: men like Cunningham, Rainy, Davidson, Dods, H. R. Mackintosh, A. R. McEwen and William Manson were chosen by arrangements more democratic than those now prevailing – and possibly just as reliable.

Which brings us to that aspect of New College life which the first generation would have rated more important – its worship only excepted – than anything else: I mean, the world-view inculcated there. For that, we turn to the professors. David Welsh died as early as 1845, and Chalmers followed him some two years later. The character of the place was therefore largely determined by those who survived them and taught successive generations of students from the eighteenth-forties right on into the eighteen-sixties: John ('Rabbi') Duncan, who professed Hebrew and Old Testament; Alexander Black, New Testament; James Buchanan and James Bannerman, Divinity; and William Cunningham, Ecclesiastical History. All strike me as more 'hard-line' in their theology than either Welsh or Chalmers.

Duncan almost defies categorisation. Of formidable linguistic expertise, with eccentricity to match, and self-described as 'a philosophical sceptic who has taken refuge in theology', he was a mystic and a poet rather than a dogmatist. Yet even at his most imaginative and rhapsodical he professed a veneration for the letter of Scripture which even his more down-to-earth, scholastically-minded colleagues could not exceed. Black, who figures in the Free Church Fasti as 'a man of vast erudition ... able to correspond in nineteen languages and converse in twelve', published little; but the tenor of all his teaching may be gauged from the affirmation which he made during the 1850 lecture-marathon, that 'The doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Word of God ... constitutes the very basis of sound theological study.' Buchanan was a celebrated preacher in the traditional mould before ever he came to New College. Thereafter he published a succession of weighty treatises on Christian doctrine which justify his description as 'a Reformed theologian of the old school'. Bannerman, who had risen to prominence during the pre-Disruption Ten Years' Conflict, later published elaborate and exhaustive studies in the fields of ecclesiology and pneumatology – the latter being hailed, quite recently, as 'a magisterial presentation of the concept of the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture.'

But it is Cunningham who more than any other embodies the conservative, combatively orthodox, high Calvinism of New College in its earliest phase. An out-and-out admirer of the great Genevan reformer ('there is', he declared, 'probably not one among the sons of men ... who has stronger claims upon our veneration and gratitude'), he was a doughty controversialist whose enemies ranged from Arians, Socinians, Arminians and –of course – Papists to various modern deviants. He believed that 'the whole Bible is composed, even as to the words of which it consists, through the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit', and argued that no future developments in theology could endanger the work of Protestantism's founding fathers and the great seventeenth-century Puritans. Today, many regard him, with some justification, as a bigot and a din-raiser; yet he was also warm-

hearted, truly learned, and an inspiring teacher, and Marcus Dods (no uncritical admirer) aptly named him 'Grand Councillor and Senator of the Free Church of Scotland.'

Led by men like Cunningham and his colleagues, New College in its earliest days was marked by a fierce and self-sacrificing loyalty to old-style Protestantism, to the distinctive principles and piety of the Free Church of Scotland, and to an unyieldingly strict interpretation of Biblical authority; and on that loyalty its international renown was built.

Cunningham died in 1861. In 1862 Robert Rainy succeeded him in the Chair of Ecclesiastical History, and in 1863 A. B. Davidson was appointed to the Old Testament Chair. Between them Rainy and Davidson dominated the College from then until the beginning of this century; and under their aegis took place the momentous transition from the theological conservatism of Cunningham and his coadjutors to the liberal Evangelicalism of the second phase of our history.

Of course, countervailing forces were also at work during those mid- and late-Victorian years, as even to mention the names of George Smeaton, Alexander Duff, James Macgregor and Thomas Smith should make plain. Nor was the intellectual revolution the only development of importance. Rich financial resources were steadily accumulated, chief among them being the Cunningham Fellowships, the Craigfoodie bequest of David Meldrum and the Book Scheme which helped many an impecunious student to lay the foundations of a theological library. Two new teaching posts were instituted: the Chair of Evangelistic Theology, whose first occupant was the veteran missionary pioneer, Alexander Duff, and the Fulton Lectureship in Elocution, which did something to improve the manner if not the content of Scottish preaching. The eighteen-seventies saw the birth of Professor W. G. Blaikie's brainchild, the College Dinner: a notable enhancer of the community spirit. And no history of New College would be complete without a mention of the increasingly professional Home Mission work carried on by the student body, first in the West Port area of Edinburgh, then in the Cowgate, and finally (with residential accommodation from the 'nineties onwards) in the Pleasance.

