

I. John Knox and the Scottish Reformation

Last week we discussed the 1638-39 Bishops war which led to the English Civil wars.

We also noted that the Presbyterians that came to America from Scotland were so influential in American politics that King George called the American Revolution the "Presbyterian War."

Witherspoon, a Scottish theologian, ran Princeton College. He educated a preponderance of the men that sat in the constitutional convention. From among his students came 37 judges (three of whom became justices of the U.S. Supreme Court); 10 Cabinet officers; 12 members of the Continental Congress, 28 U.S. Senators, and 49 U.S. Congressmen.

To understand Scotland and its heritage to through men like Witherspoon we must understand the life and influence of John Knox (1514-72).

John Knox was a preacher to whom God gave extraordinary power. His preaching "mesmerized" people. He is one of the only men in history to change an entire nation by his preaching alone.

Arthur Herman: Just as the German Reformation was largely the work of a single individual, Martin Luther, so the Scottish Reformation was the achievement of one man of heroic will and tireless energy: John Knox. Like Luther, Knox left an indelible mark on his national culture. Uncompromising, dogmatic, and driven, John Knox was a prolific writer and a preacher of *truly terrifying power*.¹

Knox got his "power" from the same source as the apostle, Paul.

"And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

¹ Herman, Arthur. How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything in It (p. 15). Crown. Kindle Edition.

The life of John Knox matters because, although the 16th century population of Scotland was only about 500,000, Scottish culture has had an inordinate effect on the unfolding of Western history.

No one suspected this influence in the sixteenth century. In the early 1500s, Scotland was a poor, primitive country, which the rest of Europe considered barbaric—a land ending in a great field of stone and ice, where the sun shone only four hours a day in winter. (Edinburgh is on the same northern latitude as Juneau). One Scot said he lived in a land “almost beyond the limits of the human race.”

By the end of the 17th century, however, Scotland was the most literate, egalitarian, cultured nation in Europe. By 1750, just prior to the American Revolution, every town had a lending library. Scotland had the highest literacy rate in Europe. How do we explain this? The only explanation is John Knox, the gospel, and the power of God.

Knox was a prophet. He feared God. He definitely didn't fear man. Through a relentless campaign of fiery oratory, he sought to destroy idolatry and purify national religion. In the end, his cause triumphed.

Knox has been underappreciated. In the twentieth century, over 400 years after his death, a statue of Knox was finally erected in Edinburgh. Before that there was no memorial dedicated to Knox in Scotland. Even today the spot where he is buried is covered by a parking lot.

Knox planted the Presbyterian system of church government in Scotland.

We have learned that, although the Puritans wanted it to, Presbyterianism didn't take root in England, but it did in Scotland. From Scotland it spread to the new world.

A. KNOX ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1st He instilled a deep sense of independence and self-reliance in the Scottish people.

2nd He ended Catholicism in Scotland.

Herman: Knox scoured away not only Scottish Catholicism but all its physical manifestations, from monasteries and bishops and clerical vestments to holy

relics and market-square crosses. They smashed stained-glass windows and saints' statues, ripped out choir stalls and roodscreens, and overturned altars... The idols disappeared from southern Scotland, and the Scottish Kirk rose up to take their place.²

3rd He established Thomas Cartwright's Presbyterianism in Scotland. Presbyterianism was the only denomination allowed, and it was not controlled directly by the State.

4th He developed a biblical argument for the necessity of rebellion against tyrannical government.

Arthur Herman: Knox and [George] Buchanan believed that political power was ordained by God, but that that power was vested not in kings or in nobles or even in the clergy, but in the people. The Presbyterian covenant with God required them to defend that power against any interloper. Punishing idolatry and destroying tyranny was a sacred duty laid by God on "the whole body of the people," Knox wrote, "and of every man in his vocation." *Here was a vision of politics unlike any other at the time.*³

B. KNOX' BIOGRAPHY

1514 Born at Haddington to humble parents.

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

1528 At the insistence of Cardinal Beaton, Patrick Hamilton was burnt at the stake.

1529 Knox entered U. of St. Andrews

1536 ordained a Catholic priest.

² Herman, Arthur. *How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything in It* (p. 16). Crown. Kindle Edition.

³ Herman, Arthur. *How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything in It* (p. 18). Crown. Kindle Edition.

1542 Mary Queen of Scots is born and takes the throne.

1543 The infant Queen Mary's regent promotes Bible reading and preaching.

Knox was converted under the preaching of Thomas Guillane.

1545 Knox becomes the body-guard of George Wishart.

Cardinal Beaton, bishop of St. Andrews, arrested Wishart and executed him.

The RC was corrupt. Beaton maintained several concubines and had at least 10 illegitimate children.

After Wishart's execution, sixteen of Wishart's supporters entered Beaton's castle, murdered him, mutilated his body, and hung it naked outside the castle window for all to see.

When these Protestants took refuge in Beaton's castle, Knox came in amongst them.

A French Catholic fleet came in support of Beaton and began to shell the castle.

Meanwhile, watching Knox teach boys SS in the castle, the leaders summoned him and asked him to be their pastor. He refused in tears.

As Knox was condering this call, he attended a service at the local catholic parish church. The dean of the church was defending Catholicism, doing so, he claimed, on the authority of the church, the bride of Christ.

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

In July 1547 the French took St Andrew's castle.

