

Book Review:

Maurice Grant, *Preacher to the Remnant: The Story of James Renwick* (Glasgow: Scottish Reformation Society, 2009), Hardback, 280 pages

At last, a contemporary biography of James Renwick, the final Covenanter minister to be martyred during Scotland's Killing Times! The Church (and Reformed Presbyterians in particular) are in Maurice Grant's debt for his thorough and balanced biographies of Donald Cargill (*No King but Christ*, 1988), Richard Cameron (*The Lion of the Covenant*, 1997), and now this work on Renwick to complete the trilogy.

The tales of our persecuted forefathers in Scotland have been told many times, and this volume contains much of that mixture of adventure, tragedy, and faithfulness under fire which many readers will be familiar with. The story abounds with hair-breadth escapes, secretive conventicles on lonely moors, and bloodthirsty government agents bent on death and destruction – and Grant tells the story well. All too often, Covenanter histories are less a single coherent story, and more a string of gripping anecdotes, which with the passage of time can become mixed with legend. Not so this work, which is free of the hagiography that mars too many 19th century biographies of the Covenanting era. The author is certainly in sympathy with his subject, but as an honest historian, he refuses to sugar-coat the shortcomings of our forefathers. Renwick thus emerges from the narrative as a truly remarkable, but also very human personality, with a gentle spirit, great personal integrity and exceptional gifts – all the more exceptional in view of his youth (he was executed two days after his 26th birthday).

As “Scotland's Most Wanted” in the mid-1680's, Renwick the elusive fugitive pastor is no easy subject for a biographer. Yet, despite the scanty information available, the author has assembled an impressive array of primary source materials – letters, sermons, society minutes, testimonies and court documents, many hitherto unpublished. This ground-breaking research will surely help to make Maurice Grant's *Preacher to the Remnant* a definitive account of one of Covenanter history's most famous sons. Highly recommended, especially for a generation that is again feeling its civil and religious liberties brought under pressure.

Can the author now be persuaded to give us a full biography of Alexander Peden?

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