

Nature and Grace in the Theology of John Maclaurin

Jonathan Yeager

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Chattanooga, TN 37403, USA

jonathan-yeager@utc.edu

Abstract

The important, but unexplored, John Maclaurin of Glasgow (1693–1754) represents the branch of enlightened evangelicals in the Church of Scotland who defended aspects of supernaturalism as compatible with reason. Evangelicals like Maclaurin endorsed the transatlantic evangelical revivals while still maintaining that such pervasive and multifarious spiritual awakenings were not a chaotic display of enthusiasm. Maclaurin supposed that God had created humanity with the ability to reason and could influence one's thinking to adopt epistemological assumptions about religion which some saw as irrational and superstitious. In order to prove this point, Maclaurin turned the tables on the opponents of the revivals by arguing that in order to be truly natural, in the sense of being a complete human, one *must* embrace the inner workings of the Holy Spirit. The corruption of our nature which occurred as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve left mankind in an incomplete state. Therefore, the purpose of God's supernatural grace is to restore mankind to its authentic natural state. Without such divine aid to form knowledge, he argued, one would never be able to gain a full understanding of spiritual truth.

Similar to Thomas Aquinas, Maclaurin assumed that humans can know many things about God and his work in the world using reason. Sin has not corrupted our intellect to the extent that we cannot ascertain any truth about God from observing the world around us. Nevertheless, in order to have a thorough understanding of God, divine grace is needed. Following Aquinas, Maclaurin claimed that God uses secondary causes like preaching to motivate people to seek grace. Such secondary causes cannot produce any real change in a person unless accompanied by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. As opposed to many of the more liberal ministers of the day, Maclaurin, although not entirely comfortable with the fainting and weeping which sometimes appeared at the revivals, was willing to admit that emotional displays could be a natural response by a person whose heart had been moved by the spirit of God. While defending extreme emotions, Maclaurin's main point in his sermons was that evangelicalism was entirely reasonable.

Keywords: Enlightenment, evangelicalism, John Maclaurin, nature and grace, Scotland.

John Maclaurin (1693–1754) was one of the most important eighteenth-century evangelicals in Scotland. While serving as a minister in Glasgow, he became one of Jonathan Edwards’s ‘Scottish Connections’, a handful of prominent clergymen in the Church of Scotland who frequently communicated with the Northampton divine.¹ Maclaurin, like many of his Scottish colleagues, admired Edwards for his erudition as well as his writings which defended the legitimacy of the spiritual awakenings in New England. Works such as Edwards’s *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737) and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742) provided a paradigm for evangelical clergymen in the Kirk who struggled to make sense of the revivals which were taking place at approximately the same time in Scotland.

Maclaurin was a key supporter of Edwards and probably introduced other Scottish ministers, such as William McCulloch of Cambuslang, James Robe of Kilsyth and John Erskine of Edinburgh, to Edwards. Maclaurin had been the ‘chief contriver and promoter’ of the ‘Concert for Prayer’ in which evangelical ministers in America like Edwards coordinated their efforts with British clergymen to set aside certain days and times to pray that the revival would continue to spread.² Maclaurin’s support for Edwards is also evident in his collection of subscriptions for the first edition of Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will* (1754).³ Along with John Erskine, Maclaurin secured commitments for more than half of the total subscriptions of this work.

¹ See Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England’s Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1991), p. 227; Susan O’Brien, ‘A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735–1755’, *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), p. 819; Harold Simonson, ‘Jonathan Edwards and his Scottish Connections’, *Journal of American Studies* 21 (1987), pp. 353–76; Christopher W. Mitchell, ‘Jonathan Edwards’s Scottish Connection’, in David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 222–47; Christopher Wayne Mitchell, ‘Jonathan Edwards’s Scottish Connection and the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Evangelical Revival, 1735–1750’, Ph.D. dissertation, St Mary’s College, University of St Andrews, 1997, p. 313. The majority of the letters exchanged between Edwards and Maclaurin are lost; however, a few abstracts have survived. See *Jonathan Edwards Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn, vol. 16 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

² Mitchell, ‘Scottish Connection’, p. 227; John Maclaurin, *The Works of the Late Rev. John Maclaurin, One of the Ministers of Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, 1818), p. viii. On the Concert for Prayer, see Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, pp. 229–30, and John Foster, ‘The Bicentenary of Jonathan Edwards’s “Humble Attempt”’, *International Review of Missions* 37 (1948), pp. 375–81.

