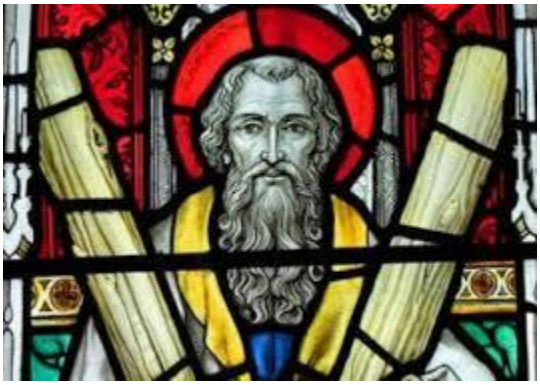
F is for FAITH by Kyle Granite A—Z of Scottish History

Buckle up folks because it's a long one! Scotland's history with religion is a complex and often contentious issue. From early on the people of Scotland, as we now know it, looked to a higher being(s) for answers and guidance. Unfortunately little is known about the popular religious belief prior to the arrival of Christianity, although it is widely speculated that the Picts would have observed a form of Celtic polytheism, similar to druidism and paganism. It is still argued by many that the scattering of prehistoric monuments, sculptures, inscriptions and standing stones were created as temples or shrines to facilitate the worship of these higher beings. Sites such as the Ring of Brodgar in Orkney and Calanais on the Isle of Lewis continue to baffle visitors and scholars alike and their undeniable aura of enchantment and mystery continue to arouse speculation on the influence of mythical or omnipotent beings.

It is likely that Christianity arrived in the South of Scotland with the Romans, however it was not documented until 367AD when St Ninian founded the first Christian Church in Whithorn in Galloway and embarked on a mission to convert the Picts. In 563 St Columba (Colum Cille, 'Dove of the Church', c. 521-97) continued the work by converting the remaining Scots and Picts. Columba was a hot-blooded warrior-monk from Ireland, who led a mission to do God's work in Dalriada. The king of Dalriada gave Columba the island of Iona, off the coast of Mull, where he founded a large monastery which became the spiritual powerhouse of Christianity in northern Britain and a centre of learning and artistic excellence. One benefit from the arrival of organised religion was the introduction of writing and subsequently written records. Then came Mungo, who founded a church beside the Molindinar Burn, in a 'green hollow' (glascu), giving the city of Glasgow, or 'the dear green place', it's name.

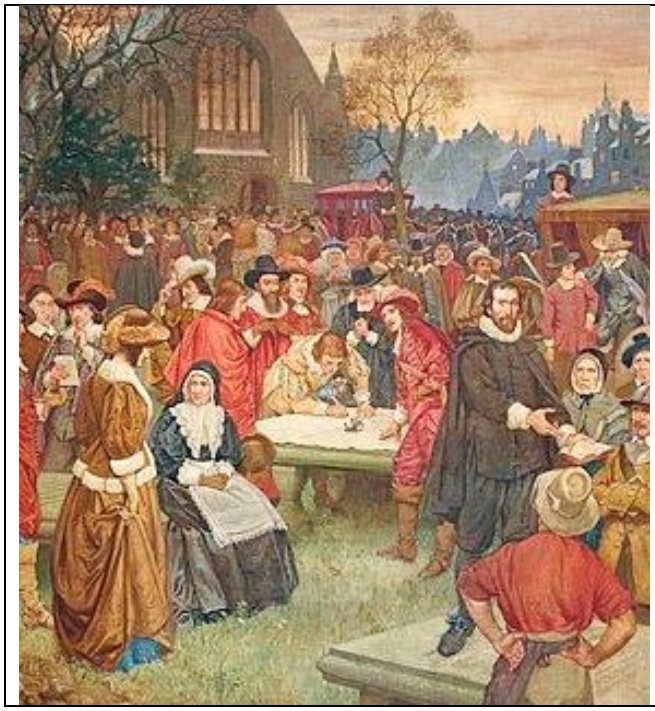
And then, of course, there is the patron saint of Scotland, St Andrew, a Galilean fisherman and one of Jesus' original disciples, whose relics (as legend has it) made their way to Kinrymont, Fife, sometime in the fourth century when St Remulus was shipwrecked off the east coast. The church in Kinrymont became St Andrews Cathedral and the town became an important centre for pilgrimage and evangelism. Scotland's very own flag, the Saltire, originates from the demise of St Andrew, who felt he was unworthy for crucifixion on a cross like Christ, and instead was nailed to an X shaped cross, which became known as the St Andrew's Cross.



