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PREFACE

The idea for this book came from various conversations which suggested that an accessible overview of the Kirk’s story would be helpful for elders, church members and the general reader – perhaps even for ministers interested in a crash refresher course.

There are many detailed studies of momentous events and famous individuals, but what I offer here is a more general survey, highlighting and illustrating the main themes of each century since the Reformation. The style aims to be accessible; the tone affectionate but not uncritical. I also make connections back and forth as the story unfolds. Inevitably, not all will agree with my choices as to what to include and what to omit, but I have endeavoured to provide enough detail to give a fair picture of the Kirk’s journey from the Reformation to the present. For those wishing to explore further there is a short bibliography with suggestions for further reading.

Finlay Macdonald
All Saints’ Day, 2016
SETTING THE SCENE

In August 1560 the Scottish Parliament rejected the authority of the Pope and outlawed the celebration of the Mass. This was far from a sudden decision; rather it was a defining moment in a process that had been gathering pace over many years and that would continue to evolve. It was, though, a hugely significant step and effectively determined the date of the Scottish Reformation.

What lay behind the growing pressure for reform? Here are some of the questions people were asking:

- When the priest celebrated Mass, did the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ?
- Was there a place called Purgatory, a kind of halfway state between Heaven and Hell where sins were purged?
- Why could the Bible not be available in the everyday language of the people?
- Why were church services in Latin?
- Why was there so much wealth in the upper echelons of the Church when so many ordinary people were poor?
- Why did so many supposedly celibate priests father children? Why couldn’t they just marry?
- Why were sons of kings (including illegitimate sons) given lucrative church appointments, sometimes while they were still children?

Questions such as these lay behind the movement for church reform, not only in Scotland, but across Europe.

The term ‘Kirk’ has come to designate the reformed Church of Scotland which today is Presbyterian in government. The change from Roman Catholic to Presbyterian did not happen overnight. The Reformers didn’t wake up one day and decide
to start a new Church. Rather, over many years and decades they sought to make changes from within to the institution in which they had been nurtured from birth. It follows that, despite the sixteenth-century parting of ways, a vital element of the Kirk’s self-understanding today is that it shares a common pre-Reformation history with the Roman Catholic Church. Today’s Scottish Catholics and Protestants may differ on matters of doctrine but they share a common heritage through Columba, Mungo and others who first brought the Gospel to Scotland.

Sauchieburn to Flodden

One of the darkest days in Scottish history was 9 September 1513. On that day the Battle of Flodden was fought, resulting in the death of King James IV, along with many leading figures in the nation’s life. Two particular battles stand out in Scottish history – Bannockburn in 1314 and Flodden in 1513. The former is celebrated in songs such as ‘Scots Wha Hae’; the latter mourned in ‘The Flowers of the Forest’.

Less well-known is the Battle of Sauchieburn, but it provides a good starting point for this narrative. James III, who reigned from 1460 to 1488, was an ineffective and unpopular king and a ready focus for rebellions. He and his queen, Margaret of Denmark, had three sons – the future James IV, James Stewart Duke of Ross (his father’s favourite) and John Stewart. The king’s ability to alienate extended even to his own family, and in 1488 matters came to a head at Sauchieburn, a few miles south of Stirling. King and heir fought on opposite sides of the battle and the king was killed as he fled the field. So at the age of fifteen, James IV came to the throne. Ever after, as a classic act of penance, he wore an iron belt round his waist, adding an additional weight each year.

Within two weeks of the battle James was crowned at Scone. The ceremony created new tensions, though this time of an ecclesiastical nature. Bishop Blackadder of Glasgow, who
had supported the rebellion, was invited to place the crown on the king’s head. This deeply offended Archbishop Schevez of St Andrews, who had been a loyal supporter of James III. Furthermore, only recently the Pope had recognised the primacy of the archdiocese of St Andrews. This meant that Schevez outranked Blackadder who was, after all, only a bishop. Surely as senior prelate he, Schevez, should have placed the crown on the king’s head!

As it happened, the new king was a canon of the See of Glasgow, a typical example of the mingling of royal and ecclesiastical appointments. This explains the choice of Blackadder, who was busy campaigning to have Glasgow raised to an archbishopric. James supported this move and quickly had Parliament pass an Act declaring its support, and four years later, Pope Innocent VIII duly obliged, establishing Glasgow as an Archiepiscopal and Metropolitan See. However, the Pope stopped short of granting an additional request from James that the new archbishop be created a cardinal. He did, however, exempt Glasgow and its provinces from the jurisdiction of St Andrews. In the gesture one senses a papal concern that the prelates re-focus their energies on their primary task of promoting the Gospel. In truth, though, high ecclesiastical office brought an enhanced political role, and this was the real prize being fought over.

Meanwhile, James had his own game to play. If high-ranking ecclesiastics wished to exercise political power it was equally the case that high-ranking non-ecclesiastics were anxious to have some control over the Church; and there was none higher than the king. Having gained the throne through a rebellion against his father, James was anxious to protect his own back against future threats, not least from his younger brother, the Duke of Ross. When Archbishop Schevez died in 1497, James saw his opportunity and nominated the duke to be the next archbishop. Then, with the agreement of the Pope, he added lucrative commendatorships of Holyrood, Dunfermline and Arbroath to
the duke’s ‘responsibilities’. These were effectively appointments to vacant monastic benefices giving title to the emoluments attached to them, thereby enhancing the royal revenues. An estimate of the comparative wealth of Church and Crown at the time suggests that ecclesiastical revenues were ten times greater than resources available to the Crown. From James’ point of view he was simply restoring the balance, buying off a potential rival and securing his throne in some style. Then, in the spirit of ‘the best laid schemes’, the Duke of Ross died in 1504 at the age of twenty-eight. This circumstance did not entirely relieve James of anxiety over possible rivals, so he devised a new plan. This was to have his illegitimate son, Alexander Stewart, who was still in his teens, appointed Archbishop of St Andrews. Two years previously Pope Julius II had approved the youth’s appointment as Administrator of the archdiocese. In addition to these lucrative roles, young Alexander was to receive the revenues of Dunfermline Abbey and Coldingham Priory and to take on the office of Chancellor of the Kingdom. As James was acting as his son’s guardian, again it was the Crown that ultimately benefited from this rich revenue stream. However, once again circumstances intervened when Alexander died with his father on the field of Flodden.

This saga perfectly illustrates the connivance between Church and Crown in the appropriation of church revenues for purposes other than the promotion of the Gospel. From these machinations one can only conclude that from 1497 to 1513 Scotland’s premier ecclesiastical office remained unoccupied by anyone qualified to provide appropriate leadership to the Scottish Church.

There were, of course, faithful priests quietly living out their calling and pressure for ecclesiastical reform was building. One of the issues the new Archbishop Blackadder had to deal with was a movement in Ayrshire that was challenging church teaching. Claims that the Pope was successor of Peter, the doctrine of purgatory, the worship of relics and the granting
of indulgences were all dismissed by these radical thinkers. Known as ‘the Lollards of Kyle’, they not only rejected traditional practices; they positively affirmed counter-arguments in favour of the priesthood of all believers, the freedom of priests to marry (as distinct from turning a blind eye to concubinage) and the right of people to read the Bible in their own language. Such ideas were not particularly new. ‘Lollardy’ was the pejorative term (meaning ‘mumbling’) used to describe the teaching of the fourteenth-century English theologian, John Wycliffe. In Scotland it had already produced martyrs such as an Englishman, James Resby, burned at the stake in Perth in 1407, and a Bohemian, Paul Crawer, who suffered the same fate in St Andrews in 1433. In 1411 Laurence of Lindores, Abbot of Scone, had been appointed Inquisitor, charged with rooting out the heresy, and in 1416 the University of St Andrews decreed that applicants for the Master of Arts degree take an oath that they would resist all adherents of the sect of Lollards. The Kyle Lollards investigated by Bishop Blackadder were fortunate compared with Resby and Crawer. For all his abuse of church offices and revenues, James IV was a man of intelligence and ideas. He spoke several languages, encouraged poets such as William Dunbar and Robert Henryson and was instrumental in the establishment of Scotland’s third university at Aberdeen. When the Ayr Lollards appeared before him he was inclined to leniency. A clue as to why may be found in a comment of John Knox. In his History of the Reformation he suggests that some of them were the king’s ‘great familiaris’.

Politically James’ Scotland found itself in a triangular relationship with France (the Auld Alliance) and England (the Auld Enemy). This created tensions that in the 1490s led to military campaigns against England; though things looked more settled when, in 1502, a Treaty of Perpetual Peace with England was signed. One of the fruits of this was James’ marriage to Margaret Tudor, daughter of Henry VII of England. Nevertheless, old habits die hard, and when war broke out
between England and France, James supported France. War was declared on England, and the Scottish fleet, a significant naval force, was dispatched to support the French. By this time James’ brother-in-law had succeeded to the English throne as Henry VIII. Aware that Henry was in France with his forces, James saw his opportunity, led an army south and engaged the English at Flodden. The disastrous outcome was a wiping out of the ‘flower of Scotland’ and the bringing to the throne of James’ son aged just seventeen months. James IV, who twenty-five years earlier had come to the throne on the field of battle, left it in the same way.
THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses

According to tradition, on 31 October 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg. It was an event that sent shockwaves across Europe and gave a huge impetus to the demand for religious reform.

Luther was born into a mining family at Eisleben, Germany, in 1483. In 1501 he entered the University of Erfurt, graduating with a Master's degree in 1505. At his father's behest he proceeded to study law but soon dropped out, being drawn instead to the study of theology. The story is told that on a visit home he was caught in a fierce storm and prayed to St Anna, patron saint of miners, promising to enter a monastery if she would save him. In that same year he was admitted to a closed Augustinian friary in Erfurt and began to submit himself to the life and discipline of a monk. His father was unimpressed, regarding this as a waste of a good education. Two years later Luther was ordained as a priest and in 1508 was invited to teach theology at the recently established University of Wittenberg. In 1512 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Theology and admitted to the Senate of the University.

