

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 46: John Knox & the Scottish Reformation

John Knox: Did You Know?

Little-known and remarkable facts about John Knox's life and times.

Kevin Dale Miller

John Knox is famous for his preaching: by it he instigated a religious revolution in Scotland, and when the Protestants became dejected in the struggle, his preaching rallied them to victory. Yet of the hundreds of sermons he preached, only two were ever published.

In early 1500s Scotland, the Catholic church owned more than half the real estate and gathered an annual income of almost 18 times that of the crown.

Bishops and priests in pre-Reformation Scotland were often appointed for their political connections, and many displayed horrific morals: the Archbishop of St. Andrews, Cardinal Beaton, openly consorted with concubines and sired ten children.

Knox was once sentenced to slave labor, rowing in a French galley. Knox later spoke of the "torment. in the galleys, which brought forth sobs of my heart." During those 19 months, he contracted a kidney infection and stomach ulcers, ailments that vexed him the rest of his life.

While in exile in Geneva, Knox worked briefly with Miles Coverdale on the English translation called the Geneva Bible.

Scottish Reformers forbade the celebration of saints' days and even Christmas. They believed only the Lord's Day should be observed.

One of the most important ways the Reformation faith spread through Scotland was through "Privy Kirks," small groups that met for prayer and Bible study.

The First Book of Discipline, an outline of government for the Reformed Scottish church co-authored by Knox, proposed that every Scottish child receive elementary and high school education—an idea centuries ahead of its time.

When a Protestant leader first exhorted Knox to take up preaching, Knox was frightened and wept openly in confusion.

During the stormy year of 1559, when religious revolution swept Scotland, Knox wrote that he could only get about four hours of sleep a night. He also asked a friend to secure a horse for him to use: "For great watch is laid for my apprehension, and large money promised [to] any that shall kill me."

We don't know the details of Knox's conversion to Protestantism. On his deathbed, though, he asked his wife to read him John 18, describing it as the passage "where I first cast my anchor."

Years after his first wife died, a 50-year-old Knox married again. His bride? Seventeen-year-old Margaret Stewart, a distant relative of Mary Queen of Scots—his chief antagonist.

In his sermons, Knox typically spent half an hour calmly exegeting a biblical passage. Then as he applied the text to the Scottish situation, he would become "active and vigorous" and violently pound the pulpit. Said one note taker, "He made me so to grow [quake] and tremble, that I could not hold pen to write."

Queen Mary once pleaded with Knox to keep Protestants from taking up the sword against Catholic priests. Knox replied, "The sword of justice is God's, and if princes and rulers fail to use it, others may."

Until this century, when a statue of Knox was erected in Edinburgh, there was no memorial dedicated to Knox in Scotland. Even today the spot where he is buried is covered by a parking lot.

Attendance in the Scottish Reformed Church was made compulsory for Protestants.

A would-be assassin once fired a shot through a window where Knox usually sat with his back to the street. The bullet passed through the chair and hit a chandelier but not Knox, who on this occasion had chosen to sit in another chair.

Knox sowed the seeds of the Presbyterian system of church government. Today his spiritual progeny includes some 750,000 Presbyterians in Scotland, 3 million in the United States, and many more millions worldwide.

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John Knox and the Scottish Reformation: From the Editor - The Hard-To-Like Knox

Mark Galli, Managing Editor

The command to *love* one's neighbor does not require one to *like* one's neighbor. That subtle distinction has helped me weather many a relationship. It's also helped me get through this issue on John Knox.

I found Knox difficult to like. Knox could be arrogant, proud, stubborn, and cantankerous. He called Catholic Queen Mary I of England, to put it in modern parlance, "a freak of nature." The universally acclaimed beauty of Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* Knox described as a "mingle-mangle."

One man standing before Knox's open grave said it as diplomatically as possible: "Here lies a man who neither flattered nor feared any flesh."

Of course, tact is not a gift usually lavished on a prophet, which is the best way to understand Knox. He was a Hebrew Jeremiah set down on Scottish soil—in a relentless campaign of fiery oratory, he sought to destroy idolatry and purify national religion. In the end, his cause triumphed.

Purifying religion I like. But the man? Then again, I don't care much for prophetic types. Had I lived in their days, I would have dismissed Jeremiah as a whiner and John the Baptist as eccentric. This dislike of outspoken and decisive heralds is no doubt a serious character flaw on my part.

On the other hand, whether I happen to like this historical figure or that, well, that's a modern eccentricity. For Knox and Jeremiah and John, the issue was not whether someone was likable, but whether he or she stood on the side of truth.

I don't agree with all of Knox's assessments and actions, but ultimately Knox was on the right side. For that, for his raw courage and tenacity, and for his legacy—Scottish, American, and world-wide Presbyterianism—we honor him.

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Preacher of Revolution

John Knox provoked rulers, incited riots, and inspired a reformation in Scotland.

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John Knox was a strange and rather frightening character. He was narrow-minded and intolerant. He lacked generosity of spirit and loved to hate. But he possessed immense courage and feared no one.

In the pulpit, he was at his most powerful. He mesmerized thousands of Scots, who were prepared to lay their lives down for Protestantism at his behest. By his preaching, he molded both nobility and ordinary folk into a formidable fighting force and thus left his stamp on the Protestantism of Scotland for centuries to come.

"Base" Beginnings

The man who was to lead this great religious revolt and challenge the authority of monarchs had humble, or as Knox put it, "base" beginnings. He was born, probably in 1514, at Haddington, a small town of some 1,500 inhabitants south of Edinburgh. We do not know whether his father, William, was a merchant or a craftsman. But Knox's humble background gave him an instinctive ability to communicate effectively with ordinary people.

He was able to avail himself of a good education, and he probably mastered the rudiments of Latin at a school in Haddington. Around 1529 he entered the University of St. Andrews and went on to study theology under distinguished theologian John Major, who had both criticized Luther's theology and condemned abuses in the Catholic church.

Knox was ordained in April 1536, but that did not lead to a parish appointment because there was an excess of priests in Scotland. Since Knox had studied law, he became a notary in the neighborhood around Haddington and then a tutor to the sons of local lairds (lower-ranking nobility).

Dramatic events were unfolding in Scotland during Knox's youth. The constant sea traffic between Scotland and Europe allowed Lutheran literature to be easily smuggled into the country. The port of Dundee became an early center of Protestant activity. Church authorities became alarmed by the emergence of this "heresy," and they tried to suppress it.

In February 1528, Patrick Hamilton, an outspoken Protestant convert, was burned at the stake in St. Andrews—the first Protestant martyr in Scotland. But people began to ask why Hamilton had been executed, and when his heresies were explained, according to Knox, "Many began to call in doubt that which before they held for a certain verity."

The outlook for Scottish Protestants brightened in 1543 when the regent for the infant Mary Queen of Scots initiated a pro-English, and therefore Protestant, policy. He encouraged Bible reading and promoted preaching by reformers. He appointed Thomas Guilliame, a converted friar, and John Rough, a converted monk, as his chaplains. They engaged at once in preaching campaigns throughout central Scotland. The preaching of Guilliame had a dramatic influence on John Knox: it made a Protestant of him.

From Bodyguard to Preacher

In the mid-1540s, the authorities abandoned their Reformation policies and began threatening Protestants. Protestant preacher George Wishart nonetheless courageously proclaimed his convictions, traveling about the country. Impressed with what he heard about Wishart, Knox joined Wishart's band, who acted as a kind of bodyguard for Wishart—Knox, in fact, armed himself with a two-handed sword.

For five weeks, he followed Wishart until it became clear the church authorities would soon arrest the preacher. Although Knox and his friends wished to accompany him at his arrest, Wishart sent them home and faced his accusers alone.

Cardinal David Beaton, archbishop of St. Andrews, the religious capital of Scotland, ordered Wishart's arrest in January 1546. Wishart was tried, found guilty of heresy, strangled, and burned on March 1. For Knox, Wishart was the supreme hero—"a man of such graces as before him were never heard within this realm, yea, and are rare to be found yet in any man."

The execution of Wishart aroused fury amongst his supporters, and they quickly resolved on a terrible revenge. Two months later, a party of sixteen nobles assassinated Beaton and mutilated and insulted his body in the most obscene manner. More than revenge, it was a revolutionary response to Beaton's Catholic policy (Beaton favored a French-Scottish alliance intended to hold Protestant England at bay). The Castilians, as the leaders of the coup were called, holed up in St. Andrews Castle as a fleet of French ships lay siege to it.

Knox was not privy to the murder, but he approved of it wholeheartedly on the principle that God often allows evil men to mediate punishment. Now his own life was in jeopardy, and he moved from one laird's house to another to avoid detection. Finally, during a break in the siege, he joined the Castilians at St. Andrews Castle.

Among the Castilians was one of the most powerful politicians in Scotland, Henry Balnaves. He and preacher John Rough were impressed by Knox's abilities as they watched him teach students. They asked him to become the castle's next chaplain, but Knox refused, saying they had no authority to grant him such a call.

Rough persisted, and as he preached on the election of ministers one Sunday, he publicly called upon Knox to undertake the office of preacher! He then asked the congregation to endorse his call, which it did with acclamation. Knox was overwhelmed and reduced to tears. At first he declined, but over the next few days, he realized that a call by a congregation was as valid a call as any.

One event in particular convinced him. As Knox was debating his call, he attended a service at the parish church. The dean of the church was defending Catholicism, doing so, he claimed, on the authority of the church, the bride of Christ.

Knox could take it no longer, and from his pew, he stood up and interrupted him saying that the Roman Church was no bride of Christ but a harlot! The congregation loudly demanded that Knox justify his remark in a sermon on the following Sunday—which he did. It was the commencement of the public career of one of the most powerful preachers of the Reformation era.

From Galley to Royal Court

Knox's career, however, was suddenly interrupted. The French fleet again lay siege to St. Andrews Castle, which capitulated in July 1547. Its occupants were taken to Rouen in France. The more important prisoners were confined in neighboring castles, but the rest, which included Knox, were sent to the galleys.

Galleys were sailing ships, but if the wind dropped, they could be propelled by 25 oars with six men at each oar. The galleys sailed along the coast to Nantes, where they spent the winter. There is no direct evidence about conditions on these galleys at this time, but Knox admitted the prisoners were "miserably entreated."

Apart from the heavy physical exertion involved in rowing, the prisoners were pressured to renounce Protestantism. The prisoners indulged in passive resistance, for example, putting on their caps when Catholic crew members sang hymns to the Virgin Mary.

Meanwhile the English government was taking a lively interest in the plight of the prisoners and in February 1549, possibly at the specific request of King Edward VI, Knox was released.

Knox spent the next five years in England as an honored guest. The political and religious authorities, anxious to secure Protestantism in England, were eager to take advantage of his abilities. After serving preaching stints in Berwick and Newcastle, in the autumn of 1551, he was appointed a royal chaplain, along with five others, an appointment that involved preaching before the king.

