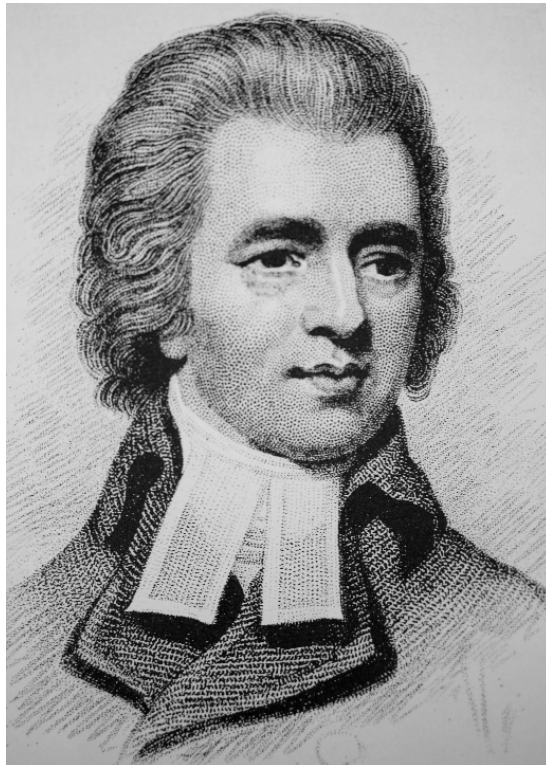


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Dr. John Love, 1757-1825.

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Changing Views on the Scottish Reformation During the Twentieth Century

DOUGLAS W. B. SOMERSET

In this paper we survey the views of academic historians on the Scottish Reformation during the course of the twentieth century. We were prompted to do this by an article on the same subject a few years ago by Dr. Stephen Holmes which gave a most unsatisfactory account – almost a travesty – of the changes that have taken place in these views.¹ The subject itself is not of the first importance; but as present-day historians are heavily indebted to the work of former generations, so it seems only fair to those that have gone before that their views should be accurately represented. Indeed, the tendency to dishonour and denigrate eminent historians of the past whose positions have become unpopular is one of the distressing features of modern historical writing. “Honour to whom honour is due” is the biblical teaching (Romans 13:7).

With Dr. Holmes, we are especially interested in two questions: namely, what was the opinion of earlier generations regarding the pre-Reformation Church in Scotland, and what explanation did they give for the great change that took place at the Reformation? Dr. Holmes says that more careful research since about 1950 has led to a far more favourable assessment of the pre-Reformation Church, and hence to an abandoning of the old “heroic Protestant” account of the Reformation.

¹ “Stephen Mark Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation: The Catholics Fight Back”, in P. D. Clarke and C. Methuen (eds.), *The Church on Its Past* (Studies in Church History, Vol. 49, Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 303-316. Dr. Holmes was a Benedictine monk for eighteen years and is now a Scottish Episcopal priest.

We will see to what extent this is correct. Unfortunately, Dr. Holmes does not define what he means by the “heroic Protestant” account of the Reformation, nor is it easy to find a clear statement of the new theory that has supposedly taken the place of the old one.

We will follow the course mapped by Dr. Holmes in considering, first the Roman Catholic writers to 1950; then the Protestant (or rather non-Roman Catholic) writers to 1950; and then the conflux of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and secular writers since 1950. We then discuss in more detail Dr. Holmes’ main assertions. We conclude with two appendices, one containing the *Tablet* review from 1874 of a standard nineteenth-century Roman Catholic history of the Scottish Church (to illustrate how biased and inaccurate the work was); the other examining the eminent Roman Catholic historian John Durkan’s comments in 1994 on certain allegations of immorality against John Knox (to show how far from impartial Durkan was, contrary to the view that Dr. Holmes is seeking to propagate).

I. ROMAN CATHOLIC HISTORIOGRAPHY PRIOR TO 1950

The purpose of Dr. Holmes’ article is to discuss the impact that the *Innes Review* and the Scottish Catholic Historical Association (SCHA) have had on academic views of the Scottish Reformation. When the *Innes Review* was started in 1950, the prevailing view in academic circles, according to Dr. Holmes, was “a partisan Protestant” one. This view, however, has now successfully been “demolished”:

In Scottish Reformation historiography there is a sense that the Catholics have fought back and “won” in the sense that a partisan Protestant historiography of the Scottish Reformation is no longer accepted by serious historians, but this was simply by good scholarship and not by combative denominational polemics.²

A very significant role in this change, according to Holmes, has been played by the SCHA and by its journal the *Innes Review*.³

² Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, p. 311.

³ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, pp. 303, 316. The *Innes Review* is named after Thomas Innes (1662-1744) who (according to the inside cover of the current issue) was “a missionary priest, historian, and archivist of the Scots College in

Dr. Holmes begins his article with a quotation from the Church of Scotland minister and professor J. H. Baxter. Baxter was writing in the first volume of the *Records of the Scottish Church History Society (RSCHS)* in 1926 and was trying to encourage research in the pre-Reformation Scottish Church. He was observing that Roman Catholic writers to that date had been of little help, and were to be criticised for their lack of scholarship:

The attempts of modern Roman Catholics to describe the Roman Church in Scotland have been, with the exception of Bellesheim's *History*, disfigured not only by uncritical partisanship, which is perhaps unavoidable, but by a glaring lack of scholarship, which makes them both useless and harmful.⁴

This observation of Baxter's is characterised by Dr. Holmes as an "aspersion", and he says that his own article will show how "the Catholics 'fought back' against the aspersions cast on them" and helped to dethrone the Protestant view.⁵ Dr. Holmes makes no effort, however, to discuss the correctness or otherwise of Baxter's observation, nor does he mention a single competent Roman Catholic scholar of the 1920s writing on pre-Reformation Scottish Church history whom Baxter had overlooked.⁶ Dr. Holmes' main purpose in introducing the quotation

Paris whose impartial scholarship stood out amongst the denominational prejudices of the time". For rather different comments on Innes, which include the sentence, "Furthermore, Innes can also be convicted of gross partisanship, on his own confession", see Colin Kidd, "Antiquarianism, religion and the Scottish Enlightenment", *Innes Review*, Vol. 46 (1995), pp. 139-154 (p. 148).

⁴ J. H. Baxter, "Some Desiderata in Scottish Medieval History", *RSCHS*, Vol. 1:4 (1926), pp. 200-8. Baxter (1894-1973) was Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of St. Andrews from 1922.

⁵ Dr. Holmes also comments that "the same issue of [*RSCHS*] makes it clear that Roman Catholics were not welcome as members of the Society". This comment is hardly fair. What the given reference says is that "the Scottish Church History Society rests on a non-sectarian basis and is open to representatives of all Protestant churches", *RSCHS*, Vol. 1, p. vii. In the religious climate of Scotland in the 1920s, it is unlikely that the thought of Roman Catholic involvement in the Society even entered anyone's head; nor was the animus solely on the Protestant side (see, for example, John Durkan's review of W. C. Dickinson's *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland* in *Innes Review*, Vol. 1 (1950), pp. 158-161). We are not aware of any Roman Catholic contribution to *RSCHS* before the 1970s.

⁶ One exception to Baxter's censure might have been Father John Hungerford Pollen (1858-1925), but he seems to have published little on the pre-Reformation period. Another possible exception was Monsignor James MacCaffrey (1875-1935), whose chapter on the Reformation in Scotland in his *History of the Catholic Church: From the Renaissance to the French Revolution* (2 vols., Dublin, 1915), makes some attempt at accuracy. Admittedly, he introduces John Knox as "a fanatical priest", but many more recent historians have struggled to preserve impartiality in dealing with Knox.

from Baxter seems to be to excite prejudice in uninformed readers against Baxter's generation of Scottish historians.

As far as we are aware, Baxter was broadly correct in what he said. The number of reputable Roman Catholic historians of Scottish Church history before 1950 was rather small. This can be seen from the surveys by James Kirk, Ian Cowan, and Mark Dilworth of scholarly writings on the Scottish Reformation, pre-Reformation, and Counter-Reformation periods respectively. Very few Roman Catholic writers prior to 1950 are mentioned.⁷

Furthermore, "uncritical partisanship" (or something worse) had been a serious problem with Roman Catholic historiography for a long time, as Dr. Holmes himself acknowledges. Too many of the earlier Roman Catholic historians were notorious for their gross inaccuracies and fabulous inventions. The opening article in the very first issue of the *Innes Review* discussed the problems of honesty and historical reliability in early Scottish defenders of Romanism such as Thomas Dempster (1579-1625) and David Chalmers (Camerarius) (c. 1571-1641).⁸ Several subsequent articles have been devoted to similar themes: the fabricated necrology of Ratisbon Abbey; Rinuccini's life of George Archangel Leslie; the Brockie forgeries on Scottish friaries; three bogus Trinitarian pictures; and the life and *Memoirs* of John Gordon of Glencat.⁹ The problem persisted even into the twentieth century, and the strictures of David Hay Fleming on Joseph Stevenson (1806-1895), William Forbes Leith (1833-1921), Matthew Power (1857-1926), and Abbot David Oswald Hunter-Blair (1853-1939) were not only of inaccuracy but, in some cases, of serious disingenuity.¹⁰

⁷ I. B. Cowan, "The medieval church in Scotland: a select critical bibliography", *RSCHS*, Vol. 21:1 (1981), pp. 91-110; M. Dilworth, "The Counter-Reformation in Scotland: a select critical bibliography", *RSCHS*, Vol. 22:1 (1984), pp. 85-100; J. Kirk, "The Scottish Reformation and reign of James VI: a select critical bibliography", *RSCHS*, Vol. 23:1 (1987), pp. 113-155.

⁸ A. Ross, "Some Scottish Catholic Historians", *Innes Review*, Vol. 1 (1950), pp. 5-21.

⁹ D. McRoberts, "Three Bogus Trinitarian Pictures", *Innes Review*, Vol. 11 (1960) pp. 52-67; H. Docherty, "The Brockie Forgeries", *Innes Review*, Vol. 16 (1965), pp. 79-127; M. Dilworth, "The First Scottish Monks in Ratisbon", *Innes Review*, Vol. 16 (1965), pp. 180-98; A. Dean, "George Archangel Leslie, *il cappuccino scozzese*", *Innes Review*, Vol. 49 (1998), pp. 66-76; B. H. Halloran, "Scandal or Repentance? John Gordon of Glencat", *Innes Review*, Vol. 55 (2004), pp. 205-223. In some respects, these papers are among the most useful to appear in the *Innes Review*. Their value becomes apparent when one tries to study areas of Roman Catholic history in which fabrications are still unexposed and current, and one realises what difficulty this creates.

¹⁰ D. Hay Fleming, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London, 1897), pp. vi, 178, 230-1; *The Reformation in Scotland* (London, 1910), pp. 591-5; *A Jesuit's Misconception of Scottish History and a Fellow-Jesuit's Apology for the Inexactitudes* (Edinburgh, 1916); *George Wishart the Martyr: a reply to*

An illustration of the all-too-common attitude of nineteenth-century Scottish Roman Catholics to Church history can be found in a work that seems to have attained some prominence in its day: James Walsh's *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland* (1874).¹¹ The review in the *Spectator* of the first two volumes of the translation of Bellesheim's *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland* (1888) treats Walsh's book as a standard work on the subject; and it continued to be cited as an authority on the Scottish Reformation period in James MacCaffrey's *History of the Catholic Church* (1915) referred to above. Ian Hazlett, in his review of writings on the Scottish Reformation, numbers Walsh's work among the "major Catholic studies or accounts of the Catholic side which appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century".¹²

"Uncritical partisanship", however, would be a kind description of this particular work. Here, for example, is its account of the character of Cardinal Beaton:

Thus perished Cardinal Beaton, the head of the Catholic Church in Scotland, undoubtedly a martyr for his faith and the independence of his country. He was a man of distinguished talents, great learning, and unblemished morals. His abilities and patriotism won for him the love and esteem of all classes of the people, with the exception of those who were traitors to their country and pensioners of England. . . . The charges brought against Cardinal Beaton are now known to be only the outpourings of slanderous and malignant bigotry. . . . The moral character of Cardinal Beaton must have been singularly pure and spotless, as we do not find a single charge urged against him in his lifetime . . . it has been stated that the Cardinal was the father of several children, but this is sufficiently explained by the fact

Father Power and the Rev W. L. Sime (Edinburgh, 1923); *Were Cardinal Beaton and Archbishop Hamilton Not Libertines?* (Edinburgh, 1929).

¹¹ J. Walsh, *The History of the Catholic Church in Scotland, from the Introduction of Christianity to the Present Time* (Glasgow, 1874). According to Bernard Aspinwall, Walsh was a "pioneering lay activist" and a bookseller and stationer in Glassford Street, Glasgow; see "Catholic realities and pastoral strategies: another look at the historiography of Scottish Catholicism, 1878-1920", *Innes Review*, Vol. 59 (2008), pp. 77-112 (p. 77). Aspinwall characterizes the book as a "monumental study". It seems to have become very rare, the only copies listed on COPAC being one at St. Andrews University and two in the Blairs College Library, currently housed at Aberdeen University.

¹² W. I. P. Hazlett, *The Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (London, 2003), p. 122. Law, too, cites Walsh as a standard work; see T. G. Law (ed.), *The Catechism of John Hamilton, Archbishop of St. Andrews, 1552* (Oxford, 1884), p. xxix.

that, like several other eminent churchmen, he was a widower previous to his entering into holy orders. To the last his character was pure. . . .¹³

Much of the book consists of concessions extracted from Protestant writings of various shades, always carefully trimmed so that the only parts to appear are those that favour Romanism and denigrate Protestantism (in its time, it must have been a useful compilation of anti-Protestant quotations). For an example of the book's general method, the martyrdom of the Protestant Walter Mylne in 1558 is covered in a short paragraph, and is then "neutralised" by five pages detailing the supposed barbarities and atrocities committed by Protestants during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (even the persecution of the Covenanters by the Episcopalians being dragged in as one of the "fruits" of Protestantism). The pre-Reformation Church, on the other hand, is painted in glowing colours, and her faults are carefully concealed. In describing the last Church Council of 1558-9, Walsh gives enough background to show that he knew well enough what the decrees were, but he avoids mentioning that the first four statutes (out of thirty-four) dealt with clerical concubinage. His silence here would be less objectionable if he did not state later on that "notwithstanding the abuse and outrageous calumnies which have been heaped upon the Catholic clergy of Scotland before the Protestant Reformation, yet it will be found that these men were at all times learned, virtuous, and pious".¹⁴ Such an approach to history moves beyond partisanship into dishonesty.

Indeed, it is not unfair to say that, with honourable exceptions, basic honesty was a problem affecting Roman Catholic writings on Scottish Church history pretty much from the Reformation through to the mid-twentieth century. This is further illustrated by a story from Father Anthony Ross.

When the *Innes Review* was begun in 1950 the small group of people behind it hoped to give a lead to other Scottish church historians. It was thought that if Catholics showed an attachment

¹³ Walsh, *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland*, pp. 266-7. Bellesheim, too, avoids acknowledging Cardinal Beaton's illegitimate children, see A. Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, (trans.) D. O. Hunter-Blair (4 vols., Edinburgh, 1887-90), Vol. 2, pp. 177-8, but he does at least admit the general problem of clerical immorality (*ibid.*, p. 322).

