Donald Ross: A Soteriological Retrospective

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# Contents

Who was Donald Ross? ................................................................. 4

*Early life* ................................................................................ 4

*An evangelist* ........................................................................... 5

*A Brethren founder* ................................................................. 7

Does Ross’ doctrine of salvation really matter? ................................. 9

*Calvinism* ............................................................................... 10

*Arminianism* .......................................................................... 10

*Biblical priority of the gospel and evangelism* ................................. 10

*Testimony of other believers* .................................................. 11

*Significance of evangelism and challenge of soteriology to Revival Brethren* .................................................................. 13

Theological foundation ................................................................ 14

*Foundation built* ...................................................................... 14

*Foundation tested by contrary doctrine* ...................................... 16

*Foundation tested by a new ecclesiology* ................................. 18

*Foundation tested by critics* ................................................... 19

*Foundation stands* .................................................................. 20

Influencers .................................................................................. 20

*Thomas Chalmers* .................................................................... 21

*John MacDonald* ...................................................................... 22

*John Caldwell* .......................................................................... 23

*Duncan Matheson* .................................................................... 27

Response to Morisonianism .......................................................... 30

*Understanding Morisonianism* .................................................. 30

*Ross responds* ......................................................................... 32

*Morisonianism infiltrates Brethren* .......................................... 35

In his own words ........................................................................ 36

*Total depravity or total inability* ............................................... 36

*Unconditional election, and the efficacious call of the Spirit or irresistible grace* ........................................ 38

*Particular redemption or limited atonement* ............................... 45

*Unpacking the “Fifth Point”* ...................................................... 47

*Perseverance of the saints or the security of believers* .............. 51
Dissonance? ................................................................................................. 51

Modified Calvinism model ........................................................................... 53
Essential Calvinism model ........................................................................... 54
Case study: John Darby ................................................................................. 54
Case study: William Kelly .............................................................................. 57
Case study: Charles Mackintosh ................................................................. 58
Conclusion ...................................................................................................... 60
Bibliography ................................................................................................ 62
Index ............................................................................................................. 68
Evangelism has always been a key if not even distinguishing feature of those who may be called “Revival Brethren”—though now an evangelism that typically repels Calvinism with suspicion or even hostility. In what might be their most fundamental doctrinal reversal in 150 years, could this evangelism now practiced by Revival Brethren really be anchored to a different doctrinal base than at their beginnings in the late 19th century? Should the unexcelled founding evangelistic success of Donald Ross, their most prominent early leader, inspire interest in restoration of the original doctrinal foundation? Rather than face these provocative questions head-on, this paper will focus on a question on which they build: was Donald Ross a Calvinist?

Who was Donald Ross?

Donald Ross is the key founding figure among Revival Brethren and is their preeminent evangelist even to this day. A significant justification for Revival Brethren interest in carefully working through the question of whether Ross was a extraordinary significance of Ross to Calvinist is made once this them is established.

Early life

Born in 1824 in Alness Parish, Ross-Duncan and Grace, staunchly Presbyterian Church of Scotland by John Knox, Donald Ross became a time in the adjacent Rosskeen old established church during the personal cost the more evangelical Free Church of Scotland formed in the secession. A few years after marrying Margaret Leslie from nearby Creich Parish in 1847, Ross moved south to Edinburgh where he began public evangelistic work while an elder in a church founded in an infamously crime-infested poor district there by Thomas Chalmers, the famed leader of the secession. In 1857, with his growing family

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1 As used throughout this paper, the term Revival Brethren refers to a loose communion of Christian congregations generally identified with the Open stream of Plymouth Brethren holding an independent polity against the distinctive federated polity of Exclusive Brethren, yet in particular, those Open Brethren with historical ties more directly to Scotland and the 1859 Revival than to the older English center in Bristol—including nearly all Open Brethren in Scotland, Northern Ireland and North America. Revival Brethren, then, would overlap with an assortment of other designations like Gospel Hall Brethren, Bible Chapel Brethren, Christian Brethren, Tight and Loose Brethren, Wide-Open and Closed-Open Brethren (their typically quixotic disdain for names actually fueling such imaginative and confusing variety).

Dickson, Brethren in Scotland, is currently the best resource for understanding the Scottish roots of Revival Brethren. Grass, Gathering to His Name, is today’s leading Open Brethren history. For a more comprehensive Brethren history, consult Coad, History of the Brethren.

2 Ross, Donald Ross, 14-15.

3 Ross was converted on the southeast slope of Cnoc Navie, probably on Thursday, July 12th, 1838 (others give age 15, as in Ross, Donald Ross, 18,99, but this cannot be resolved with information of greater weight directly attributable to Ross).
Donald Ross: A Soteriological Retrospective

(he and Margaret would ultimately have thirteen children together),
Ross moved to Newmains (near Glasgow), a Central Lowlands industrial center, where the former police officer had been invited to become engaged in evangelism full-time—a new occupation he pursued with life-long enthusiasm.

An evangelist

Soon after, Ross helped organize then led the Northeast Coast Mission centered in Aberdeen from 1858 to 1870 during the period commonly known as the Third Great Awakening or the 1859 Revival, maintaining a very close personal relationship with the widely known free-ranging Presbyterian evangelist Duncan Matheson during this time. As superintendent of this mission, Ross recruited a group of over twenty missionaries under his leadership. Ross’ occupational change was timely and his energy in pursuit of his new career as an evangelist greatly rewarded. In his first annual report to the Northeast Coast Mission board, Ross wrote of events in 1859,

> At Bervie, Gourdon, Downies, Cove, St. Combs, Inverallochy, Cairnbulg and Broadsea the blessing has descended; waters have broken out in the wilderness and streams in the desert. At the present time there are hundreds crying, “What must we do to be saved?”

Emphasizing lasting results that indicated something far different than mere inflated revivalist sensationalism operating at this time, Donald Munro, one of Ross’ early mission recruits and continuing close companion later told of Ross’ evangelistic work at this time,

> Thousands of souls were led to Christ and continued to be living witnesses of the mighty power and grace of God...

> ...we have often heard Mr. Ross say that he believed there was not a house [in Ferryden] but God entered and someone was saved, in not a few instances whole households.

> ...in Ferryden, Footdee, Cairnbulg, and Inverallochy, such was the great power of God with the Word preached, and the impressions of eternal realities that fell upon the people, that all secular employment was stopped, and for weeks scarcely a boat put out to sea...

George Masson, another mission recruit and later Brethren leader, wrote similarly of the response to Ross’ preaching in the coastal fishing village of Footdee on the outskirts of Aberdeen in incidents stretching throughout the 1860s,

> Between two and three hundred villagers gathered on the third day to hear the singing and the preaching, which were at once simple and powerful. The windows of heaven soon opened in blessing; the village was inundated; and the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters. Probably about a tenth part of the

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4 These included (in birth order) [ … ] Hughina, Helory, Mary, [ … ] Walter, Charles, Margaret, Petricia and Jemima. See Norwalk, Dill, Ross and Related Families Genealogies, 647–667, for further genealogical information.
5 In time, among many others, this group included Donald Munro, John Gill, George Masson, Alex Carnie, Andrew Allan, James Dewar, Andrew Baxter, James Scroggie, John Wallace, William Downie, John Taylor, William Elphinstone, John Hay, Thomas Buglass, John Johnston, Robert Annan, John Campbell and John McGaw.
6 Ross, Donald Ross, 136. This report was given on January 31st, 1860; and, like all that would follow, publicly read by Ross at the annual meeting of the mission held in the Music Hall Buildings, Aberdeen, and reported in the Aberdeen Journal. One of the mission directors early on was the well-known scholar then in Aberdeen, Alfred Edersheim.
7 Ross, Donald Ross, 102.
dwellers in the village during the months of February and March [1861] were delivered from out of the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love.

...[in early 1862] there was another remarkable and gracious and far more reaching moving of the Spirit of God among the fisher people...the news of such mighty spiritual work, stamped with signature divine, travelled over the north of Scotland...

...there fell from a heaven of blessing a locally unprecedented, or since unequalled, deluge. In the month of February [1869], two deaths in the village had seemingly touched the consciences of many. One afternoon, at the Sunday school, to the astonishment of the teachers, all the children broke down, crying for salvation...soul-trouble soon swept over the village. Mr. Ross, who was laboring at some of the Kincardineshire villages at the time, came quickly on the scene. The fishermen, because of deep inward conviction, were unable to go to sea; their fleet of yawls was beached, and lay uncared for during five or six weeks. Men, women, and children were seen at all times of the day dropping on their knees—indeed, oftentimes lying full-length—on the snow-covered ground, crying for mercy. Donald Ross and Andrew Allan preached with unction to a nightly overcrowded “school”, while to those unable to gain admittance (for the Aberdeen townspeople flocked to the village) the Gospel was proclaimed in several of the fishermen’s houses. At least three meetings were conducted simultaneously each night during the months of March and April, 1869. Mr. Ross estimated that about six hundred souls passed out of darkness into light during those six weeks.8

He soon encountered resistance to his evangelistic enterprise from church leaders—and that not only as he might have expected by anti-evangelical moderates in the established Church of Scotland, but also by some who proved only nominally evangelical in the Free Church. Moreover, Ross was disturbed by a lack of churches to which he was happy to recommend his converts go, becoming increasingly disillusioned by congregations he saw infiltrated by unbelievers even among his own Free Church denomination, many of which churches, in apparent vindication of his concerns, would later succumb to rank heresy as we shall see.9

Ross finally resigned from the Northeast Coast Mission in early 1870, founded and led an independent group of over a dozen men in the short-lived wider-ranging Northern Evangelistic Society, and soon broke away entirely from the Free Kirk just before in the summer of 1871 he joined a small nonconformist congregation of believers in Aberdeen who had for a short while been meeting along the principles of the independent branch of Brethren.10

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8 Ross, Donald Ross, 138-142. Ross looked back at this time as the pinnacle of his evangelistic career (Ross, Our Record, June 1898, 96). Then as at other times he was said to have underestimated results (Ritchie, Believer’s Magazine, April 1903, 47).

9 The present Free Church of Scotland, it should be noted in contrast, is the result of a group of committed evangelicals refusing to enter a union with a more liberal majority party in the Free Church. Personality and methodology within the NECM and later NES may have added to Ross’ conflict at this time. Doctrinally, his views on assurance (but never fundamental soteriology) may have also contributed to the tension.

10 Ross, Donald Ross, 54-55,114-117,193. Rice Hopkins (born a Congregationalist but probably early familiar with Brethren, being raised a son of a journalist in Plymouth where he had been a student under the Brethren textual scholar Samuel Tregelles in the aftermath of the massive 1848 split of the 700-plus member Brethren “mega-church” there that had gained considerable regional attention) had by 1868 with John Boswell founded Brethren assemblies in the Orkney Islands (Stromness, Harray and Westray). About 1869, Hopkins, who migrated to Australia in 1882, and Samuel Blow, both greatly influenced by C. H. Spurgeon in the early 1860s, founded the small Open Brethren assembly in Aberdeen. Brethren assemblies also founded in Peterhead (in 1868 through Blow
After a move back to Edinburgh in 1874, Ross migrated to America in 1878 following a visit in 1876, settling primarily in Chicago in residences east of Union Park and west of the newly rebuilt burnt district during a period of wildly unprecedented expansion for the city that billed itself as the “metropolis of the West". Later, through much of the 1890s, with significant time also spent in Portland and San Francisco, Ross made Kansas City, another centrally located urban hub, the strategic base for his geographically widespread interests.

His far-flung influence in a steam-powered world without automobiles and airplanes—even during his lifetime—ultimately stretched from his native Scotland to other parts of Great Britain, coast-to-coast across the United States, throughout Canada, to as far as Australia and New Zealand.\(^\text{11}\)

John Ritchie, a long-time acquaintance, convert through Ross’ Northern Evangelistic Society and subsequent founder of a leading Brethren publishing house\(^\text{12}\) reflected on Ross’ evangelistic legacy.

> Few men in [his] generation have “obtained help [of] God” to accomplish the work he did. From the northeast of Scotland, from its neglected inland villages and distant parishes, from the mining villages of Midlothian, and, later, from the American continent, thousands of gather around the throne, who convicted of sin, and converted to ministry.\(^\text{13}\)

Ross expended the majority of his single-mindedly pouring himself into evangelism. His intrepid enthusiasm often sick and almost always 79\(^{\text{th}}\) birthday in Savannah, Georgia, colorfully described it—evangelizing far from the comfort of his home. Fittingly inscribed on the stone marking his grave on the east bank of the Desplaines in Chicago’s historic Forest Home Cemetery are Jesus’ words, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”, \textit{Jn} 3:3, KJV.

\begin{quote}
\textit{A Brethren founder}
\end{quote}

Evidence of his influence and also of the great industry Ross poured into his work are furnished by the many periodicals he founded, edited and published through his lifetime including \textit{The Northern Witness}, later \textit{The Witness}, arguably the most widely circulated and influential Brethren magazine ever

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\(^\text{11}\) Ross, \textit{Donald Ross}, 99.

\(^\text{12}\) John Ritchie, Kilmarnock, has continuously published the \textit{Believer’s Magazine}, an influential Brethren monthly with worldwide circulation, since 1891. John Ritchie founded the magazine, editing it until his death in 1930.

\(^\text{13}\) Ross, \textit{Donald Ross}, 183. The estimates by Ritchie and Munro for thousands of converts through Ross were not private intimations made in a heady revivalist excitement, but were discerning public reflections on the results of Ross’ lifetime of evangelism by acknowledged \textit{Revival Brethren} leaders.
published;\textsuperscript{14} The Northern Evangelist, an evangelistic paper; The Northern Youth, for children; The Northern Assemblies, especially meant for new church plants; and not least, the Brethren magazine Barley Cake, later Our Record, edited after his move to America with The Ram’s Horn, later The Testimony, yet another evangelistic paper. To this work, impressive enough in its own right, Ross added the establishment and operation of book depots in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow (later becoming Pickering & Inglis, a leading Brethren publisher for most of a century) and finally Chicago.

Of Ross’ significance in the founding and establishment of Revival Brethren assemblies—by whatever name they would later be known—there should be no doubt. Ross, a gifted leader, acted on a strategic grasp of those unifying means that would prove so useful in growing a communion of Brethren assemblies. The pattern of these simple yet powerful means is still very much identifiable today— itinerant preachers, magazines, conferences, and hymnbooks—all provided then as now a shared structure regulating and supporting a community of like-minded churches.

Ross was a leader of leaders, a significant itinerant Brethren preacher himself who employed a deliberate and effective geographic strategy in planting and growing churches while exerting a powerful influence over a large number of other such men\textsuperscript{15} (building on his earlier leadership experience as a Presbyterian). One of his magazines, Our Record, was the first and only of its kind for a quarter century that supported the young rapidly expanding Open Brethren community of assemblies across North America with news and teaching—exerting a uniquely powerful normative effect among them.\textsuperscript{16} He was a key figure in establishing Brethren conferences and in supporting them as a prominent speaker,\textsuperscript{17} and he edited, published and distributed a number of widely used hymnbooks, helping to shape even the hymnody within the communion.\textsuperscript{18}

On the occasion of Ross’ death, then, it is not surprising to see remembrances like the following published in worldwide Brethren periodicals.

His success was tremendous. He awoke a gale and sounded a blast that disturbed and shook the north of Scotland from the Grampians to the shores of Caithness. In the course of a few years [after 1869], [Open

\textsuperscript{14} Founded by Ross in 1870 as The Northern Evangelistic Intelligencer, the magazine changed its name to The Northern Intelligencer in 1873, later The Northern Witness in 1875, and after Ross passed the editorship to J. R. Caldwell in 1876, it became The Witness in 1887 (an overdue reflection of its broadening influence), with the editorship passing on to Henry Pickering in 1914 at a monthly circulation of 16,000. It was long regard

\textsuperscript{15} Ross, Donald Ross, 36,104-105; Dickson, William J. McClure, 29-31,231; Ritchie James Campbell, 12-13,15-17,20,28. Just a few of those strongly influenced by Ross were Donald Munro and Robert Telfer (Toronto), John Smith (Cleveland), James W. Smith (Aberdeen and Belfast), Thomas D. W. Muir (Detroit), Caleb J. Baker and Charles W. Ross (Chicago and Kansas City), Charles Montgomery (San Francisco), John Gill (Boston), John Ritchie and John R. Caldwell (Glasgow area), James Goodfellow (London, Ontario area), James Campbell (Belfast) and William J. McClure (Oakland).

\textsuperscript{16} Ross, Our Record, December 1898, 177. Ross also supported these assemblies in their formative years with books and other teaching and evangelistic resources from his Chicago-based Bible and Tract Repository.

\textsuperscript{17} Ross, Donald Ross, 119,174-175,223-225,229.

\textsuperscript{18} Ross, Barley Cake, December 1881, 192. Ross had compiled a “Gospel Hymn Book” for use in America by the end of 1881, the first edition of a number of such hymnbooks.
Brethren] assemblies were to be found throughout the whole country, most of them founded either directly or indirectly through the service of our departed brother.19

More recently, historians Tim Grass, Kenneth Jeffrey and Neil Dickson have upheld this appraisal of Ross’ impact on Scotland.

In Scotland, the evangelist who did most to shape the Brethren movement was Donald Ross.20

...the work of Donald Ross, a chief evangelist of the 1859 revival, was primarily responsible for the expansion of the Open Brethren in the northeast of Scotland.21

It was due to Ross’ influence that the Brethren movement was established in the [northeast of Scotland].22

Across the Atlantic, similar assessments are to be found indicating that of those to whom Open Brethren in North America “owe their origins”, Ross is chief of their number.23 Further substantiation of this impressive claim of Ross’ founding impact on the Brethren movement is provided by Ross McLaren in his master’s thesis at Vanderbilt.

The Open Brethren movement in North America did not begin until the 1870s and centered not in those who historically or theologically descended from Bristol [and George Müller], but in a group of men probably better called “Revival Brethren” clustered around Donald Ross of Scotland.24

Donald Ross is undeniably a key founding figure that should be of keen interest to Revival Brethren everywhere. Adding to this his powerful influence on other founding evangelists that circled the globe together with his own passionate life-long commitment to evangelism that by reliable accounts was itself directly instrumental in the conversion of thousands, and surely his views on doctrines at the very foundation of his evangelism are entitled to be considered worthy of attention.

Does Ross’ doctrine of salvation really matter?

Admitting the importance of Ross to Revival Brethren, does it really follow that his potential Calvinism is a matter of importance too? Before establishing this, a clear definition of just what a Calvinist is will be necessary. This paper simply defines a Calvinist as a person holding a doctrine of salvation, a soteriology, better described by the primary definition of Calvinism over against Arminianism as given below.

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19 Scott, Believer’s Magazine, May 1903, 58-59. Charles Ross substantiated Scott’s claim by including it in his father’s biography (Ross, Donald Ross, 196-197).
20 Grass, Gathering to His Name, 142.
21 Jeffrey, When the Lord Walked the Land, 226.
22 Dickson, Brethren in Scotland, 91,97. Dickson adds that over a scant two years, 1871-1873, an astonishing 28 Brethren assemblies in the Aberdeenshire alone were planted through Ross’ influence (and beyond this many others in the Banffshire, Morayshire and many other regions stretching even to the north of England; see Ross, Donald Ross, 114-116).
23 Crawford, Assembly Truth, 29-34. Norman Crawford, a Revival Brethren leader, held at the time of this claim probably the largest Ross manuscript collection extant.
Calvinism

A concise primary definition of monergistic Calvinism is provided by Steele, Thomas and Quinn in their widely read work on Calvinism.

Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, and the Holy Spirit makes Christ’s death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus, God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.25

J. I. Packer, leading conservative evangelical Anglican theologian and General Editor of the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible, warned against equating Calvinism with five points on the mere fact that there were five Arminian points for the Synod of Dort to answer, but rather, really, only one great point.

This is the one point of Calvinistic soteriology which the “five points” are concerned to establish and Arminianism in all its forms to deny: namely, that sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present and future is of the Lord, to whom be glory for ever; amen.26

C. H. Spurgeon, probably still the best-known English evangelist to this day, was even more concise,

If anyone should ask me what I mean by a Calvinist, I should reply, "He is one who says, Salvation is of the Lord."27

Arminianism

The contrasting primary definition of synergistic Arminianism, again by Steele, Thomas and Quinn follows.

Salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God (who takes the initiative) and man (who must respond)—man’s response being the determining factor. God has provided salvation for everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who, of their own free will, choose to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the crucial point, man’s will plays a decisive role; thus, man, not God, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.28

Armed with this common basic understanding of Calvinism together with a background of Ross’ significance, then, can it be established that the nature of Ross’ soteriology should actually matter to Revival Brethren?

Biblical priority of the gospel and evangelism

The first argument for this relevance proceeds most importantly from the biblical priority of the gospel and evangelism.

25 Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, Five Points, 8. Italics (but not color) are original.
26 Packer, Introductory Essay, 6.
28 Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, Five Points, 8. Italics (but not color) are original.
Jesus regally declared after his resurrection “all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me”, Mt 28:18 esv, and then, explicitly based on this highest possible authority, immediately gave his disciples throughout this age the command to evangelize.