³ Mitchell, ‘Scottish Connection’, p. 235.

But Maclaurin's significance should not be solely determined by his relationship with Edwards. He had been, for instance, one of the preachers at the Cambuslang and Kilsyth revivals of 1742, two of the largest spiritual awakenings in Scottish history. Estimations of between 30,000 and 50,000 people alone gathered at one of the summer communion services at Cambuslang, a significant figure considering that the population of nearby Glasgow at that time was only about 17,000.⁴ Maclaurin, along with the itinerant Anglican preacher George Whitefield and a few other Scottish ministers, took turns preaching to the attentive, and sometimes emotional, crowds at Cambuslang. Revivals like these contributed to the wider eighteenth-century evangelical movement which burgeoned on both sides of the Atlantic.

In many ways, Maclaurin was the godfather of Scottish evangelicalism. Other younger ministers, such as John Erskine and John Gillies, admired Maclaurin, particularly his intellectual abilities. In his funeral sermon for the eminent historian and ecclesiastical leader, William Robertson, Erskine listed Maclaurin's posthumous sermons and essays as one of the best theological works produced by an evangelical in the early eighteenth century.⁵ In the preface to Maclaurin's posthumous writings, Erskine praised his older colleague for an 'uncommon genius for abstract reasoning'.⁶ Indeed, Maclaurin's theological acumen was such that he surfaced as the most logical candidate for the theology chair at the University of Glasgow. The personal

⁴ On the Cambuslang and Kilsyth revivals, see Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival: The Scottish Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971); James Robe, *Narratives of the Extraordinary Work of the Spirit of God, at Cambuslang, Kilsyth, &c. Begun 1742* (Glasgow: David Niven, 1790); Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 108–13; Ned Landsman, 'Evangelists and their Hearers: Popular Interpretation of Revivalist Preaching in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Journal of British Studies* 28 (1989), pp. 120–49; T. C. Smout, 'Born Again at Cambuslang: New Evidence on Popular Religion and Literacy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Past and Present* 97 (1982), pp. 114–27. For the population figures of Glasgow and the surrounding areas, see T. M. Devine, 'Urbanisation', in T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (eds), *People and Society in Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1988), pp. 27–52, and Ian D. Whyte, 'Urbanisation in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', in T. M. Devine and J. R. Young (eds), *Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999), pp. 176–94.

⁵ John Erskine, 'The Agency of God in Human Greatness', in *Discourses Preached on Several Occasions*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: William Creech & Archibald Constable, 1798), p. 270.

⁶ John Maclaurin, *The Works of the Late Rev. John Maclaurin* (Edinburgh: Waugh & Innes, 1818), p. xv.

connections of his rival, William Leechman, ultimately cost Maclaurin this post.⁷

Despite Maclaurin's importance, very little is written about him, and indeed very few of his manuscripts are extant.⁸ Maclaurin's younger brother, Colin, the mathematical professor and protégé of Isaac Newton, has received much more fame than his older sibling. Even less is written on Maclaurin's theology. Yet it was his role as a theologian for which he was best known by his contemporaries. In this paper, I will outline what I believe to be a central focus in Maclaurin's theology: the promotion of the reasonableness of evangelicalism. Maclaurin's intention is to demonstrate that evangelical Christianity is a reasonable form of faith which is not in conflict with Enlightenment principles. He demonstrates this through a series of arguments which are based on the relationship between nature and grace.

Most scholars maintain that the theologically liberal ministers in the Moderate party were the leading ecclesiastical proponents of the Scottish Enlightenment.⁹ Indeed, William Robertson, Hugh Blair, Alexander Carlyle, Adam Ferguson and John Home made significant contributions to the Scottish Enlightenment largely through their written works. William Robertson, the undisputed leader of the 'Moderate Literati', for instance, received £4,000 for his *History of Charles V* (1769), the highest sum paid to any author at that time.¹⁰ Only Edward Gibbon with his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

⁷ See Thomas D. Kennedy, 'William Leechman, Pulpit Eloquence and the Glasgow Enlightenment', in Andrew Hook and Richard B. Sher (eds), *The Glasgow Enlightenment* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1995), pp. 56–72, and the preface in William Leechman, *Sermons*, ed. James Woodrow, vol. 1 (London: A. Strahan & T. Cadell; Edinburgh: E. Balfour & W. Creech, 1789).

