

CHURCH HISTORY

The Reformation in Scotland

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The Modern Church, part 4

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. In no other country in the world was the Reformation so complete or so thorough as in Scotland. The ultimate test of any reform is in the fruit, and the Scottish nation is living proof of the vitality and power of God's grace. Since the Reformation, Calvinism has been for all practical purposes the religion of Scotland.
- B. From Scotland came the great thrust for Presbyterianism. In a very real sense Scotland can be called the "Mother Country of Modern Presbyterianism."

II. BACKGROUND

- A. Before the Reformation reached Scotland, the people were in gross darkness, slaves to the Roman Church, ignorant, wretched, degraded in body, mind and morals, and, above all else, very superstitious.
- B. Probably in no country of Europe was the Roman Catholic clergy more depraved than in Scotland at the time of the Reformation. This country needed reform, and God in his grace granted it.

III. PREPARATION FOR THE REFORMATION

- A. *Reformed Teaching:* There was a Christian influence for many years before the Reformation in Scotland, such as: (1) the spiritual heritage left by the old Celtic Church; (2) the influence of the Lollards in England brought back from Scottish students who attended Oxford; (3) the teachings of John Hus, Peter Dubois and William of Occam brought home by many Scottish travelers and students on the Continent; and (4) the steady increase in Lutheran ideas.

- B. *Early Reformers:* The pioneer Reformer in Scotland was Patrick Hamilton, who had gone to Wittenburg to study with Luther and returned to his homeland to preach. He was burned as a heretic in 1528. His death produced a mighty impression throughout the land. The second great leader of the Scottish Reformation was George Wishart, who had a Zwinglian and Calvinistic background. Wishart was martyred in 1546. In these early years many a Christian gave his life for the cause of Christ in Scotland. The prize student of Wishart was John Knox, God's man to lead the Reformation in Scotland.

IV. JOHN KNOX

- A. *Political Climate:* Scotland was in a sad state, virtually ruled by the French under Mary of Guise, who had a French army in Edinburgh and Leith. Mary was married to the Dauphin of France and lived in France. She was influenced by her family who were fanatical Catholics and pro-France. Scotland was essential to the French politically, for if the Roman Catholics could retain Scotland, they could use it as a base for the destruction of Protestant England. For a time the little kingdom of Scotland was politically the most important spot in Europe.
- B. *His Early Life:* John Knox was born in Scotland some time between 1505 and 1515. He received a university education and was ordained a priest. When in 1547 the French fleet captured St. Andrews Castle, Knox, together with others, was made prisoner. For 19 months he toiled as a galley slave. After his release from slavery, Knox went to England for five years. At this time, Protestantism was flourishing under Edward VI in England, but Scotland was still groaning under the thralldom of Rome. During this period in England, he met many outstanding Church leaders such as Latimer, Ridley, Hooper, and Miles Coverdale, men who wholeheartedly accepted the Reformed point of view as presented by Geneva. Archbishop Cranmer was his friend, and Knox became one of the king's preachers. He was offered the bishopric of Rochester, but declined it because of his presbyterian views of church polity. Knox had a big part in forming the original Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England. When Mary Tudor came to power in England, in God's providence, Knox had to flee England. He went to Geneva where he sat under John Calvin and Theodore Beza. He had the benefit of seeing the Reformed Church in action within a thoroughly Protestant community. Above all, he saw at work the master mind of Calvin taking the Bible as the Word of God and systematizing its truths in a doctrinal framework such as had never been seen before. This

background helped Knox become a great leader with the enthusiasm of Luther and the steadfastness of Calvin.

- C. *His Reform*: Knox returned to Scotland in 1559 well equipped to lead the Reformation. By 1560 the Roman Church had virtually vanished from the land. The Reformation was greatly helped by the Treaty of Berwick (1560) between England and Scotland. Queen Elizabeth, who had no love for John Knox, allied with the Scots to save her political future. Soon France and the Roman Church lost their hold on Scotland and, at the request of Parliament, John Knox and five friends drew up a statement of the Reformed doctrine called the Scots Confession. This remained the basic statement of the Scottish faith until 1647 when the Westminster Confession of Faith was accepted as the standard doctrinal statement of the Church of Scotland. Knox also set forth the First Book of Discipline, which expounded the Presbyterian method of church polity. In the Book of Discipline it was insisted that the properties and vast revenues of the old church should be reserved for the maintenance of religion, education, and the poor. However, greedy nobles made this impossible. Knox also set forth a magnificent plan for the education of the people, his ideal being to have “a kirk and a school in every parish.”
- D. *His Conflict With Queen Mary*: In 1561, Mary, Queen of Scots, returned from France. Knox and the nobles knew it was her plan to uproot Protestantism and replace it with Catholicism. She was a beautiful and fascinating woman, and many of the Protestant nobles fell for her wiles. But she could never move John Knox. Queen Mary stood for autocratic France and Romanism; John Knox stood for Presbyterianism, democracy, and alliance with England. The two ideas were utterly incompatible, and a clash was inevitable. Knox never visited the palace unless asked, and Mary came finally to the place where she could tolerate Knox. (Mary was her own worst enemy, for her immoral life lost her much support with the Scottish people.)

V. ANDREW MELVILLE

- A. After the death of Knox, first the regents and then the young king, James VI, did their best to undermine Presbyterianism and establish the Episcopacy. James’s goal was to secure at all costs the throne of England on the death of Queen Elizabeth.
- B. The Presbyterian leadership passed into the hands of Andrew Melville. King James was a most shifty and unsatisfactory man, and Melville had the temerity

to tell him to his face that there were two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ where James was only a subject; and the civil kingdom where James was the sovereign. The Presbyterian system was fully established in Scotland until approximately 1597, then an attempt was made to restore the Episcopate, and the Church of Scotland was brought into bondage to the court until 1638.

VI. THE SCOTTISH COVENANTERS

- A. Under Charles I of England, there was an attempt to take the Scottish Church under the yoke of the Church of England. In 1638, there was signed in Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh, the National Covenant, which bound its signatories by an oath to maintain the freedom of the Church. Lord, burghers and peasants all rallied with enthusiasm to the Presbyterian cause, and the copies of the Covenant were signed all over the land. In 1638, the General Assembly met in Glasgow, the first free assembly since 1596. In 1640, the Scots aligned with Oliver Cromwell to overthrow the Monarchy in England.
- B. The Scottish people had moved in the Restoration (1660) to bring Charles II back on the throne of England, replacing the Protectorate of Cromwell. The “Drunken Parliament” in Edinburgh carried out the command of Charles and once more imposed Episcopacy upon the Church of Scotland. There followed the disastrous defeats of the Covenanters at Bothwell Bride and Rullion Green. Then the staunchest Presbyterians organized their Societies, and when forbidden to worship God in public, met in secret amid the moorland mists and the deep ravines of the southern uplands of Scotland — constantly hunted down by those opposed to Presbyterianism.
- C. In Scotland, the Revolution Settlement of 1689-1690 brought great joy to an overwhelming majority of the people. The Presbyterian Church was once again established, and the sovereign came under obligation to recognize it. The Westminster Confession of Faith was taken as expressing the creed of the Scottish Church.