We give God glory in evangelism, “…tell of [the LORD’s] salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!”, Ps 96:2-3 esv, and thus express our love and devotion to Him. Furthermore, a believer’s highest fulfillment of the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself”, Mt 19:19 esv, relating to unbelievers around them is surely found in evangelism—it being to their greatest need and for their greatest good. Thus we can connect evangelism, in loving God and neighbor, to what Jesus said were the greatest commandments (Mt 22:34-40).

The gospel was to Paul, the evangelist, of “first importance”, 1Co 15:3 esv, and any corruption of the gospel message, the evangel, he condemned in the strongest possible terms (Gal 1:6-9).

Since we can readily see the biblical importance of the gospel and evangelism, it is clear that this importance extends to foundational doctrines that are essential to them—including soteriology, to which our question about Ross directly pertains.

Testimony of other believers

The second argument for the relevance of our question is that it touches on a subject of grave importance to many godly and respected believers.

B. B. Warfield, last of the great Princeton theologians in the conservative tradition of Jonathan Edwards, wrote in 1894,

> Why make much of minor points of difference between those who serve the one Christ? Because a pure gospel is worth preserving…

Warfield’s bold and well-known claim that “Evangelicalism stands and falls with Calvinism” was re-stated even more forcefully by James Boice, writing with urgency as he faced his death, “the gospel of grace stands or falls with the doctrines of grace”. Such earnest claims from these respected leaders connecting the gospel to doctrine should motivate interest in our question—even if only to dispute them.

If Revival Brethren were to complain that Presbyterians like Warfield and Boice were somehow not representing issues relevant to them, this would betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel as functionally a sectarian concern. Moreover, Hamilton Smith, an English Exclusive and leading Brethren figure, claimed in 1930 that,

> In spite of much evangelical zeal is it not painfully evident that [the] Open Brethren movement...has been largely neutralized by the introduction of an easy-going system of free-will...

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30 Boice and Ryken, Doctrines of Grace, 180.
By mainly confining their efforts to evangelical activity in proclaiming a gospel—largely reduced to meeting man’s need, and which appeals to the general run of Christians—the Open Brethren appear to have let slip the distinguishing truths of Christianity...  

Whether we agree with Smith’s stinging criticism or not, his claim adds motivation to explore an answer to our question. An answer could credit or discredit Smith’s controversial claim that Arminianism had intruded into Revival Brethren evangelism to the extent of “neutralizing” it by no later than about the 1st quarter of the 20th century.

What have other respected believers said that might add even more interest in answering our question?

J. I. Packer connected Calvinistic soteriology to sturdy, healthy evangelism writing in one of his best-known works,

...faith in the sovereignty of God’s government and grace is the only thing that can sustain [evangelism], for it is the only thing that can give us the resilience that we need if we are to evangelize boldly and persistently, and not be daunted by temporary setbacks. So far from being weakened by this faith, therefore, evangelism will inevitably be weak and lack staying power without it.

Criticizing fundamentalists for their imbalanced emphasis on separatism coupled with inattentiveness to soteriology on which shifting ground they had built an eager but ill-supported evangelism in the early 20th century, Iain Murray, assistant and biographer of the famed Welsh preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, wrote,

...the fundamentalist movement had itself unwittingly adopted ideas of more recent origin. Its statements of belief were brief and lacking the doctrinal coherence to be found in the churches at an earlier date. Its evangelism, while praiseworthy for its earnestness, was generally Arminian. Its policy was too occupied with war on modernism, and, sometimes, with war on denominations. Most who took the name of fundamentalist gave a high priority to separatism and advocated a policy of “come-out-ism”.

C. H. Spurgeon wrote plainly of the gospel he preached being inseparably identified with Calvinism—and that any other doctrinal basis fundamentally eroded the core gospel message,

The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach to-day, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth; I know of no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox’s gospel is my gospel. That which thundered through Scotland must thunder through England again.

I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith, without works; nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are

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31 Smith, Open Brethren, n.p. The Open Brethren to whom Smith referred encompassed Revival Brethren.  
32 Packer, Evangelism, 10.  
33 Murray, Evangelicalism Divided, 17.
called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus. Such a gospel I abhor.\textsuperscript{34}

With such a breadth of passionate, challenging, and perhaps even surprising testimony from trusted believers added, motivation for answering our question of Ross’ Calvinism (whether true or false) is already convincing—yet there is more reason for our study.

**Significance of evangelism and challenge of soteriology to Revival Brethren**

With origins arising from the 1859 Revival, founding men being noted evangelists, many local church buildings still called “Gospel Halls” or “Gospel Chapels”, many congregations holding weekly gospel meetings, and with itinerant evangelists, foreign missions, and missionaries among whom are heroes like F. S. Arnot and Jim Elliot,\textsuperscript{35} the evangelistic heritage and continuing significance of evangelism to Revival Brethren is easily demonstrated. Going even further, historian Tim Grass sees the 1859 Revival as having cast Open Brethren as a movement “whose primary raison d’être was evangelism”.\textsuperscript{36}

Linked with this core and historic emphasis on evangelism are growing signs of underlying soteriological polarization among Revival Brethren. While overwhelmingly Arminian today, many of their assemblies are Calvinist with many others frankly disinterested, ambivalent or simply confused. An international Revival Brethren bookseller, illustrating such confusion, promotes on their website a very select number of “featured authors”, with blithe incoherency recommending Dave Hunt (ex-Brethren Continuationist and militant Arminian)\textsuperscript{37} together with John Blanchard (a Baptist Calvinist). Hunt’s strident attack on Calvinism, *What Love is This?*, has been positively reviewed in *Uplook*, a popular Revival Brethren magazine with a decidedly Arminian editorial outlook.\textsuperscript{38} Yet in stark contradiction, the same work has come under withering criticism for its shoddy scholarship and destructive misrepresentations of Calvinism from the *Emmaus Journal*, a respected academic publication of a Revival Brethren Bible

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\textsuperscript{35} *Frederick Arnot* (1858-1914), famous pioneer missionary and explorer who followed David Livingstone into Central Africa. *Jim Elliot* (1927-1956), missionary killed with four others evangelizing the Waodani people in Ecuador also known for his saying, “he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose”.

\textsuperscript{36} Grass, *Gathering to His Name*, 131. Coad, another significant Brethren historian agrees: “the [1859] revival turned [Open] Brethren very largely into a ‘gospel mission’ movement” (Coad, *History of the Brethren*, 184).

\textsuperscript{37} Hunt, *Berean Call*, September 2005, 5-6. A radical four-point Arminian, Hunt here not only claims that Calvinism is heretical, but that those who are brought to faith through this “false gospel” are actually not truly saved! Were such a militant claim true, this would come as quite unwelcome news to *Revival Brethren*, presumably, who would then need to reconcile to the sad irony that their leading evangelist, Donald Ross, was deceived rather than converted on Cnoc Navie—similar to all those raised and only seemingly converted as conservative Presbyterians. Hunt was excommunicated from a Brethren church in 1966 for his non-Cessationist charismatic leanings and has long maintained close ties with the Calvary Chapel movement. Hunt and Blanchard are two of only four featured authors (excluding the proprietor’s self-recommendation) at [www.penfoldbooks.com](http://www.penfoldbooks.com) at the time of writing.

\textsuperscript{38} Shantz, *Uplook*, July/August 2003, 20. This periodical, the successor to *Our Record*, has interestingly taken a completely inverted position on soteriology relative to its predecessor (compare, for instance, Case, *Our Record*, October 1898, 145-149 with Nicholson, *Uplook*, October 1999, 2,9).
college. An editor for the *Emmaus Journal*, Mark Stevenson, sees Arminian antagonism against Calvinists among *Revival Brethren* trending “more aggressive and alarmist” in recent years. The threat of this volatile doctrinal divide is only broadened by the emphasis on evangelism among them.

Clarity then about the soteriology on which Ross’ founding evangelism was built is much more than relevant, but quite possibly even crucial in taking on the doctrinal challenges supporting an area of continuing prominence among *Revival Brethren*.

Combining the biblical priority of the gospel and evangelism with the witness of respected believers and both the significance of evangelism and increasing challenge of soteriology to *Revival Brethren*, the evidence for the question of Ross’ Calvinism being a worthwhile matter to *Revival Brethren* is conclusive.

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**Theological foundation**

A study of Ross’ theological roots will be especially helpful in beginning to build an understanding of his soteriology.

**Foundation built**

One of Donald Ross’ brothers described their parent’s conservative Presbyterian home as one “characterized by puritanic piety and exemplary godliness” in which “instruction from the Bible and the Shorter Catechism was thoroughly inculcated”. In fact, their parents, his father a parish school teacher, spent time with them every Sunday afternoon teaching the doctrines of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. This kind of instruction in the catechism practiced through those days in the hardy Ross-shire was not a mere simplistic surface treatment tacked onto vacant rote memorization, but a repetitive deep systematic and careful exposition, question by question, followed by a “minute and searching examination” of the catechist’s understanding. So thorough was Donald’s doctrinal embrace and encyclopedic knowledge of it, that his closest friend, Presbyterian evangelist Duncan Matheson, would later describe him as “the walking Shorter Catechism”.

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39 Stevenson, *Emmaus Journal*, Summer 2006. As an institution, it should be noted, Emmaus Bible College has deliberately avoided taking an official position on Calvinism vs. Arminianism out of regard to the spectrum of belief in its constituency.


41 Ross, *Donald Ross*, 10. In this, Ross’ parents (like many others; Ritchie, *Donald Munro*, 8,90) were following a long Scottish practice instituted by John Knox in his *Book of Discipline* in which Sunday afternoons were to be spent catechizing children. Much prior to the catechism prepared by the Westminster Assembly used in Ross’ home, this would have been Calvin’s catechism as earlier published by Knox in his *Genevan Book of Order*.


43 Ross, *Donald Ross*, 130. That by this description he underscored more than mere knowledge can be demonstrated by Matheson’s recommendation of the Shorter Catechism for careful remedial study by those teaching doctrine inconsistent with it (Macpherson, *Duncan Matheson*, 234). Thus Matheson, who frequently heard Ross preach, and himself a Calvinist, would certainly not have publicly commended Ross with this expression if Ross’ doctrine, which he knew better than anyone at that time, was not notably consonant with the Shorter Catechism—even by the relatively conservative standards of Highland Calvinism.
Note the particular Calvinistic emphasis of the following questions and answers from the Shorter Catechism that forged Ross’ theology.\textsuperscript{44}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the state of sin and misery?</td>
<td>God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?</td>
<td>We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?</td>
<td>The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. What is effectual calling?</td>
<td>Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?</td>
<td>The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86. What is faith in Jesus Christ?</td>
<td>Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87. What is repentance unto life?</td>
<td>Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89. How is the Word made effectual to salvation?</td>
<td>The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This catechism, prepared by the Westminster Assembly in 1647, was adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1648, by the Presbyterian Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1788, and by nearly all Calvinistic Presbyterian and Congregational churches of the English tongue.

While it may risk laboring the obvious, perhaps it is still worthwhile to briefly point out the distinctively Calvinistic teaching contained in this famous catechism. First, it teaches that election is according to God’s \textit{mere} good pleasure, not from foreseen faith or merit in his elect, the objects of his grace. It teaches that God’s covenant purpose is to bring these elect persons to salvation. It teaches that this salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit—not merely as a contributor, but as an \textit{efficient} cause. It also teaches that faith is the Spirit’s work in those who are \textit{effectually} called. While it teaches that the gospel is \textit{freely offered}, repentance and faith are gracious gifts of the Spirit by whom the will is renewed and an \textit{effectual} persuading enablement to receive Christ given. Finally, it teaches that through God’s grace, his elect persevere to the end.

This is the substance of Ross’ soteriology he held his whole life.

\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Boyd, Shorter Catechism}. Italics are added.
Foundation tested by contrary doctrine

Through his life, however, Ross would have this soteriological foundation thoroughly tested by competing doctrines. Ross widely read and studied many standard works on theology in his younger days, and encountered first-hand many divergent doctrinal streams during his lifetime—a theologically turbulent period in history.

Ross was exposed in his late teens to the first Arminian offshoot from Scottish Presbyterianism, the Evangelical Union, an institution of the movement known locally as “Morisonianism” to which was attached considerable notoriety. We will examine Ross’ repudiation of this movement later.

At that same time, in 1843, events culminated in what is generally called the Disruption. The issues precipitating this great schism in the Church of Scotland officially had to do with state control or Erastianism—but at least as significantly had to do with tension between anti-evangelical Moderates (who accepted state control) and Evangelicals (who didn’t). The Moderates had controlled the University of St Andrews from the late 18th century, and their chilling influence there is aptly summarized by Thomas Chalmers.

We [students] inhaled not a distaste only but a positive dislike for all that is properly and peculiarly gospel.

Many of these students, Chalmers among them, graduated and received ordination to preach—while still unconverted—populating pulpits throughout Scotland with this “positive dislike” for the gospel. Chalmers, later transformed after his conversion, however, went on to lead the staunchly Calvinistic Evangelical party in the Disruption, forming the Free Church of Scotland, of which Ross and his family were long members. Ross shared both Chalmers’ ultimate zeal for evangelism, and as we shall see, Chalmers’ soteriology too—rejecting Moderatism and remaining secure on his doctrinal foundation.

Shortly after Chalmers’ death in 1847—certainly by the late 1870s—an imported German liberalism began to be popularized—infesting Established and, more disturbingly, many once conservative Free congregations too. This was an era too when Westminster Calvinism was losing its grip in Scotland. Briefly surveying the revolutionary events in these mere three decades following Chalmers’ death, The New York Times asked with some alarm, “stands Scotland where she did?”

Since the days of Dr. Chalmers, Scottish Presbyterianism has been undergoing changes. The old issues between Covenanters and Anti-burghers and United Original Secessionists have passed away and new ones

45 Ross, Donald Ross, 103. Ross would continue to value such authorities as Calvin’s Institutes and Justin Martyr’s Apology (see, for instance, Ross, Barley Cake, November 1881, 165-168, and Ross, Barley Cake, March 1881, 32).
46 Ross, Donald Ross, 86-89.
47 When Ross’ father Duncan confessed “Jesus the King” (Ross, Donald Ross, 15), it meant in this Erastian context that he rejected the young Queen Victoria as head of his church—words willingly proven with costly personal sacrifice to his heavenly Monarch.
49 Ross, Donald Ross, 30-33.
50 A dramatic surrender of the historic belief in the inerrancy of Scripture had been underway in Scotland since the 1850s through Andrew B. Davidson (influenced by the German critics Ewald and Wellhausen) and popularized from 1875 onward under William R. Smith and others like Alexander B. Bruce, Henry Drummond, Marcus Dodds and George A. Smith.
have succeeded them. The questions that are paramount now are doctrinal questions. Although Dr. Chalmers was the chief leader in the Free Church movement, he preached a milder and more attractive Calvinism than the old divines, and his successor, as the head of the Scottish Pulpit, Dr. Norman McLeod, departed so far from the traditional theology of Westminster as to be repeatedly threatened for heresy, even in the tolerant [Established] Kirk.

In a generation, there has been almost a revolution in theological opinion in Scotland...there is no doubt that all the Scottish Churches are holding to-day to a modified Calvinism...[but] even in the Free Church, the most conservative of them all, opinion has undergone [significant] change...it is evident that there is a tendency toward rationalism, which would be much more unwelcome than evangelical Arminianism.  

The Brethren perspective on the situation late in this period is bluntly represented in letters written by their leading figure, John Darby, in 1877.

...the flood of infidelity that presses all around...has broken out in the Free Kirk of Scotland, so that the whole question of the authority of the Bible is in question there...unless the Free Kirk act decidedly, its influence is gone for all godly people

...infidelity is rampant...[James] McCosh has warned the Free Church of Scotland that it is a crisis, as I told them, which they denied, and recommends the rationalists to leave, but they are too cunning and not honest enough for that

We are in England, and even more in Scotland, assailed with infidelity and attacks on Scripture, the Free Church being especially prominent in retailing German infidelity.

Throughout this period of seismic doctrinal upheaval, Ross remained firmly anchored to his theological foundation, with no evidence that his soteriology gave way under influence of either a general departure from Westminster orthodoxy or of the duped exponents of then fashionable German liberalism. In fact, the Calvinist Presbyterian evangelist, mentor and close personal friend of Ross, Duncan Matheson, commended him as “sound in the faith” and his Westminster theology as “sound as a bell” as he introduced Ross on one occasion to a largely Presbyterian audience that Ross then addressed on the topic of election. Ross believed “most firmly” in these foundational Reformed doctrines, and condemned the liberal theology that swept through Scotland.

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51 The New York Times, July 6, 1879, 6. The “milder and more attractive” Calvinism attributed to Chalmers approached a low Calvinist Amyraldism—see page 47 (Unpacking the “Fifth Point”) for a description of these terms. McLeod, who died in 1872, had attempted a middle position in the Disruption and was noted for departure from Westminster Calvinism in both teaching and practice.


53 Murray, A Scottish Christian Heritage, 367-396. Ironically, many of these new Scottish liberals thought that their liberalism would help Scottish churches and the cause of evangelism—rather than kill them and it as history now shows. Many of these liberals saw no inconsistency in their enthusiastic support of Moody’s three campaigns in Scotland.

54 Ross, Donald Ross, 130.

55 Ross, Donald Ross, 107.

56 Wylie, The Northern Witness, September 1879, 135-141. Ross’ views are well represented by Wylie’s forceful criticism of William R. Smith; see also Ross, Donald Ross, 133.
Donald Ross: A Soteriological Retrospective

Foundation tested by a new ecclesiology

Ross certainly had his reasons when, in 1871, he separated from the Free Church, joining a nonconformist Brethren church in Aberdeen. Those reasons, however, never included any expression of dissatisfaction with his conservative Presbyterian soteriological foundation; instead, the decisive issues he described were increasing resistance to faithful evangelism and concern for the growth of converts in the deteriorating ecclesiastical environment already shown.\(^{57}\) Moreover, at no point in Ross’ transition from Presbyterianism or in his later life among Brethren do we ever find evidence that he repudiated the fundamental Calvinistic foundation on which he had grown and matured for over 47 years.

Of course, Ross did encounter distinctively Brethren non-soteriological doctrines. And though some of Ross’ views peripheral to his core evangelical soteriology did change after (in cases possibly shortly before) his contact with these Brethren distinctives—primarily those on baptism, ecclesiology and eschatology—any similar motivation would simply not have existed for Ross to overthrow his soteriology. Native Scot and leading Brethren scholar of the 20th century, F. F. Bruce, pointed out the Arminianism of Brethren leaders like Alexander Marshall as remarkably uncommon, assigning Calvinism to the majority belief among Brethren of Ross’ time.\(^{58}\) Brethren historians like William Blair Neatby, Harold Rowdon and others are in unanimous agreement with Bruce in claiming the dominance of Calvinism among 19th century Brethren.\(^{59}\) Mark Stevenson, in his doctoral dissertation now in progress at Spurgeon’s College, will be even further substantiating this widely validated assessment of Brethren soteriology. It seems clear that Ross found himself in happy soteriological continuity with still earlier Calvinist leaders he acknowledged among Open Brethren like George Müller.\(^{60}\)

Far from being compelled to embrace Arminianism by his newfound ecclesiology, it was that very “Philadelphian” ecclesiology that Ross saw as a refuge from the rising tide of Arminianism.

Laodiceanism [unfaithful Christendom] finds its fullest expression...in the Arminianism that pervades almost [everywhere].\(^{61}\)

So we find a complete vacuum of motivation—and evidence—that could support a claim for any foundational soteriological reversal brought on by Ross’ association with Brethren.

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57 Ross, Donald Ross, 50-53.
58 Bruce, Alexander Marshall, 548. Marshall, author of a gospel tract millions of which were once circulated, God’s Way of Salvation, brought his mentor James Morison’s Evangelical Union Arminianism with him in his transition to the Brethren. After a decade of evangelism concentrated in the Orillia district in Ontario through the 1880s, many descendants of his converts in this region are still called “Marshallites”—and still enthusiastically Arminian.
59 While some historians (as Rennie, Aspects of Christian Brethren Spirituality, 203-205) may have overstated the Calvinism of early Brethren by attributing elements of hyper-Calvinism to them, it is quite certain at least that Supralapsarianism was not without powerful proponents among them (as Lincoln, Barley Cake, November 1884, 170-171).
60 The Calvinism of George Müller, the key leader of the early Open Brethren stream preceding Ross and the Revival Brethren, is substantiated by his own account in Müller, Narrative Vol. 1, 39-40,46,752, Vol. 2, 720 (noted also in Grass, Gathering to His Name, 33, and Stevenson, Early Brethren and Calvinism, 22-23). Early in his association with Open Brethren, Ross acknowledged Müller as “chief of our number” (Ross, The Witness, January 1939, 6).
61 Ross, Barley Cake, July 1882, 110. Ross understood the seven churches of Revelation in the typical Brethren predictive sense, applying Philadelphia to their own movement at its best and Laodicea to unfaithful Christendom.
Foundation tested by critics

There should be little doubt that it was not the genteel demeanor of a diplomat that won Ross the nickname “Caledonian Warrior”. At least some of the generous abuse he received from critics was diligently earned—as with his bombastic pledge once that if all the ministers of Scotland would strike for a year or more, that a band of eighteen of his missionaries set loose throughout the realm would see more conversions than they all had (though outnumbering his men by nearly 150 to 1!) during an equal period before. This challenge was no verbal outburst better thought of and hastily retracted—no, this declaration of war our Caledonian Warrior published! One can safely suppose that Ross had critics.

