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**Bishop Thomas Nicolson and the
Roman Catholic Mission to Scotland**

1694 – 1718

Wendy J. Doran

Submitted for the Degree of M.LITT

University of Glasgow

September 1986

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RIGHT REV. THOMAS NICOLSON

*Bishop of Peristachium and
first Vic. Apost. of Scotland*

BORN 1646.

CONS. 1695.

DIED 1718.

From the Portrait at Glenbervie House.

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Summary

After the Reformation in Scotland, the Catholic Church became outlawed and Catholic practices almost died out. The influence of Protestantism was great and appealed to sections of Scottish society. However, Catholic missionary priests, mainly Jesuits and Irish Franciscans, worked untiringly and in the face of opposition and persecution, to try and keep Catholicism alive in Scotland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their work was, however, disorganised and lacked direction because they carried out their activities independently of each other and made no attempts to co-ordinate their work. Consequently, even those areas which the Reformation had not reached, the remoter districts of the Highlands and Islands, often had no contact with the clergy and Catholic, even Christian practices, quickly died out. The main concern of the Catholic church in the seventeenth century was to extend the influence of the Counter Reformation to non-Catholic countries, and Scotland, to all intents and purposes, had become such by 1660.

The Scottish Catholic Mission was organised in Rome by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda) and by the Scottish Agent, William Leslie who was in close touch with Catholic priests in Scotland. It was decided by Propaganda and Leslie in 1689 to appoint a bishop to organise and co-ordinate the work of Catholic missionaries and Thomas Nicolson was consecrated vicar-apostolic for Scotland in 1694. He was a convert to Catholicism who had been a regent of Glasgow University for several years before his decision to become a Catholic and study for the priesthood. He subsequently worked for one year as a missionary in Scotland before his imprisonment and banishment in 1688 and therefore had first-hand experience of the Catholic Mission. In the 23 years that followed his appointment, Nicolson worked untiringly to re-establish Catholicism in Scotland and by the time of his death in 1718, the Catholic Church

had once again gained a strong foothold. Despite the harshness of the Penal Laws and the remoteness of many areas of northern and western Scotland, he and his priests sought out, instructed and confirmed nominal Catholics, gained the support and confidence of lapsed Catholics and converted and baptised many non-Catholics. Catholic doctrine and canon law were reaffirmed in Nicolson's 'Statutes', Catholic schools were set up and a Scottish seminary was built at Scalán. The work of the regular priests (Jesuits, Franciscans, Vincentians, Dominicans and Benedictines) was incorporated into the Mission and Nicolson was given authority over them.

Nicolson was also an able administrator and his success in restoring Catholicism in Scotland was also due to his skilful management of the Mission. He gained the support of the Catholic nobility whose co-operation and financial assistance proved invaluable; he ensured a regular supply of student priests to the Scots colleges abroad to train as missionaries; he laboured to instruct his missionaries in the art of preaching and refuting the prevalent 'heresies' of the time, including Jansenism; he corresponded regularly with Leslie and Propaganda, sending frequent reports on the work of the Mission and requests for increased funds when these were needed. Above all, Nicolson worked undeterred in the face of recurring obstacles which included the strict enforcement of the Penal Laws, the capture and imprisonment of his priests, shortage of money, the success of the mission of the S.S.P.C.K. (Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge) and his own ill-health. He overcame each difficulty with courage and determination and can be considered to be the man who refounded the Scottish Catholic Church after its destruction at the Reformation.

ABBREVIATIONS

S.C.A. Scottish Catholic Archives
B.L. Blairs Letters
S.R.O. Scottish Record Office
N.L.S. National Library of Scotland
N.L.I. National Library of Ireland
I.R. Innes Review

Preface

Thomas Nicolson was the first Catholic bishop to be appointed to Scotland after the Reformation era and it was during his episcopate that the Roman Catholic mission became coherent and organised. Until the restoration of the Scottish Catholic Hierarchy in 1878, bishops were given the title of vicars apostolic and their main function was to ensure the re-establishment of Scottish Catholicism and the continuity of the Catholic Church in Scotland. It was during the period of Nicolson's vicariate that the number of Catholics in Scotland began to increase, that standards of Catholic practice and worship were raised, that instruction and schooling were improved and that co-operation with the regular missionaries (those belonging to religious orders), particularly the Jesuits, was begun. Secular priests were appointed by the Congregation de Propaganda Fide in Rome and it is largely due to their work that Catholicism was revived in Scotland. This is not to underestimate the work done by Franciscan and Vincentian priests who came from Ireland and contributed greatly to the survival of Catholic practice in the Western Isles; Nicolson was greatly indebted to these Irish missionaries and acknowledged the work they had done when he first visited the Highlands and Islands.

There is a good deal of mystery surrounding the reasons for Nicolson's appointment as he was comparatively unknown by Propaganda, although he had worked in Scotland as a missionary priest before he was chosen to be the first Vicar Apostolic. He may well have been chosen because he was from a noble family, the Kemnays of Aberdeenshire, because he was well-known in court circles or because of his strength of character. He was a late convert to Catholicism, and because of this it may have been felt that he was therefore the obvious choice of man for instructing non-Catholics and lapsed Catholics in the faith. He was also an intellectual and had been a regent of Glasgow University for

fourteen years; consequently, he was well known in academic circles and his experience and ability as a teacher and administrator would also qualify him for the post. His background and upbringing also made him suitable for the mission to the Catholic nobility of Scotland, many of whom had abandoned their faith out of expediency. Nicolson came to value very highly the contribution of the Catholic nobility to the success of his mission and it seems to have had a greater influence on the Catholic Church in Scotland than the English nobility had in England. It is known that many Catholic nobles at the time of Nicolson's vicariate harboured priests, giving them lodging, protection and food, and permitting them to say masses in their private chapels. Others also helped with the financing of the mission and gave more positive help. Some noble families openly practised their religion and suffered because of it, whilst others submitted to the Penal Laws, attending Presbyterian services publicly, but secretly keeping Catholic chaplains and hearing Mass in private. Nicolson himself lodged at Preshome on the Duke of Gordon's estate in the Enzie district of Banffshire, depending on the goodwill and co-operation of the Gordon family.

Much has been written, both fact and fiction, about these 'lean years' at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, so-called because of the widespread famine and successive bad harvests during this period, as well as because of religious and political persecutions in Scotland. However, the work of the Catholic missionary priests at this time has received little scholarly attention hitherto and this work endeavours to demonstrate what drove these priests to continue their work under such difficult conditions. Under the new administration established under Nicolson from 1697 onwards, they were accountable to higher authorities for their movements and work, accountable to Nicolson, to Propaganda, to the Scottish agents in Rome and Paris, and of course to the Pope. Nevertheless, many of them were men of great strength of character and temperament and were personally dedicated to the mission and to the

propagation of the Catholic faith. Under Nicolson, they did not have to rely solely on their own sources of income or their personal ability as teachers and preachers. They were financed directly from Rome and had to account for all the money they used, and in addition, they were supplied with all the necessary books, vestments and equipment they needed to carry out their priestly duties. They were never totally isolated and readily made use of trustworthy messengers to carry letters to and from their bishop, while Nicolson himself corresponded regularly with Rome and Paris. Such communication was difficult and dangerous at a time when many Catholic priests lived like hunted criminals and letters were frequently intercepted. In spite of this, many of the letters have survived the years. They were kept originally among the archives of the Scots College at Paris under the able care of Father Thomas Innes, and are now lodged among the Blairs Papers with other Scottish Catholic Archives at Columba House in Edinburgh. These letters have formed the basis of this research.

Missionary activity was not, however, confined to the Roman Catholic Church. Other Christian churches were also undertaking this kind of work at the same time and the Roman Catholic Church was not alone in its efforts to make converts and secure souls for Christ. The Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge was very active during the period of Nicolson's vicariate and its work bears remarkable similarities to that of the Catholic Mission. Nicolson's priests had to work in competition with such missionary organisations and some measure of their success might have been due to their being in the right place at the right time, as well as to the receptivity of their converts.

Thomas Nicolson holds a very important place in Scottish Catholic history and yet little has been written about this very able, yet deeply religious man. His appointment marked the decision by Catholic authorities in Rome to make a concentrated effort to restore Catholicism in Scotland and in particular, to revive it in the remoter areas of the Highlands and Islands, previously the missionary

territory of Irish regular priests. His letters reveal his character and personality which above all else hold the key to the success of the mission. He was a man of great courage and determination, who carried out his work in the face of many obstacles and difficulties, not the least of which was his own bad health; yet he was also very human and had a deep compassion for those in need and an enduring love for his country. By the time of his death in 1718, Scottish Catholicism had been firmly re-established and the Catholic Mission put on a sound footing.

1. Roman Catholicism in Scotland Prior to Nicolson's Appointment

The Reformation in Scotland was swift and effective. Calvinism in the 1550s proved popular and attractive in its beliefs and objectives and Protestant reformers believed that they had been chosen by God to purge the Christian religion of 'papistical idolatry and superstition.'¹ Initially, the Protestant reformers allied themselves to the political movement aimed at the overthrow of Mary of Guise, who governed in the name of Mary Queen of Scots then resident in France, but by the 1570s, the stability of the Protestant regime had begun to increase the difficulties facing Catholics. Many Catholics embraced Calvinism to safeguard their lives and property, whilst others fled the country and never returned. By the seventeenth century, Scotland had become a missionary country from the Catholic point of view, and it was left to Jesuit, Franciscan and Vincentian priests to attempt to convert the Scottish people back to Catholicism.

The Superior of the Scottish Jesuits working in Scotland in the latter part of the sixteenth century was Father James Gordon and the missionary work of the Jesuit priests was organised and controlled by him. In 1583, Father William Crichton was sent to Scotland and reported that the country was under the influence of the nobles; only by gaining their support could the country be brought back to the Catholic faith. In the Lowlands, this proved to be a difficult task because of persecutions, but in the north-east and in parts of the Highlands and Islands, the Jesuits met with more success, particularly in those areas where the influence of the reformers had been minimal. After a series of Protestant regencies, James VI, on assuming his personal rule, aligned himself firmly behind the Protestant interest in Scotland and even found it necessary to take some positive action against the Northern Catholic earls of Huntly, Errol, Crawford and Angus. Letters had been intercepted in 1589 which showed that some of the earls had expressed regret at the failure of Spanish armada and had promised the King

of Spain support in any further planned invasion of England. James gathered an army and marched north against the earls who surrendered. Three years later, the same earls were implicated in a Jesuit plot which involved their assistance in a planned Spanish invasion of Scotland. James again marched north in 1593 and the earls were obliged either to submit to the reformed church or go into exile. The earls of Huntly and Errol fled to France, but after learning of the forfeiture of their land, they returned to Scotland and were formally received into the reformed church. Nevertheless, Catholic masses continued to be said at Huntly Castle and for a time, little action was taken against Catholics once the political danger associated with Catholicism had been removed.²

At the death of Archbishop Beaton in 1603, the Scottish Catholic hierarchy came to an end and the half dozen or so secular clergy who were left in Scotland at the beginning of the seventeenth century were placed under the jurisdiction of George Blackwell, arch-priest of England. After 1621, Scottish priests came under the jurisdiction of vicars-apostolic of England, and Cardinal Francis Barberini was appointed protector of the Scottish mission. Barberini held this office for over half a century and offered charitable hospitality and refuge to Scottish exiles in Rome.³ The missionary priests found their situation very unsatisfactory, communications with their superiors continuing to be difficult, if not impossible, at this time. Also, the English bishops were frequently uninterested in or unsympathetic towards the plight of Scottish Catholics and did little to help or improve the situation north of the border. The Scottish Catholic clergy, secular and Jesuit, found it increasingly difficult to continue their work of preserving Catholicism in Scotland; Privy Council proclamations in 1628 and 1629 outlawed Catholic priests, ordering its commissioners to 'follow, hunt and pursue them with fire and sword.'⁴ Only the Irish Franciscans working in the Highlands and Islands seemed safe from this persecution, although Father Cornelius Ward was arrested in 1630 returning from a visit to the Papal Nuncio in Belgium and Father Hegarty

was arrested on South Uist the same year.⁵ Most of the priests remaining in Scotland between 1630 and 1650 operated independently of one another and had little communication with either the Scottish seminaries abroad or with Rome. The Irish Franciscans operated from Bunamargy on the coast of Antrim and reported frequently to the Congregation de Propaganda Fide (the Congregation of Cardinals responsible for the propagation of the faith throughout the world)⁶ These reports often contained exaggerated numbers of converts made in Scotland in order to secure increased subsidies from Rome to assist the missionaries in their work.⁷ The Catholic mission generally was unco-ordinated and lacking in direction and its chances of success were slim. A meeting was therefore held in Paris in 1650 to discuss the future of the Scottish Catholic Church and it was decided by those present⁸ to appoint a Scottish priest, who would be resident in Rome, to co-ordinate and direct the Scottish mission. The man chosen was William Leslie who acted as agent for the Scottish Catholic Mission from 1650 until his death in 1707.⁹ Three years later, in 1653, Pope Innocent X freed the secular priests of Scotland from the jurisdiction of the English vicars-apostolic and placed them under the direction and supervision of Scottish prefects-apostolic.

The duties of the prefects were the general supervision of the clergy, the distribution of a monetary allowance from Propaganda, the regular correspondence with Rome and the Scots college in Paris on the state of the Mission, the selection and transmission of students to colleges abroad for training for the priesthood and the presiding at regular meetings of the missionaries. William Ballantyne was the first Prefect-Apostolic to be appointed to Scotland (1653-1661) and he found the mission very disorganised. Part of the trouble seems to have been the clergy's involvement with political affairs and their continuous quarrels with the Jesuits. The Jesuits themselves feared that a bishop might be appointed with superiority over them and were therefore alarmed

at these changes in ecclesiastical organisation. Ballantyne recommended his clergy to try to live in peace with the regular brethren, but active co-operation was not achieved until later in the century.

Alexander Winster, also called Alexander Dunbar, was the second Prefect-Apostolic to Scotland (1662-1694) and he took up his residence at Gordon Castle with the family of the Marquis of Huntly. Winster reported to Propaganda that the Mass had to be celebrated secretly in the chapels of private houses, although in the Highlands Catholics seem to have greater freedom and Mass was often said in the open because of the large numbers of worshippers. He also reported that few people had received the Sacraments and that there were no Catholic schools in the Lowlands, although one or two existed in the Highlands. On the other hand, vocations to the priesthood were plentiful in the Lowlands, but there were none in the Highlands because parents were more insular and objected to their sons being sent abroad for their education. The Jesuit missionaries insisted that prospective missionary priests should be of high intelligence and strong character to withstand the rigours of working outside the law; they would then be able 'to gain a victory with more ease and better fortune than an unskilled multitude.'¹⁰ The Jesuits, however, were assisted financially by the nobility and relied on their protection, whereas the secular clergy generally had no fixed place of residence and were very poor. The main obstacles to the Scottish Catholic Mission at this time appear to have been the severity of the Penal Laws, the enforced education of children in Protestant schools and the exclusion of Catholics from all civil offices.

In 1677, a Scottish priest, Alexander Leslie, was sent by Propaganda to report on the state of the mission and to suggest ways in which the organisation could be improved. He reported that in all there were 14,000 communicant members of the Catholic Church in Scotland, of whom 12,000 lived in the Highlands and Islands.¹¹ In the Lowlands, few Catholics heard Mass more than three times a year because

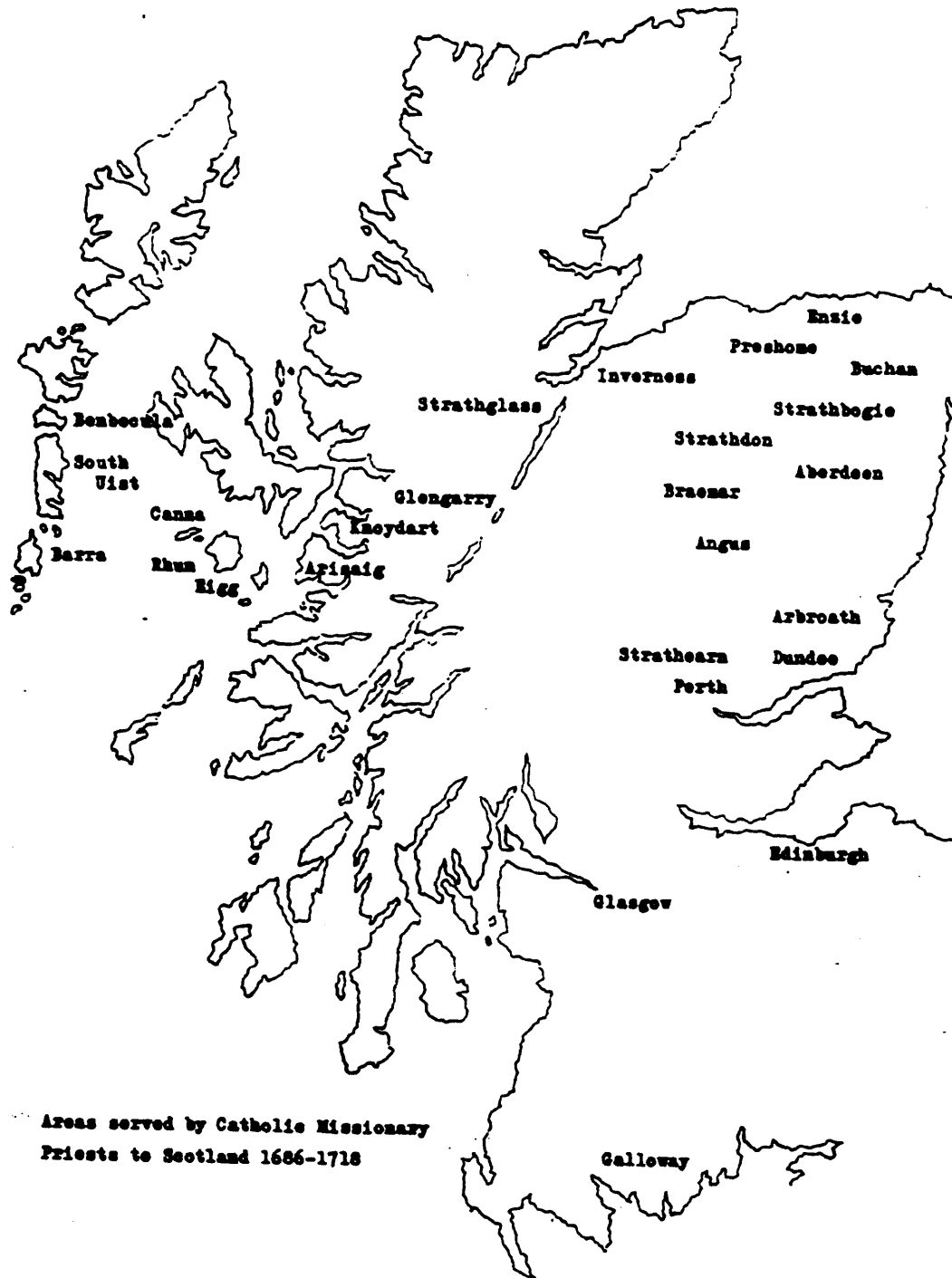
the priests were, of necessity, itinerant. Leslie's recommendations were the provision of fixed places of residence for secular missionaries, the granting of similar faculties (powers) to seculars as to regulars because many people thought secular priests were inferior to regulars, the nomination of a superior-general for Scotland with authority over both regulars and seculars, the need for more students for the priesthood in Scots colleges abroad, the granting by the Holy See of an increased subsidy to the Scottish Mission (Catholics in the Lowlands did not contribute to the support of the clergy, except for a few noble families who had a private chaplain) and the sending of more Irish priests to Scotland, particularly to the Lowlands where the need was greater than in the Highlands. As a result of this report, Propaganda issued special regulations for Scotland in 1681 in which an increase in financial support was promised both to the priests and to schools in the Highlands.¹² In addition, each missionary was appointed to a particular district to administer to the spiritual needs of the people in their area. This was invariably a difficult task since the areas to be served were too large and too sparsely populated for one priest to cover regularly. The only Scottish secular missionary priest in the Highlands at this time was Robert Munro, appointed to Glengarry, being the only native Gaelic speaker among the missionaries, the other priests in the Highlands being Irish. Leslie visited the islands of Canna, Eriskay and Barra during his stay, and the people on Barra were loath to see him leave as they desperately needed a resident priest.

By 1685, therefore, the Scottish Catholic Mission was firmly established and in spite of a shortage of priests and money, a regular channel of communication had been set up between the Prefect-Apostolic and William Leslie, the Scottish agent in Rome. A Catholic King, James VII had ascended the throne that year and the future of Catholicism in Scotland seemed brighter. But the optimism of Scottish Catholic missionaries at this time was as short-lived as the reign of the King and the full severity of the Penal Laws was to be felt again within a brief

space of time.¹³ Meanwhile, in 1687, another secular missionary priest arrived in Scotland, whose dedication to the Scottish Catholic Mission was to give it the impetus and stimulation it needed at a time when Catholicism was on the point of extinction. That priest was Thomas Joseph Nicolson.

Notes

1. Peter F. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland*, (Montrose, 1970), 1.
2. Gordon Donalson, *Scotland: James V to James VII*, (Edinburgh and London 1965), 193–4.
3. Alphons Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1887–90), iv, 38.
4. Robert Chambers, *Domestic Annals of Scotland*, (Edinburgh and London, 1858), ii, 24.
5. Cathaldus Giblin, *Irish Franciscan Mission to Scotland 1619–46*, (Dublin, 1964), 140.
6. See below Chapter 12.
7. Giblin, *Irish Franciscan Mission to Scotland*, 150–151.
8. William Ballantyne, James Crichton, Thomas Lumsden, John Walker, John Smith and William Leslie.
9. See below Chapter 12.
10. William Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics During the 17th and 18th Centuries*, (London 1909), ii, 137.
11. Alphons Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland*, iv, 128.
12. Archiv. Propaganda Acta 1681, fol. 7, March 4 1681, cited in Bellesheim, iv, 131.
13. Alphons Bellesheim, iv, 144.



2. Nicolson's Early Life and Background

Thomas Joseph Nicolson was the second son of Thomas Nicolson of Cluny, later of Kemnay, Aberdeenshire and Elizabeth Abercromby of Birkenbog. Their eldest son, George became Lord Kemnay as a Lord of Session in 1682. Thomas was born sometime between 1642 and 1646 at Birkenbog, the home of his mother's parents, between Cullen and Portsoy, in Banffshire. There is no extant record of his birth, but the register at the Scots College at Douai which he entered in 1682 refers to him as being '36 years of age' which puts his year of birth at 1646. On the other hand, in June 1707, James Carnegie (a Scottish missionary priest from 1696 to 1729) wrote about Bishop Nicolson as being in his 'grand climacteric' which generally meant the sixty-third year of a man's life, supposed to be a critical period; this would put Nicolson's birth date in the first half of 1645. Peter Anson quotes his year of birth as being 1646, but gives no source.¹

Nicolson's parents were Protestant and he was brought up as a member of the Established Church. In 1660, he was admitted to Marischal College, Aberdeen; in the 'Fasti Academiae Mariscallanae Aberdonensis' published by the New Spalding Club, amongst those admitted into the first or lower class of students, the name of 'Thomas Nicolsone' appears in the list for 1660;² there is, however, no record of Nicolson's graduation from Aberdeen, or of the subjects he studied.

During the 1660's, Nicolson moved to Glasgow where the newly appointed Episcopalian Archbishop Alexander Burnet was installing students of Episcopalian sympathies from the universities of Aberdeen and St Andrews in the pulpits of his archdiocese, 'to the disgust of west country Presbyterians'.³ By an Act of 1662, all university masters were to take the Oath of Allegiance and obtain an attestation from a bishop to the effect that they accepted the Episcopal system of church government. Some masters refused to take the oath because they were dissatisfied with the system, among them regent Robert Erskine who resigned

simpliciter in July 1663. On 6 January 1666, the Archbishop produced a commission formed in February 1665 to the assembled moderators. This commission requested him to exact the oath of Allegiance and submission before the third Tuesday in January 1666; the Archbishop, the Rector, the Dean of the Faculty, the Principal and three regents William Blair, John Tran and Thomas Nicolson, all subscribed. On his appointment as regent in November 1666, Nicolson took the prescribed oath.⁴

Nicolson remained at Glasgow University as a regent teaching Greek, Mathematics and Philosophy (and latterly as professor of Mathematics) until 1682 when he resigned his office rather than take the Test Act oath, and became a convert to Catholicism.⁵ His interest in religion and philosophy apparently led him to study Catholicism in depth and resulted in his conversion to the Roman Catholic faith. Letters written by Nicolson in later years reveal him to have been a deeply religious man, although he never referred to the reasons for his conversion to Catholicism, even when he must have known that single change of faith would cost him his position, which he clearly valued. An anecdote about Nicolson's conversion was told to the Reverend William Clapperton by Bishop Kyle who heard it from Bishop Hay (1769–1811). Apparently, in his occasional vacations Nicolson was accustomed to visit a friend, a minister of a country parish, with whom he was particularly friendly and their conversation frequently turned towards the controversial differences between Catholic and Protestant belief. On one occasion, Nicolson asked the minister to give his own personal opinion of Catholic belief; to his surprise, the minister's reply was given almost in a whisper – 'There are good grounds for thinking that the papists have hold of the right end of the string'. 'Do you really think so?' replied Nicolson. 'I do' said his friend. 'And what reason can you have for remaining as you are?' asked Nicolson. Several of the minister's children were playing in the room; pointing to them, the minister replied, 'These are my reasons.' Nicolson instantly remarked, 'But I have no such

reasons.' Clapperton comments that 'study, meditation and prayer soon completed what the minister had unwittingly begun'.⁶ Despite its apocryphal character, the story is possibly indicative of Nicolson's changing attitudes at that point.

Like many other educated converts to Catholicism, Nicolson left Scotland to enter a seminary in Europe to study for the priesthood. He was admitted to the Scots College at Douai where the register records,

'1682 3rd. July. Mr. Thomas Nicolson of Kemnay, 36 years of age, son of Thomas Nicolson of Kemnay and Elizabeth Abercromby of Birkenbog. He has been teaching Greek, Mathematics and Philosophy with great acceptance in the University of Glasgow, and now, having embraced the Catholic Faith some months ago, he has, for the sake of his faith, nobly abandoned his worldly prospects.'⁷

Bishop Kyle's Memoir in the Catholic Directory of 1836 implies that he only passed through Douai, but he was entered in the college books as an alumnus (former student) and was ordained sub-deacon there in Advent 1685. If this is true, then, as Douai was under Jesuit control, Nicolson presumably received part of his training from Jesuits and this, in turn, may explain his later role in Scotland as a conciliator between seculars and regulars. He continued his studies at the seminary in Padua where he began to take a deep interest in the Scottish mission.

Having become a committed Catholic and student priest, Nicolson's main concern at this time was the desire to be involved with the mission to bring Catholicism back to Scotland. He wrote frequently to William Leslie, the Scottish Agent in Rome, expressing this interest and his wish to return to Scotland after his ordination as a missionary priest. It was in this same year, 1685, that James VII (II of England) became King and hopes were raised in Scotland among Catholics that the Roman Catholic Church would be re-established. Nicolson himself hoped for a speedy but peaceful conversion of the people of Scotland. He was aware that open and public worship by Catholics provoked the hostility of Protestants in

Scotland and told Leslie that he wished 'that they would do their business quietly and calmly at the beginning otherwise they may undoe all.'⁸ There were few missionary priests working in Scotland at this time, eighteen in all including regulars, although Nicolson gave the impression in his correspondence with Leslie that this was not due to a lack of vocations or missionary zeal, but to a lack of funds:

'There is no doubt of finding several good wits for our countrie to engage and come in to assist the Church, but povertie is a great hindrance in the beginning to many at Rome. Oftentimes there is as much spent to erect an altar in some Frate's church or to make a fronticepiece as would erect twenty altars in our countrie and be a continuall subsistence for twenty or thirty priests. But since great men will not help us we have the more reason to implore God's help!'⁸

Such was the concern of Nicolson for the Scottish mission, barely three years after his reception into the Catholic Church. He frequently wrote about the way priests and laymen ought to conduct themselves in Scotland and emphasised the importance of not becoming involved in political affairs and of going about their business quietly and discreetly 'for protestants are so infatuated with any false opinion that Catholics are cruel and high-minded, that the least show will be thought arrogance.'⁹ The Catholic missionary activities of this time in Scotland are frequently associated with the political activities of the Jacobites and it is worthy of mention that Nicolson, at this early stage in his career was at pains to dissociate himself from such activities. Although he remained loyal to the exiled Stewarts after 1688, Nicolson's one aim continued to be the restoration of Catholicism in Scotland. He told Leslie in 1685 that 'Catholics both can and will give fealty to the civill government, never to rise in arms against his Majesty or his lawfull heirs, and seeing the government has no reason but to hold them as good subjects, it's unreasonable to persecute them by so severe edicts.'⁹

Nicolson frequently gave such advice and suggestions as to how the mission should be conducted and every letter written from Padua at this time contained

declarations of his own desire to become involved in the work of the mission, subject to the approval of the protector of the Scottish mission, Cardinal Maffeo Barberini. Although he possessed sufficient patrimony to remain abroad, he requested that he should be ordained 'sub titulo Missionis':

'I am fully resolved to serve God in our countrie rather than to seek ease or any worthie emoluments in any other place, it is needless (I think) to seek any other title than that of the Mission.'⁹

Nicolson was ordained deacon in Padua in January 1686 and ordained priest on 9 March 1686 by the Cardinal Archbishop Gregory Barbarigo who had 'conceived a great opinion of the Scots'¹⁰, several of them being employed at his seminary in Padua. He seems to have particularly admired the obviously erudite Nicolson who was made prefect of studies, the chair of Theology being filled by John Paul Jameson, a convert priest from Aberdeenshire, and Robert Strachan, son of a Presbyterian minister, was professor of Greek. As requested, Nicolson was ordained as a missionary priest, but he remained at Padua throughout 1686 awaiting permission to journey to Scotland. He continued his teaching, mainly Greek, and was also given the job of welcoming converts who had been unable to continue their work in Scottish universities. Nicolson appears to have been particularly chosen for this work because of his own background and sympathies, but it also provided him with first hand news of the mission in Scotland. With James VII as King, the news was good – Catholics were once again hearing mass openly – and Nicolson became impatient to return to Scotland. One convert to arrive in Padua, Archibald Montgomerie, was well connected and arrived with a letter of introduction from a Monsignor Forsetti; Nicolson expressed the hope that he would study for the priesthood because he was 'well-related' and could therefore help with the mission through his friends.¹¹ Many of the Scottish missionary priests were well connected, with friends or relatives in high places, and were possibly chosen because of this, including Nicolson himself.

On 25 October 1686, Nicolson received news from Lewis Innes, the Principal of the Scots College in Paris, that 'His Majesty has ordered all Scottish priests to be called home' although Nicolson knew by this time that his services were needed in Padua until the following spring and that he could not return to Scotland until the Cardinal released him from his duties.¹² Meanwhile, in November, Nicolson's closest associate, Dr John Jameson, was given permission to return and the following month Robert Strachan was also released from his duties at Padua. Nicolson's impatience and intense longing to return to Scotland is made plain in his letters to Leslie in the closing weeks of 1686 and he also writes affectionately to Jameson, by this time in Paris, 'May we meet in the Land of Cakes.'¹³

It was customary for missionary priests to stay in the Scots College in Paris for a few weeks, to receive first hand instructions regarding their journey and subsequent duties in Scotland. Jameson and Strachan were already in Paris at the beginning of 1687 while Nicolson stayed on at Padua awaiting permission for his release from Cardinal Barberini. The necessary permission did not come until the summer, and after a short period at the Scots College in Paris, Nicolson stayed at the seminary of Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet in Paris preparing for his journey to Scotland in the company of Jameson. Many priests had already made the journey since their recall by the King and had begun their work in Scotland, although this had aroused the suspicions and antagonism of the Jesuits in Scotland who had established a missionary programme of their own. This was of some concern to Nicolson who realised the importance of co-operation with them. He mentioned to Leslie that there were likely to be more priests in Scotland than he originally thought because of the number of Jesuits and he hoped they would all get on well together; differences between regular and secular priests, he was aware, could cause scandal.¹⁴ This attitude of Nicolson prevailed throughout his career and a policy of peaceful co-operation was implemented by him in later years. The need for a bishop for Scotland to co-ordinate the Catholic mission became

imperative at this time and Nicolson commented to Leslie that such a bishop must be 'a peaceful, calm man'.¹⁴ A bishop would be even more necessary, says Nicolson, should the next King be a Protestant.