⁸ Besides the previously mentioned scholarship, one may consult the comments made in G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1957); John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740–1800* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998); John Macleod, *Scottish Theology: In Relation to Church History since the Reformation*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1974).

⁹ The best work on this group of ministers continues to be Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), but other notable contributions include Charles Camic, *Experience and Enlightenment: Socialization for Cultural Change in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983); Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001); and Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688–1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1973).

¹⁰ Stewart J. Brown, 'William Robertson (1721–1793) and the Scottish Enlightenment', in Stewart J. Brown (ed.), *William Robertson and the Expansion of the Empire* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 28.

(1776–88) surpassed Robertson as a historian in the eighteenth century.¹¹ Hugh Blair counts as another key figure in the Scottish Enlightenment. He served as the minister of the High Kirk in Edinburgh, the most prestigious church in Scotland. His published sermons enjoyed immense popularity. King George III supposedly wished that every young person should have a copy of Blair's sermons along with the Bible.¹²

Many of the Moderate clergymen viewed revivals like those at Cambuslang and Kilsyth as displays of unrestrained emotion, particularly because of George Whitefield's involvement.¹³ The trend in Britain, beginning in the seventeenth century, had been towards a moralism independent of divine grace.¹⁴ In Scotland, the leading moralist, Francis Hutcheson, advocated that individuals were basically good and need only tap into their internal moral sense to exhibit benevolence.¹⁵ Many of the Moderates found inspiration from Hutcheson's thought and as a result viewed those who spoke of divine inspiration (evangelicals and participants in the revival) as impeding the progress of the Enlightenment in Scotland.¹⁶ Thus, the perception of many scholars is that only the more liberal ministers of the Kirk contributed to the advancement of the Age of Reason.¹⁷ Only recently has new light been shed on the fact that many evangelicals also fully participated in the Enlightenment, even though they continued to insist on the depravity of the mind and that people desperately needed divine grace.¹⁸

¹¹ Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 259.

¹² Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 2 (New York: Harbinger, 1962), p. 295.

¹³ John Erskine, for instance, engaged in a heated debate with his fellow Edinburgh University schoolmate, William Robertson, over the integrity of George Whitefield and his preaching at Cambuslang. See Henry Moncreiff Wellwood, *Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine, D. D., Late One of the Ministers of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co., 1818), p. 99.

¹⁴ C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003).

¹⁵ Mark A. Noll, 'The Rise and Long Life of the Protestant Enlightenment in America', in William M. Shea and Peter A. Huff (eds), *Knowledge and Belief in America: Enlightenment Traditions and Modern Religious Thought* (New York and Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and CUP, 1995), pp. 103–4.

¹⁶ Sher, *Church and University*, p. 176.

¹⁷ See e.g. Anand C. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), ch. 3.

¹⁸ On Scottish evangelicals and the Enlightenment, see Ned C. Landsman, 'Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740–1775', in John Dwyer and Richard B. Sher (eds), *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century*

Maclaurin, although a fervent supporter of the evangelical revival, sympathised with Enlightenment principles. He contended that divine grace was both necessary and reasonable. According to him, without divine grace, true 'reason could not subsist'. He defended supernatural grace from God as being entirely according to nature, and not, as some contemporaries believed, a form of enthusiasm in which God directly inspired a person in a way which was in conflict with natural science. Enthusiasm, according to Maclaurin, had to do with 'new doctrines'. Divine grace, however, related to that which has already been revealed in scripture. Therefore, it could not be deemed as advocating a unique form of divine inspiration.¹⁹

For Maclaurin, nothing could be more natural than divine grace. His definition is significant for his overall argument. He describes grace as 'Divine operations restoring the divine image in the hearts of sinners, and carrying it on gradually towards perfection'.²⁰ Maclaurin appeals to scripture and reason to argue that God originally created man and woman good, that is to say, free from evil. Prior to the Fall, the divine image was uncorrupted. Only when sin entered the world did the likeness of God in humanity become distorted.²¹ It is our sinful nature which is 'unnatural' and contrary to God's original design. According to Maclaurin, when a person strives to live independent of God, rebelling against the Creator, then one is acting unnaturally.²² The role of grace is entirely 'natural' in the sense that it restores the original nature of humanity.