Yet even Ross’ critics, whipped into a perfect frenzy as many must surely have been, never substantively questioned his fundamental Calvinism. Perhaps his chief critic, Hugh McIntosh, wrote a series of four letters published in the Aberdeen Free Press complaining of Ross’ evangelism and that of his Northern Evangelistic Society based on information both he and his informants had gathered. These complaints largely centered on disputed statements by these evangelists relating to assurance and sanctification.

While not completely void of factual merit (he correctly gave brief information about a new Brethren church having just been started at Old Rayne, for example), in other instances, McIntosh labored to establish significant accusations, such as in his principal doctrinal complaint, which were patently false. In this principal claim, McIntosh bragged about “superabundant proof” that the NES promoted a thoroughgoing doctrine of sinless perfection, a state of which, so the claim went, had been confidently achieved and loudly proclaimed by them all. The following excerpts, however, are from undisputed letters written by Ross prior to McIntosh’s claim.

As to Mr. K— speaking against us or me, I have no doubt whatever if he knew me as I know myself he would have much more to say, and if he knew me as God knows me, he would speak worse and worse.

Tell [Mrs. M’Kay] to pray that I may be more holy, that nothing may find place in my soul but Christ and Him crucified. Tell all the Lord’s people to pray for me…tell them altogether that nothing troubles me but SIN.

The transcriber of the manuscript source for this last excerpt was careful to note that Ross had written the final word in large letters and underscored it multiple times. This should suffice to show that Ross

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62 Marshall, Donald Ross, 121. This apt name was bestowed upon Ross in collegial honor by his close friend, Duncan Matheson.

63 Ross, Donald Ross, 45.

64 Ross, Donald Ross, 160,165-166,181; Ritchie, Donald Munro, 80-81.

65 McIntosh, The New Prophets. This pamphlet, popularly circulated for many years, was an expanded compilation of the McIntosh letters originally published by the Aberdeen Free Press serially throughout April and May, 1871, and was undoubtedly a catalyst in Ross’ separation from the Free North Church in Aberdeen that occurred within weeks. Even the title was a jab at Ross who was accused of neo-Montanism and was likely intended to tie him and his fellow-evangelists in the NES to the infamy of the anti-authoritarian Phrygian “lay-prophets” of the 2nd century, Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla.


67 These letters in Ross, Donald Ross, 81,80 together with a direct critique later in Ross, Barley Cake, July 1882, 101-104 bracket the McIntosh accusation and indicate the stability of Ross’ actual views on “holiness” and “entire sanctification”.

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was plainly not a fanatic sinless perfectionist whose satisfaction in his settled achievements was loud and proud. What McIntosh actually did manage to establish, was his over-eagerness to accuse.

That McIntosh, a youthful Free Church licentiate, was also anxious to establish conservative Calvinist credentials is amply demonstrated by his straining and conspicuous marshalling of a vast field of Calvinist authorities like Nettleton, Knox, Zwingli, Hodge, Bonar, M’Cheyne, Whitfield, Bunyan, Melville, Owen, Chalmers, Spurgeon, Edwards, Henderson, Brainerd, and even Calvin himself (and the list amazingly does go on!) liberally salted over these letters.

Yet for all this, while demonstrably an enthusiastic Calvinist churchman anxious to accuse his prey, and though clearly possessing ample motivation and means to expose Ross or his society as Arminian if possible, he never once accused them of it in what was later edited into a 36 page pamphlet choking with criticisms. That Ross, a man who at this time had dwindling allies and who might have seemed an easy mark, accused of so much else yet not accused of Arminianism by so motivated, well supported, youthfully eager and incautious a Calvinist critic as McIntosh is a compelling indication that not even flimsy evidence existed throughout the Aberdeenshire or districts beyond to claim it.

**Foundation stands**

That Ross was a life-long Calvinist is agreed by Brethren historian, Dr. Neil Dickson. Ross pointedly condemned Arminianism, even to the extreme of joining it to Roman Catholicism and other forms of legalism against which his evangelism had always stood.

> These are but more or less refined human efforts to secure salvation, or to keep it after it is obtained.

Any claim that Ross’ views substantially changed have to deal with the fact that pointed statements like these were published by reputable sources after his death to worldwide audiences having first-hand knowledge of Ross—and never repudiated. In fact, like these, the most powerful witnesses that Ross’ Calvinistic foundation stood firm are his own words—which shall once again speak for themselves as we examine more of them shortly.

Reflecting on the content of Ross’ preaching, John Ritchie said that he “brought no new doctrine” to Knox’s Calvinistic Scotland, but preached “regeneration by the Holy Ghost”, the “old fundamental truths”—the “old gospel”.

By all available evidence, Ross demonstrated unwavering accord with the sentiments of his contemporary, Spurgeon, who declared, “Knox’s gospel is my gospel”.

**Influencers**

It is also helpful in understanding Ross to look at the theology of influential evangelists and teachers who Ross most highly regarded. If it can be shown that the soteriological foundation fundamental to the vocation of these especially influencing people was uniformly Calvinistic, then the natural argument

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68 Dickson, *Brethren in Scotland*, 94.
69 Ross, *The Witness*, January 1939, 5. This stinging posthumous condemnation of Arminianism by Ross would have reached nearly 30,000 Brethren homes worldwide.
70 Ross, *Donald Ross*, 159.
is that just as Ross admiringly and enthusiastically shared their vocation as evangelists and teachers, so he also shared their soteriology central to it.

**Thomas Chalmers**

Ross greatly admired evangelistic Calvinist leaders like Dr. Thomas Chalmers. In Edinburgh, while a police officer, Ross was first engaged in evangelistic work in connection with a church founded by Chalmers in the impoverished crime-ridden West Port district, Chalmers Territorial Church. Ross was active in this church, became an elder there, and developed his growing interest in evangelism.

Born fifth of fourteen children to a staunchly Calvinistic middle-class family in 1780, the precocious Chalmers was sent to St. Andrews at twelve. While his chief academic interest was mathematics, he chose the ministry as his profession out of cool convenience rather than zeal. Seven years after being ordained a minister by the established Church of Scotland contaminated with anti-evangelical Moderatism, he was converted reading the famed abolitionist William Wilberforce’s book, *A Practical View of Christianity*, in which professed Christians were urged to examine their foundations and to “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”. From the moment of his dramatic conversion, Chalmers maintained an infectious interest in evangelism that was a magnetic attraction to Ross.

That Chalmers was a Calvinist is historically indisputable.

Thomas Chalmers was a Calvinist. There is no other theological term that can be used to describe him. Not that he was a blind follower of Calvin...he refused to make any man his master in theology save for “the man Christ Jesus”. Chalmers merely felt that Calvin had come closest to the true meaning of the Bible and to the system of theology taught in the Scriptures. He used the name because it had already been coined and was used to describe the system of theology that he held. He insisted on the total depravity of man, the unconditional election of sinners by grace to salvation; the sweet irresistibility of God’s gracious call, and the final perseverance of all the saints of God. He also taught that only the elect would be saved by Christ’s death, “not because of any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross”, [Canons of Dort, Chapter 2, Article 6] but because the rest would not believe. However...Chalmers differed significantly from such writers as James Haldane and Robert S Candlish in his understanding of what “Limited Atonement” or “Particular Redemption” meant.

While a Calvinist, Chalmers’ views on the extent of the atonement which he held to be universal in salvific intention but particular in effect (Hypothetical Universalism) probably more precisely define him as an Amyraldian.

“We hold as unfortunate”, Chalmers told his students as he criticized the very lectures he had heard at St. Andrews, “the assertion that Christ did not die for all men, but for those of every nation who are in the end to be saved.” The implication, backed up by Chalmers’ own preaching, was that the students, in calling sinners to Christ, ought to tell their hearers that Christ died for all. And this hypothetical universalism, which is the marrow of Amyraldism, was not just a brief theological phase in Thomas Chalmers’ career. From the *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* in the 1820s to his *Institutes of Theology*, which was still
unfinished at his death, Thomas Chalmers insisted on this doctrine when he thought it necessary. In the pulpit it was urged with the outstretched hand of offer, in the classroom urged with scientific logic.\textsuperscript{73}

Chalmers was influenced by men like the Puritan Richard Baxter and the famous American Calvinist Jonathan Edwards of whom Chalmers wrote,

\begin{quote}
Him I have long esteemed as the greatest of theologians, combining in a degree that is quite unexampled, the profoundly intellectual with the devotedly spiritual and sacred.\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

More than by those who exerted influence on him, Chalmers` rich and fruitful life is better measured by those upon whom he exerted influence.

He did more than anyone else to determine the character of the new [Free] church...defending and then restructuring the Calvinist inheritance in theology was due to him above all others.\textsuperscript{75}

Those under Chalmers` massive influence included, as an instructor, the famed Calvinist evangelist, Robert Murray M`Cheyne, and certainly not least, by an enthusiastic example that ignited a kindred evangelistic passion, Donald Ross.

\textbf{John MacDonald}

Another prominent Calvinist leader for which Ross had high admiration was Dr. John MacDonald. MacDonald, a powerful evangelist and Gaelic poet, was also influenced by the early American Calvinist, Jonathan Edwards, and through untiring zeal became known to Scottish Highlanders as “The Apostle of the North”. Of this great inspiration to him, Ross wrote,

\begin{quote}
One of the [evangelists I cannot forget, Dr. John M`Donald, of Ferintosh, Ross-shire, a man of uncommon eloquence, power and godliness. I have seen hundreds awakened under his preaching. His appeals to the consciences of the Christless I have never heard equaled anywhere.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

What was the content of this preaching that so impressed Ross?

\begin{quote}
When MacDonald’s evangelistic preaching is analyzed, it will be found that it is powerful in its simplicity. Election is there, foreordination is there, limited atonement is there, supernatural regeneration is there; and because these elements are there, the free offer of the Gospel is there, and it is bathed in a passion for the souls of men, in dependence upon the Spirit, and with a clear end in view: that men will close in with Christ and take him at his word.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Another biographer echoed MacDonald’s enthusiastic Calvinistic grasp of the gospel by which he vigorously proclaimed its free offer.

While never losing sight of God’s sovereignty in dispensing his grace, he never hesitated to proclaim his good will to all. He believed on the same authority the electiveness of God’s covenant purposes, and the
indiscrimenateness of his gospel calls. No preacher was more careful not to fetter the sovereignty of God on the one hand, and on the other, not to limit the overtures of his grace.\textsuperscript{78}

In further testimony of the sturdy Calvinistic soteriology on which this remarkable evangelist based his presentations of the gospel, yet another biographer writes,

As a preacher, there are hundreds of thousands in Scotland, England and Ireland, who have been roused by his appeals. His theology was of that solid and substantial character, which is represented by such works as those of John Owen and Jonathan Edwards.\textsuperscript{79}

MacDonald himself wrote in journal entries during one of his teaching and preaching visits to his beloved remote Scottish island, St. Kilda, with warm pastoral concern for his converts there—wary of the opposing threats of hyper-Calvinistic antinomianism and Arminianism that lay on either side of the Calvinistic “foundation of the Gospel”.

Yesterday morning I read in course and made observations on Romans 9. Although this chapter presents rather strong meat than milk for such babes as were before me, yet I did not think it safe to conceal from my hearers the important subject of which it treats. The sovereignty of God in the method of grace lies at the very foundation of the Gospel, and is a doctrine much calculated to humble the proud sinner in the dust.\textsuperscript{80}

...I was afraid that the people would veer towards Antinomianism (an extreme as dangerous if not more so than Arminianism)...\textsuperscript{81}

Later at scenic Conon Bridge in the Ross-shire, Ross himself powerfully preached in fluent Gaelic to people that had no Bible in their tongue available to them before 1801. John Gill, one of Ross’ early mission recruits and later Brethren leader, related that older people present on this occasion claimed they had heard nothing like it since the days of Ross’ admired “Apostle of the North”.\textsuperscript{82}

John Caldwell

Not long after separating from the Free Church and joining the small Brethren assembly at Castle Street, Aberdeen, Ross was pleased to discover a wider Brethren community at a conference in Glasgow, John R. Caldwell chief among them,\textsuperscript{83} of whom he was long very appreciative.

...it was truly astonishing...to find [myself] in the company of such men as J. R. Caldwell and others, who... became a great blessing to [me].\textsuperscript{84}

By the time Ross’ evangelical interests turned toward America in 1876, his admiration and trust of Caldwell had grown to the point that he asked him to take over as editor of The Witness, a monthly

\textsuperscript{78} Kennedy, \textit{Apostle of the North}, 331.
\textsuperscript{79} MacGregor, \textit{Life of John MacDonald}, 94.
\textsuperscript{80} Kennedy, \textit{Apostle of the North}, 151. From MacDonald’s May 26th, 1825 journal entry.
\textsuperscript{81} Kennedy, \textit{Apostle of the North}, 153. From MacDonald’s May 27th, 1825 journal entry.
\textsuperscript{82} Ross, \textit{Donald Ross}, 132. MacDonald had died in 1849. Gill, who offered this account, is not to be confused with the well known Baptist theologian of the previous century.
\textsuperscript{83} Ironside, \textit{Historical Sketch of the Brethren}, 72-73. Formerly a Congregationalist, Caldwell joined Glasgow’s first Open Brethren assembly, the young Campbell Street congregation, in the mid-1860s and by 1866 led the group that branched off, establishing the nearby Marble Hall congregation.
\textsuperscript{84} Ross, \textit{Donald Ross}, 56.
Donald Ross: A Soteriological Retrospective

magazine for believers with a doctrinal focus that became perhaps the most widely circulated and influential Brethren magazine in the world. It seems wildly unlikely that Ross would have entrusted this important editorship to a person with whom he had significant doctrinal disagreements.

As editor, Caldwell continued Ross’ popular question and answer section in The Witness—a common feature in Brethren magazines still. Caldwell’s responses are helpful both in establishing his soteriology and in determining the historic normative belief in this period of Brethren growth reflected in his expanding readership. For instance, Caldwell responded to a query about whether saving faith was voluntary.

God never deals with man as a mere machine. His way is so to operate by His Spirit, through the Word, or by His providential dealings, or both together, as to show man his guilt and need, and so to make him willing to believe what otherwise, owing to the innate enmity of his heart against God, he would treat with indifference or contempt, and in any case with unbelief.

The first motion towards salvation is, therefore, of God’s grace, and not of the will of man.

But the full guilt of unbelief is charged against the sinner. “Though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him.” And again—“If I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?” Unbelief is the sin which above all others demonstrates the revoluted will, the enmity of the carnal mind, and it is “making God a liar.”

This answer makes clear that Caldwell’s concept of depravity was of “innate enmity” that without God’s intervention would respond to the gospel with “indifference or contempt, and in any case with unbelief”. Caldwell saw God’s effectual intervention as necessary to turn the will of man, “to make him willing to believe”.

Another questioner, evidently an Arminian, challenged Caldwell.

Has God ordained some to be saved and some to be lost, when He has so clearly said in His Word, “whosoever believeth in Me hath everlasting life”?

Interestingly, Caldwell, who had recently begun inviting countering responses to questions for publication to better represent a broader cross-section of Brethren views, was in unanimous agreement with both other respondents—all affirming predestination and denying equal ultimacy. Caldwell responded as follows.

Scripture [demonstrates] that God has ordained some to eternal life. Their names have been in the book of life “from the foundation of the world” (Rev 17:8, 13:8). They are chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4).

But we fail to find any such predestination of individuals to destruction. Certain scriptures may be adduced as apparently giving countenance to such a doctrine, but rightly understood they teach nothing of the kind.

It is evident that not only are all men lost, dead in sins by nature, but also that every man’s “free will” would decide for sin and against God. “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” The “free will” that is directed by

85 Caldwell, The Witness, April 1898, 67-68.
86 Equal ultimacy is a more precise term for what is often popularly called “double-predestination”.

such a mind and motive must be directed against God, against Christ, against the truth, against even the Gospel, seeing the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God as well as the grace of God, and can only be received by such as become subject to that righteousness (Rom 10:3) and confess themselves guilty before God (Rom 3:19).

In such a scene, where there is “none that understandeth”, “none that seeketh after God”, what does God do? He retires into His own sovereignty, and looking from that infinite majesty upon a world in which all were guilty, lost sinners, He says in His heart, “I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy; and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Rom 9:15).

What about the rest? They are “endured with much long-suffering” (Rom 9:22). They are invited (Lk 14:17), they are besought (2Cor 5:20), they are commanded (Rom 16:26) to believe the Gospel, to accept salvation, to receive Christ, and in Him pardon and life. If, after all, they reject the gift of love, the responsibility is with them. God has abundantly proved that the obstacle lies not with Him, or in any doctrine of reprobation, but in the rebel will of man.

But...we must ever bear in mind that the Christian’s true place is that of the “little child”. Many problems there are that we are not, in our present infant state, capable of comprehending. It is ours to believe what God has said, whether we can reconcile the apparent discrepancies or not. Faith can rest in the assurance that God can and will cause to harmonize all apparent discrepancies and paradoxes in His own time. Many things that we know not, and cannot know now, we shall know hereafter.  

The simple answer to this question, had Caldwell believed in conditional election, would have been to write something like, “those in whom God foresaw belief he ordained to salvation”. Instead, Caldwell wrote that God foresaw a scene where “none...seeketh after God”, where human “free will” is resolutely directed against the Gospel—deciding only for sin. Having foreseen only this, God “retires into His own sovereignty” and chooses those objects of mercy and compassion on whom are set His unconditional “I will”. Caldwell’s Calvinistic concepts of depravity and unconditional election are unmistakable.

Caldwell’s response to a question about the endurance of the saints from Mt 10:22 explains his view of perseverance.

...holding steadfast to the end [Heb 3:14] is not a condition of being made partakers of Christ, but the evidence which declares who are partakers.

So the endurance to the end of Mt 10:22...is not the ground of their salvation, but the evidence that they are not of those who draw back unto perdition.  

In a transcription of an address Caldwell gave on Jn 6:37-40, his exposition of this key soteriological text is another demonstration of Caldwell’s consistent theology.

All those who came to Christ, those who saw the Son, and believed on Him, are those whom the Father has given to Him. And note that remarkable word—“Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out.” It is usually brought before an unsaved person or an anxious soul, to encourage them to trust Christ; and it is blessed to use it so, but I think there is more than that in it here. Mark the force of the previous word—“All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me.” That is His confidence, His assurance. It seemed as if He was to be totally rejected; it seemed as if no one was going to come to Him, but His confidence is this—“All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me” and whenever He saw a poor sinner coming to Him, believing on

88 Caldwell, The Witness, May 1895, 84.
Donald Ross: A Soteriological Retrospective

Him, it mattered not whether they were high or low; whether it was Nicodemus coming by night, or the poor, wretched sinner that came behind His feet, washing them with her tears, He saw in each of these one that the Father had given Him; and when they came to Him He would in no wise cast them out; or rather, He would “in no wise surrender” or “give up”. He could not give up, He could not surrender, He could not cast out, one that His own Father had given Him, given Him from eternity, given Him from before the foundation of the world, given Him in the bond of the Eternal Covenant. How could He cast them out? “Nay,” He says, “for I came down from Heaven not to do My own will, but the will of My Father.”

He came, not to make an election for Himself, but to receive the election of His Father. He came not to pick and choose for Himself, but to receive everyone that the Father gave Him.

“Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out” is a blessed verse to give to a convicted sinner, but it is also a blessed verse for one that has come and trusted, for it tells that He will never give you up. Why? If He failed to bring those who have believed on Him to His eternal glory, He would fail to accomplish the Father’s will. “This is the Father’s will which hath sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing [not even a hair of their head], but should raise it up again at the last day.” But, in order to accomplish this, it behooved Him to go down to the very depths of the waves and billows of the wrath of God, and bear the curse on Calvary. “Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” He loved them till He could say “It is finished” and He will love them until He has them in His own image, made glorious forever, and has presented them to the Father as the fruit of His own obedience unto death.

Expressing himself in a warm devotional tone, Caldwell’s exposition sweeps expansively through themes of eternal election, redemption, regeneration, perseverance and eternal glorification—all cohering in the Father’s sovereign will. Caldwell described, for instance, the resolute unbelief Jesus faced (Jn 6:36) such that “it seemed as if no one was going to come to Him” but for the guarantee of His Father’s sovereign eternal purpose in election (“the election of His Father”) and effectual calling (“to receive everyone that the Father gave Him”).

Caldwell later published articles in The Witness that were afterward widely circulated in book form in the early 20th century, giving evidence of the breadth and persistence of Calvinism among Revival Brethren.

