

**ENLIGHTENMENT AND REFORMATION IN THE HISTORICAL  
WRITINGS OF THOMAS M'CRIE**

**A Master's Thesis**

**by**

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**THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
BİLKENT UNIVERSITY  
ANKARA**

**September 2007**



To my family

**ENLIGHTENMENT AND REFORMATION IN THE HISTORICAL  
WRITINGS OF THOMAS M'CRIE**

**The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
Bilkent University**

**by**

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MASTER OF ARTS**

**in**

**THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
BİLKENT UNIVERSITY  
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**September 2007**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### ENLIGHTENMENT AND REFORMATION IN THE HISTORICAL WRITINGS OF THOMAS M'CRIE

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There are a limited number of studies of post-Enlightenment Scottish historiography and these are mainly concerned with the imaginative literature products of the period. However, there were many reflections of the conflicts and discussions about religious, political and social matters in the historiography of period from the Enlightenment to the separation of the Evangelicals from the Established Church of Scotland in the Disruption of 1843.

My research aims at investigating the outstanding themes in the works of a post-Enlightenment Scottish history-writer, Thomas M'Crie. The reception of the Enlightenment ideas—as we perceived it in the texts—by an early nineteenth century Scottish historian and divine will not only show the perception of these ideas by an individual but also will bring forward to the much neglected issue of the relationship between the Enlightenment and the Evangelical movement within and outside the Church of Scotland. M'Crie's historical works are very important for their depiction

of a particular contribution, made most firmly by the Seceders to the intellectual environment and religio-political discussions of the time. His works were an attempt to restore the estimation of the Scottish Reformation past in reaction to an Enlightenment historiography, which attacked this heritage as a hindrance to progressive ideas and fuller integration into the British state. His restorationist and Counter-Enlightenment view was a Scottish manifestation of a movement in Europe at large responding to the dangerous ideas disseminated by Enlightenment thinkers and actions of the French Revolutionaries.

**Key Words:** Thomas M’Crie, Enlightenment, Reformation, Nineteenth Century, Scottish History-Writing, Church of Scotland, Evangelicals, Restoration, Counter-Enlightenment.

## ÖZET

### THOMAS M'CRIE'NİN TARİH ESERLERİNDE AYDINLANMA VE REFORMASYON

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Yüksek Lisans, Tarih Bölümü

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Aydınlanma sonrası İskoç tarih yazımıyla ilgili sınırlı sayıda çalışma vardır. Bu çalışmaların büyük bir kısmı da dönemin yaratıcı edebi ürünleriyle ilgilidir. Oysaki Aydınlanma'dan Evanjeliclerin İskoç Kilisesi'nden ayrıldıkları 1843 bölünmesine kadar ki zaman diliminde dini, siyasi ve toplumsal problemlere ilişkin çatışma ve tartışmaların tarih yazıcılığında pek çok yansımaları olmuştur.

Bu çalışma Aydınlanma sonrası İskoç tarihçisi Thomas M'Crie'nin eserlerinde öne çıkan temaları incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Aydınlanma fikirlerinin eserlerde görüldüğü biçimiyle, 19.yy.'ın ilk yarısında yaşamış olan bir İskoç tarihçi ve din adamı tarafından alımlanması sadece bu fikirlerin bireysel olarak değerlendirilmesini göstermeyecek, bugüne kadar ihmal edile gelmiş olan; Kilise içi ve dışındaki Evanjeliclerle Aydınlanma arasındaki ilişkiyi de ortaya koyacaktır.

Thomas M'Crie'nin tarih eserleri, İskoç Kilisesi'nden ayrılan gruplar tarafından dönemin gerek düşünsel ortamına gerekse dini ve politik tartışmalarına yapılan özgün katkıyı göstermesi açısından çok önemlidir. Bu eserler, İskoç

Reformasyon mirasını ilerlemeci düşünce ve Britanya devletine bütünleşme sürecinin önünde bir engel olarak görüp ona saldıran Aydınlanma tarih yazımına karşı, bu mirası yeniden yapılandırmaya çalışan tepkisel bir çabanın ürünüdürler. Aslında, M'Crie'nin restorasyonist ve Karşı-Aydınlanmacı bakışı Aydınlanma düşünürleri tarafından geliştirilen düşünceler ve Fransız devrimcilerinin faaliyetlerine karşı oluşan bir hareketin İskoçya'daki yansımasıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Thomas M'Crie, Aydınlanma, Reformasyon, On Dokuzuncu Yüzyıl, İskoç Tarih Yazımı, İskoç Kilisesi, Evanjelikler, Restorasyon, Karşı-Aydınlanma.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ÖZET.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	ix
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: THOMAS M’CRIE AND THE RECEPTION OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT .....	1
CHAPTER 2: BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THOMAS M’CRIE’S HISTORIOGRAPHY .....	10
2.1 Secondary Literature on M’Crie .....	14
2.2 A Union of Antiquarianism and History.....	18
2.3 Restoring the Past .....	24
2.4 Enlightenment and M’Crie .....	28
CHAPTER 3:THOMAS M’CRIE AND THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL LIBERTY ....	35
3.1 The Reformation as the Origins of Civil Liberty.....	40
3.2 Knox and Melville as the Representatives of Civil Liberty.....	43
3.3 Political Use of Civil Liberty by M’Crie.....	48
3.4 Concluding Remarks on Civil Liberty.....	60
CHAPTER 4: THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THOMAS M’CRIE’S WORKS.....	65
4.1 Religion and National Identity.....	66
4.2 M’Crie, Scott and the Covenanting Identity.....	70
4.3 Reformation, Union and National Identity .....	75

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	94

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **THOMAS M'CRIE AND THE RECEPTION OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT**

The project of this thesis is to settle the historical writings of a post-Enlightenment history-writer in the context of the period in which he lived and wrote and to make a contribution to the understanding of the reception of the Enlightenment in a broad sense. As Dorinda Outram indicated, the meaning and the impact of 'Enlightenment' began to be discussed in the eighteenth century itself and this discussion has continued intensely up to now.<sup>1</sup> In the traditional accounts, Enlightenment has been defined as an intellectual movement of the eighteenth century as the source of critical ideas, such as the centrality of freedom and reason. However, today, the definition of 'Enlightenment' as a unitary and autonomous project has been extensively challenged for some decades. Particular, in the case of Scotland, to present the Enlightenment as "the work of people who largely knew and

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<sup>1</sup> Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.

admired each other” is misleading.<sup>2</sup> Historians of our day generally do not define it on the basis of hostility to religion and the critical use of reason to achieve progress and freedom in the face of religion, to change human being’s own life and society. This has been a recent trend in European historical scholarship. It is thought necessary to look at the Enlightenment as a great variety of debates with different forms and contents in different national and cultural contexts.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, it is more acceptable to speak of Enlightenments happening in different parts of Europe at different times.

However true it may be that there were different experiences of Enlightenment; the constant feature of the Enlightenment period was that it was a product of religious discussion and not merely a rebellion against religion. Particularly, in the case of the Scottish Enlightenment, there was no area in which religion was not determinative in the period. The main topic was religion and most topics were discussed within religious terms. So, Enlightenment ideas were expressed through sermons, theological works, and historical works related to religious discussions. In this thesis, what is emphasized by the term of Enlightenment is the debates among the Scottish intellectuals on the matters related to religion. Scottish Enlightenment writers certainly much used some concepts such as stadialism, progress, reason, civil liberty and civil society and these were used to justify the theological positions.

In this process, the Counter-Enlightenment was at the centre of the Enlightenment debate and should probably subsume under it as part to whole. Counter-Enlightenment was partly a reaction to the ideas of the Enlightenment in the

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<sup>2</sup> Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (London: Macmillan Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Kirk, “The Matter of Enlightenment” *Historical Journal* 43 (2000): 1129-1143. and for the essays discussing the distinctive nature of the Enlightenment in different countries see, Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and also a movement among those who criticised the notions those conventionally identified as Enlightenment writers and sprang from a necessity to reply to them.<sup>4</sup> Further, the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas in the countries like France and Scotland in its historical context, as “a movement and system”, led to various kinds of counter-movements and responses with religious and political dimensions especially in the early nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

In Counter-Enlightenment discourse, an emphasis on the inherited patterns of the society and tradition was dominant and this was advanced by the use of history, often responding to what we easily recognize as Enlightenment history-writing. However, Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment were not simply two opposing camps. Rather, it was a question of emphasis. The arguments in the debates were related to the theological positions of the writers, which did much to determine their political and social stances. Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment debate was also a continuous debate in the Christian Church and the most fundamental texts were explicitly concerned with religion.

This shows us that it is very hard to draw a line between Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment ideas and attitudes, rendering it difficult to make a certain definition of the Enlightenment. In the matter of reception of the Enlightenment, it is necessary to look at those who oppose what we describe as Enlightenment to ask what kind of society shaped this thought and how it shaped the society. This becomes possible only by moving away from the traditional interpretation of the period, based upon a restricted number of famous writers. To understand the period, one must look

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<sup>4</sup> For a recent comprehensive analysis of the nature of Counter-Enlightenment see, Garrard Graeme, *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth Century to the present* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 24. and for the interpretations upon philosophical issues and authors see also the author's *The Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Mentor, 1956).

at the social context of the ideas, in terms of how these ideas were received, used and responded to.<sup>6</sup> This produces the necessity to give a wider recognition to the lesser-known or forgotten authors in the debates, whose ideas were accessible in the period.

Thomas M’Crie is one of those lesser-known authors in historical record. He was a renowned writer in his time although he is hardly well-known today. He was not an Enlightenment figure in a conventional sense. He wrote his works in the early nineteenth century in the post-Enlightenment period, but he cannot be left out the Enlightenment debate, because he was a recipient of Enlightenment ideas.

Scottish Enlightenment was a period of intellectual activity, which continued up from the 1740s to the late eighteenth century. Scottish Enlightenment figures contributed to the intellectual history in the fields like history, moral philosophy and political economy. They discussed and communicated their ideas with similar concepts like progress, civil liberty, civil society, private judgement, stadialism, public good, reason and rational inquiry. Many of the great names of the Scottish Enlightenment were deeply committed Christians and ministers of the Kirk. In the political and religious spheres, the debates over Enlightenment thought took place in the Church as well as the university (a part, after all, of the Kirk) and in other social institutions.<sup>7</sup> The Moderates had been in a predominant position in the Church and their activity was the chief means of disseminating Enlightenment ideas. However, the opposition to the Moderate party had increased both by the work of the Popular or Evangelical party in the Church of Scotland and by the work of dissenting groups

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Darnton, “In Search of the Enlightenment: Recent Attempts to Create a Social History of Ideas” *Journal of Modern History* 43 (1971): 113–132. and also for a recent examination of the reception of the Enlightenment in its wider social context look, Dorinda Outram, *Panorama of the Enlightenment* (London: Thames & Hodson, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> David Daiches, “The Scottish Enlightenment” in *The Scottish Enlightenment 1730-1790: A Hotbed of Genius* (eds.) David Daiches, Peter Jones and Jean Jones (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 1987), 13. and also for an understanding of the relationship of the Enlightenment to Church and University, see, Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1985).

outside the Established Church, in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment debate in religious circles centred on the conflict between the Moderates and the Evangelicals. The rise of the Evangelicals also represented the consolidation of the post-Enlightenment conservatism and reaction to the revolutionary politics of the period.<sup>8</sup> These religious discussions centred on the church-state relations and reached a peak in the first half of the nineteenth century, resulting in a new schism with the Disruption of 1843.

As a dissenting Presbyterian minister, Thomas M'Crie's purpose was to reply to Scottish Enlightenment historiography relating to the Scottish Reformation past, which was shaped by the religious and political struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His works may be described as a product of the Counter-Enlightenment continuing to develop in the religious debates of the time. In a way similar to other examples of opposition to Enlightenment ideas, he attacked them with the notion that they undermined the religious and thus social and political heritage of Scottish society. While mounting this criticism of the Enlightenment historiography, M'Crie used the concepts and language of the period. The progressive idea of Scottish Enlightenment and the care for conserving and restoring the inheritance of the Scottish Reformation past combined in M'Crie's mind. Thus, a kind of restorationist criticism of Enlightenment ideas was the major theme in his works.

M'Crie was born at Duns, the county town of Berwickshire in the Scottish Lowland region in 1772 and died in 1835.<sup>9</sup> He was a son of strictly religious father. Thomas M'Crie was nurtured in a circle of the Anti-Burgher Seceders, those who

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<sup>8</sup> David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, Routledge, 1989), 48–58.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas M'Crie the Younger, *Life of Thomas M'Crie* (Philadelphia: William S. The Young, 1842), 13.

rejected the Burgess Oath, which had been introduced as an anti-catholic measure in Scotland.<sup>10</sup> This contained a clause binding the swearer to profess the religion established by law in the burgh and the Anti-Burghers held the view that this was contrary to the Presbyterian principles upon which the Secession was formed.

The life of M'Crie was shaped by ecclesiastical controversy. He was a part of perhaps the most important discussion in Scotland since the Reformation about the relative roles of the state and the church in the government of the nation. In Scottish history, the Reformation represented a break with the Papacy. In the following process, the main debate was between Presbyterianism, a form of Calvinism, which evolved primarily before the Act of Union of 1707 and Episcopalianism holding a form of church governance, which was hierarchical in structure with the chief authority of the bishops. This was a political debate as well as the religious one.

The fear for the establishment and strength of the Episcopalianism in the state enforced the opposition of the Covenanters, extreme and radical Presbyterians of the seventeenth century. They held strictly to the principles of the Reformation and signed up the National Covenant of 1638. Their memory and heritage remained vital and strong in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries because the matter of the place and dominance of the Presbyterianism in Scotland had been always the core issue. The discussions were shaped around the questions about the role of the church in the society and whether the ministers were subordinate to lay authorities. This created the new schisms in the Church of Scotland by the appointment of ministers by lay patrons. The interference of civil courts with the Church decisions, particularly over the right to appointments of the ministers led to a number of groups

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Herron, *Kirk by Divine Right* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1985), 73.

seceding. This began with the Secession of 1733 and culminated in the Disruption of 1843.

M’Crie had a dissenting position in these debates and he was against the voluntary principle, which won considerable acceptance in Britain in the period following the French Revolution. Voluntaryism was a religious and political thought underlining the church’s dependence on the state as a reaction to it. M’Crie and his brethren opposed this tendency in Scotland and were strictly attached to the basic tenets of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the original standards of the Secession, although the majority of the Seceders were abandoning these principles. Voluntaryism was, for them, a quite unacceptable price to pay for the freedom of the Kirk. They sought a free Church and state bound and obedient to it. M’Crie and his other dissident friends formed a new congregation under the new name of the Constitutional Associate Presbytery in 1806.<sup>11</sup> M’Crie wrote works presenting his theological arguments on the ecclesiastical controversies of the period. However, he was more widely known by virtue of his historical works, which became the best-sellers in the first half of the nineteenth century Scotland.<sup>12</sup> Among the literary figures of early nineteenth century Scotland, he was surpassed in the public estimation only by Sir Walter Scott.

In the midst of the discussions related to church-state relations, M’Crie decided to search out the original principles of the Scottish Reformation and this became the main subject of his historical studies. While doing this, he directed himself to the important characters, in the history of the settlement of Protestantism in Scotland. Firstly, he started to write the *Life of John Knox* in 1807 and published

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Crichton, “A Memoir of Thomas M’Crie” in *Life of John Knox*, Thomas M’Crie ( London: Henry G. Born, 1847), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688–1843, The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1973), 213.

it in 1811. In 1813, he published a second edition of the work with some corrections and improvements. This was translated into French and Dutch. After the first edition, the University of Edinburgh honoured him with the degree of doctor of divinity, the first occasion on which the degree was given first to a dissenting minister.

M’Crie’s ideas about the Covenanters of seventeenth-century Scotland was seen to reflect popular sentiment when his polemic against great Scottish literary figure Walter Scott and his very negative view of the Covenanters was published in the first three numbers of the *Christian Instructor* for the year of 1817. In 1819, another biographical work, the *Life of Andrew Melville*, was published. It was not as popular as the *Life of John Knox*, but it was important because it was the sole comprehensive narrative of the life of Andrew Melville and it long remained a very valuable and well used work in depicting the political and religious atmosphere of the period.

In this thesis, the chief primary sources are the above-mentioned biographical works of Thomas M’Crie. In the first chapter, I try to present his methodological preoccupations, and the basic religious and political beliefs motivating him to write. The similarities and differences between M’Crie’s history-writing and the preceding historiography are discussed. In the second chapter, the perception of the Enlightenment concept of civil liberty by Thomas M’Crie is investigated. In M’Crie’s historical works, this concept, extensively developed in the Scottish Enlightenment, was much used to justify theocratic government in Scotland. How M’Crie used this concept against the Enlightenment historiography is significant in the context of discussion of reception of Enlightenment notions. In the third chapter, the question of national identity in M’Crie’s works has been considered. This was a significant issue in the Scottish thought of the period and new myths, shaped by

different political and religious positions, were created about the Scottish past. What Thomas M'Crie perceived was a national identity shaped by the Presbyterian religion, established by the Scottish Reformation. He constructed a direct relation between Scottish civil liberties, a gift, he held of the Reformation, and the identity of the Scottish nation and sharply criticised the Enlightenment writers, who wished a fuller incorporation of Scotland into a British identity.

The motivation behind this study is a wish to understand the historiographical characteristics of the early nineteenth century Scotland in the religious and political context of the time, by an interpretation of the written texts of a less-known Scottish history-writer. My research aims at investigating the outstanding themes in the works of Thomas M'Crie. This makes it important to consider why and how he developed the arguments in his works and how he treated the existing Enlightenment historiography dealing with the Scottish past. This will be advanced by offering a contextualisation of the writings of M'Crie- a consideration of the extent to which the political and religious affairs of the period influenced his work. The reception of the Enlightenment ideas —as we perceived it in the texts— by an early nineteenth century Scottish historian and divine will not only show the perception of these ideas by an individual but also will bring forward to the much neglected issue of the relationship between the Enlightenment and the Evangelical movement within and outside the Church of Scotland. Fundamentally, I hope that my understanding of how M'Crie interpreted the Scottish Reformation past and how he used and responded to the Enlightenment ideas will give a clearer idea about the historiographical, religious and political life and the mentality of the period.