On 11 November 1687, Nicolson wrote to Charles Whytford, Procurator at the Scots College in Paris, thanking him for his kindness during his stay there and saying that he hoped to sail for Scotland within the next two days with Jameson and another priest, Patrick Carolan.¹⁵ The period of waiting was over and it was time for Nicolson to begin his work as a Catholic missionary priest.

Notes

1. Peter F. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland*, (Montrose, 1970), 92.
2. *Fasti Acedemiae Mariscallanae Aberdonensis*, (New Spalding Club, 1898), 3 vols., ii, 227.
3. John Durkan and David McRoberts, 'The University of Glasgow and the Catholic Church', Scottish Historical Committee, (Glasgow 1950), 12.
4. *Munimenta Alme Universitatis Glasguensis*, 2 vols., ii, 335.
5. *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 3rd series, edd. P.H. Brown and H. Paton, vol. vii (1915), 336, 744, 754, 773-4, 780, 782. See also *ibid.*, ix (1927), 334 (where the University's quaestor paid to James Nicolson on behalf of his brother Thomas, £133 6s 8d. 'for his profession of the Mathematiks'...); and *cf.*, *Munimenta*, ii, 492 (where the visitation of 1681 had recommended fixed subjects for individual teachers).
6. Scottish Catholic Archives (S.C.A.), Reverend William Clapperton, *Memoirs of Scottish Missionary Priests* compiled from original letters, i, 34.470.
7. *Records of the Scots Colleges*, Registers of Students, (New Spalding Club, 1906), 56. '3 Julii. D. Thomas Nicolson, 36 annorum ex D. Thoma Nicolson, Aberdonensi, barone de Kenny et Elizabtha Abercromby de Birkenbog, linguam Graecam, mathesin et philosophian 14 circiter annis in universitate Glascuensi magno cum plausu docuerat et ab aliquot mensibus fidem Catholicam amplexus, pro ea genere omnia reiquit'.
8. Blairs Letters (B.L.), Nicolson to William Leslie from Padua, 31 August 1685.
9. B.L., Nicolson to William Leslie from Padua, 4 October 1685.

10. Marjory G. J. Kinloch, *Studies in Scottish Ecclesiastical History*, (Edinburgh, 1898), 261.
11. B.L., Nicolson to William Leslie from Padua, 2 August 1686.
12. B.L., Nicolson to William Leslie from Padua, 25 October 1686.
13. B.L., Nicolson to Jameson from Padua, 20 December 1686.
14. B.L., Nicolson to William Leslie from Paris, 22 September 1687.
15. B.L., Nicolson to Charles Whytford from Le Havre, 11 November 1687.

3. Nicolson's Work as a Missionary Priest 1687-94 and the State of the Scottish Catholic Mission

Nicolson arrived in Scotland at a time when the country was experiencing a brief revival of Catholicism during the reign of James VII. Catholic priests were officially recalled from the continent and the King gave a solemn promise that those who held property should have their rights of possession confirmed. Penal statutes against Catholics were suspended and James declared himself in favour of liberty of conscience, promising to uphold the rights of the established Kirk. There was, nevertheless, a good deal of discontent with the King's use of royal authority because he tended to encroach on the rights and authority of both church and state. A complaint was made from Ireland through the nuncio at Paris that the King had expelled from their sees, certain bishops nominated by Propaganda, had caused their bulls of appointment to be burned and had installed his own nominees in their place.

The King also demanded that the Privy Council should make payment of bills of exchange against the express wishes of its members. He acted illegally in the spending of a great deal of public money on the refurbishing of the Chapel Royal at Holyrood Palace, and in doing so James committed himself to purchases of 'an illegal character, a revelation of which would have excited insurrection'.¹ On the King's behalf, the Lord Chancellor Perth had, in 1685, spent £8000 in procuring 'Romish gauds' for Holyrood Chapel in contravention of the Acts of Parliament concerning such matters. A royal warrant was issued, instructing that the chapel should be repaired and put in order for Catholic worship. The King also granted the sum of £200 per annum from his privy purse for the support of the Chapel, Catholic schools, the mission in the Highlands, secular and Jesuit missionaries and the Scots Colleges at Douai, Paris and Rome. On 23 November 1686, 'the King's Yaught arrived from London at Leith, with the Popish altar, vestments,

images, priests and other dependers, for the Popish Chapell in the Abbey'.² This cargo was the product of 'carvers, joyners and other workmen engaged by Mr James Foulis (a London merchant).' On 30 November 1686 'the papists consecrated the Chapel in the Abbey by holy water and a sermon by Widrington'.²

In June 1687, James made it clear to the Edinburgh Town Council that he also wanted the Abbey Church to be recovered from the magistrates of Edinburgh 'not only as being most fit and convenient for accommodating the Knights of the Thistle but also as most proper for the performance of religious worship and exercise of our household, when We shall have occasion to be there, our present chapel in that palace not being large enough for the same.' The Council was asked to call upon the civic authorities 'to deliver up the keys of the church to the Earl of Perth, the Chancellor' in order that it might be adapted as 'the Chapel of the said Order'. To compensate the parishioners of the Canongate, James proposed to grant to the Town Council, for erecting a new church, money given some years before by Thomas Mudie, an Edinburgh merchant, who had invested his money in the crown with instructions that the income from it should be used to improve the city. Private citizens who had previously owned lofts and galleries in the old church were to be similarly accommodated in the proposed new church.³ The keys of the church were given to the Lord Chancellor on 11 July 1687 who delivered them to the Provost the following morning. Lord Fountainhall remarked, 'so this is the first Protestant church tane away from us.'⁴ Throughout 1687 there were frequent riots in the city, but these were rigorously suppressed and rioters publicly flogged.

The year 1687 was also important for the Catholic Church in Scotland because a conference was held of the leading Catholic clergy in April to report on the state of Scottish Catholicism and to lay down future plans for the church in the hope of re-establishing public worship under James VII. Eight priests met at Gordon Castle, near the mouth of the River Spey, under the presidency of David Burnett,

the Vice-Prefect. A report of the meeting was later laid before Propaganda by Cardinal Howard, the Protector of England and Scotland. Several points were made at this meeting. Only six priests were working in the Highlands, but the Catholic faith was still making progress. Alexander Leslie was resident chaplain at Gordon Castle and served the Enzie district of Banffshire with 300 communicants. John Irvine served the eastern part of this area with a slightly larger flock. St Ninian's Chapel was being rebuilt. Alexander Christie and John Jameson had Strathbogie under their care. Approximately 700 Catholics worshipped in a chapel at Huntly. Two Irish missionaries, Patrick Carolan and Father Trenor served Glenlivet and Strathdon. Catholics in and around Aberdeen were served by three priests, Robert Strachan, Father Fordyce and a Benedictine. (In 1687, Abbot Marianus Irvine of Wurzburg sent several of his monks to Scotland at the request of James VII). Many Catholics were in the habit of contracting marriages within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity and affinity. Cardinal Howard was requested to arrange for the necessary dispensations for these couples, and guidance was also asked for dealing with the problem of those Catholics who had been married by ministers, or whose children had been brought up as Protestants, and were therefore unable to receive the Sacraments. Register-books of baptisms, marriages and deaths were produced and compared as well as a list of communicants. There was stress laid on the difficulty involved in renewing the holy oils for the Sacraments. These had to be brought to Scotland from London after being consecrated by Bishop John Leyburn, vicar-apostolic of England. The appointment of a bishop for Scotland would obviously remedy this problem. A bishop was also needed to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation and to represent the interests of the Scottish clergy at court. Alexander Leslie, David Burnett and Alexander Winster (also called Dunbar) were suggested as possible bishops. A list of moveable feasts was to be drawn up yearly by the royal chaplains and published on the feast of the Epiphany.

Such then was the state of Scottish Catholicism when Thomas Nicolson first arrived in the country to take up his duties as a missionary priest. The need for a bishop to guide the Church in Scotland had become vital, but the Pope would not nominate any particular priest unless the King approved his decision. On the other hand, Propaganda feared the appointment of a Jesuit bishop and attempted to influence the King in his choice. The events leading up to the appointment of a bishop will be dealt with more fully in Chapter IV. Little is known of Nicolson's activities as a missionary priest, but he must have been prominent in his work, since James VII nominated him as one of the two bishops-elect in 1688, the other being Lewis Innes. Although he made Glasgow his base, possibly because of his knowledge of the city and the university, but also because of the number of friends he had there, Nicolson seemed to spend a good deal of time in Edinburgh where many Catholics were beginning to worship openly. Having been granted emancipation from the Penal Laws, Catholics in Edinburgh set up a printing press at Holyrood House, which issued a number of religious books and pamphlets under royal patronage. Edinburgh bookshops began to sell Catholic literature and religious objects imported from France. The Jesuits opened a boys' school at Holyrood, intended for the education of both Catholic and Protestant boys and with a curriculum that included Latin, Greek, Poetry, Rhetoric and Philosophy. Freedom under the law to do such things however, was not synonymous with freedom from prejudice and intolerance of Protestants.

Trouble in Edinburgh began after Holyrood Chapel had been renovated and the mass came to be celebrated openly. The first mass was said there on St Andrew's Day 1687 and a Missa Cantata was sung by the Jesuits on the feast of the Immaculate Conception (8 December). According to Father Richard Hay, a member of the order of Augustinian Canons-Regular to whom James VII proposed to commit the case of the newly restored Abbey Church, the mass was sung by the Jesuits with the aid of 'some few devout women brought over from

France'.⁵ Father Hay described this mass and the High Mass sung at Christmas 1687:

'On Christmas night High Mass was sung. I was under the impression that I was to officiate, at least the chancellor said so to one of the Jesuits. However, Father Abercrombie, a Benedictine, performed the function; he is a good honest man enough, but as nature has not favoured him with a good vocal organ, and he has been long away from his monastery (where I imagine there is not much in the way of singing), the poor Father acquitted himself very ill of his office. There was no deacon nor sub-deacon – in Scotland they have not got so far as that. The choir was composed of a man who passes here for a musician, although he has neither voice nor any knowledge of plaint-chant, of Mdlle. Alexandre and two girls she brought from France, with another woman of the same nation, the wife of a saddler here. Vespers were sung after dinner, but in a miserable style: I say nothing of the defects of the singing, but the rubrics were very ill-kept – the less said about them the better.'

Although the Catholics were criticised by the Presbyterians for their use of music and singing as an integral part of worship, Father Hay was not alone in his condemnation of the use of excessive, unnecessary or bad music at masses and services of devotion. Nicolson himself feared it might create a bad impression at a time when Catholics needed support in the hope of maintaining their new-found freedom, and in his early letters he emphasised the importance of 'moderation' in all things. Father Hay commented 'in churches where due reverence is shown to our Holy Mysteries, it is certainly not customary to sing in the sanctuary things written for the amusement of rustics and revellers'. It was not until after the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Scotland in 1878 that music once again played a part in Catholic liturgy. Even today, Scottish Catholics display a reluctance to sing, a fact which may in part be a symptom of the Scottish temperament but which may also be in an indirect result of Penal times.

In 1688, it was nevertheless the Protestants who became increasingly horrified by the ostentation displayed by the Catholics at their masses and religious processions. A Privy Council injunction of 3 December, 1687 sanctioned 'daily service according to the Romish ritual' and Lord Fountainhall commented in his

entry for 6 February 1688,

'In the evening and next morning many Litanies and Masses were said in the Abbey by Popish Priests, for the soul of King Charles 2nd to bring him out of Purgatory, he having died on that day now three years agoe.'

Anti-Catholic feeling among Presbyterians appears to have been most strong in Edinburgh during 1688 where the King seems to have encouraged public Catholic worship to the extent that it could not be tolerated by the majority of Protestants. If a low profile had been maintained, such opposition may not have reached such hysterical peaks among the people.

Nicolson wrote to Charles Whytford in February of that year – his first letter since arriving in Scotland – expressing his disappointment at the state of Catholicism. There were few converts, and with disease and poverty rife in many areas, people were more concerned with their bodily welfare than spiritual matters. Catholic preachers, he said, were 'only beginners', preaching being mainly the province of Protestant ministers who were specially trained. Nicolson was clearly disturbed by the great aversion to Catholicism among the Scottish people, but he remarked confidently that the missionary priests hoped to overcome the prejudices of the populace. The King, he said, 'does what he can, but he has no Catholic heir to succeed him'. The concern felt over the future of the Catholic Church in Scotland stemmed from the growing unpopularity of James VII and the lack of a Catholic heir, although on 8 February Nicolson wrote, 'The Queen is with child' adding that they all hoped it would be a boy.⁶ The King himself was considered by many to be living in a world of fantasy, quite out of touch with reality. He acted impulsively, devoting greater sums of money to the Church and sanctioning lavish expenditure on chapels and schools. On 22 March 1688, Father Hay issued the printed rules of a Catholic college which he hoped to establish in Edinburgh, which would offer 'gratuitous instruction'.⁷ Riots in the town followed this particular innovation but were rigorously suppressed, two of the rioters being

executed and others publicly flogged.⁸ Popular risings became more frequent, in spite of such repressive measures, and the Chancellor, Lord Perth, a convert to Catholicism, was publicly insulted by the mob when he was returning to his house from attending mass. Opposition to Catholicism is generally held to have stemmed from fear – fear of being dominated by foreigners, the Catholic Church itself being regarded as something alien and a threat to the security of Britain. Such fear was not as widespread in England as it was in Scotland, and the Anglican Church tended to be more tolerant in religious matters than the Church of Scotland.

Nicolson wrote to Whytford again on 23 February referring to the demonstrations in Edinburgh against the public celebration of mass. John Jameson, he said, had been doing missionary work in the north while he himself was planning to work in and around Glasgow. He owed a lot to the protection of a certain Lord Charles (or Chambers). He complained of bad eyesight and a consequent difficulty in writing.⁹ It was the last letter Nicolson was to write for three years, although his experiences are well recorded in the letters of other priests who knew him, notably David Burnett¹⁰ and George Innes.

In spite of opposition to the Catholic Church in Scotland, the missionary priests continued their work in comparative freedom now that the Penal Laws had been suspended. The birth of a Catholic heir raised new hopes for the restoration of a Catholic monarchy in Britain, and most priests carried out their work quietly, with a minimum of ostentation to avoid trouble. At this point, they hoped for toleration. Their brief respite from persecution, however, came to an end in the closing months of 1688 when the political situation reached a crisis which culminated in the arrival of Prince William of Orange in Britain on 5 November. John Thomson maintains that 'the King himself was so infatuated that he would not believe it [the invasion] until it was too late'.¹¹ James eventually fled the country on 11 December and although many of his subjects were disheartened by

this desertion, a great many others had already given up their allegiance to him. John Thomson, a Catholic historian, remarked 'of him it may with justice be said that he was worthy to reign if he had never reigned'.¹¹ Protestants in London reacted by pulling down Catholic chapels and houses, including those of notable foreign ambassadors. In Edinburgh, Captain John Wallace, a member of the Craigie family, had been stationed at Holyrood Palace with a military guard of forty soldiers when it was feared there might be an insurrection. On 11 December, the day on which James escaped from Whitehall, the Town Council of Edinburgh passed an order for the arrest of Wallace and his men. A week later, a mob gathered in the streets of the town, calling for the reformation of the Kingdom and the city. The city guard joined the mob and marched on to the palace calling for the heads of the two chief ministers, the Chancellor, Lord Perth, and his brother the Earl of Melfort, Secretary of State. The mob broke into the palace and successfully pillaged the school and the library, burning their contents. The King's domestic chapel was desecrated and its contents thrown out of the windows into the outer court. The Chapel Royal was similarly broken into and statues, missals and vestments brought out into the court where the remnants of Catholic worship were burned.

The houses of Catholics in the town were also rifled and the mob began to search for priests. Although a good number of missionary priests lived in Edinburgh, few were taken as they had foreseen the trouble and either fled the city or taken refuge in Edinburgh Castle, which was being held for James VII by the Duke of Gordon. Nicolson records that his own lodging was in the middle of the town and he was forced to flee through the mob incognito:

They were conveying a quantity of sacred images and books found in the houses of Catholics, principally breviaries and books of prayers, to a great fire lighted in the street. One of them went in front with a great crucifix, surrounded by a crowd of children and women carrying lighted torches and shouting for joy. The novelty of the sight, and my own personal danger so much occupied me that I did not feel at the time all the anguish which such a

spectacle was calculated to draw forth, but the recollection of it never recurs to me (and it recurs very often) without leaving behind it a most painful impression. *Vidi mala gentis nostrae et Sanctorum.*¹²

Following this unpleasant encounter, Nicolson fled to the 'west country'¹³ and joined Lord Dunfermline and others who formed 'a party for the King'. Nicolson appears to have had a great affection for James VII and may have considered the possibility of the King's return at this time. Perhaps none too convincingly, Thomson maintains that the 'general intention of the invaders was rather to intimidate him [James] than to deprive him of the crown'. Nicolson clearly hoped for the restoration of the Stewart dynasty, but fearing for his own safety, he set sail for Flanders. He never reached his destination as he was recognised and captured by 'some Kirkaldie men', brought back to Scotland, and was imprisoned at Stirling Castle with Lord Perth. Perth remained prisoner in Stirling for three years, but Nicolson was transferred to the tolbooth in Edinburgh from where he finally secured his release on caution of 5000 marks that he left Britain and did not return.¹⁴ James Nicolson of Trabroun, late dean of gild in Edinburgh, was his cautioner.¹⁵ Nicolson on several occasions seems to have owed his life and safety to his brothers, and although there is no extant evidence of a close relationship between them after Thomas's conversion, they remained in touch with one another. Family connection clearly assisted Nicolson in his work as a missionary priest. Now a banished priest, Nicolson set sail for France, where he became chaplain to nuns at the English Benedictine Abbey at Dunkirk.

Most of the missionary priests in Scotland suffered similar fates to that of Nicolson after the revolution of 1688. After imprisonment, they were usually banished from the country and threatened with the death penalty if they returned. Walter Innes was imprisoned in Blackness Castle, Alexander Crichton in Dunotter Castle and afterwards in Aberdeen. The Prefect-Apostolic, Alexander Dunbar, took

refuge in Edinburgh Castle but later fled north to Aberdeen where he was arrested and imprisoned. He was released on bail, but instead of being forced to leave the country, he was allowed to stay at Gordon Castle, provided he relinquished his priestly duties. David Burnet lost all his possessions, but managed to save two chalices, a monstrance, a ciborium and a small silver hand bell from the Chapel Royal. These items are now preserved in the Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. He escaped Edinburgh, spending a night in a field because there was no boat to cross the Forth until morning. He sailed from Newhaven and then rode in through Kirkcaldy where he was recognised and chased out of the town by a crowd. Eventually, he reached Speyside where he was joined by Alexander Leslie and the two priests lay low in the open for a month. During the winter of early 1689, they lived in a rough stone hut on the hills of Aultmore, between Keith and the Moray Firth. Such experiences were to become commonplace among missionary priests in the years that followed and illustrate the dedication of these men to a cause which must have appeared doomed to fail at the time. Burnet eventually joined James VII in Ireland, but returned to Scotland the following year to resume his missionary work in the Enzie district of Banffshire. He died in 1696, worn out by his experiences and suffering.

Catholic laymen suffered as much as the priests at this time. In December 1688, Protestant fanatics broke into the house of the Countess of Traquair on the Tweed, burnt vestments, books and other articles at the Cross in Peebles. John Adamson, a prominent Catholic, was imprisoned in Inverness Castle and Henry Neville Payne, an English country gentleman, was apprehended in Dumfriesshire in 1690 and brought to Edinburgh on a charge of being involved in a plot to restore James VII to the throne; he was tortured, committed to prison and released in 1701. A Catholic gentleman called Bruce who lived in Edinburgh suffered at the hands of the mob who 'assaulted his house with a great fury, turned his wife,

who was a foreigner, and his children out of doors, carried off the furniture and set fire to the house'.¹⁶ Catholic women also suffered, particularly the nobility; Lady Lucy Hamilton, Lady Margaret Hay and the Countess Dowager of Errol had their houses rifled and their furniture burned.

The Catholic Church in Scotland had disintegrated within a matter of months and the business of reorganising the mission was left to the Congregation de Propaganda Fide in Rome and to William Leslie, the Scottish Agent. It was quickly realised that Scotland needed its own vicar-apostolic to co-ordinate and organise the work of missionary priests and it took the Catholic Church almost five years to come to a decision and appoint a man who was capable of carrying out this daunting task.

Notes

1. Rev Charles Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, (Grampian Club, 1882), p.ccxvii.
2. Sir John Lauder of Fountainhall, *Historical Notices of Scottish Affairs* (Edinburgh, 1848), 2 vols., ii, 763; 764-5.
3. William Maitland, *History of Edinburgh*, (Edinburgh, 1753), 108.
4. Fountainhall, *Notices*, ii, 809.
5. Father Hay to Charles Whytford, 22 February 1688 published in *The Month*, (1890), 74.
6. B.L., Nicolson to Charles Whytford from Edinburgh, 8 February 1688.
7. Fountainhall, *Notices*, ii, 860. (This proposal for a seminary was not put into effect.)
8. Daniel Wilson, *Memorials of Edinburgh*, (Edinburgh, 1872), 2 vols., i, 138.
9. B.L., Nicolson to Charles Whytford from Edinburgh, 23 February 1688.
10. David Burnett was born in Aberdeenshire and became a Catholic in 1660. He studied for the priesthood at the Scots College in Rome and after his ordination returned to Scotland. In 1674, William Leslie asked him to act as assistant agent in Rome, but he declined for health reasons. He became Vice-Principal of the Scots College in Paris in 1676 where he remained for four years. He returned to Scotland in 1680 where he worked as a missionary priest in the Enzie as

Vice-Prefect. James VII appointed him Dean of the Chapel Royal, Holyrood, in 1687.

11. S.C.A., John Thomson, *Some Account of the State of Religion and of the Mission in Scotland since the Reformation, 1560-1731*, 189.
12. B.L., Nicolson to Father Thyrsus Gonzalez, General of the Society of Jesus, January 1691. This letter is quoted by W. Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics*, 154. The letter, he says, is not signed, but in the handwriting of Nicolson. The copy among the Blairs Letters is not, however, in Nicolson's hand and is written in Latin. It is unsigned.
13. S.C.A., John Thomson, 195.
14. *Register of the Privy Council*, xiii (1932), 464.
15. *Ibid.*, 584. James Nicolson of Trabroun is probably Nicolson's brother, James, who had received payment on Nicolson's behalf from Glasgow University in 1684.
16. W. Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics*, 150.

Reverend Amos B. Stone

(Copy of Nicolson's letter to Fr. Gonzalez
Jan. 1691)

Quas ad me gladius xpi disti. Liberos non ita proinde auer-
et miror quod toties postales ut saeuiret. narratione complectar que in capitis Borchan-
nis multis contigerunt cum primum huc appellerem, non satis ratione hoc ex-
agere uidebatur et idcirco tibi morem gerens ad quos istud me auincit. Sed ma-
nu quoniam ad multa insperata, mihi suborta sunt difficultates, et multa dice-
re debet esse perceptum, quod si etiam dicere liceat, et tunc fidei lubens commissum
se ea scriptis mandare non satis habuit, istis curis perplexum, grauius debetur
nulli morbo iniquitate, et per aliquot mentes ita me laeto officium tenebat
ut omnem studium, sed et indigentiam deponere uoluit fuerim. In-
bera multi ex Britannia et Roma uel transierunt, qui sicut omnia ple-
nissime explorare et exomscere debebantur ita te circiter et commodius ex
his singula exquirere, et discere potueras. ut autem desideris tuis, quod
toties uenias aliqua saltem ex parte satisfeceris, quod in ista uerum
maturatione Cath. praesentibus sacerdotibus audierint hoc uideri expediam
Cum res serenissimi Regis nostri in Anglia caesa essent, et Scotia
inueniente eam tempestate conuulsa manifesta belli signa daret, qui in
fide et officiis exa. Regem persistere deueniant in loca ubi fugis
ducere conati sunt. Nam enim populus fremebat, et qui rerum guber-
nantes erant ad moti plebem in officiis contineri non potuerunt
nam exercitum, quem Rex in Scotia aluerat, cum antea Londonum
eis cauerat, et quamuis parentis uulgi incerta plerumque sunt
studia, et discessus sententiae. Tunc tamen satis apparet nubes
istam contra Catholicos uidentem fuisse. Multa de his odiosa sim-
ul, et incredibilia inspecta, quae ipsi deus, homini auerant quidem
non ad hominem. Sane mentis exagitatione posterant, tanta tamen cum
fiducia in conuictis populi narrabantur, ut imperitam multitudinem
delegerint. unde, in ualibus haerentem, imperitiam praestiterant
um nil nisi Bonitatem, et uim ut eorum cedere erat. Phantasmagoria
mam tempestatis impetum sustenuimus, sub uesperam illius diei, turba
iuuentutis uisibilem, et senum per uices diei currens, et uariis
spargens clamores, eius hortabatur ad reformationem regni et
uirtutis. Atque deinde numero ex ipso exiit audacia, ut in pala-
tium Regis, quod in Sabaudis est, irrumperet conaretur, uel quod
per uiam ad multos, qui istud ad salutem huius uellet, sunt, fa-
uoribus instabat, et hostilia minabatur, sed multos eque
riter respicerunt, cum ad manus uentum est aggressorum, na-
us interfectus est, tres grauer vulnerati. Sed plagis istis nihil
mitiores facti sunt, redierunt enim in urbem maximam ciuium partem con-
citauerunt. Quin et legis consiliarios aliquos, quia prout qua minus impule-
runt, ab omni manu milites istos depelli iusserunt, quod ante quam
fieri potuit, plures e turba ista uulnerati sunt, ut breui postea semper
re intererent. Multos tam sponte dilabentibus palatium ingressi
Sacellum, in quo publicam fuerat Cath. cultus exercitium, polluerunt
et quicquid in eo repperant, ignibus consumentibus, profum fecerunt in
uisum templum, quod olim fuerat Canonico regularium, tunc autem
quia Sacellum nimis agustum erat, iussu et sumptibus Regis instau-
rabatur, sed eundem die. Dominum Cancellarij, qui ex tantum die ex urbe
discesserat, plerique domini perierunt, sed pauci flammis additis, habebat
enim laetam supellectilem, et non pauci reformationum (ista enim semel
ipsos designabant) sui non immemores, uaper et potius quam perdere uole-
bant, rapuit igitur, unusquisque eorum ipse potuit, et sceleratus amor

4. The Appointment of Thomas Nicolson as Bishop for Scotland

The need for a bishop for Scotland was first mentioned at the meeting of the Scottish Catholic clergy held at Gordon Castle in 1687 when Cardinal Howard and Propaganda were informed of the difficulties in consecrating holy oils and more particularly for representing the interests of the Scottish Catholic clergy at court. After the revolution of 1688-89, it became a more urgent problem, more specifically for the purpose of co-ordinating the work of the missionary priests who were now scattered, some lying low in Scotland, others imprisoned and some, like Nicolson, banished abroad. Apart from the obvious difficulty of whom to appoint, there were two other problems to surmount: first that the Jesuits should not be involved in the choice or in the nominations, and therefore the procedure had to be kept fairly secret. The Scots College in Rome believed that the secular clergy had a special status within the Church, superior to that of priests who were members of religious orders and while it was recognised that regulars contributed much that was of value to the mission, the administration and organisation was best undertaken by secular priests.¹ The second difficulty to be overcome with regard to the nomination and appointment of a bishop, was that both the King, James VII and the Pope, Innocent XI, had to be consulted. The Pope would not nominate any priest for the office of bishop for Scotland unless the approval of the King could be assured. Innocent XI agreed that the right of nomination rested with the King and from 1687 onwards, the missionaries awaited James' decision on the matter. They could do nothing to accelerate his decision except to ensure that he did not propose any priest known to be on friendly terms with the Jesuits. James, on the other hand, valued the work being done by the Jesuits and was anxious that they should work in close co-operation with the secular missionary priests. It was likely, therefore, that he would favour the appointment of a priest who, if not a Jesuit, would work closely with them to co-ordinate the activities of the mission.

The English Vicar-Apostolic, John Leyburn had written to the Pope as early as February 1686 recommending Alexander Dunbar, the Prefect-Apostolic of Scotland, for the office of bishop; he described Dunbar as being 'well-known to the King and most esteemed by His Majesty and by the noble Catholics of this realm'.¹ Dunbar was also one of the nominees put forward by the Gordon Castle meeting in 1687, but Lewis Innes, almoner to James VII, and William Leslie, the Scottish Agent in Rome, had both already taken measures to block the approval of the Prefect-Apostolic by the King and the Pope. The reason for their intervention was that Dunbar was known to be on friendly terms with the Jesuits. Walter Leslie wrote to Whytford, assuring him that if the King nominated any priest favourable to the Jesuits, Rome would not accept it 'for Kings and Princes are not granted things they seek that are supported by Geometers [Jesuits], for the Court is extremely jealous of these poveri padri senza poverta'.¹ A month later he admitted to Whytford that the objection to the nomination of Dunbar was the fact that he was known to be on good terms with the Scottish Jesuits:

'The Chancellor [Perth] has written to the Cardinal [Norfolk] that there is great contentions with Geometers. God send us a man to remedie this, but I assure you that if it be Dunckan [Dunbar] that he be Bishop, everie Geometer will be Vicar General.'¹

There was also, at this time, a suggestion that William Aloysius Leslie, then Superior of the Scottish Jesuits, might be chosen as bishop, but this very fact would make him unsuitable as far as Rome was concerned. William Leslie described his cousin as 'the most pious, good, religious, wyse and prudent man that I know amongst all the Jesuits'¹ but Innocent XI would not approve a Jesuit as bishop anywhere, however suitable he might be. David Burnet, the Vice-Prefect of Scotland, had also been suggested by the Gordon Castle meeting in 1687 as a possible bishop. He seems to have been a more probable choice than Dunbar as he was not on such good terms with the Jesuits. Moreover, Burnet believed that the missionaries themselves should choose their own bishop and forward a list of

suggested nominees to the King for approval. Because James was not as opposed to Jesuit influence as the Pope and his advisers seem to have been, the missionaries began to fear, not merely the appointment of someone who was known to be friendly with the Jesuits, but of a Jesuit himself. Burnet wrote to Walter Leslie in February 1688 in no uncertain terms:

Tell Guilielmo [William Leslie] to tell the Congregation that they may resolve to have no more clergy in this country, if they give a Jesuit for a bishop.¹

He wrote again the following August saying that they would rather not have a bishop at all if they could not have one of their own choice.¹

Meanwhile, Lewis Innes had arrived in London from Paris and was trying to influence the King in his choice of a bishop. Innes persuaded James to nominate Abbot Placide Fleming of Ratisbon, in spite of the fact that he was known to dislike the Jesuits. Fleming had been educated in Edinburgh and served in the English navy when James was Duke of York and High Admiral. He was captured by pirates and sailed with them for a short time before entering the Scots College in Paris, where he studied for little over a year. He came to the monastery at Ratisbon in 1669 where he became a Benedictine, taking the name of Placide. He became abbot in 1673 at the age of thirty, although his blessing was postponed until August 1692. He is considered to be one of the greatest abbots of Ratisbon and many of his priests became Scottish missionaries. The appointment of a Benedictine as bishop of Scotland, however, may have helped to leaven the contention between Jesuits and secular priests and with this in mind, no doubt, Fleming was notified of the possibility of his appointment. The abbot had come to London in 1687 to negotiate with the King for some financial assistance for his monastery, particularly as it had by this time become a training ground for Scottish priests. He refused the office of bishop, giving as his reasons for declining the appointment his increasing ill-health and lack of missionary

experience. He preferred the peace and seclusion of his monastery to the dangers and difficulties of working in Scotland and recommended the appointment of Lewis Innes.