The believer can look back into the ages past and learn that then, “before the foundation of the world”, he was “chosen in Christ” (Eph 1:4). It was then that each individual was set apart—sanctified—by God the Father. These are they of whom the Lord Jesus so frequently speaks as being given to Him by the Father. (See Jn 6:37, 17:2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24.)

In the counsels of eternity they were chosen and set apart by the Father for Christ. They were called “His own” (Jn 13:1). Having chosen them and sanctified them, the Father predestinated them “to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29). All this dates back to “before the world was”. Redemption is before creation. Creation is in order to the fulfilling of the eternal counsels of redeeming love. By the will of God, to fulfill which the Son of God came into the world, every believing one is sanctified, and this sanctifying by His will has in due time been given effect to by “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ”. Sanctification in this aspect of it belongs to the eternity past, in which these glorious counsels were entered into between the Father and the Son.

89 Caldwell, Because Ye Belong to Christ, n.p. Italics are original.
“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” [1Pe 1:2] In this aspect of sanctification the Holy Spirit of God is the effective agent. The work has its origin in the foreknowledge of God the Father. But not until the appointed moment in time arrives can the eternal purpose be made good in the experience of the elect one. The Son is empowered to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given him (Jn 17:2). He is the quickener of the dead, but the agent employed in the execution of the work is the Holy Spirit of God...thus by the Holy Spirit those whom God the Father has foreknown are set apart in regeneration for God, and sealed unto the day of redemption.

A very familiar illustration may be helpful. One goes to a shop and purchases and pays down the price for an article. There and then it is no longer the property of the shopkeeper; it legally belongs to the one who paid for it; it is set apart from everything else for its new proprietor. The next stage is, the purchaser takes possession of it, and as he carries it away in the full sense of ownership, it becomes effectively his as well as legally. Finally he arrives at home, and it is opened out and set apart for the purpose, useful or ornamental, for which it was intended.

Thus by the Blood of Christ the believer is purchased; he is no longer his own; he is set apart (or sanctified) by blood; redeemed, “not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ”. Then by the Holy Spirit he is quickened and sealed. He is taken possession of and set apart for God. Finally, at the coming of the Lord the blood-bought, priceless treasure will be unfolded and displayed and given the place for which he was designed in the eternal counsels of the Father and the Son.90

While elsewhere in his work expressing a moderated Calvinistic view of the extent of Christ’s work (universal propitiation and particular substitution) comparable as we shall see to that of earlier Brethren leaders like John Darby,91 here Caldwell again takes a panoramic view of salvation. His description of “the eternal purpose...made good in the experience of the elect one” in God’s “appointed moment in time” wherein the “effective agent...employed in the execution of the work [of regeneration] is the Holy Spirit” plainly embraces a Calvinistic concept of the effectual call.

Ross’ vow to make effective use of “tongue and pen”92 in his ministry was carried consistently through to his discerning paternal carefulness in editorial control of the key Brethren periodicals he had founded—The Witness and Our Record. It is beyond improbable that Ross would have passed control of The Witness to Caldwell with glaring soteriological incompatibilities between them.93 We would expect Caldwell and Ross to reflect one another’s soteriology—and they do.

Duncan Matheson

It is widely agreed that the man that exerted the greatest influence in Ross’ life was Duncan Matheson.94 That this influence was mutual is attested by Alexander Marshall.95 But more than mere intellectual influence, the relationship between Ross and Matheson also involved a deep personal friendship. Ross

90 Caldwell, Foundations of the Faith, 128-129,131-133. Italics are original.
91 This typical early Brethren view of the redemptive/atoning work of Christ is properly placed between Amyraldism (Hypothetical Universalism) and strict Particularism in the spectrum of Calvinistic soteriology as described in more detail beginning on page 47 (Unpacking the “Fifth Point”).
92 Ross, Donald Ross, 53.
93 Grass, Gathering to His Name, 123,376-377. Not only was The Witness known for its Calvinism, but so too was Ritchie’s Believer’s Magazine—even as late as the 1950s.
94 Ross, Donald Ross, 40. This claim is made by Ross’ own son, Charles. See also Crawford, Assembly Truth, 30.
95 Marshall, Donald Ross, 121.
specially referred to his friend as “dear Duncan” and was described by John Ritchie as Ross’ “bosom friend” even decades after his companion’s death. The possibility may interest Revival Brethren that it was through Matheson’s influence from the 1860s via Ross that Caleb Baker later created his Two Roads and Two Destinies chart in 1885.

Matheson, an acquaintance of Thomas Guthrie, a famed preacher and Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Free Church of Scotland, was a member of this church from the Disruption to the end of his life. Matheson spent considerable time in the Crimea during the 1850s at great personal risk and sacrifice as a wartime evangelist, spending the remainder of his life evangelizing mainly throughout Scotland. The Free Church acknowledges both Matheson’s Calvinism and his significance as an evangelist among them to this day—comparing him to MacDonald.

...in Scotland there were Calvinistic evangelists in the nineteenth century such as John MacDonald, Brownlow North and Duncan Matheson.

Matheson’s long-time friend, fellow-evangelist and biographer, John Macpherson, noted his habit of both reading and disseminating sturdy “Puritanic theology”:

...he read incessantly, and devoured large and substantial meals of the good old Puritanic theology. Owen, Baxter, Howe, and the other divines of that age were his delight. Thus he laid in a good store for days to come, and treasured much precious seed to be afterwards scattered broadcast over Scotland.

His stores of Christian literature for gratuitous distribution were immense, varied, and judiciously selected. Besides Bibles, tracts, and other books in the several languages of the East, he carried with him a considerable number of copies of the Shorter Catechism with proofs...under the title of “Compendium of Christian Doctrine”...

He had no patience with ignorant lay-preachers, and often said to the young men, “Lads, sink the shaft deeper.” On one occasion a man, imagining he had a gift, requested permission to address Mr. Matheson’s meeting. This granted, the result was a sad display of ignorance, whereupon [Matheson], tapping him on the shoulder, stopped him, saying, “That’ll do, John,” quaintly and significantly adding, “Man, don’t you know the Shorter Catechism is a splendid book for learners? I would advise you to study it a good while before you speak in public”.

Macpherson also noted how Matheson’s Calvinistic theology was infused throughout his evangelism—energizing it with confidence and purpose.

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96 Ross, Donald Ross, 40.
97 Ross, Donald Ross, 179.
98 Macpherson, Duncan Matheson, 228-229. In the author’s personal conversation with a descendant of Baker, Mary (Sommerville) Farwell allowed this possibility. See Ross, Barley Cake, October 1885, 159; the first public offer of the chart is made in this issue.
99 Macpherson, Duncan Matheson, 253. After Chalmers, the eloquent Guthrie was Scotland’s most admired pulpit orator of the 19th century.
100 The horrific conditions of this war prompted the work and later fame of nurse Florence Nightingale, “the lady with the lamp”.
102 Macpherson, Duncan Matheson, 47,111,234. Italics are original.
Duncan Matheson thundered out death, judgment, and eternity; never forgetting, however, the great doctrines of grace.\textsuperscript{103}

...firmly believing in the purpose and love of God, and knowing that the divine sovereignty runs upon the path of appointed means, he preached the gospel with the most confident expectation of success.

Regeneration by the Holy Ghost formed a large and prominent part of his teaching. He had dwelt long beneath the awful shadow of this great mystery of grace, and he often said, “I have always been afraid to preach on that text, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” Yet he continually and most emphatically announced the necessity and explained the nature of the second birth. “Who made you a Christian?” he would ask. “Some are made Christians by their parents, some by their Sabbath-school teachers, others by their ministers and pastors, and many are made Christians by themselves. But man-made Christians cannot enter the kingdom of God. Friend, were you made a Christian by the Holy Ghost?”

The sovereignty of God in the salvation of man, the sinner’s need of the Spirit’s grace, the helplessness, folly, and infatuated wickedness of the human heart, were truths written as by a pen of iron and the point of a diamond upon his innermost heart; and he always spoke as he believed. One day a friend referred in conversation to the errors of a low Arminianism that leaves no room and no need for the work of the Holy Spirit or the election of grace. Suddenly stopping, he said, “It won’t do, J--; the truth is, you and I would be damned, if it were not for election. But that grips,” he added in a decided tone, at the same time clenching his fist. “Yes,” he continued, “that is true,” and suiting the action to the word, he added, “I know that if I had one foot in heaven, and Christ were saying to me, ‘Put in the other,’ I would not do it.” Stating clearly the sinner’s guilt and wickedness, the evil conscience and the depraved heart, with equal clearness and force he proclaimed the twofold remedy—the blood of Christ and the all-powerful grace of the Holy Ghost. After setting forth the utter ruin of man, it was his manner to say, “Here is the sinner, and there is the blood: the great question is, ‘How may these two be brought together?’ The answer is, ‘The Holy Ghost: He only can do it.’”\textsuperscript{104}

Matheson’s conviction and zeal for his soteriology are demonstrated by a long-remembered incident related by the wife of a minister at the Free Church of Garioch in the Aberdeenshire.

I was greatly refreshed while listening to a conversation in which I found my two fellow-travelers engaged when I entered the coach. One, an elderly man, was making objections to the doctrine of sovereign grace. The other, a young man, although evidently suffering under severe toothache, was using the opportunity to plead for truth wisely and lovingly. I felt so interested as to be constrained to enquire on reaching our journey’s end after his name, and found it was Duncan Matheson...\textsuperscript{105}

Matheson’s frank expressions of dependence on God were consistent with his monergistic theology—a foundation that sustained his faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel and a fuel that ignited an enthusiastic evangelism that could not bear cold dead orthodoxy.

Often when ready to faint have I been sustained by the blessed truth, “All that the Father hath given shall come;” and some measure of faith in the omnipotent power of the Holy Ghost has revived the drooping heart, and enabled me more urgently to present Christ and Him crucified to dying men.

Oh for living men...to preach the everlasting gospel, and for the descent of the Holy Ghost from on high to call the dead to life!

\textsuperscript{103} Macpherson, \textit{Revival}, 28.
\textsuperscript{104} Macpherson, \textit{Duncan Matheson}, 323,246-247.
\textsuperscript{105} Macpherson, \textit{Duncan Matheson}, 145.
What I have longed, and prayed, and sought for has been conversion unto God, and any hope or comfort I have had in seeking this has arisen from this very truth, that He works as seemeth good in his sight, and calleth whom He will.\textsuperscript{106}

Matheson, though strong, rugged and even bear-like in appearance, having spent himself in passionate pursuit of the gospel, succumbed to diabetes at 44 leaving his wife, Mary, and five young children behind—depriving Ross too of his closest friend and greatest influence, yet leaving him an incandescent example of intrepid Calvinistic evangelism that would burn throughout Ross’ remaining 33 years of ministry.

Though Ross naturally had Arminian acquaintances of some significance like his younger evangelist colleague Alexander Marshall, the dominant influencers in his life were uniformly Calvinistic. It is hard to imagine that these men—Chalmers, MacDonald, Caldwell and Matheson—so especially admired and influential in Ross’ life and with whom he shared such a core passion for evangelism—would have shared views fundamental to that evangelism with each other, yet not with Ross.

\textbf{Response to Morisonianism}

Before turning to a more comprehensive review of Ross’ own words expressing his soteriology, we will first evaluate Ross’ response to Morisonian Arminianism—a fair representation of his mind in an economy of words. Ross’ emphatic denial of a rumor briefly circulated in the late 1860s by an antagonistic cleric that Ross was a Morisonian not only firmly denied he held an Arminian soteriology, but also positively affirmed his Calvinism.

\textit{Understanding Morisonianism}

A quick review of the controversy that clung to the youthful Finneyesque James Morison beginning in the 1840s in Kilmarnock (near Glasgow) is necessary to build the context for sensibly interpreting Ross’ response.

While raised a Calvinist in the United Secession Church,\textsuperscript{107} Morison’s views on atonement had long been suspected,\textsuperscript{108} and in March, 1841 he was brought before the Kilmarnock Presbytery to answer for himself on this and other matters. The first charge was related to Morison’s concept of faith and atonement:

\begin{quote}
That the object of saving faith to any person is the statement that Christ made atonement for the sins of that person as He made atonement for the sins of the whole world...\textsuperscript{109}
\end{quote}

Not denying this, Morison was further charged with views relating to his concept of human ability and of the lack of necessity of an effectual call of the Spirit in salvation:

\begin{quote}
[Further details not provided.]
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{106} Macpherson, \textit{Duncan Matheson}, 106,108,56. Italics are original.

\textsuperscript{107} A union of Presbyterian churches formed from an earlier series of secessions out of the Church of Scotland that had occurred prior to 1820.

\textsuperscript{108} Morison had also long been known to deny the eternal Sonship of Christ. Influenced by American revivalist Charles Finney through his \textit{Lectures on the Revival of Religion}, it seems Morison ultimately imported many of Finney’s doctrinal and methodological innovations—and Finney’s antagonism to “Princeton theology”.

\textsuperscript{109} Adamson, \textit{James Morison}, 124-125.
That all men were able of themselves to believe the gospel unto salvation, or, in other words, to put away unbelief, the only obstacle to salvation which the atonement had not removed.\footnote{Adamson, \textit{James Morison}, 127.}

Narrating Morison’s response, his biographer wrote,

This statement was accepted by Mr. Morison as accurate, and, in vindication of it, he stated that he could not maintain man’s responsibility unless he firmly believed that he was able to do all that God commanded him to do. The sinner’s natural and perfect ability to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ must be admitted by all who maintain that the sinner is blamable for his unbelief.

...he could never hold that the Spirit imparted power to believe.\footnote{Adamson, \textit{James Morison}, 127-128. Morison, as all Arminians do, had philosophically predicated responsibility on ability—based on the fully Pelagian concept that moral responsibility for obedience to God’s law implies moral ability to perfectly do it.}

At the conclusion of the trial, the Kilmarnock Presbytery by an overwhelming majority voted to depose Morison, who after a failed appeal to the Synod, led his Clerk’s Lane congregation in seceding from the denomination. Ultimately, the only vestige remaining of Morison’s former Calvinism was his maintenance of the final perseverance of the saints—adopting a now commonplace four-point Arminianism holding to human ability, election conditional on faith, universal atonement, and universal yet resistible call of the Spirit.

The doctrines became modified in Mr. Morison’s mind...it was seen by him that if the work of the Spirit of God was universal, it was, and must be, resistible in its nature; conditionalism must pertain to election, reprobation, and effectual calling as well as to justification. In other words, Mr. Morison came to see most clearly that he who believed would be elected...

In this manner, Mr. Morison was led step by step to part with the unconditional predestinarian doctrines of Calvinism...\footnote{Adamson, \textit{James Morison}, 236.}

Following a similar expulsion of Morison’s father and two other ministers all in sympathy with him soon afterward, these men, with a small group of others met at Clerk’s Lane, forming the Evangelical Union on revivalist principles,

As to Church government, my impression is that we should set the Christian world the example of union by associating on the basis not of ecclesiastical polity as has hitherto been the case, but of the gospel of God’s love to the world.

Let it be no inquiry or admission to the union whether a church has ruling elders or deacons, or both, whether it is Baptist or Paedobaptist, whether it is in connection with a Synod or Congregational Union. Let our Association be on a revival ground, and take cognizance only of revival matters.\footnote{Adamson, \textit{James Morison}, 237.}

The brief doctrinal statement adopted by the Evangelical Union emphasized a simplified Arminian soteriology and was summed up in an expression, “The Three Universalities”, that became a well-known theological slogan throughout Scotland.
Donald Ross: A Soteriological Retrospective

Thus on May 18th, 1843 in Kilmarnock—the very day of the great Disruption in Edinburgh—the Evangelical Union finalized their establishment. Calvinistic Presbyterian Scotland had produced its first Arminian denomination—a tiny but enormously significant disruption all its own.

Ross responds

When, in 1867, Ross responded to the rumor circulated by an Aberdeenshire minister, John Clark, that he was a Morisonian, the fiery tone of his response left no doubt of the conviction with which Ross held his Calvinistic soteriology. Apparently pleased with the clarity and teeth in Ross’ words and anxious to see the rumor squelched, the response was printed and circulated by Ross’ close fellow-evangelist, Duncan Matheson. Shortly after, it received honorable mention at the Aberdeen Free Synod, and much later was published in Ross’ biography by his son Charles. Any attempt, then, to dismiss Ross’ response by claiming he grossly misunderstood Morisonianism would need to attribute similar ignorance to Matheson, Clark, Charles Ross and even members of the Aberdeen Synod—and would also need to imagine why no correction to its supposed ignorance was ever made throughout its long history. Nor would claims for such a circus of ignorance merely accuse Ross of a vacant Forrest Gump like simplicity about a theological controversy literally swirling around him, but of a remarkably profound exhibition of prideful ignorance to have so directly, strongly and publicly disavowed that concerning which he had only the very faintest and most defective knowledge. No, his focused doctrinal repudiation is plain evidence that Ross had a firm grasp of essential Morisonianism.

Ross wrote,

...that I am a Morisonian...I deny most emphatically. Their chief error I understand to be the following—namely, “no special work of the Spirit.” I believe in the absolute necessity for the Holy Spirit—not the

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[1]...the love of God the Father in the gift and sacrifice of Jesus to all men everywhere, without distinction, exception, or respect of persons...

[2]...of God the Son in the gift and sacrifice of Himself as a true propitiation for the sins of the world...

[3]...and of God the Holy Spirit in His present and continuous work of applying to the souls of all men the provisions of Divine Grace...

This statement of doctrine was considered by the assembled brethren, sentence by sentence, with the greatest care for three days, and finally adopted as their manifesto as an Evangelical Union...

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114 Adamson, James Morison, 240. With these “universalities” was also claimed that “the saving influences of the Holy Spirit are vouchsafed to all men”. B. B. Warfield thought that the new political dynamic in Britain beginning in the 1830s influenced Morisonian theology and its “universalities”, as though salvation was the just entitlement of every person; see Warfield, The Plan of Salvation, 100-102.

115 John Sim Clark had been the Free Presbyterian minister of the coastal Foveran Parish from before the establishment of the NECM. His accusation of Morisonianism had been relayed to Ross by James Scroggie, a former mission agent in Banff. While Ross insisted of his response, “I do not withdraw one sentence in it—nor can I honestly do so”, and though (probably in the redacted form printed by Matheson) it even received honorable mention at the fall meeting of the Aberdeen Free Synod on October 8th, 1867, he was nevertheless quite concerned his outspokenness in the circulating letter was contributing to an unhealthy relationship between the mission and local parish ministers—even prompting his offer to resign. Not likely surviving long past the Synod meeting, the rumor certainly was quashed long before McIntosh and his informants compiled their complaints against Ross in early 1871 (Ross, Donald Ross, 89; McIntosh, The New Prophets).
Spirit’s influence, but Himself. The influence of the Spirit has never been promised by God as far as I am aware. It is the Comforter, not the Comforter’s influence. There never was and never will be a conversion without Him.

Regarding the Morisonianism with which you charge me, let me add that I believe in the perseverance of saints, or rather in the perseverance of God’s dealings with them. I believe in particular redemption, and, alas, there is overwhelming evidence to prove original and universal depravity.

After I have thus given a detailed denial to these charges, I hope for your own sake that you will drop the practice of evil-speaking…what you say without evidence will harm yourself. 116

“No special work of the Spirit”, the “chief error” of Morisonianism that Ross had understood must be interpreted in its historical context. That neither Ross nor Morison believed that the Holy Spirit was uninvolved in salvation is quite plain—both agreed to the necessity of the work of the Spirit in salvation. 117 This implies that the error Ross rejected in this expression was the non-specificity of that work—a work Morison saw as general, common or universal. Morison had not only affirmed this view of the work of the Spirit drawing “all men” (synergistically cooperating with an independent human “natural and perfect ability to believe”) in the doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Union, but he had actually popularized it too as one of “The Three Universalities”. This confirms that universality was the popularly distinctive Morisonian claim of the work of the Spirit in salvation that Ross here confronted as error.

Building on this, Ross next argued for the person over the influence of the Holy Spirit. 118 This possibly unfamiliar argument is bracketed by an opening statement declaring the necessity of the Spirit and a closing statement declaring the impossibility of a conversion taking place without Him. These bracketing statements establish the scope of Ross’ argument—the necessary work of the Spirit in conversion. Thus Ross argued for person not mere influence (contra Morison) being necessary for conversion. Ross was not fussing over a wispy semantic person/influence distinction or asserting absurdly that the person of the Spirit exerted no influence or arguing that Morison’s concept of influence did not somehow come from a person—only to incompetently fuel the rumor with confusion rather than end it with clarity. Instead, Ross was boldly contrasting his determinate Calvinism (with its special effectual work of a sovereign person) against Morison’s indeterminate Arminianism (with its hopeful universal permeating yet usually ineffective mere suggestive influence). In the Calvinistic understanding of salvation, a Spirit-regenerated heart unhesitatingly results in conversion (repentance and faith). 119 Accordingly, Ross was claiming conversion can only come (and must come) in consequence of Spirit-regeneration; that is, the necessary special effectual regenerating work of this newly (or newly to be) indwelling person has an

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116 Ross, Donald Ross, 86-88.
117 Adamson, James Morison, 128. For his part, Morison “maintained that it was to the Holy Spirit that the conversion of every believer was to be ascribed”.
118 Neither Morison nor Ross spoke of “influence” in a manner meant to deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit (e.g., claiming that the Spirit is an influence).
119 This is often called the ordosalutis, Latin for “order of salvation”; see Grudem, Systematic Theology, 669-670. Specifically, the Calvinistic understanding of the relationship of regeneration to conversion is presented in Grudem, Systematic Theology, 702-704.
inevitable result—conversion. In the process of salvation, then, Ross asserted the determinate necessity of a person within over an indeterminate influence upon. This was no wispy scholastic distinction.

