

1

In the Steps of Calvin

John Calvin and the Genevan Reformation

John Calvin was an eight-year-old boy in his native French city of Noyon when the German monk, Martin Luther, heralded the Age of the Reformation by nailing his ninety-five theses on the castle-church door at Wittenberg in 1517. A generation of tumult followed this act of defiance against the Church of Rome; then, in 1536, a second phase and new dimension of the Protestant Reformation was opened by the publication of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

For nearly two centuries before Luther, members of the powerful Roman Church had increasingly criticized the church's wealth, immorality and corruption. By the beginning of the sixteenth century such diverse personalities as Savonarola, the Italian religious demagogue, and Erasmus of Rotterdam, the humanistic scholar, were calling for renewal in the life of the Catholic church, and many church leaders of that day agreed with their call. Perhaps the growth of nationalism and the information explosion following the invention of the printing press made internal reform of the church impossible, yet ultimately it was the church's over-reaction to Luther in official circles that first broke the unity of western Christendom. Despite his seemingly revolutionary doctrine of justification by faith alone rather than by works, Luther's Reformation and that of his Swiss contemporary, Zwingli, were theologically conservative. It remained for John Calvin to convert one branch of this separatist movement into a radical break with the religious

organization that had developed over fourteen centuries.

John Calvin had received a Master of Arts degree in philosophy from the University of Paris in 1527, had studied law for four years in Orleans and Bourges, where he also learned Greek. During this period Calvin certainly encountered Luther's ideas. By 1531 the promising young scholar was back in Paris learning Hebrew and continuing his humanistic studies. Late in 1533, because of a charge of heresy arising from his association with the university rector, a suspected heretic and reforming humanist, Calvin was forced to flee to south-western France. After months of reflection he made the painful but now unavoidable decision to leave the Church of Rome and to settle at the Reformed free city and publishing centre, Basle. There he found safety and satisfaction in his "literary ease" as his own religious thoughts took definite form. There too was published his *Institutes* in 1536, bringing him instant fame as "the Theologian" in an age of great theologians.

Calvin's *Institutes* was not a medieval theological treatise — a series of arguments to be debated by scholars — but a short and incisive manual of religious instruction for the world at large, and probably the most important single product of sixteenth century Protestant thought. Like many of his later commentaries on the Bible, his *Institutes* expressed readily understood ideas in a masterly and creative style. Calvin began his theological exposition, deliberately structured on the Apostles' Creed, with beneficent God's search for sinful man. Because of Adam's disobedience to God's will (his sinful pride in attempting to make himself God's equal), fallen man stands in utter dependence on his sovereign and caring God, his only hope of salvation. Only when, through God's effectual calling, man recognizes God's love, can he respond gratefully and freely by giving to God that obedience which alone makes his soul truly the reflection of God's image. To humanity God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, His incarnate love, and through the "good news" of Scripture enlivened by the Holy Spirit, He revealed Christ to later ages. Man's faith is not an intellectual assent to formal creeds but his trusting reception of God into his own life so that God becomes a powerful force in his being.

The church, 'the mother of believers,' is then God's essential instrument for the means of grace to lead man through Scripture to Christ and through Christ to the Father. This relationship of man to his gracious Father delivers him from his sinful Adam-nature and permits him to model his life on that of Christ, the second Adam. Calvin rejected the Roman doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the wine and bread of communion by which the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, and insisted that Christ's presence in the Sacrament results from the operation of the Holy

Spirit who unites the believer with the risen Christ. For Calvin salvation through Christ's self-sacrifice and resurrection was always more important than predestination, that difficult concept of divine initiative that attracted undue attention from Calvin's spiritual heirs. Calvin's own intellectual struggle with the idea of salvation for some and damnation for others may be reflected in his conclusion that this doctrine was a labyrinth from which most mortal minds would find no exit. Although Calvin's theology was essentially Bible-centred, he reserved an important role for those historic teachings of the early church that he believed were in accord with Scripture. As "the Theologian," he stands squarely in the long line of succession of great divines stretching from Augustine.

Important as Calvin's theology was, his role in the Reformation rested at least as much on his ability to win supporters to his ideas and to weld those supporters into a solid religious organization. His plan of local church government, stressing as it did popular participation, rather than the hierarchical structure of authority derived from the political institutions of the Roman Empire, was ideally suited to bring strength and order to the small Protestant states of that age. In the summer of 1536, the twenty-five year old Calvin was travelling to the Protestant stronghold of Strasbourg to pursue his scholarly career in peaceful surroundings when war between France and Austria forced him to detour through Geneva, then a free city adjoining the Swiss cantons. As recently as 1535, after a protracted struggle against its ruler the prince-bishop, the city on Lake Lemman had won its independence and accepted Protestantism under the leadership of another Frenchman, William Farel, an inspiring figure but no organizer. When Farel learned of Calvin's presence in the city, he challenged the famous author of the *Institutes* to abandon his selfish life as a scholar and stay to do God's will by transforming Geneva with its thirteen thousand inhabitants into a city of saints. "I felt," said Calvin, "as if God from heaven had laid his mighty hand on me to stop me in my course . . . and I was so stricken with terror that I did not continue my journey." ¹ From that day forward the names of Calvin and Geneva would be forever and inseparably linked together.