¹⁴ Walsh, *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland*, pp. 284-289; 293, 326-7. A further impression of this work can be gained from the *Tablet* review in Appendix A below.

to critical analysis, and were not afraid to publish unpalatable facts with proper indication of sources, the whole atmosphere in church history might change. We had most to hide, in most people's opinion. Fearless publication was, of course, met with intense opposition within the [Roman] church in Scotland. "They print Protestant slanders!" thundered a canon, at a meeting of the council of Scottish Catholic Truth Society, from which it was hoped to get £500 towards the printing bill. "What slanders, canon?" asked the Rt Revd Donald Scanlan, then Bishop of Motherwell. "Lies!" retorted the canon; "they say that Cardinal Beaton had illegitimate children!" Smoothly the bishop remarked: "We have the best witness to that; his own sworn evidence when applying to have them legitimated." The canon deferred to episcopal authority, and the grant was made.¹⁵

The "intense opposition" to which Ross refers shows the attitude to Church history that prevailed in the Roman Church in Scotland at the time. Even the humorous remark that the canon deferred to "episcopal authority", rather than to truth, tells its own story.

In saying these things, we are not forgetting that there were other Roman Catholic historians who had a genuine historical instinct. The names of John Paul Jamesone (1659-1700), Richard Augustine Hay (1661-1734), Thomas Innes, John Geddes (1735-1799), James Kyle (1788-1869), and George Griffin (1810-1860)¹⁶ deserve honourable mention in this respect. Our intention is not to disparage early Roman Catholic historiography but merely to defend J. H. Baxter and his generation of Scottish historians from the "aspersion" that Dr. Holmes is casting at them. Where there was more of an impartial approach to history among Roman Catholic historians, Protestants were very ready to acknowledge this. Hay Fleming had a regard for J. H. Pollen whom he described as "a much more competent student of history than Father Forbes Leith"; and Pollen in his turn thanked Hay Fleming warmly for help with the preparation of his *Papal Negotiations with Mary Queen of Scots* – "Dr. Hay Fleming [has] done me an inestimable service by reading through my proofs with minute care, and with wonderful patience

¹⁵ Anthony Ross, *The Tablet*, 28th August 1982, p. 13.

¹⁶ For George Griffin, see the able and interesting article by Timothy Duffy, "George A. Griffin: a priest among antiquaries", *Innes Review*, Vol. 27 (1976), pp. 127-161.

and intelligence".¹⁷ Similarly, David Laing paid a warm tribute to George Griffin:

For the use of the MS, I was indebted to the late Rev. George A. Griffin, Roman Catholic priest at New Abbey, in Galloway. He was a patient and accurate investigator of all matters relating to the early history of the Romish Church in this country; and it is to be regretted that he was not encouraged by his own Superiors to publish his biographical and historical collections. This very amiable man . . . I always found most willing to communicate information.¹⁸

One Roman Catholic academic publication which was current when J. H. Baxter was writing was the American *Catholic Historical Review*, first published in 1915 (with the American Catholic Historical Association being formed four years later). The *Catholic Historical Review*, however, paid minimal attention to the Reformation and pre-Reformation period in Scotland, with the exception of four papers by the Protestant scholar W. Stanford Reid which appeared in the 1940s.¹⁹ It was to meet an acknowledged need, therefore, that the *Innes Review* was started in 1950, with the "recognition and blessing" of the Scottish Roman Catholic bishops. The SCHA was established the following year for "the advancement of education in and study of the part played by the Catholic Church and the Catholic Community in the life of the Scottish nation".

The setting up of the SCHA was really a long-overdue "Counter-Reformation" in Scottish Roman Catholic historiography. It was the adopting of a Protestant attitude towards history in which one endeavours to face painful facts rather than to deny them.²⁰

¹⁷ Hay Fleming, *A Jesuit's Misconception*, p. 12; J. H. Pollen (ed.), *Papal Negotiations with Mary Queen of Scots* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1901), p. cxliii. This shows that Hay Fleming's vehemence was not so much against Romanism (though he was vehement enough against that when occasion demanded) as against poor historiography. We think that he has been misunderstood on this issue.

¹⁸ D. Laing (ed.), *Works of John Knox* (6 vols., Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1846-1864), Vol. 6, p. 168.

¹⁹ W. Stanford Reid, "Scotland and the Church Councils in the fifteenth century", *Catholic Historical Review (CHR)*, Vol. 29:1 (1943), pp. 1-24; "The origins of anti-Papal legislation in fifteenth-century Scotland", *CHR*, Vol. 29:4 (1944), p. 3-27; "The Papacy and the Scottish War of Independence", *CHR*, Vol. 31 (1945), pp. 282-300; "Clerical taxation: the Scottish alternative to the dissolution of the monasteries, 1530-1560", *CHR*, Vol. 35 (1948), pp. 129-153.

²⁰ It is perhaps no coincidence that Anthony Ross, one of the founders of the SCHA, had been brought up within Protestantism; see his autobiography, A. Ross, *The Root of the Matter* (Edinburgh, 1989).

Notwithstanding the place given to the bishops in the SCHA, the *Innes Review* has greatly improved the standard of Scottish Roman Catholic historical scholarship, though some contributions have been more careful and scrupulous than others.²¹ Its tone has generally been calm, although one historian commented on the articles in an important early volume of the journal that they were “occasionally and anachronistically punctuated with elements of pre-Vatican I [II?] ingenuousness, grandiloquence, nostalgia for a *temps perdu* and irascible references to the ‘protestant faction’”.²²

II. NON-ROMAN CATHOLIC HISTORIOGRAPHY PRIOR TO 1950

Dr. Holmes’ survey of Protestant or non-Roman Catholic historiography prior to 1950 is meagre in the extreme. In a page and a half, he mentions John Knox, George Buchanan, David Calderwood, John Spottiswoode, Robert Keith, William Robertson, David Hume, Thomas M’Crie (senior), David Hay Fleming, and Andrew Lang. He aims some passing blows at M’Crie and Hay Fleming, but the main purpose of the survey seems to be to create the impression that the “partisan Protestant” account of the Reformation de-throned by the SCHA was the product of highly conservative Presbyterianism. This impression is reinforced by references to “the dominant modern Presbyterian narrative”, “the Presbyterian consensus”, and the “partisan Presbyterian target” that the later Roman Catholic research sought to demolish.²³

²¹ Appendix B looks at an attack by John Durkan on John Knox in the *Innes Review* in 1994 which showed that the “partisanship” that J. H. Baxter complained of has not entirely gone away.

²² Hazlett, p. 122, commenting on D. McRoberts (ed.), *Essays on the Scottish Reformation, 1513-1625* (Glasgow, 1962), which consisted largely of articles from Vol. 10 of the *Innes Review*. In the otherwise excellent 1976 article by Timothy Duffy on George Griffin (mentioned above), the hostility of both Griffin and Duffy to the Protestantism of a certain James Edmond is breathtaking. Edmond’s Protestant views, as quoted in the article, were calmly and politely expressed, but Duffy attacks them as “facile bigotry”, while Griffin numbered Edmond among the “Aberdonian rabble of ultra-evangelicals” (see Duffy, pp. 143-4).

²³ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, pp. 305, 309, 316. Ernest Holloway notes the same inaccurate and pejorative use of the term “Presbyterian” in the recent scholarship on Andrew Melville. One modern writer, he says, speaks of “the hyperbole of Presbyterian rhetoric” in praise of Melville while ignoring the “vast array of

M'Crie (1772-1835) and Hay Fleming (1849-1931) were indeed highly conservative Presbyterians, but Andrew Lang (1844-1912), who was a close friend of Hay Fleming's, was a secularized anthropologist. Other prominent nineteenth and early twentieth century writers on the Scottish Reformation who might have been mentioned in Holmes' survey include conservative Presbyterians David Laing (1793-1878), Peter Lorimer (1812-1879), A. F. Mitchell (1822-1899), and J. D. Mackie (1887-1978); liberal Presbyterians such as A. R. Macewan (1851-1916), John Herkless (1855-1920),²⁴ William Murison (1863-1944), G. D. Henderson (1888-1957), and J. H. S. Burleigh (1894-1985);²⁵ Episcopalians such as Cosmo Innes (1798-1874),²⁶ Joseph Robertson (1810-1866), John Hill Burton (1809-1881), George Grub (1812-1892), William Stephen (1834-1901), and John Dowden (1840-1910); the English Congregationalist William Croft Dickinson (1897-1963);²⁷ and others again who were of indistinct religious views such as the lapsed Roman Catholic T. G. Law (1836-1904) and the former Free Churchman Peter Hume Brown (1849-1918). There were others again such as David Patrick (1849-1914), William Law Mathieson (1868-1938), and Robert Kerr Hannay (1867-1940) whose religious views we have not been able to determine.²⁸ Between them, these writers represented very different attitudes to the Reformation, and some of them were at loggerheads among

[non-Presbyterian] historians" who have also praised Melville; see E. R. Holloway III, *Andrew Melville and Humanism in Renaissance Scotland, 1545-1622* (Leiden, 2011), p. 12 and n. 74.

²⁴ Margaret H. B. Sanderson lumps Herkless with the "ultra-Protestant" historians, *Cardinal of Scotland: David Beaton, c. 1494-1546* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 1. The term "ultra-Protestant" occurs from time to time in modern academic writing, and one is left wondering whether Luther and Calvin were "ultra-Protestants" or merely "Protestants", and whether the Pope is an "ultra-Catholic". In any case, Herkless' Lee Lecture, *Ritual and Romanticism* (Edinburgh, 1913), shows how mild his Protestantism actually was.

²⁵ In 1960, Burleigh was both Moderator of the Church of Scotland and a Vice-President of the Scottish Reformation Society, a combination that would be hard to imagine nowadays. This strikingly illustrates the extent to which Protestantism has declined in Scotland in the last fifty years.

²⁶ For an extended discussion of Cosmo Innes' views on the pre-Reformation Church, see R. Marsden, "Cosmo Innes and the Sources of Scottish History, c. 1825-1875" (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2011) (especially p. 124). A glaring omission in this thesis, with its negative comments on nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian historians, is its failure to mention the eminent London-Scot Peter Lorimer.

²⁷ J. Kirk, *Her Majesty's Historiographer: Gordon Donaldson, 1913-1993* (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 44.

²⁸ David Patrick was a student for the ministry with the Free Church of Scotland but did not proceed to ordination. Law Mathieson seems to have been a Church of Scotland liberal.

themselves.²⁹ To group their views together as “partisan Protestant” is hardly a sensible or helpful contribution to historiography; and M’Crie and Hay Fleming, while eminent among them, were far from dominant, or even representative.

Notwithstanding this diversity of background, it is probably true to say that there *was* a prevailing view of the Scottish Reformation, or at least certain aspects of it, up to and beyond 1950. Dr. Holmes does not expand on what this was exactly, but he refers the reader to Alec Ryrie’s description of the so-called “heroic Protestant narrative”. This “narrative”, according to Ryrie, stressed “the profound corruption of the Catholic Church in Scotland; the fertile soil on which the seed sowed by the first reformers fell; the steady growth of Protestant belief in the dark years of persecution; and the sudden dawn of open Protestantism in 1559-60 banishing the night of popery”.³⁰ Holmes devotes a small amount of attention to the rise of Protestantism, but his main interest is in the overturning of the idea that “profound corruption” characterized the pre-Reformation Church.

Certainly the profound corruption of the pre-Reformation Church was a matter of general agreement among historians of all shades of opinion before 1950. We shall give a sample of quotations, none of them from writers who could fairly be described as “partisan Protestant”. Passing by the well-known testimony of early Roman Catholic historians such as John Lesley and Thomas Dempster, we give extracts from the following eight writers: Alphons Bellesheim, William Stephen, T. G. Law, Andrew Lang, W. Law Mathieson, David Patrick, William Murison, and W. Croft Dickinson.

We begin with the words of the Roman Catholic historian Bellesheim:

It cannot be denied that the rulers of the Church, although it would be unjust to charge them with having betrayed their sacred trust, were nevertheless partly responsible for the circumstances

²⁹ For example, David Hay Fleming regarded Andrew Lang and Law Mathieson as “Philistines”, *Critical Reviews Relating Chiefly to Scotland* (London, 1912), pp. 188-204. George Grub and Joseph Robertson strongly disliked M’Crie’s writings, see G. Grub, *An Ecclesiastical History of Scotland* (4 vols., Edinburgh, 1861), Vol. 2, p. 329; J. Robertson, *Concilia Scotiae* (2 vols., Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1866), Vol. 1, p. cxliv n.; while Law Mathieson regarded M’Crie as “intensely prejudiced”, *Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 1 (1904), p. 49.

³⁰ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, p. 306; A. Ryrie, *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 5-6.

which had facilitated the ultimate triumph of the Protestant cause. They had at least tacitly sanctioned the iniquitous system by which some of the wealthiest benefices and most important ecclesiastical dignities were in the hands of laymen, who, when it suited their own interests, deliberately ranged themselves on the side of the Church's bitterest enemies, and threw themselves into the arms of heresy. Not virtue nor learning, but kinship to some noble house was too often considered the best qualification for high offices of the Church; nor, as we have seen, was the stain of illegitimate birth deemed any bar to ecclesiastical advancement. Even among the higher clergy, too many were more than suspected of leading lives the reverse of edifying; while the inferior ecclesiastics were lamentably deficient in that trained theological learning which alone could meet and overcome the dominant errors of the time.³¹

Next, the Episcopalian William Stephen:

The medieval Church had fallen, and Scotland was lost to Rome. What the causes of the fall were has been indicated in these pages. They may be summed up in the following heads: (1) The want of self-government. . . . The supervision of Rome, even when wisely exercised, was too cumbersome, too costly, and at too great a distance to be readily effective for good, while its venality and the systematic abuse of dispensations and indulgences were productive of the greatest evils. (2) The celibacy of the clergy, and its resulting concubinage, fostered immorality and bred scandals which wounded and weakened religion. (3) The system of pluralities and the alienation of church benefices in support of bishoprics, cathedrals, and monasteries impoverished the parishes and left them destitute of properly qualified priests. (4) The nepotism of the later kings and of the barons, thrusting incapable persons, sometimes mere boys, into the highest offices of church and monastery. (5) The gross ignorance of many of the clergy. . . . (6) The wealth of the Church. . . . (7) The severe pressure of the tithe system, and the still more hateful mortuary dues. . . . (8) The mistaken policy of persecution. . . .³²

³¹ Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, Vol. 2, pp. 321-3.

³² W. Stephen, *History of the Scottish Church* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1894-6), Vol. 1, pp. 580-1. Stephen was incumbent of St. Augustine's, Dumbarton.