In that capacity, he contributed to the preparation of the second *Book of Common Prayer* (1552) (BCP). Knox sternly opposed kneeling to receive Holy Communion, which was required in the first BCP. Knox insisted that a rubric should be included explaining that kneeling did not imply accepting the doctrine of the bodily presence of Christ in the elements. This came to be known as the "black rubric."

Knox was next invited to become Bishop of Rochester, and a few months later, vicar of the influential All Hallows Church, Bread Street, in London. He declined both positions (for reasons that are unclear.) Although the authorities found his intransigence trying, they still found places for him to preach.

Once again, political developments interrupted Knox's career. On July 6, 1553, King Edward VI died. The future of English Protestantism looked gloomy. His successor, Mary Tudor, began her reign giving the impression she would tolerate Protestants, but it soon became clear she meant to reinstate Catholicism as the national religion.

Her first Protestant execution, of Bible translator John Rogers, occurred in February 1555, but the withdrawal of English Protestants to Europe had begun a year before. For Knox, Mary was the "wicked English Jezebel," and he had no wish to become one of her victims. By January 1554, he was in France.

Curious Marriage

When Knox pastored at Berwick, he met Elizabeth Bowes, a woman of independent mind who studied her Bible assiduously and embraced the Protestant faith. Mrs. Bowes found in Knox a spiritual guide and confidant. Her letters to him reveal her constant need of spiritual comfort, mainly because of her doubts about her salvation.

When Knox came to know her, she was 45 years old and had borne 15 children. Of her ten daughters, the fifth was Marjory. Early in 1553, Knox made a solemn promise before witnesses to marry Marjory, but the formal marriage took place later, at a date now unknown (probably in 1555, when Knox returned briefly to Scotland). Marjory's father, Richard, did not approve of the match.

The circumstances of the marriage were curious. When Knox and Marjory returned to Geneva in 1556, her mother joined them, having left her husband behind. Richard Bowes died two years later, and Elizabeth continued to live with Knox—even after the death of her daughter Marjory in 1560.

These arrangements provided ammunition for Knox's critics. He was accused of indulging in an

incestuous relationship with both mother and daughter. But there is nothing in his letters to Mrs. Bowes to suggest any sexual attraction between them. The letters do show the tender side of the reformer. He could be patient, kind, and gentle, despite the fact he occasionally found Mrs. Bowes trying.

Quarrels over Worship

After his arrival in France in 1554, Knox made his way to Geneva, where he met John Calvin, and then to Zurich, where he met Heinrich Bullinger. Eventually, he decided to settle in Frankfurt am Main, where Knox was plunged into distressing quarrels that had lasting implications for the Church of England and the Church of Scotland.

Frankfurt was a great commercial center and a free city of the Holy Roman Empire. It enjoyed a large measure of religious tolerance—as long as the suspicions of Catholic Emperor Charles V weren't aroused. A group of exiles had been granted the use of the Church of White Ladies by Frankfurt authorities. They had asked Knox to be their pastor, and on the advice of Calvin, Knox agreed.

At once Knox was confronted with the question of what liturgy should be used. By now he had become critical of the 1552 **Book of Common Prayer** (BCP) and declined to use it. Nor was he happy about Calvin's **Genevan Order of Service**, since some members of the congregation objected to it. As a compromise, they began using a service devised by William Whittingham. Still the BCP group objected.

During the winter of 1554–55, other English exiles arrived (some of whom would later be leaders in the Elizabethan church), who also favored the BCP. A group, which included Knox, drew up a new order of service in February 1555. It was a more significant liturgy than they imagined, because after the Scottish reformers had carried the day in 1560, it became the **Book of Common Order**, the official worship book of the Church of Scotland.

Nonetheless, in Frankfurt, it was rejected by a large minority. So yet another order of service had to be prepared and was used on an experimental basis.

At a meeting in late March, a split—which embodied the differences between the future Church of England and Church of Scotland—became apparent. The minority BCP group had become the majority and proposed Knox's dismissal.

They convinced the city authorities to prohibit Knox from preaching. He obeyed, but when he entered church merely to worship, the BCP party walked out; they said they would not worship in the same building as Knox! City authorities were soon convinced to expel him. By that time, though, Knox had had enough and had left for Geneva.

Duty to Rebel

Back in Scotland, beginning in 1555, Protestants had redoubled their efforts. Protestant congregations were forming in Edinburgh, Dundee, St. Andrews, Brechin, Perth, and elsewhere. They adopted Protestant forms of worship, and some made use of the English **Book of Common Prayer**. At first these were clandestine meetings, but they soon became public again.

In December 1557, a group of nobles drew up a covenant to "set forward and establish the most blessed Word of God and his Congregation" and to renounce Catholicism and make Protestantism the official religion of the land. Their motives as a group were mixed: some sought political power and others economic gain. But many of the "Lords of the Congregation," as they were called, were sincere believers. This group began playing a leading role in the Scottish Reformation.

One of their earlier decisions was to invite Knox to return to Scotland to inspire the reforming work. (By this time, Knox had left Frankfurt and was co-pastoring an English congregation in Geneva.) At their insistence, he returned in August 1555 and spent nine months preaching extensively and successfully. His popularity so alarmed the Catholic bishops, they summoned him to Edinburgh in May 1556 to face legal proceedings.

When the summons was canceled by Regent Mary of Guise, Knox wrote her, thanking her for her clemency and asking her to grant complete toleration to Protestants. She contemptuously dismissed the letter and became even less conciliatory in her policies. Knox was forced to return to Geneva, and it was from there that he published some of his most controversial tracts.

All during this period, Knox was gradually developing his justification of revolution. On his first sojourn to Geneva in 1554, he asked Calvin whether it was permissible to resist by force a monarch who was "idolatrous," that is, who promoted Roman Catholicism. Calvin would have none of it. Knox visited all the congregations of Switzerland and put the same question to their pastors.

In his 1554 **Admonition to England**, he virulently attacked the leaders who had connived at the restoration of Catholicism under Queen Mary Tudor. Nor did he spare the queen: "Had she ... been sent to Hell before these days, then should not their iniquity and cruelty so manifestly have appeared to the world."

No wonder his critics accused him of advocating the assassination of the queen! William Tyndale had insisted that rulers were God's representatives and, "Whosoever therefore resisteth them, resisteth God," and religious leaders in England agreed with him.

But not Knox. He pondered whether a woman could be a legitimate ruler. If not, would revolution be justified? Though he failed to secure the support of men like Calvin, that did not deter him from publishing his most notorious tract, **The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women** (1558). ("Monstrous Regiment" means "unnatural government.") It was aimed directly at Catholic Mary Tudor.

It is a ruthless assertion of male domination and an unsparing attack on women based on the Bible and quotations from early church fathers. He concluded no woman could be a legitimate ruler—certainly not a woman who persecuted Protestants. She is a rebel against God.

Knox concluded that those who have accepted offices "must acknowledge that the regiment of a woman is a thing most odious in the presence of God; they must refuse to be her officers because she is a traitress and rebel against God; and finally, they must study to repress her inordinate pride and tyranny to the uttermost of their power."

That was the message to the higher classes. Knox took the final step in his **Appellations to the Nobility and Commonality of Scotland**, in which he extended to ordinary people the right, and indeed the duty, to rebel.

Publishing **The First Blast** was a monumental political mistake. Calvin severely disapproved and banned its circulation in Geneva. In a matter of weeks after its publication, Protestant Elizabeth I suddenly ascended to the English throne, and when she saw the tract, she was so appalled that her hatred of Knox never abated. Knox himself had to admit, "My first Blast hath blown from me all my friends in England." At a stroke, he had destroyed the links that had joined him to the Church of England.

Military Stand-Off

In Scotland affairs were moving toward a crisis. Knox left Geneva for the last time in January 1559 and

arrived in Scotland in May. A trial of strength was developing between Mary of Guise and the supporters of reformation, and Knox deployed his formidable authority as a preacher to increase Protestant militancy.

Within days of his arrival, Knox preached at Perth, waxing fierce and eloquent against Catholic "idolatry." When the service was over, a riot broke out. Altars were demolished, images smashed, religious houses destroyed.

The regent threatened to deploy her forces to restore order; the Lords of the Congregation militarily occupied Perth, Stirling, and St. Andrews. By the end of June, Knox and his supporters were in Edinburgh, and the inhabitants promptly elected him to be their minister. From that pulpit, Knox used his formidable preaching skills to exhort and inspire his Protestant listeners. On more than one occasion, he lifted their despondent spirits and roused them to action again.

Knox was convinced that only English intervention could save the day. His unpopularity with Queen Elizabeth precluded him from making a case to her personally, but the Lords of the Congregation were successful in drawing up the Treaty of Berwick in February 1560. By it England promised to provide military assistance to counter Mary of Guise and her French troops.

The treaty worked: on July 6, 1560, the French and the English both agreed to leave Scottish soil. Without French interference, the future of the Reformation in Scotland was assured.

Struggling Reformation

The Scottish Parliament met later that month, and Knox preached to this most distinguished congregation, at St. Giles's in Edinburgh at a great thanksgiving service. The Parliament ordered Knox and five colleagues to write a **Confession of Faith**, which was quickly adopted. On August 17, acts were passed to abolish the Mass, repudiate papal jurisdiction, and rescind laws at variance with the Reformed faith.

The **First Book of Discipline**, drawn up by Knox and close colleagues, was submitted to the General Assembly (annual national church meeting) in December 1560. The unstable condition of the country, however, made its full implementation impossible for some years. Finally, first informally and then officially in 1564, "Knox's Liturgy" from Frankfurt, now called the **Book of Common Order**, became the official worship book for Scotland.

This was only the beginning, of course. There now existed two churches in Scotland, the Roman Catholic and the Reformed. Much work remained to be done to establish efficient government in the Protestant church and to make adequate provision for its financial support. Knox continued to play an active role in all these developments, but real power rested with feuding and often murderous politicians.

From the beginning, these developments were complicated by the return of Mary Queen of Scots from France in August 1561—a devout Catholic ruling a now officially Protestant country.

Knox could make nothing of Mary, especially as her personal life moved on its tragic course. His hatred of her became more intense. Civil war played havoc with Scotland as Mary tried to suppress Protestantism. Crime and lawlessness were rife and government was near collapse.

By the middle 1560s, the hard years of fighting for reformation were taking their toll on Knox. In some respects, he became an embittered man, and his intolerance and spleen became more and more insufferable. At times, he possessed little of the milk of human kindness. It didn't help that his health was deteriorating. Still he insisted on preaching even when he had to be carried into the pulpit and his voice had become too weak to reach any but the hearers nearest to him. He preached at St. Giles's for the last

time on November 9, 1572, and died five days later.

The Scottish Reformation would continue to establish itself in fits and starts over the coming decades, but it had gotten its footing in 1560, to a great degree because of the single-minded devotion and burning sincerity of the "thundering Scot."

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The Prophet Pleads Guilty

The fiery reformer was keenly aware of his own shortcomings.

