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# EXPOSITOR

A PUBLICATION OF  
ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER  
*No. 19 - 2017*

THE  
SCOTTISH  
REFORMATION

**THE PULPIT**  
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# JOHN KNOX

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# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JOHN KNOX

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

I have long felt a deep affinity for the Scottish Reformation. Several years ago, when I first began reading about John Knox and his fiery passion to reach Scotland with the gospel, this history-altering movement resonated within me. The passionate preaching of Knox and those Scottish Reformers who followed him has long found a place in my heart.



This love affair with the Scottish Reformers intensified when John MacArthur first took me to Edinburgh. He and I were led by a local guide on a walking tour through the streets of this extraordinary city. As we briskly walked, our local historian pointed out epic buildings and statues that represented pivotal events and key figures in Reformation history. There seemed to be no end to the legacy that this place had passed down to the church.

We walked into St. Giles Cathedral on the Royal Mile and saw where John Knox stood in the pulpit and proclaimed the Word. The ground beneath him shook under the sway of his trumpet blast. We went to the Martyr's Stone and saw where the lives of the Scottish Covenanters were taken.

We went into Magdalene Chapel and saw where the bodies were prepared for burial. We walked to Greyfriars and witnessed where these heroic men and women were buried for their uncompromising stance for the gospel. They boldly confessed that the King of England was not the head of the church, but that Jesus Christ is its sole and supreme Head.

The strong stand that these Scottish Reformers took for the gospel of Jesus Christ left an indelible mark within me. Something about their uncompromising convictions unto death stirred me deeply. I determined that I wanted to be like them.

Then, after further study, I discovered that the last time John Knox ever entered the pulpit at St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, was in 1572. On this momentous occasion, it was that he might lay hands upon his chosen successor. His name was James Lawson.

My name is Steven James Lawson, and my father and one of my sons is named James Lawson. As you can imagine, the connection that I felt with Knox and these Reformers was strengthened all the more. The deep feelings that I have for those who ignited the flames of the Scottish Reformation have only spread within me over the years.

Even as I write these words, I am preparing to lead a OnePassion Tour to Edinburgh and St. Andrews, where I shall share the story of the Scottish Reformation with those who will accompany me. How could they experience this Protestant movement and not be stirred? My prayer is that, in like manner, this issue on Knox and other bold Scots will have a significant impact upon your life as well.

Though these are difficult days for the church in Scotland, it was much the same in the days when John Knox returned to his native land in 1559. May God do again in the church around the world what he did long ago in Scotland. May there be more expositors in this hour who, like Knox of old, will blow the gospel trumpet loud and clear for all to hear. ♦



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The Conference between Mary, Queen of Scots and John Knox at Holyrood Palace, 1561  
Robert Inerarity Herdman (1829–1888)

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**EXPOSITOR**



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# John Knox: Father of the Scottish Reformation

Hidden below street level on the grounds of the University of Geneva stands a monument that pays lasting tribute to the Protestant Reformation. Known as the *Monument internationale de la Réformation* or the Reformation Wall, this imposing memorial of statues and bas-reliefs rises thirty feet high and stretches 325 feet long. Built in 1909 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Calvin's birth and the 350th anniversary of the establishment of the University of Geneva, which Calvin founded in 1559, it stands for all time as a stark reminder of the history-altering movement that galvanized this ancient city over five hundred years ago.

Emerging prominently from the chiseled granite, standing fifteen feet tall, are the four leading figures of the Genevan Reformation. On the left is the fiery evangelist William Farel (1489–1565), who first lit the match igniting Reformation flames in Geneva. Standing by Farel is the pastor-scholar John Calvin (1509–1564), who stoked the flames of Reformed truth through his biblical exposition and extensive writing. To the right of Calvin is his successor, Theodore Beza (1519–1605), the first principal of the Geneva Academy. And on the far right is the fourth leader—an indomitable figure, dressed in Genevan robe, standing resolutely, Bible in hand, steely-eyed, and sober in countenance. This was the exiled expositor who would car-



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ry the Reformation torch back to emblazon his native land of Scotland with the preaching of the gospel. His name was John Knox.

## **Champion of the Truth**

Reaching down through the last five centuries and extending to this present hour, the influence of Knox remains firmly implanted in the life of the church. This prolific individual was influential in the formation of a Reformed church: in its government, polity, education, and doctrinal creed. The one area, though, in which this remarkable Reformer proved to be most impactful was in leading the church in a return to biblical preaching. Every history-altering reformation begins at this exact point, with preaching, and for John Knox, it was no different. Despite his many contributions, Knox was first and foremost a preacher. To understand the force of his life requires grasping the impact of his pulpit ministry.

As “the greatest of Scotsmen” and “the Reformer of his country,” Knox ushered in the Scottish Reformation principally through his pulpit power. By the exposition of Scripture, he established the church in Scotland as a fortress for Reformed truth. The revival of true religion in his native homeland found its champion in this emboldened proclaimer of the truth.

The leading expositor of the twentieth century, Martyn Lloyd-Jones of Westminster Chapel, London, recognized that God had sovereignly chosen Knox and uniquely shaped him into a rugged individual for this difficult hour of Scottish history:

He was a man for his age; a man for his times. Special men are needed for special times; and God always produces such men. A mild man would have been useless in the Scotland of the sixteenth century, and in many other parts of this country. A strong man was needed, a stern man, a courageous man; and such a man was John Knox. . . . In those times an heroic rugged character was needed; and God produced the man.

### Chiefly a Preacher

From the start of his ministry to the end, Knox was chiefly a preacher of the Word. When first called into the ministry, he began preaching to the congregations in St. Andrews Castle. After he was captured by the French and released eighteen months later, he resumed his preaching in England, where he pastored and became a powerful expositor of the Scripture. With a growing reputation, he became a Royal Chaplain for King Edward VI and served as an itinerate preacher, proclaiming the Word throughout England. When Mary I became Queen of England in 1533, Knox was forced to flee for his life to the European continent, where he preached to English-speaking exiles in Frankfurt and Geneva. After Mary I died in 1558, Knox returned to Scotland, where his

forceful preaching was used by God to usher in the Scottish Reformation.

In his native land, Knox was a minister at the St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh, where he preached in the most prominent church in Scotland. In this pulpit, Knox proclaimed God's Word twice on the Lord's Day and during the week. In addition, he traveled throughout the country, and pulpits were opened to him. Whether in St. Giles or traveling, whether in a church house or private house, Knox was constantly preaching wherever he was. Knox refused to assume many other ministerial responsibilities so that he might remain focused upon his primary calling, the proclamation of the Word of God.

It would be hard to overestimate the influence of Knox on the pulpit in Scotland. Almost single-handedly, Knox raised up a new generation of preachers through his powerful expositions. In 1560, when Knox returned to his homeland, there were only twelve ministers in the whole of Scotland. By the year 1567, only seven years later, there were 250 ordained ministers. In addition, there were 150 exhorters who were lay preachers, and 450 lay leaders who ministered the Scriptures. The bold proclamations of Knox inspired other men to do likewise. This valiant Reformer virtually filled Scotland with a new love for the preaching of God's Word.

What were the distinctives of the pulpit ministry of this fiery Scot? What caused his pulpit ministry to transcend the centuries? Some of the most significant distinctives of the preaching of John Knox are as follows:



MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS [1542-1587]



# The strength of Knox's preaching lay in his conviction that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. When standing in the pulpit, Knox remained intently focused upon feeding the Word to his hungry flock.

## Divine Calling

First, Knox believed he had been personally called by God to preach the Word. The pulpit was not a domain he had entered into lightly as a mere vocation. Rather, he was deeply convinced this was a sacred duty to which he had been sovereignly appointed by God. So solemnly did Knox enter the office of preacher that when he was first urged to take up the work of preaching by the leaders in the church, he burst into tears and refused.

Due to his recognized ability in expounding the Word, Knox was publicly charged in a worship service to answer the divine call upon his life. An overwhelmed Knox melted into tears and withdrew himself to his room in St. Andrews Castle. After much soul-searching, he finally stepped forward to present himself for installation as pastor of this Protestant congregation.

Knox later affirmed that St. Andrews was “that place where God first in public opened my mouth to His glory.” For the remainder of his life, Knox asserted, “I must be blowing my Master’s trumpet.” Few preachers in the history of the church have ever sounded forth the Word of God with such intense fervor and bold conviction as did he. He stated he would not run where God had not called him. Reflecting upon this divine summons, Knox stated:

Considering myself called of my God to instruct the ignorant, comfort the sorrowful, confirm the weak, and rebuke the proud; by tongue and lively voice in these corrupt days, rather than to compose books for the age to come, seeing that so much is written, and yet so little well observed, I decree to contain myself within the bounds of that vocation whereunto I found myself especially called.

Knox said, “It has pleased God, of his superabundant grace, to make me and appoint me, most wretched of many thousands, a witness, minister, and preacher.” This assurance anchored him, and every syllable he uttered, in his calling by God. He prayed, “O Lord eternal, move and govern my tongue to speak the verity.” Later, when Knox was nominated to be the Bishop of Rochester, he declined this highly esteemed position of overseeing many churches because he chose to remain “simply a preacher.”

## Biblical Convictions

Second, the strength of Knox’s preaching lay in his conviction that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. He possessed an unshakable confidence in the divine inspiration and infallible character of the sacred Scripture. He wrote that what is recorded in the Bible is the “infallible and eternal truth of God.” When standing in the pulpit, Knox remained intently focused upon feeding the Word to his hungry flock. He stated, “I did distribute the bread of life, as of Christ Jesus I received it. . . . My honor was that Christ Jesus should reign, my glory that the light of His truth should shine in you.” He believed he must preach the Word exactly as it is recorded in Scripture.

Knox was convinced that when the Bible speaks, God speaks. This was his unwavering conviction:

For as the Word of God is the beginning of life, spiritual, without which all flesh is dead in God’s presence, and the lantern to our feet, without the brightness whereof all the posterity of Adam doth walk in darkness, and as it is the foundation of faith, without which no man understands the good will of God, so it

is also the only organ and instrument which God uses to strengthen the weak, to comfort the afflicted, to reduce to mercy by repentance such as have sinned, and finally to preserve and keep the very life of the soul in all assaults and temptations, and therefore if that you desire your knowledge to be increased, your faith to be confirmed, your consciences to be quieted and comforted, and finally your soul to be preserved in life, let your exercise be frequent in the law of your God.

Consequently, when Knox preached the Bible, he was persuaded God was speaking through him to the extent that he rightly handled the Word. A naturally introverted man, all such timidity vanished when he mounted the pulpit and opened God's Word. He knew he was a mere messenger of the divine message. The power was in the Word, not in himself.

#### Holy Boldness

Third, Knox was profoundly aware that, as a preacher, he must give an account of himself to God, who had called him into the ministry. This soul-sobering reality instilled within him an unshakable boldness before men and women. Knox feared God so much that he did not fear any human. He preached so strongly because he revered God so deeply. The closer Knox drew to God, the bolder his preaching grew. Consequently, when he stood in the pulpit, he roared like a lion. Knox confided:


Whatever influenced me to utter whatever the Lord put into my mouth so boldly, and without respect of persons, was a reverential fear of my God, who called and of his grace appointed me to be *a steward of divine mysteries*, and a belief that he will demand an account of the manner in which I have discharged *the trust committed to me*, when I shall stand at last before his tribunal. (emphasis added)

Knox testified that he was gripped with “a certain reverential fear of my God, who called me.” He stated, “I knew I must render an account when I shall appear before His tribunal.” Knox preached with this dominant reality, that he would stand before God on the last day, as a steward before his master, and answer for the message entrusted to him. He said, “I have never once feared the devil, but I tremble every time I enter the pulpit.” Such

a final accountability before God captured his soul and made him bold in the pulpit before men.

#### Diligent Study

Fourth, Knox was gifted with a brilliant mind, which he devoted to the careful study of Scripture for his sermons. In his sermon preparation and personal study of Scripture, Knox poured over numerous commentaries and other books. He was convinced that biblical preaching demands



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the best mental powers. He therefore absorbed the important works written by the leading theological writers of ancient and modern times. In one of his letters, Knox described himself as “sitting at my books” and contemplating Matthew's Gospel by the help of “some most godly expositions, and among the rest Chrysostom.” Most of all, Knox was thoroughly absorbed in the biblical text to be preached. The depth of Knox's study of the Scripture made him so powerful in the pulpit. William Taylor records:

It was his habit to speak from a few notes which were made on the margin of his Bible, and which remained the sole written memoranda of his discourse . . . Yet [his sermons] were as carefully premeditated as if they had been written . . . He prepared with care . . . and remembered with accuracy. He did not speak extemporaneously, in the sense of never having thought upon his subject until he was required to speak, but he had fixed beforehand his line of thought, and there is reason to believe also, in many cases, the very words in which he had determined to express himself. Yet, though he premeditated very carefully, he was able also to introduce what was given to him at the moment.



JOHN KNOX PREACHING

In his preparation for the pulpit, Knox even drew upon his knowledge of the biblical languages to discover the meaning of the text. John Broadus points out:

Knox is a notable example of entering upon the ministry late in life. Educated for the Catholic priesthood, but early deposed because of Protestant heresy, he meant to spend his time as professor and public lecturer, but was pressed into the ministry at the age of forty-two . . . . About this time he learned Greek, and at the age of forty-nine we find him at Geneva, busily studying Hebrew.

So capable was Knox in handling the Scripture in the original languages that he worked with the small team of Bible translators in Geneva who produced a new English version known as the *Geneva Bible*. Knox assisted with this translation project and helped write the marginal notes that provided theological commentary on the biblical text. Completed in 1560, this Bible would be the first English version published in Scotland (1579) and would have an enormous impact upon the Scottish Reformation. This translation was the Bible of choice for the Reformers and Puritans over the next century and the one the Pilgrims would take to the New World in 1620.

### Sequential Exposition

Fifth, Knox favored preaching through entire books of the

Bible or through extended sections of them. He expounded the biblical text verse by verse, finding clarity by “an appeal from a difficult passage to a plainer, clearer passage in Scripture itself.” When he first expounded Scripture in St. Andrews Castle, he taught his listeners through the Gospel of John. He later expounded entire books of the Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah, Daniel, and Haggai. As the lead author of *The First Book of Discipline*, Knox wrote that his preaching must be according to “the plain reading or interpretation of the Scripture.” This literal approach necessitated that his exposition be carried out with considerable care given to discovering the authorial intent, historical context, and specific theme of the biblical book. Knox stated:

By frequent reading, this gross ignorance, which in this cursed Papistry has overflowed all, may partly be removed. We think it most expedient that the Scripture be read in order, that is, that some one book of the Old or New Testament be begun and orderly read to the end. And the same we judge of preaching where the minister for the most part remains in one place. Skipping and deviating from place to place in Scripture, be it in reading or be it in preaching, we judge not so profitable to edify the Church, as the continual following of one text.