Innes' name was not mentioned at a special meeting held to discuss the appointment of a bishop in June 1687, which was attended by eleven priests, including two from the Highlands. Fleming clearly favoured Innes as bishop because of his dislike of the Jesuits, hoping that Innes would control them with a firm hand; 'he will help much to animat the clergy and to compound the impudence of the Padres which really I think is come to an intolerable height'.¹ There is also evidence in the letters of Abbot Fleming to Whytford that unfavourable reports on Innes and Burnet had been given to the King:

'Judge my endeavour that Scotland might be provided with a bishop. I putt Lewis Innes in the first of my likes. I spoke to the King, to the Nuncio, to my Lord Melfort [Secretary of State], to the Bishop [Norfolk], to the Dukes ... who have much of the King's ear. The King and all the rest were persuaded of the necessitie of it and his Majesty promised to have a care of it, and my Lord Melfort assured me that we should have one shortly. But he told me that it was impossible for him to get either Mr Innes or Mr Burnet promoted to that Dignitie as for him to fly through the air. They had been so much misrepresented to the King.'²

Presumably, this 'misrepresentation' involved reports of the two men's antagonism towards the Jesuits. In any case, the meeting, after much discussion, had chosen Dunbar, but to placate the minority who voted against him, it also put forward three other names to the King, knowing that the chances of their election were minimal. These three were William Leslie, considered too old for the office, David Burnet, who would not be accepted by the King because he was anti-Jesuit and Placide Fleming, who had already refused the nomination. Nevertheless, Dunbar was unpopular in Rome and was not approved by the Pope, so the choice of candidates for the office of bishop remained wide open.

In February 1688 it was announced in London that the Pope had named three

bishops for England – Dr Gifford, Father Ellis and Dr Smith, but no word of a bishop for Scotland. Innes blamed the Jesuits for the delay and spread the story that they opposed individual nominations and objected to the idea of having a bishop at all. William Leslie wrote to his Jesuit cousin expressing his annoyance at their interference with the problem of choosing a bishop:

‘What an impudence is it to exclude a worthy man and not sacrifice our own interest for a foolish consideration of this kind (being favourable or not favourable to the Jesuits). To this I would willingly know who will dissent if this be reasonable and just. The clergy proposeth another, the Jesuits excludeth him, for what reason? because forsooth he is not favourable to the Societie.’

He maintained that there were three important points to be considered:

‘one, that the granting of a bishop is the comone good of that Kingdome, two, that you think just contrair, so will that the Societie would not have a bishop and three, that the same Societie is the only hindrance of a bishop for us – these last two points you may and that with reason say are false, that the Societie have no such thought, I grant you all, but that is not the question. It’s this, that the world, even wyse and pious men believe that the Jesuits are the cause of all, so two things are to be consulted, one first of charitie and justice requyareth that you take this blame.’³

Realising the influence the Jesuits had with the King, Leslie urged the Society to consent to any nomination put forward by the Mission as a body, so that the appointment could proceed without further delay. Once in office, a bishop would naturally work for the common good of all the missionaries, secular and regular alike, and the Jesuits should not therefore fear the contrary. Elsewhere, he said,

‘Jesuits and bishops agree verie well, so all the blame (for any disagreement) falls only on the Scots Bishop necessary because a bishop makes priests, priests make Catholics, Catholics are good subjects to their prince; this is evangelical policy and it succeeds other policies.’³

The delay in appointing a bishop, claimed Leslie, had resulted in this failure of the Mission to ‘make’ Catholics in Scotland in recent years. ‘The highlands this day would have been all Catholics if there had been priests amongst them, and

priests had been if wee had had bishops.³

This apportioning of blame on the Jesuits does appear to be a little unfair, considering Rome's opposition to the appointment of a Jesuit, or anyone favourable to the Jesuits, to the office of bishop. In March 1688, Leslie advised Melfort that the Mission was willing to accept any priest nominated by the King 'unlesse that he carrieth on his back the coat of a Jesuit, for his holiness will not hear of a Jesuit'.⁴ Rome, he said, firmly believed that the Jesuits actively stirred up the 'princes' against papal authority, especially in France, and cannot therefore 'willingly give honors and preferment to the Jesuits, especially when such honors carrieth with them the Government of the Church, as is the dignitie of cardinall or of bishop'.⁴ Finally, he recommends that a bishop should be a 'counterpoise and counterbalance to the Jesuits' whose influence in Scotland was already strong.

On 30 April 1688, Scotland still being without a bishop, Cardinal Norfolk wrote to Lewis Innes promising to make use of his faculties to assist and direct the Scots until such time as they got a bishop. He recommended that further use be made of Irish priests, particularly in the Highlands, until a bishop could be appointed to assist him.⁵ Norfolk may well have been implying that two bishops were necessary for Scotland, one being Innes himself. It was obviously felt by many of the missionaries that the Highlands would require their own bishop as their needs differed from those of the Lowlands, and the responsibility of conducting a mission over the whole of Scotland was too great for one bishop. In June 1688, King James declared that he wished to have the approval of the Scots Jesuits for the men appointed and proceeded to nominate Innes and Nicolson. Norfolk wrote to Innes on 30 August 1688 as if the affair was settled; 'that no time be lost, I desire you to send us word which part of Scotland is to be your district and which that of the other, your brother bishop'.⁶ Innes may have been nominated to placate Rome, since James was clearly aware that the Jesuits would not approve his appointment.

The choice, of Nicolson, however, was unexpected, as this was the first time his name had been mentioned in the context of the bishop discussions. It was certainly surprising, as it was only two years since he had been ordained and he had worked in Scotland as a missionary for only one year. It has been suggested⁷ that Nicolson's nomination may have been due to the social status of the Nicolson family, a fact which was considered of some importance when choosing bishops, since they could then have some influence with those in authority in Scotland. It was certainly to prove useful to Nicolson as a missionary priest in 1688 at the time of the revolution in Edinburgh when he relied on the good will of his brother, Lord Kemnay, to release him on bail. Nicolson's education may also have been an important consideration, particularly the work he undertook at Glasgow University where, in his capacity as regent, he lectured and taught for fourteen years. He was obviously well-known among academic circles and this would prove useful when he began his work as bishop. Nicolson's whole life had been involved with teaching, both at Glasgow and Padua, and a man skilled in the arts of rhetoric, disputation and logic would be an ideal candidate for the office of bishop for the mission, whose work would necessarily include preaching, teaching and proselytism.

Nicolson's zeal and loyalty to the mission may also have helped to influence the King's decision to nominate him as a bishop. His determination to be a missionary priest from the time of his conversion to Catholicism onwards, and his obvious love of Scotland, are evident in all the letters written by him between 1685 and 1688. He clearly believed he had a vocation for the mission and frequently spoke of being 'called' to serve God amongst his fellow Scots. Nicolson also firmly believed that missionary priests should work in close co-operation with the Jesuits and this attitude would win him favour with James. In a letter written to William Leslie after his consecration as bishop, he referred to his friendship with the 'good fathers' and his intention to maintain that

friendship. Since all the missionaries worked for the advancement of the Church, it was important, he said, to co-operate with the Jesuits 'and we will certainly abide in union and not trouble Rome with complaints'.⁸ It is also possible that the Jesuits themselves recommended Nicolson to James as being a man they were prepared to accept and with whom they would co-operate. A letter written by Nicolson to William Leslie in February 1690 suggests this is near the truth:

'It is said to their [the Jesuits'] charge ... that they endeavoured to hinder our having a Bishop. For my part, I know not whether they did or not. I believe they recommended one for that dignitie who, as he trewlie was unworthie of it so he was sensible of his unworthiness.'⁹

On the other hand, Nicolson was probably well-known in court circles by 1688 through such men as Lord Melfort who was acquainted with him during the period of Nicolson's missionary work in Scotland. Although the matter of the appointment of a bishop for Scotland was necessarily shelved after the Revolution because of the dangers threatening Catholic clergy there, the discussion concerning who should be appointed when the situation in Scotland eased a little, continued amongst Scottish priests and Catholic laymen abroad. Before 1688, it seemed clear that the nomination would have to come from the King, but after his flight to France and the coronation of William of Orange, James' position became unclear. The Pope made no move to appoint Nicolson, who became ill at Dunkirk, suffering from a 'tertian ague' due to the dampness and cold. Other nominations were bandied about, but no appointment made. Lewis Innes wrote to William Leslie to enquire if the King still had the right to nominate a bishop, considering his exile:

'I doubt not but my Lord Melfort had written you ... why ther is no word of any Bishop for Scotland, whilst so many are named for Ireland. Pray informe yourselfe exactly and let me know whether his Holiness has given to our King any new power or right to name bishops as he doth for Ireland, or if he confirms any Right that the King is supposed to have had.'¹⁰

Walter Innes replied to that letter from Rome a month later as follows:

'... I fynd the Acta Pastoralia of former tymes which treat properly of that affair (bishops) doe not mentione that our Kings have or had any right either to name or represent Bishops for any of the three nations, but on the contrary say that the Pope did provide Bishops to the bishoprics of those Kingdoms ... I hope to be better informed thereof shortly, that when it pleases god to restore our gracious soverain, he may easily without peryle take a way to have a greater right both to name and represent bishops than any other King has.'¹¹

The delay in appointing a bishop, therefore, appears to have been due to the Pope's reluctance to name anyone recommended by those at St Germain, whether such recommendation came from James VII or from exiled priests. Clearly they were not disposed to accept any man recommended by the Jesuits, and although Lewis Innes confirmed that Nicolson was still the favourite for the post as far as the King and his circle were concerned, Rome put forward the name of John Jameson. Innes wrote to William Leslie that Jameson was certainly well-liked, having

'carryed the admiration since he went home; he is young but docile of your own educating and to your mynd strong enough to travell ... which is absolutely necessary in that Country.'¹²

The missionaries felt there was some urgency in the matter, that a bishop should take up his duties in Scotland immediately, and with Nicolson being ill at Dunkirk, his ability to travel was out of the question. On 20th March 1692, Nicolson had intimated in a letter written to Leslie, that his health was failing fast and that he was close to death. He was in his late forties. All he wanted, he said, was to retire to some corner of the north and there end his life and endeavours forthwith.¹³ His depression and homesickness were apparent but he was unable to find a way of releasing his brother from the conditions imposed by the bail. In spite of this, those at Paris and St Germain continued to press for the appointment of two bishops, Nicolson and Jameson, while at Rome, Jameson alone was the favourite for the post. Nicolson was not considered a suitable

candidate both because of his delicate health and his lethargy. Walter Innes told his brother in April 1693 that both sides were agreed on Jameson as a suitable bishop, but Nicolson was clearly not recommended. Cardinal Norfolk, he said, had been inquiring as to the background and character of Nicolson and Innes had told him that

'he was converted some years agoe and came heir [to Rome] whereby his Eminence saw him, and of late was in prisone with me for some tym but was liberat by giving bail to goe out of the Kingdome and never to return, upon which the Cardinal replied that one that had done so did not seem fitt to be bishop, and Bishop Ellis added that he saw him once come to St Germain to speak to him about the coming of a pensioner Nunne that stayed at Dunkerque to the Court of St Germain, and that he saw him to be a sloe, blunt, scrupulous kynd of man and of little action.'¹⁴

In May 1693, the Congregation of cardinals met to discuss the appointment of a bishop and Walter Innes spoke to them of the main contenders for the position. John Jameson he described as 'a very sharp and learned young man, and many good qualities and beloved by the Missione'¹⁵ but on the other hand he had not the resolution and experience necessary for the job. Nicolson, he said, was still under bail and could not, therefore, return to Scotland at present.

Rome appears to have opposed the appointment of Nicolson on several grounds: firstly, he was unwell and not fit to travel; secondly, he was slow and not a man of action; thirdly, he was forbidden by the authorities to return to Scotland under pain of death; fourthly, he was known to be on friendly terms with the Jesuits; lastly, Nicolson himself was reluctant to accept the nomination. This last point was made increasingly clear in Nicolson's letters written to Lewis Innes in 1693 and the first half of 1694. By August 1693, Nicolson had received word that he was once again in the running for the nomination and expressed considerable surprise at this. Since his banishment, he thought he had been 'out of head as to these nominations long ago'. He was obviously aware that nominations were being made again, but had assumed that he would not be 'troubled with it'. He

told Lewis Innes that for many reasons he was afraid of the responsibility; the 'great sickness' he had in Flanders weakened him and he tires easily. He did not feel up to the hard work and suffering involved, although he added, he knew God was preparing him for a better life.¹⁶ This last remark may have meant a life after death, as in his depression, Nicolson spoke more often of dying. On 14 April 1694 he wrote to Innes that he had heard of the likelihood of his appointment as Bishop, but again stressed his inability to fill the office, due to his infirmities. He had, he said, more need to think of death than preferment.¹⁷ He asked Innes to dissuade the King from appointing him and to avoid all mention of his name at court. At the same time, Nicolson was anxious to return to Scotland, particularly as he missed the company of his fellow countrymen, but not in the capacity of bishop. Rome did not take his refusal to accept the nomination seriously and since it became clear that Jameson was too young and inexperienced for the office of bishop, Nicolson was the only possible contender.

Nevertheless, the delay in coming to a decision over the appointment of a bishop for Scotland continued. One problem appeared to be the question of maintenance. The funds for the Scottish mission were small, as Nicolson himself had remarked in 1685, and obviously, a bishop would require a greater allowance than the ordinary missionary priests. This problem of finance is dealt with more fully in Chapter XV. The Pope eventually agreed to an extra two hundred crowns being given for the maintenance of a bishop for Scotland and King James agreed to provide the bishop with a royal allowance.

Yet another delay over the appointment of a bishop was brought about because of political implications. The court of St Germain had begun to fear that the appointment of a Catholic bishop for Scotland might be prejudicial to the King's return, which was regarded as a likely event for the near future. Lord Melfort told William Leslie that a bishop:

'may fright the King's protestant subjects there, and make them more averse to his restoration ... I think there can not be a precise obligation upon the King more than upon the Church to name bishops in this very time, yet there are reasons to fear it may make a noyse prejudiciall to his re-establishment, for this were ane discreet zeal, there's no debate of the justice of the thing since its God's institution, but its Christian prudence to time it so as it may not be a hinderance to another thing which in my opinion is no less necessary for the advancement of the Catholic religion in these Kingdomes than Bishops, I mean the King's restoration. However, I shall watch when it is proper to propose the thing and I assure you it shall not be my fault if it doe not succeed, for I hope you are convinced that I am no less zealous for my religion than I am for my King.'¹⁸

Lorenzo Leslie, William Leslie's brother, later wrote to Whytford that the appointment of a bishop might raise another persecution against the Catholics in Scotland 'and make them all to be banished and so lose the little liberty they have'.¹⁹ He also believed that the presence of a bishop in Scotland would make a 'contrast between the regulars and clergy which would give scandal to both Protestants and Catholics and hinder the connections of those who are well affected to the true faith'.¹⁹

Clearly, the political implications worried the King's advisers at St Germain and although they recommended Nicolson for the office of bishop as early as March 1693, they delayed giving approval for his appointment. Rome began to get impatient and William Leslie wrote frequently to Lewis Innes requesting confirmation of the King's approval. On 19 April 1694, the King finally approved the nomination of Nicolson as bishop for Scotland and Leslie wrote gratefully to Innes:

'Never in my lifetime have I had greater consolation than what I received by your letter of the 19th April, wherein you tell me that his Majestie, God allmightie blesse him, has named a Bishop for our afflicted countrey. The persone that his M. has pitched upon is most fitt for to carie the charge; learned, wyse, prudent, modest and zealous, yett I find two difficulties in him: first, the engagement that his Brother has of five hundred pound sterlin if hee returns to the countrey, which difficultie I believe his Majesty has considered how to overcome before hee named him. The 2nd difficultie is that, as I heare, hee will not accept of the burden.'²⁰

Leslie wrote to Nicolson asking him to reconsider accepting the position, but received no reply. It may be that Nicolson did not receive the letter or assumed that Rome would take for granted his acceptance. Although he had frequently expressed a disinclination to undertake the responsibility, Nicolson realised that he would have to obey his superiors and acknowledge the honour done to him by King James. Nicolson told Innes that he recognised the 'dignitie and preference' attached to the high office of bishop but still doubted his suitability for the post. He thought the Court of Rome would carry out a full investigation into his character before confirming the appointment and therefore decided to 'be passive, and wait to see what the Court of Rome will do in it'. He went on to say:

'If they discover anie aversion, I hop that then at least you'll move his Majestie to name another, which I assure you shall in no wayes trouble me. If it passe ther as at your Court, I shall have several things to consider. God of his mercy grant me His lights and assistances I stand in need of. I beg your assistance in one thing to which good manners oblige me. If I had the honor to speak to his Majestie, I would expresse the sense I have of my unworthiness, and of the honor he has been pleased to doe me.'²¹

In June 1694, Nicolson spoke to the Abbess at Dunkirk about leaving the convent. Her age, delicate health and nervousness may have made him reluctant to sever his connection with the community too abruptly. He did not communicate with Leslie, whose impatience to get the matter settled increased. Leslie wrote to Innes,

'It is now 3 weeks since the news came heer that his Majestie was graciously pleased to name Mr Nicolson for to bee our Bishop in Scotland, but wee have no newes as yett whether he has accepted of the charge.'²²

Leslie also feared that unless Nicolson was consecrated immediately, the Jesuits would once again interfere to try and stop the appointment:

'Our geometers will not faill to doe ther uttermost at this court to stoppe the affair, and although now they can doe little or nothing against us, yett if they gett tyme, accidents may fall out wherin they may winne ther point, at least in making delay ... I am sure

that heer they are aiming at this point, so I believe they are not idle at St Germain and elsewhere.²²

Nicolson, meanwhile, continued to discuss his new position with Innes by letter and began to wind up his affairs in France, quite unaware of Leslie's impatience and taking for granted the knowledge in Rome of his acceptance. His residence in Paris and the trappings necessary for his consecration would, he knew, be expensive. His personal income was small and he had lived frugally at Dunkirk; his affairs in Scotland were in the disorder inevitable from his long absence and he had been able to reserve only such funds as were necessary for his day to day subsistence or for funeral costs if he died abroad. Innes offered him financial assistance, but Nicolson still saw no great need to hurry immediately to Paris. He wrote to his brother about the possibility of coming back to Scotland, the problem of bail still presenting an obstacle. Lord Kemnay, in reply, indicated that the only way his return would be feasible would be to make friends at the Court of Orange and thereby obtain some sort of passport. There was some doubt expressed by Innes as to the trustworthiness of Nicolson's family, but Nicolson assured him that his brothers had always been kind to him 'even though they are protestants'.²³ He asked for the news of his appointment to be kept secret to facilitate his return to Scotland.

Word finally reached Rome of Nicolson's acceptance of the appointment in late June 1694, and early in July the Pope gave orders for the preparation of a brief for the consecration which was drawn up by a congregation of cardinals in August. The brief was despatched on 7 September 1694 to St Germain with orders for the consecration to take place as speedily and as secretly as possible. This latter injunction was disobeyed by the Jesuits, who at once published the news far and wide, so that not only the news of his election reached Nicolson in Dunkirk, but he was even informed of the sum of the allowance James would make him. However, as Nicolson was not ready to go to Paris, the fuss died down

and preparations for a secret consecration began. Nicolson's title was to be Bishop of Peristachium²⁴ and Vicar Apostolic for Scotland.²⁵ Propaganda also announced the provision of a yearly income of two hundred scudi (a scudo being an Italian silver coin worth about four shillings) with fifty more for travelling expenses. Nicolson obtained permission from the Abbess to leave the convent at Dunkirk as a suitable successor to him there had been found by September 1694, and he finally reached Paris on 26 November.

The consecration did not take place immediately. Nicolson, who by now had completely recovered his health and strength and was taking his new position very seriously indeed, began to quibble over the bishop's faculties, sent to him in December by William Leslie. Both Lewis Innes and Nicolson expressed great dissatisfaction with them since they were no different from those given to an ordinary missionary priest – in other words, it seemed that Nicolson was to have no powers over and above the ordinary clergy, secular or regular. Innes wrote to Leslie:

There is not one missionary in the country who has not the same and some have much larger and more ample power, the regulars especially, and what is worst of all ... there is no mention in his Faculties of obliging all the missionaries, both Secular and Regular, to take their faculties from him. If they be not obliged to this, they will have no dependence upon him at all.²⁶

Innes suggested that provision should be made in the faculties for the voidance of all missionaries' faculties within three months of Nicolson's arrival in Scotland; Nicolson would then be empowered to draw up new faculties for them (this to include the regulars who would automatically be dependent on the new bishop). It was pointed out by Innes that the English bishops had been 'slighted' by the regulars there when it was discovered that the episcopal faculties were no different from those of ordinary priests, and Bishop Witham was already on his way to Rome to remonstrate in the name of all the bishops. Innes requested that Leslie should receive these complaints and endeavour to get 'our Bishop's

Faculties enlarged, especially that all seculars and regulars be obliged to tak their Faculties from him.²⁶ By February 1695, it had been agreed by Propaganda that instead of enlarging the bishop's faculties, the suggestion that ordinary priests, including regulars, should have their faculties invalidated, pending the granting of new ones by bishops in authority, should be implemented. The consecration could now go ahead without further delay.

Even at this stage in the proceedings, there was a minor setback regarding who was to undertake the performance of the ceremony. Rome had requested the Papal Nuncio at Paris to consecrate the new bishop, whereas Innes had asked the Archbishop of Paris, Monsignor Francois de Harlai de Champrallon. The Archbishop cordially agreed to Innes' request, believing that the court of St Germain had specifically required it, and straight away named the assisting bishops, offered the use of his private chapel and vestments and promised the utmost secrecy. Nicolson, however, diplomatically avoided a collision of jurisdiction, which had occasionally happened before between the Nuncio and the Archbishop. He called on the Nuncio, informing him that the consecration was to take place at an hour or so earlier than originally intended (the new time was to be 8 am) and did not wish to inconvenience him. The excuse was, apparently, accepted in good part by the Nuncio, who gave Nicolson his blessing and promised to recommend poor Scotland to his Holiness. The details of this story and a further difficulty which arose concerning the consecration were described in a letter written by Thomas Innes to his brother Walter in Rome.²⁷

This second difficulty was Nicolson's background which produced a few objections from the canon lawyers when it became known that he had been brought up and educated as a Protestant. Innes wrote

There was some difficulty started on a mistake about his being sometime a protestant, some pretending there ought to have been a particular dispense for that irregularity, or a special clause in his Bulls for it; but that was decided by the learned and pious Bishop

of Lucon and Mr Prior, chancellor of the University, because that aliens to be born and educate in heresy, is not infamy ... and that if any, it was taken away by dispense at his entry to the tonsure.'²⁷

Thomas Nicolson's consecration as first Vicar-Apostolic for Scotland finally took place on 27 February 1695 at eight o'clock in the morning in the private chapel of the Archbishop of Paris. The officiating prelate was Monsignor John Mascaron, Bishop of Agen, whom the Archbishop had nominated to perform the ceremony, assisted by the Bishops of Ypres and Lucon. The consecration was kept as secret as possible with only a few Scots clergy present. Those who attended the ceremony included Lewis Innes, Thomas Innes, Charles Whytford, Robert Davidson and Alexander Drummond, the last two being secular missionary priests, and also two Jesuits, Roger Maxwell, Procurator of the Jesuits, and a companion, who were allowed to attend after great promises of secrecy. Thomas Innes remarked, 'Our Bishop behaved extraordinarily well at the action, and was very Majestuous in his pontificals.'²⁷ Obviously a changed man from the invalid who lay dying at Dunkirk!

It is interesting to note that Nicolson, although described as slow and a man of little action by Bishop Ellis, should assume authority so completely and decisively as he did after his appointment as bishop. He was obviously used to being in a position of some authority after his years at Glasgow University as regent and later in a teaching capacity at the seminary in Padua. His inactivity at Dunkirk clearly resulted from months of imprisonment in Scotland and the dampness of the low-lying countryside in northern France. As soon as he returned to Paris, he resumed his old vigour and took an active part in the preparations for his consecration. Much of the controversy surrounding the choice of a bishop happened without Nicolson's knowledge and he merely accepted his nomination quietly and without fuss when news finally reached him of Propaganda's decision. William Leslie had described Nicolson as being 'most fitt for to carie the charge;

learned, wyse, prudent, modest and zealous'.²⁸ The new bishop had a lot to live up to as he took up his new duties in organising and advancing the Catholic Mission to Scotland.

Notes

1. Malcolm V. Hay, *Failure in the Far East* (Edinburgh, 1956), 29–34.
2. B.L., Abbot Fleming to Charles Whytford from Ratisbon, 23 March 1688.
3. B.L., William Leslie to William Aloysius Leslie from Rome, February 1688.
4. B.L., William Leslie to Lord Melfort from Rome, 3 March 1688.
5. B.L., Cardinal Norfolk to Lewis Innes, 30 April 1688.
6. B.L., Cardinal Norfolk to Lewis Innes, 30 August 1688.
7. Peter Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland*, (Montrose, 1970), 92.
8. B.L., Nicolson to William Leslie from Dunkirk, 31 January 1695.
9. B.L., Nicolson to William Leslie from Dunkirk, 1 February 1690.
10. B.L., Lewis Innes to William Leslie from St Germain, 23 February 1693.
11. B.L., Walter Innes to Lewis Innes from Rome, 24 March 1693.
12. B.L., Lewis Innes to William Leslie from St Germain, 19 March 1693.
13. B.L., Nicolson to William Leslie from Dunkirk, 20 March 1692.
14. B.L., Walter Innes to Lewis Innes from Rome, 14 April 1693.
15. B.L., Walter Innes to Lewis Innes from Rome, 11 May 1693.
16. B.L., Nicolson to Lewis Innes from Dunkirk, 24 August 1693.
17. B.L., Nicolson to Lewis Innes from Dunkirk, 14 April 1694.
18. B.L., Lord Melfort to William Leslie from St Germain, 18 May 1693.
19. B.L., Lorenzo Leslie to Charles Whytford from Rome, September 1694.
20. B.L., William Leslie to Lewis Innes from Rome, 11 May 1694.
21. B.L., Nicolson to Lewis Innes from Dunkirk, 1 May 1694.
22. B.L., William Leslie to Lewis Innes from Rome, 1 June 1694.

23. B.L., Nicolson to Lewis Innes from Dunkirk, 22 June 1694.
24. Now the Turkish village of Sharkioi, about 20 miles north of the Dardanelles and the Galipoli peninsular, facing the Sea of Marmora.
25. Archivio della Sacra Congregatione de Propaganda Fide, Acta 1694, 37. 'Eligatur Vicarius Apostolicus cum titulo episcopali in partibus et dentur ornamenta sacra cum vasis sacris et libris.'
26. B.L., Lewis Innes to William Leslie from St Germain, 20 December 1694.
27. B.L., Thomas Innes to Walter Innes from Rome, 7 March 1695. Thomas Innes had been recently ordained and was tutor to the younger students at the Scots college in Paris. He acted as almoner to Nicolson at the consecration.
28. B.L., William Leslie to Lewis Innes from Rome, 11 May 1694.

Reverend and honored Sir

I have heard of your last news from Rome & his holiness good intentions for our country. My friends by wayes have been pleased to compliment me with your opinion = ones of my being concerned in that affaire. I know yr is able or no probability of it, & am therefore glad of it. yet I find my selfe obliged in the present circumstances to give you this trouble I am & always have been sensible yt I want many endowments necessary for the discharge of yt function & the last yeares have found such changes and injunctives yt I have more need to think of death in preferment upon the attempt I have of the entreat, yt, if yr be any any mentioning of my name as to yt, you would be pleased to discontinue it, yet I am sure you may safely do so at our kings court, & yr will not be much discouraged of it at Rome. I wish yt affaire must be done with little proposals and solicitations for my part if I had any right to provide or content I would entirely yield it up to you. our news here are most from Paris. the last two weekes the court have had good fortune to bring in to the port sundry prizes one from the coast of England brought to by of great value by the passengers we are told yt things do not come aboard in England I have the hopes & disorders of yt people will make way for our good Kinge with my dearest respects to your Honor

Honored Sir

your obliged humble servant

Tho: Nicolson

Dunkirk

14 April 1694

Letter of Nicolson to William Leslie from Dunkirk dated 14 April 1694 expressing his unwillingness to be appointed as Bishop: 'I have more need to think of death than preferment'.

5. The Mission to the Highlands 1697–1701

More than two years elapsed before Nicolson was able to begin his episcopate in Scotland. Having no passport and being still under the bond of banishment, he applied for official permission to re-enter Britain. His application was supported by the Duke of Bavaria who, at the request of the papal internuncio, contacted his ambassador in London to obtain the necessary permission from King William.¹ While waiting for his permit, Nicolson travelled to Cologne in June 1696 to meet Abbot Cook from the Scottish Benedictine monastery at Wurzburg and the two men then travelled on to Wurzburg together. During his stay there, Nicolson and Cook discussed the Scottish mission at great length and after consulting Placide Fleming, the abbot of Ratisbon, it was agreed that Benedictines serving the mission would be subject to Nicolson's authority.² Nicolson left Wurzburg in September 1696 after he had been informed by a 'correspondent' in Holland that he had been granted permission to return to Britain.³ He journeyed to the Low Countries where he met up with William Stuart and both men embarked for England. In spite of having been released from his bond, Nicolson was arrested as soon as his ship docked on suspicion of being involved in a Catholic plot, 'some rascal having made an affidavit against the Bishop'³ and he was kept in prison in London until March the following year. After a brief trial at which no convincing evidence was produced, Nicolson was finally permitted to continue his journey north. He arrived in Edinburgh in June 1697.

When Thomas Nicolson came to Scotland as its first Catholic bishop since the Reformation era, his main concern was the organisation and co-ordination of the Scottish Catholic Mission which was fragmented and without direction. In the Highlands and Islands, Catholicism had been kept alive by the Franciscan and Vincentian missionaries who had worked there throughout the seventeenth century; these priests were mainly Irish and worked independently, teaching,

preaching and administering the sacraments whenever and wherever they could. In July 1697 when Nicolson began his vicariate, there were twenty-two Scottish missionary priests working in Scotland, but only one secular priest, Robert Munro, was working in the Highlands. The remainder were scattered throughout the country, ministering to those Catholics who had remained loyal to their faith at a time when persecution and suspicion made its overt practice difficult and dangerous. Nicolson's main concern, however, was the lack of missionary activity in the Highlands and Islands, and the organisation of a cohesive and positive mission in these areas was to be one of his first priorities.

The remoteness and inaccessibility of the Highlands and the Western Isles was a major problem for the missionary priests and may in part account for the difficulty in maintaining Catholic missionary activity over the area as a whole, especially considering that such residual strength as Catholicism had in Scotland was located in these areas. The older priests had died and on the island of Barra, the last remaining priest after the Reformation had married.¹ The Scottish missionary priests did not speak Gaelic and many were reluctant to make the hazardous journey to the more remote Islands. Protestant ministers had performed baptisms and marriages and most Catholics preferred their children to be educated at Protestant schools than receive no education at all. The Catholic inhabitants in these remoter parts of Scotland were largely unaffected by the Penal Laws, but to Nicolson, ignorance and heresy were just as much of a problem. The MacLeods as a clan had become Protestant and a whole new generation had grown up despising Catholicism. The remainder of the Catholic families, among them the MacDonalds and MacNeils, remained loyal to the old faith, but Catholic practices had died out in many places, except for a few badly remembered prayers and superstitions.

