



SAMUEL RUTHERFORD

A NEW BIOGRAPHY OF
THE MAN & HIS MINISTRY

BY

KINGSLEY G. RENDELL



CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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EDITOR'S NOTE

In the providence of God Kingsley Rendell did not live to see his biographical study of Samuel Rutherford through to publication. My task as editor has been to add a number of footnotes which provide fuller explanations of various matters, such as names and events, which may not be as familiar to readers as the author expected. At a few points the text has been corrected but otherwise the book is as Kingsley Rendell wrote it. This is Kingsley Rendell's book, not mine. May it serve to make a faithful minister of Jesus Christ better known to a new generation of readers and challenge them to follow the God of Samuel Rutherford with the zeal which he manifested.

David McKay
Reformed Theological College, Belfast





CHRONOLOGY OF RUTHERFORD'S LIFE

- 1600 Probable year of Rutherford's birth.
- 1617 Enters the University of Edinburgh.
- 1621 Receives the degree of Master of Arts.
- 1623 Appointed Regent of Humanity in the university.
- 1626 Rutherford is removed from his post on the ground of fornication with Euphan Hamilton, whom he subsequently marries.
- 1627 After studying theology, Rutherford becomes minister in Anwoth in Galloway.
- 1630 Rutherford's wife Euphan dies.
- 1636 Publishes *Exercitationes Apologeticae pro Divina Gratia*. On this account he is summoned in July to appear before the High Commission in Edinburgh, where he is forbidden to exercise his ministry and exiled to Aberdeen.
- 1637 On 23 July the first use of "Laud's Liturgy" sparks a riot in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh.
- 1638 *February*: Returns to Anwoth. On 23 February the National Covenant is signed in Greyfriars Churchyard in Edinburgh.
November: Serves as a commissioner at the General Assembly in Glasgow.
- 1639 Appointed Professor of Divinity at the University of St. Andrews.
- 1640 Marries Jean McMath.
- 1642 Publishes *A Peaceable and Temperate Plea for Paul's Presbyterie in Scotland*.
- 1643 Appointed one of the Commissioners of the Church of Scotland to the Westminster Assembly as a consequence of the Solemn League and Covenant concluded in September.
- 1644 Publishes *Lex Rex* and *The Due Right of Presbyteries*.
- 1645 Publishes *The Trial and Triumph of Faith*.
- 1646 Publishes *The Divine Right of Church Government*.



- 1647 Publishes *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself*. In November, returns to Scotland from the Westminster Assembly and becomes Principal of St. Mary's College, St. Andrews. Sides with the opponents of the Engagement.
- 1648 Publishes *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist*. On 17 August the Engagers are defeated by Cromwell at Preston.
- 1649 30 January: Charles I executed.
Publishes *A Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience*.
- 1650 On 3 September the Scots are defeated by Cromwell at Dunbar.
- 1651 1 January: Charles II crowned King at Scone by the Scots. Rutherford appointed Rector of the University of St. Andrews. Publishes *Disputatio Scholastica de Divina Providentia*. At the General Assembly in June, sides with the Protesters against the Resolutioners. On 3 September the Scots are defeated by Cromwell at Worcester. Charles flees to Europe.
- 1653 20 July: rival Resolutioner and Protester Assemblies in Edinburgh are dissolved by Cromwell's troops.
- 1655 Publishes *The Covenant of Life Opened*.
- 1658 Publishes *A Survey of the Survey of that Summe of Church Discipline*.
- 1659 Publishes *Influences of the Life of Grace*.
- 1660 May: Restoration of Charles II.
October: copies of *Lex Rex* are publicly burned and Rutherford is stripped of all the posts he holds, including his pastoral charge. He is called to appear before the Committee of Estates to answer a charge of treason.
- 1661 29 March: dies and is buried at St. Andrews.
- 1664 Publication of *Joshua Redivivus*, the first collection of Rutherford's letters.
- 1668 Publication in Utrecht of *Examen Arminianismi*.