Morison’s non-specific concept of the work of the Spirit was his “chief error” to Ross probably in that other objections Ross had to Morisonian theology could be derived from it—Ross found this universal but usually ineffectual work wholly inconsistent with God’s unfailing plan to graciously bring His naturally unwilling depraved elect to faith and the benefits secured for them in redemption (Jn 6:37,44). It was counter to and unraveled his own entire soteriology.

At first glance, Ross’ affirmation of perseverance and missing claim for unconditional election may seem difficult to explain; in fact with perseverance, it may even appear that Ross ineptly tried to refute Morisonianism by underscoring a point of agreement. Yet if we notice the conspicuous emendation “or rather in the perseverance of God’s dealings with [His saints]”,120 we actually see a compact expression encompassing both unconditional election and a more God-centered concept of perseverance. In articulating the one Calvinistic doctrine about which he might have seemed to agree with Morison, Ross expressed it in a manner that drew attention to God’s timeless perseverance in sovereignly working for his eternally elect ones (as in Rom 8:29-30)—not with a man-centered perspective focused merely in time. For Ross, perseverance began with God’s choice; for Morison, it begins with man’s. Ross understood God’s perseverance to mean that He would utterly finish what He started in election—God as author and finisher. This effectively ran Ross’ repudiation of Morisonianism over even the single apparent point of soteriological agreement.

The remaining terms Ross uses are in a fairly standard theological form.

It is helpful to compare Ross’ response (even as concise as his language was in this instance) to doctrinal points of traditional Calvinism and to contrast it with counterpoints of James Morison’s fully-developed four-point 1860s Arminianism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctrine</th>
<th>Ross’ Calvinism</th>
<th>Morison’s Arminianism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total depravity or total inability</td>
<td>Pointedly, “there is overwhelming evidence to prove original and universal depravity”.</td>
<td>An unbeliever is not so depraved as to lack “a natural and perfect ability to believe [the gospel]”—an ability that may exert itself without the Spirit’s special enabling power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconditional election</td>
<td>Ross’ stance on depravity, his belief in particular redemption, his view of a special effectual call of the Spirit and his expression insisting on God’s perseverance for His elect are all indicative of this doctrine.</td>
<td>Affirmed “conditionalism must pertain to election” and “he who believed would be elected”. With Christ’s universal atonement and the universal saving influence of the Holy Spirit assisted by a natural human ability to believe the gospel, then election must be conditional, hinging on a good human choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particular redemption or limited atonement</td>
<td>Simply, “I believe in particular redemption” (a theological term emphasizing the special work of Christ for the elect).</td>
<td>The redemptive/atoning work of Christ was “to all men everywhere, without distinction, exception, or respect of persons”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

120 A careful distinction Ross consistently maintained; Ross, Donald Ross, 88,226.
So we see Ross succinctly upholding Calvinism and denying Arminianism—even punching the rumor in the snout by labeling the squealing libel “evil speaking”. In his piquant brevity, however, Ross did not explicitly claim unconditional election, nor may he have formulated his claim for the efficacious call of the Spirit to suit everyone’s sense of clarity. We will see that Ross wrote much more that substantiates his position on these points shortly.

As if to guard against speculation that Ross’ beliefs such as those expressed in this letter responding to Morisonianism ever materially changed, Ross’ younger son, Charles, in selecting letters like this made specific note of his father’s stability of mind.

What he was, as seen in these letters, he was to the end of his days...those printed here are a fair sample of what he ever wrote and ever felt even to the end.  

This claim will be weighed when we attempt to determine if Ross later moderated his views on particular redemption.

**Morisonianism infiltrates Brethren**

As an historical footnote, while Ross like the vast majority of Brethren leaders of the time stood firmly and consistently against Morisonianism, it appears that some substantial Morisonian influence had begun being felt among *Revival Brethren* at least as early as the 1880s. Ross’ notes from the 1884 Hamilton conference (together with the Chicago conference, the most influential annual conferences then held by North American *Revival Brethren*) are particularly revealing.

In an extremely unfiltered style, James Campbell, a conference speaker and highly respected evangelist especially in Ireland at the time, unloaded on the malpractice of a sort of “easy believe-ism” evangelism beginning to take hold among *Revival Brethren.*

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121 Ross, *Donald Ross*, 77. That the younger Ross was conscious of terms and issues pertaining to his father’s soteriology—a theology he shared with him—can be demonstrated from his editorship of *Our Record*. For instance, Charles both read and appreciatively quoted from Horatius Bonar’s rich presentation of Calvinism in *Truth and Error* (see Bonar, *Our Record*, June 1905, 92-93 and Bonar, *Truth and Error*).

Many are taught the fear of the Lord and still they worship their own gods. Presbyterians have as a rule got a gradual process like the men in 2Ti 3:7 ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth. Methodists have a moment perhaps at the penitent bench, a few happy feelings and they are saved. Baptists are pretty much the same, etc. But there is a more dangerous thing still—[Brethren] read Jn 3:16, and make [the unregenerate] believe because they believe it they are saved. Those deceived by [Brethren] thus are the most hopeless of any—with the word of God you can soon get [an unregenerate] Presbyterian to see the error of his way, but to [unregenerate Brethren] who have got the word of God so upon their tongue, it is almost impossible. This thing commenced with Morisonians, then us, and the sects have copied it.123

Attending the conference fresh on the heels of a successful evangelistic campaign in his beloved Orillia district little more than 100 miles away, the young Alexander Marshall unexpectedly perhaps became the most uncomfortable person in the audience, twisting in his seat as he wilted under Campbell’s unsparing indictment. Like his father, Alex was in perfect sympathy with Morisonian Arminianism; in fact, James Morison had been both pastor and valued friend to him.124 Eyeing with alarm its early progress, as recorded by his mentor Ross, Campbell had uncomfortably poked his finger right at a significant source of what would later develop into the four-point Arminianism that has largely overrun Revival Brethren soteriology today. A quarter-century afterwards, Marshall actively lobbied a later generation of Revival Brethren for tolerance on “minor matters”, which for him interestingly included “election, free-will and predestination”.125 The historical indication is that an infiltrating Morisonian-inspired Arminian evangelistic methodology was the precursor to outright Arminian theology among Revival Brethren.

In his own words

Ross’ own words are the most direct and compelling indicators of his theology. Careful comparison of these statements to our definitions of Calvinism and Arminianism will be helpful.126 Ross’ statements are organized here under the headings of the classic five points as given by Steele, Thomas and Quinn.127

Total depravity or total inability

Ross often mentioned his parent’s home and the godly atmosphere pervading it, yet against the privileges of this environment was set “his inborn enmity to the things of God, in spite of the gracious influences with which he was surrounded”.128 Ross “was not willing to be saved”129 and his attitude to the gospel was “full of resistance”. Far from attributing his conversion to his unregenerate free will,

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123 Campbell, Barley Cake, March 1884, 44. Campbell had spoken similarly at the Chicago conference shortly before (Ritchie, James Campbell, 58-59) and his critique of Revival Brethren evangelism in the 1880s was echoed by other of their evangelists too like J. Norman Case (see Case, Our Record, October 1888, 110-111). Under Ross’ influence, Campbell and James W. Smith, together with William Matthews became key Revival Brethren evangelists in Ulster. It was said that Campbell’s evangelism was instrumental in founding no less than 40 Revival Brethren assemblies in Ulster alone (see Grass, Gathering to His Name, 126 and Beattie, Brethren, 288-291).
125 Dickson, Brethren in Scotland, 174. One might easily wonder just how “minor” these issues really were to Marshall (see Hawthorn, Alexander Marshall, 4,21,149).
126 See page 10.
127 Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, Five Points, 17-71.
128 Ross, Donald Ross, 17.
129 Ross, Donald Ross, 35.
Ross colorfully described his inveterate self-will driving him on in his unwinnable fight against the “prevailing grace of God”.

> God’s hook was in him, like the fisherman’s hook in the fish, and, however long he might fight, God had hold of him in such a manner that he could not get away. 130

In a favorite expression, Ross was frequently heard to say that God “squeezed” him into salvation—emphasizing his own natural unwillingness and God’s overpowering sovereignty in the matter. 131

> God made him willing to be saved and the same grace made him willing to devote himself, body and soul, to the service of his Savior. 132

In relating his experience of God graciously overcoming his willful resistance, Ross would often tell of a sailor he heard addressing a Calvinistic congregation, who of his conversion cheerily chirped, “God and I did it all!” After a pause calculated to maximize the dramatic effect, the sailor went on to explain to the bewildered monergists picking themselves off the floor, “I tried not to be saved, and God did all the rest!” Ross’ son, reflecting with rather more seriousness on his father’s humorous story, gave perhaps as clear a picture as we have of the elder Ross’ determined grasp of the doctrine of depravity. Ross saw not less than God’s glory at stake.

> So our father would tell how unwilling he was to be saved, and how the grace of God overcame his unwillingness and brought him to Himself. And language that conflicted with this, or that in the slightest degree weakened the truth that man was by nature an enemy of God, he would not tolerate. In his judgment, it not only was untrue, but it clouded the true grace of God, and robbed Him of His glory as the alone and altogether Savior. 133

While jealous for God’s glory, Ross’ “low thoughts of man” meant that he always considered himself “simply a sinner saved by sovereign grace”. 134 As editor of what became Our Record, Ross was once asked about the propriety of the expression “decided for Christ”. His public response confirms his distaste for such expressions that elevate human ability—an intolerance of what is now commonly called “decisional regeneration”.

> Becoming a Christian is not a matter of cold, calculating, intellectual choice. Jesus says, “No man can come to me except the Father who sent me draw him” (Jn 6:44,45,65). The Father who sent the Son has to draw the sinner. It is a matter of life and death—a terrible necessity...phrases as “decided for Christ”...are altogether fleshy, and savor strongly of “moral suasion”... 135

130 Ross, Donald Ross, 23.
131 Ross, Donald Ross, 35,61.
132 Ross, Donald Ross, 35.
133 Ross, Donald Ross, 23.
134 Ross, Donald Ross, 64.
135 Ross, Barley Cake, October 1885, 153-155. By “moral suasion” (the persuasion of a moral argument) is implied some residual moral human capacity, though fallen, to be persuaded to respond in saving faith to the compelling arguments of the gospel message apart from effectual enablement from God—to do the right thing, to “decide for Christ”.

As an evangelist theologically committed to human inability, Ross felt the full brunt of the unpopularity of his duty. Commenting on Galatians 2, Ross associated Arminianism with the incipient works-righteousness gospel infiltrating ancient Galatia—a gospel he refused to preach.

...this...root of Arminianism, i.e., legality, caused some bitterness before...there can be nothing more repugnant to poor fallen man than to become the nonentity grace makes him.

If grace saved us when we had nothing to commend us, and if grace preserved us ever since...we have no claims whatever.

...when the people are told of Christ being and doing all, the whole is generally rejected as heresy...the Gospel of Grace is the Gospel of which so little is preached and known now.136

Tersely repudiating the first post-Reformation Arminian sect to take root in Scottish soil, Ross wrote, “there is overwhelming evidence to prove original and universal depravity”.137 Ross was completely familiar with both the theological meaning and implications of this expression. As we have seen, this was completely set against the Morisonian claim of “a natural and perfect ability to believe” fed by Pelagian philosophy.

Unconditional election, and the efficacious call of the Spirit or irresistible grace

Among Ross’ longest remembered sermons was one delivered in the Nairnshire on the topic of election. In his introduction of Ross on this occasion, Duncan Matheson particularly commended his colleague’s sound doctrinal grasp of the Westminster standards, which of election pointedly declare,

God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.138

The sermon on this doctrine was remembered for its faithful plainspoken clarity decades later.139

As the influential editor of what became Our Record, Ross published an answer to a question about the doctrines of election, predestination and foreordination to his North American first-generation Brethren readers.

Election means choice; predestination means what He predestines the objects of his choice to, and foreordination the same. Israel was elected, Christ was elected and precious, all the saints are elected and predestined to be conformed to the image of His son and ordained for the same glory.

If there were no elections there never would be salvation at all. It is God alone that saves, none else could or would do it.

We remember at one time a certain old professor in Lanarkshire, Scotland, fell out on us about this blessed election. We simply first proposed to him a word of prayer, and then while he was engaged in it he certainly appeared to us to make salvation as dependent on the Lord as ever we did; after which he was asked,

136 Ross, Barley Cake, November 1883, 167-168.
137 Ross, Donald Ross, 88.
138 Boyd, Shorter Catechism, 60. See Question 20.
139 Ross, Donald Ross, 130.
“Don’t you admit that all are sinners?”
“Surely.”
“And you acknowledge that sinners have been saved?”
“Yes, true enough.”
“And you will doubtless own that it was Christ only that saved them?”
“Yes, assuredly.”
“Well you know that all are not saved—only some?”
“Yes.”
“Well, what is this but selections, or what?
No answer.

We believe that pride of heart alone causes opposition to the Lord’s way. Wherever infidelity pervades society, election, predestination, new birth, etc., are rebelled against as if, forsooth, man could or would save himself or at least help to do it—or, in other words, lay God under some obligation to do so. There is nothing more unmistakably taught in God’s word than election, predestination and foreordination (Rom 9:10-11; Eph 1). 140

While Ross clearly argued here for election, can this quotation prove he believed in unconditional election? Most Arminians believe in a form of election conditional on God seeing future faith in an individual. While Ross’ views on depravity are fundamentally incompatible with this typical Arminian understanding of election, a few observations can be made from his response that will confirm that Ross believed in unconditional election—even independent of his understanding of depravity.

1. The prideful opposition and rebellion that Ross claimed arises against his understanding of election is explained by an unconditional—not a conditional view. If a person in effect autonomously chooses whether to be elect or not, on what possible basis could he then object to such a concept of election?
2. Ross cited Rom 9:10-11 where the text stresses that God’s election of Jacob over Esau was not conditional on their actions, but on God’s sovereign will alone.
3. He also cited Eph 1 where God’s choice is connected to His own (mere) divine will and pleasure—not to human will and pleasure.
4. To write “if there were no elections there never would be salvation at all” is quite dubious if Ross held a view of conditional election; but by then adding in this context “it is God alone that saves, none else could or would do it” Ross implied that saving election, choice, or selection comes from God alone—not from divine collaboration with human will.
5. In the dispute over election with the Lanarkshire professor, Ross’ view of it being “dependent on the Lord” implies an unconditional understanding.
6. Ross’ expression of human attempts to “lay God under some obligation [to save them]” is most naturally understood in the sense of “God knew I’d believe so he had to elect me”—a conditional statement Ross scorned.
7. Ross compared the election of Israel and “all the saints”. Since the election of Israel was unconditional—even Arminians don’t argue for conditional election from a world of nations—the only consistent form of election Ross could have had in mind was unconditional.

140 Ross, Barley Cake, December 1885, 184. The Lanarkshire was near the heart of Arminian Evangelical Union territory of the time.
Of God’s sovereign declaration in Rom 9:15 esv, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion”, Charles Ross later wrote in his father’s journal, Our Record, in complete continuity with his father’s Calvinism.

He is acting in sovereign grace. There was no obligation on Him to show mercy to any, and if He chose to do so, leaving the others to their well deserved fate, who can find fault?

After disclaiming equal ultimacy in this text, a common Arminian objection, the younger Ross continued upholding God’s electing sovereignty with worshipful unhesitant sweeping language.

It is well for man—for us indeed, to bow at the throne of the Eternal Sovereign—to know there is One above all circumstances, whose will must and shall prevail to the uttermost bounds of the universe for all eternity.

Charles related a memorable saying of his father’s that he attested to being a deep life-long conviction.

We are just God’s pickings out of this wretched world, and when He has got all His own out of it, He’ll burn up the whole concern.

This saying compactly expresses a plainspoken God-centered Calvinistic understanding of unconditional election and effectual calling.

Ross was not always content with memorable brevity in articulating such important doctrines. In his mid-seventies, Ross published an article by a fellow evangelist and Brethren missionary colleague, Dr. J. Norman Case, that trained his penetrating editorial spotlight on unconditional election and effectual calling. Ross was still editor of Our Record (as he would be until his death), and gave this biblical survey of God’s sovereign good pleasure the prominence of a lead article in his publication—the only Revival Brethren magazine then in North America.

In an interesting, challenging and troubling introduction, Case and Ross appear joined in concern about a shift implied among Revival Brethren since the 1870s and 1880s from a God-centered soteriology to a more man-centered emphasis in their outlook (if not yet theology) by the 1890s. Considered together with the more removed yet still intramural Exclusive Brethren claim 30 years later by Hamilton Smith that a more fully developed Arminianism had intruded on and “neutralized” Revival Brethren evangelism, mounting historical evidence of a slipping soteriology begins to emerge. It would seem that the appeal to the “younger Brethren” of 1898 did not arrest the theological slide.

The words “divine sovereignty” and the facts beneath them were much oftener in the minds and on the lips of believers of a past generation than they are to-day. Those stern old warriors humbly and heartily confessed before heaven and earth that the chief end of man was to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We live in different days. Influenced by our environment, we are all apt to assume the converse of this; viz.,

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141 Ross, Our Record, 1930. Charles Ross, taking back the editorship of his father’s magazine following Thomas D. W. Muir’s death, took this occasion to relate his deeply felt sense of the responsibility that his father had entrusted to him—a duty as steward of his father’s doctrinal legacy that Ross had been careful to honor.

142 Ross, Our Record, May 1910, 99-102.

143 Ross, Donald Ross, 16.

144 Smith, Open Brethren, n.p.
that the great business of God is to serve man and make him happy forever. Then the thoughts and plans of Christian men centered around God and His claims; now we are more occupied with man and his needs...It is to be feared that many have got away from the base which, in the nature of things, they should occupy. Our creation, preservation, redemption, regeneration alike demand of us to put God first...

...in the Scriptures, the sovereign will and pleasure of God, like a golden thread, run through all His planning and working for His people. Perhaps a few brief notes on the same may be of value, especially to younger [Brethren].

It may be parenthetically noted that North American soil and climate had always been an inhospitable place in the experience of European Brethren in which to transplant their Calvinism. John Darby had written to this effect in late 1872, not many years before Ross arrived in Moody’s Chicago.

In Chicago [among believers]...one had to insist on the first principles of grace. No one will have it as a rule in the American churches. Old school Presbyterians, or some of them, have the most of it. It is otherwise resisted or unknown...it is preached nowhere, but the contrary...loose Brethren who [emigrate] fall in with all this...145

Case goes on, however, to describe with sparkling clarity the old Revival Brethren soteriology—connecting the mere good pleasure of God’s will to both election and effectual calling.

*Our election out of the world and predestination to eternal glory are according to the good pleasure of His will. (Eph 1:4-5; Rom 8:28)*

In this matter God is the planner and chooser, and He chooses, not from any outside compulsion, not because of any merit or worthiness in the creature, but in His own sovereign wisdom and grace. It is a true confession we make when we sing, “chosen not for good in me...”. As with love, so with election; we chose Him because He first chose us. The great and scriptural terms, “foreknowledge”, “election”, “predestination”, take us back to the counsel of the Triune God before times eternal, and believing that the terms betoken facts, we bow to and worship the God of sovereign grace, wisdom and power.

*In the revelation of Christ to the soul.*

For this is what God does to those who are found of Him; and nothing short of this is regeneration, and the apostle traces it directly up to God’s good pleasure. “But”, he writes, “when it was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me...” (Gal 1:15-16). From his birth, in the superintending providence of God, he had been set apart as “a vessel of election” (Acts 9:15, RV margin), to become a vessel of mercy. It is probable that from his birth Saul’s parents had set him apart to be a Pharisee and teacher of the law; but God had other and higher designs toward him. The first object of this setting apart was to reveal the Christ in or to him—not here through him. That object accomplished, God’s further purpose comes in: “God revealed His Son in me”, he says, “in order that I preach Him among the Gentiles”. But the chief point is that the revelation of Christ to him and appointment to the apostleship are of God’s sovereign good pleasure.