Next, T. G. Law:

Nor was mere ignorance the only peril to the church. By their exactions, their avarice, and their open profligacy the parochial clergy had lost all hold upon the country, and had forfeited especially the reverence and affection of the poor. The old ecclesiastical system was breaking to pieces from internal corruption, and was at the mercy of the first enemy who should strike the blow, whether it was to come from the greed of the nobility, eager to lay hands on the estates of the church, in imitation of their English neighbours, or from the iconoclastic zeal of the preachers of the new doctrines.³³

Next, Andrew Lang:

Knox had only to keep his eyes and ears open to observe the clerical ignorance and corruption. . . . The almost incredible ignorance and profligacy of the higher Scottish clergy (with notable exceptions) in Knox's youth, are not matter of controversy. They are as frankly recognised by contemporary Catholic as by Protestant authors. . . . Though three out of the four Scottish universities were founded by Catholics . . . the clerical ignorance, in Knox's time, was such that many priests could hardly read.³⁴

Next, W. Law Mathieson:

We cannot, of course, accept satire as serious history; but the substantial truthfulness of the picture presented to us in the comedy of the *Three Estates* is attested not merely by such zealous Catholics as Winzet and Abbot Kennedy, but by the remedial legislation of the Church itself. As early as the beginning of the fifteenth century the vices of the cloister had provoked a severe remonstrance from James the First, and the secular clergy soon vied with the regular in their repudiation of the law of chastity. So notorious did the matter become, that Lindsay represents the priests as enjoying an unfair advantage in that they were not subject, like the laity, to the restrictions of marriage. Many of the bishops were audaciously profligate – Cardinal Beaton is supposed to have had nine children, and Bishop Hepburn of Moray, who

³³ Law, *The Catechism of John Hamilton*, p. xi.

³⁴ A. Lang, *John Knox and the Reformation* (London, 1905), pp. 7-8.

survived the Reformation, had undoubtedly ten, all by different mothers; and their incontinence was the more mischievous because it led them to abuse their rights of patronage by providing for their offspring at the expense of the Church. One of the scandals of the time was the nomination of prelates' sons, even in infancy, to substantial benefices. Even worse than the licentiousness of the clergy was their amazing incompetence . . .³⁵

Next, David Patrick:

Worst of all in the eyes of the historical student, anxious not to judge the church of the thirteenth century by the standard of the twentieth century, or even of the first, is the distinct implication that bishops and priests, rectors and vicars, were not free from the guilt of abusing the most solemn sacraments of the church, the church fabric, and the churchyard by indecently and sacrilegiously dishonouring the women who came to them as penitents for confession and absolution. Our Scottish statutes make it painfully clear that Scottish mothers and aunts had the same strong reasons as St. Catherine of Siena had for urgently imploring the girls and women of their kith and kin to fly from their confessors the moment confession was ended. . . . The comprehensive impeachment of the clergy of all ranks for their ignorance and immorality, so humiliating to the clerical order, so ruinous to the prestige of the church, could have been put on record by the Council only under stress of sheer conviction, and as a statement of facts too notorious to be disputed.³⁶

Next, William Murison:

Can we accept a friend's praise as absolutely true? Can we admit the truth of an enemy's blame? An enemy's praise of a friend's blame is a different story. As far as is known, David Lyndsay was not a professed Protestant but if he can be reckoned a friend of the Roman Church, he must be termed a candid and critical friend. Sir Thomas Dempster looks upon him as an enemy and speaks of the godless writings of Knox, Lyndsay, Buchanan and others, for

³⁵ W. L. Mathieson, *Politics and Religion: A Study in Scottish History from the Reformation to the Revolution* (2 vols., Glasgow, 1902), Vol. 1, p. 23.

³⁶ D. Patrick, *Statutes of the Scottish Church, 1225-1559* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1907), pp. lxxxix-xc.

which an antidote must be found to protect the unwary. Modern readers of Lyndsay, unacquainted with Scottish Church History, 1530-1560, and viewing the Roman Church of today, regard his charges as in part untrue, in part exaggerated, and wholly untrustworthy. I propose, from official documents of the Roman Church, to show that Lyndsay, satirist and humorist though he was, had a solid foundation for his charges, that in fact they are substantially true.³⁷

Lastly, William Croft Dickinson:

The decay in the Roman Church is attested by its own historians. A Church whose servants at one time had sought "religion and its increase" was now ill-served. Its priests were ignorant and its prelates lax. Preaching was almost unknown. Successive Provincial Councils of the Scottish had passed enactments in which the clergy were enjoined to preach "the word of God to the people" – for "the little ones have asked for bread and there was none to break it unto them" – but the very necessity for re-enactment proved that the injunctions were of small effect. . . . Yet even if divine observance had become a mystery not wholly spiritual, ignorance alone might have been overcome, had not greed and corruption followed hand in hand. . . .³⁸

This, then, was the "traditional" position up to 1950; and it continued beyond 1950 as the following quotation from Maurice Lee, Jr., in 1953, shows:

In sharp contrast to the burgher class and to the powerful but chronically impecunious nobility stood the Catholic Church – very wealthy, politically and socially powerful, and hopelessly corrupt. No branch of the Church in Europe was more riddled with vice; this helps to explain why it succumbed so easily to the Protestants. The testimony of all contemporaries, Catholic and Protestant alike, agrees on this point. There were all the usual vices: sexual immorality, clerical ignorance and rapacity, pluralism, and the

³⁷ W. Murison, *Sir David Lyndsay* (Cambridge, 1938), p. 120.

³⁸ W. C. Dickinson (ed.), *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland* (2 vols., London, 1949), Vol. 1, pp. xv-xvi. The same sentiments are expressed in more detail and with greater force in W. C. Dickinson, *Scotland from the Earliest Times to 1603* (Edinburgh, 1961), pp. 313-4.

like. . . . Finally, this corrupt and secularized Church proved utterly unable to reform itself. In the last decade of Catholic supremacy in Scotland, from 1549 to 1559, three Church Councils were held. All of them passed excellent statutes against the prevailing vices in the Church, which statutes had absolutely no effect whatever.³⁹

To describe this view, as Dr. Holmes does, as “partisan” and “Protestant” is entirely incorrect. It was not “Protestant” in that it was held by historians of all religious persuasions, including Roman Catholic; and it was not “partisan” in that it was maintained by the rigorous scholarship of the day.

Dr. Holmes hints a couple of times that pre-1950 scholarship was, in his opinion, inferior to modern scholarship. It was, he says, “by working closely with the sources” that Gordon Donaldson and the McRoberts’ publication in the 1960s were successful in “refuting a particular denominational point of view”; and again, it was “by paying attention to the sources, and being honest about abuses” that modern Roman Catholic scholars “contradicted [Hay] Fleming’s picture of a Church marked by ignorance and depravity” before the Reformation.⁴⁰ The implication would seem to be that Hay Fleming and his generation were working less closely with the sources than has become the practice since. Elsewhere, however, Holmes admits that Hay Fleming’s work was “rooted in the sources”;⁴¹ and indeed any claim that historical scholarship is now markedly more accurate than it was before 1950 is unsustainable. Many of the “sources” that modern historians are using are those edited in the nineteenth and early twentieth century by the likes of David Laing, Cosmo Innes, Joseph Robertson, T. G. Law, R. K. Hannay, and J. H. Baxter.⁴²

³⁹ M. Lee, Jr., *James Stewart, Earl of Moray* (New York, 1953), pp. 12-13.

⁴⁰ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, pp. 309, 311. In his subsequent book, Dr. Holmes is more openly dismissive of the work of earlier generations: Gordon Donaldson’s 1960 book (discussed below) “marked a turn in Scottish history from the Presbyterian view of the ‘Reformation’ towards serious historical study”; see S. M. Holmes, *Sacred Signs in Reformation Scotland: Interpreting Worship, 1488-1590* (Oxford, 2015), p. 8.

⁴¹ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, p. 306. This time Holmes’ objection is that Hay Fleming’s narrative of events was “simplistic”, whereas the modern SCHA historians present “a more nuanced picture of sixteenth-century Scotland” (*ibid.*, p. 311).

⁴² Leslie Macfarlane lists nearly two hundred “Primary printed sources” in the bibliography of his *William Elphinstone and the Kingdom of Scotland, 1431-1514* (Aberdeen, 1985), of which over 130 were printed before 1950, and over 80 before 1900.

As far as the reasons for the rise of Protestantism are concerned, there was probably much less agreement among the pre-1950 writers than there was regarding the state of the pre-Reformation Church. Hay Fleming lists the corruptions of the Church as “secondary causes” of the Reformation, but notes that these secondary causes did not of themselves lead to Protestantism: “When disgusted and repelled by the corruption, the ignorance, and the rapacity of the clergy, the Scots might have lapsed into religious apathy, into infidelity, or into heathenism, had it not been for the counteracting agencies that were at work.”⁴³ Evangelical writers such as M’Crie and Hay Fleming traced the rise of Protestantism ultimately to the Gospel and to the fact that people were being converted in sufficient numbers to give the Protestant movement some impetus. This fits in with the well-known words of the contemporary Roman Catholic controversialist Ninian Winzet:

I conferred with myself how that might be, that Christian men professing, teaching, and preaching Christ and his Word so many years, in one month’s space or thereby, should be changed so proudly in so many high matters in the plat contrar men. At Pasche and certain Sundays after they taught with great appearing zeal, and ministered the sacraments to us in the Catholic manner, and by Whitsunday they change their standard in our plain contrar. And so judged I, that it necessarily behoved them either to have been afore very feigned hypocrites, and temporizers with the time contrar their conscience, or to have been ravished by some Mighty Spirit.⁴⁴

The evangelical view of the Reformation and the rise of Protestantism can be summarised in the words which William Douglas of Lochleven, 6th Earl of Morton, wrote in his will in 1568: “O Lord . . . my defence in all my trials . . . specially since the planting of this thy kirk, newly reformed in this country from ignorance and idolatry . . . which was begun and planted by thy only mercy as the same may evidently appear by the success of the same. . . . Surely it may be called thy work for it was thy hand that wrought the same, for we were na company.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Hay Fleming, *Reformation in Scotland*, p. 172.

⁴⁴ N. Winzet, *Certain Tractates*, (ed.) J. K. Hewison (2 vols., Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh, 1888-1890), Vol. 1, p. 53.

⁴⁵ M. H. B. Sanderson, *Mary Stewart’s People* (Edinburgh, 1987), p. 56; eadem, *Biographical List of Early Scottish Protestants* (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh, 2010), pp. 158-9.

With the non-evangelical writers, it is more difficult to get their views on the rise of Protestantism, but we doubt that any of the eight that we have quoted above (with the possible exception of William Murison) would have committed themselves to the “heroic Protestant” view as expressed by Ryrie. They may well have thought that Protestantism increased steadily from the days of Patrick Hamilton – that hardly seems partisan – but most of them disliked John Knox and the fervent Protestantism of the Reformers, and they would not readily have spoken of “the sudden dawn of open Protestantism in 1559-60 banishing the night of popery”. We have already seen above T. G. Law’s view that the pre-Reformation Church was ready to collapse from its own corruption, and that Protestantism simply happened to be the instrument at hand that brought this to pass. This is not dissimilar to Hay Fleming’s picture of the Church as “a hoary giant of the forest . . . rotten within and doomed to collapse ignominiously before the approaching storm”.⁴⁶

Inevitability

One strange idea that crops up in discussions of the historiography of the early twentieth century is that of the so-called “inevitability” of the Reformation. It is often asserted that Presbyterian writers believed that there was an “inevitability” in Scotland’s becoming Protestant and Calvinist,⁴⁷ and Dr. Holmes describes the “narrative of Protestant inevitability” as “a Presbyterian counterpart to the Enlightenment doctrine of ‘progress’”.⁴⁸ Amongst those holding this “inevitability” view is supposed to have been David Hay Fleming; but whether he did so, we strongly doubt. The nearest thing that we have noticed to it in his writings (apart from the quotation given in the paragraph above) is the statement that: “This doctrine [that Scripture and the Kirk were of equal

⁴⁶ Hay Fleming, *Reformation in Scotland*, p. 171.

⁴⁷ Jenny Wormald asserted that many works on the pre-Reformation Scottish Church were “inspired by the ‘historical inevitability’ thesis of the triumph of Calvinism” and that this thesis was “lamentably exemplified, as late as 1961, by J. S. McEwen, *The Faith of John Knox* (London, 1961)”; see her *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland, 1470-1625* (London, 1981), p. 200. A search through McEwen’s slender volume, however, fails to locate anything bearing out Wormald’s criticism. James McEwen (d. 1993) was a Church of Scotland minister and Professor of Church History at Aberdeen University.

⁴⁸ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, p. 305; Ryrie, pp. 5-6, 196. Neither writer provides any reference. For some discussion, see Maurice Lee, Jr., “The Scottish Reformation after 400 years”, *Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 44 (1965), pp. 135-147 (p. 147) and Hazlett, pp. 5-6, 126-7, both of whom refer to Hume Brown. See also Iain Ross (ed.), *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis* (Edinburgh, 1940), p. 7.

strength, power, and dignity] might continue to hold the field at Rome; it was rapidly ceasing to hold it in Scotland, where, in this year, the year of Walter Myll's martyrdom, the ultimate triumph of the Reformed doctrines was already assured to the eye of faith."⁴⁹ This hardly amounts to "inevitability", however, and is simply a description of the confidence of Protestants that their cause was going to prevail. A similar confidence is expressed in the ballad "The Paip, that pagane full of pryde" (which must date to just before the Reformation): "His Popische pryde, and thrinfolde crowne, almaist hes loist their nicht."⁵⁰

The historian J. H. Baxter uses the word "inevitable" when he says that the Reformation was "inevitable as early as the time of James I or James II", but probably he meant nothing more than that the processes leading to it were (in his view) already under way.⁵¹ Likewise, Janet Foggie thought that Burleigh held the "inevitability" doctrine when he wrote of the reforming councils from 1549 to 1559 that "no doubt it was rather late in the day to be making statutes about things so elementary, and it is not surprising that long neglect brought its own nemesis"; but it seems more likely that Burleigh was just using the word "nemesis" as a figure of speech.⁵²

The one writer that we know of who held the idea of "inevitability" was Hume Brown. His views on this were summarised by C. H. Firth in his obituary: "The adoption by Scotland of some form of Protestantism was, under existing conditions, inevitable: the particular form Protestantism took in Scotland was determined by the character of the nation, which the Presbyterian Church in its turn reshaped and moulded."⁵³ In Hume Brown's own words:

It was by natural affinity that Scotland adopted the special form of Christianity which had been formulated by Calvin; and in adopting it the nation impressed it with its own moral and intellectual characteristics. That for three centuries the Scottish people have clung with such tenacity to this type of religion is conclusive proof that at a particular stage of their development

⁴⁹ Hay Fleming, *Reformation in Scotland*, p. 238.

⁵⁰ Ross, *Gude and Godlie Ballatis*, p. 60.

⁵¹ Baxter, "Some Desiderata in Medieval Scottish Church History", p. 204.

⁵² J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London, 1960), p. 138; J. P. Foggie, *Renaissance Religion in Urban Scotland: The Dominican Order, 1450-1560* (Leiden, 2003), p. 82.