CHAPTER 1

STUDENT AND PROFESSOR

Although the lifespan of Samuel Rutherford does not fall strictly into the Covenanting period of Scottish history, the name of Rutherford will always be associated with the Covenant. Fame, perhaps, has not written it as indelibly upon the page of Scottish church history as those of Cameron, Cargill and Renwick, Covenanters of the succeeding generation, but Rutherford is none the less worthy of special study. His life and ministry provide an indispensable link between Andrew Melville and the Covenanters. It bridges the gap between the late sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. There would have been no Covenanting torch to bear, if Rutherford and his associates had not kindled it in their day. Robert Gilmour aptly described him as ‘a link in the evangelical succession of Christendom’.¹

In the wake of the Reformation

Rutherford was born into the mêlée of the Scottish Reformation. It is understandable to think of the Reformation as centring in the ecclesiastical crisis of 1560. The dramatic events of that year, John Knox’s sermon in St. John’s Perth, the riot that ensued, and the subsequent rising of those who styled themselves ‘the Faithful Congregation of Jesus Christ in Scotland’, resulted in a sudden severance with Rome. The break with Rome, which was not so unexpected as is often imagined, was largely a negative act, which demanded positive measures if the schism was to be maintained, and a national reformed church established. The Church of Scotland, as we know it today, was not the brain child of Knox, but the result of growth from 1560 to 1689. As Professor Burleigh observed, ‘What shape the Reformed Church of Scotland was to take was left an open question over which there was to be a long and bitter struggle. Not until 1689 can it be said to have been finally settled.’² In the words of T. C. Smout, ‘It emerged as the



classic Presbyterian church of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with its elders, deacons, ministers and kirk session, Presbyterian synods, and General Assembly.³

During the first decade of the reformed faith in Scotland the pressing problem was the spiritual care of the Scottish people. Joseph Robertson's contention that the church was largely made up of 'rich livings with the care of thousands of souls, held by boys, by infants even, by men deformed in body, imbecile in mind, hardened in ignorance, old in wickedness and sin'⁴ may have been something of an exaggeration, but it contains a sad truth. Knox, who is generally recognised as a Father of the Scottish Reformation, was not primarily concerned with theories of church government, but with the parochial consideration of establishing the reformed faith, and pastoring the flock of God in Scotland. His concern was apostolic success rather than apostolic succession. Unlike many who succeeded him, Knox followed Calvin, having no objection to some form of Episcopacy. Professor G.D. Henderson pointed out: 'the question of Presbyterian government was not one that interested the reformers. No constitutional document of the Reformation is concerned about it;⁵ while Smout has observed that 'nothing in the polity of the Church can be described as Presbyterian'.⁶ Knox did not deny that national and ecumenical organisation has its uses, but he insisted that the *esse* of the church was to be found in the local congregation, where there is true preaching of the Word of God, right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus – and ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered as God's Word prescribes.⁷

The Scottish Reformers were careful to distinguish between Prelacy and Episcopacy.* In 1560 there was not so much reason to resist Episcopacy as there was a century later. It was the patronage of James VI and Charles I that made it so odious. Its imposition by the Stuarts, largely for their own convenience, made it unacceptable to the Scots. James Moffatt was of the opinion that 'it might have proved stable. What upset it was the absolutism

*'Episcopacy' is government by church officers called 'bishops'. Different systems accord varying powers to these bishops. 'Prelacy' is the state-supported episcopal system characteristic of the Church of England.

of James and his son.⁸ When we remember that Knox was one of the six presbyters who, in the Confession of Faith of 1560, allowed for the appointment of superintendents, which to his opponents were bishops in all but name, there is justification in Donaldson's description of the early reformed church in Scotland as 'Independency with a dash of Episcopacy'.⁹ Ross, in his *History of Congregational Independency in Scotland*, maintained that initially in the Scots Confession and the First Book of Discipline 1561, (both of which were largely drawn up by Knox), the ecclesiastical order was guided by 'the principles for which Independents have all along contended',¹⁰ the polity of the reformation churches in Scotland being distinctly Independent and Congregational.¹¹

Episcopacy can be detected too. After the Presbyterian system had been established, bishops, abbots and priors, many of whom were Protestants and laymen, were to be found throughout the country. In the assembly which met on December 25th, 1567, Knox himself was appointed to join the Superintendent of Lothian in his visitation from Stirling to Berwick, and thereafter to visit Kyle, Carrick and Cunningham.¹² In 1578 it was agreed by the civil and ecclesiastical authorities that the names and titles of archbishops and bishops should continue for those who now acted as superintendents, subject to the Kirk and General Assembly.