The Irish missionaries working in the Highlands were reputed to be 'little instructed and not very zealous'⁴ producing few converts and receiving little

encouragement. In the years immediately preceding the revolution of 1689–90, there were only three Irish Franciscans permanently based in the Highlands, but this number had increased to eight by 1697. Their main functions appear to have been the administration of the last rites to dying Catholics and the saying of Mass, and although Nicolson valued the work they were doing, he was anxious to replace them with Scottish priests whose activities he could oversee and monitor personally. At the time of Nicolson's appointment as bishop in 1694, Lewis Innes had written to William Leslie from Paris reporting on the condition of Scottish Catholics in the Highlands.⁵ He had received information first hand from Hugh Morgan, an Irish missionary priest who had been working in the Highlands and Islands and who was at this time in Paris to appeal for help. The greatest need appeared to be that of instruction in the faith and for Catholic schools to be set up. Innes asked that at least one school should be established in the Highlands, a priority for consideration by the new bishop, that a special fund be set up for the education of young Catholic men from the Highlands, presumably for the priesthood, and that a special allowance be given for Highland missionaries. Innes also recommended that Morgan should return to Scotland immediately to continue his work with the two other Irish priests. His first duty would then be to set about establishing a school, since he was well qualified to do so 'being a good humanist and designed for that seven years ago when first sent, but there is not one farthing to bear his expense back'.

The financing of the Highland mission appears to have been a major problem since most of the missionary fund was being used to maintain priests already working in the Lowlands. Another problem appears to have been that of language, the main reason why Nicolson was temporarily willing to allow the Irish priests to continue their work in the Highlands despite their lack of academic qualifications. Together with the remoteness and inaccessibility of the inhabited areas of the Highlands and Islands and the apparent lack of knowledge of their people and

customs, these factors combined to make the extension of the Scottish Catholic Mission into the Highland area a very difficult undertaking.

Nicolson set up his own headquarters at Preshome on the Duke of Gordon's estate in the Enzie district of Banffshire. Soon after his arrival there, he sent Robert Munro to London to receive a sum of money which had at last been sent by Propaganda to finance a Catholic school in the Highlands. He was, however, arrested on suspicion of being involved in Jacobite activities connected with King James' proposed landing in Britain in October 1697 - 'That Noble person is coming into Britain' wrote Nicolson to Lewis Innes.⁶ Munro was imprisoned and the money taken from him. Innes was concerned, not only at the loss of the money but at the danger in which the missionary priests were placed. He wrote to Leslie⁷ saying that he hoped Nicolson would be able to visit the Highlands himself to assess the situation there and submit a full report to Propaganda. Innes suggested that when Leslie wrote to Nicolson about the proposed visit, he should put no address on the letter, neither refer to Nicolson as 'My Lord' in case it should fall into enemy hands. Much of the correspondence reaching Scotland during 1697 and 1698 was written on small pieces of paper in miniature handwriting, suggesting that the letters were concealed in the clothing or footwear of the messenger. Innes also suggested to Leslie that the matter of setting up a school in the Highlands should be deferred pending Nicolson's report.

Nicolson had, in fact, written to Propaganda in September 1697 although this letter took several months to arrive.⁸ He regretted that he had as yet been unable to visit the Highlands and Islands, the main reason for his reluctance appearing to be the storms and inclement weather experienced that summer which had made sea-crossings perilous. For Nicolson, a man of frequent ill-health in his fifties, prone to rheumatism, the prospect of a journey to the remoter Western Isles of Scotland in an open boat must have appeared daunting. Understandably,

therefore, he proposed to postpone his visit until the weather improved to make the journey less arduous. In some areas of the Highlands there were garrisons of government troops and it was considered unsafe for missionary priests to remain in one district for any length of time. The severity of the penal laws in Scotland between 1697 and 1700 necessitated that the Scottish Catholic missionary priests, including Nicolson, should lie low and attempt to divert suspicion from their activities. In the summer of 1698, Nicolson sent one of his priests, John Irvine, to William Leslie in Rome with a detailed report on the state of the mission in Scotland at that time. Irvine reported⁹ that there were now twenty three missionaries in Scotland of whom 10 were in the Highlands (8 Irish and 2 Scottish), 4 in Banffshire, 3 in Aberdeenshire, one in Forfarshire, 2 in Edinburgh and one with the Earl of Traquair in Tweeddale. In addition there were ten Jesuits, five in Edinburgh and five in the north (one with Count Leslie, one with Lord Seaforth, one with Pitcapel, one at Drumgash and one at his father's house). Four Benedictines were also assisting the mission - one in Edinburgh, one in Aberdeen, one with the Countess of Dunfermline and one assisting Nicolson; this last appears to have been Father Columba MacIennan whom Abbot Placide Fleming at Ratisbon had recommended to the Highland mission because of his learning and knowledge of Gaelic. The former Prefect of the mission, Dunbar, was residing at the house of the Duke of Gordon while Nicolson remained in hiding at Preshome. Irvine also reported that a great many priests had been banished and six had died in the previous two years.

Nicolson, however, was not idle during these years of persecution. He spent his time performing the normal episcopal duties in Enzie, administering the sacrament of confirmation to men, women and children, preaching, instructing the clergy and people as well as doing the work of an ordinary missionary priest, visiting the sick, taking the sacraments to them, saying Mass and receiving converts into the Church. He had hoped to visit the Highlands in the spring of

1699, but was dissuaded from doing so by letters from the priests there reporting famine. For three years in succession there had been no harvest due to bad summers and in low-lying districts there had been no meal to spare for planting. Nicolson prepared instead to visit Lothian and Galloway, but was prevented because of a new wave of persecution. During 1699, famine and persecution made life almost intolerable for poverty-stricken Catholics in Scotland. In the Highlands there was little meal, seed or money; two-thirds of the land was left unploughed and probably two-thirds of those who died, died of famine and disease. Missionary priests in the lowlands fled north because of the persecution. On Low Sunday, sixty Catholics went to the Duke of Gordon's house to hear Mass where a party of soldiers had been sent by the local magistrate to break up the gathering. Forty of the people were arrested and imprisoned, including the Duke, but the rest together with Dunbar, managed to escape. This kind of harassment of Catholics appears to have been frequent during 1698 and 1699 and life for the missionary priests was unsettled and hazardous. They took refuge in the mountains and uninhabited places and ministered to the faithful by night.¹⁰

By 1700, however, the persecution had abated and the weather improved. The news from France was that King James had postponed his invasion of England with a French army¹¹, and suspected Jacobites and Catholic priests were left in peace for a short while. The Duke of Gordon was released from prison and the Scottish missionary priests resumed their work less furtively. In the spring, Nicolson began to prepare for his visit to the Highlands and Islands and on 24 May 1700 set sail for Inverness. The details of the visit were recorded by Thomas Innes who accompanied him, his account being forwarded to Propaganda by Nicolson after their return in September.¹² The sixty-miles' journey from the Enzie to Inverness was made perilous by unexpected violent storms and Nicolson arrived with a severe cold and took to bed for three days at the house of Lord Lovat. On 27 May they went overland to Strathglass where they were cordially

received by the Frasers and the Chisholms, two Catholic families in that area. The next stage of the journey was to Glengarry, twenty-four miles over rugged hills and mountains. Horses had been borrowed to carry the baggage, but the two men walked the full distance. Innes reported that Nicolson frequently used both hands and feet to negotiate the steep hillsides, and to break the journey they stayed in shielings. They stayed only one day at Glengarry, a day which was used by Nicolson to confirm the men and women who came to him there.

Except for the reasons of ill-health, Nicolson wasted no time during his Highland visit. He was acutely aware of the need to complete the journey during the summer months while the weather was good and was determined to visit as many places as possible. From Glengarry, he and Innes went on foot over the mountains to Knoydart. Nicolson remarked to Innes on this stage of the journey that he had crossed and recrossed the Alps several times, but that seemed as nothing compared to these mountains. They arrived finally at Loch Earn where they spent the night at a shieling, sleeping on the grass. The following day Nicolson said Mass at the house of a local Catholic and confirmed forty people. The 95-year old laird, a MacDonald, was visited personally by Nicolson who gave him his blessing. The interest Nicolson showed in the local people won him a good deal of affection and Innes' report is full of such details. On 13 June the two priests arrived at Loch Morar where they were met by two Irish missionaries John Cahassy and Father Ratray and two Scots missionaries Hugh Morgan and Columba MacIennan. Columba MacIennan was a Benedictine from Ratisbon whom Abbot Placide Fleming had recommended to the mission in 1696 because he had been brought up in the Highlands, spoke Gaelic and was a good preacher.¹³ Nicolson and Innes decided to take MacIennan and Morgan with them on their journey to act as interpreters.

Two days later they arrived at Arisaig, a less mountainous area where there was a small Catholic school. The chief of the Clanranald clan met the bishop and

offered him boats and sailors to take him to the isles. Nicolson and Innes set sail for Eigg (at 2 am) on 18 June from Arisaig. The wind was gale force, but the four men arrived on Eigg at midday. They found the island to be fertile and promising a good harvest. There were three hundred inhabitants, all Catholics, of whom Nicolson confirmed 140. Most belonged to the Clanranald clan and lived in stone houses. On 21 June the four men set sail for Canna and were well received here; the clan chief on the island was Lord Moydart and he, along with the 130 inhabitants were all Catholic. The resident priest was an Irish Franciscan, Charles Hara, although Canna had also been served from time to time by Hugh Morgan. From Canna, Nicolson and his companions undertook the twenty-five mile crossing to Uist where there were 1500 Catholics. They left Canna at 11pm but Innes remarked that since it was light practically all night in these northern areas, the lateness of the departure did not make their journey any more difficult. In fact, the Minch was calm and it was a good crossing. Nicolson celebrated an open air Mass on the island and confirmed 900 Catholics at twelve different locations. He crossed the two to three mile stretch of water to Benbecula where he found all but forty of the inhabitants Catholic. Again, Nicolson's main task seems to have been that of administering the sacrament of confirmation and the saying of Mass, a primary consideration on Benbecula where there had been no resident priest for two years and only an occasional visit from Father O'Shiel, an Irish Franciscan whom Innes described as a good man, but illiterate. The Catholics were nevertheless found to be zealous in their faith, remaining loyal to the Church in spite of difficulties and scandals. Here the Catholic gentry and noblemen had helped to keep Catholicism alive by their example. The island clan was MacDonald which had clung steadfastly to their faith despite the influence of protestantism there. Hugh Morgan was given the task by Nicolson of keeping a particularly watchful eye on Benbecula.

On 10 July, Nicolson went to Barra where he confirmed 500 people. All the

inhabitants were Catholic and although there was no priest on the island, there were ruins of three churches and a priory at Kilbarre. All the Islands around Barra were found to be inhabited with a small chapel on each. On Vatersay a Mr MacNeil acted as catechist, instructing the people in the faith. Nicolson stayed a week on Barra, preaching and visiting the people, returning to Uist on 19 July where more of the inhabitants were waiting to be confirmed. There were, nevertheless, several shepherds up in the mountains who were unable to come down, but the bishop was unable to stay any longer, being anxious to cross back to Canna while the weather was still clement. Canna was successfully reached on 24 July and the following day the party crossed to Rhum, home of the MacLean clan. Twenty-four people were confirmed there before Nicolson returned to Arisaig on 29 July. Innes remarked that the bishop made a special point of visiting the school there and confirming the children. Altogether 700 people were confirmed at Moidart and Morar and a further 240 at Knoydart. On 24 August Nicolson visited Glengarry again where he slept in the open at Inneroick. The Catholics there were served by Robert Munroe who attended to their spiritual needs, although Nicolson found the people restless and angry about the persecutions. He left Glengarry on 28 August, promising to return to administer confirmation; he appears to have been unwell these last few days of his journey.

Thomas Innes in the report of the Highland visitation wrote that bishop Nicolson was very diligent in the performance of his duties throughout the visit. He was certainly kept busy, although the journey was intended initially to be merely to estimate the needs of Catholics in the Highlands and Islands. Each day was spent travelling, preaching, confirming or visiting, as well as in making a conscious examination of the condition of the people. Nicolson never confirmed without preaching first, making use of one of his interpreters, and rarely had a moment's rest. Sleeping accommodation was often meagre or non-existent and the journey itself hazardous, at times dangerous. Nicolson was forced to rest for several

weeks after the visit and hence the reason why his report was written by Thomas Innes. The few letters written by Nicolson in the following year are brief and the handwriting that of a very weak man.

The report on the Highland visitation also contains a brief account of the practices and beliefs of the people visited as well as details of the needs of the Catholic communities. With regard to the former, Innes wrote that the people observed Sundays and the principal feast days of the church and also saints days not observed elsewhere, for example the feast days of St Columba and St Finan. Public penance was rigorously observed for 'public' crimes such as fornication and adultery; this practice appears to have originated in Ireland and brought over by Franciscan missionaries. It was, however, also practised by Protestants in these areas. Brigandage and pillage were common among some clans, notably the Camerons but not, Innes remarked, among Catholics.

The greatest need was for instruction in the faith since there was a diminishing respect for 'holy things' and the prevalence of superstitions and empty observances. Second sight appeared to be popular amongst the inhabitants of the Islands and many people claimed to have had visions and to be able to predict the future. Innes claimed, however, that they had not 'made a pact with the devil' and the visions were often the result of mental instability. Prayer and exorcisms were used by visiting priests in an attempt to eradicate such practices. The report concluded with the expression of a great need for extra priests and because of the difficulty of visiting the Islands often, considering the state of Nicolson's health, Innes commended the establishment of two provicars to work on Nicolson's behalf in these areas. In fact, the bishop had already authorised and given faculties to Robert Munroe to take charge of the Scottish Mission in the Highlands and to consolidate and improve the work of the Irish missionaries in the Islands.

A year later in 1701, a further report written by Thomas Innes from Paris¹⁴ revealed a decided improvement in the missionary activities in the Highlands and western isles, with all the missionaries, Irish and Scots, under the administration and control of Bishop Nicolson. The Jesuits were not assigned to particular districts and moved about from place to place whenever they found it expedient to do so, or where there was a particular need. They had submitted formally to the jurisdiction of the new bishop on 7 February 1701 and were now co-operating more closely with the secular missionary priests. Seven missionaries had been elected to manage the spiritual and temporal affairs of the rest and reported frequently to the bishop. A general procurator had been appointed to administer the finances of the mission, allocating money according to the rules set out by the bishop. Accounts would now be rendered annually to Propaganda, although the provision of funds for the Scottish mission continued to be limited.¹⁵ Schools had also been set up in Uist and Barra by 1701, although more schoolmasters were needed.

By the end of 1701, the year following Nicolson's visitation of the Highlands and Islands, the Scottish mission had become more organised and its priests had drawn themselves more closely into a body, working together to consolidate and expand their activities.

Notes

1. Alphonse Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, iv, 147.
2. M. Dilworth, *The Scots in Franconia*, (Edinburgh and London 1974), 140–141.
3. Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics*, (London 1909), ii, 172–174.
4. National Library of Ireland (N.L.I.), Archive della Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda Fide, Scozia, Scritture Riferite nei Congressi, ii, (1701–1760), 5666; 5667.
5. B.L., Lewis Innes to William Leslie from Paris, 20 December 1694.

6. B.L., Nicolson to Pierre de Compigny from Preshome, 22 October 1697. Pierre de Compigny was one of the pseudonyms used by Lewis Innes.
7. B.L., Lewis Innes to William Leslie from Paris, October 1697.
8. N.L.I., Archiv. Propag., Germania, Scritture Riferite, 1680-1700. Letter dated 21 September 1697 written from Aberdeen.
9. B.L., John Irvine to William Leslie from Paris, 5 September 1698.
10. John Thomson, *A History of the Scottish Mission 1650 to 1731*, quoted in W. Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics*, ii, 179.
11. B.L., Carnegy to Pierre de Compigny from Edinburgh, 9 May 1699.
12. N.L.I., Archiv. Propag., Scozia, Scritture Riferite nei Congressi, ii, (1701-1760), 5668. *Relation de la Visite des Montagnes d'Ecosse faite par M. Nicolson, Eveque de Peristachium, Vicre Apostolique en Ecosse, en l'annee 1700.*
13. B.L., Abbot Fleming to William Leslie from Ratisbon, 5 June 1696.
14. B.L., Thomas Innes to William Leslie from Paris, 13 October 1701.
15. See below Ch. 15.

6. The Appointment of a Coadjutor, Bishop James Gordon and his Visitation to the Highlands 1707

Bishop Nicolson, who was in his fifties when he undertook his arduous visit to the Highlands and Islands in 1700, had been a physically weak man for good many years and suffered constantly from rheumatism and chills. Notwithstanding, he had continued to lead an active life as Vicar-Apostolic and his highland visitation revealed his dedication to and concern for the Scottish Catholic Mission. The visit to the highlands, however, had also revealed the great need for an assistant to Bishop Nicolson, a coadjutor who would carry out some of the more tiring and exacting tasks, leaving Nicolson free to administer the mission from his headquarters at Preshome. After the highland visitation of 1700, Nicolson had divided Scotland into districts for administrative purposes¹ and within each district, the missionaries would keep their fixed stations so that they could be contacted easily. In his report to Propaganda in 1703 Nicolson recorded that there were 33 missionary priests now working in Scotland, 15 secular priests, 2 Irish, 7 Jesuits, 4 Benedictines and 5 Irish Franciscans. The main 'station' was the Enzie, with Preshome as its centre and the seat of the Bishop. Protestants called the Enzie 'the Papistical Country' but the influence of the Duke of Gordon made the Privy Council lenient towards the district, and estates of Catholic peers there were exempt from the severity of the Penal Laws.

As well as co-ordinating the work of the missionary priests, Nicolson was kept busy with other administrative work; this included the drawing up of the Statutes of 1700 which pertained to Catholic doctrine and practice in Scotland, and the organisation of the financing of the mission.² In August 1702, Nicolson drew up a mandate for the administration of the funds of the mission and appointed seven priests to assist the general procurator in Edinburgh.³ These seven were Alexander Dundas, Robert Munroe, Paul Sandison, Robert Francis Mearns, James

John Fife, James Hall and Alexander Drummond. With the pressure of work increasing, Nicolson thus found it more difficult to continue his earlier work of visitation and the need for a coadjutor was mentioned frequently in his letters to Rome written between 1703 and 1705. In 1706, Nicolson made his first visit to Braemar, taking advantage of the absence of the Earl of Mar who was antipathetic towards Catholics. This normally meant that it was difficult for the bishop to visit the 500 Catholics on these estates who were served from time to time by two Jesuit missionaries. The loyalty of these Catholics to their faith is usually attributed to the fact that the Church owned no land in the area and they were thus not tempted to turn apostacy into gain,⁴ but the priests who ministered to the Catholics in this area were diligent in their duties, and in spite of recurrent difficulties and persecution were able to instruct and baptise the faithful.

Such visits by Nicolson, however, were infrequent due to pressure of work and ill-health, and in October 1705 a coadjutor had already been chosen. This was James Gordon, a former missionary priest in Scotland who knew Nicolson well. Born in the Enzie and educated at the Scots College in Paris, he had worked in Banffshire on the Mission from 1692–1702 after which he was sent to Rome as an assistant to William Leslie. One of the objects proposed by Nicolson and the Scots clergy in sending Gordon to Rome was to make him known to the Cardinals in the hope that he would be the chosen candidate for the position of coadjutor.⁵ Two other men had been considered for the post; Gordon himself favoured Thomas Innes who had worked alongside Nicolson for several years and accompanied him on the visitation to the Highlands in 1700. Propaganda, however, preferred not to put Innes' name forward as he was suspected of having Jansenist sympathies. William Leslie, on the other hand, had suggested George Adamson, another missionary priest with a great knowledge of Scotland and probably as a result of influence and persuasion, Adamson was the man chosen by the Congregation of Cardinals on 12 January 1705. This decision was,

however, kept secret until Adamson was formally offered, and had declined the appointment because of ill-health. James Gordon then seemed the obvious choice, having worked closely with Nicolson, being constantly in touch with the Scottish mission and having worked for five years on Nicolson's Statutes. Nicolson was immediately informed of the decision, and he replied to Propaganda on 20 November 1705 expressing his joy and relief at the appointment.⁶ Nicolson had just passed through a time of great depression, owing to a drop in the numbers of missionary priests between 1703 and 1705; O'Shiel and Hakeen from Uist and Barra had retired due to ill-health and extra priests were already desperately needed in the Western Isles. No reference was made to the necessary approval for Gordon's appointment by James VIII, the Old Pretender, although out of courtesy, the court of St Germain was officially consulted on the matter, the exiled Kings asserting their rights to appoint both Protestant and Catholic bishops to Scotland. But Rome sought to avoid the complication of royal interference in the matter which had been instrumental in the delay attached to Nicolson's appointment in 1694, and the consecration of the new bishop took place at Montefiascone on the shores of Lake Bolsena on 11 April 1706. Gordon was given the title Bishop of Nicopolis and the ceremony was performed by Cardinal Barbarigo. The coadjutor then travelled to Scotland to take up his position, going by way of Genoa to pick up two missionary priests for the Highlands, Peter Cluan and John Gasman, Irish Dominicans from the monastery of St Clemente, and also through Paris where he paid his respects to the exiled King who had raised no objection to the appointment. Gordon came to Britain via Holland and finally reached Aberdeen by the end of July 1706.

As was to be expected, Nicolson's first request of the new bishop was that he should undertake a visitation of the Highlands to follow up his own initial visit in 1700. With a fall in the number of missionary priests in the Western Isles, a great many Catholics still requiring the sacrament of confirmation and the need for

instructing priests and people according to Nicolson's Statutes which had now been formally approved by Propaganda, Bishop Gordon's visit was planned and prepared in the winter of 1706. He intended to set out early in the spring of 1707, but was needed to supply a vacant congregation during Lent and Easter and subsequently fell ill from over-fatigue. It was the last week of May before he was well enough to embark on his journey.

The details of Gordon's visit to the Highlands have been preserved in his journal and give a day by day account of his journeys and activities in the Highlands and Islands.⁷ Like Nicolson, he chose the summer months for his visit when the weather could be guaranteed fine and the sea calm. During the three months he was away, however, he was able to visit a greater number of places than Nicolson by cutting down the time spent in each area, concentrating mainly on his episcopal duties and not mixing with the people quite as much as Nicolson had done. His intention was to note improvements in areas visited by Nicolson and to assess the needs of Catholics in areas hitherto unvisited.

Gordon set out from Preshome on 1 June 1707, passing through Aberlour where he said Mass and baptised his sister's infant son, and arrived at Glenlivet on 6 June. He was accompanied by George Dalglish, a deacon working in the Highlands because of his knowledge of Gaelic. Gordon also procured a guide in Glenlivet who would be able to direct him to some of the more remote areas. They continued their journey through Strathdon and Badenoch, arriving in Glengarry for the feast of Corpus Christi on 12 June. Gordon and his companions experienced the same problems as Nicolson seven years previously. The terrain was rough and food scarce; the three men lived mainly on water, milk and oatmeal and slept rough. They had to lie low wherever there was a possibility of discovery by government troops, and on 13 June the bishop was met by Hugh Morgan and Robert Munroe, the two provicars of the Highlands and Islands, who advised him not to tarry at Glengarry because of the presence of the garrison

there, but to continue his journey to the Western Isles first. Bishop Gordon also sent back his two horses at this stage, knowing from Nicolson's experience that it was easier to proceed on foot in the mountainous areas. After saying Mass at Glengarry, he therefore continued his journey across the mountains to Glenquoich, an unpleasant and tiring trek during which the men's hands and feet were constantly wet from sinking into marshy pools. They arrived at Knoydart on 20 June where the bishop rested for a couple of days, said Mass and administered the sacrament of confirmation. Arisaig was reached on 24 June from where the party set sail for Uist, a journey of some 50 to 60 miles.

Unlike Bishop Nicolson's account of the highland visitation of 1700, Bishop Gordon's diary does not dwell on the condition of the people and their life-style, but concentrates more on the brief description of the execution of his episcopal duties in the areas visited. En route for Uist, the party was blown off course by high winds and they put in to Eigg on the afternoon of 25 June. A small congregation of Catholics gathered to meet Gordon who administered confirmation to 58 people and heard confessions. Travelling by way of Rhum, the bishop arrived at Uist on 27 June where he was met by members of the Clanranald clan and given lodging. The following day he confirmed 103 people before travelling on to Barra. There he preached to the people and then set out to visit the smaller islands around Barra, of which only Vatersay had been visited by Nicolson. On Vatersay, Gordon confirmed 44 people and a further 56 on Kyles where he also made tentative arrangements for the building of a Catholic school. Gordon also visited Kilbarra, Wistam and Askernesh, preaching, confirming and saying Mass, and then journeyed on to Benbecula on 7 July where he was received by the Lord of Moydart. Again, on the island of Benbecula, the administration of the sacrament of confirmation was the bishop's primary concern, but he also discussed with the priests and people the need for removing abuses and scandals. Most of these scandals arose out of ignorance of Catholic

teaching on such matters as marriage; where no priest was available to solemnise the sacrament, couples had either married before a protestant minister or had merely drifted into a common law marriage. To make missionary priests aware of their duties, Gordon issued copies of Nicolson's Statutes and advised priests of their faculties.

Bishop Gordon journeyed the 50 miles to Canna on 12 July where he confirmed 101 people and then set sail for Eigg. A storm arose during the night after his arrival on the island and the bishop therefore stayed there three days while the weather abated, using this time to teach and preach as well as to administer the sacraments. He arrived back on the mainland at Arisaig on 17 July and after confirming those who had waited patiently for his return, he planned to proceed to Moydart, but was warned that there was now a garrison of soldiers there. His subsequent journey through the highlands took over a month, avoiding troops, yet trying to visit as many Catholic communities as possible. On arriving at Borrodale in Knoydart, he said Mass and confirmed 189 people, with troops garrisoned only three miles away, and also visited the location of a proposed new school in the area.⁸ Between 18 July and 27 July, the bishop travelled around the Knoydart area, visiting Bearad, Glenmuble, Kyles and Scothouse, administering confirmation and saying Mass. On 25 July he ordained George Dalgleish as priest, the man who had accompanied him on his visitation. The ordination took place at Borrodale and is generally considered to be the first Catholic ordination in Scotland since the Reformation.

In the days that followed, Gordon began to show signs of fatigue and became feverish. Although he was constitutionally much stronger than Bishop Nicolson, the severe physical strain of the journey and lack of food began to have its effect. Nevertheless, the bishop continued his work in the highlands, journeying on foot to Catholic communities unvisited by Nicolson, and confirming the faithful. On 28 July he went to Glencoich, then on to Strathglass on 29 July,

Glenmoriston on 31 July, Knockfyne 2 August, Glencarrick 4 August and Glengarry on 5 August. At Glengarry, he was again near a garrison of troops and it was considered unsafe to gather the people together for Mass. In spite of this, the bishop confirmed 245 people in the five days he stayed there and continued his episcopal duties. His illness became prolonged and he was forced to rest more frequently in these latter days of his visit. He complained of thirst and his looks became emaciated due to lack of food. On 14 August he feared he was in danger of death.

Having almost reached the end of his visitation, Bishop Gordon continued to discharge his functions despite the fever, knowing that to stay too long in one place would increase the suspicions of government forces in the area. On the feast of the Assumption, 15 August, he arrived at Inverlochy in Lochaber to celebrate Mass, but was forced to move on 12 miles to Badenoch because of the presence of a garrison there. Between 15 August and 20 August he visited Strumoss, Ruthven, Strathspey, Strathdon and Ballentrach, returning to Ballencraig on Deeside on 21 August where at last he was able to rest and recover his health, being cared for by his brother who was a doctor of medicine.

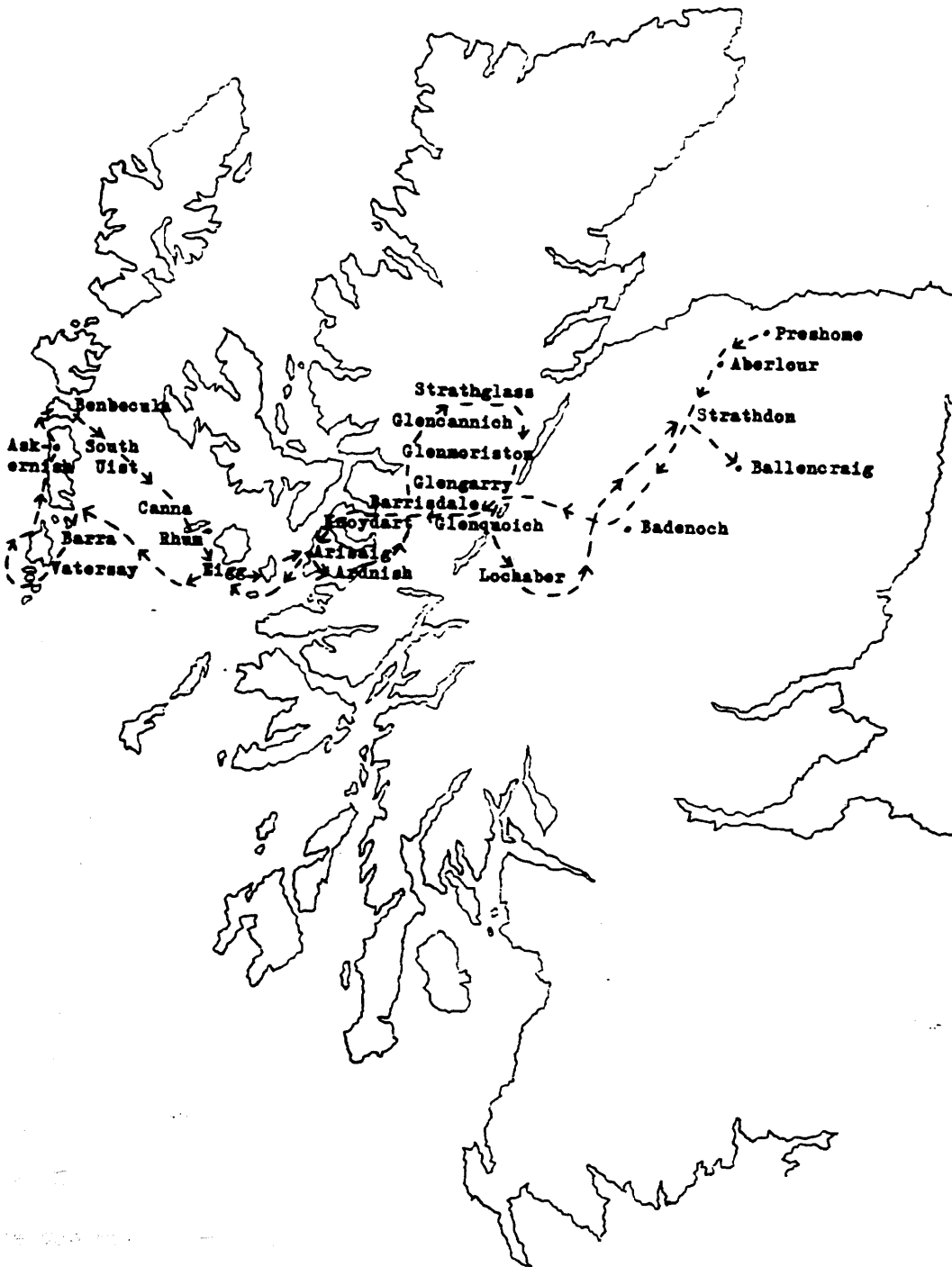
Bishop Gordon's journey took him eleven weeks in all compared to the fifteen weeks of Nicolson's visitation in 1700, but more ground was covered during this second visit since Gordon was constantly on the move. Nicolson had confirmed approximately 3000 Catholics during his visitation and Gordon a further 2740, making the total number of Catholics in the Highlands and Islands in excess of 6000. The official report of the visit based on Gordon's journal was finally presented to Propaganda by Monsignor Cavalieri on 3 September 1708 and the Congregation in reply congratulated the bishop and his companions on their work. Few converts had been made since Protestants, on becoming Catholic, if detected, automatically forfeited their land and possessions. Also, about this time, Protestant missionaries under the auspices of the S.S.P.C.K. had begun to make

inroads into the highlands and islands and were establishing an evangelistic mission of their own.