## CHAPTER 2

### BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THOMAS M'CRIE'S HISTORIOGRAPHY

When compared to the quantity of similar studies covering the period from the sixteenth to late eighteenth century, early nineteenth-century Scottish historiography has been much ignored and neglected. However true Christopher Harvie's assertion that there are "several substantial investigations of the economic and social transformations"<sup>13</sup> of Scotland from the 1800s, such investigations with those in political and intellectual history have not been used to provide a comprehensive context for Scottish history-writing in the age of Counter-Revolution and Restoration.

There may be many reasons behind this lack of interest; yet the general neglect comes from a common opinion that Scottish history-writing and literary successes passed away after a long period of achievement by the Enlightenment philosophers. What is more, the preoccupation with Walter Scott among the researchers dealing with early nineteenth-century historiography has distorted the perceptions of the period. There seems to be an agreement that there were few figures who could be

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Harvie, "Industry Change and the State of Scotland" in *The History of Scottish Literature*, Vol.3 (eds.) Douglas Gifford and Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), 23.

compared to the great names of Scottish Enlightenment such as William Robertson, David Hume or Adam Smith. It is evident though that there were many reflections of conflicts and discussions about religious, political and social matters in the historiography of period from the Enlightenment to the separation of the Evangelicals from the Established Church of Scotland in the Disruption of 1843.

In this regard, the early nineteenth century provides historians with a much material for research on history-writing. Initially, it might be suggested that Scottish history-writing of the period could be settled into its historical context by considering the historiographical, intellectual and literary contributions of the figures from Walter Scott to John Galt, to speak of literary figures, and George Chalmers to Thomas M’Crie to speak of those commonly regarded as historical scholars. It may also be suggested that the main feature of early nineteenth-century Scottish historiography was religious and political convictions stimulated by Counter-Revolution and Restorationist politics. It is in this context that Thomas M’Crie’s historiography will be discussed and presented, with its some basic characteristics, in this chapter.

The existence of many currents in the contemporary Scottish mind needs to be taken into account while writing about the historiography of the time. We may turn firstly ecclesiastical politics. The ideals of the Moderates, the hitherto dominant group in the Church of Scotland tended to facilitate the incorporation of the Scots into a unified British identity. These were receding and the notions of the Evangelical or popular party, and of dissenting groups, which emphasized the Presbyterian identity of Scottish nation, were advancing. Religious-centred politics, agitation of which reached a climax in the Disruption of 1843, shaped historiography

significantly. In many literary products of the time, a controversial style developed.<sup>14</sup> Thomas M'Crie, as a divine and historian, cannot be understood apart from this context.

M'Crie was a significant personality, as a historian as well as in his role as a participant in the religious conflicts. His historical vision was permeated with radical Presbyterianism. To state briefly the general characteristics of his history-writing, M'Crie's attempt was to construct an assertive Presbyterian historiography calling for a return to the essential truths of the Scottish Reformation. He created a narrative of the political and religious events in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century in his *Life of John Knox* and *Life of Andrew Melville*, which were published in 1811 and 1819 respectively, as an instrument to convey his political and religious thought with an eye to concerns and conflicts of the period.

Adopting an aggressive style that attacked Scottish Enlightenment historians and thinkers like William Robertson and David Hume for their treatment of John Knox especially, he produced an apologetic for the two Reformation fathers in these works. M'Crie tried to restore the past to influence the religious and political affairs in Scotland taking up a defensive position. The restorationist content of his histories was elaborated with anti-Catholic and anti-Episcopalian discourse.

To speak of fundamental characteristics further, his combination of Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment views should be noted in his works. While he criticized the Enlightenment writers' interpretations of the Scottish Reformation, he could also use Scottish Enlightenment notion such as 'stadialism' in his works. While discussing the importance of Reformation principles, he suggested an identity of Scottish nation, which could be equated with Calvinist-Presbyterian

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Campbell, "Nineteenth Century Non Fictional Prose" in *Scottish Literature* (eds.) Gifford and Craig, 179.

historical assertions as a reaction to the idea, which merged Scotland in a British identity, visible in Enlightened historiography. He benefited from the concept of ‘civil liberty’ as expounded in the Enlightenment, but turned it against the Enlightenment writers, by depicting Knox and Melville as the representatives of libertarian Calvinist-Presbyterian principles. Thus, in M’Crie’s historiography, the Scottish nation, civil liberty and Presbyterianism become interchangeable in a Restorationist political discourse.

There is thus a convergence of Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment thought in his works, though this aspect of it has been mentioned in secondary literature only with very briefly. Conventional religious history-writing was revived in the early nineteenth century by the Evangelicals and generally it may be very difficult to detect its relationship to the Enlightenment.<sup>15</sup> However, noting his use of concepts like ‘stadialism’ and ‘civil liberty’ that he emphasised the legacy of Knox and to do so referred much to David Calderwood’s *History*, M’Crie might be depicted as an Enlightened successor of both Knox and Calderwood.<sup>16</sup> M’Crie’s historical methodology, the influence of Restorationist political discourse and his similarities and differences with Scottish Enlightenment figures require attention. Before turning to these matters, it is necessary to assess the secondary literature on M’Crie’s work.

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<sup>15</sup> David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and The Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 166.

<sup>16</sup> For an historical understanding of David Calderwood, see David George Mullan, *Episcopacy in Scotland: the History of an Idea, 1560-1638* (Edinburgh: J. Donald, 1986).

## 2.1 Secondary Literature on M’Crie

M’Crie’s historiography has not been comprehensively examined in any monograph although he was certainly a highly significant religious figure and historian of the period. His historical works have been lightly passed over in the secondary sources. In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, James Kirk gives an outline of Thomas M’Crie’s life, his religious and political stances and a chronological description of his works. He underlines that M’Crie’s historical scholarship “remained unsurpassed” until almost two centuries later.<sup>17</sup>

In *Life of Thomas M’Crie*, his son Thomas M’Crie the younger, eulogizes his father’s religious and scholarly accomplishments saying that “little justice has been done to the important topics and events connected with the life of his father.”<sup>18</sup> This biography gives us a detailed account of M’Crie’s life, notes his correspondence with the other important figures of the time, mentions how and why he wrote his works, and discusses his controversies. In doing so, it throws some light upon aspects of the debates of early nineteenth-century Scotland. It is the most important secondary source dealing with M’Crie and it is much referred to here. Other secondary literature is much dispersed, ambiguous and does not permit a good understanding of M’Crie’s historiography. A monographic study is required.

His two biographies of the Scottish Reformation fathers, John Knox and Andrew Melville have been appreciated as an “antiquarian examinations of the roots of Presbyterianism” and his history has been noted as receiving popular approval.<sup>19</sup> Bruce Lenman refers his works as the “single greatest achievement of ecclesiastical

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<sup>17</sup> James Kirk, “Thomas McCrie (1772-1835).” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press (2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17406> (accessed 2 Sept 2007)

<sup>18</sup> M’Crie the younger, *Life*, vii.

<sup>19</sup> John F. McCaffrey, *Scotland in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 18.

history”<sup>20</sup> in the early nineteenth century. Additionally, he places M’Crie as an ultra-conservative figure against Walter Scott. Further, Michael Lynch presents M’Crie as a figure, looking back to the basic assumptions of the Reformation to find solutions to the problems and conflicts of the time. He suggests that these works were not accidental when the religious and political schisms have been considered. According to Lynch, his histories were “a part of Counter-Enlightenment” developing in the religious debates of the century.<sup>21</sup>

Another Scottish historian T.M. Devine, in his book, *The Scottish Nation*, indicates that early nineteenth century was shaped by the idea of Scotland as a national entity and this motivated Scots’ interest to their past. In this respect, Presbyterian religious history started to attract the attention of the people. Devine concentrates on the rise of middle-class literacy and touches upon M’Crie’s works popularity as the best sellers.<sup>22</sup> These detections give many important hints about the interrelation of the perception of Scottish identity, Presbyterianism and popular appeal of the people to the evangelical revival and force the historian to examine these connections. Marinell Ash emphasizes “the self-identification of the Scottish churches with certain historical myths” before the Disruption and sees Thomas M’Crie’s histories as a breakthrough in Scottish historical writing although they include a sharp anti-catholic discourse.<sup>23</sup>

Colin Kidd has made the most detailed discussion of Thomas M’Crie’s historiography, centring on the concept of ‘civil liberty’. Kidd claims that a powerful form of Whig-Presbyterian historiography survived in Archibald Bruce and his pupil

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<sup>20</sup> Bruce Lenman, *Integration, Enlightenment, and Industrialisation: Scotland 1746-1832* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 147.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Pimlico, 1997 ), 400.

<sup>22</sup> T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700- 2000* (England: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1999), 292.

<sup>23</sup> Marinell Ash, *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Edinburgh: The Ramsay Head Press, 1980), 125.

Thomas M’Crie in the early nineteenth century. Kidd focuses on M’Crie’s equation of the Scottish Reformation with the rise of the civil liberty and his assault on Roman Catholicism. He also emphasises the apologetic tone of M’Crie’s history-writing. Additionally, he concentrates on M’Crie’s interpretation of George Buchanan’s resistance theory and says that he tried to revive Whig-Presbyterian ideology, not in the Buchananite tradition, but with reference to John Knox, as the leading symbol of Scottish civil liberties. Kidd in a short treatment, mentions many aspects of M’Crie’s historiography and concludes that M’Crie was unsuccessful in constructing a strong Presbyterian historiography capable embracing the whole Scottish nation, since the sectarian attitudes of the Evangelicals prevented this.<sup>24</sup> In this, Kidd touches upon the some significant points in Thomas M’Crie’s histories and also the influence of the Enlightenment culture and moral philosophy of the Enlightenment figures on the Evangelicals; but there is need to bring the two topics together and expand on the relationship.

Apart from these general considerations of M’Crie’s histories, secondary literature relates largely to his controversies with Walter Scott, after the publication of Scott’s *Old Mortality* in 1816. Thomas M’Crie’s three lengthy reviews in *Christian Instructor*, which were published in the following years as *A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters*, are frequently mentioned. M’Crie criticizes Scott’s depiction of the Covenanters and accuses him of “violating both truth and probability.” In his article on the Scottish Covenanting tradition, Edward Cowan notes this as a revival of this tradition and declares M’Crie as a reactionary figure.<sup>25</sup> M’Crie criticized Scott by saying that the author “has the imagination and feeling of

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<sup>24</sup> Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 201-202.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Cowan, “The Covenanting Tradition in Scottish History” in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past* (eds.) Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 139.

a poet, but he is deficient in the judgement and discriminating taste of the historian”<sup>26</sup> and recorded his distress at the disrespectful description of the Covenanters. Historical and literary studies which mention the controversy tend to see M’Crie only as a marginal figure in Scottish literary-writing and are little interested in expanding on his views, even on the Covenanters.

M’Crie’s place in Scottish historiography has been less commented on than his place in the history of the schisms among the Presbyterians in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. M’Crie is mentioned in Scottish church history as an important contributor to the debate about the revision of the Westminster Confession with respect to the civil magistrate and church-state relations.<sup>27</sup> Such sources afford much assistance to the understanding of M’Crie as a historian.

But in the last years, a few remarkable things have been written about Thomas M’Crie even if they mention some aspects of his historiography in a confined sphere. But, Ann Rigby, in her study about the influence of Romantic account of the past in the historical writing, underlines an interesting side of M’Crie’s history-writing. She says that M’Crie believed that “novels were likely to reach a much longer ignorant and unwearied audience than a work of sober history.”<sup>28</sup> There was a sharp distinction for M’Crie between history and other forms of writing. He wrote history to communicate his religious and political arguments. This determination can be inferred from Rigby’s reference to M’Crie and the problem about his perception of history motivates the question of how he wrote his history as style and form and what

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<sup>26</sup> Edward Cowan and Douglas Gifford, “Introduction: Adopting and Adapting the Polar Twins” in *The Polar Twins* (eds.) Edward Cowan and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1999), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Pearson M’ Adam Muir, *Church of Scotland: A Sketch of its History* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2005), 169.

<sup>28</sup> Ann Rigby, *Imperfect Histories: Elusive Past and Romantic Historicism* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2001), 47.

kind of a methodology he made use of in his works, further what he aimed at writing history.

## **2.2 A Union of Antiquarianism and History**

M’Crie’s historiography has two dimensions. His religious and political convictions first lay at the heart of his history-writing and require attention. Then, too attention should be paid to the fact that his historiography was shaped by the techniques and style of the historical scholarship of the early nineteenth century. Early nineteenth century history-writing is a complicated and confusing phenomenon because the period was one of transition from an understanding in which history had been dominantly characterised as a serious entertainment, having a moral and instructive purpose to an understanding which led to a marriage of antiquarianism and history. This showed itself especially in the second half of the nineteenth century as the professionalisation of history took place in the academic world. In the early nineteenth century, historical scholarship did not have the status of distinct academic area. Rather; it was a part of literary activity.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, M’Crie’s scholarly studies were a reflection of the history-writing in the period. True, there is antiquarian erudition present; but also his history had moral and instructive priorities in the old tradition of serious entertainment. We may expand somewhat on some distinctive characteristics of history-writing before and after the period in which M’Crie lived.

In the early modern period, history became one of the most powerful and prominent way of propagating religious truth and giving moral instruction and was regarded as one of the most important fields of literary endeavour. This moral

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<sup>29</sup> Linda Orr, “The Revenge of Literature: A History of History.” *New Literary History* 18 (1986): 1-22.

instruction was often political. In addition to what was generally called history, the narration of political events in a cause-effect relationship, historical scholarship was found in law and divinity and in the collection and explanation of the antiquities. Antiquarianism began with the collection of the rarities, relics, archaeological and material evidence, often historical primary sources. As Mark Selber Phillips has indicated, after the Reformation, antiquarian study acquired a form to respond to the religious controversies of the age, but it remained distinct from the narrative tradition of the historical scholarship.<sup>30</sup> Antiquarian erudition remained in this position at least until the attempts to link the narrative and antiquarian traditions in the late eighteenth century.

In the Scottish case, attachment to the documentary evidence for facts became crucial with John Knox and his successors like David Calderwood and James Kirkton. Calvinists had an opinion that “a peculiar importance” attached to the spread of an accurate historical narrative. They believed that history was a special formulation of the Divine Word. History as a form of disseminating revealed truth was to be put into practice by evidence and testimony rather than narrative and interpolation.<sup>31</sup> However, documentary research was not a determinant factor in composing history, although there were reflections of this in the books of some writers.

There was continuity in the nature of history-writing and reading from the Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century which witnessed the beginning of a movement from history as an amusement and popular activity to something

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<sup>30</sup> Mark Selber Phillips, “Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Eighteenth Century.” *Journal of the History of the Ideas* 57 (1996): 297-316.

<sup>31</sup> Allan, *Virtue*, 53.

approaching modern academic historical scholarship.<sup>32</sup> Central to this was the increased desire for facts and documentary evidence, for such things as the declarations of statesmen and the reports and registers of the parliaments now required by both writers. They had been used earlier; but they were not strictly necessary to history. History was essentially a serious entertainment and reflected the religious and political thoughts of the historian. The basic concern of the historian was to construct a unity in his narrative, which could give the story a sense of wholeness. Frequently, God remained at the centre of the events directing and shaping history.<sup>33</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, many aspects of this general framework were to be seen in history-writing. The sharp distinctions between history and literature would be the products of the professionalisation of history in the second half of the century, with its application of the “rigorous methodological ground rules”, as academic historians sought a scientific perception, which excluded the literary merits of a historical work.<sup>34</sup> However, it is difficult to claim that early nineteenth century history-writing was shaped by this distinction between history and literature. The concept of a serious entertainment, with moral purpose was basic to history, as can be seen in M’Crie’s works although the union of antiquarianism and history was also evident there.

Thomas M’Crie published his *Life of John Knox* in 1811, and his *Life of Andrew Melville* in 1819. There were many reviews of his works in the Scottish periodicals of the time. An assessment of the *Life of John Knox* in one of the most

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<sup>32</sup> Nancy F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth Century England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977), 3-4.

<sup>33</sup> B.W. Young, “Religious History and the Eighteenth-Century Historian” *Historical Journal* 43 (2000): 849-868.

<sup>34</sup> Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore, “Apologias for the Nation-State in Western Europe since 1800” in *Writing National Histories* (eds.) Stefan Berger, Mark Danovan, Kevin Passmore (London: Routledge, 1999), 4.

influential British Whig magazines, *Edinburgh Review*, gives an idea about the understanding of history- writing and the taste of the time:

... a book which has afforded us more amusement and more instruction, than anything we ever read upon the subject; and which, independently of its theological merits, we do not hesitate to pronounce by for the best history that has appeared since the commencement of our critical career. It is extremely accurate, learned and concise, and at the same time, very full of spirit and animation exhibiting, as it appears to us, a rare union of the patient research and solid judgement, which characterise the more laborious class of the historians.<sup>35</sup>

M'Crie's work was appreciated by the other critics of the time in other journals. A general consensus of approval prevailed in these reviews although the Episcopalians were grieved by his attacks on the English Church; but the instructive and entertaining structure of his work was underlined. M'Crie's interpretations and judgements were accepted as contributing a successful piece of historical scholarship. His use of variety of the facts and his scholarly method was emphasized. He had made erudite research in the sources. The *Life of Andrew Melville* was discussed in similar way to *Life of John Knox*. Apart from the religious one about rigid attachment to the radical Presbyterianism, the most negative criticism was about his Scotticisms. According to one review, the *Life of John Knox* was deficient in "verbal elegance and purity."<sup>36</sup>

M'Crie thought it necessary to rescue the image of John Knox and Andrew Melville from the pejorative comments of Enlightenment thinkers, who were popular in his age. He held that their depictions were false and they should have been suppressed. Like the Enlightenment writers, M'Crie had a pre-eminently moral and instructive purpose, but expressed in an apologetic for the two Reformation fathers. The assaults made on the personalities of Knox and Melville were various, full of

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<sup>35</sup> Crichton, "Memoir", 16.

