CHAPTER ONE

ANDREW MELVILLE AND THE MELVILLE LEGEND

The Melville Legend

The intellectual legacy of Andrew Melville (1545–1622) as a leader of the Renaissance and a promoter of humanism in Scotland is as complex as the man himself. Few figures in early modern Scotland have been as misunderstood as Melville. His work as an academic and university reformer as well as his ecclesiastical labors have generated diverse and, at times, conflicting assessments. Some, reflecting upon his labors as a humanist and university reformer, have labeled him “the Scots Melanchthon,”1 “the Beza of Scotland,”2 the first of Scotland’s “pure scholars,”3 “a scholar’s scholar,”4 “the Second Founder of the University of Glasgow,”5 and even “the chief restorer of the western university.”6 Others, contemplating his efforts as an ecclesiastical reformer, have designated him the “Episcoporum exactor” or “επισκοπομαστικ,”7 the “father of Scottish Presbyterianism,”8 the “Presbyterian missionary to Scotland,”9 the primary author of the 1578 Second Book of

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1 James Bass Mullinger, *The University of Cambridge: From the Royal Injunctions of 1535 to the Accession of Charles the First* (Cambridge, 1884), 365.
5 H.M.B. Reid, *The Divinity Principals in the University of Glasgow 1545–1654* (Glasgow, 1917), 1.
Discipline," and “the de facto leader of the Scottish Presbyterians from the 1580s on.” Still others in assessing the period more broadly have simply declared that he was “the dominant figure in Scottish history for thirty years.” To be sure the more extreme characterizations have arisen, in part, because of Melville’s own charismatic personality and flamboyant histrionics. He was unquestionably a polarizing figure. Consequently he has been portrayed in almost mythic terms as an “ancient prophet emerging from his seclusion to hurl denunciation and protest” and as a high-handed theocrat and “militant champion” of Presbyterianism who preached sedition from the pulpit and who brought about, almost single-handedly, the acceptance of presbytery in Scotland in 1580. Whereas some have categorically denied that he was a church leader at all, others have attributed to him a virtual omnipotence in the church’s highest judiciary.

Despite his decidedly Presbyterian commitments and avowed opposition to episcopacy, as seen in his 1604 Anti-Tami-Cami-Categoria, he has been labeled the “intellectual grandparent” of the ‘Aberdeen Doctors’. Students of Scottish history will remember him as the one who confronted James VI of Scotland in September 1596 at Falkland Palace, calling him “God’s sillie vassal,” tugging on his sleeve, and boldly

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13 Reid, The Divinity Principals in the University of Glasgow 1545–1654, 57.


15 Reid, The Divinity Principals in the University of Glasgow 1545–1654, 57.