But it was the theological transformation effected by Davidson and Rainy – assisted, during the last decade of the century, by Marcus Dods – that won the College widespread acclaim (and notoriety) and made it such an exciting place in which to study.

Of all the influences at work in this transformation the most important was undoubtedly a greatly heightened historical awareness. Rainy's Cunningham Lectures of 1873, entitled *The Delivery and Development of Christian Doctrine*, contain the following sentence: 'In our day ... what meets us is the question, "How will you face and what will you make of history ..?"' His Old Testament colleague, Davidson, tacitly posed the same question, and answered it in a life-time of teaching and writing dedicated to the advocacy and exemplification of the critico-historical approach to Holy Scripture. As one of his contemporaries put it: 'For him, the historical delivery of the Old Testament was authoritative as truly as the contents; and the divine meaning was not to be ascertained without a critical knowledge of the original speakers and circumstances. Upon that basis, modest and humble though it was, great doctrinal superstructures might be raised. But the critical ... basis of fact must first be laid.'

Armed with this conviction, Davidson brought the literature of the Old Testament dramatically, indeed electrifyingly to life, and altered forever his students' attitude to the Bible as a whole. They now came to regard it not so much as a quarry of texts easily removable from their original setting, or a compendium of dogmatic propositions, but as the record of a particular people – its life and its literature – over many centuries; and the conviction dawned upon them that in respecting Church traditions and confessional deliverances less than what the text actually said they were returning to the faith and practice of the sixteenth-century reformers at their best. Of course (as I have pointed out elsewhere) there were dangers in the new approach. It could foster the view that the Bible was for literary and historical experts only. It could be warped by naturalistic or positivist presuppositions – or represented as coming 'in paper parcels from Germany'. It could reduce 'the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture' to shifting sands. But to those who adopted it there came a sense of liberation and a belief that the Bible's riches were being opened up in a manner scarcely conceivable under the old ordering of things. That revolutionary novelty, believing criticism, had found a home in New College: a home from which it has never subsequently been evicted.

The fusion of faith and critical scholarship may well have been the College's main achievement during the mid- and late-Victorian period. Many difficulties were created for Christian belief by the advances then being made in the realms of geology, biology and history. But as one thinks not only of Davidson but of Rainy's London lectures on *The Bible and Criticism* (1878), his inaugural address as Principal on 'Evolution and Theology', and the sermon he preached on 'Faith and Science' during the University's tercentenary celebrations ten years later, as well as of Dods' great commentaries in the *Expositor's Bible* series, one is inclined to agree with Principal Oswald Dykes of Cambridge's Westminster College when he affirmed (in 1900) that 'It was ... the [New College] teachers' awareness of all the current problems in their latest form, combined with their unshakeable loyalty to the Catholic and Evangelical faith, that continued to draw the constant stream of questing students from many Churches.' One also begins to appreciate the distinctive character, and the value, of New College's contribution to nineteenth-century life and thought.

In many respects the third (or United Free Church) phase of the College's history, which spans the years from the Church Union of 1900 to the still greater Union of 1929, can be regarded as a continuation of the second.

The scholarly eminence of the teachers was in no way diminished. In the first decade of the new century the loss of Davidson, Rainy and Dods was compensated for by the advent of A. R. McEwen, the masterly biographer of the Erskines and John Cairns and author of a two-volume history, still useful, of the pre-Reformation Scottish Kirk; of H. R. Mackintosh, his country's most distinguished theologian (with Robert Flint and W. P. Paterson) between Cunningham and John Baillie; and of Harry Kennedy, a pioneering scholar who anticipated later work on the Greek of the New Testament, eschatology, the mystery religions, and the theology of the Epistles. Along with them should be mentioned the variously-gifted J. Y. Simpson, last in the line of our professors of Natural Science. They were joined, in the years just before and just after the First World War, by Adam Welch, an Altestamentier who brilliantly combined many of the characteristics of his predecessors, Duncan and Davidson, and Hugh Watt, the archetypal 'college man' and chronicler of its history. It would be hard to think of any other theological institution in Great Britain which possessed a more able body of scholars and teachers.