Although Geneva was reputedly infamous for its sins, it was probably no worse and no better than other European cities of that age. Calvin and Farel, however, were determined to force the Genevans to live up to their Reformed faith, and so the city council began to enforce public confession and the reform of morals, beliefs and church ordinances. This attempted regimentation of city life caused a revolt in 1538 and both leaders were exiled by the Council. Calvin went to Strasbourg, where he preached to French refugees and taught in the academy of John Sturm whose humanistic Reform

curriculum was later the model for new universities such as Strasbourg and Geneva. By 1541, however, the political and religious situation in Geneva had so deteriorated that a new and evangelical-dominated Council begged him to return and establish the holy republic. Calvin was by nature reserved and proud, but again that sense of a God-imposed obligation which had kept him from leaving Geneva in 1536, now dictated his return, this time on his own terms. Nevertheless, his victory did not ensure an end to all opposition and many years were to pass before Calvin's aims were realized in Genevan life.

Once back in Geneva, Calvin proposed a reformed church with four ministries — pastors, teachers of the Word, elders and deacons. Guided by the powerful Consistory of pastors and elders, the church of Geneva resisted any attempt of the city Council to rule the church, while insisting that the state ought to support the Consistory's decisions on doctrine and discipline. Within the church a rigid discipline over morality, dress, eating, drinking and social behaviour was exercised by the Consistory, often reinforced by the civil authorities. Total obedience, or at least silent conformity, to the Genevan Church Order was achieved by excommunication or as a last resort by banishment from the state for the unrepentant or indiscreet. Not all who disagreed with Calvin were treated to the leniency of exile. The most famous incident involved Michael Servetus, a Spanish Unitarian heretic. Servetus came to Geneva in 1553 despite warnings of danger there. Calvin had earlier declared, "I shall never let him depart alive," and when discovered in Geneva Servetus was tried, condemned by Geneva's civil court with the approval of the other Reformed churches, and publicly burned to death. The execution of Servetus marked Calvin's total victory over the "ungodly" and, until his death eleven years later, Geneva was a city of saints ruled by a determined government that enacted repressive laws and dispensed harsh justice.

Calvin's Geneva may seem repellent to later and more tolerant generations, but in that day the majority of Genevans accepted such repression as the only protection for a city encircled by enemies seen and infiltrated by enemies unseen. On the positive side, Geneva offered a safe refuge to other persecuted Reformers, provided hospitals for the sick and aged, and established universities and schools. Calvin's own iron will and rigid self-discipline set the tone of Genevan life — piety conjoined to industry. Despite his chronic illnesses he managed to deliver some five hundred lectures and sermons each year — his writings fill fifty-nine volumes in the definitive edition. He corresponded with political leaders throughout Europe and a constant theme of his letters was the promotion of the freedom of the church from worldly interference.



John Calvin, Father of Presbyterianism circa 1536



John Knox, from Beza's Icones,
perhaps the only authentic portrait

For Calvin the vocation of a layman, whether prince or peasant, was a life dedicated in all its aspects to God. This was the central reason why Calvin emphasized the need to educate all classes, so that they could understand God's work and show a vital and continuing concern for their neighbours who, like themselves, were made in God's image. Succeeding generations in all quarters of the globe have been profoundly influenced in many ways by Calvin's thought, but his greatest immediate achievement at Geneva was to restore to the Reformation movement the aggressive sense of divine purpose that it had exhibited in Luther's Germany three decades earlier. In later ages and other lands the theology of Calvinism would grow to be bigger than Calvin the man, but in his own lifetime "no pope or king of them all could compare as a ruler with John Calvin, because John Calvin in the moral and religious sphere was the strongest, the most intense man of his age."²

The Spread of Calvinism in Europe

As a practical handbook of Reformed theology Calvin's *Institutes* had received international attention, thanks to the printing press without which the Reformation would probably not have happened in that century. In 1541 Calvin translated the *Institutes* into French so that the book could be read by the common man, and in 1561 an English translation of it appeared. With each new edition Calvin expanded the contents of his *Institutes* until they filled two volumes. Calvinism as a Christian faith spread widely and rapidly throughout northern Europe, yet ironically Calvin always thought of himself as a religious reformer, never as the founder of a new church. His system of church government by consistory had in fact a very practical limitation because it was designed to meet the needs of one particular city-state, Geneva. Only as Calvinism spread through France, the Netherlands, and Scotland did it acquire an organization suitable for larger territorial units. That form of church government, presbyterianism, took shape in provincial or national synods composed of representatives from the consistory or presbytery level.

Calvin had never considered that he was establishing a religion of revolution at Geneva, but as taken up by other nations Calvinism was used to justify political rebellion against "tyrants." In all the states of western Europe the reformed religion was considered seditious because it challenged the established relations of church and state. Every country persecuted religious minorities because men did not distinguish between religious belief and political dissent, which, in that age, were admittedly often identical. Since the church had always sanctified the political order, the Reformed religion

appeared to be a revolutionary attempt to overthrow existing governments. Medieval kings had supported the Catholic church's insistence on conformity — and in Reformation Europe the same tradition was now simply reproduced at the national level. At Augsburg in 1555 the German princes agreed that the religion chosen by the ruler must become the religion of his subjects, and this doctrine — that political unity required religious conformity — became the hall mark of both Protestant and Catholic states for centuries thereafter.