To this Knox raised no objections. What did raise his ire was the flow of church revenue into the hands of laymen, with consequent patronage, which was to vex the Church of Scotland for almost four centuries. Knox longed to see ecclesiastical revenues used to provide an adequate ministry, an efficient educational system, and relief of the poor. Out of the total revenue available, ultimately only one ninth went to the support of the national church, while clergy of the old regime were given two thirds of their revenue. Temporal lands of religious houses, by devious means, came into the possession of the nobles. Many reverted to the crown and were later lavished upon commendators or lay occupants of benefices (the 'Lords of Erection' as they were called), or on royal favourites. Many, however, were irretrievably lost as long leases and feus [a perpetual lease at a fixed rent],



while some were appropriated by force. Dr. Malcolm Taylor, almost a century ago, rightly remarked that, ‘far reaching as were the changes which the Reformation introduced, the practical organisation and beliefs which had been inherited from the past were recast in accordance with the ideas and altered conditions of the times, rather than exchanged for entirely new principles and methods’.¹³

Patently some clarification of ecclesiastical government and relation between church and state was necessary. The Regent Morton favoured a similar settlement to that which existed in England, the church being controlled by the supreme power of the Crown. He strongly supported Episcopacy, but was prepared to subject bishops to the will of the General Assembly. The Assembly of 1572 meeting at Leith drew up a Concordat – largely the work of Morton – which decreed that archbishoprics and bishoprics would be left as they were until the monarch attained his majority. Chapters should not be abolished, but their members be replaced by senior ministers as death depleted their numbers. Bishops were to be consecrated to vacant sees, and be required to take an oath of allegiance to the king. They were to be more than superintendents, but subject to the General Assembly; a conservative compromise with the ancient order. Morton had cause to be pleased, and followed up his success at Leith by securing the election of Douglas to the archbishopric of St. Andrews.

Knox was not opposed to some form of Episcopacy; indeed, he advised the filling of vacant bishoprics according to the agreement reached at Leith. But he had misgivings about Morton’s policy, voicing them in his usual thunderous tones on the occasion of Douglas’ institution to the see of St. Andrews. The aged Knox did not foresee that within a few years Morton would have filled all the vacancies with his own nominees, the ‘Tulchan Bishops’ as they were called. Nor did the reformer foresee that Morton would come to a profitable financial arrangement with the nearly senile Archbishop of St. Andrews. After the Leith Assembly, the way seemed open for the imposition of royal authority over the Church, and possibly its secularisation; but Morton had moved too far and too fast. The fear of ‘popery’ was aroused and no



amount of explanation could remove it, even though Morton assumed the role of Court opponent and champion of the reformed faith.

The Contribution of Andrew Melville to the Reformation

In the spring of 1574, after an appeal from his nephew to raise the standard of education in Scotland, the Scottish exile Andrew Melville left Geneva for his native soil. He was destined not to make any significant contribution to Scottish education, but to play an important part in the drama of ecclesiastical politics. On arrival in Scotland he was offered a post in the household of Morton, but declined. After residing for three months with his brother, in November of that year he settled in Glasgow.

Melville's arrival in Scotland was most opportune for those who feared a Romeward drift. During his six years in Geneva, he had been greatly influenced by the thorough-going Presbyterianism of Beza. Melville was not the man to view the ecclesiastical situation of 1574 with indifference. He was strongly opposed to Episcopacy. He made his presence felt at the March General Assembly of the Kirk. John Durie, an Edinburgh minister, voicing the sentiments of Melville, asked 'if the bishopes, as they are now in Scotland, hes their functions of the Word of God or not, or if the Chapters appointit for creating of them, aucht to be tollerated in this reformed Kirk?'¹⁴ Along with John Craige, James Lawsons, George Hay, John Row and David Lindsay, Melville was appointed to a Commission whose brief was to discuss the matters and report back to the Assembly. They thought it not expedient to answer to the question of bishops, only to decree that 'if any bishopes heis chosen who has fit qualities as the Word of God requires, let him be tried by the Generall Assembly *de novo*, and so deposit'.¹⁵

The General Assembly under the influence of Melville went further. In 1578 it was recorded that 'forasmeikle as there is great corruptions in the estate of Bischopes – the Kirk has concludit that no Bischopes shall be electit or made hereafter before the next Generall Assemblie; discharging all ministers and chapters to proceed any wayes to elections of Bischopes in the meanetye, under the pain of perpetuall deprivations from their offices'.¹⁶ At



the following Assembly this was extended ‘for all tyme to come’, and all bishops already elected were requested to submit themselves to the General Assembly.¹⁷ The pressure of Melville paid off, as is evident from the Second Book of Discipline, sanctioned by the General Assembly – though not by the state – in 1581. Rejecting the supervisory nature of the office of bishop as unscriptural, along with the chapters which created it, Melville and his associates declared that oversight should be in the hands of Church courts, composed of ministers and life appointed elders, consisting of kirk session, presbytery, synod and general assembly, which should cease to be a gathering of the three estates, and be solely that of ministers and elders representing the church courts.