Notes

1. See Appendix 1.
2. See below, p.131.
3. B.L., Transcript of Mandate, 8 August 1702.
4. W. Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics* (London 1909), ii, 227.
5. S.C.A. Rev William Clapperton, *Memoirs of Scottish Missionary Priests*, ii, 40, 714.
6. B.L., Nicolson to Propaganda from Gordon Castle, 20 November 1705.
7. B.L., *Itinerarium Visitationis Nicopolitani in Montanis* 1707. Transcription of the diaries of Bishop James Gordon (Nicopolitanus) of his journeys in the West in 1707 and 1709.
8. *Ibid.*, '... tunc vidit locum in quo tenedam esse scholam constitutum fuerat'. 21 July 1707.

Bishop Gordon's Highland Visit 1707



7. Protestant Missionary Activity During Nicolson's Vicariate

On 7 June 1689, an Act of Parliament was passed abolishing Episcopacy in Scotland and King William II agreed to settle in Scotland the form of church government most acceptable to the majority of people. Presbyterian ministers were restored and Episcopal ministers in many places had to vacate their livings. Those Episcopal clergy who were willing to submit to the Presbyterian form of government and who signed the Westminster Confession were permitted to retain their livings, but in the north east and Highlands and Islands, Episcopacy held on and many Episcopal ministers continued to minister to their flock without submission to the Presbytery.

On 16 October 1690, the General Assembly met in Edinburgh to reorganise the church in Scotland and to determine which areas were to be designated as missionary areas. The roll at this meeting numbered 116 ministers and 47 ruling elders. Most of them were from lowland synods where Presbyterianism had a strong hold, but there were also present 6 ministers from Argyll, 4 ministers and 4 elders from Moray, 2 from Ross and Sutherland and one minister and one elder from Caithness. Glenelg, Angus, Mearns, Orkney and Shetland were not represented and the remaining highland areas possessed no Presbyterian ministers.¹ Clearly, there was a need for the Presbyterian Church to begin some constructive missionary work in these northern areas and for some years it was difficult to follow the normal Presbyterian method of supplying vacant parishes with ministers due to a lack of clergy. The area north of the Tay was designated as a special missionary area and the Assembly dispatched itinerant missionary bands to the northern synods. By 1694, the year of Nicolson's appointment, a further number of Presbyterian ministers was available to fill vacant parishes in the north and two batches of 16 ministers were sent to supply vacancies in Angus, Mearns, Aberdeen, Ross, Sutherland and Caithness. A number of

Gaelic-speaking ministers was allocated temporarily for periods of three months to northern parishes while other northern areas made free use of interpreters in their catechising. The Presbyterian Church thus found the problem of language as difficult to surmount as the Catholic Mission had discovered at this time. Ministers who had only a smattering of Gaelic were tried out in purely Gaelic parishes to learn more of the language. Presbyteries and Universities were advised to allot bursaries to those planning to seek positions as ministers in highland parishes. In general, however, it was felt that the progress of Presbyterian missionary work in the Highlands depended on the introduction of English and the English Bible, Gaelic being disliked because of its association with Jacobitism and 'barbarity'.² In a memorial by the committee of the S.S.P.C.K. to the Commissioners of the Society, it was urgently recommended that additional schools be set up in which religion could be taught in English, thus 'by time wearing out the Irish language'.³ This attitude dominated the policy of the S.S.P.C.K. until 1767 and it was an offence, punishable with dismissal, for the schoolmaster of a charity school to help his pupils read Gaelic.

The S.S.P.C.K. (the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge) was set up in 1701 and was originally associated with the Anglican missionary organisation of the same name. There had always been a need for evangelism within the Presbyterian Church, especially in the Highlands, but until the setting up of the S.S.P.C.K., Protestant missionary activities, like those of the Catholic Church, had been disorganised and of limited success. Until 1690, most evangelists of the Presbyterian Church worked independently in the north, confining their activities to small areas, where Catholicism and Episcopacy were weak. In religion, as well as in politics, the clan followed the chief, and was usually averse to any change, clinging to its religion because of traditional ties and ready to resist innovation. In South Uist, the Episcopal minister Donald Martin refused to conform to Presbyterianism and subsequently deserted his parish; a

Presbyterian minister, Angus MacDonald, was then instated in 1689 with no opposition from the Catholics, but his flock was small and no converts were made from the Catholic populace. In North Uist, a Presbyterian minister was appointed in 1699 and began a systematic programme of missionary work, in spite of frequent threats from the Episcopalians. On Lewis, the two Episcopal ministers conformed to Presbyterianism and Kenneth Morrison, the minister of Stornoway, helped to defeat MacKenzie of Kildun, leader of a militant band of Catholics, and thus managed to establish Protestantism on Lewis.⁴ Neither Nicolson nor Gordon visited Lewis during their highland visitations because of the hold on the island by the Presbyterian Church. When Prince Charles Edward Stewart visited Stornoway in 1746, the people were polite, but insistent that he should leave their coasts. The main areas which the S.S.P.C.K. concentrated upon for their missionary work were therefore areas where Catholicism and Episcopacy were strong, in the north east, highlands, western and northern isles.

Like the Catholic mission, the S.S.P.C.K. realised the importance of setting up schools in the highlands and of training young men to be clergymen 'in order to their being fitted to be School-Masters, Catechists and Ministers in their own Country'.⁵ The Society made schools its first priority in its proposals set out at the time of its foundation so that

papists as well as Protestants of all Denominations and all persons whatsoever, who shall be willing to be instructed in the principles of the Reformed Protestant Religion shall be received and taught by fitt and well qualified school masters.⁶

The initial work of setting up schools and parishes was carried out in the north east, including Perthshire, Moray, Inverness, Moy, Caithness, Sutherland, Dornoch, Tain and Abernethy where Presbyterian ministers were instated as soon as previous Episcopalian ministers had died. Subsequently, the work of the S.S.P.C.K. extended to 'infidel and papish' parts of the country and concentrated its evangelical and missionary work on the preaching of the gospel and

catechesis. This contrasted sharply with the work of the Catholic mission whose main concern was the confirming of Catholics in their faith rather than conversion. The first S.S.P.C.K. school was set up in Abertarf on the north west side of Loch Ness, and by 1713 several other flourishing charity schools organised under the auspices of the Society had been established and were visited frequently by Presbyterian missionaries. The Earl of Mar expressed his support for and interest in the Society, particularly as he regarded it as another bastion against the encroaching tide of Catholicism.⁷

After the appointment of Nicolson and the extension of the Catholic mission into the Highlands and Islands, the Presbyterian Church became more involved with evangelistic and missionary work in an effort to counter 'the infectious traffiquings of Popish emissaries and ... foreign influence'.⁸ The missionaries of the S.S.P.C.K. found 'gross ignorance' among the highlanders, many of whom they reported as being lacking in knowledge of the gospel and practising idolatory and diabolical rites, a reference no doubt to some of those Catholic practices which had survived in the Highlands and Islands until the Catholic mission was established. Fear of the political consequences of Catholicism also prompted the S.S.P.C.K. to pursue their programme of evangelism into these northern and western areas; so long as they were left unguided and untutored, Catholics were regarded as being dangerous to both church and nation, since they were ready to assist 'invading forrainers, or to break out for plunder in case of domestic troubles'.⁹ It was even suggested that the Presbyterian church should copy the methods used by Catholic missionaries who were obviously reaping the harvest of their endeavours in these early years of the eighteenth century. The synod of Glasgow explained this success by 'the fervent seal of papists who spare neither cost nor hazard to propagate their errors over all the world'.¹⁰

There was obviously a great need of funds to finance the work of the S.S.P.C.K., a need which also continued to concern the Catholic mission at this time. The

S.S.P.C.K. relied heavily on donations and to this end worked assiduously to obtain support from men in prominent positions, such as the Earl of Mar. Donations were also received from England to assist with the work of the Society in Scotland, whilst bibles and catechisms were printed in London and sent north.¹¹ Most of the Society's funds were used to finance the establishment of schools in the highlands

where Papists as well as Protestants of all denominations ... shall be received and taught by fitt and well qualified schoolmasters.¹²

In 1711, the funds amounted to £3,700, but by 1758 this sum had been increased to £28,413; the number of schools in the highlands founded by the S.S.P.C.K. rose in direct proportion to this increase of income, numbering 5 in 1711 and 176 in 1758. Because of the lack of Catholic schools in highland areas, the children of Catholic parents either received no schooling, or attended the Society's schools where religious instruction formed a large part of the curriculum. The S.S.P.C.K. was thus able to claim numerous converts through these schools, although ultimately Catholics were permitted to withdraw their children from school prayers and catechism classes.

Compared with the Catholic mission, the Protestant mission in Scotland might appear to have had more success during the period 1694–1718, but many parts of the Highlands and Islands were still firmly inclined towards Catholicism during this period. Between 1707 and 1718 Bishop Gordon endeavoured to visit highland areas more frequently since heresy was regarded as a greater evil than ignorance. The Catholic mission became more evangelistic, following the example set by the S.S.P.C.K., and the 'winning of souls' became as much an aim of Catholic missionary priests as it was of Protestant catechists at this time.

Notes

1. J. MacKay, *The Church in the Highlands*, (London 1914), 170.

2. John Macinnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland 1688-1800*, (Aberdeen, 1951), 18.
3. Scottish Record Office, S.S.P.C.K. Papers, G.D. 95/10/68.
4. W.C. McKenzie, *History of the Outer Hebrides*, (Paisley, 1903), 527.
5. S.R.O., S.S.P.C.K. Papers, G.D. 95/10/39.
6. S.R.O., S.S.P.C.K. Papers, G.D. 95/10/40, 1701.
7. S.R.O., Records of S.S.P.C.K. Letter from Rev. James Robertson to Nicol Spence, Secretary to the S.S.P.C.K., Edinburgh 9 February 1713.
8. S.R.O., S.S.P.C.K. Papers, G.D. 95/10/39.
9. S.R.O., S.S.P.C.K. Papers, Recommendation of a Charitable Contribution: for promoting Religion and the Knowledge of God in the Highlands: With an account of the Resolutions of the Synod of Glasgow for that End. (Undated).
10. S.R.O., S.S.P.C.K. Papers, G.D. 95/10/39.
11. S.R.O., Minutes of the General Assembly 1690, CH1/2/1/67.
12. S.R.S., S.S.P.C.K. Papers, Minutes of General Meeting, 5 June 1710.

8. Catholic Missionary Priests Working in Scotland 1696–1718

During the period of Nicolson's vicariate the number of missionary priests working in Scotland increased from twenty-three to thirty-five. One of Nicolson's main tasks as bishop was to reorganise the Scottish Catholic Mission and increase its efficiency. To this end, he divided the country into districts or stations with one or two priests working permanently within each area. Whenever a priest became ill, died, was called abroad or apostasized, Nicolson's first priority was to seek a replacement. He was in constant touch with William Leslie in Rome, requesting more priests as replacements or additional priests to serve in large or remote areas. As bishop, he was always looking for suitable educated Catholic young men who could be sent abroad to study for the priesthood with a view to returning to Scotland as missionaries. Many of the extant letters written by Nicolson during his vicariate are letters of introduction sent with prospective candidates for the priesthood to the various Scots colleges abroad. For security reasons and for fear of correspondence being intercepted, these letters, both requesting priests and those sent with prospective students, did not refer openly to the Catholic mission but were written covertly as from a 'trading company' to 'merchants' in Paris or Rome; Scotland was referred to as 'this shop' and trainee priests as 'apprentices'. Nicolson himself used several pseudonyms when writing such letters, signing his name as Shepherd, Nesbit, Bruce or Emslie. These informal letters were especially requested by Propaganda¹ instead of formal reports on the work of the missionary priests and therefore the details about various priests and their work is sparse and usually couched in obscure language or cypher. This demonstrates the difficulties Nicolson was working under and yet in spite of the many problems he faced, he was able to keep in touch with his priests and with Rome and to expand the activities of the mission within an efficient organisation. By the time Bishop Gordon became Vicar Apostolic in 1718, the Scottish Mission was firmly established as a flourishing

concern, the bulk of the groundwork having been undertaken by Nicolson whose devotion to Scottish Catholics never wavered.

The majority of missionary priests worked in the Highlands and Islands and the north east of Scotland where many Catholics were to be found. Bishop Gordon frequently used Glasgow as a base to co-ordinate the activities of priests in the southern lowlands and Edinburgh was the centre of the administrative work carried out by a specially appointed group of priests. Nicolson worked in Preshome which remained his base throughout his vicariate. In 1701, two provicars were appointed to assist Nicolson in the co-ordination of the highland mission, these being Robert Monroe, provicar of the highland mainland, and Hugh Morgan, provicar of the isles. The remaining missionary priests were mostly secular – before Nicolson's appointment as bishop, missionaries were mainly regular – and in addition a few Benedictine and Franciscan priests were appointed to fixed 'stations'. The Jesuits were not confined to particular areas, preferring to work peripatetically wherever their assistance was needed, but their activities were controlled by Nicolson from 1701 when they formally submitted to the Scottish bishop. A complete list of the missionary priests working in Scotland between 1697 (the year of Nicolson's arrival to take up his position as Vicar Apostolic) and 1718 (the year of Nicolson's death) is given in Appendix I.

Robert Monroe was one of the longest serving secular priests on the mission (33 years). He entered the Scots College in Rome in 1668 and came to Scotland in 1671 where he worked in the highlands among Catholics until 1688 when he was imprisoned. He made his escape in 1689 and returned to the highlands to continue his work in spite of frequent attempts by Presbyterian ministers to seize him and hand him over to the authorities. He was finally captured in 1696 and imprisoned in Edinburgh after which he was banished to Flanders, being threatened with death if he returned. In Ghent he was imprisoned again, accused of being engaged in rebellious activities against the Prince of Orange but was

released when Lewis Innes exerted influence on his behalf. He then went to Paris from where he wrote an account of himself and the mission to Propaganda in which he craved permission to return. He asked for, and received monetary assistance and while in Paris he used some of these funds to buy a chalice, vestments and other altar vessels. On his return to London he was recaptured, robbed of his money and purchases and banished from the country once again. On his release, however, he made his way to Scotland at great risk to his life, arriving in 1699 to take up his duties again in the highlands. In 1701 he was made provicar of the highlands area and for the next three years worked in Glengarry and Strathglass, co-ordinating the work of the highland missionaries. His health began to fail in 1703 and when renewed persecution of Catholics began in 1704, he was arrested at his house, dragged from his sick-bed and imprisoned in Glengarry Castle where he died of a fever on 27 January. James Carnegie wrote an account of Monroe's arrest in his letter to Charles Whyteford, alias Pierre de Compignie, in Paris:²

I hear from two gentlemen lately come from the highlands, that Captain Stewart who commands the garrison to Garrie Castle, hearing that Monroe, a priest, was laying sick in a house near him, sent a party and took him out of his bed in the midst of fever and because he was not able to sit upon a horse he was layed allongst it with his belly to the horse's back. By this and by the bad entertainment he got in the castle, he died. I saw a letter by our Mr Shepherd [Nicolson] to one Gibson here giving account that Monroe was taken and carried to Garrie castle, tho' the Lady Glengarrie, a Protestant, Seaforth's sister, offered either 1000 Scots pounds bail to produce him when called for or maintain the sentries ...

It is doubtful whether Monroe would have survived his fever if the bail had been granted, since many missionary priests, Gordon and Nicolson included, found the cold and damp of the highlands of Scotland combined with the poor diet, inevitably brought on a 'fever' from which few recovered. Monroe was missed as he was one of the few Scots missionary priests able to speak Gaelic and his devotion and dedication to the mission was much appreciated by Nicolson who mourned his loss.³

Hugh Morgan was an Irish missionary who had worked in Ireland before joining the Scottish Catholic mission in August 1688. Like Robert Monroe, he was able to speak Gaelic and worked mainly in the western isles. He was banished from Scotland on three occasions, but his knowledge of the islands proved to be invaluable to Nicolson who appointed him provicar of the islands in 1701, a position he held for only eighteen months before his banishment in December 1702. His missionary work in the islands was assisted by various Irish Franciscans under the co-ordination of Bishop Gordon from 1705 onwards. These Franciscans were officially appointed to fixed stations in the isles by Nicolson who, after his visit to the Highlands and Islands in 1700, had realised the importance of having a priest working permanently on each of the 'Catholic' islands. The work was undertaken by Father Lea on Uist and Barra, already living amongst the islanders from 1687, Father O'Shiel on Uist from 1701, Father McFie, also on Uist from 1701, Father Mackeen on Barra from 1701 and Father Patrick Carolan on Barra, also from 1701. Father John Cahassay worked on Eigg and Rhum from 1703, having been moved from Knoydart where he had worked on the mission since 1687. After Bishop Gordon's initial visit to the Highlands and Islands, two Irish Dominicans were recruited to assist in the ministrations to island Catholics, men chosen because of their ability to speak Gaelic and their desire to help with the Scottish mission. These were Father Peter Cluan and Father John Gasman and both these priests had journeyed to Scotland with Bishop Gordon in 1706:

God's providence had offered two good Irish Dominicans, who seem to be vertuous religious men and sufficiently capable ... we have seen their obedience from their General which gives them licence to go to Ireland, but does not restrain them to it only and we know that their General's inclination is that his Religious who are fitt for missions, help such as are most destitute; they advised with some of their own order and other friends and they made no difficulty.⁴

These two Dominicans were from the convent of St Clemente at Rome and had expressed a desire to assist Gordon with missionary work in the Highlands and

Islands. Although Nicolson preferred to use secular Scottish priests on the mission, he was grateful for assistance from Gaelic-speaking regulars such as these in the islands, and the heads of the religious orders concerned usually gave permission for their priests to join the mission.

The mission in both the Highlands and Islands was often a source of anxiety for Bishop Nicolson and his coadjutor because of the illness, death or banishment of priests working in these areas. Bishop Gordon spent four months journeying through the western highlands in 1709, where, in spite of gallant efforts by the missionary priests to minister to the faithful in the extreme weather conditions, there was still a great need for new recruits to the mission.⁵ Hugh Ryan was continuing the work of Robert Monroe in Glengarry and Strathglass, Andrew Deans was the missionary priest in Strathbogie, Alexander Leslie in Banff, William Stuart in Angus and Joseph Gordon in Glenlivet and Strathdon. However, Bishop Gordon reported that Father MacLellan, the Benedictine who had worked in Knoydart since 1701, had neglected his duties and was to be dismissed. He had also received 'great complaints' of Robert Gordon who 'does not give entire satisfaction'.⁵ In fact, this priest had been accused of excessive drinking and wrote to Thomas Innes to exonerate himself⁶ claiming also that he spent many hours in study and frequently requested additional books on morality and history. Father McFie at this time was reported sick and 'gives no little grief to us' whilst Father Logan in Moydart was said to be 'weak'. Nicolson feared for the priests working in the islands who frequently suffered from 'a kind of pleuritise fever'⁷ which was treated by bleeding, not always successfully. Morgan, the provicar of the isles, fell ill in 1709 and Andrew Deans was reported sick in 1710 and had to return to Rome in 1711. In spite of these difficulties, Bishop Gordon was able to continue his frequent visits to the highlands whilst Nicolson continued to send a fair number of 'apprentices' to the Scots colleges abroad for training as priests for the Mission.

Elsewhere in Scotland, the work of the missionary priests did not encounter the particular problems associated with Highland geography and language. The work of James Carnegy at Edinburgh and Traquair during the period of Nicolson's vicariate was particularly useful as he co-ordinated the work of the missionary priests in the lowlands under very difficult circumstances, and he corresponded regularly with Rome. From 1700 onwards he adopted the rather ingenious method of writing to Rome as a Protestant to conceal his identity for the purpose of conveying news of the Catholic mission. In 1705, Carnegy was chosen to be procurator of the group of administrators working in Edinburgh where he organised the finances of the mission and distributed monies from Rome to the various districts and the priests working in them. In 1708 he took up permanent residence at Traquair and Walter Innes replaced him in Edinburgh, although Carnegy still acted as procurator in all the money transactions of the mission and sometimes had to draw on his own resources in times of difficulty to meet all the needs of the mission.⁸ Most of the co-ordinating work of the mission in the lowlands was undertaken by Carnegy as vicar-general in the south where he presided at meetings of the clergy and exercised a supervision over them to see that the instructions of Nicolson were carried out. Carnegy was related to the Earl of Northesk⁹ and he frequently used the influence of his titled relations to escape arrest. During the severe persecution of Catholics in 1710¹⁰ Carnegy was deputed to London by the Scottish Catholic clergy and laity to plead their cause before Queen Anne where he 'succeeded beyond his expectations'.¹¹ Carnegy's missionary work was, nevertheless, marred by his tendency to become involved in politics against the express wishes of Bishop Gordon,¹² his inability to get along with the Jesuits and his involvement in the Jansenist controversy. The Jesuits formally accused him to the Papal Nuncio at Paris of favouring the Jansenists and said that the Jansenistical party in Scotland were trying to get Carnegy made bishop so that he could establish heresy in Scotland. In spite of these difficulties, Carnegy was able to contribute a lifetime's work to the Scottish mission,

publishing a new catechism for use in Scotland, at his own expense.

Carnegy was assisted in Edinburgh by seven priests who had been appointed in 1702 as administrators. These men were Alexander Dundas, Robert Monroe, Paul Sandison, Francis Mearns, James Fife, John Hall and Alexander Drummond. Fife was arrested and banished from Scotland in 1710 but was well praised by Bishop Gordon for his contribution to the mission; 'he has been in Glasgow, Nithdale, Annandale and has made full progress in these shires, I hope with some advantage to his trade'.¹³ Robert Monroe died in 1704 and that same year Alexander Drummond was banished to Germany, although he returned to Scotland in 1707 from which time onwards he worked from Drummond Castle. Nevertheless, these administrators did invaluable work for the missionaries in distributing funds, books and communion wine which arrived from Rome. In 1711, they secured a doubling of the allowance made to the Scottish mission which had been fixed at 500 crowns in 1650 (enough for 10 priests) and had remained the same for over sixty years.¹⁴ The new sum of 1000 crowns was still considered insufficient for the needs of the mission, taking into account increased taxes after the Union of 1707, the increase in numbers of priests and deacons and the schoolmasters and regular priests also attached to the mission. This may have been why James Carnegy frequently had to use his own money to finance the work of the missionaries. Two cases of wine were sent to Nicolson in 1710 and were known to cost 18 crowns,¹⁵ and books were expensive and difficult to bring into Scotland. Robert Gordon claimed:

I'm not ignorant, but our Speculative Studies are very dry without they be watered with the reading of history, controversy (in which I take great delight) and morality, the wherefor you recommended unto me what Bishop Gordon ordered before his departure which is very good but the half the books, yea the best and most necessary are not found in our library.¹⁵

Another difficulty was that both the Highlands and Lowlands south of Perth

suffered from a quick turnover of missionary priests, although this did not seem to affect the Catholic communities to any great extent. In the Highlands, three schools were established during Nicolson's vicariate and Bishop Gordon visited the more remote areas annually. In spite of his earlier ill-health he claimed in June 1711¹⁶ that the highland air was good for him and that he never tired of revisiting the people there; 'if it were the will of the Exchequer, I should confine myself so long as I live among our hills and consecrate my days to serve the poor people that live in them'. Nicolson also commented that Bishop Gordon should spend so much time in the Highlands 'he needs would do it. I am glad that we had laity accounts of his wellfare and that the air and diet did agree with him'.¹⁷ During these frequent visits, Gordon was able to assess the needs of the Highlands and Islands, to recruit candidates for the priesthood¹⁸ and to place new missionary priests in areas poorly served. Six Scottish priests replaced the Irish Franciscans who had died in the early years of the eighteenth century; George Adamson and George Innes both joined the highland mission as schoolmasters whilst George Dalgleish, Aeneas McLachlan and Alexander Paterson all served the highlands on Gordon's recommendation. In the southern lowlands Carnegy was able to report that in spite of renewed persecution of Catholics in 1709 and 1710 'We have an admirable crop upon the ground ... yet I believe the victuall may be dear because the scarcity we hear there is abroad',¹⁹ the 'crop' being the fruit of their labours and the 'victuall' the priesthood. Robert Davidson worked untiringly in Galloway between 1678 and 1711 and Andrew Hackett and William Stuart in Traquair. Andrew Hackett assisted Carnegy in the publication of the new catechism which was much criticised by the Jesuits as being heretical, but was finally approved and published in 1726.²⁰

The remaining areas of Scotland were well-served by Catholic priests during this period, many of whom worked on the mission all their lives. Alexander Dunbar who died in the Enzie in 1708 had been a missionary priest for 51 years, David

Guthrie, who died in 1707, had been 31 years in Scotland working first in Angus and then in Arbroath and John Irvine, who died in 1717, had served the mission for 34 years. It was partly due to the dedication of men such as these and the enthusiasm of younger priests such as Peter Fraser, that the mission was able to carry out its work so successfully. Failures were few and far between and were quickly dealt with through the effective administrative machinery and the ability of both bishops to recognise weaknesses in their missionaries. Typical of such priests were James Thomson who entered the mission in 1694 but became too fond of convivial company and drinking and was dismissed in 1700. Another priest, James Paplay, came to Scotland in 1704 where he worked under the watchful eye of James Carnegy who suspected him of immoral conduct. Paplay stole money and clothing from Carnegy and eloped to England with a woman of ill repute, after which nothing was heard of him. These problems, however, were minimal compared with those of illness and persecution which lost the mission many able priests. Nicolson devoted a great deal of time to recruiting young Scotsmen to the priesthood to replace those men, and by the end of his life had succeeded in increasing the numbers of priests working in Scotland.²¹ To avoid the possibility of recruiting men like Thomson and Paplay, Nicolson insisted that prospective candidates to the priesthood should be rigorously examined as to character and dedication to the work of the mission, '... that vagrant young men be not taken in without an exact and long trial'.²² As to training, they were to be carefully instructed in sacred scripture, morals, knowledge of church history, readings of the fathers and councils as well as in various heresies, necessary so that they could learn to refute them. Nicolson was worried by the claim of some 'heretics' to having uniformity of doctrine with the Catholic Church, and when John Irvine went to Rome in 1698 he requested him to obtain copies of all the books printed by Propaganda relating to the state and doctrine of various Christian sects – the Grecian, Nessorian, Armenian and Coptic – as well as the works of Allatius, Arcadius and Galanus, specifically so that the missionaries could

study them and learn how to refute their doctrines.²²

By the time Nicolson's Statutes had been issued to the missionary priests in 1706, there was little doubt about the content of the doctrines which had to be taught in Scotland and these, together with the new Scottish catechism helped the missionaries in their work of teaching and preaching the Catholic faith. There is no doubt that it was the dedication of these priests, many of whom were converts themselves to Catholicism, which succeeded in firmly re-establishing the Catholic church in post-Reformation Scotland.

Notes

1. B.L., James Gordon to John Irvine from Rome, 3 March 1704.
2. B.L., James Carnegy to Pierre de Compigny from Edinburgh, March 1704.
3. B.L., Nicolson to George Grant from Preshome, September 1705.
4. B.L., Bishop Gordon to William Leslie from Brille, 21 June 1706.
5. B.L., Bishop Gordon to M. Debie from Drum, 1 October 1709.
6. B.L., Robert Gordon to Thomas Innes, 29 April 1710.
7. B.L., Nicolson to M. Debie from Preshome, 16 May 1707.
8. S.C.A., Rev. William Clapperton, *Memoirs of Scottish Missionary Priests*, 46, 1192.
9. J.F.S. Gordon, *Journal and Appendix to Scotichronicon Monasticon*, (Glasgow, 1867), 533.
10. B.L., Bishop Gordon to James Carnegy, 10 May 1710.
11. J.F.S. Gordon, *Scotichronicon and Monasticon*, 533.
12. B.L., Bishop Gordon to John Paterson from Edinburgh, 11 July 1710.
13. B.L., Bishop Gordon to Thomas Baynard, 16 August 1710.
14. B.L., Thomas Innes to William Stuart, 23 February 1711.
15. B.L., Robert Gordon to Thomas Innes, 29 April 1710.
16. B.L., Bishop Gordon to William Stuart, 19 June 1711.
17. B.L., Nicolson to William Stuart, 22 January 1711.

18. One from Benbecula was sent to Rome in November 1710. B.L., Bishop Gordon to M. Melvin (Paris), 23 November 1710.
19. B.L., James Carnegie to Thomas Innes, 7 September 1709.
20. J.F.S. Gordon, *Scotichronicon and Monasticon*, 564.
21. See Appendix II
22. B.L., Instructions given to John Irvine by Bishop Nicolson, 1 July, 1698.

