

SOCIAL STUDIES — SCOTTISH HISTORY / RME · P5–P7

Ath-leasachadh na h-Alba — The Scottish Reformation

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The Scottish Reformation

1

The Reformation — background

In the 16th century, Protestant reformers across Europe challenged the authority and practices of the Roman Catholic Church — corruption, the sale of indulgences, the Pope's authority. Martin Luther (Germany, 1517) started the movement.

2

John Knox (c.1514–1572)

The dominant figure of the Scottish Reformation. A fiery preacher who studied under Calvin in Geneva. His 'thunderings' against Catholicism and Mary Queen of Scots shaped Presbyterian Scotland.

3

Scottish Reformation (1560)

The Scottish Parliament formally broke with Rome in 1560. The authority of the Pope was rejected. The Mass was abolished. A Calvinist form of Protestantism (Presbyterianism) was established.

4

Presbyterianism

A form of church government run by elected elders (presbyters) — not by bishops appointed by the Crown. In theory, all members are equal before God. This democratic structure made the Scottish Kirk distinctly different from the Anglican Church.

5

The Church of Scotland (The Kirk)

The national church of Scotland — Presbyterian, not Anglican. Its independence from royal control was central to Scottish national identity. The Kirk was 'established' (the national church) but not subject to the Crown on spiritual matters.



6

Impact on education

Scottish Presbyterianism placed enormous emphasis on reading the Bible — which required literacy. The Education Act 1696 required a school in every parish. Scotland's high literacy rate by the 18th century was a direct legacy of the Reformation.