The issue of church government was inextricably linked with that of the relation between church and state. Melville drew a sharp distinction between the two. Following the teaching of Hildebrand, he maintained that the church was above the state. ‘There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland,’ he declared; ‘there is Christ Jesus the King, and His kingdom is the Kirk, whose subject King James the Sixth is and of whose kingdom he is not a king, not a lord, nor a head, but a member.’¹⁸ The General Assembly was at pains to point out that ‘the power and policie ecclesiasticall is different and distinct in the awin nature from that power and policie quhilk is callit the civill power’,¹⁹ and frequently documents of the time record that Christ is the ‘onlie spirituall king’.²⁰ It is little wonder the king complained of ‘fiery ministers’ who dreamed of democracy, themselves playing the role of *tribuni plebis*.²¹ It is little wonder too that James VI increasingly challenged the power and decisions of the General Assembly. In a letter of 1579 to the thirty-ninth General Assembly, read by one of his ministers, John Duncansone, he pointed out that there were some matters which should be left to Parliament, and that decisions of the Assembly should be presented to the estates of the realm.²² Melville for the moment won the day, largely because, as Smout has observed, his doctrines ‘offered a practical solution to certain problems at parish level’.²³

James was determined to be sovereign in his own realm. To him the Kirk was a state within a state. He demanded the exercise

of royal authority over the church, and the legality of the episcopate which would make the bishops willing instruments of the Crown in ecclesiastical affairs. By 1584 James found himself strong enough to achieve his ends by means of the passage of the Black Acts through a servile Parliament, which asserted royal authority in spiritual and temporal affairs, and granted the bishops full Episcopal powers. He contended that it was his intention not to follow the Anglican or Roman pattern, but elevate the dignity of the ministry. James could argue that Melville would make ministers the oracles of God, and as Croft Dickinson has remarked, 'Where lay the need for a king's council, when ministers claimed they were the counsel of God?'²⁴ Both Melville's theory of church government with its wide chasm between the local congregation and the General Assembly, and his clear distinction between the civil and ecclesiastical paved the way for Rutherford's theory of Divine right of presbytery.

A confrontation between James and the Melvillian party seemed inevitable, and indeed would have taken place if James had not been prepared to compromise. In 1586, it was decided to make bishops moderators of presbyteries, and an Act of 1592 confirmed Presbyterianism. James' flattery of the Church of Scotland as 'the sincerest Kirk in the world', and his insult to the Church of England as 'an evil said Mass in English' came as a shock to both friend and foe. The Melvillian party might have emerged victorious if it had not so strongly objected to James' indulgence of Roman Catholics, and Melville's caustic remark that the king was 'God's sillie vassal'. James seized the opportunity to bring about the fall of Melville and further his own aims. He astutely employed the Act of 1592 to select dates and venues for the General Assembly to suit his own purpose. He so manipulated the Assembly that in 1597 at Dundee a committee of fourteen was appointed to discuss all ecclesiastical matters with the king. Before a year had elapsed, this committee pressed for representation of the Kirk in Parliament, with the result that in March 1598 it was decided that those whom the king appointed as bishops should take their place in the Legislature. The decision was effected in 1600, when royal nominees George Gledstones, David Lindsay and Peter Marshall



were appointed to the sees of St. Andrews, Ross and Caithness respectively, and took their seats in Parliament.

James' accession to the English throne in 1603 greatly strengthened his position. Fond farewells and endearing promises to return to his native soil every third year were offset by the boast that he could rule Scotland with the stroke of a pen from London. With the strength of the Church of England behind him, he had little difficulty in weakening the power of the General Assembly, postponing that of 1604 for a year, and in 1605 postponing it yet further. He hastily and eagerly filled vacant bishoprics with his nominees, and followed up his success in 1606 by summoning Melville and his associates to London, in a vain effort to convert them to Episcopacy. For his criticism of the style of worship he witnessed in the Royal Chapel, Melville was exiled, finding a useful sphere of service in the Huguenot seminary at Sedan. Three of James' bishops were sent to England for consecration, a move which cast doubts upon the validity of the Scottish ordination. Parliament showed its subservience to James by repealing the Annexation Act of 1587, thus restoring temporalities to the bishoprics. The result was, that by 1610 an Episcopal system of church government had been established in Scotland and ratified by Parliament. Although presbyteries still remained in name, power lay with the bishops. With Episcopacy came such practices as kneeling for the sacrament; private administration to the sick; baptism in houses; confirmation and observation of holy days, enunciated in the Articles of Perth, 1618. Under duress the Assembly accepted, but the nation rejected them. Although some ministers were brought before the Court of High Commission for disobedience, it is to the credit of the Scottish bishops that they were not zealous to enforce them. Such was the situation into which Rutherford came when he entered upon his career as a minister of the gospel. For him the challenge could not be refused. Where Melville lay down the sword and the pen, Rutherford took them up.