Reformed Presbyterian churches professing Calvinistic theology sprang up in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the French-speaking cantons of Switzerland, England, and Ireland; but historically the most important development of presbyterianism occurred in France, the Netherlands, and Scotland. Calvinism spread westward to France as a result of continuous contacts between that country and Geneva's French leaders. In France, thanks to the eighty-eight missionaries known to have been sent there from Geneva in the seven years preceding Calvin's death, there emerged a large body of Calvinists called Huguenots. In 1559 those French Reformed churches that had been modelled on the practice of Geneva formed a united organization, and some fifty of the seventy-two congregations were represented at a general synod held that year in Paris. Nevertheless, Roman Catholicism was so firmly embedded in the institutions of France and the hearts of Frenchmen that Calvinism would never be more than the religion of a minority.

The persecution of the French Huguenots appeared to end in 1560 when limited religious freedom was granted to the Reformers. This concession, intended to restore religious peace and political harmony, had however the reverse effect, as the country became torn by rival political factions who championed either the new faith or the old. The culmination of atrocities, assassinations, and mass murders by all parties came in 1572, when thousands of Huguenots died in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. From that date until 1598, when the new monarch, Henry IV, issued the Edict of Nantes guaranteeing toleration to the Huguenots, France was wracked by religious wars that retarded the development of every aspect of its national life. The Edict of Nantes also permitted the one and a quarter million Huguenots to keep private armies in the major Huguenot cities.

When Henry was assassinated in 1610, however, his widow Marie d'Medici began her rule by dismissing Huguenots from important offices. Her religious policies were later supported by the Cardinal-Duke de Richelieu, chief of the royal council after 1624, whose single goal was a strong and united France. The existence of the Huguenot armies were an obvious obstacle to their plans, and the renewal of civil war with the Huguenots in 1625 gave

Richelieu the opportunity to achieve his aim of French unification. The fortified seaport of La Rochelle, main stronghold of the Huguenots since 1568, was besieged and, despite English intervention on the Huguenot side, its twenty-five thousand inhabitants were starved into surrender in 1629. This defeat marked the end of Huguenot political and military power as their armies and fortresses were dismantled; yet as a state-recognized religion the Reformed faith was ensured of toleration during the next half-century by a reaffirmation of the Edict of Nantes.

To the north of France, the Low Countries — present-day Belgium and the Netherlands — formed part of the vast Hapsburg empire of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. In 1555, however, Charles retired to a monastery and divided his territories between the Spanish and Austrian branches of his family. The Low Countries became provinces of Charles's son, Philip II of Spain, but where Charles had been identified with the Low Countries by birth, language, and sentiment, Philip had adopted Spanish culture with all the enthusiasm of a convert. Philip's policies in the Spanish Netherlands, as the Low Countries were called, intensified a growing rift between the commercially-minded and nationalistic Netherlanders and their new ruler. His laws against Protestantism, his introduction of that powerful counter-reformation force, the Society of Jesus, his reorganization of the Catholic hierarchy in the provinces, and his attempts to increase taxes on the rich region were countered by the organizing of anti-Spanish political groups and the rebellion of Calvinists who openly preached revolution against this "foreign tyranny."

In 1565 a dreadful civil war began between the Netherlanders and the Spanish. At the outset, this revolt was a national liberation movement supported by both the Catholic majority and the Calvinist minority. In six years some six thousand people were put to death, and in the space of two generations about 400,000 fled that troubled land. Members of the resistance movement, derisively called "Beggars" by the Spanish, suffered an almost unbroken series of defeats in the land war, but by becoming privateers and preying on Spanish shipping the "Sea Beggars" turned the tide of revolution in their favour. Their popular leader, William of Orange, a convert to Protestantism, was made "Statholder" by the Dutch port cities whose wealth and sea power promised eventual victory. An attempt by Philip in 1574 to save his provinces by conciliatory gestures was rejected by a virtual declaration of independence the following year.

A temporary peace was established in 1576 but almost immediately political and religious issues arose between Catholic and Calvinist Netherlanders. The southern provinces had remained predominantly French and Catholic;

Holland and Zeeland in the north were both Dutch-speaking and increasingly Calvinistic in their sympathies. Like Switzerland, the Spanish Netherlands were a religious and linguistic patchwork quilt whose parts could live in peace only if each distinctive territory was secure in its own identity. Unlike Switzerland, however, neither geography nor Spanish policy permitted such an easy solution to the question of national self-determination in the Low Countries; so cultural and religious division now produced civil war among the Netherlanders themselves.

