

Prophet in the Pulpit, Pastor with the Pen: The Pastoral Christology of John Knox

By Alexander Brown

John Knox has entered into legend as something of the hard man of the Reformation. It can be argued that this reputation is in no small part due to Knox's own characterization of how the Protestant Reformation took hold in Scotland and the part that he played in it. From his beginnings as the sword-wielding bodyguard of George Wishart, whom Knox depicts in the colors of an Old Testament prophet calling for repentance and faith, with pestilence coming upon those who neglected his warnings,¹ to his description of life as a defiant slave in a French warship (Knox, *Works* 1.227–229), generating a heroic image of a man who feared no man, not even those who held his life in their hands, to his forthright denunciations of monarchical abuse to the faces of those he opposed.² The picture that Knox paints of himself in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland* is one that engenders a picture of a strongman who brooked no rival nor cowered in the face of his opponents.

When this self-conscious depiction is coupled with Knox's notorious *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (*Works* 4:349–422), and his frequent depiction in artistic renderings as a man of stern face and wild excitements, flying out of the pulpit as he preached,³ it is easy to understand why some would see Knox as the premier amongst "Scotland's Calvinist ayatollahs,"⁴ ushering in the rule of a harsh and repressive Kirk.⁵ Knox can easily become characterized as a bully-reformer, who forced a revolution in the religious life of Scotland by the sheer force of his thunderous personality.

This reputation has become enveloped into the national lore of Scotland's history and has made frequent appearances in popular literature, giving a widespread impression that John Knox was a one-sided figure, and that side was not particularly attractive. Donald Macleod has traced the running theme of anti-Calvinism in Scottish literature. Tracing the theme from Robert

Burns, through Sir Walter Scott, to the 20th Century poet Iain Crichton Smith, Macleod has pointed out that Calvinism has gained in Scottish self-understanding a reputation of being a force of suppression and confinement that has shrouded the nation under the cloak of a harsh legalism. Within the national literature he writes that "John Knox has been the object of relentless opprobrium, the Covenanters have been pilloried as epitomes of bigotry and intolerance, Thomas Boston portrayed as a moron, the Seceders as killjoys and Wee Frees as antinomian Thought Police."⁶ This has not just been the result of a proclivity to morose self-reflection, significant literary figures from outside of Scotland, such as C. S. Lewis,⁷ G. K. Chesterton,⁸ have been willing to promote this trope. The result has been that John Knox has entered the popular imagination as the cruel architect of a Reformation the deleterious effects of which scarred a nation for centuries.

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1. John Knox, *Works* ed., David Laing (Edinburgh, 1846; repr., Edinburgh, 2014), 1.129.

2. W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (New York, 1974), 215, 227–231; also "A Sermon on Isaiah 26:13–21, Preached in St. Giles's Church, Edinburgh, 19th August 1565," in Knox, *Works* 6.221–275.

3. Cf. John Knox preaching before the Lords of the Congregation, 10 June 1559, by Sir David Wilkie (1785–1841).

4. Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* (New York, 2001), p. 12.

5. Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*, p. 9.

6. Donald Macleod, "Scottish Calvinism: A Dark, Repressive Force?" *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 2001): 195–225.

7. C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 196–203.

8. G. K. Chesterton, "The Hammer of God," *The Complete Father Brown Stories* (London, 2013).

It is the contention of this paper that this caricature is one that is not true to the reality of who John Knox was, nor how John Knox sought to advance the cause of the Reformation in Scotland. By examining the most personal artifacts we have of Knox's ministry, namely his correspondence, we are given a unique insight into both the man himself, and how he presented the Christ he proclaimed.

The extant doctrinal works of Knox are notoriously few and far between. While his collected works run to a generous six volumes, Knox left only one significant doctrinal treatise in his *On Predestination, An Answer to the Cavillations by an Anabaptist, 1560* (*Works*, 5:7–468), and only one complete sermon in his *Sermon on Isaiah 26:13–21, Preached in St. Giles's Church, Edinburgh, 19th August 1565* (*Works*, 6:221–275). This lack of material has left the study of Knox as a man to be something of a patchwork endeavor. However, when we limit our study to the product of his own pen, and particularly that which was directed to a specific recipient, as we find in his correspondence, we are given an ability to understand the man on his own terms.