9. The Work of the Jesuits on the Scottish Catholic Mission 1694–1718

Prior to the appointment of Nicolson as Vicar-Apostolic in 1694, most of the Catholic missionary work in Scotland had been undertaken by regular priests; Jesuits, Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans and Vincentians. The Society of Jesus claimed in 1650 that it had maintained a constant succession of priests in the lowlands for nearly sixty years and that their numbers had seldom dropped below half-a-dozen at any time.¹ The few secular priests who had worked in Scotland in the first half of the seventeenth century had been ineffective and disorganised and the Jesuits on the Scottish Mission regarded them as interlopers and trespassers on their preserves. They hoped that eventually Scotland would be made an exclusively Jesuit mission field, ruled over either by vicars-apostolic drawn from the Society or by Jesuit-nominated bishops. Their hopes were not realised because of the intervention of the Scots College in Paris, the only Scots college abroad which was not staffed by members of the Society, and of William Leslie, the Scottish agent in Rome from 1650, both opposed to Jesuit control of the Scottish Mission. When Propaganda began to send secular missionary priests to Scotland in 1652, Father Robert Gall, the Jesuit Rector of Douai, wrote to Father Adam Gordon in the Scots College at Rome warning him of Propaganda's intention to reorganise the mission under a non-Jesuit bishop and recommended that steps be taken to prevent this 'derogation' of their privileges which would frustrate the fruit of their labours.²

The Jesuit missionaries in Scotland continued in the second half of the seventeenth century to work independently of the secular priests and took their instructions from their superiors rather than from the Prefects-Apostolic appointed by Propaganda after 1653. They became alarmed at the number of young men sent abroad to be trained for the secular priesthood and were shocked by the friendly relations between Catholics and Protestants in Scotland

which were encouraged by William Ballantyne, first Prefect-Apostolic (1653-1662). The Jesuits worked mainly among the aristocracy, usually lodging with them, and in some of their reports sent to Rome, claimed that the seculars were not achieving much success, most of their converts coming from the 'lower orders'. They conveyed the impression that it was on the work of the Jesuit missionaries that the reconversion of Scotland would be based, specially because of their influence among the landed gentry. This certainly seemed true until the appointment of Bishop Nicolson, since the Society's mission was more methodical and organised and had regular financial support from the Scottish Catholic nobility. They were experienced in the arts of escaping arrest, travelling from castle to castle with vestments and altar vessels and lodging in remote or concealed rooms in these buildings. They frequently changed their names and became adept in the art of disguise, a device the secular priests were to use permanently during Nicolson's vicariate when the penal laws became harsher. The Jesuits corresponded frequently with their superiors, seeking advice and guidance; their correspondence was direct and businesslike, unlike that of the secular priests which had a more conversational style. They were required to report to their general on fixed occasions and their accounts had to be submitted regularly. They also wrote frequently to each other to keep in touch with their movements and the work of their brothers and made use of various cyphers to prevent their correspondence falling into the wrong hands. All these methods of co-ordinating and concealing their mission effectively were fully utilised by the secular mission under Nicolson who built on the work begun so successfully by the Jesuits. The criticism levelled at the Jesuits by the secular priests, who gave them the nickname of 'geometers' was, however, justified to a great extent in the latter half of the seventeenth century when laxity had begun to set in to the Jesuit mission; they filled the taverns, behaved badly and brought Catholicism into bad repute. They were often accused of making money 'by mischief' and of intriguing with government agents.³

Nevertheless, Nicolson was one of the first of the secular priests to recognise the worth of Jesuits, their work and sacrifices for the Scottish Mission. Two Jesuits stand out in the period prior to Nicolson's appointment as bishop; John Seaton, who in 1686 opened a new mission in Perthshire, was imprisoned at the Revolution in 1689 and died on his release in 1694. Another, Stephen Maxwell, an alumnus of Douai and Professor of Philosophy at Carcassonne, came to Scotland to join the Jesuit mission and was imprisoned in Blackness Castle at the Revolution. He later became superior of the Scottish Jesuits and died in 1713.⁴ Prior to coming to Scotland as a missionary priest, Nicolson expressed his wish that Propaganda should co-operate more closely with the Jesuits because he feared that their differences might cause 'scandal'.⁵ He spent the next few years, both in Scotland and in France, building up a closer relationship with the Jesuits and encouraging greater co-operation with them on the Scottish mission. In a letter to William Leslie, written soon after his appointment as bishop, Nicolson spoke of his friendship with the 'good Fathers' and his intention to maintain that friendship: 'We will certainly abide in union and will not trouble Rome with complaints'.⁶

Nicolson's determination to work closely with the Jesuits to achieve some unity of action on the Mission contrasted sharply with the anti-Jesuit attitude of William Leslie. Leslie believed that the secular clergy made up the professional army of the church and that the Jesuits, as regular priests, might be attached to that army for special temporary service, as they were with regard to the Mission; they joined the army of the church, according to Leslie, as amateurs, with no official standing and could not be considered for high office, such as that of bishop. Leslie wrote to his Jesuit cousin, William Aloysius Leslie, superior of the Scottish Jesuits, on 1 December 1691, denying the equality of status between members of religious orders and the secular clergy who, he said, 'are the true natural pastors of the faithful ... the others can pretend to no more than to be

auxiliary troops of the clergy'.⁷ It was not until 1950 that the Apostolic See refuted this teaching.⁸ In 1688, when Propaganda began to investigate the possibility of appointing a bishop for Scotland, Leslie wrote to Lord Melfort that the mission was willing to accept any priest for the office of bishop 'unlesse that he carrieth on his back the Coat of a Jesuit'.⁹ Although Leslie acknowledged the loyalty and obedience of the Jesuits to the Pope, he claimed that the court of Rome disapproved of many of their actions, particularly their allegiance to the great princes and nobles of Europe which was, he believed, responsible for the disagreements between Rome and Portugal, Spain, Poland, Austria and France. Rome, he said, had condemned many propositions which were put forward by Jesuits and upheld by them in their books, and he also accused them of teaching doctrinal heresies. Leslie believed that the Jesuits actively poisoned the princes' minds against Rome, especially in France, and felt that Rome in its turn could not openly give 'honours and preferment to the Jesuits, speciallie when such honours carrieth with them the Government of the Church, as is the dignitie of cardinall or of bishop'.⁹ A Jesuit was not, therefore, chosen for the office of bishop in Scotland, but Nicolson may have been chosen because of his willingness to co-operate with the Jesuits.¹⁰

After Nicolson had taken up his appointment in Scotland as first Vicar-Apostolic he continued to persevere in his policy of co-operation with the Jesuits in spite of their opposition to him. Lewis Innes wrote to Leslie expressing the Jesuit fear that the new bishop would have special privileges and control over their work. The Jesuits, he said, were also worried that the bishop would have the right to place his own choice of candidates into the Scots colleges abroad and that he would call to the mission only those regulars chosen by him. Innes requested Leslie that as it would only serve to increase the differences between regular and secular priests the Scottish bishop should not be given these privileges since it was essential that the two groups of missionaries should work in harmony to

ensure the success of their work.¹¹ Nicolson told Leslie the following year, 1697, that the Jesuits had already accused the secular mission of trying to undermine the Society, but that he was determined not to let this develop into quarrels which would hamper the mission. He planned to carry out his work 'quietly and calmly' allowing the Jesuits a large measure of their former freedom.¹² However, when Nicolson's faculties were finally sent from Rome, he found that they had been enlarged upon those given to the English bishops to the extent that he was allowed authority over all missionary priests in Scotland, both secular and regular. This may have been because the priests in Scotland were so few and so scattered that it became necessary for their bishop to have greater authority and control than his counterparts in England where the mission was more tightly knit and penal laws not so harsh.

When Nicolson came to Scotland as Vicar-Apostolic in 1697, there were five Jesuit priests working in the country and this number had risen to nine by the time of the bishop's first official report to Propaganda in 1698. One of the bishop's first tasks in organising the mission was to divide the country into districts or 'stations', each station being the responsibility of a particular priest or priests.¹³ The Jesuit missionaries, however, were not given fixed stations and were permitted to change their area of work whenever they found it 'convenient'.¹⁴ This may have been Nicolson's attempt at remaining on good terms with the Jesuit priests, but may also have been due to the lifestyle of the Jesuit missionaries in Scotland which had always been insecure and of a 'wandering' nature. Two Jesuit priests worked frequently in Braemar where they risked arrest, this being a mainly Protestant area under the Earl of Mar, known to be anti-Catholic. Nicolson praised the work of these Jesuits who worked mainly with the peasantry and 'lower orders' with whom in earlier days the Jesuits were reluctant to work. In his report to the Scottish Mission of the Society of Jesus for the year 1702, Father Alexander Macrae described the difficulty under which the

Jesuit missionaries worked in these Protestant areas:

Two ministers, one Presbyterian, one Episcopalian ... do not cease to annoy me in every way they can, and threaten my people, but in spite of them, forty persons abjured heresy, and embraced, and made public profession of the Catholic Faith last Easter'.¹⁵

Another Jesuit, Father John Innes, wrote in 1702 of the dangers of travelling through lowland Scotland at this time and of the need at all times to work incognito:

What disguises have I not worn what arts have I not professed! Now master, now servant, now musician, now painter, now brass-worker, now clock-maker, now physician, I have endeavoured to be all to all that I might save all.¹⁵

Father Robert Seaton, one of the Jesuits who worked in Braemar, wrote of his experiences among the 'lower orders' and the great number of converts he received into the Church from among their number. The respect and friendship between Bishop Nicolson and the Jesuit missionaries culminated in the formal submission of the Jesuits to the Scottish bishop on 7 February 1701 from which time they worked in closer co-operation. The Jesuits worked mainly in lowland areas, their main task being the instruction of potential converts, whereas the secular priests concentrated their activities in the Highlands, undertaking the work of ministering to Catholics in remote areas. Bishop Gordon wrote to the general of the Jesuits, Father Tamburini, in May 1709, praising the work of the Jesuit missionaries in Scotland:

Having travelled over almost the whole of Scotland and visited all the pastors and people committed to my charge by the Holy Apostolic See, there is scarcely one of the Fathers of your Society labouring in this country whom I have not seen and made acquaintance with, and I can assert with no little satisfaction that I found all your Fathers submissive and obedient to authority, as well as earnestly engaged in the discharge of their functions.¹⁶

Father James Levingstone confirmed this submission to, and acceptance of, the bishop's authority in a letter written to his superior in September 1712. He had

spent two days in the company of the two bishops and they had assured him that the 'care and solicitude displayed by our Fathers leaves nothing to be desired'.¹⁶ In that year there were nine Jesuits working in Scotland, four in the Highlands and five in the Lowlands. Those in the Highlands were Father Macrae, Father Hugh Strachan, Father Robert Seaton and Father John Innes. In the Lowlands, the Jesuit missionaries were Father Alexander Seaton in Buchan, Father Maxwell with the 'Earl of Leslie'¹⁷ in Fetternear, Father Russell with the Countess of Seaforth, Father Durham in Edinburgh and Father Levingstone. These were the men visited and praised by Bishop Gordon who followed Nicolson's policy of working closely with the Jesuit missionaries. Gordon requested the Jesuit General in 1711 that he would not appoint any Scottish superior who was not 'commended to us all by modesty, excellence and good sense, and who will not earnestly join us in promoting good understanding and concord with us'.¹⁸ He praised the Scottish Jesuit superior, Father Maxwell, for his extraordinary wisdom, benevolence, high character and knowledge of business, and the Jesuit missionary priests for their laborious piety and zeal.

Despite this friendship and co-operation between Jesuit and secular missionary priests in Scotland, undercurrents of hostility and jealousy between the two groups persisted throughout the period of Nicolson's vicariate. The secular priests were critical of the Jesuit laxity with regard to their personal lives and frequently accused them of immorality, drunkenness and lavish expenditure on clothing and food. The Jesuits in their turn often spread rumours that the secular priests were Jansenists, mainly because they had more liberty than the Jesuits, were permitted to read more widely and were not subject to the same discipline.¹⁹ There may have been some truth in these rumours since many of the missionary priests were trained at the Scots College in Paris, where many of the professors and students were attracted to the Jansenist movement. Jansenism was popular in France at this time because its asceticism was regarded as an antidote to the

abuses and laxity existing within the Catholic Church. The austerity of the lives of a great many missionary priests suggests that they may well have been Jansenists. Thomas Innes, Prefect of Studies at the Scots College in Paris from 1701 to 1733, was known to have had Jansenist sympathies and James Carnegie, a missionary priest in Scotland from 1696 to 1729, was formally accused by the Jesuits of being a Jansenist. However, no positive evidence was ever found against any of the Scottish priests and Bishop Gordon, on becoming Vicar-Apostolic in 1718, persuaded all his missionaries to sign a document accepting the Papal Bull 'Ugenitus' of Clement XI which denounced all the teachings of Cornelius Jansen. For their parts, the secular missionary priests looked for ways to criticise the Jesuit activities. Lorenzo Leslie, cousin to William Leslie and administrator to the Scottish Mission, wrote to Charles Whytford in 1692 explaining that Jesuit practices did not always conform to the rules of their order. He asked for a copy of 'Regulae Societatis Jesu', which he had been unable to find in Italy, so that he could study it; he had already perused the decreets of the government of their general congregations and found in them 'sufficient to condemn all their practices in all missions and their court wayes'. If he could determine that the rules of the Society conformed to these decreets, he would then be able to 'fight all our Scottish Jesuits with their own weapons'.²⁰ Lorenzo thus hoped to prove that the Society of Jesus no longer represented the institution founded by Loyola and could therefore exclude the Jesuits from the mission.

Nevertheless, while William and Lorenzo Leslie sought for ways by which they could condemn the Jesuits, Nicolson and Gordon in Scotland found they could work with them successfully, and as far as the Scottish mission was concerned, achieve a measure of co-operation and friendship with their Jesuit brethren. William Leslie, shortly before his death, was to abandon his anti-Jesuit stance and in 1707 published a declaration in which he renounced any statement he may

have made against the Society:

I declare ... that all my informations, speeches and writings were never intended directly against the Venerable Society of Jesus, which for the brightness, worth, knowledge, sanctity and other illustrious and most excellent prerogatives of its conspicuous members has been, is, and shall be by me revered and praised in all duty and respect.²¹

Leslie maintained that any criticism he made of the Society was for the good of the mission, to prevent scandal, and he asked forgiveness of all those members of the Order who may at any time have felt offended by anything he had said or written about them.

Disagreements between the secular priests and Jesuits in Scotland arose again in the 1720's but for the remaining period of Nicolson's vicariate, relations were very much improved. The successes and achievements of the Scottish Catholic Mission between 1694 and 1718 were due very much to the great efforts and tireless dedication of the Jesuit missionaries combined with the skilful administration of Bishop Nicolson who was able to incorporate the Jesuit work successfully into his own mission.

Notes

1. P. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland*, (Montrose, 1970), 48.
2. M.V. Hay, *The Blairs Papers, 1603-1660*, (Edinburgh and London, 1929), 186.
3. Bernard Basset, S.J., *The English Jesuits*, (London, 1967), 235.
4. A. Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, (Edinburgh and London, 1890), iv, 127.
5. B.L., Nicolson to Leslie, from Paris, 22 September 1687.
6. B.L., Nicolson to Leslie from Dunkirk, 31 January 1695.
7. B.L., William Leslie to Lord Melfort from Rome, 3 March 1688.
8. Pope Pius XII in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XL111, 27-99.
9. B.L., William Leslie to Lord Melfort from Rome, 3 March 1688.

10. See above, Chapter 4.
11. B.L., Lewis Innes to William Leslie from St Germain, 23 December 1696.
12. B.L., Nicolson to William Leslie from Elgin, 16 September 1697.
13. See above, Chapter 8.
14. B.L., Thomas Innes to William Leslie from Paris, 13 October 1701.
15. Stoneyhurst MSS. quoted in W. Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics*, (London 1909), ii, 193; 196.
16. W. Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics*, (London 1909), ii, 253; 257.
17. Ibid., 258. This 'Earl of Leslie' is probably George Leslie mentioned by O. Blundell, *Ancient Catholic Homes of Scotland*, 179. Forbes Leith also refers to him as 'Count' Leslie of Balquhain, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics*, ii, 189, 212.
18. Ibid., 261.
19. B.L., William Leslie to Aloysius Leslie from Rome, 12 May 1688.
20. B.L., Lorenzo Leslie to Charles Whytford from Rome, 18 March 1692.
21. B.L., William Leslie, Declaration, 12 April 1707.

10. The Catholic Nobility of Scotland and their Contribution to the Mission

Any assessment of the size and strength of Roman Catholic landed families within the period of Nicolson's work is a subject fraught with difficulties. The surviving evidence itself is fragmentary and, at times, is ambiguous and hard to interpret and there was also a tendency for missionaries to magnify their achievements and to exaggerate the importance and standing of particular families sympathetic to their work. Nor are matters helped by some contemporary correspondence which presents rather garbled information on the names and titles of certain families inclined towards Catholicism. Yet, despite the formidable difficulties in providing such a study, some appreciation of the religious background of the families amongst whom Nicolson worked is necessary for a fuller understanding of the problems confronting the Catholic mission as a whole.

Abbe MacPherson, the Catholic historian, once asserted that 'the preservation of the Ancient Faith in Scotland was due, under God, to the House of Gordon'¹ and certainly, the Dukes of Gordon, of all the Catholic nobility, contributed most to the preservation of Catholicism at a time when it was in danger of extinction. They were an example to the rest of the possibility of continuing the open practice of the Catholic faith without the loss of their position in Scottish society. During the seventeenth century this was not easy for the Catholic nobility of Scotland and the Dukes of Gordon, amongst others, had their share of suffering and persecution for openly adhering to their religion. Many noblemen and clan chieftains, who regarded themselves as Catholics, continued to attend the services in the parish kirk on Sundays, accompanied by their family, servants and tenants and heard Mass in private; others drifted into indifference whilst the rest gave up the struggle altogether in the face of political opposition and religious intolerance. The work of the missionary priests and in particular of the Jesuits²

helped to keep the faith of these families alive and their efforts were rewarded with assistance from the Catholic nobility in terms of money, shelter and the offering of their sons, who were sent abroad to be trained as missionary priests.

The Dukes of Gordon were the most powerful of the Catholic nobles in Scotland, coming originally from the region of Strathbogie and also known as the Earls of Enzie, Marquises of Huntly and the Barons of Badenoch, Lochaber, Strathaven and Glenlivet. Other important Catholic families at the time of Nicolson's vicariate included the Duke of Perth, the Earl of Melfort, the Earl of Nithsdale, the members of the Houses of Hamilton, Abercromby and related families. Many of the Highland clan chieftains were Catholic at this time, the most notable being Ronald MacDonald (Clanranald) and the MacNeils of Barra. The Jesuit missionaries had realised long before that the key to keeping the Catholic faith alive in Scotland during penal times was to ensure that these noblemen and gentry kept the faith; this was particularly true of clan chieftains, since they had a tight control over the religious practices of their clansmen who tended to follow the example set by the chief.

Marriage with leading Protestant families was permitted provided the non-Catholic partner agreed to the rearing and education of any children of the marriage in the practice of the Catholic faith; this ensured the continuation of Catholic families and sometimes the conversion of the non-Catholic partner in a 'mixed' marriage helped to restore the failing of faith of a nominally Catholic noble family. One example of this was in the House of Abercorn, inheritors of the rich lands of Paisley Abbey, who had ceased to practise the Catholic faith and had lapsed from the Church; the Countess Marion, wife of the first Earl, was a convert to Catholicism who openly proclaimed her religion and encouraged her children to do the same.³ The influx of Jesuit missionaries in the early part of the seventeenth century resulted in the reconciliation of many individual members of noble families to the Catholic Church and these Jesuits continued to serve the

Catholic nobility by acting as chaplains and taking up residence in their houses, many of which became the headquarters of missionary priests, being used as bases for correspondence and also as convenient places for the saying of Mass. However, during penal times this practice became less frequent as the houses of the gentry were often searched and priest and noble lord imprisoned. In April 1699, the Duke of Gordon allowed Mass to be said in his Edinburgh house and was arrested along with the priests and the small congregation present. It was about this time that Gordon Castle began to be used as the more permanent headquarters of the Gordon family and Bishop Nicolson was given a house on the estate at Fochabers. This was Preshome, Nicolson's residence until his death in 1718. Nathaniel Hooke, writing in 1707 said that

The territory of the Duke of Gordon is of great extent. He is absolute master of it, to protect the Catholics, he has given a house to the Bishop three miles off from Gordon Castle, where the Prelate lives with his priests, and the Catholic religion is exercised pretty openly all over.⁴

The Seton family, who resided at Seton Palace nine miles east of Edinburgh, also kept a resident chaplain. Seton Palace was often a hiding place for priests and Catholic laymen on their way to and from the continent, but was seldom raided or searched as the Earl of Seton was a respected member of the Privy Council.

The Earls of Traquair also gave protection to missionary priests and have been referred to as the 'bulwark' of the Catholic religion during penal times.⁵ Bishop Gordon frequently stayed with the Traquair family when he was visiting Tweeddale and Nithsdale, giving instruction to the children of the family and administering Confirmation. He also kept up a regular correspondence with the Countess of Traquair, his spiritual direction being couched in secular phrases; he asked that she should hear so many 'morning remembrances' (Masses), make so many 'breakfasts' (Holy Communions) and that she should ensure remembrances were held for 'the good friends' (Masses for the Holy Souls).⁶

The Fraser family, many of whom were Catholic, did not give special assistance to the missionary priests, primarily because many of their clansmen were Protestant. The Chisholms however, were converts to Catholicism and freely offered help and accommodation to Robert Monroe the missionary priest in Strathglass from 1687 to 1704. In 1660, Lord Chisholm of Strathglass had visited Rome and whilst there promised the Pope that, in the event of Catholic missionaries penetrating into his area, he would offer them as much shelter as the stringent laws then in force against Catholics would allow; this meant the offering of lodging but did not necessarily extend to the provision of facilities for priests to carry out their spiritual duties. On his return to Strathglass, he began to instruct his family in the tenets of the Catholic faith. This ended in the conversion of his son Colin who settled in Knockfin and assisted the mission by his offers of protection.

Very few of the Scottish nobility were willing to risk their position and reputation in this way. The missionary priests carefully boasted of converts amongst the gentry, but seldom referred to those families who neglected their religion or who lapsed from its practice, often after marriage into a leading Protestant family. The Barons of Balquhain at Fetternear were Catholic and in 1670, Pope Clement X confirmed a charter granted to Alexander Abercrombie. The Honourable Mary Elphinstone stated that her sister Margaret married George Leslie at Balquhain in 1706 and this George Leslie and his sisters were all 'bigoted Papists'; she knew there was a 'Popish chapel' in their house and a 'Popish priest' always kept at Fetternear. When her brother-in-law the Earl of Leslie died in 1715, his widow

sent for the priest and desired him to pack up all popish trinkets, vestments, baubles and many popish books and to convey them away, which he accordingly did; and that she was resolved to bring up her children, James and Earnest, and to educate them as Protestants which she did.⁷

Religious allegiance, in any event, is particularly difficult to define; and it is not

surprising, given the context of the times, that ambivalent attitudes are frequently to be found even among those whose religious sympathies seemed instinctively to lie with Catholicism.

Even the Dukes of Gordon, protectors of priests that they were, were not as fervent in the practice of their religion as many would imply. David Mathew maintains that 'as far as the men of the Gordon main line are concerned, it is difficult to disentangle religious interests from a general preference for the old traditions, it was rather the women who were fervent'⁸. J.M. Bulloch says that the First Duke's Catholicism was doubtful; he was nominally Catholic and indeed defended his religion before the Privy Council in 1699, but some of his training had shown him the Protestant standpoint, and the fierce Catholicism of his wife may have 'scunnered' him. Macky in his 'Characters' remarks, 'he was a Roman Catholic because he was bred so, but otherwise he thought very little of revealed religion'.⁹ Adam Cockburn of Ormiston, the Lord Justice Clerk, writing of the 'insolence of Papists' in 1705 said 'You may guess what pass we are at when the Duke of Gordon takes the boldness to insult the Government; he has never been known to expose himself, but when he thought there was a sure game in the field.'¹⁰ The Duke's son, the second Duke of Gordon, married a Protestant, Henrietta Mordaunt, and when he was on his death-bed, local tradition has it that he obtained a promise from the Duchess that she would allow their children to be educated in the Catholic faith. She afterwards disregarded any such promise and took the children with her to the Kirk the Sunday after their father's death and subsequently brought them up in her own religion.

The Duke of Gordon seems to be typical of many of the Catholic nobility, who defended their Catholicism when it suited them, perhaps in expectation of preferment should the Stewarts be restored, but were quick to abandon this allegiance when their situation was threatened. Renewed persecution usually resulted in many renouncing their religion. Peter Anson maintains that 'some

Catholic lairds went into voluntary exile to find peace and quiet overseas; others abjured their religion, not from conviction but from sheer weariness'.¹¹ There were certainly times when it was politic not to display one's Catholicism and times when the open acceptance of the Catholic faith, for a member of the nobility, promised reward, for example during the period of James VII's reign from 1685 to 1688 and at the time of the 'Fifteen rebellion. But it would be maligning the sincerity of some of the Catholic gentry to include them all in this category. The Maxwells, for example, who lived in and around Dumfries, faithfully observed Catholic customs and traditions; they had their children baptised by the missionary priests, they sent their sons to Scots colleges abroad, especially Douai, being the most accessible, they lit bonfires on saints days and kept Jesuit chaplains resident in their households. The Drummond family at Stobhall regularly had Mass celebrated in their chapel even though they lived in a predominantly Protestant area, Perthshire. In the north east around Aberdeen, Banff and Moray, the Catholic families of Dunbar, Forbes, Fraser, Hay, Innes, Leslie and Ogilvie openly professed their religion, although it must be added that except in times of extreme persecution such as happened in 1707 and 1715, it was generally safe for Catholics of all classes to practise their faith in these areas. Some Catholic lords found that because of their social standing, they were able to remain Catholic, provided they kept a low profile. Others, again, chose exile. The Earl of Seton, a privy councillor, thus escaped arrest as did the Earl of Seaforth, the Earl of Perth (Chancellor of Scotland 1686) and the Earl of Melfort (Secretary of State 1686).

In the west, and specially on the Western Isles, it was no hardship for Catholic lairds to adhere to their religion. Although the demand for the services of priests was greater in these areas than in the rest of Scotland, Catholic traditions were well-rooted, and Bishop Nicolson and Bishop Gordon were well-received by the clan chieftains during their visits. When Bishop Nicolson visited Knoydart in 1700,

he was met by 'Lord MacDonell', who received him with great pleasure and lodged him in his father's house for several days. On South Uist, the chief of Clanranald had helped to preserve the Catholic practices of his people and Nicolson was able to confirm over 800 islanders in spite of there being a Protestant chapel there. MacNeil, Lord of the Isle of Barra, had been equally instrumental in the preservation of Catholicism from deep conviction as well as from a desire to preserve the traditions of his people. Although the people on the island had been visited by Franciscan missionaries before Nicolson's vicariate, many of them were unbaptised, preferring to remain thus than receive the sacrament from any but Catholic priests. Couples lived together without the blessing of the Catholic Church rather than be married by a Protestant minister. On the other hand, MacNeil had encouraged superstitious devotion to sacramentals such as the use of holy water, the sign of the cross or the recital of the 'Ave'; these outward signs of Catholicism were cherished on the islands rather than hidden as they were on the mainland. The position of the Catholic lairds was not endangered by their reception of priests or their adherence to Catholic traditions.

Occasionally, Propaganda saw fit to criticise the close association of some of the missionary priests with the Scottish gentry, believing the priests to be neglecting their duties to other Catholics and liable to succumb to an easy life in the luxury of country houses and the security they afforded. Alexander Dunbar, who resided at Gordon Castle from 1687 to 1708 assured Lewis Innes that only good would come from missionaries making use of such accommodation, and that around 'the House of Huntly and Strathbogie there may be now seen above 1900 Catholics where within the [last] 20 years their have hardly 2 or 3 hundred.'¹² Certainly, for the Catholic populace, the more or less permanent residence of a priest at the laird's house provided access to the Sacraments and a means of regular contact with the clergy.

Protection was therefore the most valuable form of assistance given by the Catholic nobility to the missionary priests working under Nicolson, and this help was given both by practising Catholics and by those sympathetic to their cause. It could also be argued that the presence of the priests helped to keep the faith of these men and women alive and also that of their clansmen and neighbours. The presence of Nicolson at Preshome earned Banffshire the reputation among Protestants of being 'papistical country'. In addition, monetary help from the Duke of Gordon enabled the mission to continue functioning when financial assistance from Propaganda was inadequate or delayed;¹³ much of Gordon's money was spent on altar vessels, vestments, altar wine and books, and was greatly appreciated by the missionaries.¹⁴ Candidates for the priesthood also came from these noble families and the missionary priests who came to Scotland both during Nicolson's vicariate and later were invariably the sons of gentry. In considering the success of the Scottish Catholic Mission at this time, the contribution of the Catholic nobility cannot, therefore, be underestimated.

Notes

1. O. Blundell, *The Catholic Highlands of Scotland*, (Edinburgh and London, 1909), i, 1.
2. See above Chapter 9.
3. P. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland*, (Montrose, 1970), 27.
4. J.M. Bulloch, *The First Duke of Gordon*, (Huntly 1908), 99.
5. O. Blundell, *Ancient Catholic Homes of Scotland*, (London 1907), 123.
6. B.L. Bishop Gordon to the Countess of Traquair from Edinburgh, 22 February 1718.
7. O. Blundell, *Ancient Catholic Homes of Scotland*, 179.
8. David Mathew, *Scotland under Charles I*, (London, 1955), 152.
9. J.M. Bulloch, *The First Duke of Gordon*, (Huntly 1908), 106.
10. Bath Papers, Hist. MSS Comm., Letter to Harley, Feb. 3 1705.
11. P. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland*, 31.

12. B.L., Alexander Dunbar to Lewis Innes from Gordon Castle, 26 August 1688.

13. See above Chapter 15.

14. B.L., Alexander Dunbar to Lewis Innes from Gordon Castle, 26 August 1688.

11. The Scots Colleges Abroad and their Contribution to the Mission

The missionary priests working in Scotland during Nicolson's vicariate were trained at colleges and universities abroad. Most were from wealthy families who could afford to maintain their sons at these institutions, and entry qualifications were minimal since Catholic education in Scotland was lacking and existing schools were inadequate. The Scots colleges in Europe for the education and training of priests at this time were at Douai, Paris, Madrid and Rome, and in addition to these colleges there were also facilities at the Benedictine monasteries at Ratisbon and Wurzburg for the training of priests. Officially, boys had to be at least seventeen years old and possess a knowledge of Latin and Greek and an ability to read and understand philosophy before they could be accepted, but these qualifications were frequently waived. Because of the desperate need for priests in Scotland, boys were accepted at a younger age and academic qualifications were not necessarily required.

Nicolson firmly believed that the success of the Scottish Mission depended very much on the work and prosperity of the colleges. He suggested to Propaganda that more colleges should be established and that boys should be encouraged by their parents and teachers to study for the priesthood. Indeed, one of Nicolson's tasks as bishop was to advise on and encourage religious vocations among Catholic boys and young men in Scotland. Nevertheless, he was anxious that the colleges should not take on boys who were unsuitable and recommended that

... vagrant young men be not taken in without an exact and long trial and that the vocation of those who are to be promoted to raised orders be duly and maturely examined.¹

The students were to study what would be most useful to the mission in Scotland, that is, the study of sacred scripture, morals, church history, the readings of the Fathers and Councils of the Church, and 'other such critical

learning as lends most to the clearing [i.e. of heresy] of the constant tradition of the Church'.¹ Nicolson was also modern in his attitude in that he believed an understanding of current heresies was necessary so that missionary priests could learn to refute them. John Irvine, on his visit to Rome in 1698, was asked by Nicolson to obtain and bring back any books which explained the beliefs and doctrines of various heretical sects so that the missionaries could study them.

In spite of Nicolson's aspirations for the Scots colleges and the Scottish mission, very few priests returned to Scotland during the period of Nicolson's vicariate. With the exception of the Benedictine monasteries and the college at Paris, the Scots colleges were controlled by Jesuits and inevitably produced Jesuit priests, not all of whom became missionaries. Douai, for example, was originally intended to train boys for the secular priesthood, but the government of the college was entrusted to a Scottish Jesuit, Fr. Edmund Hay of Megginch in 1580 and from that time until the closure of the college in 1793 it produced only Jesuits. Very few of these came to Scotland. The same was true of the Roman college which was administered by Italian Jesuits. Few Scottish priests from Rome returned to Scotland, but towards the end of Nicolson's vicariate the numbers began to increase. Between 1712 and 1765, 22 out of 29 highland missionary priests were educated at the Scots college in Rome.² The Royal Scots College at Madrid produced no Scottish missionary priests during this period being temporarily closed between 1680 and 1715 and even after 1715, no Scots priests were educated there, preference being given to the sons of Spanish noblemen. In 1703, James Gordon, missionary priest in Scotland, reported to Propaganda that the Spanish college had supplied only two secular priests for the Scottish Mission since its foundation in 1672 in spite of receiving an annual endowment of more than 3,000 crowns. Clearly, this money was not being used to train priests for Scotland, and Nicolson's letters to William Leslie and Propaganda frequently refer to the lack of trained and ordained priests returning to Scotland from the

colleges abroad.

The Scots College of Paris was the only pre-Reformation Scottish college abroad and was also the only one not controlled by the Jesuits. Most of the secular Scottish missionaries were trained here and consequently much of Nicolson's correspondence was with the Paris college. In 1688, Louis XIV authorised the amalgamation of the college with the University of Paris and by Letters Patent it was to enjoy all the rights and privileges given to other university colleges. Between 1688 and 1727 the college was governed by two brothers, Lewis and Thomas Innes, during which period, known as the 'Innes Dynasty' and the college's 'golden age', it also enjoyed the personal patronage of James VII, his son the Old Pretender and the exiled Stewart court. During Nicolson's vicariate it supplied only six priests to the Scottish Mission, but the college played an important role in educating Scottish Catholic laymen, many of whom did not take religious orders, and also in preserving archives relating to the pre-Reformation church in Scotland.

Several Benedictine missionary priests working in Scotland between 1694 and 1718 came from the two Scottish Benedictine monasteries of Ratisbon and Wurzburg. Abbot Fleming of Ratisbon founded a seminary for the education of Scottish priests in his monastery in 1685 and sent one of his monks to Scotland to recruit boys for this. Education was free, but boys who wanted to be ordained had to be received into the order first; Nicolson was happy to agree to this arrangement and in a letter to William Stuart, the Scottish agent in Rome in 1711, remarked that he had

lately a line from Placide Fleming bearing his willingness to breed up some saplys [supplies] to our labourers and send them to us when they are ready.³

A similar seminary was set up within the monastic foundation at Wurzburg, although the numbers of Benedictine priests returning from there to Scotland

were not as high as those coming from Ratisbon.