At this time a major project was the rebuilding of St Peter's in Rome, and a rich source of funding was the selling of indulgences to the faithful. These purported to offer forgiveness of sins and shorten the period the purchaser might have to spend in Purgatory after death. This flew in the face of what Luther’s studies had led him to believe, particularly from Paul's letter to the Romans; namely that people could be saved only by
divine grace mediated through faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation was not something that could be purchased like a commodity or a reward for good deeds. For Luther this was a profound revelation, a defining moment, and it moved him to write a letter of protest to his bishop. Enclosed with the letter was a document entitled ‘Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences’. This became known as ‘The Ninety-Five Theses’. It is now reckoned that Luther was not seeking a public confrontation, rather a theological debate on the nature of faith and salvation. Be that as it may, there was no doubting the force of his questioning of the Church’s teaching and practice. One of the theses asked why the Pope, ‘whose wealth today is greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, builds the basilica of St Peter with the money of poor believers rather than his own money’. Such a challenge could not be ignored and it wasn’t. Indeed, it had the twofold effect of galvanising those who wished to see the Church reformed and mobilising upholders and beneficiaries of the policy to rally to the Church’s defence.

Particularly helpful in spreading the call for reform was the recently invented printing press, and Luther made full use of it. Indeed, it has been calculated that he was responsible for 20 per cent of the output of German printing presses between 1500 and 1530, a flow that vastly exceeded that of his antagonists. The Theses spread rapidly across Europe, eventually reaching Scotland through travellers from the continent who had embraced this new theological thinking. Their arrival inspired those in Scotland who shared Luther’s concerns, including Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart.

It was in 1523 that the nineteen-year-old Patrick Hamilton began his studies at St Andrews University. Hamilton was extremely well connected, his father being Sir Patrick Hamilton of Kincavil and his mother Catherine Stewart, a granddaughter of James III. In 1517 the thirteen-year-old Hamilton was appointed titular abbot of Fearn Abbey and the proceeds of the benefice paid for his education. This is somewhat ironic given
that such appropriation of ecclesiastical revenues by the nobility was one of the main grievances of the Reformers.

Four days before Hamilton's arrival in St Andrews, James Beaton had been installed as archbishop. As Lord Chancellor, Beaton was already Scotland's leading statesman. He now became its leading churchman as well. In 1525 Parliament passed an Act against Lutheranism and this gave Beaton his opportunity. The heresy hunt was on and Patrick Hamilton, who had generally kept his head down, was summoned to answer a charge of spreading Lutheran ideas. Sensing a trap, Hamilton left Scotland and travelled to Germany where he enrolled at the University of Marburg. While there he published his own 'Theses', which became known as 'Patrick's Places'. In these he set out 'commonplaces' of the Reformed Faith, centred round Luther's core doctrine of justification by faith. In 1527 he returned to Scotland, began to preach and soon found himself invited to confer with Beaton. This time he accepted, returned to St Andrews and participated in a series of colloquies. It transpired, however, that this apparently civilised dialogue was no more than a ruse to lead Hamilton to incriminate himself. The mood changed and he was summoned to answer a charge of heresy. Once again friends urged him to flee, but he refused. There are suggestions that Beaton himself would have been content not to press things to their inevitable conclusion. Given Hamilton's royal pedigree this is understandable; but the die was cast. The trial went ahead with Hamilton effectively pleading guilty as charged. The outcome was inevitable. The accused was declared to be a heretic, guilty of 'disputing, holding and maintaining divers heresies of Martin Luther and his followers'. The very same day, 29 February 1528, Hamilton was burned at the stake at the entrance to St Salvator's College. It was a particularly horrific event. The day was wet, the wood was damp and it reportedly took six hours to finish the job. The location is marked by the initials 'PH' laid into the cobbled pavement. To this day respectful St Andrews students maintain a tradition
of never walking on them, and tour guides point to the image of a human face in the stonework above the arched entrance to the quadrangle. Some say it was scorched into the tower by the bright face of an angel sent to comfort the martyr; others suggest it was caused by a beatific radiance from Hamilton’s own face as he died for his faith.

Reaction to these proceedings was the precise opposite of what Beaton intended. The Reformation cause was given a great boost as, in the words of John Lindsay, one of Beaton’s advisers: ‘My Lord, if you burn any more, let it be in underground cellars, for the reek of Master Patrick Hamilton has infected as many as it blew upon.’

James V – Solway Moss

When James IV was killed at Flodden the throne passed to his infant son. Less than two weeks after the battle, on 21 September 1513, he was crowned James V at Stirling Castle. Initially his mother, Margaret Tudor, sister of Henry VIII, ruled as Regent, but on her remarriage the following year to the Earl of Angus, the Regency passed to the Duke of Albany. As a grandson of James II and cousin of James IV he was next in line to the throne after the young king. The Queen Mother and her husband did not take kindly to this new arrangement and tensions simmered, leading to factions within the national leadership. Not until 1528, aged sixteen, did James assume personal rule when, once again, the great issue of the day was whether Scotland should align with France or with England.

When in 1534 Henry VIII finally broke with Rome he put pressure on his Scottish nephew to follow suit. James resisted, yielding rather to persuasion by the King of France and the Pope. One of James’ chief advisers at the time was David Beaton, nephew of James Beaton and, like his uncle, a leading figure in both Church and State. In time he would succeed his uncle as Archbishop of St Andrews and wear a cardinal’s hat. Under
Beaton’s influence James remained loyal to the Catholic Church and allied to France. He married Madeleine, a daughter of the French King François I, and, following her untimely death, he looked again to France, marrying Mary of Guise, of the House of Lorraine. It is not coincidental that at this time the French king nominated Beaton for the lucrative French bishopric of Mirepoix. However, such Francophile/Catholic supporting policies served only to stiffen the resolve of those seeking reform. The late fifteenth-century struggle over rank between Schevez and Blackadder continued anew between Beaton and his opposite number at Glasgow, Gavin Dunbar. A particularly scandalous incident occurred in Glasgow Cathedral in 1545 when an argument over precedence in a procession culminated in ‘fisticuffs’ between the prelates and their supporters.

Alongside his twin loyalty to the Catholic Church and the French alliance, James sought to keep the senior clergy on their toes by hinting that he might introduce his Uncle Henry’s reforms into Scotland. He encouraged writers such as the satirist Sir David Lindsay and appointed the learned Protestant sympathiser, George Buchanan, as tutor to one of his sons. At the same time Parliament passed a series of Acts, one of which was entitled ‘for reforming of Kirkis and Kirkmen.’ This directly impugned the ‘unhonestie and misreule of kirkmen’ and identified these failings as the cause of low esteem in which church leaders were held. The Act went on to urge archbishops, prelates and churchmen generally ‘to reform thare selfis and kirkmen under thame in habit and maneris to God and man.’ Cardinal Beaton, along with other senior clergy, was present when Parliament passed this legislation, yet there was no follow-up, no ecclesiastical council held to begin a process of reform. Indeed, shortly afterwards Beaton travelled to France on a diplomatic mission to cement relations and seek a wider alliance against Henry’s England. One outcome was the arrangement of a ‘summit meeting’ between James and Henry, to be held at York. James, perhaps playing for time, wished the
meeting to be deferred until his queen had given birth to the child she was carrying. He was also alert to rumours that he might be kidnapped by the English king. The request for a delay was rejected but James still failed to appear. Henry was furious, deeming his nephew’s behaviour not just as rank discourtesy, but as clear evidence of the Scots’ commitment to an alliance with Catholic France rather than Protestant England. The time for talking was over and hostilities should resume.

As it happened, Henry’s sister, James’ mother, had died earlier that year (1542), severing a personal and familial tie between Scotland and England. Learning of Henry’s plans James, against the advice of his generals, decided to get his retaliation in first. A Scots raiding party entered England and attacked an English force at Solway Moss in Cumberland. The outcome was an ignominious defeat for the Scots. James did not take part in the battle, but within a fortnight he was dead. As the thirty-one-year-old king lay dying at Falkland Palace his wife gave birth to a little girl. On being informed James is said to have murmured, referring to the Stewart dynasty: ‘it cam wi’ a lass and it’ll gang wi’ a lass’. The reference was to the beginnings of the Stewart line through Marjorie Bruce. Within a few days the lass became James’ infant heir. We know her as Mary Queen of Scots.

For the second time in thirty years Scotland was vulnerable to an English military move. The Franco-Scottish alliance was holding and tensions between England and France were running high. Back in 1513 both Scotland and England had been within the Catholic fold but by the time of Solway Moss, England had shifted its religious alignment. Henry wished Scotland to follow the same path and with this strategy in mind he pursued three tactics. The first of these involved taking prisoner many prominent Scots who had been captured after Solway Moss. These were subsequently and gradually released on condition that they would return home and make the case for a strong alliance with England. Second, he encouraged the export of Protestant tracts in the hope of destabilising the Scots’ Catholic
The Sixteenth Century

allegiance. Third, he proposed a dynastic marriage between his son and heir Edward and the young Scots Queen Mary.

Following James V’s death the immediate question for the Scottish political establishment had been the appointment of a Regent to act on behalf of the infant queen. Cardinal Beaton wasted no time in producing a document, asserting that it had been signed by the dying king, appointing him to discharge this high office. This was suspected to be a forgery, Beaton was imprisoned and a meeting of nobles was called to resolve the matter. They convened on New Year’s Day, 1543 and their choice was James Hamilton, Earl of Arran, a great-grandson of James II and heir-presumptive to the throne. At the time Arran was sympathetic to the Reform cause and appointed like-minded chaplains to preach at Holyrood and St Giles. A Parliament was called and met on 12 March that year. Ambassadors from England were present to press the case for the marriage between Mary and Edward that Henry desired. Parliament also passed an Act authorising the reading of the Bible in the language of the people. This was certainly in line with Arran’s sympathies at the time, but it is interesting to note that the proposal came from Lord Maxwell, one of the returned prisoners following Solway Moss. Henry would have approved, but the Scottish clergy did not. Archbishop Gavin Dunbar of Glasgow recorded his dissent and a compromise was agreed. This restricted popular access to the Bible simply to reading; follow-up discussion was firmly forbidden. However, any victory for Reform was short-lived. Beaton was eventually released from prison and this led to a concerted push against the Regent’s English/Reform policy and in favour the French/Catholic connection. In June a proclamation banned the possession of ‘heretical’ books and forbade criticism of the Sacraments. In September, Regent Arran, a notorious trimmer, repented publicly of his ‘apostasy’ and was granted absolution by Beaton. The following day, 9 September, the infant Mary was crowned at Stirling Castle. On 3 December Parliament met and revoked the royal marriage treaty between
Mary and Edward agreed just six months earlier. The French alliance was reaffirmed and further laws passed against the spreading of ‘heresy’. For good measure Beaton was made Chancellor of Scotland.