Spain took advantage of these new divisions to reoccupy the southern and Catholic provinces, but the independence-minded Calvinistic north could not be so easily destroyed. Even the assassination of William of Orange did not weaken the republic, and its ultimate survival as an independent country was ensured by England's destruction of Philip's Armada in 1588. Dutch independence was confirmed in 1609, the same year that the Dutch East India Company sent the Englishman, Henry Hudson, on a westward search for a shorter route to the Orient. The religious future of the Dutch republic was settled a decade later when the famous Synod of Dort confirmed Calvinism as the official theology of the state-supported Dutch Reformed Church, which had already been organized on presbyterian principles. Political stability, religious peace, rapid economic recovery from the civil wars, the founding of overseas colonies, and an aggressive trading policy that soon made the Netherlands the strongest nation in Western Europe, all combined to promote the blossoming of the Dutch spirit in the next century when their tiny homeland produced world-renowned theologians, philosophers, artists, scientists, merchants and explorers, and the first Calvinist settlements in the New World.

Catholicism, Calvinism and Nationalism in Scotland

Christianity came to the British Isles as one of the several eastern religions brought by Roman soldiers and colonists. From England the new faith was carried to Ireland by the Romano-British missionary, St. Patrick, but during the fifth century, when the southern part of England was invaded by pagan Anglo-Saxons, the church in Britain became isolated from Rome. It survived only in the Celtic regions in Ireland, Wales and Cornwall, where it developed distinctive practices of its own — a different calendar was used, monks shaved their heads in a different shape from the “crown of thorns” pattern used in Europe, and the Celtic church was interwoven with tribal organization. As no parish system existed, Celtic bishops exercised no authority except to consecrate monk-priests, who commonly wandered abroad like the begging

friars of the later Middle Ages.

Christianity reached Scotland about 400 AD. when Ninian, a Roman-Briton, built a church called *Candida Casa*, or *White House*, near *Wigtown*. The full impact of the new faith was only felt two hundred years later when another Celtic tribe, the Scots from Ireland, reputedly founded a kingdom in western Scotland, and *Columba*, an Irish priest, established his monastery on the island of *Iona*. This Celtic church spread through the Scottish lowlands and south into the Saxon kingdom of *Northumbria*. Meanwhile, a second conversion of England was begun about 600 by *St. Augustine*, and in a few decades the influence of the Roman church expanded throughout the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms until it encountered the Celtic missionaries in *Northumbria*. The confrontation between the Celtic and Roman churches came in 664 at the famous conference of *Whitby* where a Celtic abbot debated the date of *Easter*, the shape of clerical tonsure, and the form of church government with the next bishop of *York*. After listening to the two prelates, *King Oswy* of *Northumbria* decided to adopt the Roman form of Christianity because, as he said, the successors of *St. Peter* held the keys to heaven and he wanted to be sure of being admitted there. Within the next half century the Celtic church in Britain accepted the authority and practices of the Roman Church.

Around 1080, the church in Scotland reached a second turning point. The tone of religious life had slowly degenerated throughout the Catholic church until in the eleventh century *Pope Gregory the Great* restored the practices of clerical celibacy, poverty, and discipline. *Margaret*, English queen of *King Malcolm Canmore* of Scotland and a refugee from the *Norman Conquest*, had seen the effects of these reforms in the English church, and with the support of her husband forced their adoption in Scotland. During the next two centuries, when peace encouraged close Anglo-Scottish relations, English culture was dominant in lowland Scottish language, dress, military organization, architecture, and political and religious ideas. The parish system was instituted, proud cathedrals were erected, great monasteries established, hospitals, asylums, and finally universities built.

Nevertheless, a growing awareness of Scotland's national identity was gradually turning popular opinion against these two foreign influences — *England* and *Rome*. The late medieval church was more like a commonwealth of national churches acknowledging the primacy of one bishop at *Rome* than a monolithic organization controlled by a superking. Without denying the authority of the pope, the church in Scotland, as in many other countries, managed with political help to preserve a separate identity and a measure of autonomous jurisdiction. The Scottish parliament passed laws restricting court appeals to *Rome*, the payment of taxes to the papacy, and

the appointment of foreigners to positions in the church in Scotland. The kingdom's struggle for religious autonomy during the late Middle Ages was the parallel of its protracted struggle to assert political independence from England.

In its conflict with England, Scotland was supported by the power of France through the "Auld Alliance," a treaty first signed in 1295 against their common enemy, England. After Henry VIII made himself pope-king of England in 1531 by having his parliament declare him Supreme Head of the English church, James V of Scotland rejected Henry's overtures for friendship, preferring to remain Catholic and the ally of France. At the same time James took steps to stop the spread of Reformation ideas in Scotland. A law of 1525 prohibited the importation of Lutheran books; in 1528 the popular religious leader, Patrick Hamilton, was burned to death at St. Andrews for preaching Lutheran doctrines. For both political and religious reasons, however, a growing body of Scottish nobles had opposed James's policies, particularly his maintenance of the Auld Alliance, because they believed that Scotland's best interests lay in promoting friendship with England. James, however, feared that Henry coveted the throne of Scotland. To strengthen the Auld Alliance James married a daughter of France's king, Francis I, in 1537, and after her early death he married another Frenchwoman. Henry's dynastic ambitions became clear in 1542 when he proclaimed himself King of Ireland and invaded Scotland. James's encounter with the English at Solway Moss that year led only to shameful defeat and his death shortly after the birth of an heir, Mary, Queen of Scots.