Maclaurin's understanding of nature and grace complements the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Like Aquinas, Maclaurin believes that through reason a person is capable of knowing much about God and his work. 'The distinguishing faculties of rational creatures', the Glasgow minister says, 'make them capable of various considerable enjoyments, in contemplating things wonderful and extraordinary; in contemplating whatever has in it admirable order and symmetry, or manifold evidence of deep contrivance, and in a special manner, in viewing the connection between causes and

Scotland (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1993), pp. 194–209; McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland*; David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2005); Mark A. Noll, 'Revival Enlightenment, Civic Humanism, and the Evolution of Calvinism in Scotland and America, 1735–1843', in George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), pp. 73–107.

¹⁹ Maclaurin, *Works*, pp. 28–9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 190.

their effects'. Despite the corruption of our nature after the Fall, he argues that our 'apostasy has not wholly deprived us' of knowing certain things about God.²³ However, even though we can know aspects of God and his works, we continue to be dependent upon divine grace to reach a fuller knowledge of the Almighty. It was this last point – that reason presumably depended upon supernatural enlightenment – which separated the freethinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from the more conservative evangelicals.

Maclaurin, also like Aquinas, posited the theory of a First Cause (God) and subordinate secondary causes which contribute towards the divine will. It is 'clear from experience and reason' that God uses means to move our affections so that we are drawn to him. He gives the example from scripture of the Son sitting at the right hand of the Father, interceding on our behalf. God, therefore, must use means (secondary causes) to accomplish his will since the Father does not need the Son to intervene for humanity.²⁴ If the Father wanted to act, he could do so without the intercessions of the Son. Examples of means which are used to persuade us include 'light or evidence, arguments and motives, serious proposal of them, mature consideration, earnest exhortation and entreaty, [and] warnings of danger'.²⁵ All these secondary causes, however, are useless by themselves. They derive value from acting in accordance with the divine will. In other words, it is because God, and not humanity, orchestrates these means that they have inherent worth.

But, regardless of God's direct involvement in using secondary causes to move individuals' affections, all means operate within nature. 'Every thing in the order of grace, or in the new creation, is connected, suitably to the frame of human nature, to the nature of good affections and inclinations, their means and effects.' If secondary causes have as their source the divine will, then it is only natural for a person to submit to various means which are utilised by God to restore the divine image in an individual. 'When a sinner becomes a new creature', Maclaurin states, 'the use of the means of spiritual life becomes, as it were, natural to him. They are as naturally the objects of his hunger and thirst, as it is natural for every living creature to use the means of self-preservation'.²⁶ These secondary causes conform to the laws of nature and are, therefore, rational. Affections become 'irrational or unreasonable', if they 'are not founded on a well-informed judgment', and 'when they are not excited by just and sufficient motives, when they are excessive in their

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 43–5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 193–4.

degree, or have a bad influence on the mind and practice'. Since divine grace restores us from our corrupt nature, it is the 'most reasonable thing in the world' for a person to want 'deliverance from sin . . . in the most vigorous manner'.²⁷ Thus, to be a Christian and believe in the supernatural spiritual effects of God is to go with nature, not against it.

Fundamental to Maclaurin's understanding of nature is that secondary causes are attributed to God. The preaching of the Word, although spoken by individuals, is a tool which God uses to lead a person to a life of holiness. Since God is the author of his Word, any effects of it should be credited to him alone. God's 'word contains necessary instructions and motives' so that 'his providence frequently awakens men to a careful consideration of these things'.²⁸ It is by God's grace that people are given 'inclinations' to 'comply with the will of God' and thus change their heart of stone.²⁹ It is not to humanity's credit that they have these proclivities. Rather, God 'causes' them to happen so that there is no basis for boasting.