With the coming of spring, Henry began his fight back and there commenced the ‘rough wooing’, in response to the rejection of his desired marriage treaty between Edward and Mary. On 3 May an English fleet of 300 ships and 10,000 men entered the Forth, taking Leith and sacking and burning their way into Edinburgh itself. Meanwhile, an invading army had made its way north to join the fray, doing much damage on the way. The evidence remains to this day in the ruined abbeys of Melrose, Jedburgh, Kelso and Dryburgh – the destruction caused by the invading English forces not, as is sometimes suggested, by Protestant iconoclasts.

It was around this time that another significant figure was to emerge. George Wishart was an Angus man, educated at the new University of Aberdeen and a teacher in the grammar school at Montrose. In 1535 he came to the attention of the Bishop of Brechin for teaching his pupils to read the Greek New Testament. Sensing danger, he left Scotland for Bristol, thence to Switzerland, where he came into contact with the Reform movement in that country. From Switzerland Wishart returned to England, where he was appointed a tutor at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In 1543 he made his way back to Scotland and began teaching and preaching in accordance with the reformed faith. He spent time in Ayrshire, where he had strong support from the continuing Lollard tradition. From there he moved east, being particularly drawn to Dundee at a time of plague and great suffering in that city. His next move was to prove fateful. At Ormiston in East Lothian he was arrested and delivered into the hands of Cardinal Beaton. On 1 March 1546, at St Andrews, he was condemned as a heretic and then, in John Knox’s words, ‘put upon a gibbet and hanged, and then burnt to powder.’
Meanwhile, the threat from the south continued and in 1547 English forces gained a significant victory at the Battle of Pinkie, near Musselburgh. Henry had died in January of that year and the ten-year-old Edward VI reigned in his place. Mary, his no-longer intended bride, now four years old, was being brought up by her mother, Mary of Guise. The safety of the young queen was clearly a concern. Her father’s death meant that any prospect of a ‘spare’ had gone, leaving Mary as his sole dynastic heir. The Scots defeat at Pinkie further underlined the fragility of the situation and it would have come as very welcome news to Mary of Guise when Henri II of France proposed a marriage between her daughter and his son and heir, the Dauphin François. Henri, aware of young Mary’s vulnerability and conscious also that, through marriage to his son, she could one day be Queen of France, pressed for her to be brought up at the French court. There was Scottish resistance to this, including from the Regent Arran. However, this was overcome, perhaps not entirely coincidentally, when the French king granted Arran the French dukedom of Châtellherault. Accordingly, in June 1548 the young queen set sail for France, leaving behind her mother, who remained dutifully at her post and who, five years later, would replace Arran as Regent.

John Knox

The name of John Knox has been mentioned once or twice in passing. It is now time to introduce him more substantially to the narrative. Along with Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart he is a towering figure in the story of the Scottish Reformation. Hamilton and Wishart gave their lives to the cause; Knox survived not only to make it happen but to see it prevail.

He was born in Haddington around 1515 and educated at the local grammar school. From there he proceeded to St Andrews University to study under John Major, one of the great scholars of the age. A 1540 record describes him both as priest
and notary and a 1543 reference describes him as ‘a minister of the sacred altar in the diocese of St Andrews, notary by apostolic authority’. He did not immediately take up a parochial appointment but was appointed tutor to the sons of Hugh Douglas, Laird of Longniddry, and to the son of John Cockburn of Ormiston – both in East Lothian. As previously noted, it was at Ormiston that George Wishart had been arrested and taken to St Andrews for trial and execution. In fact Knox was not only a disciple of Wishart; he was his bodyguard and sword-bearer. He had been present when Wishart was taken and was minded to stand by him. Wishart, however, dissuaded him, allegedly remarking that ‘one is sufficient for a sacrifice’. Recognising the force of this, Knox remained in East Lothian as tutor to the Douglas and Cockburn boys. Events then moved dramatically and on 29 May, in a daring and carefully planned raid on the
castle at St Andrews, Cardinal Beaton was murdered. Under cover of building work, the assassins had entered and taken possession of the castle. Beaton was stabbed to death in his chamber and, for good measure, his body hung from a window as proof of the deed. Given Beaton’s role, not only as high-ranking ecclesiastic but also leading statesman and champion of the French-Catholic alliance, his assassination was not simply a revenge killing, though it certainly was that, but also a coup d’État.

The safest course for the assassins was to remain within the castle, where they were soon joined by others to a number of around 150. They had a useful asset in that the young son of the Regent Arran was a member of Beaton’s household. In fact he had been placed there by Beaton as a hostage for the Regent’s good behaviour (in Beaton’s view) but now became a different kind of hostage, and certainly a useful one. Obviously there was satisfaction among those seeking reform. At the same time there was an ugly mood among many, for Beaton had been a strong man who had stood up to the forceful Henry VIII. The siege dragged on for many months, despite Arran raising an army to end it. In the December, seven months after the assassination, a truce of sorts was brokered, which allowed the ‘Castilians’, as they became known, to remain, pending an absolution from the Pope. On receipt of that they were to surrender without suffering any penalty. In January 1547 Henry VIII died, and in the April of that same year John Knox himself sought refuge in the castle, accompanied by his young East Lothian charges, at the request of their parents.

During this period of stalemate, those holding the castle had a fair degree of freedom to move around the town. While John Hamilton, a half-brother of the Regent, had been appointed Beaton’s successor as archbishop, he had not yet taken up the role. Meantime, the administration of the archdiocese was in the hands of the Vicar General, John Winram. Winram was one of those who remained loyal to the Church but who also
From Reform to Renewal

acknowledged the case for reform. Controversially, he agreed that Knox could preach in the parish church, though only on weekdays. The concession was one of which Knox took full opportunity.

Meantime, Arran and Mary of Guise were seeking help from France to end the siege. Eventually, at the end of June, a fleet of ships carrying a significant force arrived in St Andrews Bay. Arran justified involving the French on the grounds that the Castilians had received the promised papal pardon, but rejected it as irrelevant. In the same way they now rejected the French command to surrender. Another stand-off ensued, broken eventually at the end of July, when Arran arrived with an army, and a combined assault from land and sea finally ended the siege. All lives were to be spared but under a condition that they were transported to France from where they would be free to move on, anywhere but back to Scotland. Knox fared less well. Given his role as teacher and preacher of ‘heretical’ views he was made a galley slave, a role he endured for nineteen months. From his History of the Reformation in Scotland comes a story of his galley passing between Dundee and St Andrews in the summer of 1548. The spire of the parish church appeared in the distance and a fellow prisoner asked Knox if he recognised it. He replied that indeed he did. It was where he had first preached; adding that he would preach there again before he died. Eventually Knox was released in February 1549, and decided to seek sanctuary in England. He was licensed to preach in the Church of England in April of that year and appointed to minister in Berwick. It was while there that he met his future wife, Marjorie Bowes. Her father, a staunch Catholic, opposed the match but her mother, Elizabeth, was to become a great supporter.

In June of that same year, 1549, Cardinal Beaton’s successor, John Hamilton, was finally enthroned as Archbishop of St Andrews. One of his first actions was to call a Provincial Council at Linlithgow, and this was followed over the next decade by further Councils. While loyal to the Catholic Church
Hamilton was not insensitive to the need for reform. Issues such as clergy immorality and the general ignorance of the laity, and of some clergy as well, could not continue to be tolerated. To the extent that these gatherings in Council involved both traditional and reform-minded churchmen they offered an opportunity for seeking a resolution of the growing crisis. Inevitably, though, an easier target was those deemed to be promulgating heretical views, and many thought the elimination of such dissent was the real priority. In any event, there was little evidence of commitment to real reform of clerical morals or a directing of the Church’s financial resources towards work at parish level. Indeed, this question went to the heart of the matter. For decades ecclesiastical wealth had funded the higher echelons of the Church, not to mention the royal household, and there was neither incentive nor effective pressure for this to change.

In the end something positive did emerge from a Provincial Council of 1552. This was a document that became known as ‘Hamilton’s Catechism’. Essentially, it was an exposition of the faith that was to be read in churches on Sundays when there was no preacher. No discussion of the document was to be allowed, but one striking omission from the text was any reference to the authority of the Pope. Was this a gesture to those urging reform? Given the concern over lay and clerical ignorance, the ‘Catechism’ was a logical development, and the fact that no discussion was to be allowed perhaps reflected a concern that many priests would be unable to answer any questions raised. The authorship is unknown but it has been conjectured that it was the work of John Winram.

In 1551 Knox took up a ministry in Newcastle and was appointed a chaplain to King Edward VI. Two years later he was invited to London to preach before the royal court, where he used the opportunity to argue against the English practice of kneeling to receive communion. This led to a debate in which Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, defended the custom. A compromise agreement resulted in the practice continuing,
but with a printed rubric added to the liturgy explaining that kneeling merely signified a ‘humble and grateful acknowledging of the benefits of Christ given to the worthy receiver’. In other words, it did not imply any adoration of the bread and wine or the real presence of Christ’s flesh and blood. This victory added value to Knox’s stock. He had already made an impression on John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, who had been appointed Regent during Edward’s minority. Dudley had heard Knox preach in Newcastle and now invited him to become Bishop of Rochester. Knox, however, declined, wishing to return to Newcastle and remain nearer to Scotland. The following year (1553) he was again invited to London to preach before the king, and this time was offered the appointment of Vicar of All Hallows Church in the English capital. He duly preached before the court but, as in the case of Rochester, declined the All Hallows position. He did, however, accept an appointment to Amersham in Buckinghamshire, where he remained for a few months. Then, on 6 July, everything changed. Edward VI, whose health had been deteriorating, died and his half-sister, Mary Tudor (‘Bloody Mary’), came to the throne. Six months later, in January 1554, Knox left England for Geneva, where he remained for some months in the company of John Calvin and other reformers. He also travelled to Zurich and Basel.