⁵³ "In Memoriam: Peter Hume Brown", *Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 16 (1919), pp. 153-159 (see p. 154).

it embodied the highest ideal they could conceive of human life and destiny.⁵⁴

More work on the pre-Reformation Church

Before leaving this section, we should draw attention to the fact that Scottish historians of the earlier twentieth century were well aware of the need for more detailed work on the pre-Reformation Scottish Church. The main publications on the subject at that stage were probably Patrick's *Statutes of the Scottish Church, 1225-1559* (1907), Herkless and Hannay's five volumes on *The Archbishops of St. Andrews* (1907-15), Dowden's *Medieval Church in Scotland* (1910), and Macewan's *History of the Church in Scotland* (1913-18).⁵⁵ It was clear to those active in the field, however, that a vast amount remained to be uncovered. In 1926, J. H. Baxter published his paper "Some Desiderata in Medieval Scottish Church History" to which reference has already been made.⁵⁶ This paper is interesting to read in the light of subsequent developments, and raises the thought that perhaps Baxter deserves as much credit for promoting the subject as does the SCHA. In 1930, Baxter edited the letter-book of James Haldenstone, Prior of St. Andrews (1441-1443) from a manuscript that he had found in the Ducal library at Wolfenbüttel.⁵⁷

Baxter's call for further work on the pre-Reformation Church was reiterated by H. M. Paton in 1934 in "Record Sources for Scottish Church History"; and in discussing the pre-Reformation Church in the sixteenth century, Paton speaks of the "pressing need and ample material for histories of the various religious orders in Scotland, on the lines of Dr. Moir Bryce's monumental work on *The Scottish Greyfriars* (2 vols., 1909)".⁵⁸ The online indices of *RSCHS* show that these calls were

⁵⁴ P. Hume Brown, *History of Scotland* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1912), Vol. 2, p. 126. See also P. Hume Brown, *Surveys of Scottish History* (Glasgow, 1919), pp. 5-7.

⁵⁵ J. Herkless and R. K. Hannay, *The Archbishops of St. Andrews* (5 vols., Edinburgh, 1907-1915); J. Dowden, *The Medieval Church in Scotland: Its Constitution, Organisation, and Law* (Glasgow, 1910); A. R. Macewan, *A History of the Church in Scotland* (2 vols., London, 1913-1918).

⁵⁶ Baxter "Some Desiderata in Medieval Scottish Church History". On p. 201, Baxter calls for a "Dictionary of Scottish National Biography" covering the sixteenth and earlier centuries, and notes that J. D. Mackie had simultaneously been pleading for the same thing in *Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 23 (1926), p. 157.

⁵⁷ J. H. Baxter (ed.), *Copiale Prioratus Sanctiandree* (Oxford, 1930).

⁵⁸ H. M. Paton, "Record Sources for Scottish Church History", *RSCHS*, Vol. 5 (1934), pp. 101-116 (p. 109).

soon taken up by David E. Easson and other writers.⁵⁹ In the same year, 1934, appeared Annie I. Cameron's work on the Vatican archives and Scotland, *The Apostolic Camera and Scottish Benefices, 1418-1488*, together with the first volume of her *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome*. In the foreword to the former, she thanks J. H. Baxter for suggesting the work in the first place, and H. M. Paton and R. K. Hannay, among others, for their helpfulness.⁶⁰ We have already referred to the papers on the pre-Reformation Church published by the Presbyterian W. Stanford Reid in the *Catholic Historical Review* and elsewhere in the 1940s.⁶¹ From all these works (together with numerous others that might be mentioned) it can be seen that the appearance of the SCHA in 1950 did not mark an entirely new era in the study of the pre-Reformation Church. The SCHA may have invigorated the subject, but it did not initiate it.

III. ROMAN CATHOLIC, PROTESTANT, AND SECULAR HISTORIOGRAPHY SINCE 1950

In this section we briefly consider some of the most prominent works on the Scottish Reformation that appeared between 1950 and the beginning of the twentieth-first century.

Mackie and Burleigh 1960

A flurry of publications appeared around the quatercentenary of the Reformation in 1960. Of these, J. D. Mackie's brief *History of the Scottish Reformation* (1960) and J. H. S. Burleigh's *Church History of Scotland*

⁵⁹ See, for example, D. E. Easson, "The Medieval Church in Scotland and Education", *RSCHS*, Vol. 6 (1936); A. Coutts, "The Knights Templar in Scotland", *RSCHS*, Vol. 7 (1940); J. P. Bulloch, "The Crutched Friars in Scotland, Parts I and II", *RSCHS*, Vol. 10 (1949); D. R. Currie, "The Order of Friars Preachers in Scotland", *RSCHS*, Vol. 10 (1949).

⁶⁰ A. I. Cameron, *The Apostolic Camera and Scottish Benefices, 1418-1488* (Oxford, 1934), p. vi; (with E. R. Lindsay), *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1418-1422* (Edinburgh, 1934). Her *Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine* had appeared in 1927. Dr. Holmes mentions Annie Cameron, but associates her with the SCHA historians, overlooking the fact that she was publishing twenty years before the SCHA was formed: "What enabled these Catholic historians to perform this successful exercise in revisionism . . . ? It helped that they were not working alone; for example, Annie I. Dunlop [Cameron] (1897-1973) also laboured in the field of pre-Reformation Scottish Church history"; see Holmes, "Historiography of the Scottish Reformation", p. 312.

⁶¹ See A. D. Macleod, *W. Stanford Reid: An Evangelical Calvinist in the Academy* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), pp. 303-4.

(1960) presented the pre-Reformation Church and the rise of Protestantism in the “traditional” light, in a balanced and reasonably impartial manner (though Mackie’s book would probably be considered too religious for the modern palate).⁶² Both publications were more interested in Protestantism than Roman Catholicism and therefore tended to dwell more on the defects of the pre-Reformation Church (which were opening the way for her downfall) than on her positive aspects.

Donaldson 1960

Gordon Donaldson’s book *The Scottish Reformation*, which also appeared in 1960, was the fruit of substantial original research, and gave a somewhat broader assessment of the pre-Reformation Church than the works just mentioned. It is often supposed to have marked a great change in Reformation studies, but there was little change as far as the perception of the pre-Reformation Church was concerned. As Donaldson says: “while the picture is a dark one, the gloom is not wholly unrelieved”.⁶³ Maurice Lee, Jr., furnishes a convenient summary:

[Donaldson] accepts the traditional view that the Roman church was in bad condition in the first half of the sixteenth century, and he carefully points out in what respects this was true: pluralism; the appropriation of the revenues of both parsonages and vicarages, . . . ; the decay of church buildings; the extreme contrast between the wealthy prelate and the underpaid vicar; the taking-over of the majority of abbacies and bishoprics by members of the aristocracy.⁶⁴

The book paid little attention to the rise of Protestantism, and its main novelty was in arguing for the essential Episcopalianism of the Reformation, in contrast to the implicit Presbyterianism that had hitherto been supposed.

⁶² J. D. Mackie, *A History of the Scottish Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1960).

⁶³ G. Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge, 1960), p. 2. The same position was reiterated in Donaldson, *Scotland: James V. James VII* (Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 132-140. Donaldson thought that reviewers of his 1960 work would have been less inclined to regard it as novel had they been better versed “in earlier scholarly works on the subject”, Kirk, *Gordon Donaldson*, p. 99. It would appear that the same is still true today.

⁶⁴ Lee, “The Scottish Reformation after 400 years”, p. 136.

McRoberts 1962

The previous year (1959), the *Innes Review* had published a considerable number of articles connected with the Reformation, and most of these appeared in book-form in 1962, under the editorship of David McRoberts, with the title *Essays on the Scottish Reformation, 1513-1625*. Again we are indebted to Maurice Lee, Jr., for a summary of the general argument of the book:

The interpretation runs something like this. The faults of the ancient church are freely admitted, although they are not as grievous as is usually supposed. The church was not intellectually dead; it did something for education, and for the poor. The religious orders did not accept passively the exploitation of their property by lay commendators: they resisted when they could. The church was aware of the need for reform: it did its best to reform itself; it failed, not because zeal was lacking, but because time ran out and because of the opposition of a minority. It is suggested at one point that ten more years of [Cardinal] Beaton might have averted disaster. Responsibility for the weakness in the church is placed squarely on the system which produced the kind of bishops, abbots, and commendators who mismanaged its affairs to their own profit in the three generations or so before disaster finally came. And, of course, responsibility for the pernicious system lay with the crown. James V emerges as one of the major villains of the piece . . . Mary of Guise was not much better. . . . What is true of Catholic politicians is, by assumption, also true of Protestants: they are all weak, dishonest, or dominated by worldly and selfish considerations. . . . The Reformation triumphed, not because of the impact of Protestant ideas, but because of the greed and land-hunger of the nobility, nationalist sentiment, the collapse of the authority of the crown, and the intervention of England. . . . The essays in this collection are for the most part of a very high quality. The authors have shown immense learning and industry. . . . More serious, though, [than certain other criticisms] is the fact that the Catholic approach completely fails to explain why there should have been a reformation at all. . . . What is missing, not surprisingly perhaps, is any appreciation of the driving force of Protestant ideas and Protestant zeal. . . .⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Lee, "The Scottish Reformation after 400 years", pp. 143-5.

The volume is certainly an impressive collection of information; and it is interesting to get the Roman Catholic perspective on a number of matters. For example, Durkan explains how the mind of the medieval Roman Catholic managed to surmount the evident faults in his Church.

A modern observer might be tempted to comment that a congeries was exactly what the medieval church had become: with its lush diversity and endemic untidiness, its multiple acts of delegation, dispensation and exemption, the arrogance and avarice of many of the monarchs in Christ's kingdom, the venality and laxity of ecclesiastical judges and the bleeding white of local churches appropriated to cathedral and monastery. But many observers then would have thought that this was a worm's eye view. For them it was more important that there was an ordered society, with a God-given hierarchical structure, legislating on behalf of a divine Lawgiver, transcending its human membership and so more than the sum of its numbers, a single thing in the unity of the Holy Spirit whose regimen, as Cajetan said, "gives to churches as far apart as those of Scotland and Spain more than agreement in faith, hope, charity, the sacraments and obedience to the same head; there is that bond that unites one part to another in a single community . . .".⁶⁶

For another example, Anthony Ross (a Dominican friar) raised issues about the friaries just before the Reformation that would not so readily have occurred to a Protestant. He drew attention, for instance, to the predicament of an orthodox friar under an immoral bishop who was his ecclesiastical superior; to the perplexities within the small communities of friars when a considerable number of the fraternity were defecting to Protestantism and not a few were being put to death; and to the tensions between the different orders of friars, and between those in a community who wanted stricter observance and those who were more lax.⁶⁷ Ross suggested, as others have done, that the chief reason for the Protestant hostility to the friars was because of their "importance" and their "continued vitality".⁶⁸ There may be something in this; but it is puzzling then, as Burleigh observed, that Archbishop Hamilton did not

⁶⁶ McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, p. 309.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 203-7.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 208.

systematically employ the friars for preaching when he was urgently looking for preachers from 1549 onwards.⁶⁹

The book introduced a great deal of new material, some directly relevant to the pre-Reformation Church and the Reformation and some rather less so. It certainly broadened the study of the pre-Reformation Church, but cannot be said to have “refuted” the earlier view of a “corrupt” Church. Instead, it generally conceded the corruptions. Perhaps the old approach could be likened to a description of a house concentrating mainly on its defects, while the new approach described favourable aspects of the house in great detail, acknowledging its defects without dwelling on them. The effect of this was to divert attention away from these defects, but the defects were still there, and so too was the question of how serious they were. A house may have various elegant features, and yet be about to collapse. The general view of the book would be that the pre-Reformation Church was not on the brink of collapse, but she was certainly far from robust. As Thomas Winning put it:

The Scottish church was in a perilous condition, spiritually and materially, as the sixteenth century approached middle-age, for not only was the whole of Europe in religious turmoil but, nearer home, Henry VIII had abjured the authority of Rome and was doing his best to encourage James V to do the same. Scotland had by then assumed the role of an isolated northern stronghold of Catholicism but she was in no fit state to play the part.⁷⁰

On the whole, the book sheds little light on the rise of Protestantism. Perhaps the most useful chapters in this connection are Gordon Donaldson’s on “The Parish Clergy and the Reformation” and Anthony Ross’s on the religious orders (i.e. the monks and friars). Many of the post-Reformation ministers had been either parish clergy or members of a religious order before the Reformation, and the background in these chapters gives some insight into the transition that these men must have made. Generally, however, the book’s understanding of Protestant theology and Protestant motivation is limited. For example, the letter from the Protestant martyr John Rough expresses

⁶⁹ Burleigh, *Church History of Scotland*, pp. 78, 137. A number of friars were so employed, but apparently only on an individual basis. There were perhaps about two hundred friars in Scotland in 1559 (McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, p. 234).

⁷⁰ McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, p. 334.

ordinary Protestant sentiments in the face of death and by no means shows that Rough had not found “peace” in Protestantism, and that “his soul was in anguish”.⁷¹ Durkan’s discussion of “Justification and Merit” is distinctly peculiar, as is his statement: “For Luther, God’s grace covered man like a mantle from the Father’s ire”.⁷² Maurice Taylor’s account of Justification is somewhat clearer, but disregards the development in the Protestant doctrine between 1520 and 1560, and the variations in the Roman Catholic position over the same period.⁷³ Who in Scotland maintained the Tridentine doctrine of Justification before 1560? In the end, Durkan confesses that he does not really understand the origin of Calvinism: “The whole genesis of Calvinism in Scotland needs to be examined minutely; until that is done, 1560 will remain an enigma.”⁷⁴

One point that emerges from the book is the gulf between the doctrine and worship of Romanism and of Protestantism. For example, the bedesmen in the Magdalen Chapel in Edinburgh were required before the Reformation to recite “five paters, fifty aves, and a creed”, morning and night.⁷⁵ Protestants regarded these “vain repetitions” as ridiculous, and of no religious value whatever. Again, Denis McKay describes the worship in a pre-Reformation parish church: “the preaching would be of a simple nature, possibly on the popular devotions of the day, to the Souls in Purgatory, to the Blessed Virgin in her many titles, Our Lady of Pity, Our Lady of Loretto, etc., the Passion, the Holy Blood, St. Sebastian, etc.”⁷⁶ Protestants, on the other hand, were wanting to hear sermons about God, Christ, sin, heaven, hell, the Devil, Divine

⁷¹ McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, p. 205.

⁷² McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, pp. 304-7 (see also pp. 296-7). The statement may, for all we know, be a direct quotation from Luther, but it is not the way that a later Protestant would describe the doctrine of imputed righteousness. For several further puzzling statements by Durkan on Justification, see p. 17 of Durkan, “Scottish Reformers: the less than golden legend”, *Innes Review*, Vol. 45:1 (1994), pp. 1-28.

⁷³ McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, p. 246.

⁷⁴ McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, p. 313. Durkan continued to explore the origins of Scottish Protestantism for the rest of his life; see J. Durkan, “Some local heretics”, *Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 3rd Series, Vol. 36 (1959), pp. 67-77; J. Durkan (ed.), *Protocol Book of John Foular, 1528-1534* (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh, 1985), preface; J. Durkan, “Scottish ‘Evangelicals’ in the patronage of Thomas Cromwell”, *RSCHS*, Vol. 21 (1983), pp. 127-156; J. Durkan, “Heresy in Scotland: the second phase, 1546-1558”, *RSCHS*, Vol. 24:3 (1992), pp. 320-365. Even in the last-mentioned paper, he was still cautioning against “premature conclusions” regarding the Scottish Reformation (p. 320). It should be said that these papers constitute a mine of valuable biographical detail on early Scottish Protestants.