In other words, Knox believed the preacher should start with

a text of Scripture and stay with it. He should open up its meaning and show its practical relevance for the listener. To accomplish this, he would normally spend the first half of an hour introducing and explaining the text before spending the second half-hour thundering the application and exhorting his hearers.

### Reformed Theology

Sixth, Knox was firmly committed in his preaching to the biblical doctrine expounded by the European and English Reformers. This God-centered theology was the result of his penetrating study of the Bible. It was further developed by his close associations with such Reformed leaders as George Wishart (c. 1513-1546), John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and others. From the very beginning of his pulpit ministry, Knox made the doctrine of justification by faith alone prominent in his sermons. He preached that the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is given freely to undeserving sinners by grace alone through faith alone, in Christ alone. Only the blood of Christ, he declared, can take away sins. This is apart from the works of the law. Any reliance upon good works to aid the finished work of Christ renders one accursed.

It has been said that *sole fide* was the axe that Knox laid to the root of the Roman Church to demolish it. In his *Epistle to His Brethren in Scotland*, Knox sums up his commitment to the material principle of the Reformation in the following words:

If therefore the doctrine and persuasion of any man tend to the exaltation and advancement of any righteousness or perfection, except of Christ Jesus alone; if any affirm that Christian justice which is available before God by any other perfection than remission of our sins, which we have by only faith in Christ's blood; or if any promise such perfection in this life that unfeignedly we need not say, "Remit to us our offences, for we are unprofitable servants"; and finally, if any persuade that our merits, good works or obedience be any cause either of our justification, or yet of our election, let him be accursed.

A staunch defender of salvation by grace alone, Knox denounced Rome's teaching on purchasing indulgences, holy pilgrimages, forced fasts, and clerical celibacy. He declared these vain practices to be blasphemous. He even pronounced the pope to be an antichrist. Describing the spiritual climate of the day, church historian William Blaikie explains, "In those days, every man's preaching was colored by the attitude he held to the Church of Rome." As a result,

those under Knox's preaching likewise renounced the false gospel of Roman Catholicism and pledged their allegiance to the biblical truth of the Reformation.

### Divine Sovereignty

Seventh, Knox strongly asserted in his preaching ministry the absolute sovereignty of God over all things. He taught that this divine authority extends over all matters, over creation, providence, salvation, and judgment. Knox was firmly persuaded that if the church is to be strong in any hour of its existence, this truth of God's unrivaled supremacy must be proclaimed in the pulpit for all to hear. In the Preface to his theological treatise entitled *Predestination*, Knox maintained that this foundational truth of divine sovereignty is necessary to produce true humility, transcendent worship, and strong faith in Christian living.

This Scottish firebrand was enflamed with a holy passion for the absolute sovereignty of God. Knox biographer John J. Murray notes it was Knox's transcendent view of God that emboldened him as a spiritual force. Murray writes: "At the heart of [Knox's] Christian experience was a vision of God on His throne. Like Calvin, his great mentor, he lived *coram Deo*, before the face of God." This theocentric worldview was first ignited within Knox in Scotland by George Wishart. This towering view of God was further fanned into full blaze within Knox's soul as he studied the Word of God. He wrote:

The doctrine of God's eternal predestination is so necessary to the church of God that without the same can faith neither be truly taught, neither surely established; man can never be brought to true humility and knowledge of himself, neither yet can he be ravished in admiration of God's eternal goodness, and so moved to praise him.

On another occasion, Knox wrote of the uncontested reign of God over the works of His hands:

For as our God in his own nature is immutable, so remaineth his love toward his elect always unchangeable (*Eph. 1*); for as in Christ he hath chosen his church before the beginning of all ages, so by him will he maintain and preserve the same unto the end.

Believing God to be in control of every event and movement in human history, Knox was instilled with an undaunted courage. He stood fearless before queens, kings, noblemen, and commoners alike with the truth of Holy Scripture because he believed that God is the Ruler over all earthly rulers.

# The Lord Himself, in all the matchless glory of His divine person and saving work, must be magnified through the preacher's exposition.

## Exalting Christ

Eighth, Knox believed that the highest aim of preaching concerns the person and work of Jesus Christ. Before his listeners, he claimed that he “labored with all [his] power to gain them to Christ.” The Lord Himself, in all the matchless glory of His divine person and saving work, must be magnified through the preacher’s exposition. This riveting focus upon Christ was primary for Knox. He wrote:

There is no other name by which men can be saved but that of Jesus, and that all reliance on the merits of others is vain and delusive; that the Savior having by His own sacrifice sanctified and reconciled to God those who should inherit the promised kingdom. All other sacrifices which men pretend to offer for sin are blasphemous. All men ought to hate sin, which is so odious before God that no sacrifice but the death of His Son could satisfy for it. They ought to magnify their heavenly Father, who did not spare Him who is the substance of His glory, but gave Him up to suffer the ignominious death of the cross for us. Those who have been washed from their former sins are bound to lead a new life, fighting against the lusts of the flesh, and studying to glorify God by good works.

To the concluding days of ministry, Knox maintained his riveted focus in preaching upon Jesus Christ. Even during the last weeks of his life, Knox faithfully expounded the crucifixion of Christ from Matthew 27. This was “a theme,” says biographer Thomas M’Crie, “with which he had often expressed a wish to close his ministry.” Ten days before his death, Knox was too weak to sit in a chair. Nevertheless, he insisted on getting out of bed and going to church to preach on the resurrection of Christ. Though he was physically unable to preach, he still longed to proclaim his Savior and Lord to the end of his life.

## Fiery Passion

Ninth, Knox was known for the fiery zeal of his biblical preaching. His blazing passion for God was remarkably ignited when he stood in the pulpit before an open Bible. Many preachers are orthodox in what they say, but speak with a dead orthodoxy. However, Knox’s spiritual power was clearly evidenced in the dynamic manner with which he delivered his doctrinally sound messages. Knox was the leading example of the observation made by John Broadus, “The Scotch preachers . . . have as a rule been more fiery and impassioned than the English.” Thomas Thompson notes that Knox’s great characteristics in preaching were “his zeal in the pursuit of truth and boldness in proclaiming it.” None who heard Knox could dispute this claim.

In describing this passionate preaching of Knox, William Taylor states:

[The pulpit] was the [magnifying] glass which focused all his powers into a point and quickened them into an intensity which kindled everything it touched. It brightened his intellect, enlivened his imagination, clarified his judgment, inflamed his courage, and gave fiery energy to his utterances . . . There, over and above the fervid animation which he had in such large measure, and the glow of enthusiasm which fills the soul of the orator as he addresses an audience, he had the feeling that he was called of God to be faithful, and that lifted him entirely out of himself. He spoke because he could not but speak, and his words went *in* to men; like these modern missiles which burst within the wounds which they have made, so his words *exploded within the hearts* of those who received them and set them on fire with convictions that flamed forth in conduct. It was apparently impossible for anyone to listen to him without being moved either to antagonism or to agreement, or—for he could be tender also—to tears.

M’Crie describes Knox’s zeal in preaching this way:

His ministerial functions were discharged with the greatest . . . fervor. No . . . infirmity prevented him from appearing in the pulpit. Preaching was the employment in which he delighted, and for which he was qualified by an extensive acquaintance with the Scriptures and by the happy art of applying them in the most striking manner to the existing circumstances of the Church and of his hearers. His powers of alarming the conscience and arousing the passions have been frequently celebrated.

The following is a description of the great Reformer’s preaching in St. Andrews in 1571, one year before his death. It was recorded by James Melville (1556-1614), who at the time was a fifteen-year-old student at the University of St. Andrews. Despite his youth, Melville was enthralled by Knox’s energetic delivery. He writes:

Of all the benefits that year [1571] was the coming of that most notable prophet and apostle of our nation, Mr. John Knox, to St. Andrews . . . I heard him teach there the prophecy of Daniel, that summer and the winter following. I had my pen and my little book and took away such things as I could comprehend. In the opening up of his text he was moderate the space of half an hour; but when he entered to application, he made me so to grew [shudder] and tremble, that I could not hold a pen to write. He was very weak. I saw him, every day of his doctrine, go slowly and warily, with a fur . . . about his neck, a staff in one hand, and good, godly Richard Bannatyne, his servant, holding up the other, from the abbey to the parish kirk and, by the same Richard and another servant, lifted up to the pulpit, where he behoved to lean at his first entry, but before he had done with his sermon, he was so active and vigorous, that he was like to ding [hit] the pulpit in blads [pieces], and fly out of it.

Here we learn that it was not merely what Knox said in his preaching that made him so effective, but also *how* he

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because he was much  
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said it. He was both sound in his doctrine and dynamic in his delivery.

#### **Intercessory Prayer**

Tenth, Knox was a preacher who regularly petitioned God in prayer to bless his proclamation of the Word. He knew the success of his preaching ministry lay, ultimately, not with him, but with God. He spoke to God about men before he spoke to men about God. Knox was much *for* God because he was much *with* Him. He stood strong in the pulpit because he had kneeled low in prayer. The depth of his prayers determined the impact of his preaching ministry.

So powerful was Knox’s prayer life that Charles H. Spurgeon once remarked, “When John Knox went upstairs to plead [with God] for Scotland, it was the greatest event in Scottish history.” Mary Queen of Scots acknowledged the same when she said, “I am more afraid of [Knox’s] prayers than an army of ten thousand men.” After Mary Tudor assumed the throne of England and began her reign of terror upon Protestants, Knox wrote *A Treatise on Prayer* (1553), in which he exhorted the suffering believers in England to pray. It was a charge to the Reformed church to intercede for the advancement of the gospel under the new, malicious monarch. Knox wrote:

Where constant prayer is, there the petition is granted . . . The precept or commandment to pray is universal, frequently inculcated and repeated in God's Scriptures. "Ask, and it shall be given to you" (Matt 7:7). "Call upon me in the day of trouble" (Ps 50:15). "Watch and pray, that ye fall not into temptation" (Matt 26:41). "I command that ye pray ever without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). "Make deprecations incessantly, and give thanks in all things" (1 Tim 2:1-2, 8) . . . He who, when necessity constrains, desires not support and help of God, does provoke his wrath no less than such as make false gods or openly deny God.

In the course of his entire preaching ministry, Knox prepared only one sermon for publication. The text was Isaiah 26:13-21, and in its conclusion he wrote these words as he best remembered how he had expressed them in the pulpit, "Let us now humble ourselves in the presence of our God, and from the bottom of our hearts let us deserve Him to assist us with the power of His Holy Spirit." It was this kind of fervent intercession that undergirded the faithful expositions of Knox in the pulpit.

### The Voice of One Man

The dynamic preaching of Knox is best summed up in what Thomas Randolph, the English ambassador to Scotland, conveyed to William Cecil, the Secretary of State in England: "I assure you, the voice of one man [Knox] is able in one hour to put more life in us than five hundred trumpets continually blustering in our ears." Such was the powerful effect of Knox's preaching upon those who heard him. His

one voice was stronger and more compelling than an entire army of men. His trumpet-like call rallied the church in Scotland and England, as well as parts of continental Europe, to the high cause of the Reformation. His proclamation of the Scripture was used by God to instill grace into the hearts of the countless multitudes who heard him.

How could Knox be so bold and courageous? The answer lies not in himself, but with the Holy Spirit who indwelt him. It was God in him who fueled the fire within his soul. In recognition of his dependence upon the Holy Spirit, Knox said, "God gave His Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance." Knox was a simple man who was possessed by an all-powerful God. At his burial, the Earl of Mortou uttered words long remembered, "Here lies one who never feared or flattered any flesh." This reality surely marked the preaching of this Scottish Reformer.

Let us learn from the example of this great figure from yesteryear. Here was a man who prioritized the preaching of the Word and carried it with an unusual force of conviction in the truth. His zeal in the truth was virtually unmatched in his day. His allegiance to the divine revelation in the Scripture marked him as a man of exceptional influence for the kingdom of God. We must become such as this rugged individual was so long ago.

May God bring a new Reformation to the church in this hour. If such a powerful movement is to come, it will be ushered in through the Spirit-empowered preaching of the Word in pulpits around the world. This will require strong men like John Knox to herald the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. May a new generation of expositors declare the truth of Scripture as did this emboldened figure so long ago. ♦



JOHN KNOX CONFRONTING QUEEN MARY





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# KNOX AT THE CHURCH DOOR? REFLECTIONS ON THE PASTOR-TEACHER AS REFORMER



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## SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow and distinguished visiting professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. His many books include *The Whole Christ*.

In his *Heroes and Hero Worship*, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) described John Knox as the real father of Puritanism—the evangelical movement that flourished in the seventeenth century and whose influence endures to this day. Whatever Carlyle’s inadequacies and misunderstandings, he rightly portrayed Knox as a “hero.” The Scotland that he loved was regarded by contemporaries as almost beyond the borders of civilization—in Philip Schaff’s words, “a semi-barbarous though brave and energetic race.” No one contributed more to what it became than Knox did. In one sense, he *made* Scotland. Carlyle writes:

In the history of Scotland, too, I can find properly but one epoch: we may say, it contains nothing of world-interest at all but this Reformation by Knox. A poor barren country, full of continual broils, dissensions, massacrings; a people in the last state of rudeness and destitution . . . It is a country as yet without a soul: nothing developed in it but what is rude, external, semi-animal. And now at the Reformation, the internal life is kindled, as it were, under the ribs of this outward material death.

The Scottish Reformation in Scotland has often been

summarized in three words, “Scotland followed Calvin.” But at first the truth was nearer to “Scotland followed Luther.” The famous “Patrick’s Places” (*Loci Communes Theologici*) of the young martyr Patrick Hamilton (1504-28) consisted of the gospel according to Luther pure and simple. The doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone lay at the heart of things. But it was not long before mainstream Reformers realized that this rediscovery of justification belonged to a bigger picture and laid bare other considerations. Thus, what Calvin came to underline was not merely the need for doctrinal clarity (at the cognitive level) but the entire reformation of the church. He therefore saw two great issues as primary (and the order in which he mentions them is striking):

If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence among us, and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, viz., a knowledge, *first*, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, *secondly*, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained.