<sup>36</sup> M'Crie the younger, *Life*, 154.

many faults and “uncandid and exaggerated censures.”<sup>37</sup> It was thus very necessary to present the virtuous characters of the Reformers. In this sense, M’Crie represents an evolution in scholarship similar to that evidenced by George Chalmers, Scottish loyalist historian of the period, who claimed that it was necessary to rescue his subjects from the “doleful consequences of the Enlightenment historians.”<sup>38</sup>

To fulfil this purpose, M’Crie took on responding to Enlightenment figures like William Robertson and David Hume by placing some of the documentary facts “in a new and more just light and collecting others, which had been unknown until then.”<sup>39</sup> He employed many documentary sources such as the Parliamentary reports, records, General Assembly registers, letters, and memoirs and biographies as well as the history books written in earlier centuries. In addition to British sources, he used documentary evidence and historical literature from the Continent, which could throw light on the deeds of Knox and Melville, who had lived for many years abroad. M’Crie perceived a double set of opponents to be countered. In the *Life of Andrew Melville* he indicated that it was difficult to make an accurate and “impartial estimate” of the abilities and characters of the figures who played a role in the struggles of Scottish Reformation. Earlier studies had been under the influence of prejudiced views, deriving from their “tenderness or antipathies” towards the historical figures in the period they narrated.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, M’Crie believed that historians writing in the later period lost their impartiality by assessing these

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *Life of John Knox*, 5th edition (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1850), ix.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Cadoc Leighton, “George Chalmers and the Reformation: Writing Scottish History in the Age of Counter -Revolution and Restoration.” *Archivium Hibernicum* 59 (2005): 290-304.

<sup>39</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, p.vi.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *Life of Andrew Melville* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and His Sons, 1899), p.340.

characters according to the tastes and values of their own times, which were dissimilar to those in the previous centuries.<sup>41</sup>

M'Crie identified two chief problems about the historical, especially ecclesiastical studies. While one benefited from the ideas found in the contemporary historical records, one could also encounter many narrow-minded opinions, excessive praise of the figures spoken of by their friends, or the "hostility and misrepresentations of their adversaries."<sup>42</sup> Besides, the accounts of the public transactions by contemporaries distorted and complicated a clear interpretation, because of their confusing description of the events. The second problem was the ecclesiastical histories. M'Crie said that "if the civil history is a source of the record of wars and bloodshed, the pages of ecclesiastical history are too often filled with the accounts of theological contention"<sup>43</sup> and they represented the characters either as an aggressive or stubborn. In this sense, they created negative impression of men's morals and private manners.

M'Crie suggested two solutions to these problems in historical methodology. First of all, a close study on the facts would adjust and polish our prejudiced and excessively quick generalisations. Secondly, he preferred the information from private memoirs and from letters of the subject of biography to the arbitrary illustrations and explanations of later biographers and writers of secondary sources. As a biographer, he had suspicions about the works of his predecessors.<sup>44</sup>

M'Crie asserted that the facts ascertained from primary sources would help him to correct the mistakes and distortions in the depictions of the characters. As can be gathered, M'Crie held to general rules of objectivity with a view to giving the true

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 340.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 341.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 341.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 341.

description of the historical figures. This brought him to a historical scholarship, which combined antiquarianism by virtue of dependence on primary sources and history, although he distinguished himself from antiquarians, as well as the novelists, whom he scorned.<sup>45</sup> It is obvious that M’Crie was an historian, writing dominantly, a narrative history with a unity of story. While doing this, he used primary documentary material to repair the broken images of Knox and Melville. He thus benefited from history pragmatically in the communication of his own political and religious messages in the midst of the debates going on in early nineteenth century Scottish society.

### **2.3 Restoring the Past**

The nature of the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary politics shaped the historiographical content of M’Crie’s writings. If the documentary evidence revealing the truth about the past was one aspect of M’Crie’s history, restoring it was another. M’Crie believed that the preceding centuries were a determinant factor in the understanding of the existing religious and political situation of Scotland and Britain. The nature of much of political discussion in Scotland in M’Crie’s time can be described in terms of the restorationism. Restorationism was a pan-European phenomenon<sup>46</sup> and religion was the most important element in it.<sup>47</sup> In this discussion, the main debate was around the problem of preserving and restoring the legacy of the past in Scotland. The religious Debate about all aspects of religion and the present and future role of religion in society shaped much public discussion. It can be asserted that the sequence of debates up to the Disruption about church-state

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<sup>45</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, p.167.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Breunig, *The Age of Revolution and Reaction: 1789-1850*, 2nd edition (New York: Norton, 1977), 183.

<sup>47</sup> Franklin Ford, *Europe: 1770-1830* (London: Longman, 1989), 237.

relations was the core matter in Scottish public life and the Presbyterian heritage of the Scottish Reformation and of the Covenanters was taken as an appropriate guide by many for political thought and action.<sup>48</sup>

According to M’Crie the younger, it was “the controversy relating to the religious profession”<sup>49</sup> that mostly moved M’Crie to start to write his scholarly works. M’Crie wrote to one of his friends that “had it not been for ‘new light’, he would probably never have thought of writing”<sup>50</sup> his works. He believed that the new principles, which were imposed on the Presbyterian religion, began to threaten the principles of the Reformation laid down by the Reformation fathers. It was especially, the controversy about the church-state relations which motivated his studies.

Here we need to draw attention to some elements in these struggles. If the social and political disturbances brought about by the effects of the industrialisation are put aside, the most important issues in Scotland surfaced in the struggle between the Moderates and the Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland. This resulted in the Disruption of 1843 that split in the Established Church, which led to the creation of the Free Church following a separation of a large minority of the ministers.<sup>51</sup> The roots of this conflict lay in the eighteenth century. A discussion of the conflict between the Moderates and the Evangelicals might look back to debate over the Patronage Act of 1712, giving the right of appointment of the ministers to lay patrons. As a consequence of this struggle, the first Secession emerged with “the

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<sup>48</sup> Cadoc Leighton, “George Chalmers”: 290-304.

<sup>49</sup> M’Crie the younger, *Life*, 146.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 146-147.

<sup>51</sup> Stewart J. Brown, “The Ten Years’ Conflict and the Disruption of 1843” in *Scotland in the Age of Disruption* (eds.) Stewart J. Brown and Michael Fry (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 1.

defection of four ministers in 1733 to form the Secession Church.”<sup>52</sup> In 1747, the Seceders had separated from each other over the problem of Burgess Oath, directed against Catholics, and used in some of the royal burghs. This “contained a clause, binding the swearer to profess the religion by law established”<sup>53</sup>, and to defend it. The group condemning this oath took the name of Anti- Burghers.

In the early nineteenth century, the debate was concerned about the character of Presbyterianism itself. The ‘New Light’ controversy caused schisms in both the established and dissenting churches. In this conflict, the ‘Old Lights’ emphasized the religious character of the society, taking the seventeenth-Covenanters to provide their essential principles, while the ‘New Lights’ took a more individualistic and Evangelical view of religion.<sup>54</sup> This controversy clearly raised problems in church-state relations and encouraged examination of the roots of Presbyterianism in the Scottish Reformation.

Thomas M’Crie took a part of this discussion because he was an anti-Burgher dissenting minister. The question related to position of the civil magistrate in matters of religion that had ignited the Secession. The French Revolution caused profound alarm and brought debate about defending and maintaining the British Constitution. The anxiety of the some Secession ministers like M’Crie was chiefly about a declaration of an attachment to the British Constitution. This would, they held, mean an acceptance of the English episcopal hierarchy, and approval of spiritual supremacy of the sovereign.<sup>55</sup> In his *Life of John Knox* M’Crie maintained this view.

The alarm produced by that revolution which of late has shaken the thrones of so many of the princes of Europe, has greatly increased this party; and with the view of preserving the present constitution of Britain, principles have been

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<sup>52</sup> Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>53</sup> Crichton, “Memoir,” 5.

<sup>54</sup> Lynch, *Scotland*, 400.

<sup>55</sup> Crichton, “Memoir”, 6-8.

widely disseminated, which, if they had been generally received in the sixteenth century, would have perpetuated the reign of Popery and arbitrary power in Scotland.<sup>56</sup>

The superiority of the civil magistrate in religious matters and the strict separation of church and state were the crucial problems. M'Crie was certainly against voluntarism, the view that the church was in no way to depend on the state and constituted a voluntary institution. He believed that the church and state had to act in cooperation by supporting each other requiring the state to serve the cause of Presbyterianism. He was against an absolute monarchy, which might exercise religious authority, and he presented this view against the supporters of this view of the British monarchy in his *Life of Andrew Melville*, by referring the words of Melville in his interview with James VI.

I must tell you, there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the head of this commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member. Sir, those whom Christ has called and commanded to watch over his church, have power and authority from him to govern his spiritual kingdom both jointly and severally; the which no Christian king or prince should control and discharge, but fortify and assist; otherwise they are not faithful subjects of Christ and members of the church.<sup>57</sup>

It is evident that M'Crie's history-writing was a response to the main religious conflicts of his period. M'Crie took Knox's and Melville's thought as a guide to be followed in dealing with the issues of his time and attempted to revive their legacy with a zealously Presbyterian historiography. He was a restorationist going back to the principles of the Reformation. His historiography constructed a mythology, a timeless narrative guide to action for the Presbyterian past. His writings have Counter-Enlightenment elements in that he tried to defend the memory of Knox and Melville against Enlightenment writers. However, as indicated above, there is an

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<sup>56</sup> M'Crie, *Knox*, 355.

<sup>57</sup> M'Crie, *Melville*, 181.

Enlightenment influence, particularly the concept of 'stadialism' and progress, on his historiography, which should be noted.

#### **2.4 Enlightenment and M'Crie**

In his two biographical works, M'Crie inevitably displays ideas and concepts discussed in his period. However much he reacted against Enlightenment thinkers' portrayals of the Reformation figures as violent and tyrannical, there are certain notions similar to those of the Enlightenment writers upheld in his writings. In this sense, despite his aggressive and insulting criticisms of Enlightenment thinkers, it is very hard to isolate his thought from at least some elements of the Scottish Enlightenment. In particular, stadialism, as a new method of social analysis, points to something of an enlightened identity for M'Crie.

The Enlightenment was a movement of immense diversity, almost impossible to describe, despite the fact that diverse ideas were interrelated and there were convergences on some basic concepts. Further, it is impossible to draw sharp lines between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment thought. Historical study particularly in recent years has changed the traditional view of the anti-clerical European Enlightenment. Religion, it is emphasized, penetrated Enlightenment, and Enlightenment religion.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the fact that M'Crie was a figure of the early nineteenth century, a period of reaction to the Enlightenment, and had Counter-Enlightenment ideas, he benefited from stadialist approach of the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. A concern and preoccupations of those writers with social change and the progress of mankind from rudeness to refinement produced stadialism, in this developed form, a new

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander Brodie, (ed.) *The Scottish Enlightenment: An Anthology* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), 18.

concept to analyse societies.<sup>59</sup> The stadialists like Adam Ferguson perceived an evolution of mankind from a state of savagery to a modern social order by progress through defined stages of social, economic and cultural development.<sup>60</sup> History was to be explained with the concepts of progress and change.

In his histories, M'Crie frequently provides indication of his enlightened identity. His arguments, for example, were not infrequently, whatever their purpose, aided by Enlightenment rhetoric. While speaking of Episcopalianism, for example, he described the doctrine of absolute necessity at ordination by the hands of bishops as "a doctrine which has been revived in present enlightened age"<sup>61</sup> but illiberal and contrary to the libertarian atmosphere of the period.

He looked too to the stages of the past for apologies about Knox and Melville. M'Crie pointed out that the political doctrines of the Reformation period were shaped by the spirit of the age, in a society which had been "rude and unsettled"<sup>62</sup> when compared to his own time. M'Crie used a similar progressive and temporally comparative approach when speaking about the emergence of the Reformation in Scotland. Stadialism is evident too, as in so many writers of the age, in his distinctions between Highlanders and Lowlanders.<sup>63</sup> The Highlanders were regarded as inferior and barbarous people in M'Crie's history and there was a little sign of the increasing romantic Highlandism of the period. M'Crie expressed this traditional view against the Highlanders in the *Life of Andrew Melville* and he wrote about the Highlanders of the seventeenth century as living in state of complete barbarism,<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Alan Swingewood, "Origins of Sociology: The Case of the Scottish Enlightenment." *British Journal of Sociology* 21 (1970): 164-180.

<sup>60</sup> H.M. Hopfl, "From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment" *Journal of British Studies* 17 (1978): 19-40.

<sup>61</sup> M'Crie, *Knox*, 34.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

<sup>63</sup> Colin Kidd, "Gaelic Antiquity and National Identity in Enlightenment Ireland and Scotland." *English Historical Review* 109 (1994): 1197-1214.

<sup>64</sup> M'Crie, *Melville*, 233.

still to be brought to civilisation. M’Crie used stadialism to serve Presbyterian apologetic. In his negative view, the Highlanders, in the seventeenth century more inclined to Catholicism and episcopacy, are denigrated to emphasize the civility of the Presbyterian Lowlanders. This is a stadialism used to serve sectarian argumentation.

However, he much made use of the concepts of Scottish Enlightenment thought such as progress, barbarity, reason and rational inquiry, Providence as a factor in all the mundanely affairs played a great role in the historical events. M’Crie “inherited a Presbyterian faith in the theological utility of history, and the need to investigate the past in order to understanding the workings of Providence.”<sup>65</sup> Providence acts through complex chains of secondary causes through stadial progress of mankind from rudeness to refinement.<sup>66</sup> It was interpreted as a progressive instrument in history, which had always a transformation further from an historical age to another one. According to M’Crie, the Renaissance period, which had revived the study of the ancient sources, stimulated the Reformation in Europe. In M’Crie’s historiography, the Reformation symbolized, by God’s Providence, an improvement and evolution in the society as a means of surviving from the superstition and a transition to the rational enquiry and as a triumph of “truth over error.”<sup>67</sup> In this respect, there were many similarities of his thought about the relationship between progress and Providence to that of Moderate minister and Enlightenment historian, William Robertson.

Robertson believed that the Divine Word had only been revealed when the world was ready to take it and the Providence would act in a gradual and progressive

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<sup>65</sup> Karen O’Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 123.

<sup>66</sup> Colin Kidd, “Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History.” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55 (2004): 502-519.

<sup>67</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 34.

way in accordance with the world could understand it. For Robertson, Reformation was a time that the people of the period were prepared to take the Word of God because they were more civilized than the people of the earlier times.<sup>68</sup> In M’Crie’s historiography, similar to that of Robertson, Providence was the Divine intervention designing all human actions. According to him, Divine Providence displayed wisdom according to the circumstances of the age and in this sense, the talented people of one age like John Knox could not be suitable for another age.

In this regard, the theory of utmost change in the social affairs takes place in M’Crie’s historiography by the help of Divine Providence. While he identified the backwardness of the earlier times, M’Crie focused on the innovations and developments in British society. He praised “the organ of free press, influence of the public opinion”<sup>69</sup>, which were introduced into British Constitution, as the symbols of a transition and evolution from unrefined to refined one. It is obvious that M’Crie was combining his restorationist views with progressive elements. For M’Crie, the progress to a more civilised society was an act of Providence. According to him, people had to be grateful to Divine Providence for the Reformation from Popery, which had enlightened them and they were indebted to Knox and his successors, who had contributed to the overthrow of the ignorance and superstition.<sup>70</sup> Thus, while he constructed a historiography attempting to restore the deeds of the leading figures of the past as a light for present, he also believed in a progress by Providence for a more developed society. He thought that in the present Enlightened age, which was

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<sup>68</sup> Nicholas Philipson, “Providence and Progress: An introduction to the historical thought of William Robertson” in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (ed.) Stewart J. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 70.

<sup>69</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 189

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

contrary to the sixteenth century, there were many progressive principles of political liberty, which were threatened by the claims of Episcopalian supremacy.<sup>71</sup>

However, if the progress of the society from the unsettled to a civilised one has been considered, there emerges a problem about whether John Knox and Andrew Melville were backward when they were compared to the people of M’Crie’s time. M’Crie attempted to solve this problem by historicism. M’Crie used this concept in his works for apologetic purposes to counter the assaults on the Reformation Fathers. He thought that Knox lived “in a state of society very different from”<sup>72</sup> the writers criticising him and he was to be evaluated in the context of his time. In this sense, Knox’s thoughts and deeds were a breakthrough in the Scottish Reformation history. M’Crie thought that the truth remained essential in the process of history but the truth has been received by the people of different times in different ways in conformity with the changes in the manners of the society. John Knox and Andrew Melville were the practitioners of this unchanging truth in their own societies which had been backward when compared to the society in which M’Crie lived. M’Crie claimed to correct “the prejudices against the characters and proceedings” of the Knox and Melville, which were “now far more general than they formerly were among those who still profess to adhere to their doctrine and system of church government.”<sup>73</sup> While he was attempting to defend the Reformation Fathers, he was attacking the Enlightenment writers with a Counter-Enlightenment discourse.