Through God's providence, 'he brings his word to our door, and puts us in circumstances fit to excite us to the serious consideration of it'. While there is a necessity for outward means of influence to guide us towards God, there is an equally strong need for an inward call which can only occur through the Spirit's influence in our hearts. Scripture teaches us to seek an internal transformation earnestly through prayer even though it is a work of grace by God. This internal change is unique for the true believer. The sanctifying work of God in our hearts is 'peculiar to sincere Christians, and as having a certain connection with true faith and holiness; which cannot be said of the outward divine operations to which some people restrict the grace of God'. Maclaurin distinguishes between those who hear the Word of God outwardly, perhaps even agreeing with it, and those who hear the Word inwardly, receiving divine illumination which leads to saving grace. The main argument is that natural causes alone are insufficient to restore the divine image in an individual.³⁰

At first glance, Maclaurin seems ambiguous on whether a person can resist God's grace. On the one hand, he says that to oppose God's power is impossible. On the other hand, he seems to credit human nature with the possibility of defying the divine will, or at least not submitting to it entirely. He states, 'The meaning therefore of resisting the grace or Spirit of God is, that men refuse to comply with the revealed will of God, notwithstanding

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 213, 215.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 114–23.

good motions and impressions produced by his grace, tending to incline them to a compliance.' Maclaurin wants to argue that, because of our sinful nature, even when God's Spirit effectually calls us, we have the capacity to avoid a complete response. This incomplete acceptance of divine grace explains why we can continue to sin even after experiencing true conversion. Our sinful nature has not allowed God's grace to consume us completely and eradicate all our evil inclinations. By not submitting fully to God's effectual calling, 'it may be said there is some sort of resistance'.³¹ Maclaurin's view of irresistible grace is that the Holy Spirit comes and takes away the aversion of the heart to God's will. This is a real and significant change of the heart. However, the need continues to exist for the sanctifying grace of God, which works to sweep away the remaining sinful tendencies. It is because we do not become fully holy when divine grace touches our heart that we are capable of resisting God's will.

What about excessive emotions which are sometimes attributed to divine grace working in the heart? Does divine grace operating within a person elicit a strong, and sometimes disturbing, reaction? This issue was of central concern in the debate between Scottish evangelicals and the more liberally minded with regard to the revivals. As opposed to many of the Moderate ministers, the evangelicals, although not entirely comfortable with 'bodily constitutions' in the conversion process, were willing to concede that emotional displays sometimes followed when a person's affections had been moved. Maclaurin is no different from other Scottish evangelicals in arguing that there are some legitimate emotional responses to divine grace. However, it is clear that his overall intent is to downplay these exceptional conversions. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit – prophecy, miracles and visions, but also fainting, weeping and extreme emotions – are presented as 'rare' occurrences.³² His minimising of these gifts is no doubt because of his intent to demonstrate to the watching world that evangelicalism is rational.

Maclaurin is very suspicious of emotional demonstrations which relate to religion, believing that, in many of the cases, the motive is to draw attention to oneself. He is particularly concerned with those who intend to deceive, rather than those who are simply naive. 'Of all who want true holiness, those are least in danger', he writes, 'who neither deceive themselves nor intend to impose on others'.³³ The admirable individual is the person who sincerely seeks after true holiness, utilising all appropriate means.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130–1.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

Despite his preference for a quieter form of reasonable assent to divine grace, however, Maclaurin does not deny that in some circumstances emotional excess is an appropriate response. He admits, 'There are some good affections in human nature' that are 'lively' in nature. He offers the example of a sorrowful parent who mourns for the death of a child. In this case, one does not need to persuade the parent to weep since this will certainly take place regardless of any outside encouragement. This type of sorrow 'springs naturally from a strong affection rooted in [the] heart, meeting with a disaster that robs it of the object of its tenderness'. In the same way, Maclaurin contends that a person cannot be justly ridiculed for displaying emotion when encountering divine grace.³⁴ God can choose to move the affections in a way which brings forth exuberance or lament, both of which may need to be expressed.

