



William Salmond was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 9 February 1835, the son of John Salmond, a grocer, and his wife, Agnes Reid. He studied in Edinburgh, graduating BA in 1853, and then MA. After four years studying theology in Scotland and Germany, Salmond became a minister at North Shields,

near Newcastle, England, about 1858. He married Jane Paxton Young at Dunfermline, Fife, on 25 December 1861.

During a 17-year ministry he developed a lively reputation for innovation and moral courage. He challenged rigid Sabbatarianism and tackled the relationships between science and religion, and free will and providence. By 1871 he was questioning the view that those unconverted to Christianity in this life forfeited all hope of salvation, and in 1873 he argued for a freer interpretation of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

In February 1876 Salmond and his family emigrated on the *Corona* to Dunedin, New Zealand, where he had been appointed the first professor of theology at the Presbyterian Theological College. He was described as 'a spare-built man, of diminutive stature....his hands clasp the desk, the left shoulder being slightly raised above the right.' In addition, 'the general hue of the countenance give[s] abundant evidence of a sickly constitution.' With only one or two students to teach, Salmond plunged into the work of presbytery and the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland. His dashing pen, oratorical skills and enthusiasm led to his being lionised by the Presbyterians of Otago.

Salmond became an articulate apologist for the reasonableness of Christianity. In *The Christian doctrine of providence and prayer, and the reign of law* (1876), he engaged with the threat posed by the laws of science to Christianity's personalist understanding of the universe. Religion and science are found to be compatible: miracle and prayer neither subvert scientific law, since both can be thought of as forms of energy, nor are they irrational, since God always works 'in sweetest harmony with law and order'. God plays creation like a harpist; the labour of science and intuition of the Hebrew are at one. Although he pronounced Darwinism to be in deadly antagonism to Christianity, he later changed his views.

Salmond's well-attended public lectures on the inspiration of Scripture and on the person of Christ were models of lucid and broad scholarship. In 1879 he took over the editing of James Copland's *Evangelist*, amalgamating it with the *Missionary Record* to form the *New Zealand Presbyterian*. He also gradually built up the infant Theological College, soliciting support and enthusiasm and laying the basis for its curriculum.

In 1886 the synod pushed through Salmond's appointment to the chair of mental and moral philosophy at the University of Otago in succession to Professor Duncan MacGregor, whose 'materialism' had affronted many Presbyterians. Almost immediately, however, Salmond's sensational *The reign of grace* appeared. It was far from a full apologia for universalism, but opponents were outraged by its arguments, its passionate language and its swingeing polemic against the 'intellectual terrorism' of classical Calvinism, whose inhumane and arbitrary deity kept people in existence 'for no reason but to inflict tortures on them through endless ages.' Salmond was bitterly, and rather unfairly, accused of concealing his true views until he found the safe haven of university employment. The pamphlet went through five editions, and provoked, among other responses, a closely argued reply from a Presbyterian elder, and an elegant, if rather disingenuous, riposte from James MacGregor, a conservative Presbyterian theologian from Oamaru. Salmond's views were pronounced heretical in presbytery, but a liberal group led by the ministers James Gibb and Rutherford Waddell and the layman Keith Ramsay were eventually able to convince their colleagues in presbytery and then in the synod that further action against him would not be opportune.

As a university teacher for 28 years Salmond won accolades from colleagues and students alike for his wit, clarity and humanity, but the controversy in which he had been embroiled seems to have scarred him. He produced little in the way of publications until his final, still more fiery pamphlet, *Prohibition, a blunder* (1911), which ran to five editions and again touched a nerve. Although not without an élitist, even misogynistic, flavour, it is a rather fine plea for individual human rights against 'vicious moral coddling'.

William Salmond's standing as a theologian was recognised by the awarding of doctorates of divinity from the University of Glasgow in 1882 and of Edinburgh in 1885. He died at Dunedin on 6 March 1917, survived by his wife (who died on 12 June 1919), four sons and four daughters, and is buried in

Dunedin's Southern Cemetery.

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