In this, as in much else, he was followed by John Knox, and in this sense, “Scotland followed Calvin.” Both realized that the end goal of their ministry was not the preaching of the gospel *simpliciter*, but the true worship of God to which it leads. The Protestant Reformation was therefore both a protest against false worship and a reformation of it according to Scripture.

In this context emerged the distinctively Reformed understanding of *sola Scriptura*, in distinction from *Scriptura prima*—a much more radical principle than the Lutheran one (what is forbidden in Scripture should *not* be practiced). God’s Word is not merely a *limiting* principle in worship but a foundational and *governing* one. Just as Scripture taught the way of salvation, it also taught the way of adoration; it governed theology, but for that very reason, it also governed liturgy. Having directed us how to be justified by grace, the Scriptures do not abandon us to our own devices, however creative, when it comes to worship. They regulate our worship according to what pleases God as He has revealed His will to us in His Word.

There is a massive contrast here between Knox’s vision and the practice of whole swaths of the contemporary church. Knox held that the Word of God teaches us what pleases God in worship.

In this context, consider the now infamous public statement of Victoria Osteen (wife of Joel Osteen):

I just want to encourage every one of us to realize when we obey God, we’re not doing it for God—I mean, that’s one way to look at it—we’re doing it for ourselves, because God takes pleasure when we’re happy.

So, I want you to know this morning: Just do good for your own self. Do good because God wants you to be happy. When you come to church, when you worship Him, you’re not doing it for God really. You’re doing it for yourself, because that’s what makes God happy. Amen?

No doubt readers of these pages would regard saying “amen” to these words as analogous to an Israelite’s “amen” to the curses pronounced at Mount Ebal (Deut 27:11–26; Josh 8:30–35). Yet, in some ways, they are only a more blatant form of, and give voice to, a modern spiritual epidemic: *what pleases us*, and *what we like and enjoy*, is now, in practical terms in many places, *the regulative principle* for corporate worship. Indeed, to question this is to confront the subliminal authority underlying what more than one social critic has described as “the age of narcissism” bleeding out of the world into the church. Thus, worship “style” is determined by what appeals to us and is enjoyed

by us—or worse, by the non-Christian men and women (and especially the young men and women) of the world. But, by nature, the men and women of the world are spiritually dead, blind, and deaf; they have exchanged the glory of God for idols (Rom 1:21–25); they do not like or enjoy what God likes. The idea of awe in the presence of God is not attractive to them. Yet, paradoxically, it is this that is the real attraction (cf. Acts 5:11–13).

What would Knox have made of the way we worship today? The services of worship in which I was nurtured were still shaped by Knox. Every one of them began with the same four words, “Let us worship God.” That was what we were assembled to do. Like soldiers on parade, marching past the Commander-in-Chief taking the salute, and hearing the command, “Eyes . . . Right!” we were urged and encouraged to follow the example of the psalmist:


Behold, as the eyes of servants  
look to the hand of their master,  
as the eyes of a maidservant  
look to the hand of her mistress,  
so our eyes look to the Lord our God,  
till he has mercy upon us. (Ps 123:2)

It is a rare thing now to hear the words “Let us worship God.” Are they too stiff, too traditional, too formal, too serious-sounding, too Presbyterian (!), too non-seeker sensitive (what are they seeking?). Dare one say too Knox-like? And perhaps too utterly God-centered?

What would Knox make of self-appointed “church consultants” who tell congregations, “the quality of your morning worship is exceptional”? They are not thinking of Isaiah in Jerusalem, or John on Patmos. They are not ticking boxes marked: “sinfulness exposed”; “overwhelming sense of God’s unapproachable holiness”; “sense of the majesty of Christ”; “melting sense of the overwhelming grace of God in the gospel”; “Cross central.” But it is these realities that bring true joy in worship. Anything else will soon send us scampering for the next thing that “works” but can never satisfy.

In any case, since the assessment of the quality of our worship belongs to the Lord alone, how dare mere men give churches such an assessment? To echo the words of Chief Justice John Roberts in another context: “Who do we think we are?” We are but men and women with unclean lips when we worship; we stand in need of pardon even when—indeed especially when—we are engaged in this, the highest activity of our lives. True worship puts us inwardly on our faces before the majesty of our God. Anyone who admires or assesses “worship” is looking in the

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## Pastor-teachers from Calvin, through John Owen, to the present day have discovered that it is in the reformation of the church and its worship according to the Scriptures, not only in the preaching of the Word from the pulpit, that the bloodiest battles are often fought.

wrong direction when they come to church and has missed the point of coming. We come to God our joy, not to seek enjoyment as our god.

In Knox's day (as in ours?), many were stunned (or irritated, offended, even angered) by the affirmations that God (i) desires to be worshiped according to who He is and what His, not our, preferences are; (ii) has given us guidance on the true way of worship; and (iii) provides this guidance to the church through a careful, prayerful, sensitive, ongoing study and application of the Scriptures.

But what place does a jeremiad on worship in the modern church have in a journal devoted to *preaching*? The question itself signals a false disjunction between preaching and worship. Preaching *is* worship both for the preacher and for the congregation. Nevertheless, this question also leads us to an important principle we learn from Knox: if the chief end of preaching is worship, pastor-teachers cannot afford to let their pastoral role be confined to preaching alone. The Word must not only be preached to the people—it must also shape the worship of the people and thus transform their lives. Knox did not bifurcate between preaching and worship (or for that matter, preaching and church life). He believed that the latter was as much the responsibility of the pastor-preacher as the preparation and content of his sermons.

This issue presents a considerable challenge in contemporary church life, and to contemporary pastors and

teachers. But this is nothing new. Pastor-teachers from Calvin, through John Owen, to the present day have discovered that it is in the reformation of the church and its worship according to the Scriptures, not only in the preaching of the Word from the pulpit, that the bloodiest battles are often fought. Knox might well “ding the pulpit in blads” in the High Kirk of Edinburgh, but his vision was not restricted to his pulpit utterances; it was always the reformation of the church. *Ecclesia reformata reformanda est* may not be phraseology invented by the Reformers, but they certainly believed it. It was no light or easy task in Knox's day any more than it is in our own.

What then would Knox regard as key responses to the worship-chaos of our times? We can only speculate. But not all speculation needs to be fanciful. For Knox's responses to the chaos of his own day provide us with some guidelines for ours. Of course, he planned for the life of the Scottish church in concert with other brethren. But there can be no doubt that he was the mastermind and the driving force in both the strategies envisaged and the documents written to further them. He had seen with his own eyes the reformation of church life in Geneva, so that it had become “the most perfect school of Christ that there ever was on earth since the days of the apostles” (*Works* 4: 240). And he had learned how to go back to Scripture for principles and precepts that would shape the church in Scotland.

Three elements in Knox's pastoral application of the Word to the life of the church stand out.

### 1. The Reformation of Liturgy

The first is the attention he gave to the church's liturgy. Knox recognized that there are both necessary elements in worship and also accidental features related to the identity of the people and their location in place and time. But he anticipated that the basic structure of worship would be universally recognizable. For him, this meant that worship should be marked by a reverent and godly fear—we are, after all, approaching the Holy, Loving Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator. We do so through the blood of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:18).

Our worship should therefore have a kind of theological and affectional progress as we move from approaching God, through confession of sin and assurance of pardon (the latter deeply concerned him), to praise and a humble hearing of God's Word both read and preached, then to intercession and the portrayal and appropriation of union and communion with Christ crucified and risen in baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is no mere hymn-prayer (or praise-preaching) sandwich, but a pattern of worship that is theologically driven and shaped, while also deeply sensitive to the human mind and emotions. Though marked by great simplicity, it does not have monotony.

Particularly noteworthy here is the attention Knox gave in his teaching to three elements of worship: prayer, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. He wrote at length on each of these because he saw how basic they are to the worship and life of the Christian community. In worship, people should have a sense that they are being brought before the very throne of God in prayer.

Knox's exposition of prayer constitutes a hidden masterpiece (*Works*, 3:81-109). He gave congregations a rich appreciation of the significance of baptism and the Supper. Baptism should be seen as a privilege-granting, Trinity-centered naming ceremony in the new family of God. Christ is "really present" at the Supper, not enclosed in the bread and wine through transubstantiation, but the true Host, present Himself by His Spirit with His people at the table. Here, He offers Himself to us through simple, physical gifts of bread and wine. By means of these He displays, expresses, and communicates His dying love for, His presence with, and His sure return to His people.

This was a liturgy to stretch the mind and affections of the most advanced believer, but also to mature the youngest. Worship, Knox believed, is a serious business. Otherwise, it could never be truly glorious and therefore never deeply satisfying.

The title of Thomas Bergler's 2012 book, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* is telling in this context. By contrast, Knox was intent on producing mature Christians and grown-up worshipers. I recall Jim Boice saying many years ago: "In other churches, adults are being taught to worship like children; here, by contrast, we want to see our children grow up to be able to worship like adults." Knox would surely have approved.

The salutary lesson here is that pastor-teachers need to think a great deal about the liturgy of the worship services in which they preach. This is all the more important in a culture in which it may never even have been seriously asked whether Scripture teaches us how to worship. Knox and his fellow Reformers would have been amazed, to say the least, if as leaders we were not able to assure our congregation that we have carefully thought through from Scripture what we do as a community in the worship we offer and the liturgy we employ as its framework. (It need hardly be said here that every worshiping community follows a liturgy, not least those that hotly deny it!).

So, Knox did not share the modern myopia that Scripture tells us "how to get saved" but then leaves us to ourselves to decide how to worship. Here, almost randomly, are some obvious questions his teaching calls us to consider:

1. Is there any theological logic that drives our services?
2. What are we singing, and how (Eph 5:18; Col 3:16)—do we still sing Psalms, for example, as we are commanded to do?
3. Does it matter if we ever confess sin in our worship?
4. How does Scripture teach us to pray?
5. What place should be given to the reading of Scripture, and who should read it? (This was apparently a consideration in the apostolic and post-apostolic church: 1 Timothy 4:13 and Revelation 1:3 both refer to public, not private, reading of Scripture.)
6. How is our worship truly congregational?
7. How important are baptism and the Lord's Supper (apart from arguing about them)? What ongoing difference do they make to our lives as Christians? Or do we regard them merely as things we do from time to time?
8. How important is corporate worship and the use of the Lord's Day? (To respond that "the whole of our lives is worship, so we need not think about such a question" would surely be naïve, since it was Knox and others who taught us that the whole of life is worship!)

The list could go on. For John Knox, reformation *preaching* meant the reformation of *worship*. Inevitably, that also meant the reformation of the Lord's Day to help the people of God grow in worship; and this, in turn, transformed the lives of believers in community. Incidentally, the social impact was also phenomenal.

## 2. The Confession of Faith

Knox well knew that the development of a biblically informed liturgy required growth in understanding biblical theology. Otherwise, worship, as well as Christian living, would lack strength. The worship of God flows out of the knowledge of God. We are to sing praises not only with our spirit but also with our mind (1 Cor 14:15). We are to teach and admonish one another in our singing as the Word of God richly indwells us (Col 3:16). But to do this requires a grasp of biblical theology.

How is this to be obtained? It is not enough, Knox believed, merely to say that the Bible is our creed. True though this is as a general principle, it leaves a significant question unanswered, namely, "What is it that the Bible actually teaches?" Most churches publish at least a summary of what they believe. Knox undoubtedly would have appreciated the desire to articulate basic convictions; but he would have judged inadequate any statement that can be printed on a three-by-five card. What we need is a substantial confession of our faith.

Thus, in August 1560, along with five other brethren all with the Christian name John—John Douglas, John Rowe,

John Spottiswoode, John Winram, and John Willock, Knox set aside four days to compose the stirring twenty-five-chapter, eight-thousand-word *Scots Confession*, which was in use for the next eighty years in Scotland. (And, yes, they were sufficiently grounded in Scripture to be able to write it in only four days!) Suffused with biblical teaching, its exposition of doctrine extended far beyond soteriology to the whole counsel of God and the existence of the church in the world. It still serves as a potent indication of Knox's conviction that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, and that understanding the gospel is essential to living out the gospel (Rom 12:1–2).

Writing a confession of faith is a once-in-a-generation task. But Knox was convinced it was also vital to create a practical way of keeping fresh such biblical teaching and application in the lives of individual Christians and the church community. He had seen this happen in Geneva, and was familiar with the instrument Calvin employed to accomplish it.

## 3. The Importance of Catechism

In Geneva, Knox witnessed what today is the least remembered aspect of Calvin's ministry of the Word: the weekly children's catechism service. It was conducted every Sunday after morning worship. Love for children and the instruction in the ways of the Lord may not be the first thing that comes to mind when Calvin's or Knox's names are mentioned—or John Owen's for that matter. But they all saw the nurturing of the lambs of the flock as a special and important aspect



JOHN KNOX [1513–1572]

## The reformation of the church included a focus on the children as such, but not on them as isolated either from their parents or from the whole church family.

of their responsibility as pastor-teachers. In fact, Calvin himself wrote to the Protector Somerset in 1548 that “the Church of God will never preserve itself without a Catechism.”

Catechism often gets bad press in the church these days. Rote learning went out of favor with progressive psychologists in the 1960s, and the church followed. The result? Ask a Christian today such basic questions as “How does Christ carry out His office of a king?”; “What was involved in Christ’s humiliation?”; “What is justification?”; “How do the sacraments work?,” and you are likely to discover that a twelve-year-old girl, with little education, but living in the remote regions of seventeenth-century Scotland, was better schooled in biblical doctrine than most Christian graduates from college today.

On occasion, of course, Calvin’s Geneva Catechism has questions that are simply too long—it was early days for Reformed catechisms, and they would mature into the style of *The Shorter Catechism* with its crisp questions and answers. But even in Calvin, engagingly, we find that the child’s prescribed response to a question likely to tax the memory by its length is to say, “You are right!” Having seen the fruit of such instruction in Geneva (where sometimes the Consistory instructed biblically uneducated adults to attend the catechism service!) Knox also organized an afternoon service for the children.

According to *The First Book of Discipline* (1560), whose broad Scots wording I have anglicized and contemporized:

After noon the young children must be publicly examined on their Catechism in the presence of the people. In doing this the minister must be very diligent to make sure that the people understand the questions being asked as well as the answers, and the doctrine that may be drawn from them.

Notice Knox’s simple, but telling, strategy. The children are learning biblical truth; they are also learning how to think biblically; they are having their mindsets framed by God’s Word and its logic. At the same time, this is being done *in the context of the whole church family* (“in the presence of the people”). Thus, the reformation of the church included a focus on the children as such, but not on them as isolated either from their parents or from the whole church family.