The Earl of Arran, regent for the infant queen and almost a Protestant in his religion, favoured a new alliance with England through the marriage of Mary to Henry's son, Edward. When this scheme was defeated by the queen's mother, Mary de Guise, and her powerful adviser, David Beaton, the archbishop of St. Andrews, Henry revenged this insult by invading Scotland in 1544 and 1545, burning hundreds of villages and the magnificent abbeys of Melrose, Dryburgh, Kelso and Eccles. Beaton's political victory over Arran had proved costly to Scotland, but it was not Henry of England as much as the popular evangelical preacher George Wishart who caused Beaton's ultimate fall from power. Wishart, who had fled James's persecution of Protestantism, returned to Scotland in 1543. After preaching secretly for three years, he was captured and burned by Cardinal Beaton, yet in that short period he had gained many followers including John Knox, private tutor in a wealthy family, who had been Wishart's constant companion and guard until the latter's final days.

Beaton may have been right in believing that his persecution of the Protestants had virtually stamped out heresy in Scotland by 1545, but his execution of Wishart produced overnight a band of Reformers who avenged Wishart by murdering Beaton and hanging his mutilated body from his own castle wall at St. Andrews. Knox was not one of the murderers, but he soon came to the fore as a leader of the rebellion. Knox was probably born in 1514; he was certainly a university graduate and an ordained Catholic priest. A born fighter, he was always passionately convinced of the righteousness of his own cause and the evilness of all his opponents. Knox joined the rebels in St. Andrews Castle which had become their refuge after Beaton's murder, but in August, 1547, the French captured St. Andrews and sent Knox and his companions to be French galley slaves.

Released by the French after only nineteen months, Knox was appointed in 1551 chaplain to England's boy king, Edward VI, whose advisers were carrying the Reformation in England far beyond the nationalized Roman Catholicism of his father, Henry VIII. While in England Knox refused the bishopric of Rochester, but when the Roman Catholic Mary Tudor, the "Bloody Mary" of English history, succeeded her half-brother Edward in 1553, Knox anticipated Mary's persecution of the Protestants by fleeing, ultimately settling in Geneva. There he listened to Calvin and admired the strict discipline which had made the city, in his opinion, "the maist perfytt schoole of Chryste that ever was in the erth since the dayis of the Apostillis."³ Such a blending of religion and politics seemed to offer the solution to Scotland's problems and Knox spent two years there before being invited by Scottish Reformers to his homeland where religious and political factors were rapidly creating the necessary conditions for reformation and revolution.

Because of the Auld Alliance, Scotland had again been attacked by England in 1547; Henry II of France changed from being the protector of Scotland to being its virtual ruler; and Francis, heir to the French throne and husband of the child Queen Mary, was made king of Scotland with the promise of outright possession of the country if his young bride died without children. Faced with the prospect of becoming a French province, Scottish nationalists now looked to England for help and increasingly identified themselves with Protestantism. The Protestant nobles, calling themselves the Lords of the Congregation, pledged in 1557 their wealth and even their lives to create a Reformed church in Scotland. All these combustible elements of nationalism and religion were suddenly ignited in 1558 by the burning of an eighty-two year old Protestant, Walter Myln, for heresy. Myln's death convinced Protestants that the Catholic Queen Regent could no longer be trusted; for

her part Mary de Guise felt no need to compromise further with “heretics” because she was now assured of French military aid.

The civil war began in 1559 when Mary de Guise ordered the Protestants of Perth to return to the Roman faith. Reformers in Perth and Dundee responded by attacking Roman Catholic churches and driving monks from their abbeys. The “rascall multitude,” as Knox called the undisciplined lower class, continued this destruction of property and works of religious art, yet neither the mobs nor the Lords of the Congregation could beat the French soldiers of Mary de Guise. By the end of 1559 it seemed certain that the civil war of the Reformation would be easily stamped out. Once again the Protestant cause in Scotland was saved by developments in England — this time by the death of “Bloody Mary” in 1558.

Because Mary Tudor’s half-sister Elizabeth, daughter of Anne Boleyn, was not recognized by Catholics as a legitimate heir of Henry VIII, Mary Stuart, now Queen of France and of Scotland was hailed as claimant to the English throne as well. Scottish and English nationalists, now forced to combine for mutual self-defence, signed the Treaty of Berwick. Quickly the French troops were besieged in Leith by an Anglo-Scottish force, with no hope of relief from France. The outcome of this sudden reversal of fortunes was the Treaty of Edinburgh, signed in 1560, a total victory for Scottish nationalism and the Scottish Reformation. Both French and English soldiers were to be withdrawn and all foreigners excluded from Scottish official positions. This Treaty left the religious issue to be settled by Mary and her young husband, Francis II, but Scotland’s Reformer-dominated parliament immediately passed laws denying the supremacy of Rome, outlawing the mass from Scotland, and adopting a Reformed Confession of Faith for a national church. At a single stroke Scotland became independent and Protestant.