According to him,” there were at that time a class of writers trying to blast the fairest and unblemished character” by the numerous slaves of prejudice and crudelity.”<sup>74</sup> In In M’Crie’s opinion, there were two types of hostility emerging in

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>72</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 361

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 350

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 348.

that period. One face of the prejudiced presumption was deriving from “the increase of infidelity and indifference to religion in modern times.”<sup>75</sup> In his *Life of John Knox*, David Hume was illustrated as an example for this sort of prejudice. Hume by “regarding the various systems of religious belief and worship as distinguished from one another merely by different shades of falsehood and superstition”<sup>76</sup> showed his “prejudiced and sceptical opinions” in his *History of England* and he was speaking “with great contempt of the Protestants than of the Roman Catholics, and treated the Scottish Protestants with great severity than the English reformers.”<sup>77</sup>

Another target for M’Crie was Dr. William Robertson. M’Crie used relatively a light language against Robertson when compared to his criticism about Hume. This was possibly because of the religious identity of Robertson, as a moderate minister. While assessing Robertson’s comments about Mary Queen of Scots, he indicated that nobody, acquainted with his writings, could “accuse him of being actuated by such improper motives” like those of David Hume. He wrote his displeasure and claimed that Robertson was “misled by the temptation of making Mary the heroine of his story.”<sup>78</sup> M’Crie thought that Enlightenment thinkers were under the influence of an inaccurate picture of the Scottish Reformation. They were “impressed with a high idea of illumination of the present age and imperfectly acquainted with the enormity and extent of the corrupt system of religion”<sup>79</sup> in the Scottish Reformation period. For this reason, M’Crie believed that the values of Presbyterianism were to be conserved in this rapidly changing society. John Knox was to be introduced to people in a true way by necessary examinations and Melville’s function as the constructor of the nation’s civil liberties had to be presented.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 350

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 353-354.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 354.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 354-355.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 357.

In the light of the discussions made above about the general characteristics of M'Crie's historiography, it can be asserted that M'Crie's history-writing was a brilliant example of scholarship, which was enriched by documentary evidence. M'Crie's essential motive for writing the biographies of the Reformation fathers was mainly the preservation and restoration of the Presbyterian ideals. This was a core issue in an age threatening the Presbyterian values. Although M'Crie constructed them for an assertive Presbyterian historiography as a representative of evangelical revival of the early nineteenth century, his histories were reactionary and defensive. It seems that the biographies, in a respect, were a continuum of the apologetic eighteenth century Presbyterian histories. Besides, they had some Enlightenment notions despite the fact that they were Counter-Enlightenment products. M'Crie's histories surely contributed to a historical mythology, which could be used as a political instrument for his main religious principles. In this regard, they were designed to be a guide for the present state of the affairs in Scotland. It can be said according to M'Crie, the conservation of Reformation principles would be the guarantee for the nation's identity and civil liberties because these three concepts were synonymous. In this sense, in the next two chapters, these two concepts; the discussion of the civil liberty and the construction of Scottish identity in M'Crie's history will be examined in a detailed way.

## CHAPTER 3

### THOMAS M'CRIE AND THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL LIBERTY

One of the subjects, which concerns the historian studying Scottish history, is the role of religion, especially Presbyterianism in shaping a “distinctive civil society and civil consciousness in Scotland since 1707.”<sup>80</sup> M’Crie’s works give us very rich and valuable material for debate about this with reference to the early nineteenth century. He frequently used the notion of civil liberty and civil society in his books. M’Crie continuously underlined the place and influence of the Reformation in the maintenance of civil liberties in Scotland. This chapter aims at showing the use of this concept, which preoccupied the minds of Enlightenment writers, by M’Crie, for Counter- Enlightenment purposes in the sense that he defended the essential beliefs and the role of the Reformation in constructing a civil society on the basis of the civil liberties.

As J.G.A. Pocock stated, the desire for a reduction of “the power of the churches or congregations to disturb the peace of civil society” was fundamental to the Enlightenment.<sup>81</sup> A basic dispute was shaped around the development of civil

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<sup>80</sup> Brown, *Religion*, 177.

<sup>81</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764* Vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 7.

liberty and civil society perceived as threatened by religious disruption.<sup>82</sup> In Scottish historiography in the period, this discussion appeared as a defense of or attack on Presbyterianism as the civil religion of Scotland. Thus, the Scottish past constituted part of the debate about Scottish civil liberties.

It is well-known that one of the greatest contributions of the Scottish Enlightenment history-writing was the development of stadialism, according to which human society had passed through a sequence of economic stages in a progress as hunting, pasture, agriculture and commerce. By using this theoretical framework, Scottish Enlightenment historians tried to describe the development of human society from savagery to the civil society.<sup>83</sup> Enlightenment historiography had a confidence in that contemporary civil society with increased liberties, which allowed life in a world without ecclesiastical disturbance or domination. Such writers such as Adam Ferguson, David Hume and William Robertson held this optimistic and progressive notion.

These writers were struck by the study of progress, which was manifested in the several stages of history, each relate to a specific mode of subsistence. Their investigation was motivated not merely by a concern with how society had passed through its stages to reach to the present. It also sprang from a wish to explain the patterns of this development, so as to prevent any interruption, brought about by mismanagement by individuals or government.<sup>84</sup>

The shared idea among these writers was approval of the incorporation of Scotland with England into an enlightened commercial society after the Union of 1707. In history-writing, this resulted in an apologetic language about Scottish past,

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<sup>82</sup> Adam B. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 21-40.

<sup>83</sup> Anand C. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 96-97

<sup>84</sup> Özlem Çaykent, *The History of John Galt: Past and Present in the Wake of the Enlightenment* (Bilkent University, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, 2003), 22.

especially the Scottish Reformation. The Moderate, William Robertson, emphasized that the post-Union Anglicisation of Scottish life had made a major contribution to Scotland's civil liberties. He ignored the traditionally accepted direct connection between the main principles of the Reformation and those of political liberty in early modern Scotland.<sup>85</sup> He also asserted that the founding fathers of the Scottish Reformation, such as John Knox and George Buchanan, had been rather bloodthirsty and Melvillian thought about church-state relations was an approximation of papalism.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, in the writings of another Enlightenment figure, Adam Ferguson, there was an optimistic vision about the new times, which started to emerge with commercial society and he had a deep concern for the social unity of the community.<sup>87</sup> It was very clear to those writers that any interruption of the progressive course had to be avoided.

However, it was not merely the Moderates, the dominant group in the Established Church, who emphasized the notions of civil society and civil liberty; or merely the secular intellectuals of the time. The political climate of the period was shaped by denominational politics and the religious groups gave the discussions a particular direction.<sup>88</sup> Those religious groups shared a view about the link between the civil and religious liberties.<sup>89</sup> The Evangelical party of the period was attached to Calvinist and Presbyterian principles and the Evangelicals believed that the founding

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<sup>85</sup> Kidd, *Subverting*, 192.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 195-197.

<sup>87</sup> Lynch, *Scotland*, 349.

<sup>88</sup> J.C.D. Clark shows how law and religion were profoundly related and how rival concepts of liberty were expressed in the conflicts. See his *The Language of Liberty 1660-1832: Political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>89</sup> Ned Landsman, "The Legacy of British Union for the North American Colonies: provincial elites and the problem of Imperial Union" in *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the British Union of 1707* (ed.) John Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 313

fathers of the Reformation had many things to say about the civil liberties and the functioning of civil society.<sup>90</sup>

M’Crie was a leading figure of the dissenting body of Constitutional Associate Presbytery, which separated from the Secession Church and he presented his own strict Calvinist understanding of civil liberties and civil society. In Thomas M’Crie’s works, the interpretations of the Moderates and secular writers of the Scottish past, particularly of the Scottish Reformation, were rejected precisely in discussion of the concept of civil liberty.

Thomas M’Crie tried apologetically to counter the views of the Enlightenment writers about the development of the civil liberties in Scotland. He employed the concept of civil liberty for a completely different purpose. In his view, the Reformed religion of Scotland, civil liberties and the national values of Scotland were interconnected. In the preface to the *Life of Andrew Melville*, he indicated this view by saying that “the dangers to which the reformed religion and liberties of the nation were exposed”<sup>91</sup> during the early administration of James VI, and the defeat of his policies after a long and bitter struggle, were highly important events, which influenced the future course of Scotland and Britain. He also complained about the attacks on the Scottish Reformation and its great characters, coming from all sides under the guise of discussion of civil liberty and liberty from the supersituation in the introduction part to the *Life of John Knox*.<sup>92</sup>

In his biographical works, M’Crie employed the concept of civil liberty in three ways. Firstly, he made a connection between civil liberties and the matter of national identity, which will be dealt in the following chapter. However, it should be noted that M’Crie’s emphasis on the limits of the sovereignty of the ruling body and

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<sup>90</sup> Rosalind Mitchison, *A History of Scotland*, 2nd edition. (London: Methuen, 1982), 382.

<sup>91</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, vii.

<sup>92</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, ix.

resistance to the abuses of the rulers, in the context of the discussion civil liberties constitute a dominant theme which is discussed in this chapter.

Secondly, M'Crie read the Scottish Reformation as the starting point for the development of civil liberties and defended it as the guarantee and the security of the nation. The threats to the civil and religious liberty were the Church of England and Catholicism. In M'Crie's thought, the Reformation process and the establishment of Presbyterianism were pre-eminent events in Scottish history providing a true understanding of civil and religious liberties. The civil and religious liberties had to be seen as synonymous. Similar to the English conservative figure Edmund Burke who thought that the religion was the source of civil liberties, M'Crie believed in Calvinist and Presbyterian values as the basis of liberterian views. Thirdly, in M'Crie's historiography, there was a narrative, which showed Knox and Melville as the representatives of Scottish civil liberties against despotism, equated with Catholicism and Episcopalianism.

In his biographical studies, he decidedly turned Reformation history into a history of the gaining of civil liberties. In doing so, he settled Knox and Melville at the centre of the stage. M'Crie's purpose was to argue that it was not Presbyterianism that threatened disruption of civil society or Scottish liberties. The real threat to the civil liberties of the Scottish nation came from ignoring the Reformation's principles as the origin of the liberty. This was crucial for M'Crie because the dismissal of the Reformation principles, which brought its liberties to the nation, could result in the loss of national independence. This acquaintance with the history of the Reformation was the bulwark of present liberty.

### 3.1 The Reformation as the origin of civil liberties

M’Crie’s assessment of the role of the Reformation in the development of the Scottish civil liberties contradicts the Scottish Enlightenment writers, inclined to regard that period of the Scottish past as a hindrance to the establishment of civil society and a check on the progress of society from barbarism to politeness. M’Crie made this point explicitly in his works by speaking of William Robertson and David Hume. Against Robertson, who ignored the Scottish Reformation as a real part of the history of liberty, from the beginning to the end of his works, M’Crie narrated the events, of the Reformation period as the foundation of present civil liberty.

Thus, the Reformation was not evaluated solely as a religious change affecting the lives of people. It was also evaluated as a heritage, which could provide a guide in the problems and discussions raised by the religious and political events of the time. There were many lessons, which might be drawn from the Reformation period to instruct in the true meaning of the civil liberties: the Scottish Reformation’s history was an arsenal to counter attacks on Presbyterian values and the founding fathers.

M’Crie asserted that the Reformation exerted its impact in every region of Europe. It influenced minds and consciences and encouraged, directly or distantly, free thinking. It awakened the human mind from sluggishness and the deep sleep of the Middle Ages.<sup>93</sup> It was a great turning point in Scottish history, diffusing the idea of civil liberty. The essentials of the Reformation activated men, by relieving the chains of the unquestioning and doubtful faith. It also motivated people to use their capacity to search for truth. Controversies could now be decided by appealing to the Scripture and the common sense of people.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 213.

Since it was the principles of the Reformation that taught people what the liberty meant, it was impossible to make a distinction between ecclesiastical and civil liberties. Religious notions had given their colour and shape to the understanding of civil liberties. M’Crie drew a general picture of the period before the Reformation and attempted to present the liberterian effects of the religious change in the sixteenth century. He suggested that “debased by ignorance and fettered by superstition, the minds of men were prepared to acquiesce without examination in the claims of authority, and tamely to submit to every yoke.”<sup>95</sup> During the Middle Ages, the spirit of the prevailing system of religion had included many elements adverse to the liberty. Popery sought installing a “spiritual despotism” of the ecclesiastics. For this reason, it fastened the shackles of political subjection on the people.<sup>96</sup>

M’Crie held that Popery endowed secular rulers with power and absolute authority over their subjects since it needed their support to establish its spiritual superiority. He pointed out that, “although the sovereign pontiffs claimed, and on different occasions exercised, the power of dethroning the kings, and absolving subjects from their allegiance”, if such an enterprise had come from the people, this would have been condemned by Popery as a crime, which deserved a severe punishment.<sup>97</sup>

People started to perceive the notion of civil liberty through the Presbyterian ideals of the Scottish Reformation, in its broad sense. Then, Scottish nation came to understand that religious and civil liberties could be achieved through the struggle against the despotism and oppression of the rulers. The acquisition of the liberty was not an individual or factional issue. It was directly related to the salvation and

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 183-184.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 184.

freedom of the society. M’Crie interpreted the Reformation process as an increase of consciousness relating to civil liberty on the mass of the people. The Reformation period, in this context, offered many contrasts to the barbarism of the previous centuries.

In M’Crie’s works, society, which had been shaped by the Reformation ideals, was anachronistically perceived as holding the values of his own time. To some extent he accepted that “the revival of learning, by unfolding the principles of legislation and modes of government in the republics of ancient Greece and Rome, gradually led to more liberal notions;”<sup>98</sup> but these had been restricted to a few examples and had had no direct effects on the society. According to M’Crie, in the years preceding Reformation, there had not been a sign of any thought, which would have transformed the society as a whole. The thoughts disseminated by philosophy and literature had lacked strength because most of these intellectual ventures had remained limited individual enterprises. The learned were generally “proud of their own superior illumination;” they had been “too indifferent and too timid to attempt the improvement of the multitude.”<sup>99</sup> However, with the Reformation, the notion of liberty had openly been brought up and the ideals of the Reformation had started to be employed widely in public welfare.

Corresponding to his understanding of liberty, M’Crie believed in the identification of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny. It was only possible for people to enjoy religious freedom if they succeeded in emancipating themselves from civil tyranny; and from arguments, which established their religious rights; the transition was easy, and almost unavoidable, to disquisitions about civil privileges. In short, M’Crie claimed that the Scottish nation was indebted to the Protestant spirit of the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 185.

sixteenth century for the “propagation of the genuine principles”<sup>100</sup> of liberties because these notions disseminated among people of all classes by means of Reformation principles.

### **3.2 Knox and Melville as the Representatives of Civil Liberty**

The discussion of the Scottish Reformation as a negative force in the attainment of civil liberties brought a questioning of the role of the Scottish Reformation fathers in this process. The Evangelicals were firmly attached to their vision of the Scottish Reformation as a motivating power behind the gaining of civil liberties and its leaders showed how this was achieved in practice. The descriptions by the Enlightenment writers of the Reformation fathers were rejected.

In the Reformation period, M’Crie observed, there had been a systematic attempt to confine liberty of speech among Protestants. In these circumstances, “the reformed preachers were the most vigilant and incorrupt guardians of national liberty.”<sup>101</sup> The most significant were Knox and Melville. While M’Crie was building a relationship between the civil liberties of the nation and the basic principles of the Reformation, he reinterpreted the roles of these two Reformation fathers in this light to reply the attacks of the Enlightenment writers with their concern for civil liberty. The liberterian ideals of the Reformation could be identified with the personalities of Knox and Melville.

John Knox and Andrew Melville, it was asserted, had been in many respects possessed of “the spirit of civil liberty.”<sup>102</sup> Their humanist education made them acquainted with the basic tenets of government and forms of administration “in the

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 272-273

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 186.

free states of antiquity.”<sup>103</sup> There was modern example too. Knox’s knowledge of the republics of Switzerland and particularly Geneva had made some impact on his political sentiments. He had shaped his opinions not by relying upon the settled and common prejudices of the centuries but upon close examination and observation. Thus, he was urged to think about reforming the governmental body to achieve the goal of civil liberty.

M’Crie believed that Knox as a champion of civil liberties had clearly realized the need and demand of his society for a proper government to establish “justice and order,”<sup>104</sup> and did not believe that it would be dangerous to people, if they were under the wholesome, just regime. He continuously instructed for the people in obedience to the lawful orders of the governors even when they had mismanaged the country, “so long as they did not break through all the restraints of law and justice, and cease to perform the great and fundamental duties of their office.”<sup>105</sup>

John Knox aided in constructing a language of a political liberty serving people in search of a just society. “He reminded them of the original equality of men, and the ends for which some were raised above others; and he taught the people that they had rights to preserve, as well as duties to perform.”<sup>106</sup> Knox’s understanding of liberty had to be regarded as a guide to its understanding in the nineteenth century, though the political ideas held by Knox at that period had taken their colour from “the spirit of the age.” They were very progressive ideas in a very backward and rude society with a correspondingly primitive government.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 186.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 189.

In his *Life of John Knox*, M’Crie offers the Conciliarist theologian John Mair (1467-1550) as an example for those learned men, who contributed to the revival of liberal notions in civil and ecclesiastical government. As J.H. Burns points out, M’Crie found some portions of Mair’s thought and political theory in Knox’s works. M’Crie investigated the neglected and forgotten theological books of Mair to see the connections between Mair’s and Knox’s thought and detected a continuity between Mair, Knox and Buchanan with regard to both civil government and ecclesiastical polity.<sup>108</sup>

According to M’Crie, Mair was the instructor of both Knox and Buchanan and had taken his views concerning the ecclesiastical polity from John Gerson and Peter D’Ailly, “who defended the decrees of the Council of Constance, and the liberties of the Gallican Church, against the advocates for the uncontrollable authority of the Sovereign Pontiff.”<sup>109</sup> M’Crie claimed that there was a close relationship between the opinions of Mair about civil government and the “political principles afterwards avowed by Knox and defended by the classical pen of Buchanan.”<sup>110</sup> M’Crie held that Mair’s thought on civil government was very similar to Knox’s. In summary, these were that

the authority of kings and princes was originally derived from the people; that the former are not superior to the latter, collectively considered: that if rulers become tyrannical, or employ their power for the destruction of their subjects, they may lawfully be controlled by them, and proving incorrigible may be deposed by the community as the superior power; and that tyrants may be judicially proceeded against even to capital punishment.<sup>111</sup>

M’Crie suggested that both oral teaching and writings of Major had been taken down by Knox and Buchanan and that they made use of in the following years; but a

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<sup>108</sup> J.H. Burns, “Knox: Scholastic and Canonistic Echoes” in *John Knox and the British Reformations* (ed.) Roger A. Mason (Vermont: Ashgate, 1998), 118.

