

Reconciling performance: the drama of discipline in early modern Scotland, 1560-1610.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the liturgical context of ecclesiastical discipline in early modern Scotland. The core question addresses the narrative being recounted within Protestant rituals of repentance, the liturgical expression of ecclesiastical discipline. Through an analysis of these rituals it is demonstrated that the primary narrative underpinning the performance of repentance is reconciliation with God and with neighbour. An examination of ceremonies officially authorised by the General Assembly, alongside descriptions of local practice, reveals how reconciliation was firmly embedded within the liturgical life of the Kirk. A secondary question addresses continuities and breaks with Scottish penitential practices

prior to 1560. Although bringing a physical shift and 'decluttering' of performance space, many ritual continuities remained after 1560, especially in costumes, props, gestures and speech. This thesis is divided into four sections. Section One focuses upon ritual penitential practices employed by the pre-Reformation Kirk c.1500-1560. The 'cluttered' stage, or stages, upon which rituals of repentance were performed is also analysed. These twin themes, focusing upon pre-Reformation practice and performance spaces, provide the base-line for the assessment of ritual continuity. Section Two moves the performance to the Protestant theatre of reconciliation, 1560-1610. After an initial exploration of the stages of discipline, rituals employed by the Kirk to effect neighbourly reconciliation are examined. They demonstrate how the expression of reconciliation and dispute settlement presents a potent visible representation of the harmonious community as the 'true' church. Moving from the harmonious community at the local level, Section Three investigates the liturgical performance of corporate repentance utilising the key text The Order of the General Fast. At both national and regional levels, corporate repentance became a visible expression of communal reconciliation to God and of the Protestant self-identification as the 'new Israel'. The focus of the final section concerns excommunication, the ultimate tool of ecclesiastical discipline, and a further authorised liturgy, The Order of Excommunication and of Public Repentance, is examined. Far from permanent exclusion, the ritual of excommunication was intended to be radical soul-saving surgery, designed to reconcile an offender with both God and neighbour. In contrast with other recent studies which have analysed ecclesiastical discipline within a judicial context, the liturgical context of discipline as performed in rituals of repentance is placed centre-stage.

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