The Road to Westminster

The unity of purpose between religious and secular forces that had produced the revolution of 1560 soon began to crumble. John Knox hoped to establish a Genevan style of church, and a school system that would have made Scottish society from top to bottom one of the best educated in Europe, but there was less than complete agreement among the Reformers and revolutionaries on the form of church government or type of Reformed religion that should be adopted. The Catholic church lands that Knox wanted as an endowment for his comprehensive school system were already held

by penurious Scottish nobles. To complicate matters further, the widowed Mary Queen of Scots returned from France in 1561 and for the next six years the religious question became hopelessly enmeshed in dynastic ambitions, family quarrels, and the beautiful young Mary's chequered personal life. Mary continued to practice the Roman Catholic religion in private but offered full religious liberty to her Protestant subjects provided they were politically faithful to her. Events in Scotland, however, made the Protestants suspicious of Mary's honesty. Meanwhile her enemy, Elizabeth of England, who was not yet secure on her own throne, played a careful diplomatic game by refusing to acknowledge Mary as rightful queen of Scotland, but also refusing to aid any rebellion against her.

From the moment of Mary's return, Knox, the watchdog of Protestantism, had become her outspoken critic. "He ruleth the roost," the English ambassador reported on one occasion, "and of him all men stand in fear."⁴ Mary did not fear Knox, but she did resent his continual public criticism of her private life and foreign policies. Knox was certain that she was proud, frivolous and crafty, and he lost no chance to preach the divine responsibility of monarchs and the people's right to rebel against tyrants. Proud Mary was, but not wise, for she sealed her fate by a series of injudicious marriages and political murders. In 1567 she connived at the murder of her first Scottish husband, the youthful and unstable Lord Darnley, and two months later her marriage to the arrogant Lord Bothwell provoked a revolution which ended with Bothwell in exile, Mary the prisoner of Elizabeth to whom she had fled, and Scotland in the power of Mary's half-brother, the Protestant Earl of Moray, regent for her two-year-old son, James VI. The two-year "war of religion" between the Catholic "Queen's Lords" and the Protestant "King's Lords" that followed was marked more often by assassinations than by open battles, but news of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of the French Huguenots rallied most of the Lowlands to the Protestant cause.

Lawlessness, violence, and feuding continued and rich church lands were seized by local war lords until, more than a decade later, young King James began to restore a measure of peace, order, and effective government as he laboured towards the establishment of an absolute monarchy in Scotland. Most of these domestic troubles resulted from economic and political conditions rather than from religion, since the Scottish Reformation is noteworthy in history for the almost total absence of that persecution and bloodshed practised by both Catholics and Protestants in Europe and England. Being a Protestant, James VI was acceptable as a "godly prince" fit to rule a Protestant nation — the demand for religious conformity of ruled and ruler was made by the people as much as by monarchs, as Mary had

discovered. For better or worse, however, James's interest in Scotland declined after 1603 when he inherited the crown of England as nearest heir to Elizabeth I, the queen who had beheaded his mother sixteen years earlier. This union of the crowns of Scotland and England did not create a union of the two kingdoms — each remained a separate state with its own political and economic life, but Scotland's parliament continued to be little more than a rubber stamp wielded by James from London.

During Knox's lifetime the Scottish national church had resembled the Church of England in some ways, but several basic differences between the two British national Reformations provided fuel for revived religious conflict. England's Reformation had been the work of Henry VIII and Elizabeth with the cooperation of their parliaments. Scotland's Reformation had been achieved in direct opposition to royal policy. Unlike the Church of England, the Scottish national church was ruled not by the national parliament but by its own representative General Assembly. The Scottish Reformation had gone much further than its English counterpart in emphasizing the equality of ministers and the importance of parish life, and in rejecting such traditions and practices of the Roman Church as the use of images, the keeping of the festivals of the church year, and the elaborate rituals of the Roman communion. At first the Scottish church had used the English Book of Common Prayer, but gradually simpler forms of worship were adopted in the Book of Common Order. This trend towards a more austere ritual, and towards the presbyterian church government instead of episcopacy, was consolidated by the rise of Andrew Melville to leadership after Knox's death in 1572.

Melville, who had spent several years in Geneva, was opposed to bishops under any name and to any political interference in the affairs of the church. Thanks to his influence, the classic presbyterian structure of ministers and elders, equal in rank and acting as a corporate bishop, was accepted in the Second Book of Discipline of 1578 and confirmed in 1595 by James VI in spite of his personal preference for episcopacy. Scottish Presbyterians believed that the age-old issue of church-state relations could be solved quite simply by drawing a firm line between the things of God and the things of Caesar; King James was convinced that such an artificial division was impractical and that the secular state must ultimately control the church, as in England. Impressed by the powerful support that England's Erastian, or state-controlled, religious establishment could give to an ambitious monarch, James aimed at imposing the Anglican system on the Church of Scotland. In 1600 the General Assembly agreed to send bishops to parliament; in 1609 Melville was exiled from Scotland for life; and in 1610 bishops were restored to their full pre-Reformation powers in parliament and in the church. When James returned to Scotland in 1617 on

his first visit since becoming King of England, he issued his Articles of Perth to restore many features of Roman and Anglican worship — organs, chanting, surplices, high feasts, episcopal confirmation of members, and kneeling to receive the communion.