145 Darby, Letters, Vol. 2, 193. By no means a hasty impression, this note, written on his fifth visit to North America, is an enlightening summary of Darby’s soteriological observations gathered over four years time cumulatively spent there throughout the previous decade. Darby’s mention here of the “active man at Chicago” being “deep in the mud of this” is a telling reference to Moody’s Arminianism. Darby’s stormy clash with Moody over the matter probably took place around this time (Weremchuk, John Nelson Darby, 143; Ironside, Historical Sketch of the Brethren, 81-82). After a similar conflict with Methodist theologian Daniel Steele in Boston, Darby was even accused by the Wesleyan scholar of antinomianism (something of a “medal of honor” with a long history of being slanderously bestowed on Calvinists by Arminians, being first awarded to Paul, *Rom 3:8*!)
If words are capable of meaning, then the expression “He chooses, not from any outside compulsion...we chose him because he first chose us” is surely an irrefutable claim for unconditional election. Moreover, if regeneration, “revelation of Christ to the soul”, is “what God does” and is biblically connected to “God’s sovereign good pleasure”, this is an undeniable claim for sovereign effectual calling. These were bald claims of the old—though perhaps even then fading—Revival Brethren theology.

Case ends his rich survey of God’s sovereign good pleasure with a reverent worshipful powerful prayer-like conclusion.

As our hearts understand and bow to these truths, we perceive that glorying man, boasting in the flesh and every form of self-gratulation, are, by the law of sovereign, distinguishing, electing grace, forever excluded. We understand the pertinence and profitaleness of such questions: “Who maketh thee to differ?” and “What hast thou that thou didst not receive?”

All blessings, all mercies, all gifts, all callings, all glories, now and always, are of God’s grace through our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. To which divine sovereign Lord be equal honor, majesty, dominion and power, now and forever. Amen.\(^{146}\)

Ross, the evangelist, mortified by even so little as the flavor of decisional regeneration, rejected Arminian universalized concepts of the work of Father (loving all equally), Son (dying for all equally) and Holy Spirit (drawing all equally) in salvation that reduce evangelism to pragmatic results-oriented spiritual marketing shaped by and skillfully targeted to prevail upon the all-determinative will of the potential consumer. Instead, he fixed his complete dependence on God and His special work for conversion, as demonstrated in the following collection of quotes.

I’m sorry there is no more [being saved] in Buckie. Let us just put the business before God. Tell Him that there are souls going to Hell, and if He does not save them Himself, none else will or can. If He pleases to work by us, here we are; and if he does not, may He send forth laborers into His own vineyard.

Apart from the power of the Spirit there can be no real conversions, neither by eloquence, clear reasoning, nor sound theology. True conversion is effected by the preaching of Christ in the power of the Holy Ghost.

Part of each day was spent by Mr. Ross alone with God among the broom and whins, praying for a manifestation of His power in the awakening and salvation of sinners.

You must be able to draw...a distinction between nervous excitement and the Holy Ghost. Believe me, if you had the power and illumination of the Spirit, there would be conversions.

I think there are two reasons for God’s fellow-workers falling into the mistake of thinking people are converted when they are not; first, a want of conception of the plan of salvation, and the difference between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit.

God may convert her...He has not done it yet...\(^{147}\)

\(^{146}\) Case, Our Record, October 1898, 145-149. Dr. J. Norman Case (1858-1912), Brethren missionary doctor to China for 21 years until his death by typhoid.

\(^{147}\) Ross, Donald Ross, 79-80,249,192,93,26,24.
Ross never discounted the personal responsibility of the evangelist, yet was careful to confess the sovereignty of God, and that “all is of grace” in his evangelism.\textsuperscript{148} Ross, as John Ritchie attests, believed and preached the “old fundamental truths”—“regeneration by the Holy Ghost...in full confidence that God would use His own Word to do His own work”.\textsuperscript{149} It is evident that Ross believed in an evangelism consistent with the Shorter Catechism, which declares that “the Spirit of God maketh...preaching of the Word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners”.\textsuperscript{150}

Ross, like other Calvinists—yet quite unlike hyper-Calvinists—was respectful of the biblical tension between the effectual call and the sincere universal call of the gospel—between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. Calvinists like J. I. Packer call this tension an antinomy, and urge care in maintaining a biblical balance.\textsuperscript{151} In this vein, Ross answered a question in \textit{Our Record} about resolving \textbf{Acts 13:48 esv} (“as many as were appointed to eternal life believed”) with \textbf{Jn 3:16 esv} (“whoever believes”).

There are many passages in the Word that speak of salvation as wholly of God from beginning to end, and then there are many that speak of man’s responsibility to receive the salvation provided of God. Both are equally true. It is a question that comes up every now and then, and we suppose will—God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. I know, and so does every child of God, that he is saved wholly by grace; that God did it all—that He picked me out and brought me to Himself; that if I had been left to myself, I never would have been saved. All this we know, and, on the other hand, we tell to others what is equally true, that whosoever will may come; that salvation is for all; that Jesus says, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” The reconciliation of these two truths would require an infinite mind, which we have not. We receive them both as from God; we see the difficulty involved, but believe the solution of it is in Him and trust Him about it. It is well for us, we believe, to meet with truths that are beyond us; they keep us in our place as finite creatures and hide pride from man. If we look around us in nature, we meet with much that is interesting; but, however deeply we study, we reach a point along any line where we read the decree, “Thus far shalt thou go, but no farther.” So in revelation. It is from God as nature is, and we can reach only a little way down or a little way up and then we realize our feebleness. But this need not prevent us receiving in simple faith all the truths God has revealed—His sovereignty and our responsibility among them.\textsuperscript{152}

Less than four years later, Charles Ross published an article excerpted from a letter written by the well-known Scottish Calvinist pastor, Horatius Bonar, in \textit{Our Record} that strikingly mirrored the elder Ross’ mind.

He who views everything in relation to the glory of God, takes Scripture as he finds it. He has no need to explain away even one verse or clause of the Book of Truth. He enters into the purposes of God; he looks at things in the light in which God looks at them; and he finds all harmony. There is no conflict, no discord.

One class of passages show him the yearnings of God’s heart over sinful man. They show him that God is in earnest in beseeching men to come to Him; that He really means what He says, when He makes proposals of friendship and reconciliation to them. They show him that the sinner’s unbelief is the cause of his...

\textsuperscript{148} Ross, Donald Ross, 78.
\textsuperscript{149} Ross, Donald Ross, 159.
\textsuperscript{150} Boyd, \textit{Shorter Catechism}, 212. See Question 89.
\textsuperscript{151} Packer, \textit{Evangelism}, 18. Others, like John Piper (in Piper, \textit{Response to Packer}), are critical of fellow Calvinists like Packer (and presumably Ross) for too readily appealing to “mystery” where the compatibility of these truths may be explained as by Edwards, \textit{Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1}, 1-93.
\textsuperscript{152} Ross, \textit{Our Record}, October 1901, 153-154.
damnation; and that if He is lost, it is not because God would not be reconciled to him, but because he
would not be reconciled to God. They show him that the water of life is free—free to every man—free to
every sinner as he stands; and that he is invited to partake, without price or preparation, not only although
he is a sinner, but just because he is a sinner. They show him these things, and in them he greatly rejoices.
He does not wish to abate one jot of the blessed freeness, or close by one restriction the joy of the glad
tidings. No. He takes these passages just as he finds them. He sees how suitable they are to one of the
objects on which his heart is set—I mean the conversion of souls.

But then he finds another class of passages which follow out another line of truth. They carry him at once
into the purpose and will of Jehovah, as the fount and cause of everything great or small. They are quite
explicit; just as much so as the other. He cannot explain them away. They are so plain and simple that a
child may see what they mean. He has no wish to take them in any other than their obvious sense. He sees
in them that which exactly meets his own feelings, and coincides with his view of God’s glory, as being the
paramount and all-regulating end in all the movements of the universe. He sees in them, not a restriction
upon the Gospel, but a simple statement of an infinite truth—a truth not arbitrarily thrown across the
sinner’s path as a stumbling-block, but a truth necessarily arising from the fact that God is God, the Creator,
and that man is man, the creature, the sinner. That truth is just this: that God’s will is the law of the
universe—His glory the object and end both in creation and redemption—His everlasting purpose the
mighty and all-perfect mould in which all things are cast, and from which they take their shape and fashion
from first to last.\footnote{Bonar, Our Record, June 1905, 92-93; see also Bonar, Truth and Error, 41-43. From a collection of Bonar’s letters he first published under the title Truth and Error in 1846. This volume, running to multiple editions by evident demand, was dedicated to his Free Church congregation in Kelso and was essentially a plainspoken defense of Calvinism issued with warm pastoral care.}

Compare the remarkable symmetry between the Calvinism of Ross and Bonar—both published in Ross’
widely read Brethren magazine, Our Record.
Donald Ross: A Soteriological Retrospective

Both are equally true. The reconciliation of these two truths would require an infinite mind, which we have not. We receive them both as from God; we see the difficulty involved, but believe the solution of it is in Him...this need not prevent us receiving in simple faith all the truths God has revealed.

He who views everything in relation to the glory of God, takes Scripture as he finds it. He has no need to explain away even one verse or clause of the Book of Truth...he looks at things in the light in which God looks at them; and he finds all harmony. There is no conflict, no discord.

This comparison demonstrates the balance in Ross' theology—neither an emphasis on human responsibility that didn’t take God’s sovereignty seriously (Arminianism), nor an emphasis on God’s sovereignty that didn’t take human responsibility seriously (hyper-Calvinism); but rather, a balanced Calvinism that not only compared to that of men like Bonar, but that reflected the Calvinism once diffused among Revival Brethren.

Such tempered Calvinism as Ross expressed that holds both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility as balanced biblical concepts, however, should by no means be confused for a careless and ignorant synthesis of these ideas—one that might even dare to put in Ross’ mouth an invertebrate molluscous mush of shapeless nonsensical theology—as though it were possible for him to have simultaneously been both an Arminian and a hyper-Calvinist.

**Particular redemption or limited atonement**

As we have seen, Ross flatly declared “I believe in particular redemption” when he repudiated the Arminianism of James Morison.\(^{154}\) To clarify use of terms, the expressions “particular redemption”, “definite atonement” or “limited atonement” then as today all equate to the same theological concept,\(^{155}\) stressing the particularity of the atoning/redeeming work of Christ *for his people* over an indistinguishing universal view of this work *for all people* that denies any such particularity. One of Morison’s popularized “universalities” described the work of Christ as “to all men everywhere, without distinction, exception, or respect of persons”.\(^{156}\) Since Ross wrote of his belief in particular redemption in the context of an indignant denial of Morisonianism to a Presbyterian cleric, it seems clear that the usual theological meaning of “particular redemption” is precisely what Ross meant to express.

Later however, after a decade among Brethren, Ross replied to a question on the propriety of telling an unbeliever that Christ died for his sins with the somewhat cryptic response, “Scripture knows nothing of a ‘limited or an unlimited’ atonement”, going on to use types to distinguish between blood shed and...

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\(^{154}\) Ross, Donald Ross, 88. Belief in limited atonement is now a controversial minority belief among Revival Brethren. One of their popular discussion sites, www.thescriptureforum.com, for example, at the time of writing, joins people under church discipline with believers holding the doctrine of limited atonement in equal censure under a posting ban—ironically gagging those whose offence may be nothing more than believing what their most prominent founder believed.

\(^{155}\) Compare Cunningham, Historical Theology, Vol. 2, 324, written by a Free Church contemporary of Ross, with Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, Five Points, 39. Many if not most Calvinists find the expression “limited atonement” to be objectionable, in that it is frequently mistaken to imply some sort of inadequacy or finiteness in Christ’s work.

\(^{156}\) Adamson, James Morison, 240. This view, in fact, was the impetus for charges being brought against Morison by his United Secession Church.
Donald Ross: A Soteriological Retrospective

sprinkled.\(^{157}\) Whatever he meant by this, it clearly could not have been a thoroughgoing form of Amyraldism that embraces a purely “unlimited atonement” position.

Commenting still later on the redemptive text, “…care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood”, Acts 20:28 \(\text{ESV}\), Ross followed the atonement formula “universal purchase, particular redemption”, contrasting the former in Mt 13:44 and 2Pe 2:1 with the latter in Acts 20:28.

\[
\text{We are not only a redeemed people, but a purchased people, Christ redeemed only His own people—all men are not redeemed, else none would be lost; but with His own blood He purchased this world of ours—the generations of men, mountain, fields and rolling sea are all His by purchase, and so we read in Matt 13:44, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field”...}^{158}
\]

Another potential clue about Ross’ view of the atonement is located in a poem he published in Our Record near the end of his life. His sources attributed it to a famous British spy reluctantly executed by General Washington during the American Revolutionary War, Major John André—the notorious Benedict Arnold’s handler.

\[
\text{Hail, sovereign love, which first began} \\
\text{The scheme to rescue fallen man!} \\
\text{Hail, matchless, free, eternal grace,} \\
\text{Which gave my soul a hiding-place!}
\]

\[
\text{Against the God who built the sky,} \\
\text{I fought with hands uplifted high,} \\
\text{Despised the mention of His grace,} \\
\text{Too proud to seek a hiding-place.}
\]

\[
\text{Enwrapped in thick Egyptian night,} \\
\text{And fond of darkness more than light,} \\
\text{Madly I ran the sinful race,} \\
\text{Secure, without a hiding-place.}
\]

\[
\text{And thus the eternal counsel ran,} \\
\text{Almighty love, arrest that man!} \\
\text{I felt the arrows of distress,} \\
\text{And found I had no hiding-place.}
\]

\[
\text{Indignant Justice stood in view;} \\
\text{To Sinai’s fiery mount I flew;} \\
\text{But Justice cried, with frowning face,} \\
\text{This mountain is no hiding-place.}
\]

\(^{157}\) Ross, Barley Cake, May 1881, 79-80.

\(^{158}\) Ross, Barley Cake, August 1885, 116. This “universal purchase, particular redemption” formula was held by other Brethren leaders too like William Kelly and Frederick Grant. Interestingly, S. Lewis Johnson, a respected Calvinist theologian who taught at Dallas Theological Seminary, who while remaining firmly committed to particular redemption or limited atonement, seemed tentatively open to this formula (especially in interpreting 2Pe 2:1) after having first encountered it in Grant’s Numerical Bible in the 1970s (Johnson, Design of the Atonement).
Ere long a heavenly voice I heard,
And Mercy’s angel soon appeared;
He led me in a placid pace,
To Jesus as a hiding-place.

On Him almighty vengeance fell,
Which must have sunk a world to hell.
He bore it for a sinful race,
And thus became their hiding-place.

Should sevenfold storms of thunder roll,
And shake this globe from pole to pole,
No thunderbolt shall daunt my face,
For Jesus is my hiding-place.

A few more rolling suns at most
Shall land me on fair Canaan’s coast,
When I shall sing the song of grace,
And see my glorious hiding-place.\(^{159}\)

Ross commended this poem to his wide Brethren readership being quite possibly aware of the more particularistic variants of the 7\(^{th}\) stanza (bracketed above) then in general circulation;\(^{160}\) if aware of this, his publication of the rather more Amyraldian-friendly variant is clearly more meaningful (yet even if not aware, he published the less particularistic variant without complaint).

In any case, no synergistic Arminian idea of a free-will choice for Christ is here—only the irresistible "arrest" of sovereign "almighty love"—and that not acting in a manner contingent upon human choice (which only "despised the mention of His grace", preferring "darkness more than light")—but in accordance with the determination made in the gracious "eternal counsel" of God, resulting in due time in the rebel being brought to repentance and effectually "led" to Christ. We have here a rich and memorable expression of monergistic Calvinism completely consistent with Ross’ fully matured soteriology.

Stepping back, this collection of Ross perspectives on the atonement may seem inconsistent or blurred. A more thorough understanding of the intramural debate among Calvinists concerning the atonement will help bring these perspectives into focus.

**Unpacking the “Fifth Point”**
Among Calvinists are those often described as “four-pointers” or “five-pointers”—the divide turning on a question of the extent of God’s intent for salvific benefits in the atonement. So in the context of this

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\(^{159}\) Brewer, *Our Record*, July 1901, 108-109. Other sources attribute this poem to Jehoida Brewer, citing its publication in the October, 1776 issue of *The Gospel Magazine*, four years before André was executed—meaning that the handwritten copy of the poem reportedly found on André after his execution may have been merely a copy of Brewer’s composition mistaken for that of André. The poem had recently been published by *The New York Times Saturday Review* on December 15\(^{th}\), 1900 as taken from a book published in Dublin in 1800 with the exact wording Ross used and the same (probably mistaken) attribution.

\(^{160}\) Malcolm, *Gospel Magazine*, May/June 2006, 97. This careful reprint by the same magazine that published the original reads “a chosen”, explaining the tenacity of the particularistic readings in many 19\(^{th}\) century hymnals.
debate, the distinguishing “fifth point” is that of particular redemption or limited atonement—not perseverance, as in the usual order the doctrines are considered.

Before coming to the question actually under debate, it will be useful to sweep away a couple of common misconceptions—questions that are not debated by Calvinists. First, the question under debate is not concerning the sufficiency of the atonement. All Calvinists agree that the atonement is sufficient to atone for the sins of all men. The stubbornness of this misconception is due not only to the defectiveness of the expression “limited atonement” (which is precisely why “particular redemption” or “definite atonement” are typically preferred), but is fueled by some Arminians who willfully (oops, a pun!) continue to retail the misunderstanding. The Canons of Dort should adequately and authoritatively set the record straight.

The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin; is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.

This death derives its infinite value and dignity from these considerations; because the person who submitted to it was not only really man and perfectly holy, but also the only-begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and Holy Spirit, which qualifications were necessary to constitute him a Savior for us; and because it was attended with a sense of the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin.

And, whereas many who are called by the gospel do not repent nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves.161

Further, Calvin himself used the old pre-Reformation atonement formula attributed to Peter Lombard,

Christus passus est sufficienter pro omnibus, efficaciter pro electis.162

Second, the question under debate is not about whether God intended at least some non-salvific benefits in the atonement for all. Many Calvinists that believe in limited atonement easily accept the statement that “Christ died for all men” in this sense.

According to the Reformed faith the divine design of the atonement is in an important respect limited. But the Reformed faith also insists that in other respects it is universal. It can be shown without the slightest difficulty that certain benefits of the atonement, other than the salvation of individuals, are universal.

Therefore the statement, so often heard from Reformed pulpits, that Christ died only for the elect must be rated a careless one.163

The actual question on which the debate turns, then, is the question of God’s intent for salvific benefits in the atonement. Were these salvific benefits intended for all—or only for the elect?

161 Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, 586. See Articles III, IV and VI of the Second Head.
162 Hodge, The Atonement, 360-361. Or, “Christ’s suffering is sufficient for all, efficient for the elect”, translating the original Latin.
163 Kuiper, For Whom Did Christ Die?, 78-79. See also Cunningham, Historical Theology, Vol. 2, 332-333. Among the non-salvific universal benefits frequently cited by Calvinists are: common grace or the common mercies of life and delay of punishment.
While many theologians tend to categorize Calvinists by looking for simple monochromatic responses to this question (“for all” responses identifying “four-pointers”; “for the elect” responses identifying “five-pointers”), the situation in reality is much more nuanced. Many historical theologians warn against such oversimplification, pointing out a spectrum of real-world responses that Calvinists have given.

Most of the popular books on Calvinism paint the issue as an “either-or” choice...but when more serious research is done into the Scriptures and Reformed theology, it is more of a “both-and” balance with clarifications on both sides.\(^\text{164}\)

Historical theologian Curt Daniel gives a spectrum of Calvinism that has been simplified and adapted in the graph below.\(^\text{165}\) This graph names a few well-known Calvinists, placing them at potential or approximate points corresponding to their views on the question at hand.

Note that both Arminianism and hyper-Calvinism are beyond either end of the graph as significant deviations outside the range of normative Calvinism.

A high Calvinist (as the term is used throughout this paper) favors the view that God’s intent for salvific benefits in the atonement is to the elect only; the high Calvinist is usually regarded as moving “lower” to the degree they moderate this dominant view with universalizing qualifications (God’s intention of benefits in the atonement universally to all).

Jonathan Edwards, for instance, while laying great emphasis on the particularity of redemption consistent with his typical categorization as a “five-pointer”, freely spoke of it in a universal sense too.

...however Christ in some sense may be said to die for all, to redeem all visible Christians, yea, the whole world by His death; yet there must be something particular in the design of his death, with respect to such as he intended should actually be saved thereby.\(^\text{166}\)

A low Calvinist favors the view that God’s intent for salvific benefits in the atonement is to all alike; the low Calvinist is usually regarded as moving “higher” to the degree they augment this dominant view with particularizing qualifications (God’s intention of benefits in the atonement particularly to the elect).

Richard Baxter, for instance, while often tossed into an oversimplified four-point category, made augmenting qualifications that actually locate him higher than a strict low Calvinist or Amyraldian.

Christ therefore died for all, but not for all equally, or with the same intent, design or purpose.\(^\text{167}\)

\(^\text{164}\) Daniel, *History and Theology of Calvinism*, 361. Cunningham, who preferred to deal with Universalism or Particularism as discrete, mutually exclusive options, admitted to a spectrum of mediate views (see Cunningham, *Historical Theology, Vol. 2*, 335).
\(^\text{165}\) Daniel, *History and Theology of Calvinism*, 68.
A *moderate Calvinist* is at an approximate midpoint between *low* and *high Calvinism*, approaching what is often described as a dual reference view of the atonement or Dualism. While this nomenclature is reasonably mainstream, it should be taken with a warning that far less consistency is found especially in popular discussion of these matters than one might expect. Many Arminians today unhelpfully label anything higher than four-point Arminianism “extreme Calvinism” or “hyper-Calvinism”. Hyper-Calvinists are prone to label all normative Calvinists as “hypo-Calvinists”. “High Calvinism” is sometimes taken as a synonym for hyper-Calvinism, “moderate Calvinism” for Amyraldism, and “Low Calvinism” for Arminianism. Beware.