Although I never lack the presence and plain image of my own wretched infirmity, yet seeing sin so manifestly abounds in all estates, I am compelled to thunder out the threatenings of God against the obstinate rebels. In doing whereof (albeit, as God knoweth, I am no malicious nor obstinate sinner), I sometimes am wounded knowing myself to be criminal and guilty in many, yea, in all things ... that I reprehend in others. Judge not, mother, that I write these things, debasing myself otherwise than I am—no, I am worse than my pen can express.

In body you think I am no adulterer. Let so be, but the heart is infected with foul lusts, and it will lust although I lament ever so much.

Externally I commit no idolatry, but my wicked heart loveth itself and cannot be refrained from vain imaginations, yea, not from such as were the fountain of all idolatry.

I am no man-killer with my hands, but I help not my needy brother so liberally as I may and ought.

I steal not horse, money, or clothes from my neighbor, but that small portion of worldly substance I bestow not as rightly as his holy law requires.

I bear no false witness against my neighbor in judgment or otherwise before men, but I speak not the truth of God so boldly as it becomes his true messenger to do.

And thus in conclusion, there is no vice repugning to God's holy will expressed in his law, wherewith my heart is not infected.

—Letter to his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Bowes, June 1553.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 46: John Knox & the Scottish Reformation

Knox's Shocking Politics

Knox believed Christians should rebel against "idolatrous" governments. Why?

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In the sixteenth century, subjects were required to adopt the religion of their rulers. But two questions quickly arose:

What should Christians do when their "true religion" conflicted with the beliefs of the ruling authorities?

What should Christians do if civil authorities persecuted them?

Most Protestants answered by endorsing the idea of passive resistance: God, rather than human beings, must be obeyed. Romans 13, a passage often quoted in the 1500s, commands Christians to be in "subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God." Thus in some circumstances, it was admitted, individuals might refuse to obey commands contrary to God's law. But no sixteenth-century reformer believed forcible resistance was ever justified—until John Knox came along.

Knox insisted that if the circumstances were right, Christians had the **obligation** to revolt against a tyrannical monarch. Previously, it had been a sin to revolt. The Scottish reformer now said that it was a sin **not** to overthrow an idolatrous monarch.

Knox's views shocked European society. How did Knox arrive at such a radical position?

Son of the Prophets

Knox's intense hatred of Catholicism, a hatred generated by the persecution of Protestants, played no small part in forming his views. But Knox was primarily a religious reformer, and his resistance theory was a means to an end: the reforming of religion in Scotland.

Knox believed that the ruler's highest obligation was to preserve pure faith and worship. If he had found a godly ruler, a second Josiah, to establish the Reformation, no theory of resistance would have developed. But Knox found no such sovereign (with the exception of Edward VI of England). Instead, Knox spent most of his life witnessing, and sometimes running from, persecution by Catholic rulers.

Thus Knox wanted to neutralize belief in passive resistance, particularly an overdependence on Romans 13. So he turned to the Old Testament. In fact, Knox was preoccupied with issues addressed by the Old Testament: purifying national religion, holding to the covenant, and resisting authorities who promoted "idolatry" (by which Knox meant Roman Catholicism).

Knox littered his writings with allusions to Elisha, Hezekiah, Abraham, Samuel, Jehu, Moses, Jezebel, Deborah, Josiah, Isaiah, Elijah, Amos, and Jeremiah. Indeed, Knox adopted the role and rhetoric of an Old Testament prophet to 1500s Scotland.

While the entire Bible was important to Knox, his resistance theory depends heavily on concepts derived

from a literal interpretation of certain Old Testament texts concerning sin (especially idolatry), God, and the covenant.

Wicked Idolatry

Knox's notion of political resistance related to his belief in corporate resistance to sin. As Knox stated in a 1564 debate, the faithful, when in a minority, are required only to separate themselves from idolatry. When in a dominant position and reasonably unified, however, they must not simply separate from idolatry, they must also abolish it. And if exterminating idolatry meant overthrowing a Catholic sovereign, then such action became necessary.

Idolatry was the primary sin that concerned Knox. In his 1549 tract, ***A Vindication That the Mass Is Idolatry***, Knox did not define idolatry literally as substituting a false god for the true God. Rather, he said, idolatry entails not only worshipping what is not God, but also trusting in anything besides God. To honor anything in religion contrary to God's Word is to lean on something other than God. That's idolatry.

Knox applied this logic to the Catholic Mass, in which he saw many additions unsupported by Scripture: "Unto the Mass is added a wicked opinion [merely human additions]. Therefore it is abomination." Furthermore, the Mass promoted a false atonement, based on works, and he called anyone an idolater "whose heart believed remission of sins by a vain work."

To Knox, then, to be a Catholic was to be an idolater. And if the sovereign was Catholic, then the faithful were obliged to rid the country of such an idolatrous ruler.

No Statute of Limitations

Knox believed in divine immutability: God is devoid of all change, in his being, purposes, and promises. Since the law of God never changes, he must respond to sin in Scotland as he did in ancient Israel, even raising up a Jehu to slay an idolatrous ruler. Thus, Knox demanded that God's law be upheld in the Commonwealth of Scotland as in Old Testament Israel.

At first, Knox merely warned believers to separate from idolatry. Later, in ***A Godly Letter*** (1554), Knox argued that a nation, because of the covenant obligation to live by God's laws, incurred corporate guilt for tolerating evil (i.e., "idolatrous" Catholicism). Knox prophesied that if the people permitted Catholicism to remain in England, the nation would be subject to divine judgment, namely plagues. Knox cited the example of God's punishing the entire tribe of Benjamin, not because all were adulterers but because some were tolerated.

By spring 1558, increased persecution and four years of exile had pushed Knox into full-blown resistance theory. That year, he published three pamphlets that openly challenged the standard interpretation of Romans 13, held by such reformers as William Tyndale.

The First Blast of the Trumpet (1558) was directed at Catholic Mary Tudor of England and argued, as the title put it, "Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women," that is, that it was against the law of God and nature for a woman to rule a kingdom. The inferiority and subjection of women to men were accepted in all ranks of society. Paradoxically, society considered women ineligible for any public office except that of head of state. So Knox's premise—that female rule had subverted both the divine and natural order—did not in itself seem so startling.

What alarmed Europe was his conclusion: The faithful, if afflicted by a female sovereign, "ought to remove from honor and authority that monster in nature." Furthermore, if any support her, Christians ought to "execute against them the sentence of death." Further still, not to revolt against an idolatrous

ruler was "plain rebellion against God."

In *The Appellation and Letter to the Commonality*, Knox broadened these principles to include any idolatrous (i.e., Catholic) sovereign, male or female. In these works, he also called Tyndale's doctrine of Christian obedience sinful.

Most sixteenth-century theologians instructed people to obey their sovereigns not from fear of earthly punishment but from fear of God. Knox reversed this teaching. If the people obeyed unjust commandments of evil rulers, they would receive a far more terrible punishment from God than any sovereign could inflict upon them for treason. Previously the covenant obligation demanded only separation from idolatry; now the godly (nobles and people) must punish idolatry.

Necessary Violence?

To some, Knox's views on revolution appear radical and violent. It helps, though, to understand his political context.

Knox wanted to reform religion in Scotland. To him, that meant returning Christian religion to the ideal of spiritual Israel. The great obstacle to such reform was the Catholic church, established by law and promoted by the civil power.

Other sixteenth-century reforming movements had to depend on political power to protect them and to effect changes. The magisterial Reformers (like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, who believed in the God-given authority of the magistrate) found that power in the temporal state. For example, Luther had his protector prince; the English Reformation had its Edward VI.

Since no civil authority in Scotland was sympathetic to Protestantism, Knox believed the authority should be overthrown; political power should be seized and used to bring down the Roman church. Consequently, the Scottish Reformation was a revolution, and its success depended on the wielding of political power. That may seem harsh to moderns, but it made eminent sense in sixteenth-century Scotland.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 46: John Knox & the Scottish Reformation

John Knox and the Scottish Reformation: Christian History Timeline - Journeying with John Knox

Roger Mason is professor of history at St. Andrews University in Scotland. He is editor of *John Knox on Rebellion* (Cambridge, 1994).

EARLY YEARS IN SCOTLAND

1514 Probable date of birth in Haddington

1536 Graduates from University of St. Andrews and is ordained a priest

1540 Becomes a notary (minor legal official) and a tutor

1543 Converted to Protestantism

1545 Becomes associate and bodyguard to George Wishart

1546 Wishart martyred; Cardinal Beaton murdered; Protestants at St. Andrews Castle put under siege

1547 Knox flees to the Castle; preaches his first Protestant sermon; Castle falls; imprisoned as galley slave in France for 19 months

INTERLUDE IN ENGLAND

1549 Begins pastoring in Berwick, England; establishes his preaching reputation

1550 Meets Mrs. Elizabeth Bowes and her daughter Marjory

1552 Moves to London; disputes practice of kneeling at Communion; refuses to become bishop of Rochester

1553 Forced into hiding when Catholic Mary Tudor becomes queen

EXILE IN EUROPE

1554 Flees to France, then Zurich and Calvin's Geneva; pastors an English congregation in Frankfurt

1555 Dispute over the liturgy forces him to Geneva; pastors an English congregation there; returns to Scotland secretly; weds Marjory Bowes and does missionary work

1556 Condemned for heresy in Scotland; returns to Geneva with wife and mother-in-law

1558 Writes *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, advocating rebellion against ungodly rulers

LATER YEARS IN SCOTLAND

1559 Returns to Scotland; preaches sermon condemning "idolatry"; it leads to a rebellion

1560 Reformation Parliament adopts Protestant "Scots Confession"; Knox's wife, Marjory, dies

1561 Knox helps write **First Book of Discipline**; Catholic Mary Queen of Scots returns; Knox ministers at St. Giles's in Edinburgh; first interview with Mary

1564 Marries Margaret Stewart

1566 Writes much of **History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland**

1572 Dies in Edinburgh; buried at St. Giles's Cathedral

OTHER REFORMATION EVENTS

1516 Erasmus publishes Greek New Testament

1517 Luther posts **95 Theses**

1518 Zwingli comes to Zurich and begins Swiss Reformation

1525 Anabaptist movement begins; Tyndale publishes English New Testament

1529–36 England's Henry VIII gradually breaks with Rome

1530 Augsburg confession solidifies Lutheran movement

1534 Ignatius Loyola founds Jesuit Order to renew Roman Catholic Church

1536 Calvin publishes first edition of **Institutes of the Christian Religion**; Menno Simons baptized as an Anabaptist

1549 Cranmer's first **Book of Common Prayer**

1558 Elizabeth I becomes English queen and solidifies Protestantism

1562-64 Council of Trent, to clarify Catholic beliefs, concludes

1563 Foxe writes **Book of Martyrs**

1572 St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in France;

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Demanding Faith

The Scots Confession is not for the faint of heart.

Ian Hazlett is senior lecturer in ecclesiastical history at the University of Glasgow, Scotland.

When German Christians suffering under Adolph Hitler cast about for guidance as to how to act under a fascist, totalitarian regime, some of them found great help in the Scots Confession. That may surprise us because the Confession had been created by an act of the Scottish Parliament nearly 400 years earlier, in 1560, and hurriedly put together in four days by John Knox and five others.

