

Review: John Broome, *The Reformers: John Knox*, Gospel Standard Trust Publications, Hertsfordshire, England, 1967 (1994/4th edn.)

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Star of the Scottish Reformation

This little book summarises well the life of John Knox (1505-1572) and his efforts to free Scotland from Rome. He was the driving force behind the Reformation there, showing great courage against Rome and her tool Mary Queen of Scots who wished to bring a new-born Scotland back under the heel of the Pope.

He also ministered to persecuted French Christians, and worked on the Geneva Bible with John Calvin in Switzerland during the reign of Bloody Mary in England.

Earlier physical sufferings as a French galley slave for two years, continual political pressures and a decline of health later in life took their toll. Notwithstanding, Knox was able to complete his mission and despite his grave now lost under Parliament Square in Edinburgh, history has provided a more permanent landmark; his contribution to the gospel in Scotland.

John Knox was born into a wholly Roman Catholic country. The Papacy had amassed vast wealth and there was great idleness and ignorance among the clergy. The first martyr in the reformation was Patrick Hamilton, who died February 1528, age 24.

At 16 Knox went to university in Glasgow, earning an M.A. then teaching philosophy. He was led to the scripture via

reading Jerome and Augustine. In Augustine he found sentiments opposed to the Romish Church. He was ordained a Catholic priest one or two years before 1530 and after this he began to preach the Pope was antichrist.

By 1540-42 many adhered to Reformation views and in December 1542 James V of Scotland died. Knox was pronounced an heretic by Rome and defrocked. The new Regent declared Bible reading in the common tongue legal which greatly helped the Reformation.

In 1547 a French fleet captured St. Andrews and Knox setting him to the oars as a galley slave putting him in bad health. Somehow he managed to gain freedom in 1549.

He went to England where Edward the VI was ruling under a Regency with Cranmer as Archbishop. Knox was made Chaplain in Ordinary to the King in 1551. He helped publish the English Book of Common Prayer as the Second Reformed Prayer Book of the CoE, removing mummeries of transubstantiation and kneeling to receive communion.

Despite the above, in 1552 he declined a Bishopric with the CoE on grounds it was not sufficiently reformed. On 6/7/1553 Edward VI died and Papist Queen Mary proclaimed sovereign which greatly disturbed him. Liberty was promised till December 20th, and Knox was persuaded to escape to Europe.

While having a clear conscience, Knox was concerned his escape might have a negative impact on the cause left behind. He went to Geneva with Calvin and lived off charity sent by English and Scottish friends. While there a dissension broke out between two groups of English exiles over the Protestant order of service.

When Mary began persecution in 1554 things became easier in Scotland. There, Queen Dowager (James V's second wife) was appointed Regent. She was not on good terms with Mary of

England. Knox decided to leave Geneva in August 1555 for Edinburgh. In May 1556 he was summoned before clergy on account of heresy. Despite this he went on preaching, a streak of twice a day for ten days.

In July of 1556 he was invited back to Geneva as a pastor and in his absence Catholics burnt an effigy of him at the Cross of Edinburgh. In 1557 he had two sons and thought to return to Scotland where there were divisions, so ended up staying at Dieppe in France and there ministered to French Protestants.

In 1558 he returned to Geneva to work on the Geneva Bible which was published in 1560. There was war between England and Scotland in 1556/7 which helped the Reformation in Scotland. In August 1558 an 82 year old ex-Catholic priest was burnt which caused a great tumult.

In January 1559, age 54, Knox left Geneva permanently. For his attack on women rulers he was refused carriage through England by Queen Elizabeth and went direct to Leith. By this time the Queen Regent had abandoned pretences of accommodating the Reformation. Knox sought the stronghold of St. Andrews; images were stripped and monasteries pulled down, a pattern repeated across the country.

On 21/10/1559 nobles met in Edinburgh, suspended the Queen Regent and elected a Council until a free Parliament could meet. On 1/8/1560 it opened and on the 24th issued three acts which:

- (i) abolished forever jurisdiction of the Pope in Scotland.
- (ii) repealed all former statutes in favour of Rome previously passed.
- (iii) ordered those who said Mass have their goods confiscated, then exiled, then finally executed.

Knox worked on 'The First Book of Discipline', which organised the Scottish Reformed Church with offices of ministers, doctors, ruling elders and deacons. The sign of the cross, kneeling and festivals of saints were abolished. The first General Assembly of 40 members met on 20/12/1560.

On 19/8/1561 the Protestant nobility invited the Catholic Queen Mary and legitimate heir to return. Knox had a number of 'interviews' with the Queen. In 1566 her favourite, an Italian Catholic agitator Rizzio was assassinated. The evidence pointed to Lord Darnley, the jealous husband of the Queen.

The Queen then favoured the Earl of Bothwell. On 9/2/1567, Darnley was decoyed to a house near Edinburgh and murdered in a gunpowder explosion. The evidence pointed to the Queen and Knox was in favour of the death sentence, however the lords chose to imprison her. However when she escaped the civil war began again.

In December 1567, the new Regent the Earl of Murray ratified an Act of Parliament allowing only Protestant princes to occupy the Scottish throne. Murray was eventually assassinated by the Queen, by a man whom Knox once persuaded him to release for treason. The Earl of Lennox, grandfather of young James VI became Regent, but was a weak ruler.

On 9/11/1572 he preached his last sermon at the Tolbooth Church then died on the 24th. His grave under what is now Parliament Square is lost.