These Articles, however, could not be enforced in Scotland, and tension between the popular and royal wills intensified when Charles I became King in 1625 and attempted to reclaim all church lands that had come into the possession of laymen. He bankrupted Edinburgh to make St. Giles a cathedral and build the Tron Kirk to the glory of Charles. Parish churches were ordered to be remodelled physically and ritualistically to conform to Anglican practices. Scottish objections to these many changes were useless as the parliament was Charles's creature and public protests were silenced with severity. Scotland's fears that Charles intended to restore Roman Catholicism finally sparked an open rebellion when he tried to impose a version of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer on the Scottish church. Rioting started in St. Giles cathedral where, reputedly, one Janet Geddes threw a stool at the head of the dean who was reading the Anglican service. The revolt spread because Charles refused to modify his religious policy until, in 1638, a committee of rebels, calling itself the "Tables," drew up that famous protest, the National Covenant. As popular support rallied behind the Covenant, the Kirk's General Assembly of 1638 proceeded to dismantle Charles's episcopal church and restore presbyterianism in Scotland.

Charles's decision to put down the Covenanters by force led immediately to civil war and ultimately to his own execution. The First Bishops' War of 1639 ended in a diplomatic defeat for the king, and when both the General Assembly and the Scottish parliament defied him in 1640, Charles was forced to summon England's parliament, which he had ignored since 1629, in order to get money to fight his Second Bishops' War against Scotland. This "long Parliament" of England had grievances of its own against King Charles, and it was also sympathetic to the Scottish reaction against the king's religious policies. Charles discovered that he was powerless against the popular will in England and so was forced to accept the reforms in Scotland and the virtual loss of all his authority in his southern kingdom. In vain he tried to play off Scottish nationalism against English, but when the English civil war began the Scots offered aid to neither side. They had achieved their own goal of re-establishing presbyterianism; and their price for supporting either the king or the English parliament was to be the total destruction of episcopacy in England, Ireland, and Wales and its replacement by the presbyterian system.

Early royalist victories in the English civil war convinced the king that he could beat both the English parliament and the Scots without making religious

concessions; so it was the Long Parliament that accepted the Scottish terms to buy military support. Following the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, a mutual defence pact to preserve the Reformed religion, Scottish soldiers joined with the English parliamentary armies and in two years their combined forces had completed the defeat of King Charles. The futile but bloody royalist uprising of Montrose and the Catholic Highlanders in Scotland between 1643 and 1645 had served only to harden Lowland Scottish opinion in its determination to win a total victory over Charles and over his supporters, whoever they might be.

Early in 1643 the English parliament appointed the Westminster Assembly of one hundred and twenty-one “learned, godly and judicious divines” and thirty representatives of the Lords and Commons, who were joined by five Scottish commissioners after parliament accepted the Solemn League and Covenant. The purpose of the Assembly was to modify all aspects of the Reformed faith into a state religion for England. In 1644 the Westminster Assembly produced the *Directory of Public Worship* to regulate church services, and the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government* defining the roles of pastors and teachers. Three years later the Assembly completed its work of 1,163 sessions by issuing the *Confession of Faith*, the *Larger* and the *Shorter Catechisms*, milestones in the history of presbyterianism and Calvinism and thereafter known collectively as the Westminster Standards. Presbyterianism was even established by law in England in 1646, but with the defeat of Charles’s forces at Naseby, the Independents who controlled England’s army felt free to revert to the English Erastian tradition of political control over religious matters. When the English parliament opposed their policies, Cromwell dismissed it and ruled effectively as a military dictator. That victory of Oliver Cromwell’s “New Model Army” at Naseby proved in the long run to be the herald of the end of the only serious attempt to create a presbyterian church of England.

Political Unity and Religious Disunity in the British Isles

The end of the civil war in England left the real power in the hands of men determined to preserve the autonomy of individual congregations. They would not interfere with presbyterianism in Scotland, but they would not honour the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant. Taking advantage of this growing rift between his enemies, Charles offered to establish presbyterianism in England for three years. Some Scots at least were still prepared to believe in the good faith of their king and opened a new war against England that ended with Cromwell’s army in control of Scotland as well.

Despite this defeat, Scottish opinion swung even more heavily to the royalist cause after the execution of Charles in 1649, but a second futile war against England lost Scotland its national independence for the next nine years.

The Restoration of monarchy in the person of Charles II in 1660 also meant the restoration of Scotland's independence from England, but it did not bring religious peace to Scotland. Charles's measures to reimpose episcopacy in the north divided the nation once more and forced the Presbyterians to resort to illegal conventicles or secret church meetings for worship. The most extreme adherents to the Covenant tradition, the Cameronians, were declared to be rebels, but neither persecution nor persuasion could stamp out presbyterianism which had become so closely identified with Scottish national aspirations. When Charles's Roman Catholic brother ascended the two thrones of England and Scotland in 1685 as James II, and announced a policy of religious toleration that favoured the Roman Catholics as well as Protestant dissenters, the situation was ripe for another revolt in both kingdoms.