Regardless of how God chooses to move the affections – whether by logic, the preaching of the Word or other means – these are secondary causes which are in accordance with the divine will. Even a dramatic and popular preacher such as George Whitefield cannot convince a person to become a true believer; only God has that power. Nonetheless, God will often use gifted speakers to awaken individuals to their sin and need of divine grace. Multiple secondary causes are intertwined in this process. The sincere evangelist is moved to accept divine grace, and if this person happens to be a dramatic preacher, God may use this speaker's powerful rhetoric to move the hearts of others. 'Experience shows', Maclaurin argues, 'that when men are under the actual influence of strong and lively affections, good or bad, they have a natural effect on the turn of men's thoughts and expressions. The turn of thought and style, which is the natural effect of strong affections in one person, is a natural means of exciting the like affections in others.'³⁵ Therefore, a preacher who is affected by true religion will be sincerely excited to display a love for God in a sermon, which may affect those who are listening. In this process, God is using secondary causes to accomplish his will.

Maclaurin is fully aware that some speakers may try to manipulate a crowd into responding to a message. He cautions ministers as they preach the Word of God to act with sincere motives: 'They who love devout affections, should consider the bad effects of the communication of affections that are not founded on truth and righteousness. These hurtful passions, or corrupt and irregular affections, spread and strengthened by sympathy and communication in society, have had lamentable effects in various ages.' But

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 240–1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

even if a person is a powerful and sincere preacher, this does not necessitate that true affections will be stirred. On the other hand, we should not try to stifle a speaker who is truly excited about sharing the gospel message. For, 'If we prefer the cold and lifeless way of persuasion to the pathetic way, this implies that when men propose the most just motives to excite or strengthen the best affections in others, they should endeavour to be void of these affections themselves.' This strategy would be 'far from being reasonable, or according to nature'. Despite the emphasis on reason in the current enlightened age, Maclaurin insists that religion need not be cold and indifferent. Rather, the 'design of true religion and devotion, of . . . divine grace, is not to root out or impair whatever is social in human nature; but to refine, to purify and strengthen such things'. Again, the goal is to reform the corrupted image of God in humans, which has been tainted by sin. Ultimately, 'Religion is designed to unite God's reasonable creatures to one another, and to himself, the common source and object of their happiness, the highest object of their noblest affections.'³⁶ The intent of God's work is to restore nature to its ideal state.

Since God created each person differently, there are varieties of ways in which true affections are motivated. Some people respond to divine grace through 'bodily affections'. Maclaurin submits that there is 'diversity in the influence of vigorous affections in the soul, on the inward bodily effects and outward natural signs of inward emotion'. Some people are 'more susceptible than others of strong impressions . . . It may make them more ready to be moved in seeing others affected. It may make them more fit to excite the affections of others.' If a person is an able preacher, devout and sincere in love for God, and this translates into a powerful voice which works towards moving the affections of others, then this is 'far from being contemptible'.³⁷ Regardless of how an individual may be moved by God to come to embrace divine redemption – through excited means or a more docile approach – Maclaurin defends evangelical Christianity from critics who discount this form of religion as superstitious or inferior.

Part of the problem in assessing whether a person has undergone an authentic conversion experience is that there are resemblances of the work of God's grace in unbelievers. It is entirely possible for individuals to have 'some sorrow for sin, some kind of faith or belief . . . some sort of delightful affections in the contemplation and worship of God, and kind affections towards men'. Maclaurin submits the examples of Cain, Judas, Saul and Ahab, those characters in the Bible who he says only appeared sincerely

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 244–5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

remorseful for their actions. Even if people exhibit fear, trembling, sorrow and weeping when considering their sin, these outward signs are not proof that they have genuinely repented.³⁸

These resemblances can be explained by the differences in affections. According to Maclaurin, there are three types of affections in humans. First, there are the affections which are by nature evil, which lead us away from the goodness and love that comes from God. Second, there are 'common good affections', those which are good by nature but insufficient for obtaining 'true holiness'. Third, there are 'Sincere holy affections', which allow us to live and act according to the intended nature that God has in mind for humanity. This third form changes our hearts so that we sincerely hate all sin and seek to live out a life of holiness. Maclaurin argues that there is a significant difference between the second and third type of affections. The second type may show a sorrow for sin, but often this is the result of a fear of punishment. The third form of affections not only shows remorse, but also exhibits a 'suitable hatred' of sin.³⁹ The second form can lead to a fear and sorrow for sin, and loathing for the consequences of actions, but not a hatred of sin itself. Maclaurin is saying that true believers will utterly despise all their sins, and not simply regret some of them.