There is a remarkably shrewd cross-fertilization strategy at work here that mirrors the whole-family character of the apostolic teaching (e.g. Eph 5:22–6:9; Col 3:18–25—verses that are juxtaposed to Paul’s comments on worship in Ephesians 5:18–21 and Colossians 3:16). In addition to the instruction of their children, and their children experiencing being surrounded by the church family, the arrangement is deliberately designed so that the adults themselves benefit by (i) hearing their children taught well by men who have a rich understanding of the teaching and application of Scripture—thus learning how to teach their own children, and also by (ii) being instructed themselves in the truth of the Word. These weekly gatherings were simplicity itself in a sense, and yet there is a kind of biblically rooted genius about it all.

So much more could be said here about liturgy, theology, and catechetical ministry—all part and parcel of what John Knox regarded as his concern as a pastor-teacher in Edinburgh in 1560. How important are these concerns to today’s pastor-teachers?

Knox at the church door? The most important question is what Christ thinks of the church, since He is the Lord of the church and knocks at the door (Rev 3:20). But it is still worth asking what John Knox would think of today’s evangelical churches. We can, indeed, only speculate; but if he were to worship with our church one Sunday, we can

be fairly certain he would leave asking:

- Was the Word of God the authority in all things there?
- Did we have any sense of our real sinfulness, make confession if it with full hearts, experience the wonder of grace, see the cross of Christ, and experience some measure of awe in God's presence?
- How biblically informed were our prayers?
- That baptism—was it clear to us all what baptism means both today and in the future?
- Did we sense that we were feeding on and fed by Christ at the Lord's Supper? Will that nourish me for days to come?
- Did anyone say to me at the end of the service, "I felt the secrets of my heart were disclosed; I felt like falling on my face in worship. God is really among you" (1 Cor 14:25)?

Little of Knox's preaching is extant. But we can be sure of one thing: he must have been a soul-stirring preacher (perhaps even more so in his rough yet vibrant broad Scots!). We love him for that. But John Knox was more than a preacher; he was a reformer. Not all pastors and teachers are called to that role. Our churches are at many different stages of growth to maturity; and each pastor-teacher constantly must assess and reassess the priorities of his ministry. But these three areas—liturgy, theology, and catechetical ministry—are perennial responsibilities. And the adage is surely still true: *ecclesia reformata reformanda est*—the church that has already been reformed requires ongoing reformation.

May God grant the biblical understanding, the spiritual sensitivity, the faith, and the courage to pastor-teachers today to be, with John Knox, like the men of Issachar who "had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron 12:32). ♦



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# CROWN RIGHTS OF THE REDEEMER: THE TRIUMPH OF THE REFORMATION IN SCOTLAND 1560

Of all the Reformations that were experienced in the kingdoms of Ireland, England, and Scotland, it was the Scottish Reformation which, in the words of Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch, “proved to be the most thoroughgoing and the most internationally minded.” It began in 1559 as a national revolution, and it was not the crown, but Protestant ministers and laymen, who took the lead in shaping its future. The Scottish Reformation was a good deal less bloody than that in England, with no more than twenty-five Protestant and two Catholic martyrdoms as opposed to the five hundred and more deaths in England. The Scottish Reformed were far more connected to the mainstream of Reformed thought and practice in continental Europe than were other churches on the British Isles, adopting, as they did, the *Helvetic Confession of Faith* in 1556.

Two significant antecedents of the Reformation in Scotland were the scandals in the church and the influence of John Wycliffe.

## Scandals in the Church

The great papal schism that spanned the turn of the fifteenth century had shaken the authority of the Latin church, and its reputation for holiness and even general decency had been blotted by the scandalous lives of its clergy. The Medieval church had indeed become so corrupt in worship, in

doctrine, and in morals, as well as in administration, that those who had any real desire to serve God felt instinctively that things were radically wrong, and that an effort should be made to put them right. All through the fifteenth century there was a loud and widespread cry for reform. In most cases, that cry may only have meant the curtailing of abuses or the removal of gross corruptions, for those who wished to see the church thoroughly reformed in worship, doctrine, and organization were in a feeble minority. Those who would have been happy with a more moderate reform must have learned from the Councils of Pisa, Constance, and Basel that there was little likelihood of a pope putting his hand in earnest to the plough of reform.

Within the clerical life of the church, there was long-standing rivalry. Professor MacCulloch of Oxford writes about the ongoing disputes among the clergy:

Friars sneered at parish priests for being lazy and ignorant; parish priests sneered at friars for being egotistical showmen who tried to seduce women in the confessional; friars sneered at monks for being useless and idle consumers of landed wealth. Even friars sneered at friars, because there were several refoundations of Orders trying to return to early simplicity, particularly among the Franciscans, and the reformers had every

## Another important factor in the Reformation was the appearance and distribution of Wycliffe's, and later Tyndale's, translations of Holy Scripture.

reason to denigrate those colleagues of their own Order who opposed such reforms.

But it was not clerical competitiveness and the need to reform worship and doctrine that was most obvious to the faithful; it was the behavior of the clergy themselves. In the literature of the day, we find frequent references to the ignorance, debauchery, corruption, and downright greed of priests and friars, bishops and cardinals.

### The Influence of John Wycliffe

John Wycliffe himself was influenced by Robert Grosseteste (c. 1175-1253), the Bishop of Lincoln in the thirteenth century. Grosseteste, while chancellor of the University of Oxford, placed the study of the Scriptures in first place above all other subjects and was active in addressing abuses in the church. He earned the admiration of Wycliffe, who took the ideas he gleaned from Grosseteste and turned them in a radical direction.

From the preamble to an English statute from May 1382, we discover that Wycliffe's itinerant preachers were already effectively rejecting the authority of bishops, ignoring their citations, despising the censures of "Holy Church," and preaching daily in churches and cemeteries. Wycliffe's lectures in Oxford influenced many of the leading thinkers of his time, reached some of the highest in the land, and touched the hearts of ordinary people. He never attained the clarity of Luther in his doctrine of justification by faith, but he insisted on Christ alone as our only Mediator and Savior and that He alone is the true and governing Head of the Church.

Through Scottish students at Oxford, Wycliffe's teaching had begun to spread north during his lifetime and especially so after his death. Formal documents drawn up in

St. Andrews (1390-1406) specifically address "heretics and those who receive the writings of schismatics." The persecution that broke out in England after Wycliffe's death (1384) drove many of his followers to Scotland. At a Council-General held in Perth on January 27 of 1398 or 99 the Duke of Rothesay was appointed lieutenant to his father, King Robert III, with the duty (among others) of restraining and punishing "cursit men, heretikis, and put fra the Kyrke."

During the fifteenth century, the references to heretics become more common. In the register of Kelso Abbey are two summonses (dated February 8 and March 14, 1402-3) against three priests suspected of "perverse and erroneous doctrine opposed to the catholic faith." A certain James Resby, described as an English presbyter of the Wycliffe school, was burned at Perth in 1407. Resby had denied that the pope was the "vicar" of Christ on earth. In 1416, the new University of St. Andrews required teachers to swear they would resist all Lollards (the followers of Wycliffe), and as late as 1494, the Bishop of Glasgow brought thirty people from Ayrshire up on charges of holding to the teaching of the Lollards. These folk, according to the records, rejected indulgences, transubstantiation, the priesthood, and papal claims to be Peter's successor (except where Christ said "Get thee behind me Satan"), and they maintained that sins can be forgiven by God alone. The people described here had traveled far in the direction of the Reformation. To the influence of Wycliffe, we should add that of the old Celtic church, the steady percolation of Lutheran ideas, and the teaching of Jan Hus, Peter Dubois, and William of Occam.

### The Translations of Holy Scripture

Another important factor in the Reformation was the appearance and distribution of Wycliffe's, and later Tyndale's,

translations of Holy Scripture. By 1526, Tyndale's printed translation was being circulated widely. Copies were to be found among the most influential people in the land, especially in Edinburgh and St. Andrews. In the summer of 1525, Parliament, alarmed by "damnable heresies," set out an order to "keep Scotland clean" of "all sic (such) filth and vice." An Act was passed forbidding "strangers" from bringing in any books by "Luther, his disciples or servants," and forbidding any discussion or debate on "such religious subjects as were raised in said books." In the Fall of 1527, another clause was added warning the king's lieges not to read and disseminate such literature on pains of severe punishment. Such legislation shows how widespread and pervasive the new ideas of Reformation were. Parliament didn't seem to realize that forbidding books was a great way to increase their circulation. Increase they did, and the ideas of the Reformed grew like wildfire.

### **The Glorious Company of the Martyrs**

Five months after the chancellor and lords of council made their addition to the Act of Parliament, Patrick Hamilton was sent to the stake in front of St. Salvator's College at St. Andrews (February 29, 1528), and, it is said, "his reek (that is, the smoke of his burning) infected all on whom it blew." The cruelty of his death (he was roasted rather than burned alive), the impressiveness of his humble and godly

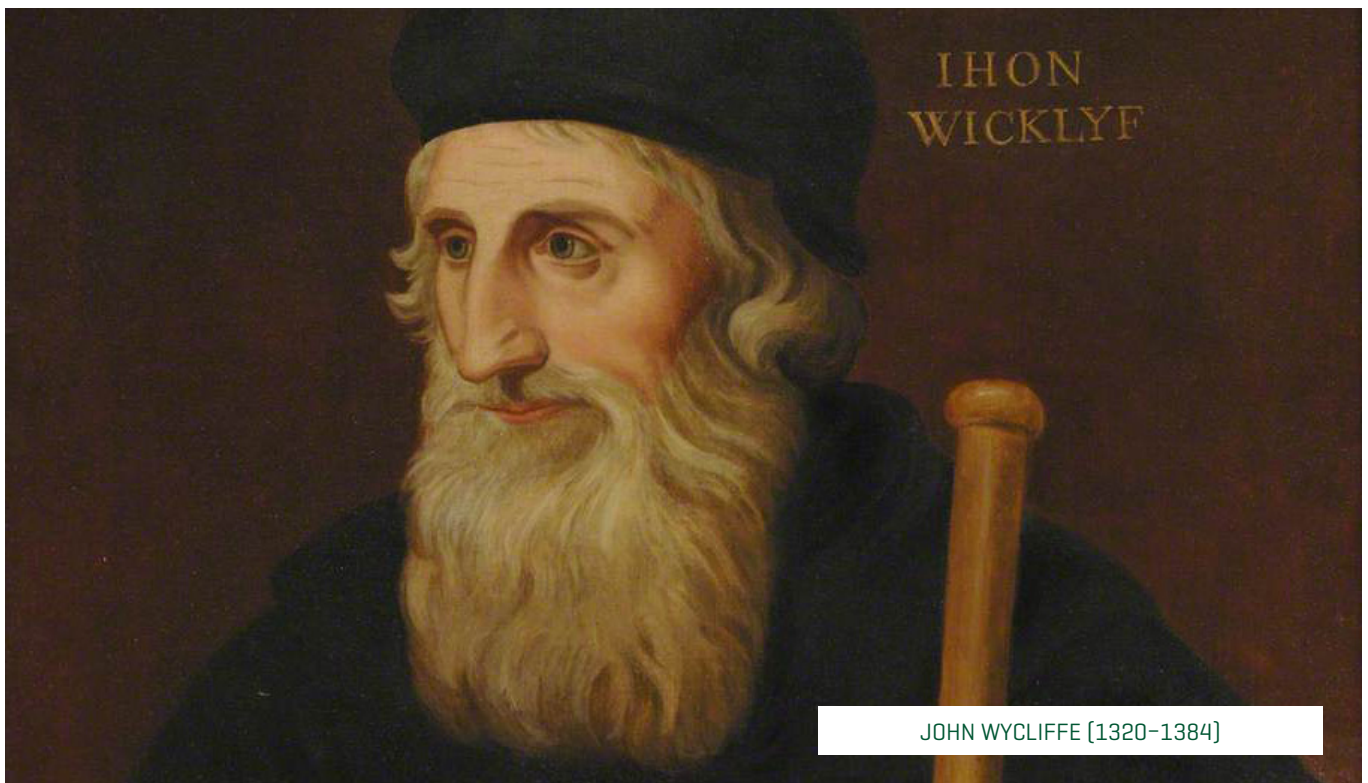
demeanor, and the purity of his life (in clear contrast to the rampant licentiousness of many clergy) raised questions among the masses about the justice of his sentence and execution.

At this point there was no Reformed church in the British Isles, for even after Henry VIII broke with Rome, the situation would remain relatively unchanged throughout Henry's life. As late as 1540, Sir John Borthwick regarded the so-called Reformed Church of England as no better than the unreformed Church of Scotland, save in its freedom from papal domination. The Reformers of Scotland did not learn their doctrines from Henry VIII or his Church. After the death of Patrick Hamilton, the inquisition was employed to hunt down those who had New Testaments or who professed Reformed doctrines, with many being burned, severely punished, or forced to flee abroad.

Eighteen years after Hamilton's death, the gentle and Spirit-filled George Wishart was betrayed into the hands of Cardinal Beaton, who had him burned in the same city of St. Andrews.

### **The Emergence of John Knox**

The death of George Wishart sparked a national outcry. Some nobles, driven not by evangelical zeal but by political and personal motives, stormed St. Andrews Castle, killed the archbishop, and hung his body out of the window.



JOHN WYCLIFFE [1320-1384]

These men never associated themselves with the Reformation, but if their motives were not primarily religious, the door of opportunity they opened was soon seized by the Reformed. It happens that Wishart's personal bodyguard was a man called John Knox. Knox had been ordained a priest in 1536 and, impatient with his career path in the clergy, later became a notary (effectively a country lawyer). He was successful in this career, mixing easily with people of wealth and status. At some point during this period, he stopped practicing both as a priest and a notary and began tutoring the children of some wealthy families who were also evangelical. The move seems to have been sparked by his own gradual change of direction, and the change of pace gave him time to start studying the Scriptures seriously. It was as he read John's gospel, and, in particular, John 17, that he cast his "first anchor" (as he put it on his deathbed) and found great assurance of his salvation.

Knox first heard George Wishart preach in Leith in 1545 and quickly became a disciple. From "Master George" he learned the difference between a true and false church, and he soon made friends within the growing network of those, throughout Scotland, who were embracing the Reformed faith and its distinctive devotional life. Wishart gave Knox the clarity he needed about the doctrines of grace and a sense of call which never left him. He got hold of the *First Helvetic Confession* of 1536, which undoubtedly provided a

framework for his developing theology.