Again, there was no dimming of the College's reputation as a centre of 'believing criticism' — now embodied in three very remarkable Principals: Dods, Whyte and Martin. Having survived a full-scale heresy trial at the outset of his professorial career, Dods went on to publish an influential summary of the Liberal-Evangelical position in *The Bible: Its Origin and Nature* (1905), and his summons to follow Rainy as head of the College in 1907 indicated the Church's implicit approval of his views. Alexander Whyte was, with R. S. Candlish (his predecessor as minister of Free St. George's Church in Edinburgh), the only pastor of a congregation to be called to the Principalship. As every reader of the biography by G. F. Barbour will know, he was a striking blend of the Evangelical and the Liberal. Admirer of the Puritan divines and supporter of Moody and Sankey, he had also signed a student petition in favour of A. B. Davidson's appointment as professor and — later in his career — spoken eloquently in Assembly on Robertson Smith's behalf. Succeeding Dods as Principal in 1909, he once declared his belief that 'the true Catholic ... is the well-read, the open-minded, the hospitable-hearted, the spiritually-exercised Evangelical'. As for Alexander Martin, Professor of Apologetics and Pastoral Theology from 1897 to 1927 and Principal from 1918 to 1935, this son of a staunch Free Churchman was more responsible than anyone else on the United Free Church side for the Union with the Church of Scotland in 1929. Like John Baillie after him, he had grown out of traditional Calvinism into a freer theological air; but his essential position is epitomised in the title of his Cunningham Lectures, *The Finality of Jesus for Faith*.

Union with the United Presbyterian Church brought a certain enrichment in the way of financial and other resources. The Jubilee Celebrations at the same time (1900) inspired a host of physical improvements, including the construction of the Rainy Hall and opening of new classrooms in the Ramsay Lane area. The curriculum was extended to include lectures on a number of previously neglected subjects: religious education, sociology, Church praise and — rather more innovative — 'The Bible in Literature'. From 1902, a 'School for Christian Workers' operated through evening classes. And just after the 1914-18 War the New College professors collaborated with the University's Divinity Faculty and other colleges in the city to establish a Post-Graduate School of Theology which would eventually bring a great influx of research students to Edinburgh.

So far, so good; but two real disasters — one of relatively local concern, the other of global magnitude — darkened the scene between the beginning of the century and the end of its second decade.

The first was a direct result of the much celebrated Union of the Free Church with the United Presbyterians which brought the United Free Church into existence in 1900. Horrified by what they saw as an abandonment of Disruption principles, a tiny minority of Free Churchmen laid claim, as the rightful heirs of Chalmers and his associates, to the entire property of the pre-Union Free Church — and in August 1904 the supreme court of appeal, the House of Lords, gave judgement in their favour. The ruling proved impossible to carry out, and eventually Parliament had to intervene to secure a more equitable settlement. But for the New College community — whose entire complex of buildings had to be vacated — the immediate consequences were dire. Between October 1904 and January 1907 alternative accommodation had to be found, partly in the Pleasance Settlement and partly in the University. Moreover, even after the premises had been recovered the endowments built up over several decades were seriously depleted by enforced transfers to the continuing Free Church. The expansive mood of 1900 was perhaps never recovered.

Though less instantly devastating, the First World War marked an even more significant divide in the College's history. Not only were classes decimated as students enlisted and replacements dwindled away. Some men never came back. Along with all the other losses of that world-shattering conflict must also be reckoned the optimism which had characterised the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods. 'Never glad confident morning again', and a more sober mood infused the Churches and their theology. At the same time, war-time exigencies undoubtedly drew the different religious bodies closer together, leading *inter alia* to increased cooperation between New College and the University's Faculty of Divinity. The way was being paved not only for Scotland's great Church Union of 1929 but also for that fusion of College and Faculty which opened a new era for them both.

The fourth phase of our history covers almost exactly one quarter of a century, from the Union of 1929 to the mid-'fifties (or, if you like, from ten years before the Second World War to ten years after it).

Among the teachers, many of the previous generation continued to play an influential part. The torch, however, was passing to younger figures like Hugh Watt, William Manson, Daniel Lamont and John Burleigh; and to my mind the determinative years were the mid-'thirties, when — in quick succession — came the appointments of John Baillie (in 1934), G. T. Thomson (in 1936), and Oliver Rankin and Norman Porteous (in 1937). The period drew to a close with the arrival of James Barr in 1955 and John McIntyre in 1956, though Tom Torrance had come as early as 1950 and Matthew Black in 1952.