The Confession is unpolished, a bit repetitive, uneven, often verbose, and streaked with emotion. It was the Scottish church's official theology for only 90 years, having been superseded in 1647 by the Westminster Confession.

Yet the Confession is also cordial, vigorous, and spontaneous. A crystal-clear theological core is dressed in prophetic and militant language. A number of its passages have inspired Christians in Scotland and elsewhere. Especially noteworthy are its insights on the Bible, Communion, Christian living, and the Christian's relationship with civil power.

Exegesis of Love

The Confession strongly affirms the exclusive authority of Scripture and the need to interpret it in light of the whole Bible: "If the interpretation of any theologian, church, or council conflicts with the plain Word of God written in any other passage of Scripture ... this is not the true understanding and meaning of the Holy Spirit, although councils, kingdoms, and nations have adopted it."

Furthermore, interpretation is not to be done in a mechanical or robotic fashion. It must square not merely with Christian faith and the whole Bible but also the dictates of love: "We dare not receive or allow any interpretation contrary to the chief points of our faith, to the clear sense of Scripture, or to the rule of love" (article 18).

Transported to Christ

Among Reformed confessions, the eucharistic teaching of the Scots Confession is "high" because it states that believers receive and absorb the true body of Christ as a gift.

The enabling power of this sacrament is neither the words and actions of the minister (as in Roman Catholicism) nor the recipients' faith (as with many Protestants), but the Holy Spirit:

"This union and conjunction we have with the body and blood of Christ Jesus in the right use of the sacraments is achieved by the Holy Spirit, who by true faith carries us above all things that are visible, corporal, and worldly, and offers us the body and blood of Christ Jesus as food. ... "

The sacrament mystically conveys to believers Christ in full. Real communion with Christ not only brings food for the soul, it also promises ultimate physical regeneration:

"We believe ... that the faithful, in the right use of the Lord's table, eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus so that he remains in them and they in him; they are made flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone so that just as eternal God has given life and immortality to the flesh of Christ Jesus, which by nature was corruptible and mortal, so eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Christ Jesus does the same for us. ...

Thus, contrary to some other Protestant teachings, the Eucharist is not just a memorial service: "Therefore if anyone slanders us by saying that we hold the sacraments to be nothing more than symbols, they offend us and the truth" (article 21).

Down-To-Earth Ethics

In the Confession, Christian existence is not just having faith and obeying prohibitions but also living a transformed life for one's neighbor and for society: "We confess that God has given to man his holy law. In this, not only are all works which displease and offend the divine Majesty forbidden, but also those which please him and which he promised to reward are commanded."

The Confession is unique in specifying practical Christian ethics. It urges good citizenship, honorable living, and a commitment to social justice: "These works are of two kinds. ... The first kind is: to have one God, to worship and honor him, to call on him in our troubles, to reverence his holy Name, to hear his Word and believe it, and to share in his holy sacraments.

"The second kind is: to honor father, mother, monarchs, rulers, and superior powers; to love them, support them, obey their orders providing they are not contrary to God's commandments, save the lives of the innocent, overthrow tyranny, defend the oppressed, keep our bodies clean and holy, live in soberness and temperance, deal justly with all men in word and deed, and finally to subdue any desire to harm our neighbor. ... Contrary acts are sins" (article 14).

Discreet on Rebellion

Most controversial has been the Confession's attitude toward civil power. Does it envisage resistance to oppressive government, even by force?

Those who deny it contains any resistance theory cite article 24, ***On the Civil Magistrate***: "We hold that any men who conspire to rebel or overthrow the civil powers ... are not merely enemies of humanity but rebels against God's will. ... We swear that those who resist the supreme powers, as long as they act in their own domain, resist God's ordinance."

Others, like Swiss theologian Karl Barth, maintain that Knox's views on the matter—overthrow tyrants (the real rebels and enemies of society)—are in the document discreetly. It is argued further that Knox makes such action not just permissible but mandatory. In article 13, for example, "workers of iniquity" are not just "filthy persons, idolaters, drunkards, and thieves" but also "murderers, oppressors, and cruel persecutors." And article 14 affirms the Christian duty to save innocent lives, overthrow tyranny, and defend the oppressed: "Such good works ... are done in faith and at the command of God." If this does sanction rebellion, it accords with Knox's known controversial views.

Probably the best way to understand the Confession's teaching is that the civil power is not absolute and is permanently on probation in Christian eyes. No Christian should give unqualified and absolute allegiance to any government, and Christians reserve the right of just rebellion.

No other Reformation confession ventured so far into such dangerous waters—perhaps because it was composed in dangerous times, times that demanded vigorous faith.

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John Knox and the Scottish Reformation: Christian History Map Room - Centers of Ferment

Key cities for Knox and the Scottish Reformation

In the early 1500s, Scotland was a poor, primitive country, which Europe thought barbaric—a land ending in a great field of stone and ice, where the sun shone only four hours a day in winter. One Scot said he lived in a land "almost beyond the limits of the human race." Yet Scotland's central cities, though small, played key roles in one of the sixteenth century's most far-reaching reformations.

Haddington

Home-sweet-home

The place of Knox's birth and youth, located about 15 miles from Edinburgh, had a population of 1,500—though a century earlier, it had been Scotland's largest city.

After his university education at St. Andrews and ordination to the priesthood, Knox returned here to become a notary and a tutor for children of local nobility.

Dundee

"Scottish Geneva"

So-named because it was an early center of the Reformation movement. Knox visited the city of 2,000 many times and had regular contact with Protestants there.

The only remaining part of the old city walls is a section upon which Protestant radical George Wishart once preached, during a plague in 1544.

St. Andrews

Bathed in blood

The seat of Scotland's highest church official, where Protestants Patrick Hamilton (1525) and George Wishart (1546) were martyred—and where Archbishop Beaton was murdered in revenge. The conspirators holed up in the castle, which was immediately put under siege. Knox, who joined the coup in the midst of the siege, received his call to preach here.

Perth

Impatient with Catholicism

A Protestant stronghold with some 2,000 inhabitants is about 35 miles from Edinburgh and 20 miles from Dundee. When Knox returned from his European exile in 1559, he preached an impassioned sermon here—after which the town rioted, destroying Catholic altars, images, and monasteries.

Edinburgh

Reform central

This small capital (population 15,000—London had 60,000 and Paris, 200,000) had two royal residences: the impressive hill-castle and Holyroodhouse Palace, favorite of Mary Queen of Scots, Knox's nemesis. Parliament enacted the Scottish Reformation (1560) here, and Knox pastored at St. Giles's Cathedral, where he was buried in 1572.

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The First Scandal

How church discipline was handled in Reformed Scotland.

Jasper Ridley is author of *John Knox* (Oxford, 1968), from which this article is excerpted with permission.

In his opening statement in his disputation with the Abbot of Crosraguel, Knox had proudly contrasted the moral integrity of the Protestant ministers with the flagrant vice of the priests of the old church:

"If our lives shall be compared with the lives of them that accuseth us, be it in general or be it in particular, we doubt not to be justified, both before God and man. For how many ministers this day within Scotland is my Lord Abbot ... able to convict to be adulterers, fornicators, drunkards, bloodshedders, oppressors of the poor widow, fatherless, or stranger ... ?"

But before this statement was published in the verbatim report of the disputation, the case of Paul Methven had made a mockery of Knox's words.

A Leader Falls

Methven had been elected as the minister of Jedburgh after the victory of 1560. This was an important position, because the Borders [a region bordering England] had not yet been converted, and Knox attached great importance, for political as well as religious reasons, to making the Borders Protestant. Methven, who more than any other man could be said to have started the revolution of 1559 with his passionate sermons in Dundee, seemed an eminently suitable person for the post.

But in the autumn of 1562, rumors began to circulate in Jedburgh that Methven was committing adultery with his young maidservant while his elderly wife was absent from home. When the rumors reached the General Assembly at Edinburgh during its meeting in December, the Assembly directed Knox to investigate the charge and to report to the church session of Edinburgh and to John Spottiswood, superintendent of Lothian. Knox traveled to Jedburgh with some elders of the church of Edinburgh, and on January 3, 1563, began hearing the case.

He admits, in his *History*, that he and his colleagues were very eager to find Methven not guilty, and "having a good opinion of the honesty and godliness of the man, travailed what they could (conscience not hurt) to purge him of the slander."

When the evidence of eye-witnesses was becoming so strong that it would not be ignored, the maidservant's brother suddenly arrived in Jedburgh. This man disclosed that his sister had recently had an illegitimate baby in his house, and that he knew that Methven was the father. When Methven saw the brother appear as a witness, he immediately left Jedburgh and disappeared.

Knox and the elders returned to Edinburgh to report that Methven was guilty. Spottiswood and the Edinburgh church session thereupon summoned Methven to appear to hear sentence passed against him, but he fled to England, and in his absence was deprived of his office as a minister, and excommunicated.

Integrity and Sadness

The action of Knox, in exposing the guilt of Methven, is a tribute to his integrity. He gave an honest judgment, although he must have realized the jubilation with which the Catholics and the enemies of the church would greet the verdict.

In his account of the upsurge of 1558–59, he did not try to minimize Methven's part, describing how in 1558 "did God stir up his servant Paul Methven (his later fall ought not to deface the work of God in him)." Knox used the case of Methven to contrast the determination of the Protestant church to punish sin with the way in which the Catholic church had tolerated the immorality of so many bishops and abbots, and pointed out that the adultery of David and the abnegation of Peter had not vitiated the truth of the doctrine they had previously taught.

The Stool of Repentance

In 1566 Methven returned to Scotland and asked the forgiveness of the church. He was ordered to stand outside the church door and "sit on the stool of repentance" in Edinburgh, Jedburgh, and Dundee, after which he would be released from excommunication and readmitted as a member of the congregation.

He declared that the penalty was very harsh, but it was decided that despite the sincerity of his repentance, he could not be treated more leniently because of the position he had formerly held in the church.

He stood at the church door in Edinburgh, where he aroused great compassion among the congregation, and then did the same at Jedburgh. But he could not bring himself to do it in Dundee, where he had served the cause so well in 1558–59, and again fled to England.

He became the vicar of a parish in Somerset, and later held two other benefices in the county, where he served for forty years until his death in 1606.

Death for Adultery?

Methven was not the only minister who failed to maintain the high standard of sexual morality the church enforced upon the people.

Alexander Jarden, the minister of Kilspindie, committed fornication with a virgin and afterwards married her. In view of his repentance and subsequent marriage, he was forgiven by the church session. After being suspended for a time from his office as minister by the superintendent of Fife, he was readmitted next year by the General Assembly.

Fornication was a much less serious offense than adultery. When Robert Richardson, the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, had an illegitimate child by an unmarried woman, he was forced to make public confession on the stool of repentance while Knox preached a sermon. But no further punishment was inflicted upon him.