⁷⁵ McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, p. 127.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

holiness, love, grace, mercy, the Cross, the Resurrection, prayer, Christ's intercession, and his Return; they wanted the Bible opened and expounded. The Reformation for them was not so much a matter of reforming abuses (e.g. the appropriation of parishes or clerical immorality) – though they wanted this too – as the reforming of the doctrine and worship of the Church. As James Kirk says: “For those Scots who followed Luther's message, a reform of doctrine was the central issue . . . the doctrine of justification carried with it implications fatal to the sacrificial nature of the Mass and the mediating role of the priesthood.”⁷⁷

Perhaps the strangest chapter in the book is the final one by W. J. Anderson in which he explains the somewhat contorted official attitude of the “Holy See” (the Vatican) to Scotland since 1560. The chapter concludes:

So far as Scotland was concerned all catholic life and all catholic progress in the conversion of Scotland from 1622, when the congregation took over Scotland, to 1908, when Propaganda finally ceased to control Scottish Catholicism, must be ascribed to its [Propaganda's] work, for which we have every reason to be grateful. Since 1908 the task is in the hands of others.⁷⁸

This chapter certainly gives a resounding answer to the question with which the book opened: did the year 1560 really have any significance for Scotland? Yes; apart from anything else, the year 1560 marked the end of the political power of the Papacy in Scotland. The chapter also raises in the reader's mind the question as to what part the book itself (written by a group of Roman Catholic historians, several of them priests, with the approval of the Roman Catholic bishops) was intended to play in the recovery of Scotland to Rome. McRoberts' preface to the book, with its profession of neutrality, is presumably to be taken with a pinch of salt:

the history presented in these essays is somewhat different from the simple “traditional” stories which have been long accepted by one side or another in the writing of Scottish ecclesiastical history. . . . The story which emerges from the following pages is much more involved, much more human, exciting and real, and

⁷⁷ J. Kirk, “The religion of early Scottish Protestants”, in *Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England and Scotland, 1400-1643* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 361-411 (see p. 369).

⁷⁸ McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, p. 483.

therefore credible, than the uncomplicated and ingenuous tales of our grandfathers. . . . We may be allowed to hope that the ungrudging help given to this work by protestant and catholic scholars alike is convincing proof that the “auld Parisiane kyndnes”, which sometimes lightened sixteenth-century controversy, is still very much alive.⁷⁹

Dr. Holmes' comment on the Donaldson and McRoberts books is not a little misleading. He says:

In the two volumes by McRoberts and Donaldson we see historians working closely with the sources and refuting a particular denominational view, but with their own denominational agendas. In 1982 Ian Cowan rightly identified the two books as a turning point in the study of the Scottish Reformation, “a triumph of scholarship over partisanship”.⁸⁰

We have already seen that in 1960 there was not “a particular denominational view” to refute; and whatever the prevailing view was, neither the Donaldson nor the McRoberts book refuted it. Both books confirmed the corruption of the pre-Reformation Church, and neither book said much about the rise of Protestantism. In addition, the quotation from Ian Cowan is curiously incorrect. What Cowan actually said is that the two books were “professedly non-partisan”.⁸¹ That statement is hardly correct either: the McRoberts book was obviously partisan, as we have seen, and Donaldson wrote as an ardent Episcopalian. As Maurice Lee, Jr., commented, “Dr. Donaldson sounds, occasionally, very like Archbishop Spottiswoode”.⁸²

Cowan 1982

Cowan's own work on the subject, *The Scottish Reformation*, appeared in 1982. This is a useful compendium of information, and was the fruit of

⁷⁹ McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, pp. v-vi.

⁸⁰ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, p. 309.

⁸¹ I. B. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation* (London, 1982), p. ix. Cowan had something of an obsession with partisanship and bias, particularly when he thought that he detected them in Protestant writers; see I. B. Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters, 1660-1688* (London, 1976), preface; I. B. Cowan, *Regional Aspects of the Scottish Reformation* (Historical Association, London, 1978), p. 39; Cowan, “The medieval church in Scotland; a select critical bibliography”, p. 95.

⁸² Lee, “The Scottish Reformation after 400 years”, p. 147, note 2.

extensive research on aspects of the pre-Reformation Church. Once again, however, his conclusions on the state of the pre-Reformation Church are not wildly different from those of earlier writers. The pre-Reformation Church was “decadent” and “had ceased to minister to spiritual needs and had lost almost all semblance of discipline”.⁸³ Cowan was somewhat more positive about the internal attempts at reform, but at the last he concedes that

as the bishops were frequently guilty of more offences than any, reforming policies were vitiated from the outset. . . . Bishops, abbots and commendators might pay lip-service to the principle of reformation, but their vested interests lay in the retention of the corrupt system which continued to produce rich dividends. . . . These forces even more than incipient protestantism led to the ultimate failure of the policy of reform of the church from within.⁸⁴

Where the book does mark a difference is in its attitude to the rise and the extent of Protestantism. Cowan tended to be “minimalist” in his assessment of the numerical strength of Protestantism in the years preceding the Reformation: the number of Protestants was pretty much the number of people who were prosecuted or martyred for “heresy”.⁸⁵ His somewhat unrealistic approach to this was countered by Margaret Sanderson, F. D. Bardgett, and Martin Dotterweich.⁸⁶ To the considerations that they mention, we would add that religious

⁸³ Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation*, p. 72.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 87-8.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 89-114. For example, Cowan mentions that there are eleven Protestant martyrs recorded between 1528 and 1539, seven of them in 1539, and assumes that this must have been the full total (p. 90). When Henry Sinclair (later Bishop of Ross) was questioned in 1550, however, by the Paris Inquisition over George Buchanan’s flight from Scotland in 1539, he deponed as follows: “Questioned whether there were four or five companions of the same George burnt in Scotland for heresy he replied that there were not only four or five but many others before and after the flight of the said George burnt for heresy. But he does not know whether they were companions of the said George or not.” See *Innes Review*, Vol. 15 (1964), p. 186. These “many others” may have been the martyrs of the early 1530s and the six Perth martyrs of 1544, but it is more likely that they were martyred around 1539 and their deaths have not been recorded. Two further testimonies, similar to Henry Sinclair’s, can be found in *The Minor Poems of William Lauder* (London, 1870), pp. xxiv and 24.

⁸⁶ Sanderson, *Cardinal of Scotland. David Beaton, c. 1494-1546*, p. 79; F. D. Bardgett, *Scotland Reformed: The Reformation in Angus and the Mearns* (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 36; M. H. Dotterweich, “The Emergence of Evangelical Theology in Scotland to 1550” (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2002), p. 197.

persecution tends to be patchy and uneven: it is driven by a few zealots, and in their absence, their less enthusiastic underlings often turn a blind eye to what their superiors would certainly have punished. This can be seen in the covenanting persecutions of the later seventeenth century, and in the erratic cases thrown up by political correctness in the present day. It would be rash, for example, to conclude from the case against the Ashers Bakery in Northern Ireland that every other baker in the United Kingdom is happy to bake cakes promoting homosexuality.

The triumph of Protestantism, Cowan attributes largely to political causes:

If in the period of the Reformation more support was to be forthcoming from this quarter [the borders], political considerations were again as important as any commitment to the protestant ideal. . . . Such considerations were to be vital for the outcome of the Reformation movement. On religious issues alone it is clear that the greatest strength of protestant support, with the exception of Kyle, was confined to a closely demarcated area on the east coast. Beyond these areas the reformers were clearly numerically weak. Yet political considerations were to favour this militant minority and enable them to achieve their religious goal.

Ultimate victory had been achieved through a combination of political and economic factors and in many localities the committed protestant believers remained for a long time in a decided minority.⁸⁷

This view was not novel: it differs little, if at all, from that expressed at length by Law Mathieson in 1902 to the effect that the Protestants were numerically weak in 1559-60, that religion was not the main motivation for many of them, and that it was chiefly the intervention of the English, together with the timely death of Mary of Guise, that gave them victory.⁸⁸ Cowan, doubtless, had more detailed

⁸⁷ Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation*, pp. 114, 180. A few years earlier, Cowan had been even more cynical about the religious commitment of the reforming nobility. "Thereafter [1558] the principal objective of the nobility, quite irrespective of religious affiliation, was the end of the French alliance. But when in turn this led them to take up arms against their queen, they sought to avoid being classed as rebels by inviting the exiled John Knox to return to Scotland and, by coupling his cause to theirs, adopted a new and 'godly' justification for their deeds as Lords of the Congregation," *Regional Aspects of the Scottish Reformation*, p. 5.

⁸⁸ See Law Mathieson, *Politics and Religion*, Vol. 1, pp. 66-72.

information than Law Mathieson, but there had been no great revolution of thought in the intervening eighty years.

One thing that is noticeable in Cowan's book is how little interest he had in theological matters. His account of the differences between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics over the doctrine of Justification was simply condensed, with several inaccuracies, from Maurice Taylor's chapter in the McRoberts book:

This doctrine [justification by faith], which is concerned with the means whereby man passes from a state of damnation owing to sin to a state of grace, emerged as one of the major divisions between catholics and protestants. Both agreed that man's justification is brought about by divine grace but, whereas Lutherans argued that man had no truly free will and justification could come about by faith alone, the catholic view emphasised the place of man's free will in allowing him to regain justification by means of penance and the performance of good works.⁸⁹

It does not appear that Cowan had understood either the Protestant or the Roman Catholic scheme of doctrine correctly. Later, he commented on Knox's doctrine in 1549: "The views [Knox] expounded were apparently still in the general Lutheran rather than Calvinist tradition. His views on justification were certainly still on Lutheran lines."⁹⁰ Cowan was apparently unaware that Calvinists and Lutherans shared the same doctrine of Justification. It is a reflection on the state of religious knowledge in Scotland in the later twentieth century that a professional Church historian could write a history of the Reformation with so little understanding of central Protestant doctrine. Furthermore, when he needed to state the doctrine of Justification, Cowan went, not to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (which is the authorised standard of the national Church and part of the legal constitution of his country), or to some earlier Protestant symbol, but to a minor Roman Catholic source. Cowan spent years studying original historical records, but when it came to the theology of those that he was writing about – which motivated so much of what they did – he was happy to take it all at

⁸⁹ Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation*, p. 98, cf. McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, p. 246. In his "Memoir of Ian Borthwick Cowan, 1932-1990", John Durkan comments that Cowan "had more flair for the details of Church organisation and their impact than for matters of doctrine and spirituality"; see R. J. Adam (ed.), *The Calendar of Fearn* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1991), p. 7.

⁹⁰ Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation*, p. 105.

second hand (and did not even trouble to get his statements checked by someone better informed than himself).⁹¹

Ryrie 2006

Passing by numerous important historians – for example, Duncan Shaw, J. K. Cameron, Jenny Wormald, Jasper Ridley, W. Stanford Reid, James Kirk, Arthur Williamson, Frank Bardgett, Margaret Sanderson, Michael Lynch, Jane Dawson, and W. I. P. Hazlett⁹² – we look lastly at Alec Ryrie’s *Origins of the Scottish Reformation*, published in 2006. Strictly, this work is outside our time-frame, but it has been influential in historical circles, and it gives a useful indication of academic opinion at the start of the twenty-first century.

Ryrie’s first chapter is entitled “A ‘corrupt’ Church?”, and is a discussion of the state of the pre-Reformation Church. For some reason, Ryrie can hardly bring himself to use the word “corrupt” without inverted commas, and he prefers to talk about “problems” in the pre-Reformation Church rather than “corruption”. Of these “problems”, however, there were quite a few: “nor can there be any serious doubt that the pre-Reformation Church had some serious and intractable problems.”⁹³ These problems turn out, not surprisingly, to be the familiar ones of irreligious and scandalous bishops, appropriation of the parishes, and the immorality and ignorance of the clergy. Ryrie reiterates Hay Fleming’s observation that “problems” of this sort did not of themselves give rise to “heresy”,⁹⁴ but observes that they nevertheless enfeebled the Church in the face of Protestantism:

If the Church’s systemic problems did feed into the rise of heresy, it is more likely that they did so in a negative way. Its financial and disciplinary shortcomings left it ill-fitted to mount a counter-attack against a genuine heretical challenge. Its moral authority was compromised and many of its financial resources had been

⁹¹ Gordon Donaldson’s venture into Reformation theology was only marginally more successful; see *The Faith of the Scots* (London, 1990), pp. 63-65.

⁹² Hazlett’s *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (2003) has a useful discussion on twentieth-century developments in the historiography of the Scottish Reformation which is considerably more accurate than that of Holmes, though we would not agree with every particular; see pp. 121-133. Another convenient summary can be found in Dotterweich, “The Emergence of Evangelical Theology in Scotland to 1550”, pp. 7-14.

⁹³ Ryrie, p. 13.

⁹⁴ Ryrie, pp. 23, 25; Hay Fleming, *Reformation in Scotland*, p. 172.

seized. . . . The Church was clearly better equipped to provide small numbers of first-class itinerant preachers and theologians than to maintain a broad defensive front in the parishes. The Church's own reforming councils had no illusions on this score. They were unsure whether parish clergy could even read aloud with any fluency, and forbade them to make any attempt to defend controversial doctrines. . . . On one level, the "corruption" of the late medieval Church in Scotland was simply a fact.⁹⁵

To balance the picture, Ryrie draws attention to what he sees as the strengths of the pre-Reformation Church: "a colourful popular piety . . . whose vibrancy is unmistakable"; the enthusiasm for shrines, pilgrimages, and mystery plays; the "robust respect for the saints"; and "the strength of the friaries [and the Carthusian monks] and the active leadership of some senior clergy". In summary, "popular piety appears to have been robustly loyal to traditional religion".⁹⁶ Thus the Church was not inherently unstable or about to collapse, but was still vulnerable to the onslaught from Protestantism. To return to Hay Fleming's picture of the "hoary giant of the forest", for Ryrie the tree still had some strength – indeed "robust strength" – and was not as rotten as Hay Fleming and T. G. Law had thought.⁹⁷

As far as the rise of Protestantism is concerned, Ryrie sees various factors: the clumsy system of discipline in the pre-Reformation Church which hindered effective action against Protestants; the death of Cardinal Beaton; Archbishop Hamilton's reform programme, which coincided with Mary of Guise's refusal to execute heretics; the unpopularity of the French; and the Protestants' success in disarming anti-English suspicion, and also in "winning noble converts" (a success which Ryrie characterises as "mysterious"). All in all, the Reformation was "a contingent set of events" which "could have had several outcomes".⁹⁸

One interesting feature of the book is Ryrie's extended discussion of Hamilton's reform programme from 1549 onwards. This is a puzzling subject and Ryrie makes some useful suggestions. He sees the "lively spirit of self-criticism" behind this reform programme as testifying to the Church's "ability to renew itself"; but he thinks that the resulting decade

⁹⁵ Ryrie, pp. 24-25.