It is, of course, the Union of the Churches, with the consequential merger of New College and Edinburgh University's Faculty of Divinity, which gives its character to this fourth phase. The implications for New College were indicated in a section of the Churches' Basis and Plan of Union' entitled, 'Relation of Divinity Halls to the University'. Among its provisions were the following:-

- that statutory tests for theological Chairs in the University be abolished;
- that 'electoral boards' equally representative of Church and University be set up to make appointments to Chairs — with the requirement of a 2/3 majority decision to ensure that no Chair could be filled by someone unacceptable to the Church;
- that the United Free Church professors become professors in the Faculty of Divinity;
- that students preparing for the ministry be matriculated students of the University;
- that New College be maintained as a college of the united Church for the use of the enlarged Faculty.

These provisions were gradually put into effect by a succession of parliamentary acts and binding agreements between Church and University which extended from the Universities (Scotland) Act of Parliament in 1932 and the Agreement between Church and University in 1933 to an important Order in Council in 1952. The result was a combination of the resources of College and Faculty which had important consequences for staffing, physical environment and general ethos.

As far as staffing was concerned, the incorporation of four New College Chairs in the University Faculty, and the concentration of all theological teaching on the Mound, meant that by the end of the 'thirties the refashioned institute could boast of nine professors — though that did not last long. Appointments to all Chairs were now the work of a Board of Nomination on which Church and University were equally represented, and the new symbiosis found striking expression when Professor W. A. Curtis (Dean since 1928) assumed the joint office of Dean and Principal in 1935.

What the post-Union state of affairs would mean for the College's physical aspect was not so immediately evident. The Church still retained ownership and control of the buildings, though making them freely available to the University for Faculty of Divinity purposes. In the long run, a huge financial responsibility was transferred from Church to University; but in the first decade or so the University may well have seemed the greater beneficiary. New College's library had always been one of its finest assets; but more adequate accommodation for the ever-expanding store of books became available when the former Free High congregation moved from its home on the east side of the main quadrangle to a new location elsewhere in the city. The consequent rehousing of the library — a massive exercise on any reckoning — was completed in 1936. The old stockrooms were released for use as classrooms and examination rooms; the old library hall became the Martin Hall; and in essentials the College approximated the lay-out still recognisable today.

The spirit of the place also underwent changes. For one thing, within the Evangelical consensus of the teachers tensions gradually emerged between Baillie's moderate Liberalism and G. T. Thomson's campaigning Barthianism — though from his appointment in 1946 J. S. Stewart (whose preaching fame attracted hosts of Americans and others) was perhaps a mediating influence. For another, as the conviction grew that professional training for the Church's ministry must be conducted with all the technical expertise that only a University could supply, so what was coming to be called 'Practical Theology' began to play an increasing role in the curriculum. Most significant of all, while the College's commitment to the service of the Kirk remained unquestionable — between 1930 and 1950 three professors (Mackintosh in 1932, Baillie in 1943, and Watt in 1950) were called to the Moderatorship — it became less identifiably denominational in character than ever before. Indeed, one could even argue that there was a certain turning-away from ecclesiastical to more distinctly academic concerns. As John McIntyre, looking back, later pointed out, the union of College and Faculty had involved an amalgamation of two views of theological education, the Church-directed and the University-directed, but the end was not yet: 'it remained to be seen whether the amalgam was to be theologically credible, or whether one ... of the components would claim superiority.'

Some fairly notable accessions to the staff ushered in the fifth phase of the College's existence. Senior figures from earlier *days*, Burleigh, Porteous and Stewart, were of course still active and influential well into the 'sixties. But in addition to Torrance and McIntyre a further cohort of younger men came to Chairs: George Anderson (Old Testament) in 1962, Cheyne (Ecclesiastical History) in 1964, Blackie (Christian Ethics and Practical Theology) and Hugh Anderson (New Testament) in 1966. The transformation which took place between the early 'sixties and the late 'seventies was no doubt partly due to them. Yet with hindsight one can see that forces greater than any individual or group of individuals were at work. The harvest of the Union of the Churches had pretty well been gathered in by this time, and decisions made in the worlds of politics and academia were as responsible as ecclesiastical events and interests for the way things developed.