<sup>109</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 5-6.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

lot of problems debated by Mair in his texts were unusable and trivial. His talents were confined by a medieval intellectual inheritance. Consequently, Knox and Buchanan disliked much in his works and released themselves from them limiting inquisitive minds.

Knox, tiring of such studies, tried to “escape into the open field of rational and free inquiry.” Both Knox and Buchanan were attempting the “the advancement of true religion and liberty”.<sup>112</sup> Knox, it was claimed, found the origins of his liberterian views in the writings of the ancient fathers. By these works, he was”led to the Scriptures as the only pure fountain of divine truth”<sup>113</sup> and developed his sysematic opinions about evangelical religion. In the outcome, M’Crie thought that is very difficult to separate Knox’s views about the civil liberties of Scottish nation from the progress of Reformation, the stimulating power behind the rebellion directed against the civil and ecclesiasstical tyranny, established in the preceding centuries.

Moreover, it was clear that Andrew Melville had inherited the same spirit of the civil liberty, in the following period of the settlement of Presbyterianism. While discussing the role of the two pre-eminent Reformation fathers in the nation’s acquisition of its civil liberties, M’Crie drew the picture of the events of these two different periods as parts of the same process. M’Crie’s described the struggle of Andrew Melville and his Protestant friends, as attempts to secure the nation’s liberties, and their resistance to the despotism of the crown, in a very similar way to in which he described the struggle of John Knox.

For M’Crie, Andrew Melville had an ardent attachment to civil liberty<sup>114</sup> and not, as suggested by Enlightened writers, a defender of an oppressive ecclesiastical system. The ecclessiastical constitution, which Andrew Melville had struggled to

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>114</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, 342.

establish, sought the promotion of the spiritual improvement and the salvation of the people.<sup>115</sup> M’Crie, of course, criticized William Robertson’s presentation of Melville as a religious fanatic seeking to establish an ecclesiastical system akin to Papalism. Andrew Melville’s purpose was merely to guarantee the religious and civil liberties of the nation against despotism.

M’Crie strove to make it very clear that Andrew Melville and his adherents’ resistance to the despotism of the absolute monarchy, which collaborated with Papalism and Episcopacy, was what was able to “rouse the nation to assert their liberties.” If they had behaved passively, “as the nobility had hitherto had done”, a despotism would have been maintained in Scotland. Their resistance to a system threatening the nation’s civil liberties was “defensible and legal.”<sup>116</sup> They had had many justifications to use in their “defence of their liberties.”<sup>117</sup> However, they had not rebelled against authority, without considering the public peace in Scotland. They had not devised a riot and they had not striven to raise the people against the monarchy.

M’Crie believed that the Reformation process ended in the amelioration of the religious and political conditions of many of the nations of Europe. In advancing the ideals of civil liberty, the leading figures of the Protestant cause had given much to their societies, having “aroused people to consider their rights and exert their power.”<sup>118</sup> The ideas spread by the religious leaders activated the politicians, who had previously demonstrated a lack of courage and self-assurance. They encouraged and animated princes, nobles, and confederated states, with their armies, “against the most formidable opposition, and under the most overwhelming difficulties, until their

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 85-86.

<sup>118</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 186.

exertions were ultimately crowned with success.”<sup>119</sup>, M’Crie was not slow to point out that these facts were accepted by some of the very same philosophical writers of his own time who also labelled the Reformation fathers ignorant and fanatical.

### **Political Use of Civil Liberty by M’Crie**

Another aspect of M’Crie’s discussion of the notion of civil liberty was his attempt to rehabilitate the Presbyterian political theory as an instrument in contemporary religious and political debates related to theme of the independence and liberty of the church from the civil authorities. He rehearsed the main features of traditional Calvinist political theory and he adapted them to the debates of which he was a part. He reinvigorated the old Whig Presbyterian political ideology and resistance theory in his discussion of civil liberties. Here, M’Crie’s political language was predominantly shaped by his concept of civil liberty and coloured by a nationalist discourse.

In reading his own work, it must be kept in mind that the subject which preoccupied M’Crie about his period was the defence of the freedom of the Presbyterian religion and its ministers against the restrictions caused by the interference of the civil authority in religious matters. The real concern visible in M’Crie’s discussion of civil liberties and the threats against the basic rights of the nation derived from this debate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The old discussion about the place of the civil magistrates in matters of religion, which strengthened the Secession church, was agitated in a new form in the period of the French Revolution. Since the Reformation, the claim had been made that Christ was the sole head of the Church and civil magistrate had no rights of interference or

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 186.

control in ecclesiastical government. During their long dominance in the Church of Scotland, the Moderates stood for strict obedience to both civil and ecclesiastical law as they understood and opposed to proposals of the Evangelicals about the rights of the ministers.<sup>120</sup>

The alarm caused by the Revolution gave a new impulse for the defence and maintainance of the British constitution against all the threats, which were perceived to be emerging in the country. One element in Secession thought that M'Crie was firmly attached, was its unwillingness to declare unqualified attachment to the existing British Constitution.<sup>121</sup> The Evangelical wing of the Presbyterians was decidedly against the Moderates in this matter. The general tendency of the Moderates towards cooperation with the civil power and their apparent uncritical support for the existing system helped rally opposition to them.<sup>122</sup> M'Crie held that their attitudes to the civil authority might be taken as implied approval of the English hierarchy with its all prelatial institutions or even its extension to Scotland.<sup>123</sup>

Old anxieties were joined by newer ones. What concerned M'Crie was to encourage a stand against "the designs of some modern infidels and politicians,"<sup>124</sup> who tended to a belief in a total separation of civil government and religion, a violent contradiction of central principles of the Reformation. This was, for M'Crie, an Erastian threat of great proportion, to both the security of the religious system and the civil liberties of Scotland. Religious authority would be repressed and restrictions placed upon its exercise of power in society. Thus, it can be suggested, M'Crie constructed a relationship between those holding these new principles and a defence

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<sup>120</sup> Alec R. Vilder, *The Church in An Age of Revolution: 1789 to the Present* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 56-57.

<sup>121</sup> Crichton "Memoir", 6.

<sup>122</sup> Mitchison, *Scotland*, 369.

<sup>123</sup> Herron, *Kirk*, 73.

<sup>124</sup> M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 85.

of the passive obedience, which he thought wholly at variance with the principles manifested in the Reformation.

M’Crie pointed out that the doctrine of the divine right of the kings to rule free popular pressure, passive obedience and non-resistance resulted in the tyranny he perceived in the Middle Ages. Unrestrained by anything like appropriate resistance, that era’s rulers had unjustly violated the rights of the people and strove to “establish an administration completely arbitrary and despotic.”<sup>125</sup> At this point, it should be noted that M’Crie did ascribe a limited liberterian character to the ecclesiastical councils of the Middle Ages. He did speak about conciliarist struggles of the fifteenth century and thought that some decisions of these councils evoked some of the basic tenets of liberty and, in the following years, these could be applied in civil government.<sup>126</sup>

According to M’Crie, the civil rulers of the Middle Ages had given active help and encouragement to the “old system of error and ecclesiastical tyranny”. The persecutions and the cruelties of the rulers inflicted on those who supported the new doctrines of the Reformation had forced reflection on limiting the authority of rulers. However, the urgent purpose that inspired this was “emancipation from religious bondage, and the salvation of themselves and their posterity.”<sup>127</sup>

In these circumstances, the Reformation had brought a political understanding conducive to the defence of civil liberties and the rights of the nation. M’Crie, following Knox’s view, suggested that the inferior magistrates- in Scotland, its nobility- had a duty to regulate government for the public good. For, the rule of kings and obedience to their governments was to be in accordance with divine law. The law of the country was supreme over the desires of the rulers. No one had “an

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<sup>125</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 184.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 7-13.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

original, inherent, and inalienable right to rule over the people independently of their will or consent.”<sup>128</sup> To check such an error the subordinate magistrates had a duty to control and limit kings, when their rule violated legality.

It is interesting to note that there are some similarities between M’Crie’s thoughts about the sovereignty of the people and French philosophe Jean Jacques Rousseau’s theories of social contract and general will.<sup>129</sup> Rousseau believed a social contract by which people, agreeing on some basic premises, become citizens of a state. People could come together through a social contract and give up some claims of right; but individuals could still protect themselves. Submission to the authority of the general was to guarantee the rights of people, entering into contract. Still, the unity of society and submission to the general will were the crucial objectives of the contract. Sovereignty lay in the hands of people and government was charged with enforcing the general will, through a small group of citizens. For Rousseau, the existence of general will was an indispensable condition for the state and it is necessary to empower the general will with a sovereignty which possessed something akin to divine authority. Moreover, he perceived a threat in any religious or secular focus of loyalty, which might challenge the authority of the sovereign power in society.<sup>130</sup>

Drawing a parallel with such thought may aid understanding of M’Crie. He did not share the individualistic tendencies of some Evangelicals, who regarded religious commitment as intensely personal and emotional.<sup>131</sup> He saw religion as the basis of society and thought of salvation and religious devotion as existing in the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>129</sup> For a discussion of Rousseau’s theories of social contract and general will see Timothy O’Hagan, *Rousseau* (London: Routledge, 1999). and Michael Curtis, *The Great Political Theories* (New York: Avon Books, 1981).

<sup>130</sup> David Nicholis, *God and Government In An ‘Age Of Reason’* (London: Routledge, 1995), 95-96.

<sup>131</sup> W.D. Rubenstein, *Britain’s Century: A Political and Social History, 1815-1905* (London: Arnold Publishers, 1998), 305.

public sphere. Thus, the importance of ‘social contract’ emerged. There had to be a concise and solid agreement, which was established mutually by rulers and subjects. This did not have to be a formal act; but it had to be accepted by the two sides. If the rulers violated this contract, and used their power “for the destruction of the commonwealth which was committed to them for its preservation and benefit,”<sup>132</sup> they become tyrants and despots. In these circumstances, people were freed from their obligations of loyalty to the rulers and could resist and remove them from their offices. But the people also had to submit to and obey rulers, who did not break this mutual contract, for the sake of the peace and harmony of the society. Obedience to the rulers could not be allowed to come into conflict with divine law and thus the importance of the role of the clergy and this law was certainly superior to the desires of the ruler. The ministers were to act as mediators between the rulers and their society. They were thus contributing working of this reciprocal agreement and their presence was a necessary condition for the preservation of the civil liberties of the nation.

M’Crie, following the old Buchanite tradition, claimed that in Scottish history, there had been many examples of resistance to state authority before the period of the Reformation, aimed at maintaining the agreement between the rulers and their subjects. However, liberty, in its true meaning, was achieved only by the implementation of the principles of the Reformation. Defences of civil liberty in Scottish history before the Reformation era “were the effects of sudden resentment on account of some mal-administration, or of the ambition of some powerful baron, or of the jealousy with which the feudal aristocracy watched over the privileges of their own order.”<sup>133</sup> Liberty was not then diffused. A spirit of subservience to the

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<sup>132</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 187.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

nobility prevented a larger body enjoying the benefits of the restraints placed on rulers.

As already emphasized, M’Crie’s concept of civil liberty was formed by his continuous emphasis on religion and the ideals of Presbyterianism. In his *Life of Andrew Melville*, he presented a narrative of past events to serve the practical political and religious needs of his time. Despotism could be established in Scotland only by subverting the ministers of religion. This was an issue directly related to the “common cause of public liberty”, because the ministers were the “common instructors and faithful and fearless monitors of all classes” in the society.<sup>134</sup> Subversion of the ministers means the corruption of the society, as they became the slaves of an oppressive government. M’Crie directly compared the subversion of the ministers under James VI to current laws related to lay patronage Act of 1712, which gave the civil authority the right to interfere in religious matters and the right for the appointment of the minister.

M’Crie thought that the Reformation period was an era, when “the principles of political liberty were only beginning to be understood.”<sup>135</sup> Therefore, it was not surprising that many writers and public men, who “had not yet thrown off common prejudices”, had been very doubtful about Knox’s resistance to the establishment of a tyrannical social order by “despotic rulers and their numerous satellites”. However, the target of M’Crie’s attack was not those figures of the sixteenth century. M’Crie expressed his surprise and indignation that in his own age, and “under the sunshine of British liberty” philosophical writers were “expressing their abhorrence” of the principles avowed by Knox and were thus writing as “the advocates of passive

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<sup>134</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, 157.

<sup>135</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 187-188

obedience.”<sup>136</sup> Knox had advanced principles which had been urgently and unquestionably necessary to check tyranny- that of the Queen Regent of and her daughter.<sup>137</sup>

It was necessary to answer to the writers of in his own time, who attacked John Knox’s political views, speaking of the allegations against John Knox in his political principles and in his influence on the ordinary people. Those M’Crie objected to clearly held obnoxious view which indicated that those writers were regarding “resistance to the civil rulers” to uphold the civil liberties of the nation was “repugnant to the express directions of the New Testament.”<sup>138</sup> The Christian religion originally had a tendency to appreciate and disseminate “a spirit favourable to civil liberty.”<sup>139</sup> The free exercise of its religion and the elimination of religious abuses had been crucial to the nation in the Reformation era. The nation needed such institutions against oppressive rulers. This guarantees not only the religious rights of the people but also their temporal rights.

In this, the nation acted in accordance with Scriptural teachings. It was impossible to assert that the Scriptures did not give permission to resistance unjust rulers. If it was claimed that “the great body of a nation consisting of the Christians, in attempting to curb the fury of their rulers, or to deprive them of the power” were in the wrong, it meant that the beneficial religion of Jesus sanctioned despotism and supported all the harmful effects of “political bondage upon mankind.” He saw the writers of his age evaluating the texts of the Scriptures as passive and servile people who were trying to “extinguish courage, patriotism, the love of civil liberty.”<sup>140</sup> M’Crie pointed out that the conditions in which the first Christians had lived were

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 191.

completely different from those of Christians of the Reformation era in Scotland and other European countries. It was true that there were some expressions in Scripture recommending subjection to the civil authorities as a necessity sanctioned by divine law; for the sake of the peace of society. He accepted that there were not any directions in the Bible about the maintenance of the civil constitutions. There were explicit statements about the right to rebel against or resist rulers, who used their powers to “convert their legitimate authority into an engine of despotism and oppression.” However, he interestingly emphasized that the Christians in the Roman Empire were a minority, while contrary to the Scottish nation in his own time was Christian and they did have the right to depose or elect the rulers in their society.<sup>141</sup>

In all this, his position was tempered. However, he asserted that “God has granted to subjects a right to take the sword of just defence” for their liberties and “he has prohibited them from submitting to the mercy of the every lawless despot” for the peace and welfare of the society.<sup>142</sup> But there was little inclination to democracy. It should be noted that M’Crie saw the nobility of the Reformation period as the defenders and guardians of the civil liberties of the Scottish nation. There had been many tasks, which had to be performed by the nobility. They were the real friends of the reformed religion and it was their high duty to preserve and care for the reformation of the religion as the civil rulers. However, he pointed out, some of the nobility sacrificed, on some occasions, the public good to their private interests and disappointed the hopes of John Knox.<sup>143</sup>

M’Crie’s discussion of the civil liberties was substantially directed by his perception of the threats to them. It was bound up with the question of the national identity, too. It is sufficient here to say that a significant motivation for the anti-

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 191-192

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 363.

Catholic character of the discourse was the long political debate about Catholic Relief, begun with the repeal of the penal acts against the Catholics in 1778 and continued until Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Then, there were the immigrations to the industrialised Lowland regions from the Highlands, making Catholics more visible-and resented- in Protestant society.<sup>144</sup> These developments in the early nineteenth century began to point towards a sharp anti-catholicism. Evangelicals shared the common British aversion to popery. They inherited the Reformation identification of the popery as Antichrist.<sup>145</sup>

M’Crie was a pupil of Archibald Bruce, the founder of the Constitutional Associate Presbytery and the writer of many texts against the toleration of Catholics. M’Crie inherited his radical and militant attitude about the issue. For M’Crie, Catholicism was the main enemy of that freedom and liberterian thought of the public, formed on the basis of the tenets of Protestantism. To claim to combine civil liberty and the integration of Catholics into political life reflected treason or ignorance. Those, who supported such ideas, were dismissing the historical realities of the Reformation period. M’Crie recalled the cruelties and intolerance of the Catholics of the Reformation period to answer to those who held that the Presbyterians and Catholics or Episcopalians might co-exist politically in Scotland, the unity of which was to be maintained by the ideals of the commercial society.

M’Crie sought to refresh the minds of his intended readers about the afflictions suffered by the Reformation fathers. They took their stand actuated by disgust at “Popish idolatry, a feeling which is fully justified by the spirit and precepts of Christianity.”<sup>146</sup> A comprehension of this idoltry’s strength was in the Reformation was impossible to his contemporaries, he believed. And they could not

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<sup>144</sup> McCaffrey, *Scotland*, 8.

<sup>145</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 101.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

sympathize with or even endure Catholic Relief and practice because of their own highly improved perception of religious liberties.