Because of the problems besetting the Scots colleges during Nicolson's vicariate – lack of funds and a shortage of suitable candidates – it became increasingly important that a seminary for the training of priests be set up in Scotland itself and this became one of the principal aims of Bishop Nicolson. Lewis Innes and William Leslie frequently mentioned this need in their correspondence before 1694, but the matter was deferred until Nicolson was appointed bishop, and then further postponed until Nicolson had visited the Highlands and sent back a full report on the mission, confirming the possibility of opening a seminary in the Highlands.⁴ In 1698, Nicolson wrote to Propaganda at great length emphasising that the success of the Scottish mission depended on the prosperity of the colleges; he strongly recommended that more colleges should be established for the training of Scots priests, but preferably schools and seminaries in Scotland 'which could be done with less expense and pains than by sending them overseas to forraigne countries.'⁵ He accepted that some allowance would be necessary – money was a continual problem – but was able to confirm that masters could be found and that missionaries would be willing and qualified enough to teach in colleges and seminaries at home. Gentlemen, he said, would be more willing to send their sons to such establishments 'where they could be trained in piety and learning' than have to send them abroad. Nicolson also saw Scottish seminaries as being suitable places for rehabilitating old, sick and infirm priests who could no longer work as active missionaries.

William Leslie and Propaganda were reluctant to agree to the building of a Scottish seminary at this stage because of renewed persecution of Catholics in Scotland. Such a move may well have had a disastrous effect on the success of the Catholic mission, refocussing attention on the spread of Catholicism. It was not until 1713 that a suitable location for a Scottish seminary was decided upon by Bishops Nicolson and Gordon, an isolated island in Loch Morar, isolated

enough to be away from the centre of anti-Catholic activity, but near enough to the Catholic regions of Scotland to be well-placed. George Innes, the brother of Lewis and Thomas, was chosen as the first head-master of this small seminary at which there were only seven students at the start.

This small seminary did not last long because the Jacobite rebellion once again placed Catholic priests in jeopardy and the Loch Morar college was closed in 1715, two of the students being sent to the Scots College in Rome to continue their studies. Bishop Gordon, however, was determined that a Scottish seminary should be established and a new location was chosen in 1716; this was in the Braes of Glenlivet, part of the Duke of Gordon's estate in Banffshire. It was an ideal spot, being surrounded by mountains, far from the road and hidden by juniper bushes. The building had previously been used as a hideout by John Gordon, the missionary in Glenlivet. It was called Scalan, the name said to have been taken from the sticks fixed in the ground and interwoven with twigs to form the small building. The first students arrived at Scalan in 1717 and George Innes was once again chosen as headmaster. The college was to last 83 years and the first Vicar Apostolic of the Highland District, Hugh MacDonald, was a product of Scalan.

Although the Scots colleges abroad were responsible for the training and provision of Catholic priests for the Scottish mission between 1694 and 1718, Nicolson did a great amount of work in seeking out and recommending suitable Catholic boys and young men for the priesthood. It could be said that the founding of Scalan was one of Nicolson's greatest achievements and this resulted in an increase of Scottish priests in subsequent years since it became easier and cheaper for Catholic parents to send their sons to college.

Notes

1. B.L., Instructions given to John Irvine by Bishop Nicolson, 1 July 1698.

2. F. Forbes and W.J. Anderson, 'Clergy Lists of the Highland District', *Innes Review*, xvii, (1966), 129-147.
3. B.L., Nicolson to William Stuart, 22 January 1711.
4. B.L., Lewis Innes to William Leslie from St Germain, 2 December 1697.
5. W.J. Anderson, 'A brief account of the seminary of Scalán', *Innes Review*, xiv (1963), 94.

12. Rome and the Mission: the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, Popes Innocent XII and Clement XI and William Leslie (1620–1707), Agent for the Scottish Mission

The Catholic Mission to Scotland was controlled and regulated from Rome and Bishop Nicolson maintained a close correspondence with those officials of the Church who were responsible for Catholic missionary activities. In particular, the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, the two popes of this period, Innocent XII and Clement XI and the Scottish Agent, William Leslie, all took a sincere interest in the work of Nicolson and his missionaries and contributed to their success in re-establishing Catholicism in Scotland.

The 'Sacra Congregatio Christiano nomini Propaganda' was an organisation within the Roman Catholic Church whose main function was to foster the Catholic faith in newly discovered countries and to assist with the setting up of a new system of church government by congregations which were formed during the period of the Counter-Reformation. The propagation of the faith was considered important enough to need a whole congregation. This congregation, which has been referred to in this work as 'Propaganda' also set about the reconquest for the Church of the lands lost during the Reformation, Scotland being one of these lands.

Propaganda originated as a commission of cardinals set up by Pope Gregory XIII (1572–85) to promote the reconciliation of the schismatic oriental churches. It was augmented by Clement VIII (1592–1605) and made into a permanent congregation by Gregory XV (1621–1623). The congregation was instituted by a papal bull 'Inscrutabili Divinae' issued on 22 June, 1622 and consisted of 13 cardinals, 2 prelates, a secretary and a consultor. Urban VIII (1623–44) who had been one of the original 13 members of the congregation when he was Cardinal Barberini, directed that there should also be a prefect general of Propaganda and

appointed his brother, Cardinal Antonio Barberini.¹

Between 1622 and 1878, Catholic life in Scotland remained under the direct supervision of Propaganda and from 1627 Scottish missionary priests were trained at the Congregation's seminary in Rome, the Collegio Urbano de Propaganda Fide, until the Scots colleges were opened for this purpose. Two years after the foundation of Propaganda, five Scottish secular missionaries began work in their native country, James Rollock, James Hegate, David Tyrie, Thomas Beattie and William Steward. The Catholic missionary priests could not work alone and their powers or 'faculties' were given to them by Propaganda, whose authority came direct from the Pope. Jesuits however, continued to receive their faculties from their superiors – the General of the Jesuits possessed powers given to him by the Pope to grant faculties to Jesuit priests working in all mission countries. Similarly, the superiors of the English Benedictine Congregation had powers to give faculties to any Benedictine monk or priest in the whole of the British Isles. Jesuit and Benedictine missionaries working in Scotland, therefore, would not be under the control of Propaganda. In England and Scotland, consequently, the work of the various bodies giving faculties for missionary work was not co-ordinated and tension and strife resulted. One of Bishop Nicolson's main tasks was to ease this tension by attempting to improve relations between the various groups of missionary priests and by doing so, improve the co-ordination of the Scottish mission during the period of his vicariate.

The secular Scottish missionaries were also supposed to be financed by Propaganda, but very often money promised failed to arrive and they were reduced to poverty and sometimes starvation, relying constantly on the generosity of the Catholics in Scotland to whom they ministered.² Another difficulty encountered by Propaganda when it first began to investigate the possible reconversion of Scotland, was the physical and cultural division between

the Highlands and the Lowlands. The nation was divided into two distinct entities kept apart geographically and by language, customs and social structure, and it was virtually impossible for the missionaries to conduct the spiritual campaign as a united front. Although Catholicism had survived the Reformation among people in the Highlands, there was a lack of Gaelic-speaking priests to minister to them and they drifted into a state of semi-paganism, though retaining many Catholic traditions. The faith just faded out – it was never systematically suppressed. Irish Friars Minor had begun missionary work there during the reign of James VI; the friary at Bunamargy on the coast of Antrim had been founded by the Third Order Regular of St Francis in 1500 and early in 1626 Propaganda handed it over to the Friars Minor of the Irish Province because it was a convenient base for directing missionary work in Gaelic-speaking parts of Scotland. Bunamargy soon became a refuge for Scots who wanted to be baptised or confirmed.³ Gradually, Propaganda began to grant more faculties and issued detailed instruction to the Irish Friars Minor for their mission work in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. In 1633, 3 Dominicans were told to go to parts of the North West of Scotland where Franciscans had not been able to penetrate, and Propaganda undertook to pay their salaries.

Nevertheless, a lack of missionaries and lack of money frustrated the work of Propaganda in Scotland during the first half of the seventeenth century. Father Hegarty, a Franciscan missionary, retired to Ireland because the stipends promised by Propaganda had not reached him. By 1674, only 3 Irish Franciscans were working on the Scottish mission, operations in the Lowlands being hampered by the exigency of the Penal Laws. The Franciscans frequently wrote to Propaganda for increased faculties and extra money, and although these were gladly granted, neither ever reached them.⁴

To facilitate the work of missionary priests in Protestant countries, Propaganda developed the idea of sending out consecrated bishops to the countries

concerned, without permission of the civic rulers and often without their knowledge. These bishops, however, had little power because the civil authority had taken over many of their functions; Roman Canon Law was no longer recognised by Protestant nations so a bishop's judgement concerning marriage, wills or inheritance had no legal effect at all. A bishop could ordain and confirm and could rely on the obedience of his clergy, but his sanctions were purely spiritual. He acted as a delegate of the Pope, and in countries like Scotland where a local episcopate had been suppressed or had died out or had lapsed into heresy or schism, he became automatically the Bishop or Ordinary of any Catholic. These bishops were therefore styled 'Vicars-Apostolic' and possessed what powers the Pope gave them, no more and no less.⁴

In 1640, Propaganda began to consider appointing a Vicar-Apostolic for the Highlands of Scotland where the missionary work was being undertaken at this time. It also discussed the possibility of reviving the ancient diocese of Sodor (Western Isles and the Isle of Man) with Father Hegarty as bishop, but neither of these proposals was realised. It was not until William Leslie was appointed as Agent for the Scottish Mission in 1649 that the search for a vicar-apostolic for Scotland was seriously undertaken by Propaganda.

Propaganda's function therefore was to organise and control the various Catholic missions throughout the world and although Nicolson often had cause to complain to this body about lack of funds, it played an important role in re-establishing the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland.

The two men who were popes during the period of Nicolson's vicariate also took a great interest in the Scottish mission and their contribution to its success cannot be underestimated. They were Innocent XII (1691-1700) and Clement XI (1700-1721) and were both well advanced in years when they ascended to the papal see. Nevertheless, they fulfilled the duties of their respective pontificates

with enthusiasm and concern for the more far-flung reaches of the world where missionary priests were working.

Cardinal Antonio Pignatelli was already in his 76th year when he became Pope Innocent XII in 1691 and in spite of his advancing years he entered into his pastoral work with great energy. His first steps were watched carefully, especially by the diplomats at the Vatican, since he had not lived in Rome for quite a long time and his political opinions were not well known. He very quickly showed himself to be a man of much independence and paid a great attention to the affairs of Propaganda. When important or difficult questions involving the missions had to be discussed, for example relations between the missionaries and the vicars apostolic, he himself would preside over the meetings and direct their decisions. Innocent was known for his concern for the poor and deprived – he turned part of the Lateran into a hospice – but he is renowned especially for his dedication towards the conversion of pagans and the eradication of heresy. During his comparatively short term of office, he worked untiringly to the achievement of these ends, granting missionary priests throughout the world the necessary financial help and spiritual direction to enable them to carry out their duties effectively.

Two months after his accession to the papal See, Innocent fell ill, a fact which worried William Leslie who had hoped the new pope would approve the appointment of a bishop for Scotland:

The Pope has been very unwell ... Hee is most passionate for our King – God bless him good old man, his age of 77 years makes us all fear his death; he is undefatigable in working for the church, hee has most upright and sincerely good intentions.⁵

Leslie need not have feared. Innocent recovered and continued his energetic work in support of the missions. On 27 April 1694 Innocent granted an extension of the privileges which had been conceded to the Scots College at Paris by Paul V and

Urban VIII. Paul V had granted the privilege of private oratory and the right of its students to become missionaries 'ad titulum paupertatis'; Urban VIII gave them the right to be admitted to all orders including the priesthood and a plenary indulgence at the beginning and end of their studies. Innocent added that students should be ordained not only 'extra tempora statuta' but also without observing the interstices as ordered by the Council of Trent.⁶ These added inducements to the students to become missionary priests greatly helped the Scottish mission and the Scots College in Paris entered its 'golden age' under the patronage of both James VII and Innocent. It was at a session of Propaganda a few days later that it was resolved to nominate a vicar apostolic for Scotland who should receive episcopal consecration and be provided by the Congregation with the necessary pontifical ornaments and other requirements.⁷ Nicolson was to remain indebted and grateful to Innocent for the rest of his life for the support he had rendered to the Scottish Mission. In his report to Propaganda in 1697, Nicolson commented:

We owe much also to our Holy Father Innocent, who in time of our distress has protected us with the power of his apostolic office.⁸

A year later, John Irvine, then procurator of the Scottish mission in Paris, reported that Catholics in Scotland had received Nicolson well, 'acknowledging before God the greatness of the favour which they owe to the seal of the Supreme Pontiff, Innocent XII.'⁹

Innocent's support for vicars apostolic in most missionary areas remained firm so long as they upheld orthodox Catholic doctrine, which Nicolson was always anxious to do. Innocent, in his efforts to stamp out heresy, had issued a condemnation of Jansenism in 1695 and in his brief 'Cum Alias' published in 1699 he condemned 23 semi-Quietistic propositions contained in Fenelon's 'Maximes'. One vicar apostolic who was openly condemned by Innocent was Peter Codde, vicar apostolic of Holland, who favoured Jansenism and advocated abstinence

from Holy Communion. Such practices were denounced by the Papacy and prompted Nicolson to publish his Statutes which reaffirmed the official church teaching on the sacraments as agreed at the Council of Trent. The Statutes immediately met with papal approval and gave Nicolson the added support he needed at a time when many missionary priests were leaving the Scottish mission and anti-Catholic feeling was high. James VII had also approached Innocent, trying to convince him of the importance for Catholicism in Britain of the restoration of the Stewarts. James finally persuaded Innocent to declare in favour of him in 1697 and Innocent, then in his eighties, issued a memorial in favour of James II of England and VII of Scotland, which was circulated among the Catholic sovereigns of Europe. In it, he pointed out the damage already done, not only to the 'pious' King and his family, but to Catholics in Britain. When the English government heard of this undiplomatic papal interference, life was made much more difficult for Nicolson, priests and lay people of Jacobite sympathies in Scotland.¹⁰

Giovanni Francesco Albani who succeeded Innocent XII as Pope Clement XI in 1700 also gave his support to the exiled Stewarts. At the death of James VII he spoke in praise of the deceased monarch's efforts on behalf of the Catholic faith. He praised Louis XIV for his kindness to the fugitive royal family and his magnanimity, regardless of possible consequences, in recognising James' son as James VIII. Clement supported the new Stewart pretender, although according to Pastor¹¹ this 'endangered the Pope's impartiality and consequently the success of his attempts at mediation'. Clement is known to have given James VIII financial assistance in his attempt to organise a Stewart rebellion in 1708 and this led to renewed ill-feeling between the English government and the papacy. Admiral Leake, commander of the English Mediterranean fleet was instructed to demand satisfaction and bombard the Civitavecchia.¹¹

On the whole, however, Clement was a peace-loving man who was well-known

for his piety as well as his intellect – he was a doctor of canon law and civil law. Because of this, Protestants received the news of his election as pope with great joy and enthusiasm and Catholic reformers greeted his accession as the death knell of nepotism on which Clement had written a strong condemnation. He was anxious to establish peace in Europe and to uphold the rights of the Church, while at the same time reaffirming his predecessor's condemnation of heresy, and in particular of Jansenism. Like Innocent, Clement also had a great zeal and enthusiasm for missionary work and donated 30,000 scudi to the missions shortly after his accession to the papacy. He was interested in Catholic education and was keen on the building of seminaries for the training of missionaries. He gave moral and financial support to the erection of a seminary in Scotland and took a warm interest in the continental seminaries for the education of priests for the Scottish mission.

Clement's philosophy was that the missions should be free not only from heresy, but from the very suspicion of such a thing. He insisted on regular reports from vicars apostolic on the nature of missionary work undertaken and on the missionary priests themselves who were subject to intensive scrutiny. He maintained that the freer the field was from weeds, the more fruitful it would be, and the stronger the concord among the missionaries, the greater would be their influence. In a brief addressed by Clement on 17th August 1709 to the Catholics of Great Britain and Ireland, he once again condemned Jansenism and warned them against 'erroneous writings' as well as against intimacy with people of suspected orthodoxy. He also mentioned 'certain countries' near to Britain (the Netherlands) where the clergy, under the pretence of upholding a stricter moral standard, were not afraid of openly attacking the authority of the See of Peter.

Happily for Nicolson, the Scottish missionaries came in for no such criticism, and the relationship between the papacy and the Scottish mission remained good, encouraging Clement to authorise the appointment of a coadjutor in 1705. The

missionary activities of Scotland's Catholic priests during the period of Nicolson's vicariate were thus greatly eased and assisted by the two pontiffs, Innocent XII and Clement XI. The extent of their support was partly due to the willingness of the Scottish missionaries, and of Nicolson in particular, to co-operate with the papacy with regard to doctrinal teaching, but also to the interest and enthusiasm for the Scottish mission shown by both popes.

Help and encouragement for the Scottish Catholic Mission at this time also came from the Scottish Agent in Rome, William Leslie. He was the son of Alexander Leslie of Conrack, a branch of the Ruddrie family of Aberdeenshire, many of which became priests, including Jesuits, and more than one bishop also came from this family. William began to study for the priesthood at Douai in 1636 at the age of 15, finishing his studies at the Scots College in Rome between 1614 and 1647. He was ordained in 1647, after which he entered the community of St Nicolas du Chardonnet in Paris to prepare for the Scottish mission. While in Paris, he met Cardinal Charles Barberini, who asked him to return to Rome as Agent for the Scottish Mission and tutor to one of his young nephews in his own household. Leslie took up his position in 1649 and remained in post for over 50 years, keeping closely in touch with the Scottish missionary priests, yet never leaving the Papal States during this time.¹²

Leslie worked closely with Propaganda and was able to draw up detailed accounts of the state of affairs in Scotland regularly, as well as of his own views and those of his associates as to the cause of the factors hindering the mission. He was outspoken and made many enemies, notably among the Jesuits who resented the fact that the organisation of the Scottish mission had been put into the hands of secular priests, feeling that this would diminish their own interests in Scotland. Leslie successfully organised the mission from Rome, first under Prefects-Apostolic and then under Vicars-Apostolic (of whom Thomas Nicolson was the first). He was also appointed archivist to Propaganda which gave him

additional opportunities for presenting to the Cardinals and the Papacy, all the miseries and trials of the Scottish missionaries; in this way, he was able to obtain extra financial help for the Mission. Popes Innocent XII and Clement XI had a particular respect and esteem for William Leslie.

By the end of his career, Leslie had successfully, organised the Scottish mission under secular priests, appointing Nicolson as the country's first Catholic bishop since the Reformation. He was a man of intelligence and determination and is generally considered to be one of the chief builders of the reconstructed Catholic Church in Scotland. He corresponded regularly with the Scottish missionary priests and the Scots colleges, as well as with the exiled court of James VII and the Old Pretender, and all his letters reveal his dedication and devotion to the Scottish mission.

Notes

1. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (London, 1911), xii, 456.
2. See below Chapter 15.
3. Cathaldus Giblin, *Irish Franciscan Mission to Scotland 1619-46*, (Dublin, 1964), 180.
4. P. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland*, (Montrose, 1970), 70; 9.
5. B.L., William Leslie to Whyteford from Rome, 18 September 1691.
6. Bullar, Propaganda, appendix ad tom. i, 125, 340 cited in Bellesheim, 145.
7. Archiv. Propaganda, Acta 1694, fol. 37.
8. B.L., Nicolson's report to Propaganda, 1697.
9. B.L., Report of John Irvine to Propaganda, 1698.
10. P. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland*, 94.
11. Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, (London, 1941), xxxiii, 25; 58.
12. Gordon, *Scotichronicon*, vii, 575.

13. The Exiled Stewart Kings and the Scottish Catholic Mission 1688–1718

Most Catholics in Scotland at this time were supporters of the Stewart cause since they saw in the restoration of the Stewarts an end to the penal laws and the persecution which accompanied them; at the least, they hoped for a government which was tolerant of Catholicism and at best, one which would restore the Catholic Church in Britain to its pre-Reformation position. It is logical to suppose that, when a government passes harsh laws against Catholics, many of those Catholics would not only oppose such a government, but support any movement which aimed at its overthrow. Inevitably, the political allegiance of Scottish Catholics at the time of Nicolson's vicariate was towards the exiled Stewart Kings and because of this, the Catholic missionaries in Scotland had always to be wary of their involvement with the Jacobite cause. James VII and his son the uncrowned 'James VIII' of Scotland were both Catholics and in order to keep the support of the Scottish highlanders, they assisted and approved the work of the Catholic mission there.

James VII had been attracted to the Catholic Church long before his conversion to Catholicism. His mother, Queen Henrietta Maria, had been a Catholic and his father, Charles I, remained a devout High Anglican. James had seen his father killed by Puritans and his impressionable years were spent in exile in Catholic countries; as a small boy in France, his mother took him to the Carmelite convent in Paris where he was deeply influenced by the nuns. He corresponded with English Jesuits in Flanders and both James and his brother Charles frequented Jesuit houses and dined out with English and Scottish Jesuit priests. After the Restoration in 1660, James remained a pious Anglican for a further nine years before he reached his critical decision. In common with many converts, James was fiercely Catholic and after his accession to the throne lavished large sums of money on the Church.¹

His devotion to the Catholic Church and support of the work of the mission continued during his exile at St Germain, although he gradually came to realise that his restoration could only be secured by maintaining the position of the Church of England. Charles Petrie² claims that James' main aim in religion was toleration and that in this he was in advance of his age. Certainly, James was anxious to gain the support of all his subjects and promised respect for the Test Acts as well as a free pardon to all his subjects after his return to Britain. But as his exile continued, he withdrew more and more into himself, spending his last years in spiritual exercises in preparation for his death. In July 1696, William II let it be known that in return for the peaceful enjoyment of the crown until his death, he was prepared to recognise the Prince of Wales as heir, but James spurned the suggestion. He put religion above all else, fearing that if the Prince of Wales was removed to Britain, he would be brought up as a Protestant.

During this period of James' exile, Catholics in Scotland were careful not to declare themselves openly for the Stewart case, although letters written by Nicolson and the missionary priests indicate their continuing interest in the political situation, and a deep respect and concern for 'the King over the water'. Some priests were very overt in their support for the Stewarts and Abbot Fleming of Ratisbon wrote to Lewis Innes as early as 1689 that he hoped

the French King will soon be able to send over all the forces possible into Scotland and Ireland, and that with all the haste imaginable, that the loyal subjects of both these Kingdoms joyning with the Rebels, but invade England in divers places ...³

Nicolson and his missionaries, of course, had to be more careful in what they said in their letters to France, knowing that their letters could be opened. Nicolson refers to James as 'that Noble person' or ambiguously as 'His Majesty', but there is no evidence to suggest that he was any more deeply involved with the Stewarts than in according them his loyalty and allegiance. He was not prepared to jeopardise the Mission by working actively to promote the Jacobite cause. In

October 1695 when en route for Britain after his consecration as bishop, he was detained at the Hague for ten days as a Jacobite suspect, but was able to clear himself in the absence of any positive evidence against him.⁴ Nicolson's efforts were always dedicated towards the restoration of Catholicism in Scotland which he regarded as being of primary importance; the restoration of the Stewarts he saw as being the concern of the politicians rather than of the clergy.

James VII died in 1701 and in the following year his son James Francis, then thirteen years old, was proclaimed King at the gates of the palace of St Germain, with his mother, Mary of Modena, as regent. He had been baptised and brought up as a Catholic, although he is believed to have been far more tolerant in matters of religion than his father had been. His devotion to the Catholic Church was seldom in doubt, but he did not have his father's desire to convert his subjects and in 1707 James expressed his willingness to be crowned by a Protestant bishop.⁵ The Duke of Perth in a letter to William Leslie in 1702 commented

The Roman politicians need not fear our K. as to his religion; he's well grounded in it and pious to a Degree I never yet saw any of his age.⁶

The main obstacle to the restoration of the Stewarts may well have been religion and as time went on it became clear that James would have to renounce his Catholicism if he wanted to be acceptable to the majority of British people; by 1714, not even the Tories were prepared to accept a Catholic monarch. Abbe Gaultier, a French priest who was the channel of communication between James and Anne's ministers wrote to the young prince in 1714 to the effect that he would never become King of Britain unless 'he dissimulated his religion or changed it entirely.'⁷ At this stage it was clear that James was not prepared to relinquish his religion for the sake of the throne and a coup d'état became the only means open to him.

Support for James in Scotland, however, remained strong among Catholics and non-Catholics alike and it was the general opinion of the time that if King James had landed in Scotland when the abortive rising took place in 1708, he would soon have become master of the whole Kingdom.⁸ Inevitably, the clergy came in for a great deal of criticism, particularly when Lewis Innes was sent to Scotland as an envoy; James himself wrote to the Pope to beg his blessing for the rebellion and also pecuniary assistance. Letters were also sent to Cardinal Caprara, the protector of England, with requests for support and help. As a result of the 1708 rising, new penal laws were passed against Scottish Catholics and the missionaries had to carry on their work with greater caution than before. They held their meetings with less frequency, usually during the night or early in the morning, and fewer converts were made during this period. To be a Catholic was to be automatically under suspicion of Jacobitism. Nicolson himself was in a weak state of health at this time and retired to Preshome for a few months, withdrawing from public life to allay suspicion. Bishop Gordon, who was undertaking a visit to the Highlands in 1707 had been accused of going there specifically to stir up support for James Stewart and there was clearly renewed enthusiasm for the Stewart cause at this time. Gordon, however, was under no doubt that priests should not interfere in politics, realising how detrimental it could be to the success of the Catholic mission. In 1710, he wrote to one of the Edinburgh priests

that we should not meddle with affairs that are not of our own sphere, having so many and weighty of our own to which the other are ordinarily an hindrance is certainly very desirable and the generality have no occasions to distract themselves with such business unless it be their own fault, but 'tis hard to fall on a way to secure all from these troubles; the apostles would not meddle in any such affairs, but S. Steven and S. Philip the Deacon did, who notwithstanding played the part of Apostles too and you know the best pastors great and small of the first and of all ages have often taken care and undergone great fatigue in settling differences and agreeing the faithful about their temporall business. These affairs tho dangerous to all, are yet more uneasy and hurtful to some and as far as can be contrived, M. Paterson, [they] shall be relieved of these embarassments, I feel that even speaking or writing of them

in general is troublesome and uneasy.⁹

Bishop Gordon's directive appears to have struck home to the Catholic clergy and there is no evidence to suggest their direct involvement with Jacobitism during the period 1707–1714. Of course, both Gordon and Nicolson hoped for the success of the rebellion of 1715 since the restoration of the Stewarts could only benefit their position, but its failure might jeopardise Catholicism in Scotland if Catholic priests were known to have assisted the movement. The Duke of Perth told William Stuart, the Scottish agent in Rome in December 1715 that the mission was even so in great danger as a result of the Jacobite rising that year and that the Catholic religion was in great risk of being 'extirpated out of Scotland'.¹⁰ Bishop Gordon wrote to propaganda the following year that as a result of renewed persecution of Catholics, the Scottish Catholic Church was in danger of annihilation.¹¹

Clearly, Jacobitism greatly affected the work of the Scottish Catholic mission, in spite of its priests' lack of involvement; all priests naturally came under suspicion and Nicolson, even in his poor state of health, was arrested and imprisoned at Fochabers. He was seventy-three years of age and no longer actively involved in missionary activities, let alone political intrigue. If James was to have been crowned in Scotland in 1715, it would not have been by either Bishop Nicolson or Bishop Gordon, although it has been suggested that he was ready to be crowned by a Protestant bishop, or by a Moderator of the General Assembly.¹² James himself realised the precarious position Catholics were in and did not want to run the risk of losing their loyalty; he is reported to have said, 'It is over the hearts of my subjects and not their consciences that I am desirous to reign.'¹² When James returned to France it was remarked that he had two Protestant clergymen with him, Dr Charles Lesley and Ezekial Hamilton, but no Catholic chaplain.

Thus, although James remained a Catholic until his death and showed his support for the Scottish Catholic mission, there was certainly a period when he was prepared to renounce his religion in order to gain the throne. The Scottish Catholic clergy for their part sincerely hoped for the restoration of the Stewarts but preferred not to jeopardise their position by showing open allegiance to the exiled Kings.

Notes

1. See above Chapter 15.
2. Charles Petrie, *The Jacobite Movement; the first phase 1688–1716*, (London 1948), 112.
3. B.L., Placide Fleming to Lewis Innes from Ratisbon, 25 January, 1687.
4. B.L., Nicolson to Lewis Innes from The Hague, 27 October, 1695.
5. A Shield and A. Lang, *The King Over the Water*, (London, 1907), 93.
6. B.L., Perth to William Leslie from St Germain, 13 June, 1702.
7. Charles Petrie, *The Jacobite Movement; the first phase 1688–1716*, 149.
8. Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics*, ii, 238.
9. B.L., Bishop Gordon to John Paterson, 11 July 1710.
10. B.L., Perth to William Stuart from St Germain, 15 December 1715.
11. B.L., Bishop Gordon to propaganda, 19 November 1716.
12. Shield and Lang, *The King Over the Water*, 251.

14. Catholic Doctrine and Practice in Scotland 1694–1718

One reason for the success of the Catholic mission during this period was the adherence to orthodox Roman Catholic teaching as laid down by the Council of Trent and the loyalty of Bishop Nicolson to the papacy. So long as Nicolson was prepared to teach and practise those doctrines and tenets which were approved of by the papal see, he could be assured of the moral and financial backing which were essential to the success of his work. The vicar-apostolic of Holland, Peter Codde, was condemned by Innocent XII for allowing his teaching to be influenced by Jansenism and the Dutch Catholic mission does not appear to have been as successful as the Scottish mission in re-establishing orthodox Catholicism; even today, the Catholic Church in Holland is subject to scrutiny by the papal see. It is not, therefore, surprising to find that much of the correspondence between bishops Nicolson and Gordon, and Rome, is concerned with Catholic doctrine and practice in Scotland.

When Nicolson returned to Scotland as its first Catholic bishop since the Reformation, he found that many nominal Catholics, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, had either ceased to practise their faith, had failed to remember the essential tenets, or had been influenced by Protestant teaching. As had already been discussed and illustrated, Nicolson's main task was to send out missionary priests to all parts of Scotland to preach, teach and baptise, and then to receive their reports and convey essential details to the agent for the Scottish mission in Rome, William Leslie. Often, Nicolson had to ask for special dispensations for Scottish Catholics, particularly with regard to church teaching on marriage. Because of ignorance of the canonical law on consanguinity and affinity being impediments to marriage, it was necessary for Nicolson to request dispensations from Rome to allow marriages within these prohibitions to be regulated; it was considered preferable to do this than to annul happy marriages where there was

already a family. Such marriages had been permitted by civil law in Scotland since the Reformation and were therefore legal and binding according to the law of the land. The alternative to a general dispensation from Rome was for individual Catholics to apply for their own dispensation, but this was a difficult, lengthy and costly process. Moreover, Nicolson knew that dissolution of such marriages could turn people against the Catholic church instead of drawing people to it. It was, he said

... impossible for the Catholic church to dissolve a marriage which is allowed by the law of the whole nation, without stirring up opinion against them. Intelligent Catholics take the view that since the law of the land allows such marriages, they are valid, because the prohibition of such marriages were first established by the imperial laws and then received by the church.¹

Nicolson's faculties were enlarged as a result of this request and he was given the power to grant matrimonial dispensations in the case of marriages within the prohibited degrees which had already taken place.