⁹⁶ Ryrie, pp. 18-20, 24-5.

⁹⁷ Ryrie, pp. 17, 196; Hay Fleming, *Reformation in Scotland*, p. 171.

⁹⁸ Ryrie, pp. 34, 196-7.

of self-criticism had an unsettling effect on the Church and was the reason why so few people were prepared to lift a finger to help her in 1559.⁹⁹ This position, however, would seem to conflict with his view of the “robust strength” of the Church mentioned above: if the people were so keenly aware of the Church’s faults that by 1559 they placed little value upon her, have we not gone full circle and returned to the old view of a Church ready to collapse?

IV. DISCUSSION

Dr. Holmes claims that the historical research of the later twentieth century “demolished” the “Protestant” view of the Scottish Reformation that had prevailed up to that time. We are now in a position to consider this assertion in more detail. We deal separately with the two aspects that we have been addressing: first, the state of the pre-Reformation Church, and, secondly, the rise of Protestantism.

1. The state of the pre-Reformation Church

We have seen that there was an academic consensus up to 1960 that the pre-Reformation Scottish Church was deeply corrupt, but that this was not a “Protestant” view, still less a “Presbyterian” one, but simply the general opinion of scholarship. Work since 1960 may have brightened the picture, but not much, and this has mainly been by diverting attention away from the worst aspects of the Church. The evidence on which the old view of the Church’s corruption was based has not been overturned or countered to any great degree, but simply down-played and even ignored.

Holmes mentions three ingredients in the SCHA revisionist “programme” which we now consider in turn.¹⁰⁰

(a) “Catholic reform”

The first ingredient in the revision programme was “Catholic reform”:

Firstly, it [the SCHA work] took seriously Catholic reform, central to the 1962 volume and to Macfarlane’s *Elphinstone*. Later work,

⁹⁹ Ryrie, pp. 196-7.

¹⁰⁰ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, pp. 314-5.

such as that of James Cameron and Alec Ryrie, has included considerations of Catholic reform, and Linda Dunbar has written a fine study of John Winram.¹⁰¹

Leaving aside Bishop Elphinstone as being rather remote from the Reformation (he died in 1514), we note that both Stanford Reid and J. H. S. Burleigh had already published on the reforming Councils of 1549 to 1559, so the serious study of Hamilton's reform programme did not begin with the SCHA historians.¹⁰² Several of the chapters in the McRoberts volume do indeed refer to the reforming Councils and their work, but it cannot be said that they shed a lot of light. Mahoney makes some pertinent suggestions but is rather brief and evasive, while Maurice Taylor's discussion of Hamilton's 1552 *Catechism* is hampered by his commitment to Tridentine theology, a commitment which the compilers of the *Catechism* evidently did not share. Thomas Winnings article on the reforming Councils provides the basic information, but the political instincts of the author are too much in evidence, and his concern is more to minimise potential damage to his Church than to elucidate the perplexing history of the period. The best contribution on the subject is Durkan's which turns up some valuable historical background.¹⁰³ Linda Dunbar's account of John Winram may be a fine study of his later life but it is thin on the pre-Reformation part of his career; and most of her section on Winram as a "Catholic reformer" relates to his involvement with George Wishart in 1546 and with John Knox in 1547. His role in the Pater Noster controversy is barely mentioned.¹⁰⁴

The fullest discussions of Hamilton's reforms are those of Cameron and Ryrie, and neither comes to a particularly positive conclusion on the subject. Cameron suggests that Hamilton may partly have been building or securing the Hamilton empire;¹⁰⁵ while Ryrie thinks that the reforms were a misguided and not entirely sincere

¹⁰¹ Holmes, "Historiography of the Scottish Reformation", p. 314.

¹⁰² W. Stanford Reid, "The Scottish Counter-Reformation before 1560", *Church History*, Vol. 14 (1945), pp. 104-125; J. H. S. Burleigh, "The Scottish reforming councils, 1549 to 1559", *RSCHS*, Vol. 11 (1955), pp. 189-211; see also Burleigh, *Church History of Scotland*, pp. 136-142.

¹⁰³ McRoberts, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, pp. 64-66 (Mahoney), 252-5 (Taylor), 301-2 and 326-9 (Durkan), 332-58 (Winnings), 367-8 (Anderson).

¹⁰⁴ L. J. Dunbar, *Reforming the Scottish Church* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 16n.

¹⁰⁵ J. K. Cameron, "'Catholic reform' in Germany and in the pre-1560 Church in Scotland", *RSCHS*, Vol. 20:2 (1979), pp. 105-117 (see pp. 116-7).

attempt at a partial compromise with Protestantism.¹⁰⁶ Clare Kellar makes an interesting comparison between the simultaneous reforms of Thomas Cranmer in England and Archbishop Hamilton in Scotland but her contribution is vitiated by a lack of familiarity with Protestant doctrine.¹⁰⁷ Since Holmes wrote his paper, his own book on “liturgical interpretation” has appeared, with a considerable amount on “Catholic reform”.¹⁰⁸ This book introduces several fresh ideas into the subject, but it does not seriously disturb the conclusion that the reform attempts, whatever motivated them, were ineffectual; and that the Church actually declined in strength during the decade of “reform”.

Overall, one is left with two impressions: first, that no one has yet properly explained what was happening during the period of “Catholic reform”; and, secondly, that Roman Catholic historians are at a disadvantage on the topic, partly because the Protestant thinking, which was starting to appear in Hamilton’s *Catechism*, is strange to them, and partly because they are reluctant to concede the problems in their own Church at the time.¹⁰⁹

(b) Scottish Renaissance

A second ingredient in the SCHA revision programme, according to Holmes, was an attack on the “myth of pre-Reformation Scotland as a cultural backwater” – a myth which Holmes regards as a “legacy of the ‘darkness to light’ view of the Reformation”.¹¹⁰ Some writers have supposed that Protestant historians are averse to the idea of a Scottish Renaissance,¹¹¹ and a recent book on the subject states: “From 1560, the

¹⁰⁶ Ryrie, p. 105.

¹⁰⁷ C. Kellar, *Scotland, England, and the Reformation, 1534-1561* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 113-148. Kellar mistakenly thinks (p. 126) that the essentially Protestant definition of faith in Hamilton’s *Catechism* (see J. K. Cameron, “Aspects of the Lutheran contribution to the Scottish Reformation”, *RSCHS*, Vol. 22:1 (1984), pp. 1-12 (p. 11)) is the same as the Roman Catholic definition of faith in the “King’s Book” of 1543.

¹⁰⁸ Holmes, *Sacred Signs in Reformation Scotland*, especially pp. 149-160.

¹⁰⁹ Holmes quotes Eamon Duffy on the advantages that Roman Catholic historians have in the study of late medieval religion (see Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, pp. 315-6); but they have some disadvantages as well, as Holmes himself points out.

¹¹⁰ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, p. 314.

¹¹¹ For example, the Roman Catholic Michael Lynch wrote: “It has recently been complained, if only as an aside, that the cultural history of late medieval Scotland has suffered as a ‘result of a Protestant-dominated historiography which had no wish to recognise the richness of the material and literary culture which the Reformation destroyed, or to admit the reformers’ collusion in its destruction’”; see M. Lynch, “In

Protestant Kirk . . . promoted a narrative of national ‘progress’ from idolatry and superstition to enlightenment and godliness, which sought to denigrate, and in many cases eradicate, the cultural heritage of the Catholic era. Many religious paintings, carvings and books were deliberately destroyed in a furious iconoclasm, whilst many ecclesiastical buildings were ‘cleansed’ and reordered. . . . The powerful combination of these factors has therefore obscured the very existence of the Renaissance in Scotland.”¹¹² In support of this, reference is made to a 2009 paper on the Scottish Renaissance which begins with the words:

It is a complicating factor in the discussion of the renaissance if the historiography of a particular kingdom denies persistently that it ever existed there at all. When we began work on this article, Professor Chris Gane, a senior colleague at the University of Aberdeen, reminded us that the standard school histories of Scotland in use in the 1960s and 1970s simply stated as acknowledged fact that Scotland did not have a renaissance. The sources of this denial are not particularly difficult to diagnose: the domination of Scottish history by lowland Presbyterian agendas lasted a surprisingly long time.¹¹³

Professor Gane may have been right about standard school histories in the 1960s and 1970s, but more to the point would have been standard academic histories of the period; and the standard Scottish history, published in 1964 by the then Historiographer Royal J. D. Mackie, reprinted frequently, with a substantially revised second edition in 1978, and last printed in 1991, was so far from denying the existence of the Scottish Renaissance that it devoted an entire chapter to the subject.¹¹⁴ It is evident that none of the writers mentioned above researched the Scottish use of the term “Renaissance” before they

search of the Scottish Reformation”, in E. J. Cowan and R. J. Findlay (eds.), *Scottish History: The Power of the Past* (Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 73-94 (p. 82, quoting Roger A. Mason from 1998).

¹¹² Andrea Thomas, *Glory and Honour: The Renaissance in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2013), p. 1. The book is beautifully illustrated; but surprisingly many of the examples in the text postdate the Reformation, which rather undermines the claim that the Reformation obliterated much of Scotland’s cultural heritage.

¹¹³ J. Stevenson and P. Davidson, “Ficino in Aberdeen: The Continuing Problem of the Scottish Renaissance”, *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*, Vol. 1 (2009), pp. 64-87.

¹¹⁴ J. D. Mackie, *A History of Scotland* (Penguin, 1964), “The Renaissance and the New Monarchy”, pp. 118-141; 2nd edn., revised and edited by B. Lenman and G. Parker (Penguin, 1978), pp. 112-135.

launched their attack on Protestantism, and clear too that the idea of the Scottish Renaissance as an embarrassment to Protestantism rests on a decidedly shaky foundation.

We have not followed up the historiography of the Scottish Renaissance in detail, because to do so would be moving away from the subject of the Reformation, but here is a brief outline of what we have found. Ian Hazlett attributes the idea of Scotland as a culturally barren place in the sixteenth century, not to Protestantism but to the scepticism of David Hume.¹¹⁵ Hume, for example, describes the young Mary, Queen of Scots, as being “left to the society of her own subjects, a people unacquainted with the pleasures of conversation, ignorant of arts and civility, corrupted beyond their usual uncouthness by a dismal fanaticism, incapable of all humanity and improvement”.¹¹⁶ Thomas M’Crie, by contrast, writing in 1812 on the background to John Knox’s life, lamented the fact that so little attention had been paid to the history of learning in Scotland in the early sixteenth century: “The state of learning in Scotland at that period [Knox’s youth], and the progress which it made in the subsequent part of the century, have not been examined with the attention that they deserve, and which has been bestowed on contemporaneous objects of inferior importance.”¹¹⁷ M’Crie’s limited discussion shows the great progress that has been made since in the study of Scottish learning and culture in the early sixteenth century.

Much of this progress was due to the great nineteenth-century antiquarians such as David Laing, Cosmo Innes, and Joseph Robertson, and it is scarcely credible that they were ignorant of the basic facts of the Scottish Renaissance, even if they did not use the term (the word “Renaissance” was not popularised in historical writing until 1860 when it was used by the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt in connection with Italy). In 1857, the Presbyterian Peter Lorimer gave a glowing description of the state of learning in Scotland at the start of the sixteenth century. We quote his description at length because in several matters he

¹¹⁵ Hazlett, pp. 117-121. An earlier contributor to the “myth of a cultural backwater” was no less than Bishop William Elphinstone. In his favourable description of pre-Reformation education in Scotland, James Grant took Pope Alexander VI to task for suggesting that the North East of Scotland was “rude and ignorant of letters and almost barbarous” (the words were actually Elphinstone’s) in the preamble to the 1494/5 Bull authorising the erection of King’s College, Aberdeen; see J. Grant, *History of the Burgh Schools of Scotland* (London, 1876), pp. 16-17.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Hazlett, p. 120.

¹¹⁷ T. M’Crie, *Life of John Knox* (Edinburgh, 1812), p. 4.

pre-empted the 2009 article on the Renaissance mentioned above. Some Presbyterians, it would seem, were promoting the idea of a Scottish Renaissance nearly a century before the SCHA:

There were new ideas and new books to be found even in Scotland, the most remote kingdom of Europe, in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. It was a time of intellectual and literary revival there as well as everywhere else. The national mind had recently been stirred by many new productions of native genius. A galaxy of new poets had shone forth in the literary heavens, including Henryson, Douglas, Kennedy, Dunbar, and other native “makars”, all writing in their homely but expressive mother tongue, and all rewarded with the plaudits of their delighted countrymen. The Roman muses, too, had at length begun to captivate and subdue a country which boasted that it had never bowed to the might of the Roman legions. The authors of the Augustan age were beginning to scatter the seeds of classical culture and refinement among the Scottish youth. We have before referred to the humane studies and labours of Boyce at Aberdeen. There the new intellectual life of the nation had already become powerful enough to shape for itself a new system of academic study. Boyce was honoured with the correspondence of Erasmus as a scholar of congenial pursuits; and we find Erasmus expressing, in one of his letters, the pleasure which it had given him to hear that the kingdom of Scotland, in addition to all its other honours, was every day becoming more polished and refined by the study of the liberal arts. This letter was written in 1529 in reply to a communication in which Boyce had begged Erasmus, in his own name and in the name of all his coadjutors at Aberdeen, to send him a catalogue of his writings; a proof how eagerly the elegant literature of the continent was then sought after by Scottish scholars.

One of Boyce’s colleagues was John Vaus, the first regular professor of the Latin language and literature in Scotland, and the first Scotsman who composed a Latin grammar – “a man”, says the learned Italian, Ferrerius, “eminently adorned with literature, and who has rendered great services to the Scottish youth”. The residence of Ferrerius himself in the country, under the patronage of Robert Reid, abbot of Kinloss, afterwards Bishop of Orkney, is an additional proof of the value in which classical learning and its

cultivators were beginning to be held; and of the favour, in particular, with which such studies were regarded by some of the dignified clergy. The Church, in truth, was both the chief promoter and the chief opponent of liberal studies in that age. Several of the highest clergy patronized and were themselves proficient in such pursuits; while, in general, the monks and friars and the whole body of the inferior clergy, with a truer instinct of danger to the interests of Rome, dreaded and hated the new learning and all its abettors. Gavyn Douglas had a knowledge and appreciation of the classical authors rarely equalled in those days, and adorned the literature of his country with productions, which were equally honourable to his ability as a scholar, and his genius as a poet.

Patrick Panther, Abbot of Cambuskenneth, had been a fellow-student of Boyce, and was master of a Latin style of remarkable purity and elegance, which enabled him, in his office of Secretary of State to James IV and the Regent Albany, to frame the communications of the Scottish crown with foreign princes in language as polished as that of the most refined courts of Europe. John Bellenden, Archdeacon of Moray, was another accomplished churchman. He was a graduate of Paris, and executed, by order of James V, not only a version of a portion of Livy, but a translation also of Boyce's Latin history of Scotland. Boyce's original and Bellenden's translation possess between them the peculiar interest of being the first specimens that have descended to our times of Scottish Latinity purged of mediaeval barbarisms, and of Scottish prose indited in the purest vernacular. Florence Wilson, or Volusenus, was another elegant Caledonian scholar of that age. He studied first at Aberdeen under Boyce, and subsequently at Paris; and his Latin dialogue, "De Animi Tranquillitate", earned for him, from his illustrious countryman Buchanan, the honourable name of "one most dear to the Muses".