M'Crie held his views to be well supported and claimed that "the warmest friends of toleration and liberty of conscience" in his time realized that persecution and "the system and spirit of popery" had been inseparable and common in Europe. The Protestants in Scotland had witnessed such threats before and now had to be awakened to oppose the toleration of Catholics in their country. He warned:

If listening to the siren song of toleration by which their adverseries, with no less impudence than artifice, now attempted to lull them asleep, they had suffered themselves to be thrown off their guard, and neglected to provide against the most distant approaches of the danger by which they were threatened. Could they be ignorant of the perfidious, barbarous, and unrelenting cruelty with which Protestants were treated in every Roman Catholic kingdom?<sup>147</sup>

This point provided a defence against accusations of Protestant intolerance. He offered historical examples from France, where many Protestants had been slaughtered "under the influence of the house of Guise" or from England where many people had been beheaded and hanged; and from Spain and Italy, in which many Protestants had been burned because of their faith.<sup>148</sup> Thus, it was absurd to "accuse the Scottish Protestants of displaying the same spirit of intolerance by which the Roman Catholics were distinguished."<sup>149</sup> Mary Queen of the Scots had been obeyed according to the laws of the country. However, in contrast, he claimed that, "if a Huguenot queen had come to take possession of a Roman Catholic kingdom," it was sure that the first thing the Catholics would have done "would have been to arrest her; and if she had preserved in her religion, they would have procured her degradation by the pope, thrown her to the Inquisition, and burnt her as a heretic." In the light of all this, the constitution of the British state in prohibiting a catholic from

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 221.

acceding to the throne, pre-eminently just.<sup>150</sup> It was certainly unnecessary to apologize for the restrictions placed on Catholics in Britain; because Popery was still as much a danger as it had been two hundred and fifty years before.

M’Crie polemically directed the attention of his readers to the other danger to the liberterian notions fostered by Presbyterianism. This is Episcopalianism. While discussing the state of religion in the Reformation era, M’Crie continually emphasized the fact that the original reformers commonly refused episcopal orders. Episcopacy was zealously attacked. It was contrary to the law of Christ. M’Crie expressed surprise and indignation that many people in his time defended Episcopalian doctrine which was made up of “absurd, illiberal and horrid” features and he found it difficult to bear hearing the “doctrine of the absolute necessity of ordination by the hands of a bishop”.<sup>151</sup>

M’Crie articulated Knox’s view that if the laws of the prince were contrary to the will or interests of the majority of the people, due to the negligence of the people or the tyranny of the prince, then, these same people or their posterity had a right to request reform according to the laws and constitution of the country. Thus, the nation had rights in order to defend its existence, to punish the idolatry, because Christian nations were “bound to enact the same penalties against all breaches of the moral law, which were enjoined by the judicial laws of Moses.”<sup>152</sup> In this way, the reformed religion was to be secured against the dangers to which it was exposed and only those to whom the nation could trust to preserve its liberties could be engaged in the administration of the public affairs.

While defending the civil liberties of the Scottish nation against the possible threats, M’Crie also tried to restore the traditional Whig Presbyterian ideology. For

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 222.

M’Crie, the dislike of Knox and Presbyterianism by the supporters of absolute monarchy of the seventeenth century were continued after the Revolution of 1688 by the adherents of Stuart family, whose religious notions had been Popish and distinguished by a “slavish principle respecting non-resistance to kings” The principles of the Reformation, which had enforced the concept of civil liberty, had been condemned completely “as allowing disorder, sedition, and rebellion against lawul authority.”<sup>153</sup> However, the great problem was that the prejudices against Reformation principles did not disappear with the dethroning of Stuart Kings. Those, who transmitted their adherence to the House of Hanover, carried on defending non-resistance.<sup>154</sup>

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the danger produced by the French Revolution, led to the couragement of those who supported the principles contrary to civil liberty under the guise of “preserving the present constitution of Britain.”<sup>155</sup> Their principles though they did not perceive it, threatened to restore the reign of the Popery and arbitrary power in Scotland. M’Crie expected no favourable hearing for his views, Reformation ideals or, John Knox, in particular from those, who adhered to these anti-liberterian views. Those writers were under the influence of the infidelity of modern times and suffered the consequent intellectual inadequacy. They had been fascinated by the illusion of the time that the world could be emancipated from superstition and priestcraft. It was very difficult for such men to understand the value of the Reformation heritage. They were naturally inclined to

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 355.

<sup>154</sup> J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien regime*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 121-142.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 355.

despise and dislike men who were inspired with the love of religion and the desire for the acquisition of civil liberty.<sup>156</sup>

### **3.4 Concluding Remarks on Civil Liberty\***

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, during the Scottish Enlightenment, the concepts of civil liberty and civil society emerged as key theoretical concepts, and fashioned by the Enlightenment writers. “Civil liberty” had a positive resonance, speaking of a future in which men would live together in peace as politically mature and responsible citizens, without the constraints of an authoritarian state and practicing tolerance of cultural and religious diversity.<sup>157</sup> For the Scottish Enlightenment writers, civil liberty became associated with the advantages of the Union with England. Scotland would become an imitable civil society as a part of the British Empire. With the elevation of such a concept, a tendency towards erastianism and a fear for religious extremism developed. The Scottish Presbyterian past and the nation’s Covenanted heritage were seen as a source of embarrassment.

In the political and ecclesiastical spheres, such thought supported a belief that civil government must be distinguished from ecclesiastical authority. The business of civil government was to secure men’s lives and liberties, whereas it was the salvation of the souls that was the concern of the religion.<sup>158</sup> However, the debates over the extent of the authority of the civil magistrate and the extent to which there might be a separation of church and state fuelled the discussions. This question

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 357.

\* This section is placed here as an interpretation of what M’Crie perceived from the concept of civil liberty in the historical context of the period in which he lived and communicated his ideas.

<sup>157</sup> Jürgen Kocka, “Civil Society from a Historical Perspective” *European Review* 12 (2004): 1–16

<sup>158</sup> Roy Porter and Ole Peter Grell “Toleration in Enlightenment Europe” in *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe* (eds.) Roy Porter and Ole Peter Grell (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6.

appeared in this era of Scottish Presbyterian history as Moderate-Evangelical conflict and the New Light-Old Light controversy.

We can see that Thomas M’Crie employed the concept of civil liberty in a highly different fashion from his Enlightenment predecessors. M’Crie’s interpretation of the civil liberty shows how different conceptions of this term might be in the early nineteenth century. His position serves as an example of the intellectual resistance to the established political and religious order in the time of Scotland. M’Crie’s reception of the concept is also an indication of the extent to which the discourse about civil liberty in the period was still religious and predominantly denominational.

His conception of civil liberty reflected the general restorationist and reactionary political tendency of the early nineteenth century, in defending religion as the guardian of the peace and just character of society. For the restorationists and conservatives of the period like the French Counter-Enlightenment politician and thinker Joseph de Maistre, whose thought might be well compared to that of M’Crie, church and state had to collaborate in promoting people’s moral welfare preserving social harmony.<sup>159</sup> In doing this, the continuity of the nation’s political and social institutions had to be valued and the community had to take precedence over the individual. The security of society could be guaranteed by a governmental structure relying upon the authority of the church to preserve social stability and order. This meant a theocratic administration in the society.<sup>160</sup> This emphasis of the early nineteenth century restorationists on the theocratic idea was an inevitable reaction to Enlightenment anti-clericalism and scepticism. For the conservatives of the time, it

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<sup>159</sup> Breunig, *The Age of Revolution*, 183.

<sup>160</sup> Jacques Godechot, *The Counter-Revolution: Doctrine and Action, 1789-1804* (London: Routledge, 1972), 84-103.

was meaningless to talk about the individual's liberty as a concept apart from the society.<sup>161</sup>

In the Scottish context, M'Crie's belief in theocratic ideals and his emphasis on the communal salvation of the society were understandable. The Scottish Enlightenment ensured that the Moderatism accepted a large case of erastianism. Those who were committed to the Covenanting ideal were deeply disappointed with a national church under the dominance of the Moderates, who could be depicted as taking over the Jacobite idea of non-resistance by submitting the erastian control of an uncovenanted king, now a Hanover. The Church of Scotland was now seen as sunk to the level of the Church of England.<sup>162</sup> In the early nineteenth century, theocratic evangelicalism was gaining ascendancy; it was flowering inside and outside the Church of Scotland, generally in a reactionary environment. The zeal of the Evangelicals in their cause gave a direction to their ideals,<sup>163</sup> which shaped their political theory in the debates leading up to the Disruption of 1843.

As an Old Light Anti-Burgher, M'Crie was sharing this vision. As illustrated in this chapter, he believed in the independence of the church and that the state had an obligation of submission to the church. The state and church had to cooperate for the peace and order of the society. This was possible only with the establishment of a social order derived from the heritage of the Scottish Reformation. He was claiming the certain authority of the church in all the religious matters and what was included under the heading of "religious matters" was a great deal indeed. Scottish Kirk had to be at centre of the civil society because religious and civil liberty was not a private,

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<sup>161</sup> John Weiss, *Conservatism in Europe 1770-1945: Traditionalism, Reaction and Counter-Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 45-52.

<sup>162</sup> Ian McBride, *Scripture Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 69.

<sup>163</sup> Arvel B. Erickson, "The Non Intrusion Controversy in Scotland, 1832-1943" *Church History*, 11 (1942): 1-24.

but a public issue. In brief, the theocratic ideas of the Covenanters of the seventeenth century were revived in the writings of M'Crie.

His theocratic convictions combined with an anti-Catholic discourse in his texts. This was one of the central motifs running through the works of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century Scottish evangelicals as a whole. M'Crie's anti-Catholicism was a response to both an increase in the Catholic population of Scotland and discussions about Catholic Relief in the period. The radical Seceders held the view that both civil and ecclesiastical authorities had to unite in action for the suppression of heresy and idolatry in the country.<sup>164</sup> Advanced by Catholic Relief they constituted a real danger to the civil liberty of the nation. M'Crie's anti-Catholicism is perfectly representative of these views of the Evangelicals.

M'Crie rejected the Enlightenment notion that Scottish Presbyterian religion was a disruptive force inimical to civil society. For this reason, he emphasized the libertarian nature of the Scottish Reformation. The concept of civil liberty notion had been set out in the course of the struggles of the Reformation Fathers against a despotism and slavery, established by ecclesiastical and civil rulers. This was what the Enlightenment writers failed to see in the Scottish past and thus failed to understand civil liberty aright. M'Crie viewed the question of civil liberty as a theological one, because it had combated the Erastian state, as it impinged on the spiritual authority of the church and threatened the liberty and freedom of the society. This error of the Enlightenment thinkers in scorning the Scottish Reformation past and its founding fathers served the ends of the erastian British state. This was, for M'Crie, equal to treason against the homeland. Thus, M'Crie

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<sup>164</sup> MacBride, *Scripture*, 83.

constructed a close relationship between the concept of civil liberty and the question of Scottish national identity, the subject of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THOMAS M'CRIE'S WORKS

M'Crie believed that the Scots could preserve their national identity merely by adhering to the principles of the Presbyterian Reformation. The establishment of Protestantism was a turning point in Scottish history and it was a part of their national identity. Therefore, in his *Life of Andrew Melville*, using the words of James VI, Thomas M'Crie thanked God that he was “a pure Christian living in the light of the Gospel in the purest Kirk in the world.”<sup>165</sup> And, Scots had the obligation to protect the purity of their Kirk.

For M'Crie, the danger of which the Scots of his time were to be watchful against the harmful ideas and influences, which might come from the foreign Church of England and their allies in the established Church of Scotland, as well as the danger of Catholicism. This situation urged him to remind Scots what constituted their national identity. There had been conformity between the Scottish and the English Protestants of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. They had respected each other's piety and merits. The Scottish ministers avoided of the

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<sup>165</sup> M'Crie, *Melville*, 141.

reflections on the ecclesiastical establishment of England and at the same time, the English Protestants had been “using the same reserve with respect to Scotland.”<sup>166</sup> If this amicable relationship was far from typical of this whole period, yet it served to point to the change in the situation. M’Crie feared that Scots of his own time sought to imitate the English both in worship and ecclesiastical polity. Such an alarming change in the attitudes of the Scots was a clear indication of the influence of the English on them.<sup>167</sup>

Such a disposition reveals that M’Crie defined national identity with a reference, perhaps exclusively, to Presbyterianism. The national past as it built the main characteristics of the Scottish nation, was dominated by religion and the formative period had been the Reformation years. All deviations from Presbyterianism were proof of foreign influence on the nation and the Scots had now to defend their religion against these influences. Given these fundamentals, this chapter will deal with the construction of Scottish national identity in M’Crie’s works in the context of the period and discuss the basic motivations behind M’Crie’s interpretation of the Scottish Reformation past in its relation to the national identity of the Scots.

#### **4.1 Religion and National Identity**

The dominance of religious thought in defining national identity was not confined, of course, to the writings of Thomas M’Crie. As it has been constantly emphasized in this thesis, religion was the most important aspect of Scotland’s social, cultural and political life and this inevitably served to determine national

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 141-142.

<sup>167</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 188.

identity in the period.<sup>168</sup> It is certain that people of the time were increasingly conscious of what would later contribute more extensively to national identity, but as J.C.D. Clark suggested, the most influential ideas, which were included in the “collective consciousness” of the people from the Middle Ages to the last years of the first half of the early nineteenth century was dynastic allegiance and closely related to one of confessional identity.<sup>169</sup>

As national identity in the British Isles, as elsewhere developed, it was underpinned by shared history and shared religious allegiance as the core elements. War, law and religion and their inter-connections were instrumental in creating national identity.<sup>170</sup> Thus, ecclesiastical history played a major role in forging national identity: for religion and national identity were twin concepts and had been for Protestants and Catholics alike since the Reformation. However, Protestantism was not basically homogenous, a single entity to be contrasted with Catholicism. Protestant churches have been instrumental in establishing a ‘British identity’ corresponding to the political framework in Britain; but they have also been the vehicle for recreating Scottish, English or Welsh identities distinct from or in conflict with each other.<sup>171</sup> Thus, the general pattern in the British Isles was a diversity and plurality of the identities, shaped around different religious perceptions rather than a unified Protestant identity.

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<sup>168</sup> Callum Brown, “Religion” in *Modern Scottish History 1707 to the Present* ed. Anthony Cook Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 63.

<sup>169</sup> J.C.D. Clark, “Protestantism, Nationalism, and National Identity, 1660-1832” *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000): 249-276.

<sup>170</sup> Linda Colley suggests that British identity was “an invention forged above all by war. In time, the war with France brought Britons into confrontation with an hostile other and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it.” For these claims, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (London: Pimlico, 1992). and for the criticism of her thesis see J.C.D. Clark’s above mentioned article.

<sup>171</sup> Keith Robbins, “Religion and Identity in Modern British History” in *Religion and National Identity*(ed.) Stuart Mews (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 465–466.

It is a fact that Scotland in this period was remarkably fruitful in manufacturing of historical myths and this was also the time when the idea of Scotland was being reinforced “through the appeal to the nation’s distinctive past.”<sup>172</sup> This was a process by which the Scots reinvented their identity as a response to the dilemma of maintaining it in a stateless nation. It was clearly beneficial for the writers of the time to build histories around the mythical stories and personalities of the past.<sup>173</sup> These constructions about the past of the nation were used for different ideological purposes. For instance, Highlandism as a myth, which most intensely worked on in the second half of the eighteenth century, was a very useful ideology for the Scots of the time because of its dual function. It emphasised the existence of the Scottishness against the fear of English assimilation, but it facilitated Unionist Britishness precisely by underlining the distinctive Scottish past.<sup>174</sup> As another example, Walter Scott’s Tory and Episcopal view suggested a Jacobite and monarchical identity by means of a romantic discourse and produced an argumentation, which saw the Hanoverian regime as acceptable. Scott’s stage-managing of the visit of George IV to Scotland showed his Toryism and monarchism and his Unionist views.

As indicated above, there were alternative approaches to the past of the nation and its identity. However, despite the destructive impacts of the eighteenth-century Presbyterian schisms, religion remained a vital factor for national identity. It is very obvious that the literary expressions of the past were shaped around the vital issues of religious belief and church government and these created very different attitudes about the religious and thus national identity of Scotland. The plurality and

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<sup>172</sup> Devine, *Scottish Nation*, 292.

<sup>173</sup> Keith Brown, “Imagining Scotland” *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992): 415-425.

<sup>174</sup> For an explanation of how the myth of Highlandism was created in the latter half of the eighteenth century see Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the myths of the Highlands* (London: Macmillan, 1989), and Devine, *Scottish Nation*, 231-249.

variety of the Protestant identities had a great impact in discussing the schisms.<sup>175</sup> The new denominations' concepts of ecclesiastical polity and their theological differences much influenced political thought, allegiance and behaviour.

One of the greatest debates in Scotland, as elsewhere, in the period was about the church's relationship to the state. This added importance of the role of religion in discussions of national identity.<sup>176</sup> The schisms were shaped by religious nationalism and transformed into a discourse against the British state, especially in the hands of the Seceders. This sort of nationalism was articulated by a focus on the Scottish Kirk's "historical independence, which was rooted in the principles of the Reformation of 1560 and defended by the claim of the distinctive features of Scottish Presbyterians in the religious struggles of the seventeenth century."<sup>177</sup> For Presbyterians, who had, from the first, been uncomfortable with the Union, the choice existed of turning back to the past and keeping their identity through their church. Religion was indeed the most prominent vehicle to articulate an opposition to the existing political order.<sup>178</sup> The Scottish religious principles, which such a view offered as the most important element in Scottish national identity, were explicitly put forward with references to the nation's Presbyterian heritage.

M'Crie used the language of the Evangelicals. The discourse of the popular Evangelicalism about national identity was that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For these Presbyterian ministers and congregations, the Reformation and the memory of the Covenanters stood as their source of inspiration. As an adherent of the popular Evangelical movement, outwith the established Church of Scotland,

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<sup>175</sup> Mary Anne Perkins, *Nation and Word, 1770-1850: Religious and Methaphysical Language in European National Consciousness* (Vermont: Ashgate, 1999), 245.