Another request by Nicolson contained in the same letter sent to Rome with John Irvine concerned the observance of Holy Days of Obligation in Scotland. These Holy Days, or feast days, obliged Catholics to rest from servile work and attend Mass, but for many Scots, this obligation was impractical. In both Highland and Lowland areas, farming was the main source of livelihood and resting from work could result in hardship. Nicolson maintained that Scottish Catholics 'should be allowed to work on holy days because of their poverty especially in Spring and Autumn.'¹ The number of feast days tended to vary from country to country, taking into account local traditions and saints, but the number was usually between twenty and thirty each year. Nicolson mentioned fourteen days which could 'most conveniently' be kept by Scottish Catholics, these being 1 January (Circumcision), 6 January (Epiphany), 2 February (Purification), 25 March (Annunciation), Ascension Day, Corpus Christi, 24 June (St John the Baptist), 29 June (Saints Peter and Paul), 15 August (Assumption), 1 November (All Saints), 30

November (St Andrew), 25 December (Christmas), 26 December (St Stephen) and 27 December (St John). In the more remote areas of the country, it was impossible for Catholics to hear Mass, even on Sundays, because of the lack of a priest in their area, and therefore the Apostolic See readily agreed to grant Nicolson the necessary power to free Scottish Catholics from their obligation in circumstances which made it detrimental to their livelihood or which proved to be impractical or difficult. Such retrenchment of Holy Days had already taken place in other countries abroad for similar reasons 'by some Cardinals of the Roman Church with much approbation.'¹ For the most part, however, Nicolson was anxious to confirm and impart traditional Catholic teaching on aspects of doctrine and practice. The importance of the Sacrament of Penance was frequently emphasised and in an open letter to all Scottish Catholics which was to be read at services on Septuagesima Sunday 1699, Nicolson stressed the necessity for communicant Catholics to receive this sacrament at least once a year – this ruling having been determined at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 – and recommended by the bishop during Lent. Penance was one of the things included in Nicolson's 'Statutes' published the following year, which set out official Catholic teaching on a variety of subjects and which were given to the missionary priests for their use and reference.² The ninth of these statutes 'Di Sacramento Poenitentia' recommended the use of public penance for public sins; this practice was popular with the Presbyterian church and indeed was approved of by the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent so that 'he who had through his example drawn others to evil manners, should recall them to an upright life through the witness of his correction.'³ The future Bishop Gordon also approved public penance as 'a venerable old practice and contributed to good discipline' but he discovered that many Scottish Catholics 'have thought it too hard to be observed in such hard times as we have nowadays in Scotland.'⁴

Nicolson's Statutes were presented to Propaganda for approval in 1700, but it was

to take four years for official acceptance to be granted. Gordon wrote to John Irvine in February 1704 that

... our bishop's statutes, tho praised by every one of the Cardinals and Secretary in particular, have not been fully discussed as yet, they having ordered that they shall be examined by P. le Boue and P. Castelli, the one Professor of Controversy and the other Director in the Propaganda and that they be presented to Congregation again.⁵

Such scrutiny was considered essential at a time when 'heretical' practices were prevalent within the church and Jansenism an all too prevalent influence. The statutes contained prescriptions on the Catholic faith, the reconciliation of heretics, episcopal authority, the priesthood, the instruction of youth, holy days, fasting, baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, marriage and usury. They reaffirmed orthodox Catholic teaching, although particular reference was made to the Scottish situation where it was deemed necessary.

For example, Nicolson recommended that Scottish priests, before joining the mission, should make a retreat for several days and then once they had begun their missionary work, should not absent themselves for more than three weeks without permission. Clergy were to be permitted to carry arms for self-defence, but were instructed 'to beware of frequenting taverns, of familiarity with the other sex and publicly joining in field-sports or similar gatherings.'⁶ The statute on the instruction of youth demanded that missionary priests should seek out the young and ignorant in their homes for the purpose of instructing them in the faith and also to make every effort to establish Catholic schools, especially in the Highlands. These details, together with the 'special' cases of holy days and marriage, were found to be acceptable to Rome. The Statutes were approved by the Councillors of Propaganda in December 1704 and returned to Nicolson, signed by Cardinal Fabrioni, Secretary to the Sacred Congregation, on 16 December.⁷

Meanwhile, the year 1701 had been declared a Holy Year and Nicolson passed on

to his missionaries, in a mandate published on 4th August, the plenary indulgence granted by Pope Clement XI and remission of sins offered to all the faithful. The missionary priests were exhorted to teach and instruct all those committed to their ministry, works of piety were to be encouraged, charity to the poor recommended, as well as penitence, reconciliation with God and their neighbours and a firm purpose of amendment.⁸ Various practices of devotion were encouraged – the singing of the hymn 'Veni Creator' and a Mass of the Holy Spirit, Confession, prayer and alms-giving and Communion between 24 October and 9 November. Missionary priests were to ensure that during the Holy Year, every Catholic area in Scotland was to be visited. Nicolson, in this mandate, also specified the prayers and psalms to be used by priests and laymen during the Holy Year, and these continue to be those most frequently used in the Scottish Catholic Church;

5 times the Lord's Prayer and Angelical Salutation (Hail Mary), priests to pray for the pardon of their own sins, peace of Christian Princes, for extirpation of heresies and the exaltation of our Holy Mother the Church.

Psalms and prayers annexed:

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
Hail Mary I Believe [Creed] Come Holy Ghost Prayer for the
Remission of Sins (Psalm 50) For the Church (Psalms 49 and 84) For
Conversion of Infidells (Psalm 48) For the King (Psalm 19) For Peace
(Psalm 121) The Litanies of the Saints.⁸

The regular use of 'set' prayers ensured that Catholics in Scotland were united in their prayer and could readily come together for prayer and worship when a priest was not at hand to say Mass on Sundays or Holydays.

Bishop Gordon continued Nicolson's good work in ensuring that orthodoxy remained the norm within the Scottish Catholic Church, and in addition to the aspects of Roman Catholic teaching referred to in the 'Statutes' he wrote extensively on the subjects of transubstantiation, Hell, and the infallibility of the

Church, all of which had come under criticism by both Protestant and Catholic 'reformers'.⁹ By 1718, all missionary priests had received intensive instruction in the tenets of the Catholic faith both at the seminary and through the guidance of their bishops, and thus even Catholics in the more remote parts of Scotland were familiar with orthodox Catholic teaching and this reduced the possibility of the spread of popular 'heresies' such as Jansenism.

Notes

1. B.L., Instructions given to Mr John Irvine by Bishop Nicolson, 1 July 1698.
2. N.L.S., Instructiones ad munera apostolica rite obeunda - per utiles missionibus Scotia accommodata: Typio sacrae Congregatione de Propaganda Fide, Rome 1781.
3. Canones et Decreta, Sacrosancti Oecumenici et generalis Concilii Tridentini, 1564 cited in P. Janelle, *The Catholic Reformation*, (London 1971), 74.
4. B.L., James Gordon to Lewis Innes from Rome, 2 September 1704.
5. B.L., James Gordon to John Irvine from Rome, 26 February 1704.
6. Alphonse Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, iv, 171. (Oswald Hunter Blair's translation of the 'Statutes' appears in full in this volume of Bellesheim's *History*. A detailed examination of the doctrinal issues arising from Nicolson's 'Statutes' lies outside the scope of this thesis.)
7. B.L., Cardinal Sacripantes to Nicolson from Rome, 16 December 1704.
8. B.L., Mandate of Bishop Nicolson for the Jubilee, 4 August 1701.
9. B.L., Bishop Gordon to Francis Scott, May 1712.

15. The Financing of the Mission 1688–1718

The Scottish mission, like other Catholic missions in various countries at this time, was financed by the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, but funds were small and never adequate for all the work required to be undertaken if the mission was to be a success. In 1650, Propaganda allowed 50 Roman crowns per annum for each of the ten secular missionary priests then working in Scotland, a total of 500 crowns to cover their living and working expenses. By the time Nicolson was appointed as bishop in 1694, the per capita allowance for each missionary had been reduced, the 20 missionaries each receiving 25 crowns, the total remaining at 500 crowns per annum. In addition to monetary funds, Rome also supplied the mission with such items as communion breads, altar wines, books, candles and vestments, and these were shipped by way of France and Holland to Leith or Aberdeen. Because the funds were so inadequate, many missionaries relied on contributions from the Catholic nobility¹; the Duke of Gordon spent large sums of money on the Catholic mission and both James VII and his son, the Old Pretender, donated money at various times.²

Inevitably, many complaints from missionaries concerned the distribution of the meagre funds from Propaganda. The inclement climate of Scotland, the difficult terrain, the lack of roads and the distance between settlements in the Highlands, the problems of reaching the remoter islands and the severity of the penal laws, combined to make the conditions of work in Scotland uncomfortable and unpleasant for the missionaries. Lack of funds often meant that missionaries had to go without food and adequate clothing in the winter months, without transport or accommodation and unable to buy other basic necessities. Alexander Dunbar complained to Lewis Innes in 1688 that after thirty years in the mission, he had never had sufficient supplies and that a disproportionate amount of money was being spent on schoolmasters for Invergarie and Barra, places which had not even

sent one Catholic youth to be trained at any of the Scots colleges abroad in the eighteen years since their schools had been established.³ Although efforts were made to ensure regular supplies of funds to the Scottish mission, these were often delayed and bills of exchange were frequently lost or intercepted before they reached Scotland. Many of the letters written by the missionary priests before 1694 and by Nicolson after his appointment, were acknowledgements of funds received or complaints about the non-arrival of monies which had been sent from Rome.

When Nicolson was appointed bishop, it was hoped that funds would automatically be increased particularly as the bishop himself would need extra money to carry out his duties and implement the changes he wished to see. Anticipating this, Walter Innes wrote to Lewis Innes in 1693, agreeing to a request for extra funds and acknowledging that missionaries should have more than mere subsistence money 'otherwise they would be slighted and dispysed and it would be a shame to our nation'.⁴ Accordingly, Propaganda was approached for additional funds, but the appointment of Nicolson was delayed, partly for financial reasons.⁵ It was estimated that Nicolson would require 150 Roman crowns a year over and above the minimum subsistence money, which would include his travelling expenses. When the Congregation of Cardinals met to discuss the appointment of Nicolson in May 1693, the suggestion was to reduce the funds already allocated to the mission by 200 crowns, this being the money to be given to the bishop.⁶ This would have meant reducing the individual amounts given to missionary priests from 25 crowns to only 15 crowns. Clearly, this was an unsatisfactory arrangement and Pope Innocent XII had to be approached for approval of the extra allocation of funds needed. This was quickly granted and Bishop Nicolson was told he would receive his 200 crowns in addition to the money already allocated to the mission. It was known also that in June 1694, four more missionary priests were due to leave the Scots College in Paris and they

were given 50 crowns each by the Pope and an additional 50 crowns by Propaganda for maintenance and travelling expenses; this money, however, was an extraordinary payment and was not renewed the following year.⁷ 500 crowns per annum remained the sum being given to the Scottish missionary priests with only 150 crowns for the bishop. There had been no increase in the amount allocated to individual priests since 1650, even though Rome was now spending a total of 650 crowns yearly on the Scottish mission, compared to the original 500 crowns.⁸

After his appointment as bishop, Nicolson tried to redistribute this 650 crowns according to the missionaries' special needs, so that those working in difficult conditions in the Highlands and Islands for example, would receive more than those working in Edinburgh and the Lowlands. Nevertheless, he soon discovered that the money was inadequate and his report sent to Rome with John Irvine in 1698 included a complaint that the mission funds were insufficient for him to carry out his work:

It is impossible to maintain more of the clergy with the allowance which our most eminent patrons give us, it being minutely divided between them.⁹

No further funds were given to the mission, however, and Nicolson was left to carry out some of the most arduous tasks of his vicariate, including his visitations of the Highlands, with very little money. Accordingly, Thomas Innes wrote to William Stuart, the new Scottish agent in Rome in 1711, at great length, putting forward the case for additional funds for the Scottish mission.¹⁰ He pointed out that the number of missionary priests, including Irish and regulars, had increased to thirty, with two bishops, whilst prices of basic commodities had doubled since 1650 and extra taxes were payable since the Union of 1707. Missioners were forced to seek free accommodation in Catholic houses and these were not always easy to find, especially as Nicolson had allocated many missioners to areas where

there were few known Catholics. Other missionaries who of necessity lived in lodgings, found that all their money was spent on accommodation, leaving little or none for food and clothing. Innes asked Stuart for an additional subsidy for the mission to pay for Catholic schools so that they 'will be better filled ... and Catholic children better instructed' and also extra allowances for the two bishops who were living in 'continuall poverty'. Nicolson, for example, suffered from bad health and yet was unable to afford the regular services of a doctor. Innes' letter had the desired effect and within a week, Stuart replied informing him that Propaganda had agreed to a hundred per cent increase in the money to be allocated to the Scottish missionaries, 1,000 Roman crowns to be the annual payments.¹¹ He further suggested that Nicolson should appoint a 'procura' for himself and the secular clergy, to be sent to Rome to receive these monies annually. Nicolson's own subsistence money was to be increased.

There is no doubt that the Scottish Catholic mission at this time was under-funded and it is to Nicolson's credit that he carried out his work in adverse circumstances with little or no funds. The reasons for the success of Nicolson's work lie mainly in the determination and courage of the Catholic priests who continued with their task of keeping Catholicism alive when circumstances continually militated against them.

Notes

1. See above, Chapter 10.
2. See above, Chapter 13.
3. B.L., Alexander Dunbar to Lewis Innes, 26 August, 1688.
4. B.L., Walter Innes to Lewis Innes from Rome, 21 April, 1693.
5. See above, Chapter 4.
6. B.L., Walter Innes to Lewis Innes from Rome, 11 May, 1693.
7. B.L., Lorenzo Leslie to Whyteford from Rome, 6 July, 1694.

8. B.L., Thomas Innes to William Stuart from Paris, 23 February, 1711.
9. B.L., Instructions given to John Irvine by Bishop Nicolson, 1 July, 1698.
10. B.L., Thomas Innes to William Stuart from Paris, 23 February, 1711.
11. B.L., William Stuart to Thomas Innes from Rome, 28 February, 1711.

16. Catholicism in Scotland in 1718 and the Death of Nicolson

Thomas Nicolson died on 23 October 1718. He was in his seventies¹ and had suffered continually from ill-health since his appointment as vicar-apostolic for Scotland in 1694. He is a man about whom little has been written and to whose work and achievements Catholic historians have hitherto paid little attention. And yet the Scottish Catholic Church owes much to the unselfish dedication and keen ability which he gave to his work of restoring Catholicism in Scotland.

If the success of Nicolson's work is to be measured by the modest but sustained increase in numbers of Catholic priests active in Scotland or by the increase in numbers of practising Catholics, then the conclusion to be drawn from his worthy efforts would be that there was comparatively little gained for the Church. The number of priests working on the Mission certainly increased during the period of Nicolson's vicariate² in spite of continuing persecution and the penal laws which were enforced mainly because of the fear of Catholic association with Jacobitism; this increase, small though it was, was due in part to the encouragement given to Scottish seminarians in Paris and Rome by the colleges and Propaganda to return to Scotland as missionary priests, but mainly to the efforts of Nicolson in recruiting young Catholic men for the priesthood. Most of the extant letters written by Nicolson are letters of introduction and recommendation which prospective student priests took out to the Scots colleges abroad. The increase in the numbers of Catholics is less easy to ascertain, since accurate figures are unavailable for this period and often refer to individual districts or areas rather than to Scotland as a whole. James Darragh³ shows a decline in numbers during Nicolson's vicariate, but this is not borne out by other sources which indicate a substantial increase. Noel Wilby⁴ maintains that the numbers of Catholics were 'more flourishing than is often supposed' especially in the less well-known Catholic centres of Invernesshire, such as Kilmorack, Abertarff and Stratherrick.

Her figures are based on manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland and these give numbers compiled from Protestant records and pertain only to Highland areas. These manuscripts do, however, confirm the missionary priests' own reports of large scale conversions in the Highlands which were sometimes doubted by Propaganda. In 1721, a Protestant minister, Wodrow, writing from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland remarked

The great matter before us is the terrible growth of Popery in the north ... Some parishes where there were not long ago scarcely any Papists, now have seven or eight hundred.⁵

Efforts had been made as early as 1703 by the Protestant Church to try and stem what was then regarded as an alarming increase in the number of Catholics in the Highlands. Catholic children were attending Protestant schools and attempts were made to ensure that these children were properly instructed in the 'principals of the Protestant religion'. The Synod of Moray declared that

... the growth and encrease of popery is to be feared amongst the rising generation, therefore do appoint that all Schoolmasters within their bounds oblige such [Catholic] children to attend publick prayers in the school evening and morning.⁶

A General Assembly survey of 1714 noted an increase of Catholicism, mainly in Banffshire, Lochaber, Glengary and Aberdeenshire and also a few converts in Perthshire and Galloway.⁷ Alarm was expressed by those conducting the survey at the increasing numbers of Catholic schools and the private tuition that many Catholic children received from the missionary priests. Catholic women teachers were quite common too:

The papists in the said bounds [Fochabers] have of late set up privat schools which are taught by popish women. The priests also instruct women and send them through the Country to propagat their delusions.⁸

In 1714 there were found to be 600 Catholics in the parish of Bellie, 265 in Tullich, Glenmuick and Glengarden, 400 in Crathie and Kindrochet and 21 in

Aboyne and Glentanner.⁸ These figures were high enough to give concern to the Protestant authorities and in Aberdeenshire it was believed that inter-marrying was partly responsible;

... papists and protestants marrieing with one another and imploying the priests to celebrate them, for in that case commonly either the protestant party is perverted or at least the children brought up popish.⁹

Nicolson's presence in this area did not go unnoticed where he was commonly known by his pseudonym of Alexander Bruce:

Mr Bruce who goes under the name of Lord Bishop of Aberdeen comes once a year and sometimes offener and with great solemnity administrates their pretended sacrament of Confirmation.⁹

A similar survey carried out in the Highlands and Islands in 1718 also revealed an increasing number of Catholics. In Lochaber, the number had risen from 40 (in 1714) to 400, on Barra it was reported that all but 40 people were Catholic, on Canna and Eigg all were Catholic, on Rhum a mixture of Protestant and Catholic and in Knoydart and Morar 800 Catholics to 10 Protestants.⁹ These figures appear to be consistent with those of Bishop Gordon¹⁰ and suggest a substantial increase in the numbers of practising Catholics in the more remote areas. Nevertheless, Catholic activity in the Lowlands remained covert and accordingly is harder to assess. After the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, many priests were imprisoned or banished and Catholics were in constant danger; it appeared from reports to Propaganda that Catholicism was on the verge of disappearing from Scotland altogether.¹¹ Only the nobility appear to have admitted to their Catholic faith and their names are listed in reports given to the General Assembly between 1701 and 1705.¹² Others were professional people, advocates, surgeons and teachers who were presumably able to maintain their position in society by paying lip-service to Protestantism.

Perhaps what is more significant in assessing the success of Nicolson's work is

the fact that both Catholic laity and clergy were reinvigorated by the Mission and inspired by the efforts of their bishop to preserve Scottish Catholicism in the face of adversity. Bishop Gordon, who was appointed Vicar Apostolic after Nicolson's death, continued his predecessor's work of administering to Catholics in the north who revealed their loyalty to the Church by refusing to take the new oath of Allegiance which was approved by Parliament in 1723. The Oath was phrased in such a way that no Catholic could take it without virtually renouncing his religion¹³ and most were not prepared to do this. That same year, the S.S.P.C.K. increased its efforts to eradicate Catholicism, being constantly alarmed at the increasing numbers of practising Catholics – Bishop Gordon claimed to have confirmed another 2090 Catholics after his Highland visitation of 1723.¹⁴

The strengthening of the Scottish Catholic Church during the eighteenth century can be clearly based on the vicariate of Thomas Nicolson who had firmly established and consolidated the work of the Catholic Mission so that his successors were able to continue the work he began unimpeded by administrative and financial problems. Nicolson had successfully drawn together all the various different strands of the Mission – the work of the Irish Franciscan and Vincentian priests, Dominican, Benedictine and Jesuit missions and the teaching and preaching undertaken by schoolmasters (and schoolmistresses) and secular priests. He had established a seminary in Scotland for the training of Scottish priests and ensured uniformity of doctrinal teaching through the publication and acceptance of his Statutes at a time when heresy and superstition were recurring problems for the Catholic Church. Marjory Kinloch comments

He had given stability to the mission; he had laboured for it by day and night; he had striven to reconcile regulars and seculars whenever they disagreed; and he left his Statuta, a noble legacy to the church.¹⁵

Above all, Nicolson was a man of great intellect and learning and was able to

instruct the priests of his mission as well as the laity. His time at Preshome was often spent in study and many of his letters written both to the Scots College in Paris and to Rome, contain requests for books. The last letter written by Nicolson before his death was one of thanks to Thomas Innes for books sent to him during his illness.¹⁶ William Clapperton says of him

His appetite for books was insatiable. One might naturally be tempted to contrast [his] desire to spend money on books while [he] stinted in the very necessities of life, with the war which the Reformers waged as much against learning and books as against popery.¹⁷

Nicolson had given up a secure position at Glasgow University¹⁸ to become a Catholic and devote his talents and abilities to the spread and re-establishment of Catholicism in Scotland. He sacrificed the prospects of an academic career for a life of 'toil, privation and many crosses.'¹⁹

Scottish Catholics owe a lot to this deeply religious man who overcame so many problems and difficulties in his determination to restore Catholicism to his country. He was a quiet, contemplative man 'slow to speak and slow to anger'¹⁹ who suffered a great deal during the twenty-four years of his episcopacy, but placing his trust and confidence in God he always behaved with 'becoming fortitude'.²⁰ According to John Thomson, 'he had been much revered and beloved by the missionaries and Catholics during his life, so he died much and justly regretted'.²⁰ Bishop Gordon in his tribute to Nicolson on his gravestone inscription at St Ninian's chapel at Preshome referred to his sincerity and honesty, integrity, learning, wisdom and courtesy for all men 'even for those without honour'.²¹

Nicolson was well-chosen as the man who was to rebuild the Scottish Catholic Church from the ashes in which it had been left by the Reformation; natural talents combined with family connections justified his hopes of success.²² In spite of his advancing years - he was already an elderly man when he was

consecrated Bishop in 1694 – he was ‘youthful and pious’ in his duty towards God and his Church.²³ In his own words to Pope Clement XI

... although Catholics here have suffered, [the persecutions] were never able to extinguish our deep piety. And this still invigorates us even to this day amid such troubles. But principally, by divine grace, we devote ourselves to God.²⁴

Notes

1. See above, Chapter 2.
2. See Appendix 2.
3. James Darragh, ‘The Catholic Population of Scotland since the Year 1680’, *Innes Review*, iv, (1953), 52.
4. Noel MacDonald Wilby, ‘The Encrease of Popery in the Highlands 1714–1747’, *Innes Review*, xvii, (1966).
5. James Walsh, *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland*, (Glasgow, 1874), 499.
6. S.R.O., Records of the Synod of Moray 1702–1713, CH2/271/4, 48.
7. Christine Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789–1829*, (Edinburgh 1983), 13.
8. Noel MacDonald Wilby, ‘The Encrease of Popery in the Highlands 1714–1747’, 93.
9. N.L.S., MSS., ‘The Encrease of Popery in the Highlands’ 976 f.143, 29 May 1714; f.147–149, August 1718; f.154, 1718.
10. See above Chapter 6.
11. A. Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland*, (Edinburgh and London, 1890), iv, 165.
12. *Miscellany of the Maitland Club*, iii, 392.
13. P. Anson, *Underground Catholicism in Scotland*, 117.
14. Bishops Gordon and Wallace to Propaganda from Speyside, 15 October 1723, quoted in Bellesheim, iv, 377.
15. Marjory G.J. Kinloch, *Studies in Scottish Ecclesiastical History*, (Edinburgh, 1898), 334.
16. B.L., Nicolson to Thomas Innes from Preshome, 19 March 1718.

17. S.C.A., Rev. William Clapperton, *Memoirs of Scottish Missionary Priests*, i, 34. 611.
18. See above, Chapter 2.
19. S.C.A., Rev William Clapperton, *Memoirs of Scottish Missionary Priests*, i, 34. 610.
20. S.C.A., John Thomson, *Some Account of the State of Religion and of the Mission in Scotland since the Reformation 1560-1731*, 589.
21. J.F.S. Gordon, *Scotichronicon* (Journal and Appendix), 2, '...comitate et liberalitate etiam iis qui foris sunt venerabilis'.
22. S.C.A., Clapperton, *Memoirs of Scottish Missionary Priests*, i, 34. 610.
23. Gordon, *Scotichronicon* (Journal and Appendix), 2, '...vir fuit primaeva pietate insignis'.
24. B.L., Nicolson to Pope Clement XI from Elgin, 4 April 1701, '...sed licet mutumque saucierut Catholici tamen pietatem penitas extinguaere numquam potuit. Quod ea inter tot augustias ad hic spiret, Divina primum gratia deo ... devomas.

Appendix I

Missionary Priests working in Scotland during Nicolson's vicariate

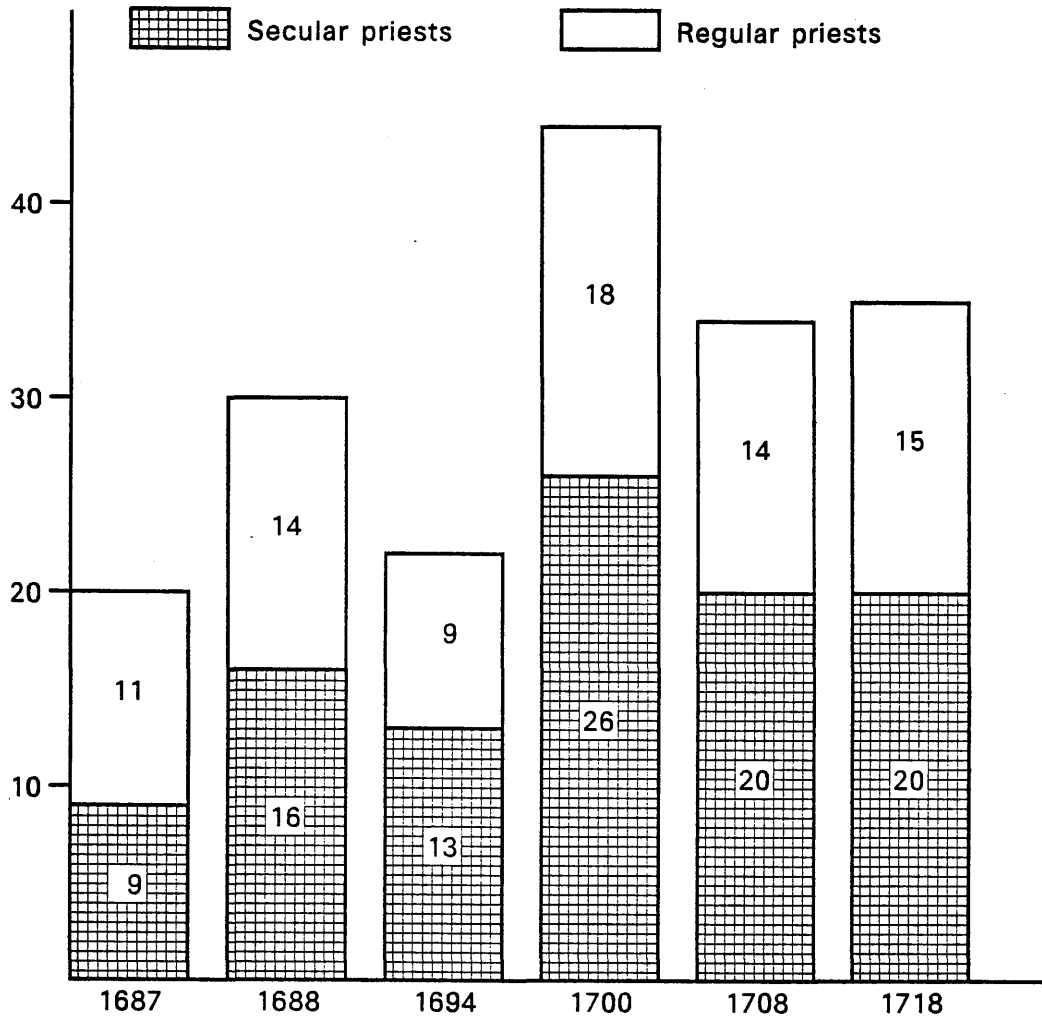
(This list compiled from names traced in the fragmentary Mission records)

Preshome	Bishop Thomas Nicolson 1696–1718
Glasgow	Bishop James Gordon 1706 onwards
Gordon Castle	Alexander Dunbar 1687–1708
Enzie	David Burnet (Vice Prefect) 1687–1696 John Irvine 1687–1717 Alexander Leslie 1687–1701 James Gordon 1692–1702 James Donaldson 1706–1740 Walter Innes 1703–1708 (transferred to Edinburgh)
Strathbogie	Alexander Christie 1687–1693 John Paul Jamieson 1687–1693 Fr. Patrick Carolan 1687–1701 (transferred to Barra) Robert Gordon 1701–1702 Alexander Moire 1701–1718 Andrew Deans 1701–1711 Fr. Peter Reid 1709–1715
Glenlivet and Strathdon	Fr. Trenor 1687 onwards Robert Strachan 1687–1701 (transferred to Aberdeen) Fr. Patrick Carolan 1687–1701 James Kennedy 1701–1704 Joseph Gordon 1708 onwards Peter Fraser 1706–1715, 1718
Banff	Alexander Leslie 1701 onwards
Mearns and Angus	William Stuart 1701–1715 (transferred to Traquair) David Guthrie 1677–1701 (transferred to Arbroath)
Arbroath	David Guthrie 1701–1707
Glengarry and Strathglass	Robert Monroe 1671–1704 (1701 onwards, provicar of the Highlands) Hugh Ryan 1687 onwards George Dalgleish 1709 onwards Aeneas McLachlan 1709 onwards Alexander Paterson 1709 onwards
Knoydart	Fr. Devoir (Devoyer) 1687–1698 (Jesuit)

	Fr. Cahassy 1687-1703 Fr. Hugh MacLellan 1701-1709 (Benedictine)
Moydart	Fr. Logan 1701 onwards (Franciscan) Fr. Hara 1704 onwards (Franciscan)
Buchan	Fr. Peter Reid 1709 onwards (Benedictine)
Arisaig	Peter Fraser 1703-1706 (1715 to Fochabers, 1718 to Glenlivet)
Islands	Fr. Hugh Morgan 1688-1709 (1701 onwards, provicar of the Islands) Fr. Peter Cluan 1706 onwards Fr. John Gasman 1706 onwards
Uist	Fr. Lea 1687 onwards, also Barra (Franciscan) Fr. O'Sheil 1701-1703 (Franciscan) Fr. McFie 1701 onwards (Franciscan)
Barra	Fr. Lea 1687 onwards, also Uist Fr. Hackeen 1701-1703 (Franciscan) Fr. Patrick Carolan 1701 onwards
Morar, Eigg and Rhum	Fr. John Cahassy 1703-1704 (1704 to Moydart)
Canna	Fr. Charles Hara 1687 onwards
Braemar	Fr. Robert Seaton 1703-1709 (Jesuit) Fr. Strachan 1710-1718 (Jesuit)
Aberdeen and Dundee	Fr. Fordyce 1687 onwards (Jesuit) Robert Strachan 1687-1725 Fr. Christopher Abercrombie 1701 onwards (Jesuit) A Benedictine 1687 onwards
Drummond Castle	Alexander Drummond 1707 onwards
Edinburgh	Alexander Drummond 1701-1707 Paul Sandison 1701 onwards John Hall 1701 onwards Francis Mearns 1701 onwards James Fife 1702-1710 James Paplay 1704 Fr. Mackie 1701 (Benedictine) Alexander Dundas 1701 onwards James Carnegy (Gibson) 1703-1708 Walter Innes 1708 onwards Fr. Reid 1701-1703 (Benedictine) Fr. Durham 1701 (Jesuit) James Thomson 1694-1700
Galloway	Robert Davidson 1678-1711

Appendix II

Numbers of Priests on the Mission 1687 – 1718



1687 }
 1688 } Revival of Catholicism in Scotland

1694 – Nicolson appointed

1700 – Nicolson's Highland visit

1708 – Penal Laws enforced

1718 – Nicolson's vicariate ends

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