These notices may suffice to show what considerable progress the revival of learning had already made in Scotland in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, and with what characteristic ardour the national mind had thrown itself into the new paths of knowledge which had recently been opened up by the labours of continental scholars.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ P. Lorimer, *Patrick Hamilton* (London, 1857), pp. 56-8.

During the earlier twentieth century, there was a hesitation in some circles to admit the term “Renaissance” as an accurate description of what happened in Scotland,¹¹⁹ but this hesitation was not confined to Protestant writers.¹²⁰ The common use of the term seems to date from the 1950s, but whether this was due to SCHA writers, or perhaps to J. D. Mackie,¹²¹ we are not sure. In any case, the examples of Lorimer and J. D. Mackie show that the existence of a Scottish Renaissance presents no difficulty to Protestantism.

The Scottish Renaissance has a bearing on the state of clerical education in the pre-Reformation Church, and also on the degree to which refined culture (buildings, art, music) indicates a vitality of religion among the people. We discuss this second point under the next heading below; but the question over clerical education is the extent to which the learning was diffused among the clergy. That some clergy were highly educated has been a favourite theme with SCHA writers, but what about the others? In discussing John Greenlaw, vicar of Keith Humber before the Reformation, David McRoberts comments that the annotations in one of Greenlaw’s books show him to have been “a scholarly, conscientious and devout cleric, a picture far removed from the caricatures of sixteenth-century priests, popularized by the early Reformers”.¹²² The main evidence for widespread pre-Reformation clerical ignorance, however, was not from “the early Reformers” but from sixteenth century

¹¹⁹ Macewan, *A History of the Church in Scotland*, Vol. 2, p. 1, “it would be misleading to speak of a Renaissance in the strict sense”; C. S. Terry, *A History of Scotland* (Cambridge, 1920), pp. 137-8, “the long association of the two nations [Scotland and France] left traces upon the language and social life, while France’s glorious *châteaux*, the characteristic expression of her Renaissance, inspired the so-called ‘baronial’ architecture of Scotland . . . but her [Scotland’s] geographical and political isolation interposed between Scotland and the fullest employment of the Renaissance”; R. L. Mackie, *A Short History of Scotland* (Oxford, 1930), p. 195, “the influence of the Renaissance was not felt in Scotland at this time (1505)”. This last statement was allowed to stand in the 1962 edition of the book, heavily revised by Gordon Donaldson (p. 108).

¹²⁰ Wormald, *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland, 1470-1625*, p. 56.

¹²¹ See, for example, J. D. Mackie’s review of R. L. Mackie, *King James IV of Scotland: A Brief Survey of His Life and Times* (1958) in *Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 38, No. 126, Part 2 (1959), pp. 133-136. Mackie was 77 when he published his *History of Scotland* in 1964, and it is unlikely that the idea of a Scottish Renaissance, which evidently pervaded his thinking, was a new one to him.

¹²² McRoberts, “Some sixteenth-century Scottish breviaries and their place in the history of the Scottish liturgy”, *Innes Review*, Vol. 3 (1952), pp. 33-48 (p. 39). Greenlaw lived in Haddington, about ten miles from his parish, and was a notary public. In 1553 he was in Paris and from 1558 he became a prebendary of Corstorphine. The extent to which his parish benefited from his undoubted learning is not clear.

Roman Catholic sources, and this evidence has not been affected by the recent work on the Scottish Renaissance.¹²³ When all the information is put together, the picture that emerges is of a small, well-educated and generally wealthy elite (who were busy swapping books among themselves) coexisting with a mass of poorly educated and poorly paid parish priests and curates.¹²⁴ As Macfarlane points out, the dissemination of Renaissance learning and culture among the lairds and among the laity in the burghs can only have made the ignorance of these ordinary priests more painfully obvious and embarrassing for the Church.¹²⁵

(c) Pre-Reformation devotion

The third ingredient in the SCHA revision programme, according to Holmes, was the opening up of “the rich world of pre-Reformation Scottish devotion”.¹²⁶ Holmes refers particularly to Audrey-Beth Fitch’s *The Search for Salvation*, the blurb of which states: “Contrary to traditional views, which portray the late medieval Scottish Church as weak and corrupt, the book argues for the vitality and flourishing of lay piety in the later fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century.”¹²⁷ As Janet Foggie remarks, however, Fitch’s method is “hampered by the constant drawing of general conclusions about the psychological state of an entire populace from specific examples in courtly poetry or prose”.¹²⁸

The “vitality” of the pre-Reformation Church is often asserted, especially by Roman Catholic writers, but is not easy to assess.¹²⁹ The

¹²³ For much of the evidence of clerical ignorance, see Hay Fleming, *Reformation in Scotland*, pp. 82-95. Holmes addresses some of this evidence in *Sacred Signs in Reformation Scotland*, pp. 92-3, but he does so by the expedient of finding a reason for dismissing each item in turn. Thus Robert Richardson’s 1530 description of ignorance among the Augustinian canons is set aside because Richardson “became a Protestant”. In fact, Richardson was violently anti-Lutheran at the time when he was writing. Holmes’ expedient seems to be a reversion to the old practice of denying unwelcome evidence rather than adjusting one’s theory to accommodate it.

¹²⁴ Holmes concedes that while almost all of the higher clergy and a sizeable minority of the vicars were university graduates, virtually none of the lower clergy were; *Sacred Signs in Reformation Scotland*, pp. 93-4.

¹²⁵ Macfarlane, *William Elphinstone and the Kingdom of Scotland, 1431-1514*, p. 246.

¹²⁶ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, p. 315.

¹²⁷ A. B. Fitch, *The Search for Salvation: Lay Faith in Scotland, 1480-1560* (Edinburgh, 2009).

¹²⁸ Foggie, p. 83.

¹²⁹ Wormald, *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland, 1470-1625*, p. 91; M. Lynch, *Edinburgh and the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1981), p. 30; M. Dilworth, *Scottish Monasteries in the Late Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 27-8, 50, 83; M. A. Mullett, *Catholics in Britain and Ireland, 1558-1829* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 33; A. B. Fitch, “Religious Community in the

testimony of those alive at the time was not of her “vibrancy” and “robustness”, but of her weakness and “abuses”.¹³⁰ The evidence presented in support of her “vitality” needs to be sifted more carefully than it has been so far. In some cases, it amounts only to this: that certain Roman Catholic practices were popular before the Reformation; for example, going on pilgrimages, bequeathing money for memorial masses, and attending religious plays. But something very similar could be said about Protestantism in Scotland after the First World War: there were still large congregations in churches, and Protestant public meetings were addressed by prominent national figures and were well-attended. Yet Protestantism was, in reality, in a serious state of decline at that time, as events were to show; and arguably the same held true for pre-Reformation religion. People may carry on religious practices out of habit, long after any conviction has gone, particularly if the practices have an independent pleasure and interest, as is the case with plays, pilgrimages, and festivals.

Another important consideration is that support for the old Church may have weakened drastically during 1558 and 1559. Some of the evidence certainly suggests this, such as the quotation from Ninian Winzet given earlier. In 1543, the people of Edinburgh were prepared to protect the friaries from destruction, but in 1559 they were not.¹³¹ Whether this change had been gradual or abrupt is not clear, but either way it was a change. This same picture of a reluctance to make a stand for Romanism was repeated in many parts of Scotland in 1559, and indicates the very reverse of vitality by that stage.

One argument often proposed in proof of the piety of the age is the splendour of many pre-Reformation religious buildings, and, more generally, of the religious art and the music.¹³² This is no new argument, as far as the buildings are concerned, and the answer given by Hay

North East at the Reformation”, in J. Porter (ed.), *After Columba, After Calvin* (Aberdeen, 1999), p. 118; Ryrie, pp. 19-20; Mairi Cowan, *Death, Life, and Religious Change in Scottish Towns, c. 1350-1560* (Manchester, 2012), p. 182.

¹³⁰ As *The Complaynt of Scotland* said in 1549: “This plague and schism [Protestantism] shall never be reformed for no statutes, laws, punishments, banishing, burning, hardship, torment that can be devised while unto the time that the spirituality reform their own abusion”; A. M. Stewart (ed.), *The Complaynt of Scotland* (Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 126-7.

¹³¹ J. Bain (ed.), *The Hamilton Papers* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1890-2), Vol. 2, p. 15.

¹³² This argument is implicit in Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, p. 315, and lies behind D. McRoberts and S. M. Holmes, *Lost Interiors: The Furnishings of Scottish Churches in the Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 2012).

Fleming a hundred years ago regarding buildings is equally applicable to art and the music:

The many beautiful churches and the magnificent monasteries, which were scattered over Scotland, are frequently referred to as so many proofs of an abounding spiritual life in the ages in which they were erected. They were certainly proofs of the great skill and still greater artistic taste of the actual builders; and while it may be frankly admitted that their erection was chiefly due to religious zeal or gratitude, it cannot be denied that the motives were sometimes less admirable, sometimes even base. . . . It would be as hazardous as rash to appraise the vital religion of a nation by the grandeur or the meanness of its ecclesiastical buildings. Who would dare to assert that God was not as sincerely worshipped by the early Scottish Christians in their churches of mud and wattles, or of undressed and unmortared stone, as in the most glorious of the imposing medieval cathedrals by which they were succeeded? To come nearer to our own day, who would venture to affirm that the Seceders of the eighteenth century, though they met in structures as plain as barns, were less pious, less earnest, or less self-denying than their new-light successors of the twentieth century, who assemble in ornate churches with lofty spires and luxurious pews?¹³³

In conclusion, there has been a considerable amount of recent research on aspects of the pre-Reformation Church, but this needs to be synthesised with the earlier work on the subject. Turning from McRoberts' and Holmes' *Lost Interiors* to the chapter in Macewan's *History of the Church in Scotland* in the 1550s, one would not believe that the two books were talking about the same Church at the same time; yet both are depending on reliable sources. In the case of *Lost Interiors*, it is quite reasonable for the book to present an idealised picture of the pre-Reformation Church at her most impressive, because that is its purpose; but those using the book have to realise that they are getting only part of the story. There was another side as well. The popularity or otherwise of the pre-Reformation Scottish Church still awaits impartial assessment.

It is sometimes alleged that Protestant writers have a tendency to exaggerate the degree of Protestantism before the Reformation, and

¹³³ Hay Fleming, *Reformation in Scotland*, pp. 322-4.

to play down the vitality of the pre-Reformation Church.¹³⁴ There is probably some truth in this (and equally that writers averse to Protestantism have the opposite tendency). It is a point worth making, however, that the stronger the pre-Reformation Church was, the more remarkable was the force that shattered it to pieces in 1559-60. Protestants, therefore, have no prior “confessional commitment” regarding the relative strengths of Protestantism and Romanism before the Reformation.

2. The rise of Protestantism

We come secondly to consider the rise of Protestantism. Holmes claims that the “heroic Protestant narrative” has been demolished;¹³⁵ and the first question that confronts us is whether there was a “heroic Protestant” view of the rise of Protestantism that could be demolished. It seems to be widely agreed that there was, but when one looks for an objective description of this view, one looks in vain. Each writer seems reluctant to describe it except in a tongue-in-cheek way. Holmes avoids defining it altogether, and we have already quoted Ryrie’s description: that it was “a tradition which stresses the profound corruption of the Catholic Church in Scotland; the fertile soil on which the seed sowed by the first reformers fell; the steady growth of Protestant belief in the dark years of persecution; and the sudden dawn of open Protestantism in 1559-60 banishing the night of popery”.¹³⁶ Roger Mason seems to have had the same “traditional” view in mind when he expressed the hope that: “In the light of this [recent] research, facile assumptions regarding the irretrievable decay of the Catholic Church and the irresistible rise of Protestantism have at long last been consigned to oblivion.”¹³⁷ Jenny Wormald spoke of “the well-worn theme . . . of corruption swept away by purity” and of the “occasional religious historian who writes with passion of the sinister dominance of Rome in the four centuries preceding the Reformation, these centuries of ‘the

¹³⁴ See, for example, Cowan, *Regional Aspects of the Scottish Reformation*, p. 39; Fitch, *Search for Salvation*, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, pp. 306, 316.

¹³⁶ Ryrie, pp. 5-6.

¹³⁷ R. Mason, “Covenant and Commonweal: the language of politics in Reformation Scotland”, in N. Macdougall (ed.), *Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1408-1929* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 97-126 (p. 97).

black terrors of the soul' which Calvinism dispelled".¹³⁸ Linda Dunbar speaks in a similar vein:

Gordon Donaldson's seminal book, *The Scottish Reformation*, marked an important shift away from the view that the Scottish Reformation expressed rejection of corrupt and bankrupt Roman Catholicism by the Scottish people as a whole. Subsequent studies, such as Ian Cowan's, highlighted the diversity of regional experiences and emphasized the need to become familiar with local variety in order to appreciate fully the bigger picture. . . . More importantly, the detail provided by these studies has helped to undermine the conventional view of an entire people suddenly turning away from the decay and darkness of the Old Church to the vitality and light of the New.¹³⁹

Elizabeth Tapscott says much the same at greater length:

To date, the most authoritative survey of the early decades of Scottish reform is Alec Ryrie's *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation*. Placing events in Scotland within the context of the wider European stage, as well as focusing on violence and the fear of violence, Ryrie outlines a theory of the Scottish Reformation as a revolution. His study is a significant contribution to the growing historical recognition that the ultimate success of the Protestant cause in sixteenth-century Scotland was far from a foregone conclusion. In saying this, Ryrie builds upon the work of previous scholars, like Gordon Donaldson, Ian Cowan and David McRoberts. Their efforts to present a more balanced interpretation stood in direct opposition to four centuries of confessional history which had treated the Scottish Reformation as a triumphalist Protestant narrative: the light of the reformed faith victorious over the darkness of Catholicism.¹⁴⁰

Keith M. Brown is even more mocking:

Of course, like every good lie the criticisms levelled at Scottish Protestantism contain a degree of truth. The Protestant, and in

¹³⁸ Wormald, *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland, 1470-1625*, pp. 75, 201.

¹³⁹ Dunbar, *Reforming the Scottish Church*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ E. L. Tapscott, "Propaganda and Persuasion in the Early Scottish Reformation, c. 1527-1557" (PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2013), pp. 6-7.

particular the presbyterian, historiography that dominated until the mid-twentieth century painted a picture of Catholic idolatry, episcopalian tyranny and of a saintly march by a chosen, covenanted people to create the perfect Godly society. Such an uncritical view had to be challenged.¹⁴¹

The recurrent features in these descriptions seem to be the movement from darkness to light, the inevitability or irresistibility of the change, and its suddenness. We have already discussed the supposed Protestant idea of “inevitability”, which seems to exist more in the minds of certain recent historians than in the writings of earlier Protestants. The suddenness or otherwise of the change is hardly a matter of religious partisanship,¹⁴² while the “movement from darkness to light” is simply a figurative way of expressing approval for the work of Reformation. It seems, then, that these writers had no very distinct idea that they were trying to express, and were merely clothing their haziness in words. This tallies with what we saw previously, that there was no “Protestant consensus” regarding the rise of Protestantism in the first place. As there was nothing to demolish, so no demolition has taken place, and no new edifice been erected. The “consensus” of historians regarding the rise of Protestantism is as elusive now as it was a hundred years ago.