<sup>176</sup> D.W. Bebbington, "Religion and National Feeling in Nineteenth Century Wales and Scotland" in Stewart Mews (ed.) *Religion*, 499.

<sup>177</sup> Devine, *Scottish Nation*, p.291.

<sup>178</sup> Gordon Pentland, "Patriotism, Universalism and the Scottish Conventions, 1792-1794" in *History* 89 (2004): 340-360.

M’Crie’s understanding of national identity was formed from adherence to this Presbyterian past. National identity was reducible to the Scottish Presbyterianism. Reformation ideals constituted part of the national identity of the Scots, supplemented by the heritage of the Covenanters, which consolidated and explained them. Thus M’Crie’s discussion with Walter Scott on the Covenanting past becomes important to the debate about the national past and Scottish identity.

#### **4.2 M’Crie, Scott and the Covenanting Identity**

When the matter of early nineteenth century discussion about the Scottish national identity has been discussed, Walter Scott has been generally settled at the centre of the stage and the romanticization of the Scottish past has been decidedly attributed to the immense and powerful influence of his novels. He has been regarded as the dominant figure in the invention of a culture and the creation of a past in the period. His connection to the Tory politics and his monarchism is underlined and his conservative political thought seen as a bulwark against all kinds of radicalism threatening the *status quo* in Scotland in the period following the French Revolution. Within the limits of this chapter, we are concerned with the contrasting views of Scott in his work *Old Mortality*, which was published in 1816, and M’Crie’s answer to him in *A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters*, as they speak about Covenanting identity and the debate about the past and heritage of the Scottish nation.

The subject of *Old Mortality* is the rebellion of the Cameronians, Presbyterian extremists, who refused to accept the royal authority in the Restoration period. The novel begins with the murder of the archbishop of St. Andrews, James Sharpe, by a group of Covenanting Whigs, and stretches to the death of Graham of Claverhouse at

the hands of the Covenanters on the battle, between the Scottish clans supporting James VII and the troops of William of Orange, at Killiecrankie in 1689. The work takes its title from the nickname of Robert Paterson, a Scotsman of the eighteenth century, who late in life, decided to travel around Scotland re-engraving the tombs of the seventeenth-century Covenanter martyrs.

The most important character in the work is Henry Morton of Milnwood, a moderate Presbyterian unsympathetic to the extremists of both sides, Covenanter and Episcopalian. He stands between two hate sides. However, neutrality and impartiality is difficult since his father was a leader in the civil wars on the Presbyterian side. Morton is imprisoned because he has given shelter to his father's friend, John Burley of Balfour. He feels himself to be a part in the conflict merely by virtue of the force of the events, his imprisonment and his love for the Royalist, Edith. However, joining the Presbyterians, he is captured in the battle of Bothwell Bridge and sent into exile but returns at the Revolution to marry Edith.

In creating a character like Morton, Scott showed his political and religious opinions about the conflicts of the seventeenth century. He divided his characters into three groups: Royalists and extreme and moderate Presbyterians. He depicted the extreme Presbyterians as bloodthirsty and dangerous although he portrayed the Royalist, Claverhouse as a chivalric hero. Such onesidedness in Scott's work derived from his Episcopalian identity. Scott was a political romantic and counter-revolutionary and his emphasis on the old and local past sprang from a fear of the threat radicalism offered to the political *status quo*. In this sense, the emphasis on this past aimed to preserve the existing order. Moderates, Jacobite and Whig, Presbyterian and Episcopalian had created the present, which was to be defended.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> McCaffrey, *Scotland*, 18.

The extreme Presbyterians were a danger to stability and harmony of society and the moderate Presbyterians were thus much preferable.

Nevertheless, this reactionary attitude was not the sole form of conservatism in early nineteenth century Scotland. As already said, different religious and political convictions were producing different interpretations about the Scottish past. So, the views of those who saw themselves as the heirs of the radical Presbyterians about the main elements in the Scottish nationhood were naturally rather different from men such as Scott.

M'Crie's position as zealous Presbyterian was in a complete contrast to Scott's, because his conservative attitude was received from very different sources. A serious and strong opposition movement sprang from the popular Evangelicals in the established Church of Scotland and the dissenters from at the church.<sup>180</sup> M'Crie was the member of the Anti-Burgher wing of the Seceders, who had decided to renew the Covenants in 1742, and the Seceders were firmly attached to the Covenanting identity.

For centuries, the Covenanters, their cause, the Killing Times of the 1680s created a body of Lowland tradition, which was a rival to the Jacobite myths as rooted in the oral and written sources. The Covenanting tradition came from two sources. The first was the National Covenant signed first in Edinburgh in 1638 and the other was the Solemn League and the Covenant of 1643. Covenanters believed in a Covenant between God and his people and the idea of the Two Kingdoms-that of the king of Scots and that of Christ- was one of the central themes to the Protestant Scottish political and religious thinking.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Bruce Lenman, *Integration*, 145.

<sup>181</sup> Angus Calder, "Introduction" to Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* (New York: Penguin Classics 1985), 18-19.

Beginning from the late seventeenth century, representing an apologetic attitude among Presbyterians, the defence of the Covenanters with attempts to show their lives and deaths as those of martyrs, became a dominant approach, from Robert Wodrow to Archibald Bruce and his pupil Thomas M’Crie.<sup>182</sup> These Presbyterians were articulating an alternative British patriotism to that expressed by others and this determined their variant interpretation of what constituted Scottish national identity. This was predominantly based on their understanding of the period of Scottish history before 1688 and this held a central place in their thought and discourse.

M’Crie sharply criticised the presentation of the Covenanters by Scott in *Old Mortality*. He held that Scott had misrepresented the Covenanters in his work and felt “as if he had been personally attacked by Scott’s novel” and “became indignant by the injustice done against the memory of the Covenanters.”<sup>183</sup> He attacked Scott’s version of history.

The author does not hesitate to violate historic truth and probability, and even to contradict his own statements or admissions. Instances of this occur in some of his best descriptions; and they show that though he has the imagination and feeling of a poet, he is deficient in the judgement and discriminating taste of a historian.<sup>184</sup>

According to M’Crie, Scott consciously distorted reality and mistreated the Presbyterians. The reason for this was to be found in his Episcopalian sympathies. While there had been “excessive tenderness and delicacy shown to Episcopal clergy”, the Presbyterians and their ministers had been treated in a contrasting manner in the work.<sup>185</sup> For instance, in Scott’s work, the character Old Mause was presented as a religious zealot who condemned all, who did not share the

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<sup>182</sup> Cowan, “Covenanting Tradition”, 18–19.

<sup>183</sup> M’Crie the younger, *Thomas M’Crie*, 199.

<sup>184</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters* (Philadelphia: James M. Campbell & Co, 1843), 17.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

Presbyterian beliefs.<sup>186</sup> However, M’Crie thought, “Mause was the favourite character with the author, and out of her mouth he intended to pour the greatest quantity of his ridicule upon the Covenanters.”<sup>187</sup> Again, in complete contrast to Scott’s positive description, M’Crie argued that Claverhouse was “a wild animal” that employed the most disgraceful measures to exterminate Presbyterians. However,

...the good people of Scotland, who inherit any portion of their fathers, will no doubt be amazed to see those whom they have been accustomed to revere as patriots to venerate as confessors and martyrs for truth now held up to derision as mad enthusiasts and reviled as hypocrites and murderous ruffians.<sup>188</sup>

M’Crie conceded that it might be true, to some extent, that there was enthusiasm or fanaticism among the Covenanters; but they had been driven to extremes by the intolerable oppression of the government.<sup>189</sup> Thus, Scott had given a most unfair view of the common people of Scotland. This was very unworthy of a Scotsman, who had a right to be proud of the superior sense and a duty to adopt a more informed view of his countrymen. He was not aware of the fact that the common people among the Presbyterians in general “were better informed than the rest of the country of the same rank.”<sup>190</sup> But, “whatever were the talents of the Presbyterian preachers, there could be no doubt of their achievements in performing most salutary and desirable reformation in the manners of the people.”<sup>191</sup>

In M’Crie’s defence against Scott, the Covenanters and the identity of the Scottish nation were interconnected. The memory of the Covenanters and the strict adherence to their tradition was one of the main characteristics of the Seceders in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This was enforced with a patriotic discourse on the Presbyterian heritage, stretching from the first settlement of the

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<sup>186</sup> Scott, *Old Mortality*, 141.

<sup>187</sup> M’Crie, *Scottish Covenanters*, 18.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

Reformation to the Covenanters. This radical Presbyterian interpretation about the Scottish past was extended back to the Reformation period in M’Crie’s own historical works. He continually underlined the interconnections between Scottish Presbyterianism and the independent existence of the nation. The establishment of the Reformation was the determinant factor in shaping of a national identity.

### **4.3 Reformation, Union and National Identity**

The self-identification of Scottish Kirkmen with such historical myths was an aspect of Scottish religious life in the early nineteenth century, on the way to the Disruption of 1843. However, what makes M’Crie’s writings important for the question of national identity was the combination of an emphasis on the history of the church back to the period before the Revolution Settlement and a rejection of what sprang from this later.<sup>192</sup> The stance of M’Crie on the question of national identity amounted to a complete change when compared to the Enlightenment historiography on the Scottish Reformation past for he criticized the Revolution Settlement of 1688, and the Union of 1707 as a danger to the national independence and identity of the Scots. He suggested a different national identity free from Unionist ideas, which produced discussion of the Scottish past and national identity with a teleology that looked to incorporation with England, and tried to construct an alternative that focused on the Reformation.

According to M’Crie, “the corruptions, by which the Christian religion was universally disfigured, before the Reformation, had grown to a greater height in Scotland than in any other nation within the pale of Western Church.”<sup>193</sup> Superstition and religious imposition dominated a rude and ignorant people, while the clergy held

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<sup>192</sup> Ash, *Strange Death*, 125.

<sup>193</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 9.

great riches and power.<sup>194</sup> The great bulk of the wealth of the nation belonged to a few individuals, notably including the clergy. They commanded the whole of the resources of the nation. The evils of “avarice and ambition” they had taken for a rule among the clergy. Bishops and abbots rivalled the nobility in their magnificence and amount of wealth they possessed. The clergy were “exempted from the secular jurisdiction and corrupted with wealth. Idleness was a scandalous thing for the religion and in contrast with decency.”<sup>195</sup> Of the Christian doctrines and values, only their names of them remained.

In the circumstances so depicted, the nation as a whole naturally demanded reform. The demand for religious change did not derive merely from the nobility but from all levels of society. Exertions were being made for a complete change and reform and all acted in their own capacities for this common purpose.<sup>196</sup> The great bulk of the Scottish nation remained unenlightened since the clergy raised their authority over people by the means of the propagation of superstition and the nation could succeed in gaining its liberties and maintain its independence only by the Reformation. Thus the people with great zeal had embraced Reformation principles. The Reformation had indeed made extensive progress before the Reformation Fathers like Knox accepted it.<sup>197</sup>

M’Crie thus offered a very different picture of national identity from that of the Enlightenment writers placing the Reformation at its heart, pre-eminent in importance. This was closely related to the political and religious context of the period. Scottish Enlightenment historiography had fabricated “a new ‘enlightened’

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 10-11.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 17.

patriotism of Scotland in the middle of the eighteenth century.”<sup>198</sup> The focal point of this construct was the achievement of the Union of 1707. The Union of 1707 had many implications both in England and Scotland in varying degrees. It is important to remember that religion was unquestioned in its centrality to national identity in the early eighteenth century and Union debates formed around ecclesiastical policy.

It can be said that, especially beginning from the middle of the eighteenth century, an English oriented definition of national identity was made fashionable by the manufacturing of the concept of North Britishness. The general approach among the Scottish Enlightenment writers was to direct the Scots toward a political and institutional identification with England by an anti-feudalist critique of Scottish society. It was a discourse, which equated the Anglicisation with patriotism.<sup>199</sup> Most of the educated and politically important figures had accepted the view that pre-Union backwardness had suppressed the people and the new association with England had been the best choice. Scots, who were under the influence of Enlightenment ideas rejoiced to have been rescued from the humiliation caused by the backwardness of Scottish society before 1707. By this motivation, they began to associate liberty and prosperity with Union and Anglicisation renouncing an attachment to Scottish past.<sup>200</sup> There was thus a consensus in support of the Union and the existing benefits of incorporation within the British state.

However, this powerful discourse aiding the establishment of an anglocentric North British identity could not prevent entirely different perceptions of religious and cultural identity. In the period, conflict between Presbyterians and Episcopalians was

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<sup>198</sup> Colin Kidd, “The Ideological Significance of Robertson’s *History of Scotland*” in Stewart J. Brown (ed.) *William Robertson*, 126.

<sup>199</sup> Colin Kidd, “North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms” *Historical Journal* 39 (1996): 361–382.

<sup>200</sup> Stephen Velychenko, “Empire Loyalism and Minority Nationalism in Great Britain and Imperial Russia, 1707 to 1914: Institutions, Law and Nationality in Scotland and Ukraine” *Comperative Studies in Society and History* 39 (1997): 413–441.

a severe hindrance to the articulation of an identity based on a common Protestantism. In addition to this, the Moderate-Evangelical conflict within the Kirk motivated varying perceptions of the Scottish religious and national past. The Moderates were in a conflict with many of the inherited attitudes and vested interests of the society. Their criticism about the Scottish Reformation past and their view of the foundation of the national church provoked a reaction, manifested in a conservative and patriotic attitude. There were many suspicions about their alliance with the political regime in Scotland. Moreover, they were accused of heresy by the Popular (Evangelical) Party within the church and Seceders without.<sup>201</sup> The call for a return to the Reformation principles was derived from the notion that the existing situation of the established church was inconsistent with the spiritual independence of the nation.<sup>202</sup> Whether the Church of Scotland under the Moderate regime could be credibly regarded as the nation in its spiritual aspect was certainly one of the questions stimulating the discussions of the period.

The national character of Scottish religion appeared as an important theme in a discourse characterised by a Scotocentric patriotism, which was widespread particularly among the Seceders in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but the Evangelicals in general showed their vigorous adherence to a traditional understanding of Presbyterianism. The Seceders and the members of the Establishment alike as a powerful expression of a Presbyterian disposition to defend the principles of the Reformation espoused Scottish particularism. M’Crie’s stress on Scottish distinctiveness reflected this conservative interpretation of Scottish past and

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<sup>201</sup> Ian D.L. Clark, “ From Protest to Reaction: The Moderate Regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752–1805” in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* (eds.) N.T. Philipson and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1996), 205.

<sup>202</sup> Drummond and Bulloch, *Scottish Church*, 220.

it was fuelled by a fear of the eclipse of the exceptional character of the Scottish Presbyterianism within the late Hanoverian state.

Thus, it came about that M’Crie felt it necessary to show that the Scottish Reformation had quite exceptional character. The Scottish people themselves were predisposed to embrace the Reformation and its liberating ideas because of the oppression they endured at the hands of the clergy.<sup>203</sup> As part of his criticism of Enlightenment writers especially, William Robertson, M’Crie underlined the acceptance of the Reformation in all ranks of society. M’Crie controverted the claim that Patrick Hamilton was the first man, to bring the Reformation ideas to Scotland with an emphasis on Wyckliff and the Lollards. This served to undermine the view of the “celebrated historian William Robertson” who thought the early reception of the Reformation in Scotland was a phenomenon in the lower and middle ranks of the society.<sup>204</sup> Contrary to this, M’Crie contended<sup>204</sup> that the Reformation had been embraced and patronised by persons who were of superior rank as well as people from the lower and middle parts of society: and the opinions of Wyckliff were received in some of the respectable families in the east and west of Scotland.<sup>205</sup> Thus M’Crie depicted a popular acceptance of Reformation ideas by the whole nation and presented how the Scots consciously adopting Protestant doctrine as the pre-eminent determinant of their national identity.

However, Scottish exceptionalism was not to be attributed merely to the manner in which the Protestant religion had been accepted by the nation. The Scots were different in the way in which they regulated the organisation of the true religion. The essential principles of Scottish Presbyterianism depended upon the “authority of God” as revealed in Scripture and secondary rules were consistent with

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<sup>203</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, 3.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

the general principles of Scripture. Scottish Presbyterianism guaranteed the rights of the people and it was, in this sense, a very libertarian form of Christianity. This was in accord with the character of the nation and the nation at large had desired the maintenance of Presbyterianism in Scotland.<sup>206</sup>

M'Crie focused on the peculiar and exceptional quality of the Scottish Presbyterianism as a significant component of the national identity. This might be seen as a response to an alienation of the Seceders from the religious and political mainstream. When such an attitude is considered in the general context of the Moderate-Evangelical conflict of the period, it emerges from the situation of the Evangelicals turning into a protest against the dominant group, the Moderates. The Moderates favoured the *status quo* and labelled as the Enlightenment at prayer. They were supporting the Union of Scotland with England in 1707. They did not have a strict attachment to the relationship between religion and national identity. For their opponents, the Evangelicals, in religious and political opposition, the inter-connection between national identity and the religion of the Scots was a theme to be used as a valuable weapon and much use was made of the alleged by unique character of the Scottish Reformation and distinctions between Scottish Presbyterianism and other forms of Protestantism.

In M'Crie's works, depiction of difference between Scottish Presbyterian religion and Calvinism on the European mainland is noteworthy. It was necessary for M'Crie to show that John Knox and Andrew Melville were patriotic Scots and that they had established a pure Scottish religion in the country. This overstatement of the distinctive features of Scottish Presbyterianism was a reaction to the Enlightenment historiography of the Scottish Reformation. The Moderates evaluated, Scottish

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 58.