If the *History of the Reformation in Scotland* and *The First Blast of the Trumpet* give us a picture of Knox at his most self-conscious, his letters may be considered a window into Knox at his most vulnerable, being largely personal appeals given to particular audiences. Without pretense or posturing, we find the heart of Knox on display, and, contrary to the caricature, we find that it is a distinctly tender heart.

Instead of browbeating opponents by either force of personality or polemic, what we find when we examine the products of Knox's own pen is a man who was indeed strongly committed to the Protestant cause, but one who sought to bring those with whom he interacted to behold both the majesty and the grace of Jesus Christ with a distinctly pastorally sensitivity. In his letters we find a Reformer who was jealous for the crown rights of King Jesus, who abhorred any opposition to Christ's supremacy in all things. Yet, Knox was a man who understood the dynamics of sin and so, from the position of a strong yet tender supplicant, bid his correspondents and audiences to find peace in Christ by faith.

9. Richard G. Kyle, "The Mind of John Knox" (PhD diss., The University of New Mexico, 1973), p. 101; see also Richard Kyle, "John Knox: A Man of the Old Testament," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 54, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 65–78, at p. 65—"While the entire Bible was important to Knox, he was primarily a man of the OT. Knox's trademark bore the imprint of the OT. The sources of his radicalness and uniqueness came largely from the OT and the way he interpreted it."

10. Kyle, "John Knox: A Man of the Old Testament," p. 68.

11. Kyle, "John Knox: A Man of the Old Testament," p. 67.

A PROPHET IN THE PULPIT

One of the first things that must be tackled when seeking to examine John Knox's pastoral Christology is his own self-conception. There is an opinion among some historians that Knox viewed himself in the mold of an Old Testament prophet. Richard Kyle has stated that "it can be readily seen that Knox was less-Christo-centric in his thought than either Luther, Calvin, or Zwingli. Because Knox saw himself in the role of an Old Testament prophet, it was consistent enough that his thought would be primarily theocentric."⁹

This is certainly true when we look at Knox's more public works. His *Sermon on Isaiah 26:13–21*, which was preached before Lord Darnley (recently made King) in August of 1565 (Knox, *Works*, 6:221–274), has the tenor of an Old Testament prophet crying to his society that they turn from their rebellion and return to God. Throughout the sermon Knox conflates sixteenth-century Scotland with ancient Israel and makes a correlation between the reign of Scotland's monarch and those of theocratic Israel that is so close as to make many contemporary exegetes uncomfortable. The notorious *First Blast of the Trumpet* also carries with it a strong sense that Knox saw himself as an Isaiah or Jeremiah crying out to an apostate kingdom that they should turn from their sin and humble themselves before the Lord their God.

However, this approach must not be attributed to an insufficient Christology, or to a failure on Knox's part to grasp the distinctions between the Old and New Testaments. It is unfair to the Reformer to accuse him of adopting an over-realized continuity between the testaments.¹⁰ And it is simply untrue to assert that Knox "did not have Luther's Christ-centeredness nor Calvin's interior witness [of the Holy Spirit] to modify the rigidity of his literalness."¹¹

A better understanding of Knox's approach both to Scripture and to his public audiences is rooted in understanding the uniqueness of what Knox was attempting to do in advancing the cause of reform in the British Isles. John Calvin enjoyed something of a hot-house environment in Geneva, being able to, within the parameters of the City Counsel, establish a model Protestant community. While Calvin had a broad ambition to see the gospel spread far and wide, and founded the Academy at Geneva for such a purpose, his primary focus was the cultivation of a thoroughgoing Reformed church in Geneva, with the implementation of Reformed liturgy, and pastors colloquiums. Likewise, Luther's attention was focused on his interactions with the magisterial elements of the Roman Catholic church, very much

defining his Reformation in opposition to the false gospel he saw being promoted by Rome. Zwingli, like Calvin, had a narrower focus for his Reformation, seeking primarily to reform a city and then use that city as a launching pad from which the Reformed church could spread far and wide.