Supremely important were the consequences of a Report on Higher Education produced between 1961 and 1964 by a committee under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins. New universities came into being, older ones were encouraged to expand and diversify; and among the institutions affected, financially and in other ways, was Edinburgh University's Faculty of Divinity. An article in the very first number of *New College Bulletin* (Easter 1964) conveys the forward-looking temper of the time. After outlining an impressive range of developments, contemplated or already under way, which included a new degree structure and refurbished buildings, it ended optimistically – thus: 'We have every reason to believe that, as a result of the Robbins Report and the will of the government to put it into effect as soon as possible, our hopes will be fulfilled and our plans implemented sooner than we had once thought possible.'

An early sign of the current expansionism was given in staffing arrangements. In addition to the professors, a number of lecturers made their appearance: ten full-time, seven part-time by 1964. A little later, student numbers began to rise, from a total of 212 in 1966 to 314 in 1975. The degree structure was also completely refashioned. The B.D. could now be taken either as an Ordinary degree (without previous qualifications in Arts) or with Honours; and students began to be enrolled for a new M.Th. degree and for various Diplomas and Certificates. Alongside these changes, moreover, innovative teaching methods were introduced: duplicated course outlines, seminars, project and role-play groups, field work.

The increase in staff and the new educational techniques were accompanied by equally significant changes in the physical environment. As already noted, New College continued to be the property of the Church of Scotland even after all the Faculty of Divinity's activities had been re-located there. For a number of reasons, this did not prove entirely satisfactory; and the eventual solution – decided

on as early as 1961, but not fully implemented until more than a decade later – was the legal conveyance of the College and adjacent properties from the Church to the University, with the crucial proviso that if an acceptable course of training for Church of Scotland candidates were not provided by the Faculty the buildings should revert to Church ownership. The full import of the transfer did not become immediately obvious. Its physical consequences were soon evident in completely renovated, much more 'user-friendly' accommodation. The library at the heart of the College found itself immeasurably better supported, with a larger staff and a professional librarian in charge. But along with these relatively straight-forward changes came others that were subtler and more far-reaching.

As portentous as any was the introduction – again, in the early 'seventies – of new degrees (B.A. and M.A.) in Religious Studies. Drawing on the resources not only of the Divinity Faculty but of a number of Departments in Arts and Social Sciences as well, these degrees provided an opportunity to study all the major world religions together with a variety of approaches to religion, in well-nigh every conceivable permutation and combination. For some years, recruitment was slow; but in time increasing numbers of students were attracted. As a result, the College gradually became more closely linked with the University, and less exclusively a home for future ministers studying Christian theology, than ever before.

At the same time as the rise of Religious Studies was undermining the old identification of theological with ministerial education, a new approach to the latter also began to be adopted. By the end of the 'seventies, Willie Tindal's successor as Professor of Practical Theology, Jim Blackie, had inspired and overseen a radical transformation of the subject, so that when his successor, Duncan Forrester, took over in 1979 he could sum up the attitude which he and Blackie shared as follows: 'In the modern world it is not enough to pass on an accepted and recognised pattern of ministerial practice; ministers must be enabled to think critically and theologically about their work, to innovate, and to respond creatively and faithfully to unprecedented situations.' And he added, even more significantly, that 'Practical Theology must interact, not only with other theological disciplines but with sociology, social work, medicine, counselling, psychiatry, and so on.'

Before we leave New College in the 'sixties and 'seventies, a word must be said about the growing spirit of ecumenism discernible there. It had always been an outward-looking place, as well as a kind of mecca for Evangelical Protestants around the world. The first great Missionary Conference ('Edinburgh 1910') met in the Assembly Hall nearby, and its secretary, J. H. Oldham, had studied there. With the creation of the Postgraduate School of Theology in 1919 it began to attract researchers from a very wide spread of Churches and countries. One of the College's most eminent Principals, John Baillie, became a President of the

World Council of Churches; Baillie, Burleigh, Tindal and Torrance were all signatories of the so-called 'Bishops Report'; and although inter-Church relations suffered something of a setback thereafter, several members of staff kept the ecumenical flame burning. John McIntyre fraternised with Anselm scholars at Bec, and Tom Torrance dedicated one of his publications 'To the Church of Scotland, the Church of my father, and the Church of England, the Church of my mother and my wife, that they may soon be one.'