So are Ross’ perspectives on the atonement convergent and coherent—or are they divergent, indicating a change in his views over time? Ross’ earliest statement being a clear affirmation of particular redemption, and it being claimed by his son to have been a lifelong view seems like an obvious starting point for analysis. But do later statements fit? While his rejection of both limited and unlimited atonement may be initially somewhat confusing, it is quite in concert with the idea fully embraced even by *high Calvinists* that the atonement is in aspects both particular and universal. Moreover, in using the “universal purchase, particular redemption” formula, Ross explicitly identifies those aspects in his understanding. Finally, Ross’ publication of the Brewer poem could quite easily be over-interpreted, and if it has any real meaning relevant to his view of the atonement whatever, it seems unlikely to indicate anything more than Ross’ rejection of a strict Particularism. Taken together, then, Ross’ statements do converge and cohere. His Calvinism was higher than *low Calvinism* (explicitly rejecting unlimited atonement, the off-ramp away from Calvinism in the theology of James Morison that he vigorously refuted) and lower than *high Calvinism* (embracing particular redemption, but assiduously avoiding a rigid Particularism). It seems appropriate to categorize Ross not lower than a *moderate Calvinist*—a typical soteriology among Brethren and other evangelicals of the time.

While the balance of evidence is that Ross’ views on the extent of the atonement fit best with *moderate Calvinism*, two notes here are appropriate. First, even the writings of John Calvin himself leave us with some doubt about his understanding of the extent of the atonement—to the point that reasonable scholarly debate exists about the qualifications with which he held (if indeed he held at all) a doctrine of limited atonement. Second, even if the correct theological taxonomy of Ross’ mature soteriology were to be as low as to even approximate a *low Calvinist* Amyraldism, theologians as substantial as B. B. Warfield quite freely name even thoroughgoing Amyraldism “Calvinism”—though deprecating it as inconsistent and unstable. So even in this unlikely extreme case, Ross’ soteriology would meet the concise definition of Calvinism we are using, and in no case could ever legitimately be better described as Arminianism.

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168 One of the earliest writers to claim that Calvin held universal atonement was Moses Amyraut. More recently, both R. T. Kendall (Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*) and Curt Daniel (in an appendix to his massive Ph.D. dissertation at Edinburgh; Daniel, *Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill*) have argued similarly and substantially concerning Calvin’s views.
169 Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* 118-120. The Amyraldian position is widely regarded as an intramural dispute within Calvinism—thus its identification as *low Calvinism*.
Perseverance of the saints or the security of believers

Strongly critical of doctrine claiming real believers could fall away, Ross wrote to a fellow evangelist contrasting the perseverance that follows true conversion with the inevitable falling away of those with shallow non-saving faith—a stand Ross maintained his whole life.

...all who do not come [to true conversion] are still under the curse, and their religion has no root; therefore it will wither as soon as anything turns up to try it.

Christless converts all go back. Many who are disappointed at their converts going back are driven, in seeking a solution of this fact, to the doctrine that real Christians fall away, although He says, “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish”. This sort of converts and non-perseverance always go together. 170

As we have seen, Ross even distinguished his concept of perseverance from that of four-point Morisonian Arminians, insisting on the “perseverance of God’s dealings with his saints” or in the “perseverance of God with his saints”. In fact, Ross went to such lengths to avoid a man-centered concept of perseverance, that he actually disliked the more ambiguous term “perseverance of the saints” in standard Calvinistic vocabulary. 171

Dissonance?

While Ross consistently articulated a clear Calvinistic soteriology, on rare occasions he would confusingly imply or claim that he was neither Calvinist nor Arminian. Any thorough evaluation of Ross’ theology must carefully account for these seemingly dissonant statements.

For instance, recounting a conversation with someone who denied perseverance and who identified Ross as a Calvinist, Ross responded with striking firmness.

Now that is not the case [of Ross being a Calvinist], and such assertions ought not to be made. It is decidedly wrong to circulate such a report. 172

Ross went on to explain that he believed in the “faithfulness of God and His perseverance” rather than in the “perseverance of the saints” as the Calvinistic doctrine is often expressed. Yet this is precisely the distinction that no less a Calvinist authority than the Canons of Dort make in addressing perseverance.

By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end.

Thus, it is not in consequence of their own merits or strength, but of God’s free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which, with respect to themselves is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since His counsel cannot be changed, nor His promise fail, neither can the call according to His

170 Ross, Donald Ross, 26.
171 Ross, Donald Ross, 88,226.
172 Ross, Barley Cake, February 1881, 17-20.
Further, avowed Calvinists such as James Boice have ever written of perseverance in perfect harmony with Ross.

…the Christian will be kept by God’s power and love.

We are able to stand firm only because God perseveres with us.

…we have a security that is based on [God’s] ability and will rather than our own.174

Ross here, we conclude, apparently resistant to being pigeonholed by an Arminian and thus having a potential evangelistic opportunity cut short, overreached in distinguishing his view of perseverance from a simplistic formulaic Calvinism (perhaps in other words saying, “what you mean by ‘Calvinist’ I’m certainly not”). In any case, he did not give here a legitimate doctrinal reason to deny being called—in a proper sense—a “Calvinist”.

On another occasion, however, Ross identified himself as taking neither a Calvinist nor an Arminian position in interpreting 2Pe 2:20-22.175 Ross claims that the “Arminian wrests” their interpretation here (a former believer who has lost his salvation) and that for their part the “Calvinist twists” their interpretation too (a false professor never truly saved). Ross disputes both “schools of theology” saying “both parties are in error” here. Ross believed that this passage referred to a believer in an unscriptural “ecclesiastical connection”, saying that “they certainly are Christians, but not separated Christians”, quoting much of the preceding context—but leaving off 2Pe 2:17b (cf. v4)!

While Ross correctly distinguished his novel interpretation here from that of a typical Calvinistic view, it hardly seems legitimate to distance himself from being identified as a “Calvinist” merely on the basis of an odd interpretation of this text.176 For that matter, Ross’ interpretation is atypical of Brethren too—yet Ross did not on this account disclaim being identified with “Brethren”.177

What are we to make of this situation? Was Ross coyly playing word games in a cunning attempt at obfuscation, was he with some sort of nearly impossible mental agility simultaneously changing his mind—and not—on soteriology (like the cowboy who jumped on his horse and earnestly rode off in all directions!), was he naively unfamiliar with even basic theological terms, or was he perhaps a “confused Calvinist” in the sense that J. I. Packer meant in reference to John Wesley? There are far better

173 Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, 593,594. See Article III and VIII of the Fifth Head.
174 Boice and Ryken, Doctrines of Grace, 156-158.
175 Ross, Barley Cake, July 1881, 111-112.
176 Ross here unmasks not a unique soteriology, but a pungent antipathy to sectarian leaders that had grown from his experience as a Presbyterian revivalist (see Ross, Donald Ross, 41) and which fed a strongly anti-sectarian ecclesiology.
177 Ross, Our Record, July 1895, 101. Ross admirably rose above the fog of quixotic horror professed by many Brethren for their name, saying that “it is sometimes mere affectation to use an elaborate phrase to describe what one word [‘Brethren’] is sufficient for.”
Modified Calvinism model

Two models for understanding Ross’ seeming inconsistency can be found represented among informed Brethren of his era. One of them, the modified Calvinism model, describes those whose views, utterly contemptuous of Arminianism, generally articulated a moderated high Calvinism—attempting to mark out a distinctively modified Calvinistic position that resisted labels which tended to exaggerate the extremes of the soteriological spectrum.

Such an attempted mediate position, however, can come dangerously close to falling under the worn-out “I’m neither a Calvinist nor an Arminian—I’m a Biblicist” rubric which sounds great but doesn’t actually introduce a helpful soteriological category at all. In fact, much like an American oddity and uselessly declaring that “I’m neither a Democrat nor a Republican—I’m a patriotic citizen”, such statements are logically formal category errors. Has any sincere Calvinist or Arminian (Democrat or Republican) ever really thought their doctrine (politics) to be unbiblical (unpatriotic)? Sincere Calvinists and Arminians (Democrats and Republicans) hold their doctrines (politics) precisely because they believe them to be biblical (patriotic). And just what useful real soteriological (political) alternative has the “Biblicist” (“patriot”) just proposed? None. These statements are similarly illogical and useless. Any real soteriology must ultimately choose between monergism and synergism—or uphold confusion or indecision. Some of these self-proclaimed “Biblicists” find cover for their soteriological ineptness or ambivalence in such fine-sounding nonsensical claims and could thus be confused for people unable to think—but not so the informed Brethren in Ross’ era who were attempting a legitimate form of modified Calvinism and may have found such a position useful for a very different reason.

This model complimented Brethren ecclesiology which even in its most scandalously sectarian practical forms, formally upheld a cherished non-sectarian principle. While Brethren generally taught credo-baptism, for instance, they were quite unhappy on account of this principle to be known as Baptists. Similarly, while many Brethren like Ross had a classic monergistic soteriology, they would on the same principle resist being called Calvinists. Claiming a distinctive monergistic soteriology (whether that distinctiveness was more real or more imagined—as seemingly so with Ross’ overreaching argumentation on at least some occasions), the “Calvinist” label could be more legitimately declined—conveniently enhancing core Brethren non-sectarian credentials. A moderated high Calvinism, higher than Amyralsidm (or low Calvinism) yet lower than a strict Particularism, typical among Brethren, is possibly one of the most legitimate and pervasive forms of this model.

We will examine individual Brethren cases shortly that exemplify modified Calvinism.

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178 While a foundational principle among Brethren like Anthony Groves, Robert Chapman and George Müller was a gentle non-sectarianism, this catholicity faded in some Brethren branches into a more strident anti-sectarianism (it is probably fair to put Ross here) and in others, further, into an outright acerbic separatism. Interestingly, even separatists, whose practical sectarianism blatantly discredits this foundational principle, will still vigorously defend their vacated non-sectarian position.

179 See page 47 (Unpacking the “Fifth Point”) for a description of these terms.
**Essential Calvinism model**

Another potential model for achieving an understanding integrating all the data available about Ross is based the proposition that while the label “Calvinist” carried mostly acceptable *denotative* meaning to Brethren like him, it carried some very unacceptable *connotative* baggage that made it seem imprecise at best, if not utterly objectionable.

Although we do not know just precisely what the term “Calvinist” meant to Ross connotatively, doubtless, like many Brethren, the term would have carried many unpleasant undertones for him. Ross would have remembered his evangelism resisted by non-evangelical “Calvinists”, and the later apostasy that so quickly corroded “Calvinist” churches throughout Scotland. Ross had doctrinally embraced *credo-baptism* (rejecting paedo-baptism and a *practical* form of “baptismal regeneration”), a whole ecclesiology (including, not least, a very non-Presbyterian polity) and an eschatology that would have nearly universally run against the Calvinist grain of his era—certainly against his Free Church background. It is quite reasonable and consistent, with this model then, to understand Ross refusing an unqualified label of “Calvinist” while simultaneously maintaining a distinctively Calvinistic soteriology. Brethren following this model liked their Calvinism without the packaging—and labeling.

This model too would have presented the attraction to Brethren like Ross of substantiating the fundamental Brethren claim to non-sectarianism as explained before. For leaders like Ross, his transition to the Brethren would be even less likely to be misunderstood as crypto-Presbyterianism—functionally merely another in the series of secessions within Presbyterianism of his era.

**Case study: John Darby**

To demonstrate these models and their influence operating among 19th century Brethren, we will point out three significant exemplars.

John Nelson Darby—doubtless the most influential thinker in early Brethren circles and from whose influence Ross was far from removed—is a significant representative of potentially either model. Darby very boldly and consistently affirmed a Calvinistic soteriology over against Arminianism as we shall see, yet at times (like Ross) spoke of himself as though he was not a Calvinist.

Darby was uncharacteristically effusive in his sweeping approval of the Calvinistic core of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles, Article XVII.

> For my own part, I soberly think Article XVII to be as wise, perhaps I might say the wisest and best condensed human statement of the views it contains that I am acquainted with. I am fully content to take it in its literal and grammatical sense.  

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180 Ross, Donald Ross, 113. While Calvinists strongly denounce baptismal regeneration, statements like those from the Scots Confession of 1560 applied in its practical ecclesiastical context of infant baptism, “by baptism we are engrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted” (Article XXI, modernized text), leave little doubt about how popular misconceptions about the relationship of baptism and regeneration could arise yet commonly receive the label of “Calvinism”. See Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, 468.

181 Darby, Writings, Vol. 3, 3. This statement was first published in a pamphlet in 1831 at Oxford.
Darby then went on to directly quote the leading paragraph of Article XVII which declared “wisest and best” the Calvinism with which he was in such fulsome agreement,

I believe that predestination to life is the eternal purpose of God, by which, before the foundations of the world were laid, He firmly decreed, by His counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of the human race, and to bring them, through Christ, as vessels made to honor, to eternal salvation. I believe therefore that those who are endued with so excellent a gift of God, are called according to His purpose working in due time; that they obey the calling through grace; that they are freely justified; that they are adopted to be children of God; that they are made conformed to the image of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ; that they do walk holy in good works; and that at length, through the mercy of God, they do attain to everlasting felicity.  

Reacting to a brewing controversy spurred on by Oxford Regius Professor of Divinity Edward Burton who had attempted to deny the literal historic Calvinistic meaning of this statement, Darby sharply countered Burton by appreciatively and extensively quoting the renowned former Regius Professors of Divinity at Oxford and Cambridge, Peter Martyr and Martin Bucer (or Butzer as he preferred to be called), both recruited by Thomas Cranmer to establish reformation in England purposely because of their doctrinal views—the influence of whose decidedly Calvinistic soteriology Darby so approvingly saw reflected and properly interpreted in Article XVII.

In this light, Darby quoted Calvin’s mentor Bucer, so commending his monergism,

But, when these preposterous patrons of divine justice say, that all men are alike called by the gospel, and that like grace is offered and bestowed upon all, that they may follow, God calling them, and that men’s embracing this grace of God is in their power, we will ask them, Whence is it that some, making good use of their power, embrace the grace equally offered to all—that some reject it, making bad use of their power? If they say, That is from man, not from God; now the chief good from which all the rest hang, the embracing the offered favor of God, is from man; and man has that which he has not received, nor is God now the effecter of every good; therefore neither is He God. This conflicts not only, as I have said, with Scripture, but also with common sense. But if it be from God that any one hears effectually and follows God’s calling, then in any case God does not give His grace to all equally. For to those who follow the call of the gospel He gives that very thing which He does not give to those who reject the gospel.

Darby again quoted Bucer with approval,

For it is certain that any one’s obeying the call of God, which is the beginning of our whole salvation, is the gift and work of God, which God bestows on some, denies to others. For these He persuades that He may effectually influence, those not so; and these whom He effectually influences cannot but follow, and those cannot follow whom He does not effectually influence. He wills therefore altogether that some should hear, and hear effectually; some hear and despise. But why God so wills and does, blessed Augustine has only two things to answer: O the depth of the riches! And, Is there unrighteousness with God?

From these and like quotes of Peter Martyr, Darby passionately argued for the historicity of a robustly Calvinistic authorial intent behind Article XVII—and in this process expressed his own enthusiastic support for its soteriology interpreted accordingly. Lest it be thought that these writings from early

182 Darby, Writings, Vol. 3. Italics are Darby’s. Compare Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, 497.
183 Darby, Writings, Vol. 3, 5-6.
184 Darby, Writings, Vol. 3, 7.
1831 were merely early opinions (at that time Darby being no more than 4½ years among Brethren),\textsuperscript{185} we have the following from 1880 to demonstrate his consistency, from not long before his death.

...the seventeenth Article...is very plain, and I think very good.

...the seventeenth Article...is really a very wise statement\textsuperscript{186}

As if Darby’s Calvinistic credentials require still more proof, his warm encouragement in 1879 to an Italian evangelist friend who had written an article against “free will” should even further confirm our understanding of Darby’s fully matured soteriology.

All depends on the depth of the conviction that we have of our sinful condition...in the reasoning of Arminians there is a totally false principle, namely that our responsibility depends on our power.

Is it true then that [an unregenerate man] can receive Christ? Here all is grace...if the flesh can find its pleasure in Christ, the flesh possesses the most excellent thing that is to be found, not only upon earth, but in heaven itself; it finds its pleasure where the Father finds His: it would not be necessary to be born of God; the most excellent thing that he possesses now, through grace, as a Christian, he possessed already before receiving life, in receiving Christ.

The certainty of salvation is gone at the same time: if salvation is the fruit of my own will, it depends upon it...

...it is said that faith is but the hand that receives salvation, but what disposes us to offer the hand? It is the grace that works in us.\textsuperscript{187}

Yet strangely, for all the sparkling clarity in Darby’s lifelong vigorous affirmations of a Calvinistic Bucer-Martyr soteriology, he at times confusingly spoke of himself as though somehow neither Calvinist nor Arminian,

If we look at the difference of Arminian and Calvinistic preaching...Arminians take up Christ’s dying for all, and generally they connect the bearing of sins with it; and all is confusion as to the efficacy and effectualness of Christ’s bearing of our sins, for they deny any special work for His people. They say, If God loved all, He cannot love some particularly; and an uncertain salvation is the result, and man often exalted... Thus he denies Christ’s dying for all, and the distinctive character of propitiation, and the blood on the mercy-seat. He sees nothing but substitution.\textsuperscript{188}

Abstracting himself from “the Calvinist”, we see here Darby’s moderated view of the extent of Christ’s work (universal propitiation, particular substitution). This fits quite well with the modified Calvinism model in a form of moderate Calvinism—higher than Amyraldism (Hypothetical Universalism or low

\textsuperscript{185} Darby, Letters, Vol. 2, 378. Darby here dates his transition from Anglicanism to the Brethren to late September, 1826.
\textsuperscript{186} Darby, Letters, Vol. 3, 69,71.
\textsuperscript{187} Darby, Letters, Vol. 2, 501. This is a translated extract from a letter written by Darby in Italian on May 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1879, to his friend, G. Biava.
\textsuperscript{188} Darby, Writings, Vol. 29, 287-288. A slightly more edited version of this article (both titled “Propitiation and Substitution”) appears in Darby, Writings, Vol. 27, 318-320.
Calvinism) yet lower than a strict Particularism or high Calvinism.\textsuperscript{189} This model helps explain how Darby could talk about both Calvinists and Arminians in the sense of “those guys”—all the while firmly holding an unquestionably Calvinistic soteriology.

At other times, for instance, Darby spoke out against baptismal regeneration which he seemed to identify as something like an unacceptably misleading packaging better “cast off” of a biblical Calvinistic soteriology,

\begin{quote}
Am I to believe in baptismal regeneration? No honest man can deny that it was, generally speaking, the reformed faith, or at least the faith of the reformers, and that forgiveness of sins was obtained in it. I may be told [that] they preached justification by faith, so that it cannot be. They did preach justification by faith for the deliverance of souls, and taught baptismal regeneration when establishing [an ecclesiology], and tortured themselves to reconcile both. The evangelical party among the reformed have, at the present day, cast baptismal regeneration off, as freer in their ecclesiastical habits...\textsuperscript{190}
\end{quote}

So in instances like this, Darby’s rejection of what may be described as an unwholesome peripheral accretion of connotative Calvinism must be reconciled with Darby’s bold embrace of essential denotative Calvinism—a reconciliation better achieved by the essential Calvinism model.\textsuperscript{191}

Case study: William Kelly
Darby and Ross are not the only Brethren leaders whose soteriology requires careful understanding. William Kelly, one of the leading Brethren intellectuals of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, is another preeminent Brethren representative explained by the modified Calvinism model.

The following quote by William Kelly from 1905 (clearly a mature opinion) is taken from a response to a question about the appropriateness of teaching predestination to unbelievers.

\begin{quote}
Leave it to Arminians to preach man’s freewill and power to turn, if not to do good. We know that we were slaves of Satan and dead in sins: a state incompatible with their bad doctrine. Leave it to Calvinists to preach election to the world, which can do no good to the lost but only injure them by accepting it in a fatalistic way, while still under the enemy’s bondage. They are alike enamored of their doctrines, true but wholly unsuitable in the latter case, and quite false in the former one. Arminianism and Calvinism are human and may be left for men to squabble about, instead of simply following (as all Christians ought) the word which glorifies Christ by the Spirit, and delivers the believer that cleaves to Him from the narrowness and the error of all human systems.

Take this evidence of it—Calvinists and Arminians contend with no small acrimony in their common assumption that purchase and redemption are the same thing. He who holds to Scripture learns the difference which they ignore. They do not see that the Christian is both bought and redeemed, and that the unbeliever, though not redeemed, is bought. Confounding the two, they cannot convince any but themselves; the Christian who discriminates them is assured that all are bought, even the most wicked (as
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{189} In the article just quoted, Darby also wrote, “He is a propitiation for the whole world...\textit{in this aspect} we may say Christ died for all...but it will never be found in Scripture that Christ bore the sins of all” (italics added).