The explosion came first in England where James was replaced by his daughter Mary and his son-in-law, the Dutchman William of Orange, in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688. An attempt of James's supporters, the Jacobites, to restore him as king in Scotland by using loyal Catholic Highland clans, collapsed by 1690; a Presbyterian majority in the Scottish parliament forced William to accept a law establishing the presbyterian Church of Scotland as the price of Scottish recognition of the new king and queen. Thus the long controversy over the form of church government in Scotland — presbyterian *versus* episcopal — was finally settled in favour of the principles laid down by Andrew Melville a century before, and the Westminster standards became the legal basis of the official state Church of Scotland. Melville's other ideal, of ecclesiastical independence from political interference, seemed also to be realized when the Church of Scotland refused to have representatives in the national parliament.

This victory for presbyterianism in Scotland was, however, offset by subjugation to Anglicanism in Ireland. The settlement of Scottish colonists had begun about 1610 as an extension of Elizabeth I's policy to anglicize Ireland, but the Presbyterian Scotch-Irish only became a major influence in the island's history half a century later. Under the protection of a Scottish army, a presbyterian church had been organized in Ireland in 1642, and at the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 the Scotch-Irish demanded the establishment of presbyterianism as the national church of Ireland because Charles had sworn to maintain the Covenant. Instead, Anglicanism was made the state religion and the Scotch-Irish were treated by the wealthy Anglican aristocracy only slightly better than their economic rivals, the Irish Catholics, who made

up five-sixths of the population. In 1690 James II attempted to use Ireland as a base to regain his English and Scottish thrones; but his failure to capture the Presbyterian stronghold of Derry and his defeat at the Battle of the Boyne assured the survival of the Scottish settlement in Ireland.

Under King William the political condition of the Scotch-Irish improved temporarily, but after 1704 they were again excluded from all public offices. Although their religion was tolerated, they resented the apparent bad faith of the English parliament which now added to their troubles by using and abusing the Irish economy for the sole benefit of England. This loss of political rights, increased rents, lack of economic opportunity, and the necessity of paying tithes to the Anglican church caused many Scotch-Irish to emigrate to America after 1717. Thousands left each year for the colonies, carrying with them hopes of finding religious and political equality, but also carrying a deep and abiding hatred of England and Anglicanism. By the middle of the eighteenth century some twelve thousand Scotch-Irish were moving to the New World each year.

The confused and troubled times of the seventeenth century with its wars and persecutions were followed by Britain's "Augustine Age", the eighteenth century, which, despite the abortive rebellion of 1745 under "Bonnie" Prince Charlie, was a period of domestic peace and technological development for the British Isles. The political and economic union of the two kingdoms of Scotland and England in 1707 was accompanied by a guarantee to protect the rights of the existing religious institutions of Scotland. Henceforth the established churches of the two kingdoms were to have equal status in their respective countries — their status in the king's overseas dominions was not defined by the treaty of union. Yet, within Scotland a series of religious problems arose that had long-lasting consequences. The traditional power of a lay patron, either the Crown or the major landowner in a parish, to appoint the local minister had been abolished in 1690, but was restored in 1712 by the united parliament. The toleration granted to episcopalians and the Abjuration Oath aimed at ending the clergy's support for the exiled royal House of Stewart, were other sources of controversy. Even in the realm of theology, disunity appeared among Scottish Presbyterians. One group, the "Evangelicals," were divided between those who adhered strictly to Calvinism and particularly to predestination, and those inclined towards the liberal "Arminian" doctrine of salvation for all true seekers. A second group, the "Moderates", notably intellectuals, adopted the contemporary philosophy of deism that reduced God as Creator to a divine clock-maker, powerless to intervene in the development of his own Creation.

All these divisive elements were present in the First Secession of 1733

when the Evangelical minister Ebenezer Erskine and his followers separated from the established church over the patronage issue to form a new body dominated by conservative theology and Covenanting traditions. This first secession was in turn split in 1745-7 over an oath required of civic officials acknowledging "the true religion presently professed in this realm." Those who rejected the oath, on the grounds that it implied recognition of the established Church of Scotland as "the true religion," were called Anti-burghers; those who saw no such identification in the oath were known as Burghers. The controversy over patronage was also responsible for a second secession from the established church. Three ministers who insisted on Melville's ideal of the complete separation of church and state and on the practice of voluntarism — an end to all state support for religion in favour of complete reliance on the voluntary offerings of the faithful — united in 1761 to form the Presbytery of the Relief Church.

Both these secession movements were the work of dissatisfied minorities — the great mass of people, both ministers and laymen — seemed content with the tolerant attitude of a Kirk which was ready to accept wide diversity of belief in the interests of religious peace and harmony. At the heart of this "moderation," or religious indifferentism as Secessionists termed it, was the spirit of rationalism and compromise, the mark of the Enlightenment philosophy which dominated the Church of Scotland in the later decades of the eighteenth century. There was widespread distrust of "enthusiasm," as emotional religion was called, an emphasis on the "comeliness" or classical influences in religious music, architecture, art, and writing, a willingness to come to terms with the secular world — to accept patronage, card playing, the theatre, and a degree of immorality as inevitable but minor evils. Given such attitudes, the Church of Scotland seemed to offer a cold, impersonal, devitalized religion that earned the dominant group in the Church the apt title of "Moderates." All these divisions, controversies, and strains, were destined to make themselves felt not merely in Scotland but in the experience of presbyterianism in British North America.