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that special relationships began to be formed with (among others) the Scottish Episcopal College, the Dominican house in Edinburgh, and the Roman Catholic seminary at Drygrange in the Borders. Most striking of all, clergy and laity from non-Presbyterian denominations began to be appointed to teaching posts: John Zizioulas of the Orthodox tradition, Robin Gill from the Church of England, and Noel O'Donoghue from Irish Catholicism (to name only a few). What William Cunningham would have had to say to all this must be left to the imagination, but one suspects that the generous-minded Chalmers might well have given it his approval.

No period in the College's history has seen a more perplexing blend of encouragement and discouragement, the welcome and the regrettable, than that which began around 1979 with the retirement of Tom Torrance and the appointment of James Mackey to succeed him — as well as the departure to St. Andrews of Bill Shaw (first non-professorial member of staff to hold the joint office of Principal and Dean) and the arrival in Practical Theology of Duncan Forrester.

This latest phase has not lacked its accessions of teaching strength and academic prestige. The well-established exchange of students with the University of Tübingen was followed by a similar arrangement with Dartmouth College in the U.S.A.. Soon afterwards, the Centre for the Study of Theology and Public Issues was set up 'to encourage work on the interface between theology and the Churches and social issues of the day.' Then two remarkable transfers of personnel and resources were effected. The Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World came south from Aberdeen under its Director, Andrew Walls, and quickly built up a strong lecturing team as well as acquiring a new professorial post. About the same time, Glasgow's Principles of Religion specialists moved east — one of them, Alistair Kee, being subsequently promoted to a Personal Chair. Meanwhile the Department of Ecclesiastical History, greatly weakened by New Zealand's capture of its Reformation expert, Peter Matheson, was fortunate enough to attract the munificent endowment of the Laing Lectureship in Reformation History and Thought. In 1986, New Testament was compensated for the grievous loss of Hugh Anderson by the arrival of that 'benign hurricane', John O'Neill. In 1987, the Chair of Ecclesiastical History, left vacant since my own demission, was happily filled by Stewart Brown from the U.S.A., author of the finest modern study of Thomas Chalmers. And within the last year or two the College's standing in the University and beyond has been enhanced by the appointment of Principal Sir Stewart Sutherland to a Personal Chair in the Philosophy of Religion and by the launching of the *Edinburgh Review of Theology and Religion*.

These causes for satisfaction have, however, been counter-balanced by several problematic or even positively distressing developments, some at least connected with the 'market philosophy' of central government. Drastic financial cut-backs, and the proliferation of burdensome systems of assessment and control, have damaged staff morale and limited teaching effectiveness. Inadequate funding has kept vacant the Hebrew and Old Testament Chair since George Anderson's retirement in 1984 and the Divinity Chair since John McIntyre's in 1986. Departing lecturers have not been replaced, and courses have had to be withdrawn. The phenomenal rise in student numbers to over 500 in 1995, un-met by a proportionate increase in the teaching staff, has created a host of difficulties. And the extraordinary heterogeneity of the student body since the boom in Religious Studies has raised quite fundamental questions about the College's purpose and identity.

To some within the Church of Scotland, an early harbinger of trouble came with the appointment of James Mackey, a laicised Roman Catholic priest, to the Thomas Chalmers Chair of Theology. A tumult of protest arose from disgruntled Presbyterians, and fundamental questions were posed. Had the Board of Nomination gone beyond its powers? Should the terms of association between Church and University be re-negotiated? Was it perhaps time, as in 1843, for the Church to go its own way and reclaim unfettered freedom — and onerous responsibility — in the management of ministerial education? In the end, that particular storm blew itself out. The General Assembly of 1980 acknowledged that Edinburgh's Board of Nomination had acted according to the procedure laid down by the Universities (Scotland) Act of 1932. It also indicated general satisfaction with the way in which appointments were made to established theological Chairs, and expressed disapproval of 'any suggestions which might impair the good relations which exist between the Church and the Universities.'

So far, so good; but the winds of change continued to buffet those who hankered after a College like that presided over by John Baillie or Alexander Martin, not to mention Rainy or Cunningham. The Church no longer seemed able to produce really high-quality candidates for professorial Chairs, so that time and again selection committees had to look beyond it for their choice. Its over-all say in appointments, moreover, was steadily decreasing — partly because of finance-driven University decisions to keep certain established Chairs vacant, partly because of a growth in the number of lectureships and personal Chairs (neither of which required approval by a Board of Nomination with its statutory quorum of Church representatives.) And of course the ever-declining ratio of ordinands to other students made its own contribution to the gradual emergence of a less Church-orientated, almost certainly more 'secular' climate of opinion in the College.