They enslaved Knox, sending him to the galleys.

In 1549, at the request of Edward VI, Knox and his fellow prisoners were released.

Knox spent the next five years in England as an honored guest of the king. The political and religious authorities, anxious to secure Protestantism in England, were eager to take advantage of his preaching. In the autumn of 1551, he was appointed a royal chaplain. It involved preaching before the king.

July 1553 Edward died, and Mary I came to the throne of England. Knox joined the Marian Exiles in Europe.

First, Knox pastored a group of Marian Exiles in Frankfurt.

Then Knox moved to Geneva to co-pastor another group of Marian Exiles.

While Knox was in Europe the Reformation began to grow in Scotland.

1555 Knox returned to Scotland and preached itinerantly with great result for nine months.

Conflict with the 13-year-old Mary Queen of Scotland forced him to return to Geneva.

In 1558 Mary I died and her half-sister Elizabeth I took the throne.

January 1559 Knox returned to Scotland permanently. He was now in his mid-forties.

When Knox preached at Perth and a riot broke out.

When he arrived at Edinburgh, they asked him to be their pastor.

Next Knox preached to the Scottish Parliament, and through him God spoke to Parliament.

Parliament ordered Knox and five colleagues to write a Confession of Faith, which was quickly adopted. Parliament passed laws to abolish the Mass, repudiate papal jurisdiction, and rescind laws at variance with the Reformed faith.

1561 widowed Mary Queen of Scots, now 19, and Catholic, returned from France to ascend the Scottish throne.

Scotland was now divided between Catholic and Protestant.

Because of his popularity—spiritual authority—with the people, Queen Mary feared 49-year-old Knox.

Mary was now the Catholic monarch of an increasingly Protestant kingdom.

Knox feared God more than he feared Mary. John Knox preached against Mary, condemning her for hearing Mass, dancing, and dressing too elaborately. She summoned him to her presence to rebuke him but was unsuccessful. She later charged Knox with treason, but he was acquitted and released.

The most dramatic interview between Mary and Knox took place in 1563. Mary summoned Knox after hearing that he had been preaching against her proposed marriage to Don Carlos, the son of Philip II of Spain.

Mary began by scolding Knox, then she burst into tears. "What have ye to do with my marriage?" she asked, and "What are ye within this commonwealth?"

"A subject born within the same, Madam," Knox replied.^[78] He noted that though he was not of noble birth, he had the same duty as any subject to warn of dangers to the realm.

When Mary started to cry again, he said, "Madam, in God's presence I speak: I never delighted in the weeping of any of God's creatures; yea I can scarcely well abide the tears of my own boys whom my own hand corrects, much less can I rejoice in your Majesty's weeping." He added that he would rather endure her tears, however, than remain silent and "betray my Commonwealth."

At this, Mary ordered him out of the room.⁴

Knox admonishing Mary

Knox continued to preach in Edinburgh. He also preached itinerantly throughout Scotland. God's word slowly convinced the people.

As we have noted, the spiritual power behind Knox preaching refashioned Scotland. The Kirk that resulted was a byproduct of the gospel.

Arthur Herman: Scotland had turned its back not only on its past, but on all purely secular values, no matter what the source...The congregation was the center of everything. It elected its own board of elders or presbyters; it even chose its minister. The congregation's board of elders, the consistory, cared for the poor and the sick; it fed and clothed the community's orphans. Girls who were too poor to have a dowry to tempt a prospective husband got one from the consistory. It was more than just fear of the ducking-stool or the stake that

⁴ Wikipedia

bound the Kirk together. It was a community united by its commitment to God and its sense of chosen-ness. “God loveth us,” John Knox had written, “because we are His own handiwork.”⁵

1. Marriage

When he was 40 Knox married 20 yr-old Marjory Bowes, who bore him two sons. She died five years later.

At the age of fifty, he married 17-year-old Margaret Stewart, a distant relative of Mary Queen of Scots. The queen was furious when she found out about her new in-law.

Margaret bore him three daughters.

2. Political Views

The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (1558). (“Monstrous Regiment” means “unnatural government.”) It was aimed directly at Catholic Mary Tudor and her cousin Elizabeth I.

The *First Blast* alienated him from Elizabeth I.

He also wrote the *Appellations to the Nobility and Commonality of Scotland*, in which he argued the right of ordinary people, and indeed the duty, to rebel against the RC government.

Context: He was a magisterial reformer. He was Erastian.

Romans 13 encourages submission to authority, even tyrannical authority. The Scottish reformer now said that it was a sin not to overthrow an idolatrous monarch. How do we reconcile these?

1572 Knox died. The Scottish Reformation would continue to establish itself in fits and starts over the coming decades, but under Knox’ 1560 preaching it had achieved a secure grounding in Scottish life. Scottish protestant Christianity was the result of the single-minded devotion and burning sincerity of the “thundering Scot.”

⁵ Herman, Arthur. *How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything in It* (p. 17). Crown. Kindle Edition.

C. PERSONAL KNOX

In 1553 he wrote his mother in law—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

D. FURTHER READING

The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World, Kelly

John Knox, Dorothy Martin

Christian History Magazine, Vol 46

The Unquenchable Flame, Michael Reeves

A Scottish Christian Heritage, Ian Murray

Reform and Conflict, Rudolph Heinze