An outburst of persecution led the parents of Knox's pupils to encourage them and their tutor to go for refuge to St. Andrews Castle, where many of the Reformed had gathered. It was there that Knox was publicly challenged to take up the battle in Wishart's place: "that ye take upon you the public office and charge of preaching." His first sermon, in 1547, electrified the congregation in the Trinity Church. He demolished the arguments of his opponents and took them apart bit by bit. As someone at the time said, "Other men sawed off the branches of the papistry. This man lays his axe to the trunk of the tree." In quick time he became the voice of the Reformed movement in Scotland, riveting his audiences with his fiery and incisive preaching. When St. Andrews fell to the French, he and others were turned into galley slaves, rowing French ships for some time before being released under pressure from the English government, who took the side of their loyal friends in St. Andrews Castle.

Knox spent time in England, worked on the *Book of Common Prayer*, and was offered the post of Bishop of Rochester under King Edward VI. During Edward's reign, he married and made many effective connections as he tried to serve Scotland as an exile. When "Bloody" Mary ascended the throne, Knox escaped to the Continent and served in several churches before settling in Geneva to lead



JOHN KNOX PREACHING

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There was no stopping Knox; through his preaching, tens of thousands of Scots men and women embraced the Reformed faith. Wherever he went, his preaching was received warmly by the people, and a rich savor of Christ filled the churches.

the English-speaking work there. He became a close friend of John Calvin. While he resided in Geneva, the news coming from Scotland was not good. There was a concerted effort to re-convert the Scots to the Roman way of worship. The Lords of the Congregation, the lay leaders of the Reformed movement there, urged Knox to return, saying that no one else was strong enough to pull the movement together.

Knox arrived at Leith on May 2, 1559, and his coming sent shock waves throughout the country. Catholic bishops who were meeting at the time adjourned their proceedings, awaiting reassurances from the Queen Regent Mary of Guise. Meanwhile, Knox escaped and preached at Perth in May and St. Andrews in June; he became minister of the great St. Giles Cathedral in July.

There was no stopping Knox; through his preaching, tens of thousands of Scots men and women embraced the Reformed faith. Wherever he went, his preaching was received warmly by the people, and a rich savor of Christ filled the churches. In St. Giles, he regularly preached to over 3,000 people. His powerful sermon preached at Stirling in November of that year turned the tide, as many hesitant leaders committed themselves to the Reformed faith.

The Queen Regent still resisted the work of Reformation and with French troops sought to silence the preachers and retrieve the former religion, but her plans were thwarted by her sudden death in July 1560. In quick succession, a treaty was signed that led to the withdrawal of French troops; Parliament abolished the Catholic religion and for-

bade masses; and Knox was looked to for leadership. He was well equipped to be the natural leader of the Protestant cause.

At the request of Parliament, John Knox and five friends (all called “John”) drew up a statement of Reformed doctrine, *The Scots Confession*, in four days. Its Preface captures the spirit of its composers and confessors—men whose spirits and minds were wholeheartedly submitted to the Word of God:

...if any man will note in this our confession any article or sentence repugnant to God’s holy word, [we hope] that it would please him of his gentleness, and for Christian charity’s sake, to admonish us of the same in writing; and we, of our honor and fidelity, do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God (that is, from his holy scriptures), or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss.

*The Scots Confession* was received by Parliament with great enthusiasm and remained a symbol of the Scottish religion until 1647, when it was replaced by the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The committee followed this up with the *First Book of Discipline*, which defined the polity of the church and recommended a far-reaching reform of the way religion was advanced, education was delivered, and the poor were treated within the realm.

*The Confession and Book of Discipline* firmly placed authority in the church in Holy Scripture; they grounded

## The work of Reformation in Scotland had both a local and a global impact. Locally, churches were established throughout the land, serving its people.

salvation in God's sovereign plan and purposes, in the saving and sufficient work of Christ on the cross, and delivered in faith alone through Christ alone. Public worship was to the glory of God, and as far as possible would adhere to the clearly given guidelines for worship found in Scripture. The great secret of the gospel's advance in those days was the clear, passionate, and Christ-exalting preaching of the Word of God. To Knox, as to his successors, preaching was "the work" of the ministry; he would have echoed Luther's comment that the Word preached "did the work" of reforming the church and drawing many to Christ.

The Reformation was thoroughly established in Scotland before Mary, Queen of Scots, arrived to assume the throne. She came with a clear agenda of overthrowing the Reformation in the land, though a majority of the people, lords, and the church itself opposed her. Knox never (despite the criticisms leveled against him) visited the queen without her summoning him; when so summoned, he was deferential to her royal position; and Mary showed him a measure of friendship and trust when she invited him to visit her at Loch Leven Castle. Throughout her troubled reign, the Reformed cause grew apace, and after Knox's death, during the reign of her son, James VI, the church established itself in every corner of the kingdom.

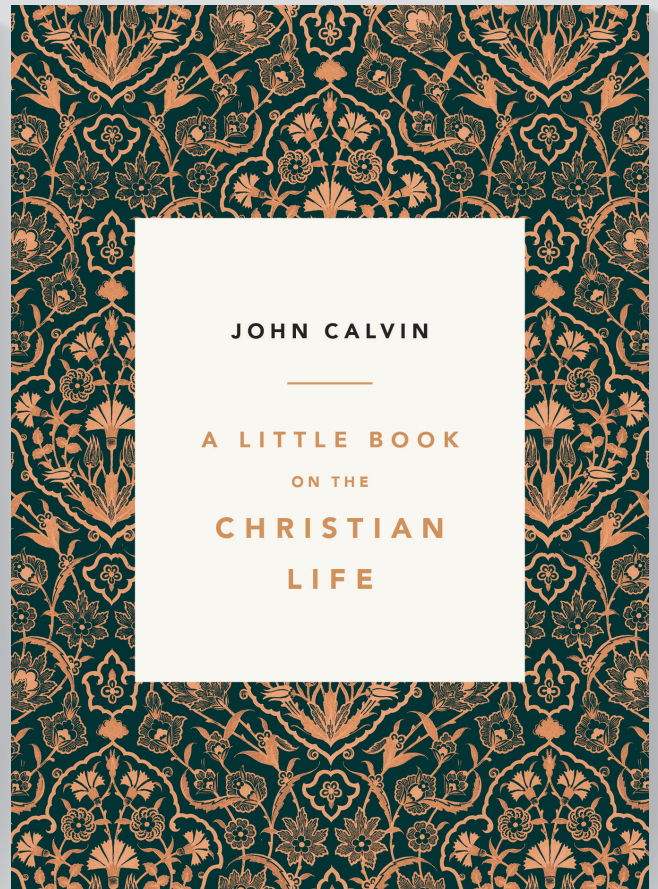
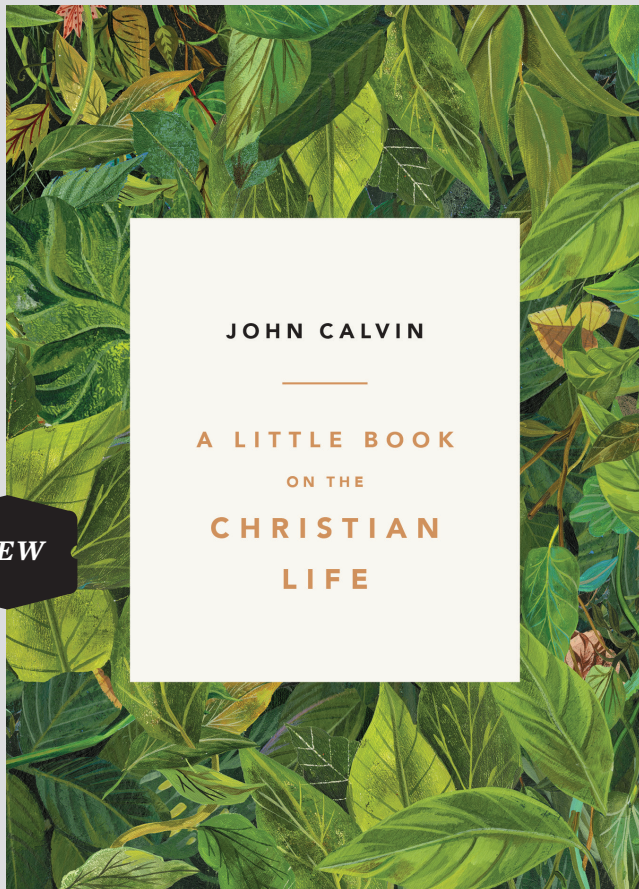
One of Knox's successors, Andrew Melville (principal of the universities of Glasgow and St. Andrews), became the great spokesman and advocate of the Reformed cause. He once told James (who loved the idea of bishops because the ceremony and authority of a bishop comports well with that given to kings) that there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland, King Jesus and King James, the commonwealth of Scotland and the church of Jesus Christ, "in

whose kingdom James is neither a king, nor a head, nor a lord, but a member." That didn't go down well! Repeated efforts to restore episcopacy would beset the Kirk for many years to come.

The work of Reformation in Scotland had both a local and a global impact. Locally, churches were established throughout the land, serving its people. There were local expressions of revival, and many multitudes came into the kingdom. The Kirk quickly grasped the importance of translating the *Confession* into Gaelic, and Highland Scotland quickly became Protestant. Throughout Scotland, schools brought education to every town and village in the land, enabling the Scots to be among the best educated in Europe. Hospitals were established, and measures were taken to relieve the poverty in towns and villages.

Globally, the Scots would export their religion internationally under pressure of persecution during James' and subsequent reigns. The first great migration of Scots was to Ireland, where they established the Protestant religion in Ulster in the early seventeenth century. The second great migration came as Scots and Scots-Irish moved over to settle in Philadelphia and the Carolinas. Their influence grew, and when a certain war of independence was declared at the end of that century, London newspapers described it as a Scots-Irish rebellion. The immigrants took their Protestantism with them and succeeded in their new homeland to a degree never really realized in their former home. The Protestant Reformation has had international ramifications as Scots have taken their love of Reformed theology with them all over the world and encouraged a simple form of worship, gathering around the Word of God, observing the Sabbath day, and offering joyful, Scripture-saturated praise to God. ♦





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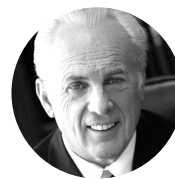
THE  
**PULPIT**

J O H N M A C A R T H U R



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# THE TRIAL OF JESUS



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**JOHN MACARTHUR** is pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, and president of The Master's University and Seminary. He is the author of over one hundred books and author and editor of *The MacArthur Study Bible*.

**T**he trials of the Lord Jesus Christ are history's most egregious miscarriage of justice. In them the friend of sinners (Luke 7:34) faced the hatred of sinners; the Judge of all the earth was arraigned before petty human judges; the exalted Lord of glory was humiliated by being mocked, spit upon, and beaten; the Holy and Righteous One was treated as a vile sinner; the One who is the truth was impugned by evil liars.

But shining forth out of the satanic darkness of His trials is the absolute innocence of Jesus Christ. The evil efforts of His accusers are turned upside down so as to actually confirm His blamelessness. During His earthly ministry, He challenged His opponents, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?". In the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesied concerning Him,

His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

The angel who foretold His birth called Him "the holy Child." His betrayer lamented that he had "sinned by betraying innocent blood." One of the criminals crucified with Him declared of Him, "This man has done nothing

wrong." The Roman centurion in charge at His execution said of Him, "Certainly this man was innocent." Paul said that He "knew no sin"; the writer of Hebrews affirmed that He "has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" and is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners"; and Peter wrote that He "committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth."

The cast of characters in the gospel accounts of Jesus' trials includes most of the rulers and important men in Israel. Annas, the former high priest and still the real power behind the scenes, was there. So was Caiaphas, the current high priest and son-in-law of Annas. Along with them were the members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body (under the Romans) of Israel. Pilate, the Roman governor, played a major role; Herod Antipas, ruler of Jesus' home region of Galilee, had a cameo role; and the extras included various unnamed false witnesses along with the crowds that would scream for Him to be crucified. But throughout the six phases (three religious, three civil) of His trials, the Lord Jesus Christ occupied center stage.

John did not record the second and third phases of the Lord's religious trial, though he mentioned that Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas. The Sanhedrin met at Caiaphas' house during the night and decided that Jesus should die. Then, in a nod to legality (since Jewish law did not permit capital

trials to be held at night), the Sanhedrin reconvened after daybreak and formally pronounced their sentence. John picked up the story at that point, noting that they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, Pilate's headquarters (probably either at Fort Antonius or Herod's palace), where he stayed when he visited Jerusalem (Pilate's permanent headquarters were in Caesarea).

The Jewish leaders' motive for bringing Jesus before Pilate was obvious. Out of envy, jealousy, and hatred, they had been plotting to kill Him for a long time. Their murderous designs had been frustrated until now because "His hour had not yet come." At last, in God's timing, with the help of the traitor Judas Iscariot, they managed to seize Jesus. After giving Him a sham trial, they sentenced Him to death. But, having done so, they were powerless to carry out that sentence; the Romans did not permit them to execute anyone. That was standard Roman policy in the territories they ruled; they did not want nationalists executing those who were loyal to Rome.

Early Jewish sources differ as to when Rome removed the right of capital punishment from the Jews. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus states that it was in A.D. 6 when Judea became a Roman province. The Talmud, however, dates it about forty years before the destruction of the temple (i.e., about A.D. 30). By way of further setting the scene, John noted that it was early. Technically speaking, "early" refers to the fourth watch of the night (3:00–6:00 a.m.), though it can also be used in a more general sense. Roman officials often began their duties at dawn and finished by late morning, so there is no reason why the Jewish leaders could not have brought Jesus to Pilate before 6:00 a.m. Their goal was to have Pilate rubber-stamp their decision to kill Jesus and carry out the execution before the crowds were aware of what was happening.

When they arrived at Pilate's headquarters, the Jewish leaders remained outside and did not enter into the Praetorium. They had ceremonially cleansed themselves in preparation for the Passover meal they would eat later that day and could not risk a defilement that would bar them from that important meal. Most likely, the defilement they feared was contamination from a dead body, which would render them unclean for seven days. That concern stemmed from the common Jewish belief that Gentiles disposed of aborted or stillborn babies by throwing them down the drains. Thus, the Mishnah declared all Gentile homes to be unclean. Entering the colonnade or courtyard outside Pilate's residence, however, would not defile them.