Presbyterianism, in part as a “return to patristic purity” and in part as a copy of the Calvinist model of Geneva thus said by William Robertson<sup>207</sup>. M’Crie reacted to this comment in different places of his works. Largely, ignoring the influences from foreign churches, he saw the Reformation Fathers attempting to build a religious organisation, which had matched the demands of the nation.

The assertions that John Knox had taken the thoughts of Calvin without any change and brought them to his native country were rejected. John Knox could be said to have organised the Scottish Church on the Genevan model. M’Crie claimed that Knox had had many radical ideas before he saw Calvin, although he did develop his notions with observation of the ecclesiastical government and discipline he found on continent. What had contributed to his thought was the correspondence he observed between own notion of what constituted a divinely authorized form of ecclesiastical government.<sup>208</sup> Scottish Presbyterianism in M’Crie’s mind had an exceptional organisation. The Scots had not taken their example from “any Kirk in the world, no, not from Geneva; but drew their plan from the Sacred Scriptures.”<sup>209</sup>

In his *Life of Andrew Melville*, in the same way, he responded to claims about Genevan influences on the Scottish Reformation. Andrew Melville’s mind, as it shaped ecclesiastical government, been dominated by thoughts about the institutions of Geneva. Melville’s goal was not to bring the Church of Scotland to the nearest conformity with Geneva in point of discipline and ecclesiastical polity, because he knew the differences between a kingdom and a republic. In these ways, in reference to both Knox and Melville, M’Crie rejected what he regarded as mere controversial allegations, produced in the seventeenth century against the English Presbyterians

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<sup>207</sup> Colin Kidd, *Subverting*, 191.

<sup>208</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 62.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*, 207.

and adopted without any investigation by the writers of M’Crie’s time, to be used in criticism of particular aspects of the Reformation.<sup>210</sup>

It could, M’Crie acknowledged, be said for both Knox and Melville that they had been greatly indebted to Calvin and Beza. They had admired the ecclesiastical order and discipline established in Geneva; but it was impossible to assert that they had unquestioningly adopted and copied the institutions in this city. Genevan Calvinism was for M’Crie a foreign institution and one model of church organisation could not simply be fitted into another environment. There were different conditions in different countries. The establishment of “the parochial sessions, presbyteries, synods and general assembly” proper to Presbyterianism was very difficult in the small territory of Geneva. Such an organisation could be erected only in a country like Scotland.<sup>211</sup>

M’Crie was trying to preserve the principles of the Scottish Reformation with a conservative stance and a patriotic discourse directed against Episcopalians and the Moderates. Argumentation for Scottish exceptionalism converged with apologetic against the Church of England and these both came together with an anti-Unionist approach in his text. The Scots had to be warned against the dangers of receiving the influences from the Church of England, particularly under the Union. They had to know the distinctive character of their own Reformation to stand against the assimilation to the ethos of the British state.

In Britain under the Hanoverian regime there existed a varied society, composed of many religious sub-cultures and oppositions. These produced different stances against or for the state, and these stances determined a complex pattern of relationships to the state. While the Moderates had supported a British identity to

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<sup>210</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, 60.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, p.61.

achieve a great degree of incorporation into a British state, other Scottish Presbyterians were sceptical about the Revolution Settlement of 1689 and from 1733, the Seceders, who left the Kirk over “concessions made to the demands of the British state”, gained a place as an opposition movement, offering a critique of both the Revolution Settlement and the Union of 1707. A radical Presbyterian patriotism survived after the Union. Its adherents thought of the Union of 1707 as directly contrary to the seventeenth-century Covenanted Union and the destroyer of fundamental laws and liberties: it established Prelacy in England and Erastianism in Scotland.<sup>212</sup> In the process, they remained in an extreme position because a Union, which did not embody the Covenanting tradition and the Reformation principles, was fundamentally unacceptable: and this anti-unionist patriotism was nurtured with beliefs about the religious characteristics of the Scottish nation, described in their historical interpretations and writings. This continuing defence of the Reformation and Covenanting tradition contributed to the popular protest which became more visible in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The views advanced in M’Crie’s works were characteristic of the Seceders and obvious re-presentation of the arguments of Archibald Bruce of the Antiburgher General Associate Synod. Bruce held that allegiance should be confined to the British Crown- not parliament- while “denouncing its Anglican dimension.” Bruce traced the “repugnant Caesero-papistry of England’s theocratic monarchy back to the Henrician Reformation, which kept papalist doctrine, canon law and much of the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy.” He thus compared the English Reformation unfavourably with the Scottish one, drawing attention to the radicalism of the Scottish Presbyterian tradition. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

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<sup>212</sup> Colin Kidd, “Conditional Britons: The Scots Covenanting Tradition and the Eighteenth Century British State” *English Historical Review*, 117 (2002): 1147–1176.

when the British government was equating the political principles of the Seceders with those of Jacobinism, a threat to the British state, Bruce was identifying the characteristics of the English and Scottish Reformations respectively as passive obedience and popular resistance.<sup>213</sup>

The Seceders held the view that there were two not merely distinct, but necessarily hostile ecclesiastical organisations in the same state. Scotland and England were different “and the abominations of Anglican hierarchy and the erastianism of royal supremacy”<sup>214</sup> were English phenomena impossible to accept. So, such views manifested themselves in historical form and found acceptance beyond the ranks of the Seceders. Thus, Bruce’s castigation of Kirk’s centennial celebrations of the defective and erastian Glorious Revolution<sup>215</sup> might be said to have expressed between Evangelicals and Moderates in their attitudes to both the British state and Reformation past.

It was M’Crie’s task to extend the differentiation between religious cultures of the two nations back to the Reformation period. He found the origins of the deviation of the English from the path of true religion in the political circumstances of the period. It was true that Henry VIII renounced subjection to the Roman See and compelled his subjects to follow his example; but it had been a suspiciously self-interested enterprise and that this was a Reformation from above changing the character of the English Reformation. Henry VIII invested himself with the ecclesiastical supremacy, within his dominions, “which had wrested from Rome; and in the arrogant and violent exercise of that power, the English pope was scarcely

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<sup>213</sup> John Brims, “The Covenanting Tradition and Scottish Radicalism in the 1790s” in *Covenant, Charter and Party: Traditions of revolt and protest in modern Scottish History* (ed.) Terry Brotherstone (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989), 51.

<sup>214</sup> Kidd, *Subverting*, 201.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

exceeded by any of the pretended successors of St. Peter.”<sup>216</sup> Although Henry made a breach with Rome, he could not renounce his Catholicism. Thus, among the English, “a motley system” had been established and the English Reformation was supported by contradictory measures.

Statutes against the authority of the pope, and against the tenets of Luther, were enacted in the same parliament; and Papists and Protestants were alternately brought to the same stake. The Protestants in Scotland were universally dissatisfied with this bastard reformation, a circumstance which had contributed not a little to cool their zeal for the lately proposed alliance with England.<sup>217</sup>

Thus, Knox had been disapproving of the course of Reformation in England and had not wished to go to England in the years of his exile: for the laws and corruptions of the Roman See remained, although the name of the Pope had been suppressed.<sup>218</sup> M’Crie perceived in a disapproval of English Erastianism, the belief that “ministers could not discharge their offices conscientiously in the sight of God because no minister had had authority according to the existing laws.”<sup>219</sup> He sought a true religion and an ecclesiastical polity in conformity with Christ’s institution. For this reason, he refused Edward VI’s offer of a bishopric in England and declared the episcopal office to be destitute of divine authority in itself, and its exercise in the English Church to be inconsistent with the ecclesiastical canons.<sup>220</sup>

Thus, the Reformation of religion was conducted on very different principles in England and Scotland, both as to worship and ecclesiastical polity. In England, “the papal supremacy had been transferred to the prince; the hierarchy being subjected to the civil power and all the ancient forms of worship had been kept.” In contrast to this, in Scotland, all of these had been “removed as destitute of divine

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<sup>216</sup> M’Crie, *Knox*, 27.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*, 48-50.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

authority, unprofitable and burdensome.” The worship and government of the Church had been reduced to a scriptural simplicity.<sup>221</sup> The Reformation in this country had been arrested by the influence of the Popish faction. The ceremonies and arbitrary statutes had been imposed and enforced, particularly after the accession of Elizabeth and a great number of ignorant and insufficient clergymen had been employed. With this observed, M’Crie was not surprised to see that every attempt to establish a true and pure religion had been defeated in England.<sup>222</sup>

In complete contrast to this, in Scotland, the nation had been struggling to preserve its national and religious identity by the measures against the corrupt clergy, who had struck terror into the minds of the people. In a short time after the first establishment of the Protestantism in the country, Protestants had become the strongest party offering proof of this, M’Crie held that Catholic worship had been almost deserted throughout the kingdom and there was no question its restoration. The nation had legally abolished the Popish religion and established the Protestantism in Scotland. Thus, the Reformation had advanced in the country from small beginnings and reached the status of a parliamentary establishment.<sup>223</sup> Although there were problems related to the organisation of the Reformation, the Reformed religion had been generally accepted in Scotland.<sup>224</sup>

M’Crie went on to observe that there had been attempts since the Reformation to introduce what he considered foreign laws on the matters, ecclesiastical government and an episcopal religious organisation. This was a danger to the public tranquility inevitably.<sup>225</sup> The Anglican Church was an alien and threatening power, as much as Catholic Church. In the past, the Episcopalians had

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 205.

<sup>225</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, 96.

been working to smooth the way for the introduction of the Episcopacy in Scotland. They had been trying to do this by an imposition on the ministers.<sup>226</sup> He attempted to show the extent of the danger of the practice of patronage. Absolutism, episcopacy and despotism had many interconnections but every manifestation of the evil stood opposed to the national organisation of the Scottish church.<sup>227</sup>

From the establishment of the Reformation, the nation at large had possessed an interest in the question of the independence of the ecclesiastical courts and had regarded the improper influence on the ministers as an oppression of the nation,<sup>228</sup> which had an aversion to the episcopacy. The ministers had not constituted a threat to the king in the past; but the king, in alliance with the episcopal priests harassed these loyal and patriotic subjects.<sup>229</sup> Lay patronage was a very important issue in this context. It was the pre-eminent issue, which had recurrently created schisms in the Scottish Kirk. The Seceders regarded the nomination of the ministers by lay patrons as unacceptable and this led to their separation from the Established Church. This problem was an endlessly debated issue, which resulted in new schisms as well as lesser conflicts until the Disruption of 1843. M'Crie was a part of this debate as a true follower of the Secession in 1733.<sup>230</sup> Inevitably, he constructed connections between lay patronage and the question of national identity. He conceived that in the normative age which followed the Reformation, there had been the power in the presbyteries and the people accordingly possessed of their liberties; but now the power of the ministers was fettered by lay patronage and the reason behind this was the influence of the Anglican Church.<sup>231</sup> He saw the Golden Act of 1592, which

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 68-69.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 224-225.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 69-70.

<sup>230</sup> Herron, *Kirk*, 83.

<sup>231</sup> M'Crie, *Melville*, 148.

gave parliamentary sanction to the system of Presbyterian courts and definitely settled the Presbyterian form of polity in Scotland, as a great step in the national Reformation, as it repealed statutes, which encouraged superstition and were hostile to the national independence of the Scots.<sup>232</sup> Here and in the following years, patriotism was manifest in seeking to establish Presbytery in the face of an Episcopalian threat and provide an evangelical ministry for the promotion of religion in country were very patriotic deeds.<sup>233</sup>

However, in following century, particularly by the Revolution Settlement and Union of 1707, everything acquired in the Reformation period was undermined and impaired. M'Crie perceived the Revolution to have been made by a coalition of parties of very different principles and most of them had been illiberal and hostile to the Presbyterians. By the Revolution, the English had started to regard the Scots as barbarians who defended the "peculiar sentiments of Knox and his followers."<sup>234</sup> However, the great majority of Scots continued to look back to the Reformers with sentiments of respect and gratitude. For a considerable time after the Revolution, the Presbyterians of Scotland regarded with contempt to views of English writers about the Scottish past, knowing that Presbyterianism was more scriptural and liberal than the religion of their neighbours. However, the Union had led to a transformation in the national sentiments of the people of Scotland. Some Scots had been jealous of the English predominance in Scotland after the Union; but in time this had turned into a desire for conformity with their southern neighbour. In the writings of the most popular of the Scottish literati, this was the dominant tendency and this explained the existing distorted picture of Scottish Reformation.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 148-149.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 264-265.

<sup>234</sup> M'Crie, *Knox*, 353.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 354.

M’Crie was simply following the traditional interpretation of the eighteenth-century Seceders about the Scottish past. They held a very different attitude towards the British state from that of the Moderates in the Established Church. It can be traced to a different evaluation of the Presbyterian heritage of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the period central to their thought as they developed their understanding of Scotland’s national identity. They were not, fundamentally hostile to Unionist views; but the Union was to be subordinate to the Covenants and an articulation of them, and more basically of the principles they identified with the Scottish Reformation. A Union was possible but only on condition of the destruction of Anglicanism in England. It was hardly possible for them to accept the religious and political order prevailing after 1707.

In conformity with Secession tradition, M’Crie was strictly attached to the Covenanting tradition and he repeated its arguments against the Union. The Union Settlement reduced the power of the Scottish Church.<sup>236</sup> The Moderates were responsible for the situation in which the established Church of Scotland languished. His anti-Moderate post-Enlightenment conservatism on the question of national identity relied upon a criticism of the Moderate interpretation of the Scottish past for the Moderates distanced themselves from the Covenanting tradition, failing to see this tradition as the source of the principle on which the national life was to be conducted and trying to find alternatives to Covenanting Calvinism.<sup>237</sup> In other words, this radical and reactionary Presbyterian patriotism, by M’Crie was an articulation of an opposition to Scottish Enlightenment historiography as it dealt with the Reformation past. He inherited the eighteenth century Presbyterian fear that

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<sup>236</sup> Alexander Murdoch, *British History 1660–1832: National Identity and Local Culture* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 55.

<sup>237</sup> J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government* Vol.2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 302.

Union might result in the absorption of the Presbyterian Kirk within a British Episcopalian church. Scottish Presbyterianism had to be preserved against this danger.<sup>238</sup> M'Crie was making a whiggish critique of the Whig Revolution and Union calling the Scots to look back to the Reforming principles and Covenanting identity their way forward. The chief contemporary influence on the formation of this critique was question of lay patronage, which led to the schisms in the Church of Scotland since 1733 and central to the debate about Kirk's independence. When this is perceived, M'Crie's contribution to our understanding of his period is considerable.

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<sup>238</sup> Colin Kidd, "Religious Relignment between the Restoration and Union" in John Robertson *A Union for Empire* (ed.) Robertson, 145-146.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

There are a limited number of studies of post-Enlightenment Scottish historiography and these are mainly concerned with the imaginative literature products of the period. Moreover, the rare studies about political and religious histories depend on a conviction that the society was secularising and emancipating itself from the religious ideas with the aid of progressive notions developed during the Scottish Enlightenment. However, if we accept this paradigm, we miss the realities of the period and it becomes difficult to understand its atmosphere. The recent historiography has challenged the understanding of the Enlightenment itself disclosed by this view and consequently its reception. Secularisation looks less inevitable.

In the period, intense debates and tensions within the Church of Scotland, between the Moderate and Popular Parties, and the controversies among the dissenting groups shaped the Scottish history-writing. These debates paved the way for different interpretations of the Scottish past, forward according to the theological position of the writers. M’Crie’s historical works are very important for their depiction of a particular contribution, made most firmly by the Seceders to the

intellectual environment and religio-political discussions of the time. His works were an attempt to restore the estimation of the Scottish Reformation past in reaction to an Enlightenment historiography, which attacked this heritage as a hindrance to progressive ideas and fuller integration into the British state. His restorationist view was a Scottish manifestation of a movement in Europe at large responding to the dangerous ideas disseminated by Enlightenment thinkers and actions of the French Revolutionaries. His works made him an important part of this intellectual, political and religious phenomenon.

Pursuing his aims, he produced counter-arguments to those of the defenders of the separation of the church and state and lay patronage. The question of Erastianism and lay patronage had been long discussed for years in Scotland and from time to time created new schisms in Scottish Kirk. In the period after the French Revolution, under the name of voluntarism, a wider question about the church-state relations emerged and the contrasting views on this question brought one of the turning points in Scottish history, the Disruption of 1843.

M'Crie's purpose was to defend and reinvigorate an assertive Presbyterian historiography serving his purposes in these discussions. As a radical Presbyterian in opposition to the Moderates, he believed in the independence and superiority of the church in relation to the state. He adhered, in other words, to the theocratic beliefs of the Scottish Covenanters of the seventeenth century. The Kirk was the visible community, a self-governing corporation, which was to operate with the aid of the state in the establishment of the true religion. This was for him a basic notion of the Scottish Reformation and placed him in the vanguard of the Counter-Enlightenment.

In looking back to the Scottish Reformation Fathers to find arguments justifying his beliefs, he showed himself a competent historian, according to the

demands of his own day. He certainly criticising Enlightenment writers, made extensive use of primary sources. His use of such documentary material showed his adaptation of antiquarian method; but his history-writing continued a tradition of undisguised moral purpose. M'Crie sought to correct a false understanding of the Scottish Reformation among Enlightenment writers; but he shared much with them- and not only in the matter of civil liberty. He shared, for example the Enlightenment view that the society in which he lived was better and more advanced than that which went before. However, he explained this progress by the influence of the Providence on the process of change, which necessitated a new mode of reception of perennial Protestant truth.

We may reflect that Scottish Whig historiography continued in varying forms in the early nineteenth century. Thomas M'Crie's attempt in defence of the cause of the Covenanters and his enthusiasm for the Scottish Reformation past best represents its Presbyterian form, which did not pass away under the Enlightenment influence. It remained to provide a powerful discourse extensively used in the religious and political debates of the period. M'Crie's history is no mere curiosity. It reveals a mind-set to which historians of the period must give attention if they are more thoroughly and profoundly to understand its conflicts.

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