Try as it may, the Church has found no solution for these problems. The most important attempt — made by a special Assembly committee which met at the end of the 'eighties under the chairmanship of Principal Johnston of Heriot-Watt University — avoided the wilder suggestions that had been made: for example, the proposal that the Church itself might undertake the funding of vacant Chairs or lectureships was dismissed outright. But for the rest it confined itself to expressing confidence in the basic good-will of the University authorities, to reminding all parties of the legal settlement that had been negotiated in the aftermath of the 1929 Union, and to emphasising the very considerable advantages of that settlement. And its final response to all who, from the Mackey appointment onwards, had longed for the pre-Union state of affairs — an exclusively Church-funded, Church-managed College — was given in these dismissive if eminently realistic words: 'it would be inadvisable to tamper with existing legislation.'

With that pronouncement and its somewhat lukewarm and grudging acceptance of the existing order, our tale draws near its end. The historian is not a prophet, at least in the predictive sense; and only a very bold or a very foolish person would dare to foretell the future, short-term or long-term, of New College. 'It may be that the gulfs will wash us down: It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles.' Yet the temptation to conclude with one or two brief comments and one or two modest hopes is irresistible.

The story has been of unceasing — sometimes almost overwhelming — change, so that *semper eadem* is not a claim which even the College's most enthusiastic admirers would make for it. Perhaps we should simply console ourselves with Newman's assertion that 'In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often!' Nevertheless I believe that through our every mutation certain over-arching continuities are to be discerned.

The fourfold task of the University (Professor Pelikan of Yale has recently reminded us) may be described thus: to advance knowledge through research, to transmit knowledge through teaching, to preserve knowledge in scholarly collections, and to diffuse knowledge through publishing. New College has proved deficient in none of these. When one thinks of the service rendered to the *preservation* of knowledge by our inconvenient but marvellous library, one is inclined to rate it the College's crowning glory. But then one remembers the remarkable succession of outstanding scholars and teachers who have adorned the place throughout its one hundred and fifty years: the peerless Chalmers, for example, of whom David Masson observed that 'merely to look at him day after day was a liberal education'; or Cunningham with his 'luminous and powerful mind' and his 'all-informed intellect' (to quote Marcus Dods yet once more); or Davidson, whose treatment of every subject, according to S. R. Driver, was always masterly and judicial, yet whose teaching was such that 'on the great lecture days' students 'came down from the top-storey classroom to the Common Hall moved' (so his biographer reports) 'with feelings of pity and awe, thrilled with aspirations of faith and hope'; or the omniscient Rainy, described by Gladstone as 'unquestionably the greatest of living Scotsmen', dominating the College as he dominated the Church for over thirty years; or H. R. Mackintosh, one of the very select band of Scottish divines to be awarded a D.D. by Oxford University; or Adam Welch, whose lectures could reach such heights of intensity that (so we are told) 'note-taking became a sacrilege' and 'every pen was laid aside and men sat awestruck and in silence'; or my own teacher, John Baillie — erudite, judicious, humane, master of a beautifully lucid, almost poetic literary style, and able (as George Newlands has recently reminded us) to combine openness to liberal scholarship with unapologetic devotion. We have indeed known giants in these parts.

Besides advancing, transmitting and preserving knowledge, New College has also played a worthy part in its diffusion through published works. Here notice may be taken of the constant stream of high-quality writings that has spread its name across the world: Cunningham's weighty volumes and Davidson's pioneering articles and reviews; the brilliant polemic of Rainy's *Three Lectures on the Church of Scotland*; the fresh and authoritative New Testament studies by Marcus Dods, Harry Kennedy and William Manson; A. R. McEwen's perceptive cameo of eighteenth-century Scottish Dissent, *The Erskines*; H. R. Mackintosh's classics, *The Doctrine of the Person of Christ* and *Types of Modern Theology*; Adam Welch's powerful challenges to received opinion in Old Testament scholarship; J. S. Stewart's eloquent Cunningham Lectures, *A Man in Christ*; John Baillie's *Our Knowledge of God*, *The Idea of Revelation* and *The Sense of the Presence of God*; and John Burleigh's standard survey, *A Church History of Scotland*; — together with more recent works from which it would be invidious to select. There is no denying the solid worth of the College's scholarly achievement.