Illustrative of the twisted devotion of religious legalists, the Jewish leaders expected to please God through their legalism, expressed in physical separation from a Gentile

house, while at the same time illegally murdering God's Son. They fastidiously avoided any superficial ceremonial defilement, but cared nothing about the profound moral defilement they incurred from rejecting and condemning to death the Holy Son of God. John's account of this phase of Jesus' trial unfolds in three acts. The purpose of this article is to explore the first: the accusation.

## The Accusation

Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you." So Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

In deference to their religious scruples, Pilate met the Jews outside his residence. Their refusal to enter the Praetorium forced him to shuttle back and forth from inside the building, where Jesus was, to outside, where His accusers stood.

Pontius Pilate had been appointed the fifth governor of Judea by Emperor Tiberius in A.D. 26, and he held that position for about ten years. Both the Gospels and extra-biblical sources portray him as proud, arrogant, and cynical, but also as weak and vacillating. His tenure as governor was marked by insensitivity and brutality. Reversing the policy of his predecessors, Pilate sent troops into Jerusalem carrying standards bearing images that the Jews viewed as idolatrous. When many of them vehemently protested against what they saw as a sacrilege, Pilate ordered them to stop bothering him on pain of death. But they called his bluff, daring him to carry out his threat. Unwilling to massacre so many people, Pilate gave in and removed the offending standards. The story highlights his poor judgment, stubborn arrogance, and vacillating weakness. Pilate further angered the Jews when he took money from the temple treasury to build an aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem. His soldiers beat and slaughtered many Jews in the riots that followed.

But the incident that led to Pilate's downfall involved not the Jews, but their hated rivals the Samaritans. A group of them planned to climb Mt. Gerizim in search of golden objects allegedly hidden by Moses on its summit. Viewing the Samaritans as insurrectionists, Pilate ordered his troops to attack, and many of the pilgrims were killed. The Samaritans complained about Pilate's brutality to his immediate superior, the governor of Syria. He removed Pilate from

# Illustrative of the twisted devotion of religious legalists, the Jewish leaders expected to please God through their legalism, expressed in physical separation from a Gentile house, while at the same time illegally murdering God's Son.

office and ordered him to Rome to be judged by Emperor Tiberius. But Tiberius died while Pilate was en route to Rome. Nothing is known for certain about Pilate after he reached Rome. Some accounts claim he was banished; others that he was executed; still others that he committed suicide.

Pilate's question, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" formally opened the legal proceedings. The Jewish leaders had undoubtedly already communicated with him about this case, since Roman troops took part in Jesus' arrest. They evidently expected him to rubber-stamp their judgment and sentence Jesus to death. Instead, exercising his prerogative as governor, he ordered a fresh hearing over which he would preside. But the last thing the Jewish leaders wanted was a trial. They wanted a death sentence; they wanted Pilate to be an executioner, not a judge. They knew that their charge against Jesus, that He was guilty of blasphemy because He claimed to be God incarnate, would not stand up in a Roman court.

The Jews' peremptory reply, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you," was not only insulting, but also skirted the issue. Their false, blasphemous assertion that He was an evildoer was an assault on His character, but not an accusation of a specific legal violation. Quite unintentionally, their utter inability to bring one legitimate charge against Him affirmed Jesus' innocence. Still, they made it clear that they expected Pilate simply to confirm their decision and sentence Jesus to death.

Stung by their haughty, disrespectful, disdainful treatment

of him, Pilate fired back a barb of his own. "Take Him yourselves," he taunted them, "and judge Him according to your law." Pilate knew full well that they wanted him to execute Jesus. But as the Jews were forced to acknowledge to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." Though he would soon cave in to their demands, Pilate initially stood his ground.

But there was a deeper significance to the exchange between Pilate and the Jews. The wicked scheming of the Jewish leaders and the cowardly connivance of Pilate merely served to fulfill "the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die." Jesus had predicted that Gentiles would be involved in His death. "Behold," He told the disciples, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again (Mark 10:33-34).

The Lord had also predicted the form His execution would take. In John 3:14, 8:28, and 12:32, He spoke of being "lifted up," which He said in order "to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die" (12:33; cf. Ps. 22:6-18). Had the Jews executed Him, they would have thrown Him down and stoned Him (as they did Stephen; Acts 7:58-60). But the Lord's prediction was about to be fulfilled, as He was "lifted up" on the cross, a distinctively Roman kind of execution. God providentially controlled the events of Jesus' trial to ensure that His prophetic words would come to pass. ♦



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# John Knox and the Preaching of the Gospel

In his address to the 1960 Synod, “John Knox: Central Figure of the Reformation,” Rev. J. P. MacQueen said:

It is to be feared that his reputation as one of the most powerful and eloquent preachers of his day, with the fruit of widespread revivals, the edification, comfort and establishment of believers, and the salvation of sinners, has been considerably and, maybe, permanently eclipsed by his widespread and justly-enduring reputation as one of the world’s greatest Reformers.

Fifty years later, a certain measure of rather grudging and qualified acknowledgement may still be made of what the nation owes to Knox for the impetus he gave to social and educational reform, but, if his preaching is referred to at all, it is as that of a rabble-rousing fanatic.

To Mr. MacQueen’s observation, we would add the observation that what is often ignored, even by those who admire the work of the Reformation, is the fact that it was by his preaching of the gospel that John Knox was enabled to achieve what he did as a Reformer. Circumstances meant that he was necessarily engaged with monarchs and statesmen and in enunciating social and educational principles that would reflect the teaching of the Word of God and contribute to the maintenance of the Reformed Church,



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## HUGH CARTWRIGHT

was, until his death in September 2011, minister of the Edinburgh congregation of the Free Presbyterian Church. He also served a Professor of Church History and Church Principles at the Free Church College, Edinburgh.

but even in these areas his success lay to a significant extent in the influence of his gospel preaching on those who held the levers of power and on the people as a whole.

In thinking of John Knox and the preaching of the gospel, we would like not merely to take a historical look at John Knox as a preacher, but to consider something of the instruction and encouragement he gives regarding preaching in our own time. In doing so, we shall say a little about each of the following points, dealing with some more briefly than with others: the man who preached, his call to preach, his view of preaching, the content of his preaching, the method of his preaching, the manner of his preaching, and the outcome of his preaching.

### 1. The Man who Preached

Ordained to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church, Knox seems to have functioned in semi-secular legal employment, and when we get the first really-verifiable glimpse of him, he is acting as tutor to the sons of lairds in the Lothians, “whom certain years he had nourished in godliness,” as he puts it himself, describing the period prior to 1546. Knox is reticent about his early spiritual experience, but it would seem from these words that he had for some time been acquainted with the truth which he sought to teach these boys. It is said that he had been led to the study of



ST. ANDREWS CASTLE

Scripture by his reading of Jerome and to the doctrines of grace by his reading of Augustine. He is said to have first received “a taste of the truth” from the preaching of Thomas Guillaume, a converted Dominican friar from East Lothian.

For a short time prior to the arrest and execution of George Wishart in 1546, Knox had accompanied this Calvinistic preacher on his missionary journeys around the Lothians and Dundee. His references to Wishart display affection and respect for him as a man and as a preacher. There is no doubt that, during their short association, Wishart exercised a great influence over him, introduced him to Reformed theology, church discipline, and worship, and gave him, by example, a high view of preaching as the authoritative declaration of the Word of God. W. G. Blaikie notes that “it seems to have been through Wishart’s preaching that the spark came that kindled his knowledge into a living flame.” Knox’s earlier classical education, his intimate acquaintance with the errors and evils of Romanism, his call by grace to the personal knowledge of Christ, his systematic study of Scripture for his own benefit and in order to teach his young charges, and his experience of powerful preaching all made their own contribution to forming the man who was to become one of the most effective preachers of all time in Scotland.

There is no doubt that the obvious holiness and integrity of his character contributed to the influence of Knox’s preaching. Speaking in 1872, James Begg asserted: “That personal Christianity was the true basis of his character

need not be repeated. Knox was a man of earnest piety.” One of the preeminent features of his character, according to Begg, was “an entire submission of his mind and will to the authority of God in his Word.” Even *The Catholic Encyclopedia* acknowledges that “it is to his credit that he died, as he had lived, a poor man, and that he never enriched himself with the spoils of the Church which he had abandoned.” W. G. Blaikie affirms that “the high reputation which Knox had among his brethren for personal holiness is another index to the character of his ministry.” He quotes the testimony of Richard Bannatyne, Knox’s devoted and admiring servant or secretary, who lived in close contact with him and who described him in his *Journal* as “a man of God, the light of Scotland, the comfort of the Church, the mirror of godliness and pattern and example to all true ministers in purity of life, soundness of doctrine, and boldness in reproofing of wickedness.”

## 2. His Call to Preach

The manner in which Knox became a preacher is well known. When in St. Andrews Castle for protection, with his young charges and their parents, his tutoring took the form of a systematic study of the Gospel according to John, to which others were admitted as hearers. He was also involved in public disputations with local churchmen. This convinced the Protestant congregation within the Castle and their preacher John Rough, who felt his need of assistance, that Knox had gifts which could be well employed in the work of the gospel ministry. He tells us that, when he



was urged by some of the leading men to take up the work of preaching, “he utterly refused, alleging that he would not run where God had not called him.”

However, the congregation resolved to call him to this work, and, when they were met on one occasion, Rough preached a sermon in which “he declared the power which a congregation, however small, had over anyone in whom they perceived gifts suited to the office, and how dangerous it was for such a person to reject the call of those who desired instruction.” Rough then addressed him:

In the name of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, and in the name of these that presently call you by my mouth, I charge you that ye refuse not this holy vocation, but, as ye tender the glory of God, the increase of Christ’s Kingdom, the edification of your brethren and the comfort of me, oppressed by the multitude of labors, that ye take upon you the public office of preaching, even as ye look to avoid God’s heavy displeasure, and desire that he shall multiply his graces upon you.

Knox, who gives this report, records his reaction:

Whereat John Knox, abashed, burst forth in most abundant tears and withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behavior, that day till the day he was compelled to present himself to the public place of preaching, did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart; for no man saw any sign of mirth in him, neither yet had he pleasure to accompany any man for many days together.

Thomas M’Crie comments on how the weight of the ministerial function is demonstrated

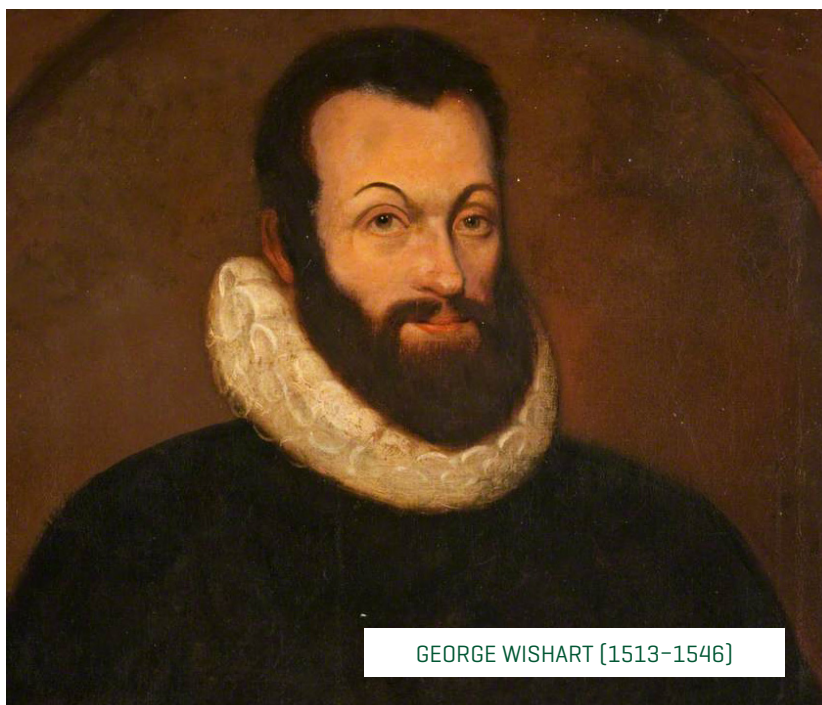
when men of piety and talents, deeply affected with the awful responsibility of the office and with their own insufficiency, were with great difficulty induced to take on them these orders which they had long desired and for which they had labored to qualify themselves. . . . [He adds:] The behavior of Knox serves also to reprove those who become preachers of their own accord, and who from vague and enthusiastic desires of doing good, or a fond conceit of their own gifts, trample upon good order and thrust

themselves into employment without any regular call.

The necessity for good order and a regular call is emphasized in *The First Book of Discipline* of 1560, to which Knox was at least a major contributor. The right of the people to elect their ministers is enshrined in that book. However, it would not normally take the form which Knox’s call did in the unique circumstances of that time, but the election would be of men whose calling and gifts had been examined and approved by the ministers and elders of the church, who would then be admitted or inducted at a public service with an appropriate sermon and charges to both minister and congregation. “The lack of able men shall not excuse us before God if by our consent unable men be placed over the flock of Christ Jesus.”

At the same time *The First Book of Discipline* emphasizes the responsibility of “all men to whom God hath given any talent to persuade by wholesome doctrine, to bestow the same, if they be called by the Church, to the advancement of Christ’s glory, and the comfort of his troubled flock.” Those among the men who were appointed to the temporary position of Readers of the Scriptures and Prayers, who

of long time have professed Christ Jesus, whose honest conversation deserveth praise of all godly men and whose knowledge also might greatly help the simple, and yet they only content themselves with reading, these must be animated, and by gentle admonition



GEORGE WISHART (1513–1546)

# Knox certainly regarded preaching as a divine ordinance and preachers as messengers sent from God.

encouraged by some exhortation to comfort their brethren, and so they may be admitted to administration of the sacraments, that is, to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

It is significant that one of the functions of the weekly “exercises” or “prophesyings” or meetings for the exposition and discussion of Scripture, which were to be held in the main towns every week—out of which the district presbyteries grew—was the discovery of men with a calling and gift for ministry:

And moreover men in whom is supposed to be any gift which might edify the Church, if they were well employed, must be charged by the minister and elders to join themselves with the session and company of interpreters, to the end that the Kirk may judge whether they be able to serve to God’s glory and to the profit of the Kirk in the vocation of ministers or not . . . For no man may be permitted as best pleaseth him to live within the Kirk of God, but every man must be constrained by fraternal admonition and correction to bestow his labors, when of the Kirk he is required for the edification of others.

One can see Knox’s own experience reflected here. In passing, one might ask if it would not perhaps be good for the church were presbyteries again to reflect something of the original exercises out of which they developed.