John Calvin

Calvin was born at Noyon in Picardy on 10 July 1509. That made him six years older than Knox and twenty-six years younger than Luther. He was a clever child and his education was funded by his appointment, aged twelve, to a chaplaincy in the cathedral at Noyon. This financially beneficial sinecure, which has echoes of Patrick Hamilton at Fearn Abbey, was arranged by his father, a lay administrator to the bishop. Two years later, again under the influence of his father, the young Calvin enrolled at the University of Paris to begin training for the priesthood. After
four years, however, Calvin senior had a change of mind and directed his son to the study of law at Orleans, subsequently at Bourges.

In 1531, following the death of his father, Calvin returned to Paris. There his studies included Latin, Greek and Hebrew, which enabled him to read the Scriptures in their original languages. At Paris he also came under the influence of Protestant scholars and eventually abandoned the Catholicism in which he had been nurtured. This was a potentially dangerous move and in 1533 he left Paris and returned to Noyon, where he formally resigned the cathedral chaplaincy. The following year, due to an upsurge of anti-Protestant violence, he thought it prudent to move to Basel in Switzerland and there, in 1536, he published the first edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This was a systematic exposition of Protestant Christianity, which he was to develop and expand through several editions. It remains a definitive text to this day. From Basel he moved to Ferrara in northern Italy before deciding to settle in Strasbourg. His route took him through Geneva, but his onward journey was delayed due to roads being blocked by military manoeuvres. Geneva had only recently embraced the Reformation and the pastor there was William Farel. On learning that Calvin was in the city he invited him to stay and share in his ministry. Calvin, intent on a quiet life of study and writing in Strasbourg, initially resisted but Farel refused to take ‘No’ for an answer and eventually prevailed.

Calvin was a second-generation Reformer who thought that, in some respects, Luther had not gone far enough. While accepting Luther’s view that the individual was saved by faith, as distinct from good deeds, he also recognised that the Christian life called for behaviour rooted in the teachings of the Bible. Accordingly, what he and Farel sought was a community of godly people whose way of life reflected the values of their Christian faith. To this end Farel prepared a Confession of Faith to which citizens were expected to subscribe, while Calvin drafted Articles for regulating the life and worship of the Church.
These texts set out the theory, but the practical establishment of such a community also required discipline; and the exercise of discipline called for sanctions. This is where the plan started to break down. Not everyone was willing to sign the Confession and then tensions began to emerge between the Reforming ministers and the City Council. For example, the Council demanded a role in cases of excommunication where sentence carried civil consequences, but Calvin and Farel refused. There was also trouble when the Council instructed that unleavened bread be used for the Easter communion services, as was the practice in Bern. The ministers’ reaction was to refuse to celebrate the Sacrament altogether. This provoked a riot and they were expelled from the city. Farel moved to Neuchâtel and Calvin reverted to his original plan and travelled to Strasbourg, where for the next three years he ministered to French Protestant refugees.

In 1541 there was a change of regime in Geneva and Calvin was invited to return and resume his ministry. In this (for him) more congenial climate, new powers were given to the clergy to instruct and admonish the populace, in public and in private, all with a view to exercising ‘fraternal correction’. Using these powers, Calvin resumed his project of establishing a society where good works abounded as evidence that the people were living out the Gospel. While this might sound idyllic, the reality was rather different. There were regulations governing all aspects of life, from style of dress to the naming children. Biblical names were particularly encouraged and a minister might well decline to baptise a child if he disapproved of the name. Even the naming of pets was monitored and the naming of a dog ‘Calvin’ was not a cause of ecclesiastical amusement. Innkeepers were expected to ensure there was no dancing or playing at cards, and guests were to be in bed by 9 p.m. Only informers were permitted to stay up later than that. A Consistory Court was established to judge alleged misconduct and determine punishments. The emphasis was on a reform of behaviour, and those making a first
appearance were treated less severely than persistent offenders. The Consistory took a particularly stern view of offences such as witchcraft, blasphemy and heresy, and more severe sentences included fines and imprisonment. Banishment was also an option, and even execution, for offences judged the most extreme.

One matter of debate among the Reformers was the nature of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. Catholic teaching was clear enough. The doctrine of transubstantiation taught that when the priest consecrated the bread and wine these miraculously became the body and blood of Christ. Luther rejected this but, in its place, offered a theory known as ‘consubstantiation’ (though Luther himself did not use the term). While rejecting transubstantiation, this theory still averred a ‘real presence’ whereby, on consecration, the inner substance of Christ’s body and blood were mysteriously joined with that of the bread and wine.

Calvin also affirmed the presence of Christ in the Sacrament, but for him it was a spiritual presence. He held that those who received the bread and wine in faith were, through the power of the Holy Spirit, nourished by the body and blood of Christ. The classic definition, deriving from Augustine, is that a Sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace. Following this Calvin expressed the matter thus: ‘For why does the Lord put the symbol of his body into your hands, but just to assure you that you truly partake of him.’ It was this understanding that would find expression in the *Scots Confession* of 1560, which we shall come to in due course.

A particular objection of the Reformers to the doctrine of transubstantiation was the notion of a priest offering Christ’s body and blood as a sacrificial offering on behalf of the people. Did this not imply that the original sacrifice of Calvary needed to be repeated over and over again? By contrast, the Reformed view was that Christ had died once and for all and the basis of the Sacrament was his command: ‘this do in remembrance
of me'. The Sacrament was instituted at the Last Supper, but in all likelihood its next celebration was at Emmaus, where the risen Lord was known in the breaking of bread. Thereafter, the breaking of bread formed part of the regular Sunday worship of the infant Church. The Eucharist thus commemorates and celebrates the crucified and risen Christ. It is also of interest to note that Calvin favoured a weekly celebration of Holy Communion.

While Calvin never visited Scotland his influence on the shape of the Scottish Reformation was profound. Knox was a disciple and the two men were close, and when Knox's first wife died in December 1560, Calvin (himself by then a widower) was deeply concerned and wrote to Knox describing Marjorie as 'the most delightful of wives'. Indeed, he would have known the whole family, as John and Marjorie's sons were born during their time in Geneva and given the appropriately biblical names of Nathaniel and Eleazar.

Frankfurt, Geneva, Scotland and the Monstrous Regiment

We meet up again with John Knox nine months after he had left England for Geneva. In September 1554 he accepted an invitation to minister to a congregation of English exiles in Frankfurt. This was not a happy move. New groups of refugees from Mary Tudor's England kept arriving, with strong leaders of some seniority. These held determined and divergent views on forms of service, including some who supported kneeling to receive communion. Inevitably, Knox became embroiled in endless arguments, with the consequence that, following some deft politicking by opponents, he found himself expelled from the city. This was just six months after he had arrived. Shaking the dust from his shoes he returned to Geneva and took up a ministry there. However, in August 1555, prompted by a letter from Elizabeth Bowes, he decided to return to Scotland. He arrived in Berwick, where he and Marjorie Bowes
became betrothed. Thereafter he continued his journey north.

Back in Scotland, Knox was much encouraged by what he saw. He was free to travel and preach and was generally well received. A network of ‘privy kirks’ was developing through which reform-minded individuals met in homes for worship and religious discussion. Supporting these gatherings was an emerging organisation of elders, deacons, preachers and readers of Scripture who were assigned various tasks. Knox preached at such meetings and celebrated the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. He also sought to curb a practice that was known as ‘Nicodemism’, namely, embracing the Reform cause in private while adhering to the Catholic Church in public. The term derives from Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came secretly to Jesus by night. The nobles who were supporting reform judged it important to retain the favour of Mary of Guise, who was by this time Regent, and one sure way of doing this was to continue attending Mass. This they judged both politic and diplomatic, though Knox would have none of it. The Regent was also being diplomatic in not seeking to interfere with Knox’s activities, but the Scottish bishops viewed him as a threat and summoned him to appear before them. Knox duly complied but when he appeared, accompanied by a large number of highly influential supporters, the hearing was abandoned. Meanwhile, he continued to preach in Edinburgh with much success, prompting two prominent men, the Earl of Glencairn and Earl Marshall William Keith, to persuade him to write a tactful letter to Mary of Guise. Doubtless Glencairn and Keith had been encouraged by the Regent’s tolerance of Knox’s preaching. Tactful letters were not Knox’s strong suit but eventually the epistle, urging her to support church reform, was composed and delivered. The letter went unacknowledged, but word filtered out that Mary had thought the whole thing a huge joke. She referred to Knox’s letter as a ‘pasquil’ (satire) and passed it round her courtiers, including the Archbishop of Glasgow, amid much hilarity.

In November 1555 the Geneva congregation invited Knox
to be their minister and, judging that the time was not ripe for a final push in Scotland, he accepted the call. Before setting off it is thought that his betrothal to Marjorie became a formal marriage, as she and her mother accompanied him. This left the leadership of the Reform movement in the hands of a younger group of nobles who banded together to advance the cause. This alliance became labelled the ‘First Band’ and represented a growing confidence and solidarity. With Knox out of the way and encouraged no doubt by the Regent’s response to his tactful letter, the church hierarchy counter-attacked, condemning Knox and having his effigy burned in Edinburgh.