3. Conclusion

Having said all this, it is evident that there has been a significant change in Scottish Reformation studies in the last sixty years. The main change, however, has not been the demolition of some supposed Protestant view by superior scholarship, as Dr. Holmes is claiming, but the near-disappearance of the Protestant historian on account of the decline in Protestantism. In his 1911 Rhind Lectures, J. Maitland Thomson commented that “most of the Scottish local historians are ministers”.¹⁴³ A century later there are very few Protestant ministers, or zealous Protestants of any sort, engaged in historical research in Scotland. This change can be seen in the pages of the *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, first published in 1926, which used to be an active amateur

¹⁴¹ K. M. Brown, review of R. Graham, *John Knox – Democrat* (London, 2001) and M. Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (Yale, 2002) in *History Today* (online).

¹⁴² Ryrie himself emphasises the suddenness of the change in 1559-60: “the sudden precipitation of a revolutionary movement”; see Ryrie, p. 203.

¹⁴³ See Paton, “Record Sources for Scottish Church History”, p. 103.

journal written mainly by Protestant ministers, but which passed into the hands of academics in the late 1970s and which now has not a single non-professional historian on its editorial board.

At the same time, the disappearance of the Protestant historian has coincided with a vast explosion of research publications in all areas of academia, with the result that work before 1960 in almost every subject tends to look rather dated. The Protestant perspective on the Scottish Reformation has not been “updated” in the way that Roman Catholic and secular views have been – witness the recurring references to Hay Fleming’s 1909 *Reformation in Scotland* – and this creates the appearance of a Protestant “defeat”. This appearance turns out, however, on examination of the underlying historical evidence, to be an illusion. The arguments that were used by Protestants and others during the first half of the twentieth century have not, on the whole, lost their cogency.

Ironically, Dr. Holmes’ version of the changes in academic opinion on the Scottish Reformation since 1960 bears not a little resemblance to the supposed Protestant view of the Reformation that is said to have been “exploded”. The account that Dr. Holmes presents in his paper is a “simplistic darkness-to-light narrative”, moving from the darkness of a pre-1960 “Protestant-dominated historiography” to the enlightenment of a present-day “Catholic victory”. This “triumphalist” narrative (“in Scottish Reformation historiography there is a sense that the Catholics have fought back and ‘won’”¹⁴⁴) evidently has a popular appeal in anti-Protestant academic circles, but it is not a true account of what has happened. Indeed, so remote from reality is it that it lies more in the realm of propaganda than of scholarship.

¹⁴⁴ Holmes, “Historiography of the Scottish Reformation”, p. 316.

APPENDIX A
TABLET REVIEW OF WALSH'S
HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SCOTLAND (1874)

The *Tablet* 8th August 1874, reviewing James Walsh's *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland* (Glasgow, 1874). This review gives some idea of what J. H. Baxter was talking about in the quotation criticized by Dr. Holmes: "The attempts of modern Roman Catholics to describe the Roman Church in Scotland have been, with the exception of Bellesheim's *History*, disfigured not only by uncritical partisanship, which is perhaps unavoidable, but by a glaring lack of scholarship, which makes them both useless and harmful."

— • —

"Prejudice," as Dr. Newman asserts in one of his invaluable works, "is the life of the Protestant view," and untrue tradition "its sustaining power." In diligently promoting the former, and in swelling the dark mass of the latter, false historians have taken a very prominent part. Scarcely a writer on the ecclesiastical history of England or Scotland has flourished since the time of the Reformation who has not prostituted his pen to the cause of wrong, and so lent his aid in thickening around his unfortunate fellow-countrymen the mist of ignorance and misapprehension by which they have been so long and fatally enveloped. The clouds, however, are at length becoming less opaque, the atmosphere is perceptibly lightening. Here and there rays of truth are piercing through the surrounding darkness, and by-and-by, we firmly believe, the obscurity will altogether vanish.

But in effecting His designs, however great, God acts ordinarily through human instrumentality, and there is no doubt that writers who, like Mr. James Walsh, stand forth boldly to confront falsehood with truth, are to be amongst His honoured agents in the work of Britain's enlightenment. The volume before us, we are told by its author, was commenced more than twenty years ago, and had the whole of those years been occupied in its compilation we should not have deemed the time misspent. Evidence of laborious research and of painstaking industry in the collection of facts is stamped upon every page, authority is given for each assertion, Protestant authors are largely quoted, and the book is characterized by an impartiality and absence of bitterness which

will render it very generally useful. As the title states, the history commences with the first introduction of Christianity into North Britain, and interesting accounts, collated from various sources, are given of the earliest missionaries to the country. Amongst these appear the well-known names of St. Regulus, a Greek Bishop, who brought to Caledonia the relics of St. Andrew, St. Ninian, St. Palladius, St. Servanus, St. Columba, and the Monks of Iona. In a consecutive manner the Church's history is continued up to the time of the Reformation; immediately preceding which event Scotland is shown to have been in a flourishing condition, prosperous and wealthy, with universities and colleges, compulsory education established by Act of Parliament, virtuous and religious, and therefore happy.

The historical facts brought forward in this chapter (writes Mr. Walsh) are more than sufficient to disprove the statements of superficial Protestant writers, who assert that the people of Scotland were "grossly ignorant," "wretchedly poor," and "miserable slaves" in Catholic times. On the contrary, we have seen Scotland become consolidated, prosperous, happy, free, and independent under the fostering care of the Catholic Church; her Catholic kings courageous and triumphant on the field; her Catholic Bishops and priests patriots of the truest and most unflinching kind; and the Catholic people heroic and brave, under every circumstance, in the long-continued and arduous struggle to free their native land from a foreign yoke. The names of Wallace and Bruce, of Douglas and Randolph, are imperishably recorded in the annals of Scottish history. We have seen trade and commerce flourishing, and the various arts of civilized life encouraged and protected by the Church.

Under her fostering care the hamlet grew into the village, the village into the town, and the town into the royal burgh and mercantile community. In short, the more the early records of Scottish history are investigated, the more clearly does it appear that the whole people of Scotland, but particularly those which lived by their labour, now called the working classes, were better instructed in religion, better fed, better clothed, better cared for, more easily worked, and in every way more virtuous, independent, happy, and free in Catholic times than they have ever been since the Protestant Reformation.

The reverse of this pleasant picture is given a little further on in the book, when the Protestant Reformation with its blighting effects on the moral, mental, and physical condition of the people was in progress:

The condition of the country would have drawn pity from the hardest heart. The people engaged in a furious butchery of each other, constantly kept up by the infernal policy of Elizabeth. Every peaceful and useful art was entirely at a stand. Agriculture, manufactures, and commerce were neglected. Nothing was heard from one end of the country to the other but the clangour of arms and the roar of artillery; nothing seen but villages in flames, towns beleaguered by armed men, women and children flying from the cottages where their fathers or husbands had been massacred, the pulpits surrounded by armed men with their hands on their swords; whilst Knox and the preachers fanned the flame of discord by declaiming against the Queen as a Jezebel, a murderer, and an adulteress, deserving of instant death, threatening excommunication to all who supported her cause, and declaring that there could not be peace in the country until she and her partizans were punished with death.

No ecclesiastical history of the country could be complete without some account of the "Great Reformer", whom Protestants claim to this day as the chief founder of their religion in Scotland, and the life and character of John Knox is thus summed up by our author:

His whole public life was spent in treason, conspiracy, rebellion, turbulence, and bloodshed. He was born of poor parents, educated by the charity of the Catholic Church, ordained a priest at the age of twenty-five, was admonished, and afterwards expelled from the office of the priesthood for his crimes of impurity and for teaching heresy. He joined the band of assassins who murdered Cardinal Beaton, and became their chaplain, was condemned to the galleys in France as one of the criminals, where he remained for nineteen months, and was then liberated. Knox then came to England, where he became a preacher of Lutheranism and Episcopalianism, although he professed to be a sort of Calvinist in Scotland. In 1559 he returned to Scotland still a rebel; he at once joined the rebellion going on against the regent Mary of Guise. He wrote letters to the English Government under a feigned name, soliciting money to aid the rebels, and an English army to invade and lay waste his native land. He urged the people to destroy and ruin the churches, abbeys, and religious establishments, and to burn all the civil and ecclesiastical histories, documents, charters, and records of the

country. He was a coarse, vulgar and vindictive rebel and traitor to his queen and country from the day Mary landed until she was dethroned. . . . He was at all times a despicable coward, who fled from that danger which was the consequence of his crimes. In his writings he defended and praised the assassination of Cardinal Beaton, the Duke of Guise, and David Riccio, as being the work of God; he also maintained that all Catholics, clergy and laity, kings and subjects, ought to be put to death, so that he was thus the advocate of murder and the fiercest intolerance. He was unsettled in his own creed, or else acted the hypocrite, as he was an Episcopalian during his stay in England, whilst in Scotland he was a Calvinist and Presbyterian. He was a calumniator and slanderer of the worst kind, as he in his writings and sermons distorted facts, misrepresented passing events, falsified history, and defamed the best of men and the most virtuous of women. . . .

Mr. Walsh's valuable history is continued down to the present year, and ends with an encouraging report of the present condition of Catholicism in Scotland, and a hopeful augury for the future of the Church in that country. In conclusion, we would say, that as a book for reference, no more useful publication has of late issued from the press, and we have no doubt that it will become, as it well deserves to do, a standard work. The materials contained in it have been thrown together in an attractive form, and the style is altogether pleasant and readable.

APPENDIX B
JOHN DURKAN, JOHN KNOX AND
THE KILLOGIE

One of the blemishes of post-Reformation Roman Catholic attempts at Scottish Church history (as we have just seen in Appendix A) was the succession of scurrilous attacks on the morality of John Knox. A detailed account of these from 1579 to 1628 is given in M'Crie's *Life of John Knox*, together with compelling reasons for dismissing them as fabrications.¹⁴⁵ In the later nineteenth century, Roman Catholic historians continued to promote these unsavoury stories while non-Roman Catholic writers paid them little regard.¹⁴⁶ It was understood that the *Innes Review* marked a new beginning and had left such "history" behind, but this expectation was disappointed in 1994 when no less a contributor than John Durkan (admittedly rather an old man by then) attempted to revive some of these tales.¹⁴⁷ Durkan did not commit himself to their veracity but he must have thought that they had enough plausibility to further his case. He was seeking to show that that "the pre-Reformation Church had no monopoly of vice" by dwelling on the supposed blemishes of the early reformers.¹⁴⁸ This was essentially a muck-raking exercise (of the sort that Roman Catholics complain of when conducted by Protestants against the pre-Reformation Church); and here is some of the muck that Durkan managed to rake up:

Because Knox's marriage with his first wife was not solemnised, [Nicol] Burne calls her his "first harlat", but adds a word about his "horrible incest with his gudmother in ane killogie of Hadintoun" and John Hamilton in 1600 added that this incurred excommunication, though he may have confused two incidents. These stories were not, as often assumed, Burne's own inventions. In June 1563 Euphemia Dundas, of the Protestant congregation in Edinburgh,

¹⁴⁵ M'Crie, *Life of John Knox*, note QQ, pp. 495-9 (1855 edn., note GGG, pp. 390-3).

¹⁴⁶ See Walsh, *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland*, pp. 384-5; Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, Vol. 2, p. 288 (translator's note); P. Hume Brown, *John Knox: a biography* (2 vols., London, 1895), Vol. 2, pp. 311-14; J. Hill Burton, *The Scot Abroad* (2nd edn., Edinburgh, 1898), pp. 190-4; T. G. Law (ed.), *Catholic Tractates of the Sixteenth Century, 1573-1600* (Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh, 1901), pp. 27-8; J. Ridley, *John Knox* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 23-4, 417, 433-4.

¹⁴⁷ J. Durkan, "Scottish Reformers: the less than golden legend", *Innes Review*, Vol. 45:1 (1994), pp. 1-28 (see pp. 21-4).

¹⁴⁸ Durkan, "Scottish Reformers: the less than golden legend", p. 24.

not only accused Knox of being with a common harlot all his days, but points up a particular occasion when he was “with ane commoun hure apprehendit and tane furth of ane killogie”. . . .

[Knox] himself wrote, “In bodie ye think I am no adulterar; yet sa be, but the hart is infectit with foull lustis, and will lust, albeit I lament never sa mekill . . .”. This was written to his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Bowes, to whom he also recalled, “I call to mynd what I did standing at the copburd in Anwick”. After his wife’s death in 1560, Knox summoned the mother-in-law to Edinburgh to oversee his motherless children. It has been said that she died in Edinburgh as late as 1568, but she surely left Knox’s home, if not Edinburgh, when he remarried in 1564. . . . The Euphemia Dundas remark must refer to [his mother-in-law’s] continual presence in the Knox household, but the “killogie in Hadintoun” incident is less easily explained, a killogie being the lower part of a kiln often left doorless and therefore accessible to squatters and to vagrants seeking cover . . . the Haddington affair may even go back to his Catholic days there, and, as such, cannot involve Mrs. Bowes.¹⁴⁹

An examination of Euphemia Dundas’ alleged statement (which she denied having made) shows, however, that Durkan had seriously misread it. The alleged statement was: “that within few dayis past the said Jhonne Knox wes apprehendit and tane furth of ane killogye with ane commoun hure, and that he had bene ane commoun harlot all his dayis.”¹⁵⁰ Dundas allegedly said that Knox was “ane commoun harlot all his dayis” (the word “harlot” was used of men, as well as women, in the sense of a “whore-monger”),¹⁵¹ whereas Durkan misread this as “being *with* a common harlot all his days”, and then claimed that this “common harlot” must have been his mother-in-law. Once this point is cleared up, the supposed reference to Knox’s mother-in-law disappears, and with it all suggestion of incest in Dundas’ accusation. Thus Euphemia Dundas provides no support for Nicol Burne’s allegation of “horrible incest”, and Durkan’s contention, that Burne’s allegation is substantiated, collapses. The only things in common between the Dundas and Burne stories are

¹⁴⁹ Durkan, “Scottish Reformers: the less than golden legend”, pp. 21-22.

¹⁵⁰ J. D. Marwick (ed.), *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh, A.D. 1557-1571* (Edinburgh, 1875), p. 162.

¹⁵¹ See *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (online) under “harlot”.

the immorality and the word “killogie”. Knox’s confession of “foull lustis” is standard in Protestantism, and no conclusion can be drawn from it; and the same is true of the slightly puzzling “Alnwick cupboard” incident, which is sufficiently discussed in Rosalind Marshall’s biography of Knox.¹⁵²

In one sense Durkan’s mistake was very small – just a single word – but the fact that he mentally inserted this word betrays his readiness, even eagerness, to believe in Knox’s immorality. A historian who is eager to uncover bad things about Protestants is not impartial.

¹⁵² R. K. Marshall, *John Knox* (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 51-2.