But even with regard to adultery, the practice of the church was always less rigid than its theory. It was repeatedly demanded that the law of Scotland should be brought into conformity with the law of God by making adultery a capital offense. And Knox, in his *History*, protests against the mildness of the Act of Parliament of 1563 that imposed the death penalty for adultery only after a warning to desist from it had been given and ignored.

But in no case was the death sentence for adultery carried out in Scotland, and when Methven [had earlier written] from England to the General Assembly, he was given an official assurance that if he

returned to Scotland to submit to the punishment of the church, he would be in no danger of being proceeded against under the statute of 1563.

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Worship Before and After

How the reformers radically changed Christian worship in Scotland.

James Kirk is professor in the department of Scottish history at the University of Glasgow. He is author of *Patterns of Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation* (T.&T. Clark, 1989).

In Scotland, the reformers took a radical, root-and-branch approach toward worship. They brought changes much more radical than in other reformations. Lutherans in Germany and Anglicans in England, for example, sought to retain a great deal of the medieval liturgy. Not the Scottish reformers.

They obliterated what they saw as the clutter of nonessentials in late medieval religion: making oral confession of sins, invoking Mary and the saints, venerating relics, using images, believing in purgatory, saying masses for the dead, obtaining indulgences, and making pilgrimages to shrines.

The Latin Mass was denounced as idolatrous (it appeared to involve the worship of a wafer), and blasphemous (it detracted from Christ's unique sacrifice at Calvary). The Scottish reformers consistently called for return to, in John Knox's words, "the grave and godly face of the primitive church." As a result, the liturgy of the pre-Reformation church and the patterns of Protestant worship could scarcely have been more different.

Attending Mass

At the heart of the medieval Scottish liturgy was the Mass. Several ministers stood in attendance at the altar, amid rich ceremony, organ music and choristers, incense, and flickering candles offered to images.

Elaborate polyphonic music, which a professional choir alone could master, provided a suitably ornate setting for the solemn celebration and devotion of high Mass. In St. Machar's Cathedral in Aberdeen, the enlarged choir included twenty vicars choral, two deacons, two subdeacons, two acolytes, and a master of the songschool to train the choristers.

A high sung Mass could be found daily in cathedrals, wealthy collegiate churches, and abbeys. In a great cathedral church like St. Machar's in Aberdeen, prayers were said throughout the day. At the canonical hours of matins and lauds (before dawn), prime, terce, sext, none, vespers, and compline, clergy offered prayer, penitence, and praise on behalf of the people.

An alternative to the elaborate and lengthy high Mass was low Mass. The bulk of parish churches up and down the land were simple, often impoverished and unadorned, rural churches. There was neither choir nor music, and simpler services were conducted by a single priest and a clerk who made the responses.

In either high or low form, prevailing practice excluded the people: they were passive spectators and listeners in a rite the clergy said in Latin. Even their view of the priest's actions at the altar was obscured because the celebrant turned eastward, his back to the congregation, until the elevation of the consecrated elements of bread and wine, the miraculous and awesome moment when the congregation might adore what they believed was the body of Christ present on the altar. Frequently, the priest was the only one to receive Communion (except on Easter, the main occasion for lay Communion).

At such masses, the people's attendance could not be taken for granted: the provincial council of

Catholic clergy meeting at Edinburgh in 1552 lamented how “very few indeed out of the most populous parishes deign to be present at the sacrifice of holy Mass on the Sundays and the other double festivals appointed by the church.”

At the same time, the belief that the sacrifice offered at each Mass removed venial sin (just as the sacrifice at Calvary did away with mortal sin) encouraged the proliferation of private masses. In Edinburgh, St. Giles’s Church had more than forty altars dedicated to Mary and the saints before which priests, silently or in low voices, said masses privately for particular souls, that they might escape torment after death. The more masses purchased, the greater the perceived benefits for the souls of the living and the dead. This emphasis transformed the corporate action of the Eucharist into individual priestly offerings.

Cleaning House

Protestant activists in Scotland embarked on a concerted campaign of iconoclasm—smashing and removing religious images, which they associated with idolatry—and of purging churches of altars, statues, crucifixes, carvings, bells, pictures, reliquaries, vestments, organs, and chalices—all the symbols they identified with Rome. They hoped to purify worship by eliminating all accretions considered to be false or detracting from the honor that God alone deserved.

For John Knox, one Mass was more fearful than ten thousand armed enemies. In 1559, his inflammatory sermon at Perth against idolatry and the “abomination of the Mass” ended in disorder and the purging of St. John’s Kirk. At the height of the struggle, abbeys and friaries were ransacked, churches despoiled, and their contents removed (though care was taken to preserve the buildings of parish churches for Protestant worship).

As the reformed congregations met for worship, out went Latin services, altars and unleavened wafers, the cult of Mary and the saints, holy days and feast days, prayers for the dead, belief in purgatory, crucifixes, elaborate ritual, eucharistic vestments, organs, and choristers, the plainsong of great churches and the silence of poor churches.

In came a simple service based on preaching, Bible study, prayers, and metrical psalms sung to common tunes. The people were no longer passive spectators but were actively encouraged to sing God’s praise as part of their worship. Seated at tables, they received both wine and bread at Communion.

This rebellion of the pious in worship was dramatic and far-reaching. By discarding the medieval liturgy, with all its visual and clerical emphases, the reformers reordered worship and focused attention on the actions of the whole congregation of believers.

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Sunday in Reformed Scotland

Protestant services were lean and (to some) mean.

The Editors

Worship in post-1560 Scotland was radically simplified. About a half-hour before Sunday worship, a bell rang warning the town of the beginning of worship (why people needed to be warned will be seen in a minute).

With a second bell, the reader's service began: the lay leader read the Scriptures and some prayers and led the congregation in singing metrical psalms—biblical psalms set to contemporary tunes. This part of the service lasted an hour and closed with the ringing of a third bell. The minister then entered the pulpit. A psalm was sung between prayers and then came the sermon, followed by more prayers, the Creed, and the benediction.

This was the first of two Sunday services. The second service was usually held in the afternoon and was largely devoted to teaching from a catechism—that of Calvin or Heidelberg or a catechism for children. Eventually, the service became known simply as "The Catechisms" and was required to be held in every church.

The Scottish reformers laid great emphasis upon faithful attendance at both of these Sunday services. At Aberdeen, for example, the town council insisted that all city officials, their families, and their servants attend worship. Beginning in 1598, fines were imposed on those who missed services, husbands being responsible for their wives, and masters for their servants.

Other towns used other methods to honor the day. At Glasgow, a piper was threatened with excommunication if he played between sunrise and sunset on Sunday. At St. Andrews, five men were imprisoned for three hours for missing the sermon.

Another problem was members' rushing out of church before the benediction. At some churches, therefore, a fine was imposed for leaving early; at others, guards were simply posted at the doors. Today, such measures seem harsh. But to the reformers, the work was an all-or-nothing proposition. Nothing less than the reform of every Scot was their goal.

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John Knox and the Scottish Reformation: A Gallery of Martyrs and Architects

The Scottish Reformation needed both—here are five who helped it succeed.

J. Stephen Lang is a writer and editor living in Richmond, Virginia. He is co-author of *Dates with Destiny* (Revell, 1990).

Patrick Hamilton (1504?-1528)

First Protestant martyr

Scotland's first Protestant martyr was a member of the mighty Hamilton family. While some Hamilton men grew rich from their powerful positions in the church, Patrick did something different: he began to take his faith seriously.

While studying at Scotland's St. Andrews University, he became attracted to the views of Martin Luther. He wrote a book that was condemned as heretical and for a time he took refuge in Germany. He quickly returned to Scotland and began preaching the Protestant faith.

In 1528 the powerful Archbishop of St. Andrews summoned Hamilton, saying he wished to have a debate. However, it was a ruse, and before Hamilton's influential friends could muster any support, a church court hurriedly found him guilty of heresy. (While heresy trials ordinarily took weeks, Hamilton's was rushed through in a mere twelve hours.)

In contrast to the trial, the punishment was long. It took six hours for Hamilton to die by burning at the stake. A witness of the execution noted that the martyr "never gave one sign of impatience or anger, nor ever called to heaven for vengeance upon his persecutors."

Knox, who did not know Hamilton, claimed that the execution led many throughout Scotland to begin questioning the beliefs and practices of Catholicism. Or as one witness put it, "The smoke of Mr. Patrick Hamilton has infected as many as it did blow upon."

George Wishart(c.1513–1546)

His death ignited reform

When Knox met Wishart in 1545, he was deeply impressed by the tall, handsome, well-mannered young preacher who had the curious habit of washing himself in a bathtub every night.

Wishart, who had been born into a refined family with aristocratic connections, was the spokesman for Scotland's growing and rugged Protestant faction. Gentle and peace-loving, he worked hard to restrain the sometimes violent lairds (nobles) who supported him.

The formidable Cardinal David Beaton, Archbishop of St. Andrews, executed five Protestants in 1544 and tried twice to have Wishart murdered. The Protestant lairds feared for Wishart's safety and encouraged him to move from place to place to avoid capture. Knox, armed with a two-edged sword, was part of the bodyguard that traveled with Wishart.

Only in Scotland could a band of fifty armed Protestants ("heretics") have wandered about, entering

churches and preaching without government interference. Instead of the usual Latin Mass, worshipers heard fiery, hour-long sermons in their own tongue. Wishart denounced ceremonies and prayers to the saints, and advocated a married clergy.

Another shocking feature of Wishart's services was congregational singing. His followers helped popularize ***The Good and Godly Ballads***, a collection of songs that promoted the Protestant cause.

Wishart frequently predicted that he would be captured and burned. In 1546, believing his arrest imminent, he bade his followers farewell, saying, "One is sufficient for a sacrifice." Knox reluctantly left him, and Wishart peacefully surrendered to authorities. He was condemned as a heretic, strangled, and burned by order of Cardinal Beaton.

A few days later, his death was avenged with the savage murder of Beaton by Protestant sympathizers—and the Scottish Reformation began its political phase. Still it would take another fifteen years before Protestants would see any significant victory.

Andrew Melville
(1545–1622)
Architect of the new church

If Knox had a successor as the spiritual leader of Scotland's Protestants, it was Melville. Well-educated in Scotland and France, Melville came under the influence of reformer Theodore Beza in Geneva. He returned to Scotland, pursued a distinguished academic career, and changed the Scottish church.

Melville was strongly presbyterian and at one point turned down the offer to become Archbishop of St. Andrews, the most prestigious church office in Scotland. Going further than did Knox, he rejected the episcopal system of church government altogether. He believed that ministers and elders should be elected by the members of the church, not appointed by bishops, let alone a king!

In 1582 he became moderator of the Scottish church's General Assembly. He played a key role in its ratification of the ***Second Book of Discipline***, often called the "Magna Carta of Presbyterianism" because it was the first document to lay out the key tenets of presbyterian government.

His staunch defense of presbyterianism angered King James VI (James I of England), who sought to impose the episcopal system on Scotland.

An audience with James in 1606 led to Melville's four-year imprisonment in the Tower of London. After his release, Melville spent the rest of his days in exile in France as a professor of biblical theology.