This next sojourn in Geneva was to be one of the happiest periods of Knox’s life. In a letter to friends in England he described the city as ‘the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the apostles’, though not all residents, particularly those subject to Calvin’s disciplinary regime, would have shared that assessment. He preached regularly in the church known today as the Auditoire de Calvin, and it was during this sojourn that he and Marjorie were blessed with the birth of their two sons. However, this peaceful interlude was rudely interrupted in May 1557 when visitors from Scotland arrived with a message that the time was now right for him to return home. At a personal level this was not what he wanted to hear, but he could hardly refuse the request. Nevertheless, it was not until the October that he set off on the long overland journey to Dieppe. Imagine, then, his irritation on arriving there to find a letter advising that the time was not as ripe as previously reported.

Much was certainly going on in Scotland, including finalisation of arrangements for the young Queen Mary to marry the Dauphin, though this was not being met with universal acclaim. One major concern was that Mary might grant her husband the crown matrimonial, thereby making him King of Scotland as well as of France. On top of this the Duke of Châtellherault (the former Regent Arran) had a more
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personal agenda. Were Mary to die he was next in line to the Scottish throne. After her marriage any children would push him down the line of succession. In addition, French pressure was being applied to Scottish nobles who had already declared for reform, with tempting inducements to re-establish the Auld Alliance and reconsider their religious allegiance. While all this was going on, Knox remained in France awaiting further word, before finally abandoning his visit and returning to Geneva.

In the summer of the following year (1558) he published what is probably his most infamous tract, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. This was published anonymously, though the identity of the writer soon emerged. Possible misgivings on Knox’s part might be inferred from the fact that, though drafting the document in Geneva, he did not consult Calvin on the matter. Was he concerned that Calvin might persuade him to think again? Did he think it was just another pamphlet and hardly worth troubling his chief with? The most common misunderstanding of *The First Blast* is to think that the word ‘regiment’ refers to a large and overbearing female crowd and assume that the pamphlet is simply a misogynist rant. In fact the word refers to the rule of women, and in the sixteenth century the word ‘monstrous’ indicated what we would describe today as ‘unnatural’. The pamphlet was aimed principally at Mary Tudor, Queen of England and, to a lesser extent, Mary of Guise, Regent of Scotland. Both were Catholic and no friends of the Reformation.

Many today would agree that Mary Tudor’s reign was monstrous (in the modern sense), justifying the title ‘Bloody Mary’. But in the sense of ‘unnatural’ it should be recalled that in those days there was a natural presumption in favour of male rulers. This was why Henry VIII had successive wives and why Edward VI, the youngest of his children, succeeded ahead of his older half-sisters. To this extent, *The First Blast* might just have been another diatribe. The real problem, however, was that Knox didn’t simply express opinions, albeit very colourfully; he
actually went on to call for action, in particular for Mary Tudor, ‘that cursed Jezebel of England’, to be overthrown. To Knox this would have seemed the perfectly logical consequence of his argument. However, it was one thing to publish a polemical tract; quite another to urge regicide. Many Protestants thought he had gone too far, including Calvin, who disassociated himself from the document and banned its sale in Geneva.

With hindsight, The First Blast was a serious miscalculation. Of course, Knox could not have known that within months of its publication Mary Tudor would be dead and the Protestant Elizabeth on the throne. Unfortunately for him, she too had been deeply offended by the pamphlet. There were question marks anyway over her legitimacy. Henry VIII had married her mother, Anne Boleyn, while his first wife, Catherine of Aragon (Mary Tudor’s mother), was still alive. In consequence, there was an argument that the rightful heir to the English throne was Mary, Queen of Scots, who was a thoroughly legitimate great-granddaughter of Henry VII. Given the future importance of the English alliance for the Scottish Reformation, this alienation of the English queen was not a smart move. An early indication of Elizabeth’s displeasure came the following year. Knox decided to return to Scotland but had to make the long road and sea journey via Dieppe because Elizabeth refused him a safe passage through England.

The Final Push

On his eventual arrival in Scotland in 1559, Knox was declared an outlaw by Mary of Guise. However, this did not deter him from preaching to a large body of supporters in Perth. Rather pointedly the theme of his sermon, preached on 11 May in St John’s Kirk, was the cleansing of the temple. Unfortunately things rather got out of hand and a riot ensued, with the smashing of images and the looting of friaries. The Regent, fearing civil war, dispatched the Earl of Argyll and Lord James Stewart to Perth
to negotiate a re-establishment of order. However, contrary to assurances given to her emissaries, she decided to travel to Perth herself with armed support. The uneasy truce facilitated by the envoys was further undermined by her dismissal of the Protestant Lord Provost and a very pointed reinstating of the Mass. The result was that Argyll and Stewart felt betrayed and decided to join forces with the Reformers. In fact they went on to become leading members of a body known as ‘the Lords of the Congregation’ and played an important role in organising their peers and colleagues in the cause of reform. Knox, meantime, had moved on from Perth to St Andrews, perhaps recalling his earlier prophecy from the off-shore French galley. He did preach again in the parish church there, with consequences similar to those that attended his preaching in Perth.

As disorder spread through the central lowlands, the Regent travelled to Dunbar. Edinburgh itself was occupied at the end of June, with the inevitable sacking of churches and friaries. By the end of July, terms had been agreed that restored order to the city and allowed freedom of conscience in matters of religion. Suspecting that the Regent would seek military support from France, Knox made his way south to Northumberland and, using a pseudonym, sought negotiations with William Cecil, Secretary to Queen Elizabeth. No doubt the pseudonym was felt necessary after *The First Blast of the Trumpet*. Events were now moving quickly and a reinforcement of French troops arrived at Leith. The Scottish nobles responded by formally deposing Mary of Guise as Regent. Her Secretary, William Maitland, decided to join the Reformers and brought his considerable skills and experience with him. This freed Knox to concentrate solely on matters of religion. Meanwhile, negotiations with England proceeded, leading to the Treaty of Berwick, signed on 27 February 1560. This secured the support of English ships and troops for Scottish forces loyal to the Reformation and the eventual withdrawal of French troops from Scotland. On the night of 10/11 June, Mary of Guise died, and on 6 July the Treaty
of Edinburgh was concluded. This provided for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Scottish territory, the replacement of the Auld Alliance with a new Anglo-Scottish accord and a meeting of Parliament the following month. On 19 July, Knox led a national service of thanksgiving in St Giles’. Having preached in Perth a year earlier on the cleansing of the temple, he chose to preach on this occasion on the prophet Haggai’s call to the returning exiles to rebuild the temple.

Over the previous year progress had certainly been gathering pace. In towns such as St Andrews, Ayr and Dundee, kirk sessions were functioning. The town council of Dundee had even passed an Act outlawing contempt of the Reformed Church and its officers, and in the early months of 1560 banns of marriage had been published in respect of some members of the clergy. In April the great Council of Scotland had instructed the ministers of Edinburgh to express their ‘judgements touching the reformation of religion’. The resultant document became known as the ‘Book of Common Reformation’. Certainly by the time Parliament met on 1 August, things were moving on the ground.

The Parliament was a well-attended gathering of Lords both temporal and spiritual, including the Catholic Primate, Archbishop Hamilton of St Andrews. The Bishops of Dunkeld and Dunblane were present and the case for reform was argued from within the Catholic establishment by John Winram, who had allowed Knox to preach in St Andrews. It is recorded that when Parliament was considering the Reformers’ Confession of Faith (what we know as The Scots Confession), Archbishop Hamilton observed that ‘as he would not utterly condemn it, so was he loth to give his consent thereto’. Unsurprisingly, Dunkeld and Dunblane concurred. There is, indeed, evidence that other bishops, not present, from dioceses as far apart as Galloway and Orkney had begun instituting reforming measures such as the abolition of the Latin rite and the institution of effective visitation. This both underlines the point that Reformation was
a process as distinct from a moment in time, and that not all the Reformers were agitating Protestants. On 17 August, Parliament approved the *Confession of Faith*. A few days later it abolished the jurisdiction of the Pope and banned the saying or hearing of the Mass.

Notwithstanding such significant steps, the struggle was far from over. Archbishop Hamilton continued to preside at Mass without challenge and, later in the year, the Convention of Estates rejected proposals to divert the funds of the old Church to the support of the new. There was still some way to go. Moreover, questions were raised as to the regularity of these Parliamentary proceedings. The Treaty of Edinburgh had specifically precluded matters of religion from the Parliament’s competence in the absence of the queen. There were also questions as to whether some of those present were legally eligible to take part. A fifteenth-century statute entitled lesser barons to attend Parliament, though for over a century none had done so; nevertheless, 110 turned up on this occasion. For several days before getting down to the real business, Parliament debated whether their right of attendance had fallen into desuetude. Finally, and potentially fatally, once legislation had been passed, no royal assent was given, as Mary Queen of Scots was still in France.

On the political and diplomatic front, the Auld Alliance with France was at an end but effective new connections remained to be established with England. The Tweed may no longer have represented a Catholic/Protestant border, but it still defined a national boundary. Yet another dynastic marriage was mooted between the son of the Earl of Arran and Queen Elizabeth of England. While Knox is reported to have favoured this plan, nothing came of it. Then, at the end of this momentous year, a quite unforeseen event occurred. The youthful François II, by then King of France, husband of Mary, Queen of Scots, died of an ear infection that had developed into an abscess of the brain. No longer Queen of France, did Mary’s future now
lie in Scotland? Commenting on her prospects, the Venetian ambassador observed: ‘she has lost France and has little hope of Scotland’. How prophetic these words were to prove!

Securing the Reformation

While much remained unresolved, there was still scope for gains to be consolidated. Two major Reformation texts had been presented to the August 1560 Parliament, namely *The Scots Confession* and *The First Book of Discipline*. The first of these had been drawn up by six Johns: Knox, Winram, Spottiswoode, Willock, Douglas and Row. Knox, Willock and Spottiswoode were long-standing reformers; Winram, Douglas and Row had all held high office in the Catholic Church but had recognised the case for reform. According to tradition, the text, requested by Parliament for its consideration, had been drawn up in four days, under Knox’s leadership. It was approved by Parliament as ‘wholesome and sound doctrine grounded upon the infallible truth of God’s word’. The Preface to the *Confession* asked: ‘That if any man will note in this our Confession any article or sentence repugning to God’s holy word, that it would please him of his gentleness and for Christian charity’s sake to admonish us of the same in writing; and we do promise him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that it is from his holy Scriptures, or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss.’

