REVIEW


*A Great Grievance* is a must-read for historians and students of early modern Scotland. As noted in the introduction, lay patronage was one of the most contentious issues of debate in the Scottish Church during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is curious, therefore, that *A Great Grievance* is the first book length study to address the topic. The analysis follows a chronological narrative, starting with the origins of lay patronage in the early Middle Ages and finishing with the rise of the Moderate Party in the 1750s.

The first four chapters cover the period up to the abolition of patronage in 1690, with the remaining eleven chapters devoted to the period 1690-1750. Whitley describes the failings of the 1690 church settlement in detail, and argues that the patronage act was ambiguous and left unresolved tensions between clergy and heritors.

Both were involved in the selection of a minister but neither were willing to compromise when faced with a difference of opinion. Mainstream kirk opposition to the restoration of patronage in 1712 was fairly muted due to the unworkable settlement of 1690 and Presbyterians’ fears of being perceived as rebellious. Whitley’s analysis provides a welcome alternative to nineteenth-century hagiographic histories whose authors romanticised the 1690 settlement.

The remainder of the book examines the political and ecclesiastical wranglings of the early eighteenth century that led to schisms in the church, most notably the Secession of 1733. Whitley argues that the General Assembly and lower ecclesiastical courts were vulnerable to management techniques and thus became victims of competing noble interests. Patronage is presented as the catalyst for schisms in the church. Whitley perceives the greatest challenge for contemporaries as the difficulty in drawing a line between church and state.
A Great Grievance provides fascinating insight into an overlooked topic, but it suffers from an excess of narration. This makes for uncomfortable reading at times. The focus on high politics and management is also quite an old fashioned approach. Since the cultural turn in early modern Scottish history, scholarly work tends to focus more heavily on the ordinary members of society and how controversy and political and religious change was perceived at grassroots level.

It may be justifiably argued that the book serves as a welcome alternative to cultural histories, but inclusion of some works which embrace the cultural turn would have led to a more critical analysis and rectified the narrative nature of this book. Whitley frequently refers to the work of P. W. J. Riley, whose Namierite approach to history has been the subject of significant scrutiny since the 1980s. Indeed, only a handful of the material in the bibliography was written in the twenty first century. Had Whitley included, for example, Karin Bowie and Jeffrey Stephen’s contrasting interpretations of the activities of the Commission of the General Assembly in 1706 and the Act Securing the Church of Scotland instead of relying on Robert Wodrow, his analysis of this volatile time would have been far more nuanced.

Nevertheless, Whitley should be commended for his rigorous approach to the research. Primary material forms the bedrock of his analysis, and he uses a vast array of manuscript and printed sources including (but not restricted to) church records, collections of correspondences, diaries, poetry, and polemical tracts to ensure that no stone is left unturned. Perhaps the greatest success of this book is the information contained in the preface and appendices.

The preface provides a glossary of political and ecclesiastical terms commonly used in histories of this period but rarely explained or defined, making this list invaluable to a student of early modern Scotland. Equally valuable are the appendices which contain a summary of the congregational call, transcripts of some key acts (such as the 1690 and 1712 patronage acts), an outline of the path ministers take to ordination, and biographical notes on the prominent political and religious figures of seventeenth and eighteenth century Scotland. As the book is
published in paperback it is affordable and should be on the reading list for any undergraduate or postgraduate course on the Scottish Church and on the bookshelf of any historian of early modern Scotland.

Jamie McDougall
University of Glasgow