\textsuperscript{190} Darby, \textit{Writings, Vol. 7}, 206-207. Darby quoted from Calvin’s Catechism on baptism in support of his controversial claim, yet admitted that its tortuous language together with the Westminster and Scots confessions on this topic were ultimately “equally unintelligible to me”.

\textsuperscript{191} A similar argument could be made from Darby’s views on assurance (Darby, \textit{Writings, Vol. 27}, 134-135) contra those characteristically much more hesitant among some Calvinists.
in 2Pe 2:1), and that the believer alone has redemption in Christ, the forgiveness of sins through His blood. Man, whether he believes or not, was purchased by the Lord, is bound to own Him, and is preached to (“all men” and “everywhere”) that he may repent and believe the gospel of salvation. Those who believe are by faith forgiven their sins, and enter the family of God as His children, comforted to know their redemption as well as their election by sovereign grace. All the evil was theirs, all the good is of God which for us turns on faith in Christ.  

While clearly admitting in substance the truth of Calvinism and error of Arminianism, the tone of this statement takes an elevated mediate position above “those guys” and their “squabble” by endeavoring to mark out distinctive theological territory (universal purchase, particular redemption—another common Brethren expression of moderate Calvinism) from which ground Kelly could frown darkly upon the undignified sectarian kerfuffle between those “human systems” down below. Cutting through all his swollen rhetoric, though, was Kelly a monergist? Absolutely.

Case study: Charles Mackintosh

Charles Henry Mackintosh serves as a final example of an influential Brethren leader that embraced Calvinistic theology, yet who with no apparent thought of inconsistency despised the label. Mackintosh popularized Brethren teaching perhaps more than any, and would become known and beloved by many the world over as “CHM”. Like other Brethren leaders, his affirmations of Calvinism rang clear.

Now, we thoroughly believe that faith is the gift of God, and that it is not according to man’s will or by human power. And further, we believe that not a single soul would ever come to Christ if not drawn, yea, compelled by divine grace so to do; and therefore all who are saved have to thank the free and sovereign grace of God for it; their song is, and ever shall be, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth’s sake.”

Strikingly, and importantly, Mackintosh went even further,

We believe these five points [of Calvinism], so far as they go...

With such unambiguous language as this, the vigor of his accompanying protest in being identified as a Calvinist is that much more bewildering. The essence of Macintosh’s article can be summarized as, “I believe in the five points of Calvinism, but I’m not a Calvinist!” In fact, after briefly exposing his approval of the “five points” as an introductory remark, the body of the article busily sets out to weave a tapestry of objections designed to all but cover it right back up. Here, in no particular order, is a summary of the

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192 Kelly, *Bible Treasury*, April 1905, 254. The similarity to his writing on this point nearly two decades prior is striking evidence of the stability of Kelly’s views (Kelly, *Things New and Old*, October 1876, 291-293). Also note that in here, Kelly only reinforces the point of the second paragraph of Article XVII in the English Protestant affirmation of Calvinism (see Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 497-499).

193 This view was shared with other Brethren leaders like Ross and Frederick Grant.

194 Mackintosh, *Things New and Old*, January 1876, 10 (this article was later unhelpfully abridged in Mackintosh, *Calvinism and Arminianism*, 604-606). This monthly periodical was edited by Mackintosh for many years, and his article here was in response to an American correspondent whose stance against the free offer of the gospel identifies him as a hyper-Calvinist (and thus indirectly, as a Supralapsarian).

195 Mackintosh, *Things New and Old*, January 1876, 11. This and like usage of “we” in this article are probably best understood as nosisms, the editorial or Victorian “we” meaning Mackintosh himself, though it is not impossible that he intended a more general Brethren reference.
key objections Mackintosh interwove in justifying his refusal to be identified as a “mere disciple” of a “system of theology”, Calvinism.

1. That the “five points” were not a comprehensive statement of faith
2. That hyper-Calvinists (Calvinists he identified with the “high school”) had distorted the five points to undermine human responsibility and the free offer of the gospel
3. That attempts to systematize theology were fundamentally flawed, should not be a grid through which Scripture is interpreted, should be “flung aside” and “ought not to be attempted” whether “high, low or moderate”
4. That the Calvinistic soteriology he accepted was frequently associated with an ecclesiology and eschatology that he could not
5. That he rejected Calvinistic views of the atonement more particularistic than his own (which, like Darby, followed the formula, “universal propitiation, particular substitution”) and also a harsh Supralapsarian doctrine of reprobation

Many of these objections simply fall apart and one would grant that Mackintosh himself would have abandoned them on further examination—they fail to put Calvinists in one category and himself distinctly in another. The first fails because it would be agreed by all but gobsmackingly uninformed Calvinists—as also the second by normative Calvinists.196 And the third also fails under near-universal hostility from believers of all kinds sharing a high view of Scripture. Does anyone read the Scriptures without assigning meaning to texts? Does anyone then never relate these meanings and texts to one another? Is this not systematizing? Is the alternative to systematic theology not haphazard theology or such a low view of Scripture that no systematic meaning is believed to exist? And what interpreter of Scripture examining a text before him does not take his systematized understanding of other texts to help him interpret it? Is not Trinitarian or Dispensational theology systematic and did Mackintosh never use these systems interpretively? If Mackintosh accepted the five points as he said, yet had a substantial doctrinal problem with the normative soteriological system of Calvinism (as opposed to the hyper-Calvinism of his correspondent that laid outside it—and his own views of the atonement or reprobation that laid well within it), his complaining about “systems” never disclosed it.

Really, the last two objections are the only satisfactory ones Mackintosh produced to justify his refusal to be identified as a Calvinist—typical Brethren examples again of the essential Calvinism and modified Calvinism models respectively. Fundamentally, then, Mackintosh was a five-point Calvinist incognito.

As one of the greatest communicators among Brethren, Mackintosh’s best objections would certainly have found an echo among other Brethren of his time. With powerful exemplars like Darby and Kelly besides, we would reasonably expect to see thinking represented by the modified Calvinism and essential Calvinism models to be commonplace among 19th century Brethren. Since Ross is not known to have disclaimed the label “Calvinist” before his association with Brethren, it is probable that he came to adopt a distaste for it after the pattern of one of these models then circulating throughout the

196 Note, for instance, the plain free-offer language in the Canons of Dort representing the standard view of confessional Calvinism that stands against the “all house and no doors” hyper-Calvinism with which Mackintosh was interacting (Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, 586, Article V of the Second Head).
Brethren community—whether the model adopted was modified Calvinism in reaction to higher or lower forms of Calvinism than the moderate Calvinism he held, or essential Calvinism arising from his embrace of non-soteriological Brethren distinctives.\textsuperscript{197}

Darby, Kelly, Mackintosh and Ross are all better understood by whatever comprehensive model we use, than methodology. Darby, Kelly, Calvinists. Darby, Kelly, times as though they weren’t. Ross were articulate and to be psychotic! These are all selectively ignored. The here provide compelling the pertinent information understanding of the entire evidence colored moth struggling against the taxonomist’s pin, defying its coldly proper place under a Latin designation, so the fact that these Brethren nobly resisted names does not mean that none were apt.

To charge Ross, then, with playing word games, of experimentation with mental quantum mechanics, with logical confusion, cognitive dissonance, or simple ignorance is unwarranted, arrogant and just unnecessary. Whatever model (or combination) more satisfyingly reconciles Ross, taking what Ross said—\textit{all} he said—seriously, we are unavoidably confronted with a consonant and plainly monergistic understanding of salvation—a Calvinist in simple, common, plain usage.

\section*{Conclusion}

The doctrine of salvation espoused by Donald Ross, a founding figure preeminent among the front rank of Brethren evangelists should surely meet with interest among a broad group of churches that can trace their beginnings back to his influence. From examination of his theological foundation, to study of key influencers in his life to analysis of his doctrine articulated in his own words—even the difficult ones, a stable, focused image of Ross’ soteriology emerges.

Was Ross really a Calvinist, then? Turning back to our definitions of Calvinism and Arminianism,\textsuperscript{198} we have seen consistent proof of Ross’ bold agreement with Calvinism—and equally consistent proof of his forceful rejection of Arminianism. Ross’ own summary of his soteriology, “salvation is of the Lord alone” (or even more succinctly, “God only”), was the very definition of Calvinism by his era’s best known

\textsuperscript{197}Jonathan Edwards too was sensitive to “unhappy consequences...of distinction of names” and accepted being called a Calvinist only with careful stipulation. “The term \textit{Calvinistic} is, in these days, among most, a term of greater reproach than the term \textit{Arminian}; yet I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a \textit{Calvinist}, for distinction’s sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and cannot justly be charged with believing in everything just as he taught.” Edwards, \textit{Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1}, 3.

\textsuperscript{198}See page 10.
Donald Ross: A Soteriological Retrospective

Calvinist, C. H. Spurgeon. So yes, Ross was certainly a Calvinist—there is just no better theological word for it. Moreover, this conclusion is in complete agreement with the analysis of others.

Certainty about Ross’ Calvinistic soteriology has potential for much more than merely historical value. It should help, for instance, provide a sturdy basis for Revival Brethren to correct a number of popular misconceptions.

- That Calvinism is a recent and alien intrusion into Revival Brethren theology
- That vigorous evangelism is fundamentally incompatible with Calvinism
- That among Brethren, only Exclusives have held a Calvinistic soteriology
- That Calvinism, if ever taught by early Revival Brethren at all, was always a minority view
- That even if some early Revival Brethren were Calvinistic, they never strongly held these doctrines

Moreover, building on ground cleared of such misconceptions, a re-acquaintance with Ross’ significance and soteriological legacy might serve as a catalyst for a fresh reevaluation of the doctrinal foundation needed to secure Revival Brethren evangelism through the mounting challenges of the 21st century. In addition, study of what may likely prove to be the most significant doctrinal reversal in Revival Brethren history could be triggered, yielding answers to intriguing and even troubling questions about how Ross’ theology could so precipitously have fallen into virtual abandonment in the 20th century.

Ross’ soteriology was something that for him impacted his life more deeply than at a mere intellectual level as seen in the aged Highlander’s quiet reflective tone near the end of his years.

The truth of free sovereign grace is held as a doctrine or as a theory only, till we have personal experience of its truth and reality in our individual experiences. Then do we begin to glory in it; and while it sustains, it also deeply humbles.

As we reach his 200th birthday, perhaps Donald Ross’ founding soteriology will be rescued from abandonment by Revival Brethren and may deeply impact lives once again. May he long be remembered (Heb 13:7), and may he long speak (Heb 11:4)!

Soli Deo gloria!

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199 Compare Ross, Barley Cake, April 1886, 61-62 and Ross, Our Record, December 1890, 189 with Spurgeon, Autobiography, Vol. 1, 168. Moreover, this was once an expression often heard among Revival Brethren who enthusiastically shared precisely the same meaning in it. Ross recorded of the 1886 Hamilton conference (Ross, Barley Cake, April 1886, 55), “…some of us had been noticing that at each of the conferences of the past, there had been some particular line of things brought out. The leading thought at these meetings seems to have been, ‘Salvation is of the Lord’.”

200 Ross is described as “a firm Calvinist” by Grass, Gathering to His Name, 143. See also Dickson, Brethren in Scotland, 94.

201 If the author may be indulged some humor, “the five points of nonsense”.

202 Ross, Our Record, December 1898, 178. Ross wistfully titled this brief reflection “How the Years Go By”.
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## Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1859 Revival</td>
<td>4, 5, 9, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan, Andrew</td>
<td>5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amyraldism</td>
<td>17, 21, 27, 46, 50, 53, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amyraut, Moses</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>André, John</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annan, Robert</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antinomianism</td>
<td>23, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arminianism</td>
<td>10, 13, 18, 20, 23, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 38, 41, 49, 50, 56, 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnot, Frederick</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>atonement formulas</td>
<td>Lombard, 48 propitiation-substitution, 27, 56, 57, 59 purchase-redemption, 46, 50, 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustine of Hippo</td>
<td>12, 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker, Caleb</td>
<td>8, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baptismal regeneration</td>
<td>54, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley Cake</td>
<td>See Our Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baxter, Andrew</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baxter, Richard</td>
<td>22, 28, 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believer’s Magazine</td>
<td>7, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible and Tract Repository</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanchard, John</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blow, Samuel</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boice, James</td>
<td>11, 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonar, Horatius</td>
<td>20, 35, 43, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boswell, John</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainerd, David</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brethren early soteriology</td>
<td>18, 24, 26, 42, 45, 56, 58, 59, 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>later soteriology</td>
<td>12, 13, 36, 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-sectarianism</td>
<td>53, 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>separatism</td>
<td>12, 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slipping soteriology</td>
<td>12, 27, 35, 36, 40, 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brethren assemblies</td>
<td>Aberdeen, 6, 8, 18, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeenshire</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banffshire</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>4, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>7, 8, 35, 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>8, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>35, 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harray</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilmarnock</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morayshire</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Deer</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Rayne</td>
<td>7, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orillia</td>
<td>18, 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkhill</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peterhead</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stromness</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulster</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westray</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brewer, Jehoida</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce, Alexander</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce, F. F.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucer, Martin</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buglass, Thomas</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunyan, John</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burton, Edward</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caldwell, John</td>
<td>8, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin, John</td>
<td>12, 14, 16, 20, 21, 48, 50, 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin’s Catechism</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvinism</td>
<td>10, 18, 34, 49, 50, 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high Calvinism</td>
<td>49, 50, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low Calvinism</td>
<td>17, 49, 50, 53, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moderate Calvinism</td>
<td>27, 50, 53, 56, 58, 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, James</td>
<td>8, 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, John</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candlish, Robert</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canons of Dort</td>
<td>10, 21, 48, 51, 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnie, Alex</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case, J. Norman</td>
<td>13, 36, 40, 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalmers, Thomas</td>
<td>4, 16, 20, 21, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapman, Robert</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Scotland</td>
<td>4, 6, 15, 16, 17, 21, 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark, John</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coad, F. Roy</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranmer, Thomas</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford, Norman</td>
<td>9, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cunningham, William</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel, Curt</td>
<td>49, 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darby, John</td>
<td>17, 27, 41, 54, 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davidson, Andrew</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis, Christopher</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decisional regeneration</td>
<td>35, 37, 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definite atonement</td>
<td>See particular atonement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dewar, James</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dickson, Neil</td>
<td>9, 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruption</td>
<td>4, 16, 17, 28, 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodds, Marcus</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>double-predestination</td>
<td>See equal ultimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downie, William</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drummond, Henry</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dualism</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edersheim, Alfred</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards, Jonathan</td>
<td>11, 20, 22, 23, 43, 49, 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efficacious call of the Spirit</td>
<td>10, 15, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 29, 35, 38, 40, 42, 43, 55, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contra</td>
<td>10, 31, 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot, Jim</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elphinstone, William</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emmanuel Bible College, 14
Emmaus Journal, 13
equal ultimacy, 24, 40, 59
Erastianism, 16
essential Calvinism, 54, 57, 59, 60
Evangelical Union, 16, 18, 31, 32, 33, 39
Ewald, Heinrich, 16
Farwell, Mary, 28
Finney, Charless, 30
Free Church of Scotland, 4, 6, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 28, 29, 32, 44, 54
free offer of the gospel, 15, 22, 23, 25, 44, 45, 58, 59
fundamentalism, 12
Gill, John, 5, 8, 23
God’s sovereignty, 12, 22, 25, 26, 27, 29, 37, 43, 44, 45
Goodfellow, James, 8
Grant, Frederick, 46, 58
Grass, Tim, 9, 13
Groves, Anthony, 53
Guthrie, Thomas, 28
Haldane, James, 21
Hay, John, 5
Henderson, Alexander, 20
Hodge, Charles, 20
Hopkins, Rice, 6
Howe, John, 28
human responsibility, 43, 44, 45
Hunt, Dave, 13
hyper-Calvinism, 18, 23, 43, 45, 49, 50, 58, 59
Hypothetical Universalism, 21, 27, 49, 56
irresistible grace. See efficacious call of the Spirit
Jeffrey, Kenneth, 9
John Ritchie, Kilmarnock, 7
Johnson, S. Lewis, 46
Johnston, John, 5
Kelly, William, 46, 57
Kendall, R. T., 50
Knox, John, 4, 12, 14, 20
liberalism, 6, 16, 17, 54
limited atonement, 45, See particular redemption
Livingstone, David, 13
Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn, 12
Lombard, Peter, 48
M’Cheyne, Robert, 22
Macdonald, John, 22, 28
Mackintosh, Charles, 58
Macpherson, John, 28
Marshall, Alexander, 18, 27, 30, 36
Martyr, Justin, 16
Martyr, Peter, 55
Masson, George, 5
Matheson, Duncan, 5, 14, 17, 19, 27, 32, 38
Matthews, William, 36
McCrie, William, 8
McCosh, James, 17
McGaw, John, 5
M’Cheyne, Robert, 20
McIntosh, Hugh, 19, 32
McLaren, Ross, 9
McLean, William, 7
McLeod, Norman, 17
Melville, Andrew, 20
Moderatism, 16, 21
modified Calvinism, 53, 56, 57, 59, 60
Monergism. See Calvinism
Montanism, 19
Montgomery, Charles, 8
Moody, D. L., 17, 41
moral suasion, 37
Morison, James, 18, 30, 36, 45, 50
Morisonianism, 16, 30, 36, 38, 45, 51
Muir, Thomas, 8, 40
Müller, George, 9, 18, 53
Munro, Donald, 5, 7, 8
Murray, Iain, 12
Neatby, William, 18
Nettleton, Asahel, 20
Nicholson Jr., J. Boyd, 13
Nightingale, Florence, 28
North, Brownlow, 28
Northeast Coast Mission, 5, 6, 32
Northern Evangelistic Society, 6, 7, 19
ordo salutis, 33
Our Record, 8, 13, 27, 40
Owen, John, 20, 23, 28
Packer, J. I., 10, 12, 43, 52
particular redemption, 10, 12, 21, 22, 34, 35, 45, 48
contra, 10, 30, 34, 45
Particularism, 27, 49, 50, 53, 57
Pelagianism, 31, 38, 56
perseverance, 12, 15, 21, 25, 34, 35, 51, 55
Pickering & Inglis, 8
Pickering, Henry, 8
Piper, John, 43
Queen Victoria, 16
Quinn, S. Lance, 10, 36
Revival Brethren, 4, 9, 61
Ritchie, John, 7, 8, 20, 27, 28, 43
Roman Catholicism, 20
Ross, Charles, 5, 8, 9, 27, 32, 35, 40, 43
Ross, Donald
assurance, 6, 19
Brethren leader, 8
children, 5
conversion, 4, 13
death, 7
disillusionment with Free Church, 6, 18
early life, 4, 14, 16
ecclesiology, 6, 18, 52, 54
evangelistic results, 6, 7
father, 4, 14, 16
founds NECM, 5
founds NES, 6
influence, 7, 8, 9
migration to America, 7
publishing, 7, 8, 27
soteriology, 14, 15, 20, 30, 60, 61
transition from
Presbyterianism, 6, 18, 19
wife, 4
Rowdon, Harold, 18
Scots Confession, 57
  Article XXI, 54
Scott, John, 9
Scroggie, James, 5, 32
security of believers. See
  perseverance
Sinless Perfectionism, 19
Smith, George, 16
Smith, James, 36
Smith, John, 8
Smith, William, 16, 17
Spurgeon, C. H., 6, 10, 12, 20, 61
Steele, Daniel, 41
Stevenson, Mark, 14, 18
Supralapsarianism, 18, 58, 59
Synergism. See Arminianism
Taylor, John, 5
Telfer, Robert, 8
The New Prophets, 19, 32
The Northern Assemblies, 8
The Northern Evangelist, 8
The Northern Evangelistic
  Intelligencer. See The
  Witness
The Northern Intelligencer.
  See The Witness
The Northern Witness. See
  The Witness
The Northern Youth, 8
The Ram’s Horn. See The
  Testimony
The Testimony, 8
The Three Universalities, 31,
  33, 45
The Witness, 7, 8, 23, 24, 26,
  27
Thirty-Nine Articles
  Article XVII, 54, 56, 58
total depravity, 21, 24, 25,
  29, 34, 36, 37, 39, 55, 56
  contra, 10, 31, 34
total inability. See total
depravity
Tregelles, Samuel, 6
Two Roads and Two
  Destinies, 28
unconditional election, 10,
  12, 15, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25,
  26, 29, 34, 38, 39, 40, 42,
  55, 58
  contra, 31, 34, 39
United Secession Church, 30,
  31, 45
Uplook, 13
Wallace, John, 5
Warfield, B. B., 11, 32, 50
Wellhausen, Julius, 16
Wesley, John, 52
Westminster Confession, 57
Westminster Shorter
  Catechism, 14, 15, 16, 17,
  28, 38, 43
Whitfield, George, 20
Wilberforce, William, 21
Zwingli, Huldrych, 20