The same six Johns were also responsible for drawing up *The First Book of Discipline*. Essentially, this set out a shape and structure for a reformed Church. Two Sacraments only were identified: Baptism, which was to be administered in church in face of the congregation, and the Lord’s Supper, which was to be celebrated quarterly, avoiding the old feast and saints’ days of the Catholic Church. There was a strong focus on the ministry. Ministers were to be educated and possessed of ‘giftis and graces able to edifie the Kirk of God’. Where a minister was not available, suitable persons were to be identified to fill the
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office of Reader. Their function was to read the Scriptures and prayers and, in the absence of a minister, to lead the service. As well as local ministers there were to be regional Superintendents covering ten districts, with responsibility for erecting churches and overseeing the work of the Church in their areas. This was a reduction of three on the number of pre-Reformation dioceses, and the aim was to ensure a ministerial presence throughout the country, not only in the main centres of population.

Alongside the question of manpower there was the matter of funding. As has already been seen, the pre-Reformation financial arrangements had involved lucrative Church benefices being used by the Crown to reward loyalty. Reclaiming such funds to support a nationwide structure of churches, ministers, poor relief and education was never going to be easy, and so it proved. The anomalous situation thus arose of a Protestant Church with her doctrine approved and acknowledged by Parliament as ‘the only true and holy Kirk of Jesus Christ within this Realm’, but unable to access the resources necessary for its work, locally and nationally.

Education was also addressed in The First Book of Discipline. What Knox and his colleagues proposed was nothing less than a whole system of elementary, secondary and higher education. Each parish would have its school, with secondary level provision in the larger towns, particularly the towns where superintendents were based. Responsibility for delivering this lofty aspiration would be willingly accepted by the Reformed Church and, once it received the patrimony of the pre-Reformation Church, those funds would be put to proper and worthy use. In truth though, as with the matter of financial support for the ministry, significant funding of such an educational vision was viewed by Parliament as ‘devout imaginings’.

The penultimate section of The First Book of Discipline set out a scheme for electing elders and deacons, including a provision whereby elders could call the minister to account if they deemed him deserving of ‘admonition’. Offences might
include being ‘licht in conversatioun, negligent in studie’ or preaching ‘not frutefull doctrine’. In theory this was a model of mutual responsibility. In practice it could readily lead to a complete breakdown in effective ministry within the parish. The final section addressed the religious education of the laity. In large towns there would be opportunities of daily preaching and prayer. In lesser towns that provision would be on one weekday as well as on Sunday. Each church would have a Bible in English and this would be read through and preached on systematically. Heads of households would accept responsibility for the religious knowledge of family members and servants.

A third significant Reformation document was the Book of Common Order. This originated in Geneva and was introduced in Scotland along with the English Book of Common Prayer. Indeed, there were many similarities in the patterns of Reformed worship north and south of the border. While Knox argued for quarterly communion, compared with Calvin’s monthly celebration, the reality in many parts of pre-Reformation Scotland had been infrequent observance of the Mass. The basic order of Reformed worship included confession, psalms, Bible readings, sermon, intercessions, the Lord’s Prayer and Apostles’ Creed. In 1562, the General Assembly instructed that it be used for the administration of the Sacraments and in services for the solemnisation of marriage and burial of the dead. In 1564, a new and enlarged edition was printed in Edinburgh and the General Assembly instructed that every minister and reader should have a copy and use it in the leadership of worship.

It was January of 1561 before Parliament got round to considering the First Book of Discipline. As already noted the proposals to redistribute the resources that properly belonged to the Reformed Church were not acceptable to the nobles. The outcome was that two-thirds of the hoped-for funding was left in the hands of its existing owners, while the remaining third was to be shared between Church and the Crown. Right from the start the ambitious plans for education were hobbled,
ministerial stipends were low and generally the Church found itself short-changed.

Notwithstanding such setbacks, the Reformed Church proceeded to make arrangements to fulfil its mission. A start was made to the appointing of superintendents, including some who had held office in the pre-Reformation Church. For example, John Winram was appointed Superintendent of Fife, Strathearn and Perthshire, and three former bishops who had accepted the Reformation were allowed to remain in their posts in Galloway, Orkney and Caithness. John Carswell, Superintendent of Argyll and the Isles, even published a Gaelic translation of the *Book of Common Order* for use in his vast and sparsely populated area. The vision was to staff over a thousand parishes with ministers, but progress was slow and not until 1574 was that number reached, many of these being drawn from the pre-Reformation priesthood.

In December 1560, continuing into January 1561, there was a gathering in Edinburgh of around forty people, comprising six ministers, along with lairds and civic representatives. This is regarded as the first General Assembly. Taking everything together, a structural pattern was beginning to emerge of local (minister and kirk session), regional (superintendents) and national (General Assembly).

**Music and Song**

An important legacy of the Scottish Reformation can be found in the metrical psalms, which enabled the people to add their voices to the congregation’s songs of praise. By the Middle Ages, worship had largely become the preserve of the clergy and trained singers, who chanted the psalms, sang the anthems and contributed musical responses to the liturgy of the Mass. Bearing in mind that the spoken elements of the service would have been in Latin, the ordinary worshipper’s role was passive in the extreme. A contemporary account of choral singing at
the court of King David in twelfth-century Scotland is less than encouraging. It describes ‘a-quavering like the neighing of horses’ and refers to the singers ‘with open mouths and their breath restrained as if they were expiring and not singing’. Things had improved considerably by the sixteenth century, thanks to the polyphonic music of composers such as Robert Johnson of Duns, Robert Douglas of Dunkeld and Robert Carver of Scone. It is also relevant to note that the martyred Patrick Hamilton had composed a Mass for Nine Voices, which had been sung under his direction in St Andrews Cathedral. Even so, such music, for all its undoubted enrichment of an act of worship, is hardly designed for congregational singing.

Martin Luther appreciated music and believed strongly in congregational singing. He wrote and encouraged what he called ‘spiritual songs, whereby the Word of God may be kept alive among the people by singing’. The process was quite simple, namely verses in a regular metre set to easily learned tunes. In the early 1540s three Dundonian brother by the name of Wedderburn published Ane Compendious Buik of Godlie Psalms and Spirituall Sangis, collectit furthe of sundrie partes of the Scripture. These ‘Good and Godly Ballads’, as they came to be known, offered twenty-two psalm portions for the people to sing in their own Scots language. In his History of the Reformation, Knox has George Wishart singing one of the Wedderburn psalms on the night of his arrest at Ormiston. Indeed, such was their popularity and reforming influence that a 1543 Act of the Privy Council described them as ‘slanderous Ballatis’. Calvin also recognised the value of congregational singing and introduced psalm arrangements to Strasbourg and Geneva. Some tunes from the period remain popular today. Examples include Old Hundredth, Martyrs, French, Winchester and Dunfermline. In 1564 the first Scottish Psalter appeared, drawing on English and continental predecessors but also including some original Scottish contributions.

While such an approach may be viewed as a positive step
there is another perspective, namely that it came at the price of extinguishing the rich choral tradition that had gone before. Organs were removed from churches and composers such as Robert Carver of Scone were not going to find any demand for their rich Mass settings. Indeed, it was not until the late twentieth century, thanks to the reconstructive work on ancient manuscripts carried out principally by Kenneth Elliot and the writing and broadcasting projects led by John Purser, that such music began to be heard again with any frequency. A memorable event during Glasgow’s year as European City of Culture (1990) was the series of performances by Cappella Nova in Glasgow Cathedral of all five authenticated Carver Mass settings, possibly the first since the Reformation; certainly the first in quasi-liturgical format complete with plainchant Propers.

Concern at the threat to musical creativity was registered at the time. In 1579 the Scottish Parliament passed an Act for the instructing of the youth in music, responsibility for this being laid upon burgh councils. This enabled the restoration of pre-Reformation Sang Schules, the function of which had been to train choristers. Edward Henderson, the pre-Reformation master of the Sang Schule at St Giles’, was continued in his role ‘to learn the town’s bairns in the art of music’ so that they could lead the singing of the psalms on Sundays. Mention should also be made of Thomas Wode, a Reader at St Andrews, who was concerned that much fine music was being lost during the post-Reformation turbulence. To mitigate this, in collaboration with the composer David Peebles he compiled a collection of psalm settings and other pieces. This Wode Psalter includes no fewer than 106 psalms arranged in four-part harmony, lovingly collated in ‘Partbooks’ and beautifully illustrated with images of musicians, flowers, angels and birds. Thanks to a 2016 project involving Edinburgh’s New College, the Church Service Society and St Mary’s Church, Haddington, where Knox would have been baptised and later worshipped, these settings are again being learned, sung and recorded.
In a 1960 lecture given to the Presbyterian Historical Society of England, James Ross, then Minister of Paisley Abbey, outlined the form of Sunday worship in the autumn of 1560 in the fictional parish of Kilmarkie. The bell rings at 8 a.m. and people arrive, carrying stools on which to sit. The church is a plain rectangle with a pulpit half way down one side. The old altar and associated images have all been removed. Men sit on one side, women on the other. At 8.30 the Reader, who was formerly the parish priest, arrives. Like many former priests he has accepted the Reformed faith but is not judged sufficiently educated to preach. He reads from the English Prayer Book of 1552. It will be another two years before the revised Scottish *Book of Common Order* is published. As Kilmarkie has no tradition of innovating, it will probably be a few years after that before it appears there. Metrical psalms are sung but, again, a Scottish psalter has not yet been produced, so English settings are used. There is neither choir nor musical accompaniment. Around 10 o’clock the Minister arrives. He is an Augustinian canon at a local priory, well educated and familiar with Reformed doctrine, which he now embraces. He preaches a sermon that lasts about one hour. This is followed by an offering taken for the poor of the parish, collected in a box on the end of a long pole. Such ‘ladles’ are used to this day at Bowden Kirk in the Scottish Borders. Prayers and the benediction conclude the service at around 11.30 a.m. and the people disperse. After an interval of some two hours, people gather again for the catechising of children. This is followed by a service of Evening Prayer, led by the Reader from the Prayer Book. The day’s worship concludes around 4 p.m. Communion is celebrated two or three times in the year, though some ministers would like to have the Sacrament more frequently. On a communion Sunday the first service would be at 5 a.m. for household servants, the second at 9 a.m. Communicants sit on benches at long tables, passing the bread and wine from hand to hand. The services again follow the order of the 1552 English Prayer Book. Kneeling for prayer is
still practised by some but not for the receiving of the elements. These consist of unleavened shortbread and claret mixed with water and are brought in by the elders at the appropriate point in the service. Before breaking the bread the minister washes his hands in a bowl of water placed on the communion table for this purpose. The Sacrament would be received after fasting.