### 3. His View of Preaching

Knox certainly regarded preaching as a divine ordinance and preachers as messengers sent from God. They were not merely orators who had biblical subjects as their theme but men whose function was to declare what God had revealed and to do so in the power of His Spirit. A week before he died, Knox gathered his elders and deacons into his room,

along with James Lawson, his successor, and David Lindsay, one of the ministers of Leith. Among other solemn statements of the dying man was the following:

Whatever influenced me to utter whatever the Lord put into my mouth so boldly, and without respect of persons, was a reverential fear of my God, who called and of his grace appointed me to be *a steward of divine mysteries*, and a belief that he will demand an account of the manner in which I have discharged *the trust committed to me*, when I shall stand at last before his tribunal. (emphasis added)

God is speaking through the preacher, communicating a message from His ancient Word that is applicable to hearers today. This is what gave Knox his authority and courage. This is what gave him his concern to convey accurately what was written in the Bible. He was not there to communicate his own wisdom, but the wisdom of God. It was this view of preaching that warranted his conclusion in his *Epistle to the Lords Professing the Truth in Scotland* that “some spark of God’s true fear” resting in the heart would lead a man “to reverence God’s messengers, heartily to embrace, and study to obey, the precepts and charges which they give.” In his *Address to the Commonality of Scotland* he said: “We require nothing of you, but that patiently ye will hear our doctrine, which is not ours, but is the doctrine of salvation, revealed to the world by the only Son of God.”

John Knox lived to preach the gospel. From his place as a slave in the French galley, after being taken prisoner at St. Andrews, he got a glimpse of the town. “I see the steeple of that place where God first opened my mouth in public to his glory; and I am fully persuaded, how weak soever I now appear, that I shall not depart this life, till my tongue shall glorify his godly name in the same place.” From his exile on the Continent he recorded his prayer in a letter to Mrs. Bowes:

And haste the time, O Lord, at Thy good pleasure, that once again my tongue may yet praise Thy holy name before the congregation, if it were but in the very hour of death . . . for a few sermons by me to be made in England, my heart at this hour could be content to suffer more than nature were able to sustain.

It was not that Knox was satisfied with himself as a preacher. Commenting in a letter on the Lord's command to feed His sheep and lambs, he wrote:

O alas! How small is the number of pastors that obeys this commandment. But this matter will I not deplore, except that I, not speaking of others, will accuse myself that I do not, I confess, the uttermost of my power in feeding the lambs and sheep of Christ. I satisfy, peradventure, many men in the small labors I take, but I satisfy not myself. I have done somewhat, but not according to my duty.

During his earlier Edinburgh days, he preached in his congregation twice on Sabbath and three times during the week and was often sent on preaching tours around the country.

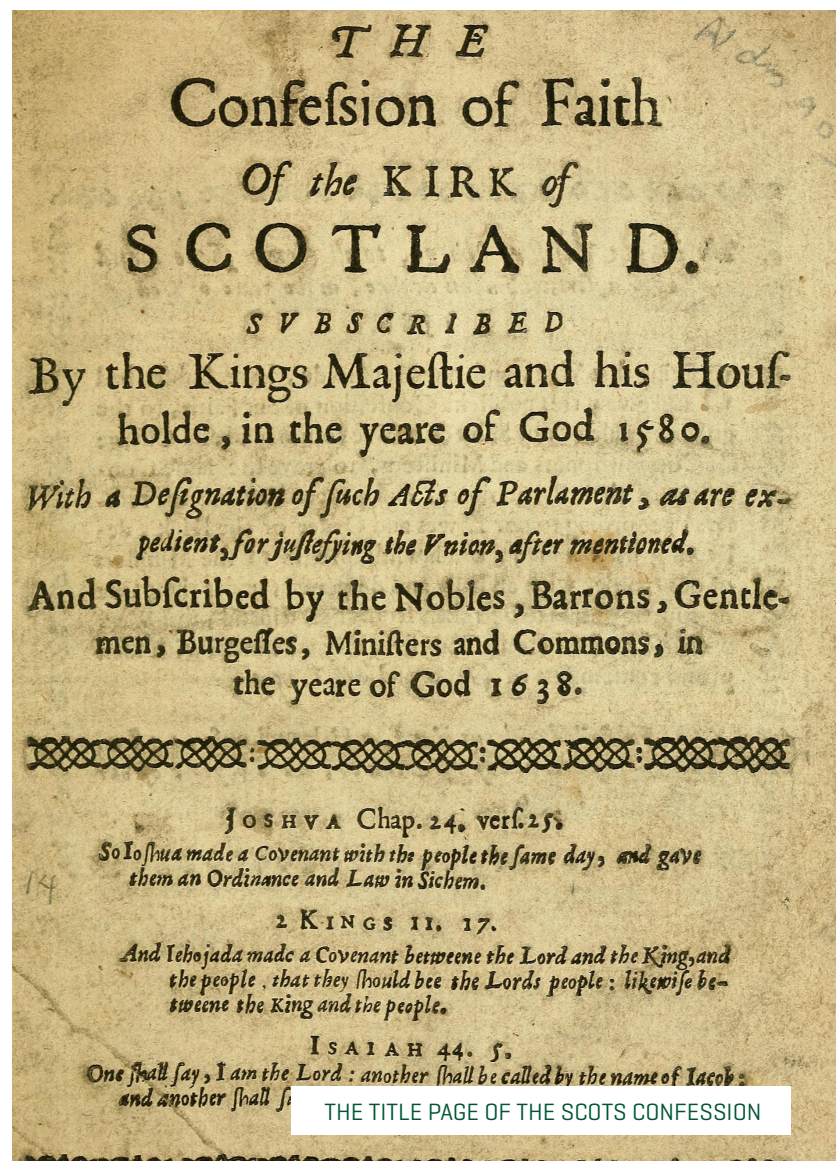
Preaching was to be the main work of the gospel minister, and the view Knox had of preaching determined the content of his preaching, the method of his preaching, and the manner of his preaching.

#### 4. The Content of His Preaching

The common view of John Knox's preaching is that it was occupied with condemnation of Romanism and of all and everyone who did not accept his views, and also with instruction to the authorities of the day as to how they should conduct their affairs. Knox's position and the situation of church and state in his time did necessitate that, as a faithful witness to the truth of God, he should show the application of biblical principles to current events and significant personages, and urge their adoption. The idea that this was the staple of his preaching may be encouraged by the fact that most of the sermons of which there is a report were preached on public occasions at critical

points in the affairs of church and nation. When there is opportunity to compare reports of even these sermons with what he actually said, as in the account he gave to Queen Mary of a sermon whose report enraged her and made her summon him to Holyroodhouse, it is clear that his statements were well reasoned and calm, however energetically presented, and far from the fanatical rants full of personal attacks which they were reputed to be.

As declared in *The Scots Confession*, he accepted all Scripture as inspired of God and profitable to instruct, reprove, and exhort. That he regarded the Word of God as the abundant resource upon which his preaching should draw is illustrated by remarks in his *Letter to the Protestants of Scotland* during his absence:



For as the Word of God is the beginning of life, spiritual, without which all flesh is dead in God's presence, and the lantern to our feet, without the brightness whereof all the posterity of Adam doth walk in darkness, and as it is the foundation of faith, without which no man understandeth the good will of God, so it is also the only organ and instrument which God uses to strengthen the weak, to comfort the afflicted, to reduce to mercy by repentance such as have sinned, and finally to preserve and keep the very life of the soul in all assaults and temptations, and therefore if that you desire your knowledge to be increased, your faith to be confirmed, your consciences to be quieted and comforted, and finally your soul to be preserved in life, let your exercise be frequent in the law of your God.

With his colleagues in the writing of *The Scots Confession*, Knox wished his beliefs and preaching to be in accordance with the Word of God,

protesting that if any man will note in our *Confession* any chapter or sentence contrary to God's Holy Word, that it would please him of his gentleness and for Christian charity's sake to inform us of it in writing, and we, upon our honor, do promise him that by God's grace we shall give him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is, from Holy Scripture, or else we shall alter whatever he can prove to be wrong.

It was Knox's concern to preach the whole counsel of God. It is clear from his writings and from *The Scots Confession*, which was intended to set forth the doctrine believed and preached by Knox and his colleagues, that his understanding of the truth of the Bible was that which has become known as Calvinistic. He had come to this understanding of the truth before he went to Geneva, and no doubt was much indebted to the teaching of George Wishart, who was probably the first significant Reformed (as distinct from Lutheran) preacher in Scotland. His sojourn in Geneva would certainly have confirmed him in his beliefs.

Knox's utterances make it clear that he had a systematic grasp of biblical theology and that he would subscribe fully to the contention of a much more recent theologian, B. B. Warfield, who described Calvinism in the following terms:

Theism comes to its rights only in a teleological conception of the universe, which perceives in the entire course of events the orderly outworking of the plan of God, who is the author, preserver and governor

of all things, whose will is consequently the ultimate cause of all. The religious relation attains its purity only when an attitude of absolute dependence on God is not merely temporarily assumed in the act, say, of prayer, but is sustained through all the activities of life, intellectual, emotional, executive. And evangelical religion reaches stability only when the sinful soul rests in humble, self-emptying trust purely on the God of grace as the immediate and sole source of all the efficiency which enters into its salvation. And these things are the formative principles of Calvinism.

In the Preface to his little work on *Predestination*, Knox wrote that

the doctrine of God's eternal predestination is so necessary to the church of God that, without the same, can faith neither be truly taught, neither surely established; man can never be brought to true humility and knowledge of himself, neither yet can he be ravished in admiration of God's eternal goodness, and so moved to praise him as appertaineth.

He wrote again: "For as our God in his own nature is immutable, so remaineth his love toward his elect always unchangeable (*Eph.* 1); for as in Christ he hath chosen his church before the beginning of all ages, so by him will he maintain and preserve the same unto the end."

The main aim of his preaching, as of Scripture itself, was to set forth Christ in all the glory of his Person, offices and work, and in relation to the various conditions of sinners, with all the implications for their lives. In his summary of the doctrine he preached before having to leave Scotland in 1556 he says that

he taught that there is no other name by which men can be saved but that of Jesus, and that all reliance on the merits of others is vain and delusive; that the Savior having by his own sacrifice sanctified and reconciled to God those who should inherit the promised kingdom, all other sacrifices which men pretend to offer for sin are blasphemous; that all men ought to hate sin, which is so odious before God that no sacrifice but the death of his Son could satisfy for it; that they ought to magnify their heavenly Father, who did not spare him who is the substance of his glory, but gave him up to suffer the ignominious death of the cross for us; and that those who have been washed from their former sins are bound to lead a new life, fighting against the lusts of the flesh, and studying to glorify God by good works.

## Although Knox did not write out his sermons in advance, there is evidence that he could remember them verbatim even years later.

During the last weeks of his life, he preached on the crucifixion of Christ from Matthew 27, “a theme,” says M’Crie, “with which he had often expressed a wish to close his ministry.” Ten days before his death, when he was too weak even to sit in a chair, he insisted on getting out of bed, thinking it was the Sabbath, intending to go to the church to preach on the resurrection of Christ, which would have been his next subject and on which he had been meditating throughout the night.

The doctrine of justification by faith was prominent in his preaching from the beginning, and, as he said himself, it was the axe which he laid to the root of the Roman tree so as to demolish it, rather than just lopping off the branches by attacking the errors in doctrine and practice which sprang from that root. He did, of course, lop off the branches as well, as these were so dishonoring to God and destructive to souls.

He sums up his doctrine on this point in his *Epistle to His Brethren in Scotland*:

If therefore the doctrine or persuasion of any man tend to the exaltation and advancement of any righteousness or perfection, except of Christ Jesus alone; if any affirm that Christian righteousness which is available before God be any other perfection than remission of our sins, which we have by faith only in Christ’s blood, or if any promise such perfection in this life that unfeignedly we need not say, “Remit to us our offences, for we are unprofitable servants,” and finally, if any persuade that our merits, good works or obedience be any cause either of our justification, or yet of our election, let him be accursed, suppose that he were an angel from heaven; for he preacheth to us another evangel than the Son of God hath revealed to the world, and the Holy Spirit hath sent up to us by

the mouths and writings of the apostles, which plainly affirmeth that there is no other name given to men under the heaven in which they may be saved except in the name, that is, in the power and virtues of Jesus crucified, who is made to us from God righteousness, wisdom, sanctification and redemption; by which alone we have access to the throne of God’s mercy, as by one only propitiator and obtainer of grace, to us that of nature be sinful; the flesh (even after our regeneration) ever rebelling against the spirit, during the travail of this life, in such sort that, with the apostle Paul, the rest of God’s children are compelled to confess that in them, that is, in their flesh, there remaineth no good.

Contrary to later popular opinion, the loving and sympathetic pastoral care of the flock was a prominent feature in Knox’s preaching. This is illustrated in some of his correspondence with his mother-in-law, Mrs. Bowes, who was subject to frequent depressions and doubts concerning her Christian state, on account of the trouble she had with sin. It is quite obvious that some of these lengthy communications are largely transcripts of sermons which he had preached. Although Knox did not write out his sermons in advance, there is evidence that he could remember them verbatim even years later.

One example of this is his exposition of Psalm 6, published as *A Fort for the Afflicted*. There is also a sermon, *On Christ’s Temptation in the Wilderness*, which he introduces with these words:

The causes moving me to entreat this place of Scripture is that such as, by the inscrutable providence of God, do fall into diverse temptations judge not themselves, by reason thereof, less acceptable in God’s presence; but contrariwise, having the way prepared to victory

by Jesus Christ, shall not fear above measure the crafty assaults of that subtle serpent, Satan; but with joy and bold courage, having such a guide as is here painted forth, such a champion, and such weapons as here are to be found (if with obedience we will hear, and with unfeigned faith believe,) may assure ourselves of God's present favor, and of final victory, by the means of him who, for our safeguard and deliverance, hath entered into the battle, and triumphed over his adversary, and all his raging fury.

That he was comforting others with the comfort by which he himself was comforted by God appears from the prayer with which he concluded the 1565 sermon, on Isaiah 26:13ff., which had him banned from preaching for a time:

Give us, O Lord, hearts to visit thee in the time of our affliction, and albeit we see no end of our dolors, that yet our faith and hope may conduct us to the assured hope of that joyful resurrection, in the which we shall possess the fruit of that for which now we travail. And in the mean season, grant us, O Lord, to repose ourselves in the sanctuary of thy promise, that in thee we may find comfort, till this thy great indignation begun amongst us may pass over and thou thyself appear to the comfort of the afflicted, and to the terror of thine enemies.