But Melville and his followers ultimately prevailed; Scotland never accepted the episcopal system. In fact, in the reign of James's son, Charles I (1625–1649), the resistance of the Scots to episcopalianism precipitated the bloody civil war that culminated in Charles's execution and permanently secured the place of presbyterianism in Scotland.

James Stewart
(c.1531–1570)
Protestant in high places

Though an illegitimate son of King James V (and thus half-brother of the notorious Mary Queen of Scots), he was a Stewart. That combined with his stellar character would make him an influential figure in Scottish politics, especially during the Reformation.

By the time he was 19, he was a member of the Privy Council, essentially the queen regent's executive committee, which ran the country's affairs. He was instrumental both in the 1558 marriage of his half-sister Mary to the French Dauphin (heir to the French throne) and in Mary's return to Scotland as queen in 1561.

During the same time, Stewart was won over to Protestantism and became a member of the Lords of the Congregation, nobles who came together to bring about religious and political revolution. Though his conversion annoyed the devoutly Catholic Mary, he became her chief adviser when she returned to Scotland.

In that position, Stewart used his power to maintain and extend the influence of Protestantism while not alienating the queen. His patience and tact irritated Knox, who thought him a traitor to the cause. But in general, Stewart maintained the respect of both Protestants and Catholics. He was, as one historian put it, "a Puritan with natural charm and diplomacy."

In 1562, he gained the earldom of Moray (so that today he is often referred to as such, or simply as "Moray"), but he found himself eclipsed when Mary wedded the vain Lord Darnley, another Roman Catholic. Moray, seeing that Protestant gains might easily be reversed, attempted to revolt. But Mary, dressed in armor, joined her husband and drove Stewart out of Scotland.

A series of political blunders forced Mary to abdicate in 1567. The throne now belonged to infant James VI, and Stewart was appointed regent ruling briefly in his stead. After Mary's tumultuous reign, Stewart determined to set Scotland on a course of peace and unity. He strengthened the Protestant church, restrained warring nobles, and gave protection to the common people. Stewart is known in Scottish history as the "Good Regent."

Still it was a violent age, and Stewart died a violent death, shot by a member of the rival Hamilton family.

John Calvin (1509–1564) *Left his imprint on Scotland*

One secular historian described Knox as "Calvin with a sword." Indeed, John Calvin, the great theologian and leader of the Reformation in Switzerland, gave Knox his theology. But in one significant respect, Knox outpaced his mentor.

Calvin was born in France and was trained as a lawyer; he had a gradual but solid conversion to Protestant teaching. He became a Protestant leader in Paris, but after an explosion of anti-Protestantism, he traveled through Europe to avoid arrest.

He finally settled in Geneva, where his Scripture-centered theology soon became the basis for the city's life. There he tirelessly preached, wrote, and acted as moral overseer of the city.

Calvin and Knox first met in 1554. Knox, like other Protestants in England, had taken refuge in Switzerland during the reign of Catholic Mary Tudor. Calvin described Knox as a "brother ... laboring energetically for the faith." Knox, for his part, was impressed with Calvin's Geneva, calling it "the most perfect school of Christ that was ever on earth since the days of the apostles."

For a time, Knox pastored the English congregation in Geneva, where he soaked in the orderly Protestant theology of Calvin's famous *Institutes* (first published in 1536 and enlarged throughout Calvin's lifetime). Thus Calvin, via Knox, gave Scotland the rudiments of its presbyterian system of church government, its Bible-centered love of learning, its concern for strict morality, and its unceremonial, sermon-centered worship.

When it came to the relationship of the Christian to the state, however, Knox was more radical than his mentor. Where Calvin merely permitted disobedience to an ungodly ruler or immoral law, Knox championed armed rebellion—a type of Calvinism that made religious revolution in Scotland possible.

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Knox's Curious Attitude Toward Women

Did Knox despise or admire the fairer sex? It depends.

Robert Healey is emeritus professor of history at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.

Over his lifetime, John Knox had personal contact with four female rulers, and his relationship with each was a stormy one.

The first was Mary Tudor of England (Mary I, 1553–1558, also called “Bloody Mary”). Knox was ministering in England when this Catholic monarch ascended the throne; he anticipated the coming persecution of Protestants and fled to Europe. Seeing the imprisonments and martyrdoms inflicted by Mary Tudor, Knox sent instructions back to his English brethren on how to pray for her and her government:

“Delay not thy vengeance, O Lord! but let death devour them in haste; let the earth swallow them up; and let them go down quickly into hell. For there is no hope of their amendment ... consume them in thine anger, and let them never bring their wicked counsels to effect.”

Pray this way sincerely, Knox assured his flock in England, and God will send a Jehu to slay Jezebel and her followers!

Knox originally showed more hope for Mary of Guise, queen regent governing Scotland (1554–1560). At first, Mary of Guise tolerated Protestants, and Protestants increased their numbers. When Knox’s 1555 preaching tour of Scotland was so successful that a frightened Catholic hierarchy charged him with heresy, Mary of Guise suppressed his trial.

Hoping she might support the Reformation, Knox wrote a letter urging her to reform the church. If she obeyed God’s will, God would “crown your battle with double benediction and reward you with wisdom, riches, glory, honor, and long life in this your [temporal rule], and with life everlasting.”

The letter failed. She called it a joke. Worse, after Knox had left Scotland, the bishops revived his trial and burned him in effigy. He never forgot that Mary of Guise had ridiculed him and let him be condemned to death. Henceforth he considered her murderously sly and crafty.

In a 1558 letter, he writes of the “hot displeasure of God” against her for persecuting the righteous and ignoring the call to reform. Her regent’s crown, he later added, was as fitting as “a saddle upon the back of an unruly cow.”

Then he published his infamous *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment* [unnatural government] *of Women*, in which he called for rebellion against England’s Mary Tudor and vehemently protested all female rulers. In a caustic, bitter tone, he argued that women must never govern because God created women as servants and subjects to men. God allowed women to rule only as retribution for national sins.

The First Blast was badly timed. England’s Mary Tudor died, succeeded by Protestant Elizabeth I (1558–1603). Her right to the throne was immediately questioned by her citizens, and she needed support, something Knox publicly refused to do, even though she promoted Protestantism.

Nevertheless the Scottish Reformation needed Elizabeth's help and got it when it counted. But Knox had no sympathy for emerging Anglicanism, and he denounced Elizabeth's use of cross and candles: she was "neither good Protestant nor yet resolute Papist."

Face-Off with the Queen

After Regent Mary of Guise died, her daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, left France to assume her rightful role as monarch of Scotland. Knox dreaded her arrival, fearing the Catholic queen might overturn the Reformation, which had just triumphed. Mary promised to respect Scotland's new religion, but she insisted on her right to worship privately as a Catholic. To Knox, attending Mass flouted the law and defied God's Word.

When Knox protested along these lines from the pulpit, he was summoned before the queen in the first of five famous meetings between them. In this first encounter, Mary said subjects should adhere to their monarch's religion. Knox denied her right to dictate her faith to the people. He left the meeting convinced that Mary had "a proud mind, a crafty wit, and an indurate heart against God and his truth." She was obstinately "proceeding from evil to worse."

In his second interview with Mary, Knox learned that she would never attend Protestant services. After the third, he observed the queen advancing a scheme to marry the Spanish crown prince. Knox used the pulpit to warn against her marriage to the Catholic prince—that would be the beginning of persecution of Protestants, he believed.

This led to a stormy fourth interview in which Knox was chastised for interfering with her private life. He wrote, "Howling, besides womanly weeping, stayed her speech," and her tears were "in greater abundance than the matter required."

The fifth encounter took place during Knox's trial for treason. The queen accused Knox of summoning her subjects to meet without her permission. But Mary's own interruptions upset the trial and enabled others to defend Knox's right as pastor to gather his congregation freely. He was acquitted.

During these interviews, Knox never demeaned Mary as a woman, and he treated her as he would have treated any king. But he could not conceal his contempt for her. Once when Mary interrupted his argument, he rebuked her, "I began, Madam, to reason with the Secretary, whom I take to be a far better dialectician than your Grace is."

"Extraordinary Exemplar"

Despite his problems with queens, Knox liked women, enjoyed their company, and ministered to them diligently. More than half his surviving letters addressed their spiritual concerns and questions.

When he was a pastor in England, Knox met Elizabeth and Marjory Bowes, mother and daughter, and soon won Marjory's hand in marriage. After Mary Tudor's accession to the English Crown, the two women fled to Scotland. They reunited with Knox during his 1555 preaching tour and lived with him all during the Reformation struggle.

Marjory was level-headed and charming, and she gave Knox two sons as well as valuable service as copyist and secretary. Writing of himself in the third person, Knox noted her passing in 1560, saying, "He was in no small heaviness of heart by reason of the late death of his dear bedfellow, Marjory Bowes." Elizabeth Bowes continued to care for Knox's sons and home until he married again.

Before and after his marriage to Marjory, Knox had a close relationship with Mrs. Bowes. The former Catholic studied Scripture avidly and agonized over questions of biblical interpretation, her sinfulness, her election, and temptations to attend Mass. Thirty-one of Knox's letters preserve her questions and his answers.

On the other hand, she inspired Knox by her perseverance and startled him with comments that gave him insights into his own spiritual problems.

Knox gave Mrs. Bowes sole credit for persuading him to begin his 1555 preaching tour of Scotland: "I praise God in you and for you, whom he made the instrument to draw me from the den of my own ease ... to contemplate and behold the fervent thirst of our brethren night and day sobbing and groaning for the bread of life." After her death, he praised Elizabeth Bowes as "an extraordinary exemplar of the Christian life."

At age 50, Knox married again, this time to 17-year-old Margaret Stewart, a distant relation of Mary Queen of Scots. Margaret gave Knox three daughters and read Scripture to him on his deathbed. He named her and their daughters executors of his estate. She preserved much of his correspondence that has survived.

Knox's Most Respected Partner

Perhaps the woman Knox respected most as a partner in the Reformation work was Anne Locke, a learned, talented wife of a London merchant.

Knox's early letters to her give advice to pass on to Protestants suffering under Mary Tudor; he urged trust in God and avoidance of the Mass. She came to Geneva at Knox's urging, returning to England only after Queen Elizabeth's accession (1558).

Knox's later letters contain practical advice for her as a leader and organizer of his supporters outside Scotland. He sent her the **Scots Confession of Faith** to study, asked her to raise money for Scotland's struggle, authorized her to open and read his letters, and asked her to send him the latest theological books.

In addition, Mrs. Locke published her own translations of Calvin's sermons and works by other European Protestant writers. Her service was truly professional, yet she agreed with Knox concerning women and authority. It is a view that no doubt sums up Knox's:

"Everyone in his calling," she wrote, "is bound to do somewhat to the furtherance of the holy building, but because great things by reason of my sex I may not do, and that which I may I ought to do, I have according to my duty brought my poor basket of stones to the strengthening of the walls of that Jerusalem whereof (by grace) we are all both citizens and members."