The Return and Departure of the Queen

The young King François II of France, husband of Mary Queen of Scots, had died in December 1560 at the age of sixteen. His ten-year-old brother succeeded as Charles IX and their mother, the powerful Catherine de Medici, assumed the Regency. In such circumstances there was no long-term future for a former Queen Consort. Of course Mary was also a queen in her own right, though thirteen years had passed since her mother sent her to France; and that mother was now also dead. Where else could she go but back to Scotland?

Such a move would certainly be welcomed by the Catholic hierarchy and, indeed, the Archbishop of Glasgow had been with Mary in France for some months. Also encouraged by the prospect was the Earl of Huntly, a prominent Catholic noble who was developing plans to raise an army to place Mary on the throne of a Scotland reclaimed for the Catholic Church. Protestant lobbyists were also bending her ear. Mary’s half-brother, Lord James Stewart, offered to support her claim to the throne of England, if only to the extent of seeking to persuade Elizabeth to acknowledge Mary as her legitimate heir. No doubt such blandishments helped persuade Mary to return to Scotland as Queen. Nevertheless, she would have left the lively French court with a heavy heart and a real sense of bereavement. This being the case, the dreich and drizzly weather that greeted her arrival at Leith must perfectly have matched her mood, while for John Knox the elements were a clear sign of divine displeasure. Royal displeasure on the part of Queen Elizabeth was also registered. Mary’s plan had been to travel through England
but Elizabeth vetoed this, forcing her to make the longer sea journey. After all, Mary had still to put her name to the Treaty of Edinburgh and commit herself to a new and positive relationship with England.

Given Scotland’s acceptance of the Reformation, Mary’s strong commitment to Catholicism inevitably became a source of tension. On the Sunday after her arrival, Mass was said at Holyrood. This led to a mob threatening to invade the palace. In his sermon in St Giles’ the following Sunday, Knox declared his view that ‘one Mass was more fearful (to him) than ten thousand armed men’. He duly received a royal summons to explain himself, the first of four bruising encounters between him and Mary. From the queen’s perspective she was content to recognise the Reformed Church and allow it to develop its policies. All she asked was that she be allowed to practise her own religion in the manner to which she had been accustomed since childhood. Today this sounds entirely reasonable. To Knox in 1561 it was the thin end of a very dangerous wedge which, given half a chance, would undermine all for which he and his fellow Reformers had striven and sacrificed.

It was not long before the question of Mary’s marriage arose, and there was no shortage of potential suitors. Her eventual choice was her cousin Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, and they were married at Holyrood on 29 July 1565. The ceremony included a Mass in which the bridegroom did not participate. Darnley had royal blood in his veins. His mother was a daughter of Margaret Tudor by her second husband, the Earl of Angus. His father was the Earl of Lennox and a descendant of a daughter of James II. Darnley thus had connections to both Scottish and English royal families. Such a lineage created tensions among courtiers, and Mary’s half-brother, James Stewart, by then Earl of Moray, was particularly displeased. One famous casualty of the court jealousy and intrigue was an Italian musician, David Rizzio. He had become a favourite of the queen, serving also as her private secretary. In the gossipy atmosphere of the palace
this gave rise to speculation as to just how close they were. The outcome was Rizzio’s brutal murder in the presence of the heavily pregnant queen. Several courtiers were in her company at the time, as was Darnley.

In June 1566, three months after the murder of Rizzio, the queen gave birth to a son, who would become James VI of Scotland and James I of England. Court tensions continued, and the following February Darnley was killed at Kirk o’Field, not far from Holyrood. Almost from the beginning, relations between the queen and Darnley had been strained. Following the murder of Rizzio they had deteriorated even further. There were also whisperings of an affair between Mary and the Earl of Bothwell, who became chief suspect in Darnley’s murder. Not surprisingly, these suspicions grew stronger when, three months after the murder, Bothwell and Mary married, he having been conveniently acquitted in a show trial. The marriage divided the country, and a month later forces loyal and opposed to Mary clashed at Carberry Hill. The outcome was defeat for the queen and her eventual imprisonment in Loch Leven Castle. There she miscarried twins, Bothwell’s children. At this lowest point of vulnerability she was coerced into abdicating in favour of her young son, something she always maintained rendered the abdication illegal. A plot, of which she was the likely instigator, enabled her to escape from Loch Leven and to link up with a force of several thousand that had gathered in her cause of reclaiming the throne. The battle took place at Langside, to the south of Glasgow, on 13 May 1568. Mary’s supporters faced a force led by her half-brother, the Earl of Moray, who won the day. Following this defeat Mary, with a small group of followers, fled south-west, eventually crossing the Solway and seeking sanctuary in England. This was not a wise move and nineteen years later she was executed on the orders of her royal cousin Elizabeth. She never saw Scotland or her son again. On 29 July 1567, just five days after his mother’s forced abdication, James’ coronation had taken place at the Kirk of the Holy Rude in Stirling, the third successive monarch to be crowned as an infant. John Knox
preached the sermon and Moray, a committed Protestant, was appointed Regent.

Securing the Reformation

The outcome of these events was a firmer placing of Church and Crown in Protestant hands. Certainly things started well from that point of view, with the Regent calling a Parliament that put beyond challenge the legality of the 1560 proceedings. In particular, Parliament affirmed the *Confession of Faith* and required holders of office under the Crown and teachers in schools and universities to assent to it. Parliament also enacted three important pieces of legislation. These were:

- The Church Act, which gave legal establishment to the Church of Scotland as a Protestant body and declared it to be ‘the only trew and haly Kirk of Jesus Christ within this realme’.
- The Church Jurisdiction Act, which declared ‘thair is na uther face of Kirk nor uther face of Religion that is presentlie by the favour of God establisheit within the Realme’.
- The Coronation Oath Act, which required the monarch to protect the Reformed Church and root out all those opposed to its teaching.

In addition there were some positive adjustments to the Church’s financial arrangements. Ministerial stipends were declared to be a first charge on the tax levied on the old Church benefices, leading to ministers being paid at least more regularly, if not more generously. Also on the positive side, Parliament declared that as benefices became vacant (many were still held by pre-Reformation clergy), the patron should identify a suitably qualified person to be examined by the Superintendent as to eligibility for the charge. By this means the numbers of Reformed ministers gradually increased.

Notwithstanding such moves the Reformation was far from secure. Scotland descended into a period of civil war between
supporters of the banished queen, who sought Mary’s restoration (the Queen’s Men) and the King’s Men, who thoroughly welcomed the new regime. A rival contender to Moray for the Regency, supported by his powerful Hamilton family, was the old Earl of Arran, who had previously held that office. Moray prevailed but three years later he was assassinated while passing through Linlithgow. The Earl of Lennox, Darnley’s father, became Regent but the following year he was fatally injured in a brawl with supporters of the queen’s party. Next was the Earl of Mar, who died within the year, to be succeeded in 1572 by the Earl of Morton. At last there was a period of some stability, with Morton, a determined supporter of a strong alliance with England, ruling on behalf of the young king.

It fell to Morton to resolve a major ecclesiastical crisis arising from the assassination of Moray. The deed had been carried out by a member of the Hamilton family, with the fatal shot fired from a house co-owned by Archbishop Hamilton of St Andrews. He was very much a queen’s man, having baptised the infant James VI at Stirling Castle. He was also at Mary’s side during the fateful Battle of Langside. For the King’s Men these connections seemed too much of a coincidence. The archbishop was arrested and put on trial, not only for the assassination of Moray but also for the murder of Darnley five years previously. On 6 April 1571 he was hanged in Stirling. By these drastic means arose the first Episcopal vacancy since the Reformation.

The Regent Mar appointed John Douglas, Rector of St Andrews University, to replace Hamilton. Douglas had good credentials, having embraced the Reformed faith and contributed to both the Confession of Faith and The First Book of Discipline; but he was an old man, in poor health, quite unfit physically for the role. The suspicion was that his appointment was simply a device to keep the rich benefice in being and avoid any proper assessment of how the role was to be discharged under the new church system. The protests led to the calling of a General Assembly, which met at Leith in January 1572 and
established a Commission to resolve the matter in consultation with the Privy Council. From this emerged the Concordat of Leith, which allowed the Crown to appoint bishops, subject to the Church’s approval, thereby giving the Church the opportunity of ensuring that the financial resources attached to the bishopric were used for Church purposes. The trade-off was that new bishops, duly vetted and appointed, would take an oath of allegiance to the Crown though, ecclesiastically, they would be subject to the General Assembly. There was also a provision, enacted by Parliament in 1573, which required that all holders of ecclesiastical benefices should publicly subscribe the _Confession of Faith_. This, at any rate, was the theory. In practice the Regent Morton appointed his own men to bishoprics as they became vacant, by-passing potentially inconvenient church scrutiny of his nominees. Consequently, funds intended for diocesan purposes were diverted into the pockets of the Regent’s political allies and the disparaging term ‘tulchan’ became attached to the bishops thus appointed. The term referred to straw-filled calf skins used by farmers to delude their cattle into believing they were the real thing and increase their supply of milk.