This aspect of his preaching was carried into his personal pastoral dealings. Knox himself tells of Elizabeth Adamson, wife of Edinburgh Dean of Guild James Barroun,

who, by reason that she had a troubled conscience, delighted much in the company of the said John Knox, because he, according to the grace given unto him, opened more fully the fountain of God's mercies than did the common sort of teachers that she had heard before; for she had heard none except friars.

He also gave much place to the practice of the Christian life, as we see, for example, in his *Treatise on Prayer*, described as "A Declaration what true prayer is, how we should pray, and for what we should pray, set forth by John Knox, Preacher of God's Holy Word, unto the small and dispersed flock of Jesus Christ." He deals with practical subjects in a practical way:

Prayer is an earnest and familiar talking with God, to whom we declare our miseries, whose support and help we implore and desire in our adversities, and

whom we laud and praise for our benefits received. So that prayer containeth the exposition of our dolors, the desire of God's defense, and the praising of his magnificent name, as the Psalms of David clearly do teach.

### 5. The Method of His Preaching.

William Taylor records the well-known fact that

it was his habit to speak from a few notes which were made on the margin of his Bible, and which remained the sole written memoranda of his discourse . . . Yet [his sermons] were as carefully premeditated as if they had been written . . . He prepared with care . . . and remembered with accuracy. He did not speak extemporaneously, in the sense of never having thought upon his subject until he was required to speak, but he had fixed beforehand his line of thought, and there is reason to believe also, in many cases, the very words in which he had determined to express himself. Yet, though he premeditated very carefully, he was able also to introduce what was given to him at the moment.

Depending on the Spirit as he did, Knox, in his thorough preparation for preaching, drew on his knowledge of the biblical languages and of the theological writers of ancient and modern times and used the commentaries available to him. Though he was by his circumstances a man of action, he was very much a diligent student. Taylor draws attention to one of his letters in which "he describes himself as 'sitting at his books' and contemplating Matthew's Gospel by the help of 'some most godly expositions, and among the rest Chrysostom.'"

It was Knox's aim in his sermons to be an expositor and open up the mind of the Spirit in His Word. It seems that his sermons, which could sometimes last for over two hours, generally fell into two parts: the first, in which he carefully expounded the text in its original context; and the second, in which he applied the teaching to the hearers.

It was his custom, when opportunity afforded, to preach through books of the Bible, or extended sections of them, in series of sermons. We first find him as a tutor going through the Gospel of John with his pupils and interested hearers. At other times, he is working his way through Daniel or Haggai. Provision was made in *The First Book of Discipline* for "the plain reading and interpretation of the Scripture" in the parish churches, so that

by frequent reading, this gross ignorance which in this cursed Papistry hath overflowed all, may partly be removed. We think it most expedient that the Scripture


be read in order: that is, that some one book of the Old or New Testament be begun and orderly read to the end. And the same we judge of preaching where the minister for the most part remains in one place. For this skipping and divagation from place to place of Scripture, be it in reading or be it in preaching, we judge not so profitable to edify the Kirk as the continual following of one text.

Such a method was considered desirable among a people who might not have access to the Scriptures otherwise.

A. F. Mitchell draws attention to the insistence of *The Book of Common Order* that “even the ordinary ministers of the church must all be well qualified to preach the gospel of salvation, as many of the common people were unable to read, and could only be saturated with its teaching by the living voice of the preacher.” Although hearers today can read, and there is much instructive literature available, we should not underestimate the extent to which many are dependent upon the pulpit for their understanding of the truth.

In addition to sequential exposition, Knox also frequently preached from occasional texts to which he was directed as appropriate for particular times and places. These he approached in the same way, seeking carefully to unfold the mind of the Spirit and to bring it home to the minds and consciences of the hearers so as to affect their experience and conduct. He did not take passages out of the context in which they were set and apply them to dissimilar situations. He brought out the meaning of the text in its original setting and then took care, as Taylor puts it, “to establish the parallelism between the original case referred to by the sacred writer and that to which he applied it.” It was then that “he set himself to enforce its practical bearing on the circumstances of his hearers and his times.” He was always the expositor of the Word of God.

His style was plain and to the point. Taylor attributes to him the first recorded use of the common expressions “calling a fig a fig,” and “a spade a spade,” and records his own saying that “from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other inspired writers, he had learned, plainly and boldly, to call wickedness by its own terms.”



In addition to sequential exposition, Knox also frequently preached from occasional texts to which he was directed as appropriate for particular times and places.

#### 6. The Manner of His Preaching

Many are acquainted with the teenage James Melville’s description of John Knox preaching in St. Andrews in 1571. In English it reads:

I heard him teach there the prophecies of Daniel that summer and the winter following, I had my pen and my little book, and took away such things as I could comprehend. In the opening up of his text he was moderate the space of half an hour; but when he entered to application he made me so [thrill] and tremble, that I could not hold a pen to write. He was very weak. I saw him, every day of his doctrine, go slowly and warily, with a furring of matricks about his neck, a staff in one hand, and good, godly Richard Bannatyne, his servant holding up the other oxter, from the abbey to the parish kirk and, by the same Richard and another servant, lifted up to the pulpit, where he behoved to lean at his first entry; but ere he had done with his sermon he was so active and vigorous that he was like to ding the pulpit in blads [beat the pulpit in pieces] and fly out of it.

William Taylor suggests that the pulpit

was the glass which focused all his powers into a point and quickened them into an intensity which kindled

everything it touched. It brightened his intellect, enlivened his imagination, clarified his judgment, inflamed his courage, and gave fiery energy to his utterances . . . There, over and above the fervid animation which he had in such large measure, and the glow of enthusiasm which fills the soul of the orator as he addresses an audience, he had the feeling that he was called of God to be faithful, and that lifted him entirely out of himself. He spoke because he could not but speak, and his words went in to men; like these modern missiles which burst within the wounds which they have made, so his words exploded within the hearts of those who received them and set them on fire with convictions that flamed forth in conduct. It was apparently impossible for anyone to listen to him without being moved either to antagonism or to agreement, or—for he could be tender also—to tears.

Knox exemplified the counsel which he gave from his deathbed to his successor Lawson: “My dearest brother Lawson, fight the good fight of faith, and do the work of the Lord joyfully and resolutely.” As M’Crie puts it,

his ministerial functions were discharged with the greatest assiduity, fidelity and fervor. No avocation or infirmity prevented him from appearing in the pulpit. Preaching was the employment in which he delighted, and for which he was qualified by an extensive acquaintance with the Scriptures and by the happy art of applying them in the most striking manner to the existing circumstances of the Church and of his hearers. His powers of alarming the conscience and arousing the passions have been frequently celebrated, but he excelled also in unfolding the consolations of the gospel and in calming the breasts of those who were agitated by a sense of guilt or suffering under the ordinary afflictions of life. When he discoursed of the griefs and joys, the conflicts and triumphs, of genuine Christians, he described what he had himself known and experienced.

The vehemence of his preaching when exposing and condemning sin did not arise from self-righteous satisfaction with himself but from the acquaintance he had with

## His message took such possession of him that it affected the manner of his preaching.

sin in himself. In a letter to Mrs. Bowes he wrote:

Albeit I never lack the presence and plain image of my own wretched infirmity, yet seeing sin so manifestly abound in all estate, I am compelled to thunder out the threatenings of God against the obstinate rebels, on doing whereof (albeit as God knoweth I am no malicious nor obstinate sinner) I sometimes am wounded, knowing myself criminal and guilty in many, yea in all (malicious obstinacy laid aside) things that in others I reprehend . . . I am worse than my pen can express . . . There is no vice repugnant to God’s holy will, expressed in his law, wherewith my heart is not infected.

His vehemence in denouncing sin was that of a man who knew and repented daily of sin in his own heart and life.

It appears that Knox forgot himself in his message, or his message took such possession of him that it affected the manner of his preaching. Taylor uses the expression “sermon-possessed” and suggests that when a man is possessed by what he is saying, as Knox so obviously was, “without any consciousness on his part of what he is doing, it speaks through him—that is, not through his words only, but through his entire personality—and bears him along as with an overflowing flood.”

Knox preached in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. He said himself of these days that “God gave his Holy Spirit to simple men in great abundance.” John Calvin wrote to him in November 1559 expressing his pleasure, and that of all the pious people to whom he gave the news, at hearing of the success which had crowned Knox’s labors in Scotland:

As we are astonished at such incredible progress in so brief a space of time, so we likewise give thanks to God,



whose singular blessing is so signally displayed therein. This affords you ample matter for confidence for the future, and ought to animate you to overcome all opposition.

He adds a comment which shows how well acquainted he was with Knox:

As I am not ignorant how strenuous you are in stirring up other, and what abilities and energies God has endowed you with for going through with this task, I have deemed it superfluous to stimulate the brethren.

Yet his natural talents would not have produced the results which followed his labors had they not been used by the Lord.

### 7. The Outcome of His Preaching

The outcome of his preaching was such as could only be accounted for by the fact that it came to the people of his generation as it did to the Thessalonians to whom Paul writes, not in word only, “but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

While various factors contributed to the success of the Reformation in Scotland, it can be said with confidence that the establishing of a church founded on the basis of the Bible, with preaching and practice governed by the Word of God, must be traced principally to the preaching of John Knox, and of others who declared the gospel which he proclaimed.

From the very beginning of his ministry, Knox’s preaching was blessed to the awakening and conversion of sinners and to the instruction and encouragement and motivating of the Lord’s people. The hunger for the preaching and the effect it had often amazed himself. In St. Andrews in the early days, in exile on the Continent and in England, during his temporary visits to Scotland and after he settled permanently here, it seems that the Word of the Lord had free course and was glorified (2 Thess 3:1).

Knox was very conscious that he was but the instrument raised up to help meet the need of souls awakened by God’s grace to seek the word at his mouth. On one of his temporary visits to Scotland, he was amazed “to contemplate and behold the fervent thirst of our brethren, night and day sobbing and groaning for the bread of life . . . their fervency here doth so ravish me that I cannot but accuse and condemn my slothful coldness.” Perhaps we do not always realize sufficiently how much influence the pew has on the pulpit and how much the preacher owes to the yearnings which the Lord has created in the souls of some among the hearers.

Many were delivered from the darkness of their natural

state, in which Rome had left them. The Reformation was not only the deliverance of the Scottish people and church from the shackles of Rome, but the deliverance of many individual souls from their bondage to sin.

Often, Knox’s preaching was used to rekindle the hope and courage of dispirited Protestants, as when the congregation had retreated before the forces of their enemies from Edinburgh to Stirling in dismay and despondency and he preached a sermon which reinforced their zeal and resolve. Hence the message which Randolph sent to Cecil in England in October 1561: “I assure you, the voice of one man is able in one hour to put more life in us than five hundred trumpets continually blustering in our ears.”

### Conclusion

It may be thought that what we have been saying about John Knox, about his content and method at least, is just what could be said about the ideal entertained with regard to any gospel minister today. But it has to be said that, if these have been characteristics of the Reformed ministry in Scotland, hopefully even to the present time, the instrumentality of John Knox in bringing this about must be acknowledged. He it was in Scotland, instrumentally, who restored the pulpit to its place in the church, and the inspired and authoritative Word of God to its place in the pulpit, and the biblical idea of the gospel minister as a man whom God has separated and called by his grace and in whom God has been pleased to reveal his Son that he might go and preach him wherever he is sent.

William Taylor claims that “there are traces of his influence as a preacher to be discovered in the discourses of his successors almost to the present day.” The characteristics of Scottish preaching in which Taylor saw the lasting influence of Knox were “its expository character, its vehemence of manner and its unflinching courage.”

Knox speaks to us down through the ages. One of the things he says to ministers is: “Let us be frequent in reading (which also over many despise), earnest in prayer, diligent in watching over the flock committed to our charge, and let our sobriety and temperate life shame the wicked and be example to the godly.”

The nearer we get to the real man and preacher, John Knox, the more we realize just how searching and humbling looking in such a mirror can be. ♦

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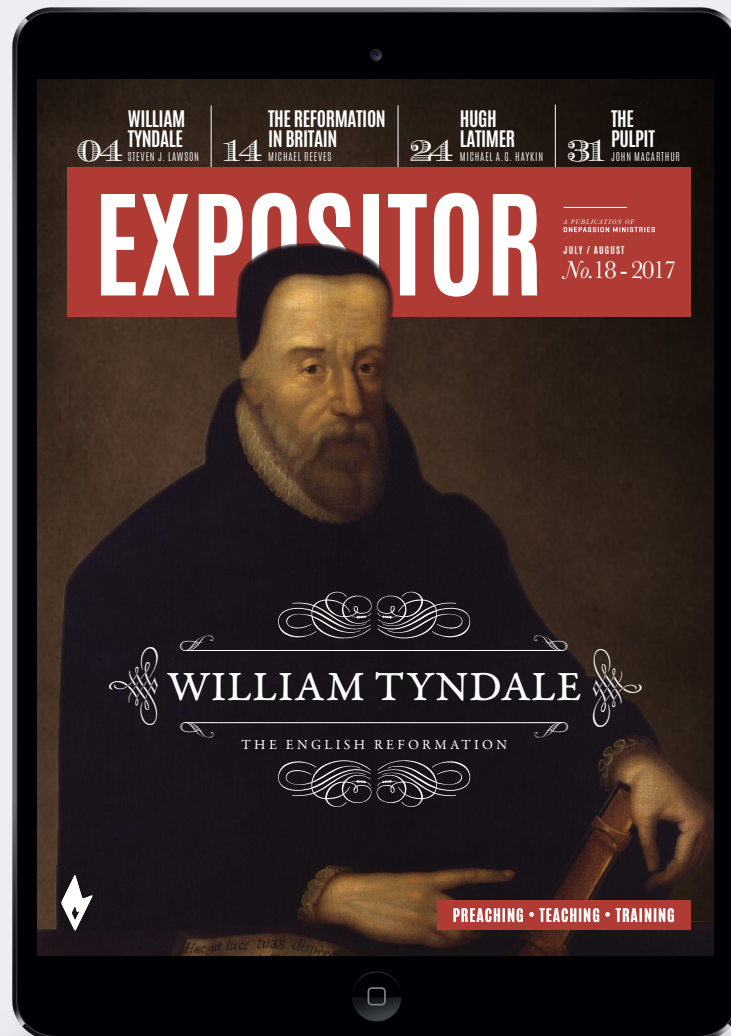
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