



Chapter from Book

SCOTTISH CALVINISM AND THE PRINCIPLE OF INTOLERANCE

by

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Abstract

In some popular historical writings Calvin is often depicted as the 'dictator of Geneva', 'the arch-inquisitor' of Protestantism, and branded, along with his colleagues Farel and Beza, and his disciple Knox, as a 'persecutor' – indeed as the one who 'brought Protestant persecution to a head'. Together they are held responsible for impressing upon Reformed Protestantism a character which, for the larger part of two centuries, is held to have discoloured its Christian witness in those areas where it held sway. As a result, Calvinism for some cannot be painted in too dark a hue nor its adherents too severely condemned. This almost universal popular antipathy, particularly among 'lay' writers, has not gone without challenge, or at least modification, from serious students of Calvinism and from a number of ecclesiastical historians who, in the post-war period, have added significantly to 16th century studies. 'Calvinism', as J. T. McNeill remarked in his preface to *The History and Character of Calvinism*, 'has usually been discussed in an atmosphere of controversy and has often been judged even by academicians with a slender reference to evidence'. But with the publication of hitherto unedited source material and with new and elaborately annotated editions of some standard works, it may be that Calvinism, as Calvin himself requested in the prefatory letter to the first edition of *The Institutes*, can still hope to be accorded a full impartial inquiry, and particularly in the area of toleration.

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