

Lecture 11 – “Blowing the Trumpet”: John Knox & the Scottish Reformation

“Sweet are the spots where Immanuel has ever shown his glorious power in the conviction and conversion of sinners. The world loves to muse on the scenes where battles were fought and victories won. Should we not love the spots where our great captain has won his amazing victories?” Robert Murray McChesney

“Unto me...is this grace given that I should preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Ephesians 3:8; “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” 1 Corinthians 14:8

Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 8, pp. 80-85

Prayer

From John Knox

“Because we have need continually to crave many things at your hands, we humbly beg you, O heavenly Father, to grant us your Holy Spirit to direct our petitions, that they may proceed from such a fervent mind as may be agreeable to your holy will. Amen.”

“Blowing the Trumpet”: John Knox & the Scottish Reformation

“To John Knox” by Sherwood Eliot Wirt

Gentler spirits have lived
in Christendom,
More gracious messengers preached
The Word of Christ
without a-dinging the pulpit,
But God knew what He was doing
when He chose you
to build His church.

He knew the temptations to compromise,
the dulcet voice pleading in tears
the soft hand of scheming sovereignty.
You were keen as steel,
As deaf as ice:
God’s man
for God’s work
in God’s time.

I. The Catholic Queen and the Presbyterian Preacher

A. John Knox (1514-72)

1. Priest, notary, tutor, body guard for George Wishart (1513-46)—“One is sufficient for a sacrifice.”
2. Preacher in St. Andrews
3. Galley slave—“I know how hard the battle is between the spirit and the flesh, under the heavy cross of affliction, where no worldly defence, but present death does appear. I know the grudging and murmuring complaints of the flesh; I know the anger, wrath and indignation, which it conceives against God, calling all his promises in doubt, and being ready every hour to utterly fall from God.”
4. Reformer in England

5. Fugitive on the Continent
 - a. Trouble in Frankfort
 - b. Joy in Geneva—"The most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the apostles; in other places, I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion so sincerely reformed, I have not yet seen in any other place."
6. *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*
 - a. Knox's argument—Divine and natural law opposed the rule of women over men. Men in England and Scotland, therefore, were obeying women rulers (Mary Tudor of England, Mary of Lorraine [queen regent of Scotland], and her daughter, Mary Queen of Scots) "against God. Wherefore I judge them not only subject to women, but slaves of Satan and servants of iniquity."
 - b. Calvin's objection—There have been women whose "singular good qualities... made it evident that they were raised up [for government] by Divine authority," women such as Deborah and Huldah. Furthermore, it is not lawful "to unsettle governments which are ordained by the peculiar providence of God."
7. Return to Scotland (English Ambassador—Knox "put life into them more than 500 trumpets")
 - a. Reformer
 - 1) Scots Confession (E. A. Dowey—"as craggy, irregular, powerful and unforgettable as the hills of north Scotland")

Closing words of the Scots Confession—a prayer: "Arise, O Lord, and let thine enemies be confounded; let them flee from thy presence that hate thy godly name. Give thy servants strength to speak thy word with boldness, and let all nations cleave to the true knowledge of thee."
 - 2) First Book of Discipline (church order and national life—poverty relief and universal system of education)
 - b. Preacher ("I consider myself rather called by my God to instruct the ignorant, comfort the sorrowful, confirm the weak, and rebuke the proud, by tongue and living voice, in these corrupt days, than to compose books for the age to come.")
 - 1) Plain speech ("Life Shall Devour Death")
 - 2) Powerful preaching ("A dinging the pulpit")

James Melville, student at St. Andrews who heard Knox's sermons in 1571-1572: "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 in the space of an half hour; but when he entered to application he made me so to tremble that I could not hold a pen to write."

Thomas Carlyle: "It seems to me hard measure that this Scottish man should have to plead like a culprit before the world; intrinsically for having been, in such way as it was then possible to be, the bravest of all Scotchmen! Had he been a poor half-and-half, he could have crouched into the corner, like so many others; Scotland had not been delivered; and Knox had been without blame. He is the one Scotchman to whom, of all others, his country and the world owe a debt. He has to plead that Scotland would forgive him for having been worth to it any million 'unblameable' Scotchmen that need no forgiveness! He bared his breast to the battle; had to row in French galleys, wander forlorn in exile, in clouds and storms, was censured, shot at through his windows; had a right sore fighting life: if this world were his place of recompense, he had made but a bad venture of it" (*Heroes and Hero Worship*).

B. Mary Queen of Scots

II. The Five Famous Meetings (1561-63)

A. First meetings—Knox: “I pray God, madam, that you may be as blessed within the commonwealth of Scotland, if it be the pleasure of God, as ever Deborah was in the commonwealth of Israel.”

B. Fourth meeting—Mary: “What are you within this commonwealth?”

Knox: “A subject born within the same, madam; and albeit I be neither earl, lord, nor baron within it, yet hath God made me a profitable and useful member within the same.”

III. The Sequel

A. Mary’s abdication in 1567 and execution (in England) in 1587

B. Knox’s ministry and death in 1572

1. History of the Reformation in Scotland

2. Two days before his death—“I have been in meditation these last two nights [concerning] the troubled church of God, the spouse of Jesus Christ, despised of the world but precious in his sight. I have called to God for it, and have committed it to her head, Jesus Christ.”

3. Earl of Morton at Knox’s funeral—“Here lies one who neither feared nor flattered any flesh.”

Questions from Class

Did Knox take his polity from Calvin or was it original?

Was Knox a theologian?

How did Knox explain his differences with Calvin on the authority of women?

Was Calvin’s objection to Knox’s book well known?

For Further Study

**Selected Writings of John Knox* (1992)

A new edition of Knox’s writings (with contemporary spelling, punctuation, and grammar) by Presbyterian Heritage Publications. The first of two volumes, this book contains selected writings by Knox from 1547 to 1559.

**Trumpeter of God* (1974), W. Stanford Reid

The most recent and the best interpretive study of Knox’s life.

**The Mind of John Knox*, Richard G. Kyle

One of the very few books on Knox’s thought.

**Christian History* (issue 46 on John Knox)

Editor’s note—“I found Knox difficult to like. [He] could be arrogant, proud, stubborn, and cantankerous...Of course, tact is not a gift usually lavished on a prophet, which is the best way to understand Knox. He was a Hebrew Jeremiah set down on Scottish soil...Ultimately Knox was on the right side. For that, for his raw courage and tenacity, and for his legacy—Scottish, American, and world-wide Presbyterianism—we honor him.”

A. Read some more of *The History of the Reformation of Religion within the Realm of Scotland*, by John Knox (Banner of Truth, 1982), pages 261-83. Knox’s *History*, while often criticized, is not a deliberate distortion of the facts. It is based on original sources, often cited in full. The *History*, however, is not a mere chronology. It is Knox’s account of the origins and development of the Protestant movement, with his personal views freely expressed. The book is a preaching book, a long impassioned sermon in behalf of God’s truth.

In Book 4, chapter 1 (after some introductory remarks looking back from the vantage point of 1566), Knox deals with the events of a week in August 1561 when the queen—Mary, Queen of Scots—came home.

*In his preface to Book 4, Knox made a strong boast. What is it? Is it justified?

*What connection did Knox draw between the weather and Mary’s arrival? What do you think of this

point?

- *Why was Knox so violently opposed to the queen's private mass?
- *Why does Knox tend to press ahead of his history with later observations (as on pages 270-71)?
- *What was Mary's opinion of Knox? On what was it based?
- *What was Knox's opinion of Mary? On what was it based?