With such women Knox could easily work. But he had no patience with women who tried to govern men because, as Knox read Scripture, she was doing "great things by reason of her sex she ought not to do."

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The Delight of a Woman's Company

I have always delighted in your company, and when labors would permit, you know I have not spared hours to talk and commune with you. ... Now absent, and so absent that by bodily presence neither of us can receive comfort of the other, I call to mind how that oftentimes when with dolorous [sorrowful] hearts we have begun our talking, God hath sent great comfort unto both. ... The exposition of your troubles, and acknowledging of your infirmity were ... unto me a very mirror and glass wherein I beheld myself so rightly painted forth.

—John Knox in a letter to Elizabeth Bowes (1553)

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The Folly of Women's Leadership

For who can deny but it repugneth to nature that the blind shall be appointed to lead and conduct such as do see; that the weak, the sick, and impotent persons shall nourish and keep the whole and strong; and finally, that the foolish, mad, and frenetic shall govern the discreet and give counsel to such as be sober of mind? And such be all women compared unto man in bearing of authority. For their sight in civil regiment [government] is but blindness, their strength weakness, their counsel foolishness, and judgment frenzy.

—*John Knox in The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (1558)*

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Life Shall Devour Death

Scotland's great Reformation preacher comforts a troubled congregation.

John Knox

In August 1565, Knox preached a sermon in front of the Queen's husband and implied so many criticisms of the royal couple, he was forbidden to preach for a time. The sermon, however, also contained comforting words for Protestants, whose newly won freedom was threatened by the Catholic monarchs. Some condensed excerpts from John Knox's sermon:

I see honor and glory to succeed this temporal shame; I see permanent joy to come after trouble, order to spring out of this terrible confusion. And finally I see that life shall devour death, so that death shall be destroyed, and so thy servants shall have life. This is the victory of faith, when [in] the midst of death, through the light of God's Word, the afflicted see life.

Easy it is in time of prosperity to say and to think that God is our God, and that we are his people. But when he has given us over into the hands of our enemies, and turned, as it were, his back unto us, then still to reclaim him to be our God, and to have this assurance that we are his people, proceeds wholly from the Holy Spirit of God, as it is the greatest victory of faith, which overcomes the world—for increase whereof we ought continually to pray.

So soon as any great temptation apprehends us, then we begin to doubt if ever we believed God's promises—if God will fulfill them to us if we abide in his favor, if he regards and looks upon the violence and injury that is done unto us—and a multitude of such cogitations, which before lurked quietly in our corrupted hearts, [now] burst violently forth when we are oppressed with any desperate calamity.

Against which this is the remedy: once to apprehend and still to retain God to be our God, and firmly to believe that we are his people whom he loves and will defend, not only in affliction but even in the midst of death itself.

The judgments of our God never shall be so vehement upon the face of the earth but that there shall be some secret habitation prepared in the sanctuary of God for some of his chosen, and that God prepared a time that they may glorify him again before the face of the world, which once despised them.

And this ought to be unto us no small comfort in these appearing dangers, namely, that we are surely persuaded that how vehement soever the tempest shall be, it yet shall pass over, and some of us shall be preserved to glorify the name of our God.

Let the faithful not be discouraged, although they be appointed as sheep to the slaughter-house. For he, for whose sake they suffer, shall not forget to avenge their cause. I am not ignorant that flesh and blood will think that kind of support too late; for we had rather be preserved still alive, than have our blood avenged after our death.

But seeing that death is common to all, and that this temporal life is nothing but misery, and that death fully joins us with our God and gives unto us the possession of our inheritance, why should we think it strange to leave this world and go to our Head and sovereign Captain, Jesus Christ?

But be of good courage, O little and despised flock of Christ Jesus! For he that seeth your grief hath power to revenge it. He will not suffer one tear of yours to fall, but it shall be kept and reserved in his bottle till the fullness thereof be poured down from heaven upon those that caused you to weep and mourn.

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John Knox and the Scottish Reformation: Christian History Interview - Prophet Without Honor?

Why many are tempted to disown Knox, and why we shouldn't.

a conversation with David F. Wright

Woman hater. Fanatic. Ruthless revolutionary. Such charges have been made against John Knox. What is his legacy, both negative and positive? What can Christians today learn from his life and teachings? We put these questions to David F. Wright, former dean of the faculty of divinity at the University of Edinburgh and a longtime editorial adviser for Christian History

How do people today view John Knox?

Knox has a bad press in Scotland nowadays. He's become a bogey figure blamed for various ills. He's thought of as a misogynist, a woman hater. Knox is also seen as an insolent, arrogant person given to harshness and even cruelty. And whenever someone discusses the development of music or theater, Knox (and Calvinism in general) gets blamed for any tendency in Scotland to want to censor or restrict artistic freedom.

How true are these charges?

There is a bit of substance in all of them, but the modern picture is greatly exaggerated and reflects little awareness of Knox and his work.

For example, people remember his notorious ***The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women***. However, the title is often misunderstood, but ***regiment*** simply means "rule," and ***monstrous*** means "not in accord with nature." Knox is objecting to women as monarchs, not damning the whole lot. In other writings, you see him acting in an extremely tender and affectionate way toward women. Even in the exchanges between him and Mary Queen of Scots, he's defiant because he believes he's standing on principle, but he remains remarkably respectful.

One shouldn't forget, also, that Knox produced visionary ideals for Scotland. ***The First Book of Discipline*** is a kind of manifesto for a Christian commonwealth; it is far-seeing about the need for universal education for children, about universities, and about relief for the poor.

What did Knox give the religious reformation in Scotland? Would it have happened without him?

I suppose there would have been reformation of some kind, just as there was in most other European nations. And Knox didn't work alone.

But Knox was the most important preacher and leader of reform by a long way. Clearly, he must have been a major drafter of ***The Scots Confession*** and ***The First Book of Discipline***. He's terribly important also because he spearheaded the rejection of the papacy without (as happened in England) leaving the church subject to the monarch. He drastically purified the church—a much more thorough reformation than the one England was experiencing at the same time.

Were there efforts at reform within the Catholic church?

The pre-Reformation Catholic church in Scotland was at a low ebb spiritually. It didn't have high levels of piety, learning, or theological scholarship.

Still, in the 1540s, councils of the old church, spearheaded by a fine archbishop, John Hamilton, produced commendable reform proposals, but they remained paper reforms. Hamilton even sponsored a catechism that spoke strongly about justification by faith. But there simply wasn't enough spiritual vigor to carry through the changes and make the Protestant movement unnecessary.

How would you respond to people who say that Knox purified worship to the point that it lost much of its beauty?

In *The Book of Common Order* or “Knox’s Liturgy,” as it’s sometimes called, the prayers become long and wordy. The prayers become like sermons, as do the exhortations in the Communion service. I don’t see Knox at his best in that context. But the concentration on Scripture and preaching was very important.

Why was Knox more of a “hard-liner” in reforming worship? Why did he, for instance, forbid the celebration of Christmas?

I think it’s fair to say that Knox is too obsessed with the idea that the Mass is idolatry. Knox operates by the rule that in worship, one should do only what is explicitly laid down in Scripture; it is not sufficient that something not contradict Scripture. For example, since in the Scripture there’s no trace of pipe organs or manmade hymns (distinct from God-given psalms), Knox did away with them, and organs did not come back into the Scottish church until the nineteenth century.

In addition, since it’s not obvious from the New Testament that the early church observed Christmas and Easter and Trinity Sunday, these special days were cut out of the Scottish church calendar. The development of Christmas as a major Christian festival in Scotland is a remarkably recent re-emergence. There are still one or two smaller Presbyterian churches that make more of New Year than they do of Christmas.

Was Knox basically a Scottish John Calvin?

There is great agreement between them theologically, but Knox doesn’t have the degree of sophistication, depth, and subtlety Calvin had. We have hardly any biblical exposition from Knox. We don’t have a great corpus of theological works. His writings are quite limited compared with Calvin’s enormous output. If you compare them, the best you could say was that theologically Knox was a mini-Calvin.

In some respects, though, Knox was bolder than Calvin. He went farther than Calvin in advocating resistance to unjust rulers. And he wrote an impressive history of the Reformation; Calvin never wrote history.

Actually, it’s a little unfair to compare the two. Calvin worked mostly in one city. Knox had to work on a national canvas, which is clearly more difficult.

How much, then, do the tens of millions of Presbyterians worldwide owe to John Knox?

If by *presbyterianism*, you mean elders working together in a hierarchy of courts of the church—not much. That emerges clearly in *The Second Book of Discipline* (1578) and the work of Andrew Melville, who leads the reformed cause after Knox’s death (1572). Many scholars see Melville as the real architect of presbyterianism.

Still, the building blocks and general vision of presbyterianism are in place under Knox. He rejected the papacy and distrusted having a monarch rule the church. He swept away those alternatives and led a quest for government of the church by its own officers.

Outside of the Presbyterians, who has been most influenced by Knox’s life and teachings?

The Reformed churches generally would have some regard for Knox as the most prominent leader of the reformation in Scotland. That Reformation, through the export of presbyterianism, had an impact on various parts of the world including, of course, North America. It has been said, with some justification, that the American Revolution is a Presbyterian revolution—many of its leaders were Presbyterian, having imbibed the fierce Scottish sense of independence.

Consequently, Knox comes up for discussion in the context of the right of Christians to resist rulers. He is often mentioned in histories of political thought, and wherever Christians find themselves under oppressive rule (as did the German Christians under Hitler), his views on rebellion are given a fresh look.

He also gets discussed a bit in relation to the Scots language. It’s interesting that the Scottish Reformation never produced a vernacular, Scots-language version of the Bible. The English versions were used. Knox, partly because he had spent a number of years in England, is often viewed as someone who played a significant role in Anglicizing the Scots tongue.

How strong is the Scottish Presbyterian church today?

The Church of Scotland (the largest by far of the Presbyterian churches in the country) is the national church. We don’t normally talk

about it as the “established” church, but it is the national church in terms of national recognition and national protection from the Crown—without any interference whatsoever. It has commonly been said that the general assembly of the Church of Scotland, which meets every year for a week in Edinburgh, is the nearest thing we’ve got to a Scottish parliament.

Yet the Church of Scotland has been losing members at a steady and serious rate for forty years. There’s not much sign we’ll be able to stem that decline. Most congregations are ineffective in winning young people. So we are becoming a worryingly old church, and some of the financial consequences of this are coming home to roost.

But there are also some signs of hope—a return to the ministry of the Word in a systematic way and a greater commitment to prayer.

Among Christians today, Knox is relatively unknown. Why?

I suppose it has to do with his reputation as a woman-hater and advocate of violence—in many respects, he’s a difficult person with whom to have sympathy. And so, though we enjoy his legacy, we’re not much interested in him. That’s true especially in Europe and America. Ironically, one country where there’s more appreciation for Knox is Korea! Korean Presbyterians come here to Scotland in considerable numbers on a kind of pilgrimage.