That the scholarship will continue to flourish is a fair certainty. But alongside it there has always existed a dedication to the service of Christ and His Church without which New College would never have come into existence or survived for over one hundred and fifty years. In one of the most interesting and persuasive articles contributed to the sesquicentennial volume, *Development to Diversity*, Dr. Gary Badcock contends that 'the milieu of faith, and specifically faith as conceived in the Scottish Reformed tradition, is what has made and makes New College what it is.' He goes on to argue that out of this distinctive religious understanding has come 'not only the College's commitment to learning but also its international outlook, its placing of worship at the heart of community life, its stress on the centrality of Biblical authority, its pastorally-oriented theology, its openness to all the insights derivable from other disciplines, other systems of thought, other values, and its tradition of acting as a "clearing-house" for theological ideas.' It is very hard to disagree.

Take away the Faith, and allegiance to it, and not much that is characteristic of the New College story would remain — just as service rendered to the Church and support received in return are among its constant themes. One small instance of this is the fact that every single decade since the eighteen-forties has seen a member of the College staff being called to Moderatorship of the General Assembly. More important, religious commitment has been a prevailing feature of all the College's most influential leaders from the eighteen-forties onward. Remember how it was 'the Christian good of Scotland' to which Chalmers dedicated his life; how Davidson once pleaded for 'a clear-cut Christianity, standing out sharp against the sky, with a chasm between it and the world'; how Rainy, on call to Huntly Free Church at the outset of his career, declared, 'I can honestly say that to be a minister

of the Free Church is an honour I would not exchange for anything earthly'; how Adam Welch, whose life was not lacking in tragedy, nevertheless remarked, 'I am not conscious of any time when I did not know that I was surrounded by stately dependabilities'; and how John Baillie, after analysing his own early experiences, concluded, 'I stand now, as I stood then, under the sovereign constraint of One who has never ceased to make it known to me that He claimed me for His own and required me for His service ... I have no choice but to set my feet upon the pilgrim's way.' At New College, godliness and good learning, devotion and intellectual acuity, have never been far apart.

To the merits of this conjunction numerous visitors have borne witness over the years. 'Used to the more or less anonymous atmosphere in a crowd of nearly one thousand divinity students', a young woman from Heidelberg wrote recently, 'I found a lively community of people not only studying together but trying to build up a Christian community as well — by daily prayers, various commitments outside the Faculty, a common meal. I would not have been able to experience this at home.' And a member of the teaching staff at Dartmouth has told how his charges found in New College 'what they had been told to expect, but did not really expect: namely, the attitude of faith and commitment which is not only proper but essential to a first-rate theological Faculty.'

Will the tradition continue into a new century? One is sometimes a little fearful. As early as 1850, Professor Campbell Fraser (soon to move to the Chair of Logic in the University) issued a warning. 'This', he said, 'like other institutions, may stand while there is a work in society for it to do, and while it is honestly doing the work, by truly creating and guiding opinion and wielding a moral force. But when the work is done or left undone, neither old endowments and associations, nor ecclesiastical or civil patronage and power, can make head against the great law of the universe, which either gradually or suddenly sweeps it away!' Fifty years later, at the Jubilee Celebrations of 1900, Oswald Dykes cut even closer to the bone. 'Let the divinity school', he counselled, 'once be severed from the practical uses it had to serve, let theology be cultivated as a purely intellectual or scientific interest, let their divines cease to be themselves men of God, or let those studies which are vital to the Church fall into the hands of scholars who were aliens from the faith which they investigated, ... and they stood in danger of a theology barren because undevout, unprofitable to the souls of men. No greater calamity could befall the Church.'

Whether Dykes and Campbell Fraser were scaremongers, or not, and whether the ideals they shared with innumerable servants and friends of New College, then and now, were deserving of survival, must be left to the present generation of staff and students, and their successors, to decide. But it would

be ungracious and inappropriate to end on such a hesitating or minatory note. Our strongest feelings at this ter-jubilee celebration must be of gratitude for the past and modest confidence for the future; and I cannot do better than express them in the words of one of our ablest and best loved *alumni*, the late Professor Alan Lewis. 'To the benefit of its associates far beyond our personal deserts', he wrote in 1987, 'the college enjoys an admiration and affection that sometimes seems to verge on awe. And rightly so: for while no-one who knows us from the inside would romanticise our present reality, or even our past, we do know how much of our history is a little awesome, and how much there is today to be excited by, as of tomorrow to be hopeful for.'