By this time another significant event had occurred in the story of the Scottish Reformation. John Knox died on 24 November 1572. He was aware of developments following the Leith General Assembly and as good as predicted that things would not work out entirely as hoped for with regard to directing church funds for exclusively church purposes. One of his last acts was to call for all bishops to give a full account of the financial stewardship of the diocese or archdiocese. He himself had declined the role of Superintendent having more than enough to do as Minister of St Giles’. In recording Knox’s death it is appropriate to mention that he had been predeceased by his wife Marjorie, who had died towards the end of 1560, that decisive year for the Scottish Reformation. Not only had Marjorie been a loving wife and mother, she had given invaluable secretarial support to Knox, whose correspondence and writing
were considerable. A little over three years later he had married Margaret Stewart, with whom he had three daughters.

**Andrew Melville and The Second Book of Discipline**

Andrew Melville was born near Montrose in 1545. The young Andrew was a bright boy, progressing from school to St Andrews University then to the University of Paris. He had a particular aptitude for languages and demonstrated proficiency in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Syriac. In Paris he took an interest in educational method, something that he was to bring back to his native Scotland. He also studied law and eventually moved from Paris, via Poitiers to Geneva, where he was appointed a professor in the Academy. He was in Geneva at the time of the 1572 St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of French Protestants, which resulted in an influx of refugees seeking sanctuary in the city. Their experiences were to have a significant influence on him.

Two years later he returned to Scotland and was appointed Principal of Glasgow University. There he introduced fresh ideas from the continent, creating new courses and appointing professors to teach a range of subjects including science, philosophy, theology and languages. From Glasgow he moved to Aberdeen in 1575, where he introduced similar changes before being appointed Principal of St Mary’s College, St Andrews, in 1580. He was also active in church affairs, serving as Moderator of the General Assembly in 1578. However, he was not prepared to take a ‘softly, softly’ approach on the unresolved issue of bishops and their role in the Reformed Church. His opposition rested on the grounds that Episcopacy effectively subordinated the Church to the State, since not only were bishops appointed by the Crown, but they also sat in Parliament.

In the years immediately following 1560 the art of the possible had led the Reformed Church to operate a ‘mixed economy’ in terms of its governance. As previously noted, some kirk sessions were already in place before 1560, having
evolved from the privy kirks of the 1550s. These continued, with their numbers added to and elders co-operating with ministers at parish level. From December 1560 through to the 1580s, General Assemblies had been meeting annually; sometimes more than once a year. It was at the middle level of governance that things were less clear cut. The First Book of Discipline provided for ten districts each to be overseen by a Superintendent. Appointments were made to some of these positions, while three reform-inclined pre-Reformation bishops continued in their sees. At this stage the issue was not so much with the term ‘bishop’ as such; rather with the way the office had developed in the mediaeval Church. Bishops had become more and more engaged in civil affairs, holding high office in the land and siphoning off church revenues at the expense of the parishes and priests on the ground. Corruption had also entered through the right of the Crown to appoint bishops and, in a country far from Rome, there was little effective papal oversight. In the early years, therefore, the primary concern of the Reformers was with the character and performance of the post-holder. The term ‘bishop’ had certainly acquired a negative resonance, but the pastoral and leadership role the office was intended to provide was recognised as both good and necessary for the Church. Indeed, around this time a satirical distinction was made between three types of bishop: ‘my Lord bishop’ who was the grand prelate wielding both ecclesiastical and temporal power; ‘my Lord’s bishop’, who owed his appointment to a powerful noble who, in return, benefited from the revenues of the diocese; and ‘the Lord’s bishop’, who was the genuine man of God, caring for the clergy and people of his diocese.

Andrew Melville was not interested in such distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ bishops. His objection was to the office itself. For him all ministers were equal and answerable to the Church for the discharge of their duties; and for this purpose of accountability the Church should be represented, not by a higher-ranking individual, but by a superior court. Already
ministers were meeting in local groups for prayer and Bible study in what became known as ‘the Exercise’. It was but a step to develop these gatherings into a tier of local church government and to call them ‘presbyteries’ – gatherings of presbyters. Such presbyteries, overseeing the local Church, would be made up of ministers and elders. As for the regional level, in Melville’s view, there was no need to argue over the relative merits of Bishop versus Superintendent, for both offices were irrelevant. Let there be a court higher than the Presbytery but below the General Assembly and let this court be called the Synod. Finally, at the highest level, came the General Assembly, overseeing the whole work of the Church. Each court would be chaired by a rotating moderatorship on a ‘first among equals’ basis. This was the clear vision of Melville, set out in *The Second Book of Discipline* and aimed at providing an orderly shape to the Kirk that was emerging from the Reformation struggle.

Another issue for Melville was the distinction between Church and State, the Kingdom of God and the kingdom ruled over by an earthly Sovereign. Pre-Reformation Scotland had been governed by the king who, effectively, appointed the leading clergy, who then became courtiers and holders of government offices. The doctrine of Divine Right was held strongly by the Stewart kings and, for James, an essential aspect of this was a calling to rule over both Church and State. In a famous clash at Falkland Palace, Melville boldly informed his monarch that ‘there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland. There is Christ Jesus the King and His kingdom is the Kirk, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member.’ Perhaps this was still ringing in the royal ears when he observed in 1604, by which time he was also King of England, that Presbyterianism ‘agreeeth with monarchy as God and the devil’.

Meanwhile, back in late-1570s Scotland, opposition to Morton’s Regency was growing and, in any event, the young James was reaching an age at which he might choose by whose
From Reform to Renewal

influence to be guided and, indeed, to begin to rule in his own right. Technically his minority ended in 1578, though it would be another five years before he gained effective control of his country. In September 1579 Esmé Stewart, a cousin of Lord Darnley, James’ late father, arrived from France and quickly became a favourite at court. His commission and not so hidden agenda was to persuade James back towards the old French/Catholic alliance. Stewart quickly found favour with the young king and it was not long before he was elevated to the earldom of Lennox. His rise continued apace and before long he was Duke of Lennox, the only dukedom in Scotland at the time. Inevitably, this created jealousies and rivalries at court. The French connection, too, was an unsettling factor, not least as Queen Mary was still alive and maintaining an effective communications network from her English prison at Fotheringay.

Adding to this political turbulence were rumours of a plan to overthrow the church reforms of the previous twenty years and restore the old ecclesiastical structure. The story was that the Pope had granted dispensations allowing Catholics in Scotland to subscribe and swear whatever might be required of them, provided they remained faithful to their religion and ready to advance its interests – Nicodemism in another guise! Whether true or not, such scaremongering served to strengthen Protestant feeling, leading in 1581 to the drafting and mass signing of a document that became known as the King’s or Negative Confession. King James himself subscribed. In what today we would call ‘colourful’ language, this stressed the ‘negatives’ in the Roman Catholic religion and bound the signatories to accept ‘the true religion’, to defend the king, the Gospel and the nation. Ministers, on pain of a deduction from stipend, were exhorted ‘to crave the same confessioun of their parochiners and instructed to proceed against refusers according to our lawes and order of the Kirk’.

In August 1582 there arose a dramatic turn of events in which the young king was seized by a group of staunchly
Protestant nobles. Known as the ‘Ruthven Raid’ from its leader, William Ruthven, Earl of Gowrie, the captors held the king for ten months, with Ruthven acting as head of an ultra-Protestant regime. Unsurprisingly, the raiders had the approval of the General Assembly, where Andrew Melville had considerable influence. However, any advantage was short lived and, indeed, the Assembly was to pay a price for its support of the raid. Once the king was free, power passed to James Stewart, recently ennobled as Earl of Arran and a close associate of Esmé Stewart. This new Arran was no friend of Melville and in 1584 Parliament, under his influence, passed a series of measures that, in Presbyterian lore, became known as the ‘Black Acts’. These asserted the power of the king over the Church as well as the State. Any gathering of subjects for civil or ecclesiastical purposes would require royal permission, including General Assemblies; presbyteries were condemned and ministers were forbidden to criticise the king and his policies in their sermons. The power of bishops was also confirmed. Indeed, additional powers were given to the Archbishop of St Andrews and to the bishops to ‘put order to all matters and causes ecclesiastical within their dioceses’. To illustrate these shifting sands betwixt Episcopal and Presbyterian polity it may be noted that the Archbishop of St Andrews, Patrick Adamson, had been Moderator of the General Assembly in 1576, the year of his consecration as archbishop.

It was not long before the tide turned again, and in 1585 the Synod of Fife excommunicated Adamson for his contribution to the passing of the ‘Black Acts’ and for setting himself above his fellow ministers. Encouraged by this, a number of ministers began to preach against royal policy. Fortunately for them, the king, now ruling in his own right, adopted a diplomatic approach that led to the drafting of Articles of Accommodation and the convening of a General Assembly in 1586. Catching the mood of conciliation, the Assembly rescinded the Synod’s excommunication of Adamson and instructed those preachers who had criticised the king to apologise. It also adopted a
pattern of presbyteries that more or less covered the country and accepted that the bishops should serve as moderators of the presbyteries within whose bounds they resided. However, such all-round goodwill could not last. Within the year a vacancy arose in the bishopric of Caithness and the king was minded to appoint Robert Pont, minister of St Cuthbert’s, Edinburgh. The response of the General Assembly was to concur in the royal appreciation of Pont’s qualities, but to point out that he was ‘already a bishop according to the doctrine of St Paul … but as to that corrupt estate or office of them who have been termed bishops heretofore, we find it not agreeable to the Word of God … neither is the said Mr Robert willing to attempt the same in that matter.’ The royal response was to annex the landed properties of bishoprics, abbeys and other prelacies to the Crown. The Church didn’t want bishops; the king needed money and saw his opportunity. Eventually though, in 1592, Parliament passed legislation that established a fully-fledged Presbyterian regime of Kirk session, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly. The right of the Assembly to meet annually, in the presence of the king or his Commissioner, was affirmed, as was the freedom of the Assembly to meet at other times, if required. Episcopal jurisdiction was abolished and ministerial appointments were declared to lie with presbyteries. This 1592 Act is sometimes referred to as the Great Charter of the Church, though, given the nature of royal and ecclesiastical politics of the time, it would not be long before it was challenged and undermined.