One problem with Knox’s being ignored is that we are in danger of forgetting the good he did, which just reinforces a distorted image of him. For example, *The Scots Confession* of 1560 has by and large had a good press in the modern Church of Scotland; it’s often admired as being a warm document—yet Knox doesn’t get much credit for playing a key role in producing it.

Knox had obvious flaws. What have you found to admire in him?

Even if he was more strident than I would care to be in carrying out his reformed convictions, nevertheless I think his stand against the Mass as it was held at the time—not what it has become since—was an entirely proper and necessary protest. He had, in my view, a positive view of the Lord’s Supper, which has always been important to Scottish Presbyterians.

His courage as a prophet is really admirable. Knox couldn’t take the stand he did out of consideration of his own pocket or status. I admire the sheer courage of his stand.

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John Knox and the Scottish Reformation: Recommended Resources

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The Scottish Reformation

- Nigel Cameron, David Wright, David Lachman, and Donald Meek, editors, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (InterVarsity, 1993). A remarkably rich and useful source, covering all of Scottish church history and theology.
- Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation: Church and Society in Sixteenth Century Scotland* (St. Martin's, 1982). One of the best studies of the social background of the Scottish Reformation.
- Gordon Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge, 1960, 1972). For many years the standard. Though now largely superseded, it still contains great value. The author had a mastery of contemporary documents.
- James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation Kirk* (T.&T. Clark, 1989). A meticulous, magisterial study of the background and context of the Reformation, with full references to contemporary sources.
- Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland 1470–1625* (London, 1981; reprinted Edinburgh 1991). A lively, short account that sets the Reformation in the context of politics and the larger society.

Knox's Life and Thought

- Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox* (Christian University, 1980). Looks at Knox's views on a variety of matters, showing him to be one of the most progressive of reformers.
- Richard G. Kyle, *The Mind of John Knox* (Coronado, 1984). Probably the definitive study of Knox's thought.
- Steward Lamont, *The Swordbearer: John Knox and the European Reformation* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1991). A provocative and arresting popular study that raises many questions about the man (and the way he is swallowed up by his legend).
- Eustace Percy, *John Knox* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1937, 1964). Though dated, many still reckon it as the best popular biography of Knox—very readable.
- W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (Baker, 1974). Knox's life as seen against the backdrop of the era's politics.
- Jasper Ridley, *John Knox* (Oxford, 1968). A long, massively learned, and thorough study.
- Henry Sefton, *John Knox* (Edinburgh, 1993). An extremely useful volume of selections with an introduction and short biography. Certainly the best place to begin.

Knox's Writings

- W. Croft Dickinson, editor, *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, 2 volumes (Philosophical Library, 1950). Knox's major work and a few other key documents.
- C.J. Guthrie, editor, *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland Written by John Knox* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1898, 1982). A 350-page condensation of Knox's major work.
- David Laing, editor, *The Works of John Knox*, 6 volumes (Edinburgh, 1846–64). All of Knox's writings and letters.
- Roger Mason, editor, *John Knox on Rebellion* (Cambridge, 1994). Knox's writings that show forth

his political views, including ***First Blast of the Trumpet***.

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John Knox and the Scottish Reformation: History in the Making - It Seemed So Innocent and Good

Many Christians unknowingly helped build the first atomic bomb.

Richard Pierard is professor of history at Indiana State University. He is co-author of the church history overview, *Two Kingdoms: The Church and Culture through the Ages* (Moody, 1993).

With this article, Christian History begins a new feature that shows how the Christian faith has affected, and been affected by, recent events.

This year many people are remembering, and debating, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki 50 years ago. In the following piece, historian Richard Pierard takes a personal look at the beginning of the atomic era and Christians' involvement in it.

In early 1944, I was a few months shy of 10 years old when my father took a defense job at the Hanford Engineer Works (HEW) in Washington State. This was part of something known as the Manhattan Engineer District, an enterprise of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Having never ventured much more than 250 miles from Chicago, I could not conceive such a distance. The journey in an aging car that towed a tiny house trailer seemed like a pioneer odyssey. The wartime conditions imposed a maximum 35 miles per hour speed limit and gasoline rationing; our poor quality tires and frequent breakdowns added to the adventure.

Eventually we reached our destination, an arid, bleak, windswept place in the Columbia River Valley of eastern Washington. The foliage was sagebrush and dry range grass, the wildlife was jackrabbits and coyotes, and sandstorms were a regular feature. After being ordered to turn over cameras, binoculars, and two-way radios, we passed through a guarded fence and drove several miles until we arrived at Hanford, a sprawling construction camp.

From there nearly 50,000 people went out daily to labor at various sites in the surrounding region, where they built mysterious factories with meaningless names and no clear purpose. The workers were instructed simply to follow the blueprints, do what they were told, ask no questions, and discuss their jobs with nobody.

When autumn set in, the plant was completed and put into operation. Those who continued working on the project (like my father) were relocated in Richland, a government town that had been under construction since mid-1943. It lay at the edge of the 600-square mile reservation that had been sealed off from the outside world.

Shrouded in Secrecy

The 13,000 residents of Richland hailed from all around the United States, and they quickly formed a unique community of active, outgoing, generous, neighborly, and optimistic people. The populace was well-educated and relatively young; kinship ties were virtually nonexistent; birthrates were high; a premium was placed on family life, and voluntary societies flourished.

Single employees lived in apartment-style dormitories, and married couples in look-alike houses located

on streets named after army engineers. All the amenities of life were available—a hospital, stores, banks, filling stations, cinemas, sports and recreation facilities.

We even had army-style churches, one for the Catholics and one for the Protestants. In the American spirit of pluralism, other communions who wished to hold services were permitted to rent space in schoolhouses.

For the most part, Christian faith and unquestioned patriotism went hand-in-hand to church on Sunday and to work on Monday. No one, not even the church, could foresee any moral problems or human tragedy on the horizon.

People traveled by bus to their jobs in the “areas”—three reactor and two separation complexes, which were from 35 to 50 miles from Richland. Naturally, they were forbidden to talk about what they were doing. They only knew they were helping to win the war. In fact, they were manufacturing plutonium, the primary component of nuclear weapons.

Everything was shrouded in secrecy. The plants had code names, and workers were not allowed to keep diaries or private notes. Hanford Works even had its own legal system so that information would not get out in open court proceedings. Press coverage was tightly regulated, and censors sought to prevent the publication of all news about the place. Only around two dozen people were authorized to know what was being made in the mysterious buildings that lay along the Columbia River and in the desert. However, my father, who was an accountant and office manager, told me that he had figured out what it was.

Winning the War

Then the veil of secrecy was lifted—at least partially—with the announcement of the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. I still remember the rejoicing that hot summer evening over the revelation that our plant was making the secret weapon that might end the war. After the second bomb was released over Nagasaki three days later, I remember trying to calculate how many bombs it would take to reduce the Japanese islands to utter nothingness.

Suddenly, the little “atom town” was the object of worldwide attention, and pride in the atomic bomb became Richland’s hallmark. The headline of the August 14 *The Villager*, the community’s weekly newspaper, screamed, Peace! Our Bomb Clinched It! Japs Surrender. The editor, N. Paul Nissen, expressed his joy that “Hanford’s own Atomic Bomb had been dropped” on the enemy and now the war was over.

A reporter solicited comments from various citizens. All believed that Hanford would continue to produce atomic materials. One friend of my father said, “Drop a bomb on the Emperor and let Richland get on with its work.” Another resident declared, “The only way to control the atomic bomb, and with it the peace in the world, is to continue making it and have enough on hand so that no one else in the world will want to fight us.”

The details of plutonium manufacturing at the Hanford Works remained shrouded in secrecy for years. Employees were required to have high-level security clearances, intensive monitoring of radiation exposure was a daily fact of life, and FBI agents frequently inquired about the loyalty and questionable habits of one’s neighbors.

“Nuke ‘em”

After the war, though, other parts of the country began having doubts about nuclear weapons, Richland citizens remained enthusiastic about their work. In 1947 it touted itself as “The Atom-Bustin’ Village of

the West” and the following year renamed its annual community festival “Atomic Frontier Days.”

Richland’s Columbia High School changed the name of its sports teams from the “Beavers” to the “Bombers.” When I was a student there in the late forties and early fifties, our cheerleaders wore a bomb symbol on their sweaters, and we did dive-bomber cheers.

As late as 1972, the students informally adopted a new school logo: a mushroom cloud. Although only the football players adopted it at first, the cloud symbol (sometimes with the phrase Nuke ‘em) quickly spread throughout the school. It adorned notebooks, bumper stickers, tee-shirts, jackets, team uniforms, and even the tile floor in the foyer of the school gymnasium.

Such was the environment I grew up in. We gloried in the atomic bomb, and I worked for construction companies that were building new atomic plants on the Hanford site. One church, now called the Central United Protestant Church, adopted as its motto, “Where the atom is split, the churches unite.” The church to which I belonged believed fervently in American nationalism and Cold War anticommunism and never questioned our city’s main industry. All that was to change in the 1980s.

Stunning Revelations

Popular illusions suffered a crushing blow when the Department of Energy in 1986 began declassifying documents having to do with radiation leaks. It was discovered that the Hanford area contained the largest collection of nuclear waste in the entire Western world.

The public was stunned by such revelations as Operation Green Run: a 1949 radiological warfare experiment in which vast quantities of radioactive iodine (I-131) were released; one monitoring station in Kennewick reported an I-131 level almost 1,000 times more than the tolerable limit.

Other problems documented included the poisoning of fish in the Columbia River, contamination of drinking water both in Hanford and communities downstream, leaking storage tanks that contained highly radioactive liquids, and an abnormal incidence of thyroid cancer in areas downwind.

One writer vividly describes the pain: “In this region, known for its patriotism and support of government programs, the news just plain hurt.... Other areas of the Northwest began to treat the neighborhood surrounding Hanford as a pariah. A mantle of collective historical guilt was laid over [the area], as if residents were somehow to blame for the situation they had just discovered.

“In the ‘atomic city’ of Richland, many people instinctively defended their homes and their heritage. Some people denied the documents could be accurate. Perhaps a majority were bitter that the achievements of the Hanford complex as the workhorse of the nation’s defense effort now were being devalued.”

Accelerating a process already begun, the aging reactors were shut down one by one. However, the amount of waste at the Hanford site was so gigantic that the federal and state governments in 1989 agreed to a 30-year cleanup program that would require the investment of billions of dollars.

Lesser-Known Victims

A key event in my own life was a journey to Hiroshima I took in April 1956. I was serving with the U.S. Army in Japan, and I was curious to see the city where the first bomb had fallen. The ruins were still evident; a monument to the dead was located at Ground Zero, and a recently constructed museum featured a display of the bombing. I was utterly devastated.

This year we are debating the dilemmas and tragedies that the atomic bomb has created in Japan. We might also remember what happened to the people of Hanford and Richland, especially the many Christians. Their faith, hard work, and loyalty helped them build the first bombs. But for their unquestioning faith they have paid an awful price.

As a young Christian, though, I remember it all seemed so innocent and good.

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