Since the eleventh century, thanks to the work of St Margaret who was married to Malcolm III, Christianity has remained the popular religion within Scotland, but that does not mean that it has not been subject to division and conflict. In 1517, a few hundred miles away in Wittenberg, Germany, an Augustinian Monk named Martin Luther wrote his Ninety-Five Theses, a letter to the bishop which he nailed to the door of the church, protesting against the sale of indulgences and subsequently starting the ball of the European Reformation rolling. In Scotland, the reformation arrived with and was promoted by the likes of Patrick Hamilton, George Wishart and John Knox. Hamilton, a young theologian and great-grandson of James II, who had studied in Wittenberg, has gone down in history as the first Scottish Protestant martyr, burned at the stake for spreading Lutheran doctrine in 1528. Archbishop James Beaton hoped that Hamilton's death would be a warning to others who may also have been dabbling in "heretical" activities. Unfortunately for Beaton, Hamilton's martyrdom shocked the country and spread Lutheran ideas even further throughout Scotland.

By the 1560's, despite the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots ruling, Scotland had become predominantly Protestant with a Presbyterian national kirk (the Church of Scotland, governed by representative committees rather than a hierarchy of bishops) following the Calvinist doctrine, however the kirk struggled to penetrate the staunchly Catholic Highlands and Islands. Sadly, the violence, brutality and religious intolerance continued with the ruthless suppression of Roman Catholicism, which included the destruction of magnificent and ancient architecture and iconoclasm (the destruction of religious images) and much of Scotland's great Renaissance works of art were lost forever.

During the reign of Charles I, efforts to impose an Anglican form of Protestantism resulted in the signing of the National Covenant in 1638 in order to preserve the Presbyterian form of Protestantism in Scotland. (see picture on next page). Charles I saw this as a direct betrayal of his authority and resulted in the Bishop's War from 1639-40 which ended in the establishment of a fully Presbyterian system in Scotland.



The signing of the National Covenant in Greyfriars Churchyard in 1638

[by William B Hole 1846-1917]

However, the violence and upheaval continued with the outbreak of the English Civil Wars and then the "Killing Times" where Scots were killed for participating in field 'conventicles' as a protest to the reestablishment of the bishops. Presbyterianism was restored following the Glori- ous Revolution in 1688 when the Catholic James II/VII was deposed by his protestant daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange. Enter the Jacobites! Who (to

keep it brief!) were mostly Catholic Highland clans who supported James and led uprisings against the mostly Protestant Hanoverians throughout the 17th and 18th centuries up until defeat at the battle of Culloden in 1746.

The 1800s saw an influx of Irish Catholic immigrants arrive in Scotland, particularly in Glasgow, as well as a significant number of Catholic Italians, Poles and Lithuanians and Jews escaping pogroms (violence against religious communities, particularly Jewish communities) in Eastern Europe.

During the twentieth and twenty first centuries the population of Scotland has become increasingly secular, however the period has also suffered from a rise in Sectarian- ism, bolstered largely with the country's two main rival football teams, Rangers and Celtic.

Today, despite the continuing localised struggles between Christian factions, most Scots pride them- selves on Scotland’s reputation for welcoming those from all religious groups and backgrounds with open arms and being a safe space for all, no matter what God they pray to.