There seems to be too often a misunderstanding of what true holiness is. The reason for the confusion is that humanity is so corrupted that without the aid of divine grace there can be no true conviction of sin. He claims that 'When men rest satisfied with a reformation that labours under essential defects, this evidently supposes, proportional defects in their acknowledgments and convictions of sin'. This partial understanding of holiness leads to an incomplete repulsion of sin. 'Men may oft-times mourn for some sins, which they can hardly avoid, being in some measure sensible of; while pride and self-love render them inexcusably blind and insensible as to other sins no less dangerous.' Maclaurin posits that a distinction can be made between confession and a sincere desire to turn away from sin completely.⁴⁰

As it is possible to have some similarities of true holiness, so it is the same with faith.⁴¹ Faith is not abstract. Rather, it is putting your trust in a specific thing, in this case Jesus Christ and his ability to save. Faith has a 'connection with salvation' which includes the 'belief and acknowledgment of the things

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 138–9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 139–40.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 143–4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

revealed concerning Christ'.⁴² Although sometimes scripture speaks of faith as the means of salvation without referring to the object of it, when the object of faith is mentioned, Maclaurin claims that it pertains to Jesus Christ. As opposed to John Locke, in his *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), Maclaurin denies that faith 'in Christ' is simply a 'general acknowledgment of Christ's being the promised Messiah'.⁴³ Instead, Maclaurin argues that, even though the Bible has passages describing faith in this way, the whole of the scriptures show that true faith is putting one's trust in Christ and his work on the cross. 'That faith which is so great a means of salvation, if it includes any thing, must include the acknowledgment of the meritorious cause of salvation.' Maclaurin believes that 'If a man only acknowledge, in general, Christ's divine mission, he acknowledges nothing concerning Christ, but what is common to him with all the prophets and apostles. Due acknowledgment of Christ as the promised Messiah, includes an acknowledgment of the principal thing promised concerning him, which is his purchasing our redemption.' Faith in Christ and his work on the cross is the key to salvation. Maclaurin clarifies that the 'faith by which we seek and obtain the remission of sins, is faith in Christ's blood', which is the 'means of pardon' for sinners.⁴⁴ Faith also must recognise Jesus Christ as distinct from anyone else. In other words, it is solely by Christ that atonement has been made for our sins. The way that faith is obtained is through the 'enlightening grace of the Spirit of God' in revealing the mystery of Christ's redemption (divine grace).⁴⁵

But since the transformation of the sinner, who hears the gospel message, takes place within the heart, it is difficult to determine whether a person has truly repented and accepted redeeming faith. 'Men may give some assent to the gospel', Maclaurin proclaims, 'a man may entertain some belief of Christ's divine mission, without owning the principal ends of it; and particularly without acknowledging the sovereign and incomprehensible love, mercy, and grace of God in redemption, by Christ's blood'. Further, 'a sinner may acknowledge redemption, and apply to the mercy of God in the blood of his Son for the remission of sins, without applying sincerely for the sanctification of his heart and life'.⁴⁶ In the end, however, Maclaurin admits that it is best not

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 50; John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity with a Discourse of Miracles and Part of a Third Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), pp. 32–44.

⁴⁴ Maclaurin, *Works*, pp. 50–1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 146–7.

to try to determine genuine displays of true affections. We are only encouraged to test our own hearts and not to speculate with regard to other people.⁴⁷

Maclaurin is an example of a Scottish evangelical influenced by Enlightenment thought. He sought to promote the reasonableness of evangelicalism by claiming that divine grace, although supernatural, was not in conflict with nature. Revivals in which people cried out in agony, wept or displayed other signs of emotion could not be deemed as enthusiastic gatherings for it could be said that God was simply working within nature to restore individuals to their intended, natural state. Maclaurin showed that God often uses means, or secondary causes, to accomplish his will. Since people have different affections, and these affections respond to a variety of influences, it is at least possible that when God touches the heart of a person so that a true conversion takes place, there is a legitimate emotional response. Although Maclaurin preferred to defend evangelicalism as a rational form of religion, he felt compelled to demonstrate that the revivals in America and Britain were the authentic work of God. In order to prove this, he outlined a convincing series of arguments, which posited that evangelicalism and the revivals could be both reasonable and natural.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 236.