However, Knox's ambition was always different from these three. Partly due to the unique situation in Scotland religiously and politically, and partly due to his own personal aspirations, Knox wanted neither to reform a city, nor tackle the Roman Catholic church on an idealistic-philosophical level. Instead, Knox wanted to see the British Isles, overturned by Protestantism in something akin to a religious revolution.¹²

If Knox had wanted to focus on a city, Dundee was ripe to be the "Geneva of the North,"¹³ with the influence of George Wishart making a lasting impression on the city and the surrounding communities through Angus and the Mearns.¹⁴ Knox was acquainted with the proto-Reformed within the city,¹⁵ and could have easily focused his efforts there creating in Dundee and Perth, which were equally early adopters of Protestantism, something akin to Geneva and Strasbourg.

Knox could have also focused on a more ideological confrontation with the Roman Catholic church. His early ministry in St. Andrews involved a regular back-and-forth with the Cathedral elite. The elimination of Cardinal Beaton in May 1546 brought with it an end to the conflation of religion and politics and resulted in a situation in which Roman Catholicism could be engaged on a more intellectual level. The continuing presence of Roman Catholic philosophers, theologians, and thinkers at the University of St. Andrews (such as John Mair) could have provided a rich ground for debate.

But Knox's goal was grander. He wanted to see the entire British Isles transformed by the whole-scale introduction of Protestantism. Undoubtedly the unique way in which the British Isles were unified by their system of monarchs and lords/lairds and the tight intertwining of Roman Catholicism with the political leaders and fortunes of the day meant that a patchwork Reformation seemed unlikely to take hold, or be able to withstand the powerful response it was likely to elicit. This had already been seen in the fortune of the Lollards¹⁶ and the reaction that had resulted from the ministry of George Wishart. If Knox was to successfully bring the Reformation to Scotland then it needed to be done through a campaign of "shock-and-awe"—a campaign that boldly assaulted the powerbrokers of the day, religious and secular, and established a wholesale replacement of Roman Catholicism within a few short years.

The unique dynamics of Knox's mission field can easily account for his regular appeals to the Old Testament, and his employment of its language. It is, after all, the only place where such national reform can be found in Scripture, and in his desire to see not simply a political reform, but one that truly gripped hearts and minds, the Old Testament is the place where we see God's own strategy (via discerning the "general equity"¹⁷) for bringing whole-scale Reform.

And so, we can see Knox's public ministry following that same pattern. It is a gross misunderstanding to think of the Old Testament prophets as preaching law and condemnation out of some sadistic desire that those to whom they preach cower before a cruel and unforgiving God. It is far more accurate to see them warning of a coming judgment in order to elicit faith and repentance that would bring them to God and receive His gracious forgiveness. The prophets wanted their audiences to see how the law of God stands against them and condemns them for turning away from the true and living God to devote themselves to the worship of dumb idols, and then to turn back, casting themselves upon the grace and mercy of God.¹⁸ If Knox stands in the mold of an Old Testament prophet, it is for the same ends. He warned of God's judgment with the hope that the people of Scotland and England would repent and cast themselves on the mercy of God. His words can strike a strong blow, but he preached only to inflict the wounds of a friend.¹⁹

12. "By the time he left England for a second exile he had become deeply attached to his new home and, alongside his Scottish identity, he regarded himself as an Englishman by adoption. In the new year of 1554 with surprise and a touch of wonder, he described his feelings for the land he had just fled: 'sometyme I have thought that impossible it had bene, so have removed my affection from the Realme of Scotland, that eny Realme or Nation could have bene equall deare unto me. But I take to recorde my conscience, that the troubles present (and appearing to be) in the Realme of England, are double more dolorous unto my hert, then ever were the troubles of Scotland.'" Jane Dawson, *John Knox* (Yale University Press, 2015), p. 54, citing Knox, *Works*, 3:133.

13. Frank D. Bardgett, *Scotland Reformed* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 28–29; Donald Macleod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak: Scottish Theology 1500–1700* (Fearn, Ross-shire, 2020), p. 30.

14. Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, p. 20.

15. Dawson, *John Knox*, p. 178; Bardgett, *Scotland Reformed*, p. 48.

16. A. M. Renwick, *The Story of the Reformation* (1960; reprint, Fearn, Ross-shire, 2010), pp. 26–34.

17. Westminster Confession of Faith 19. 4. "To [the people of Israel] also, as a body politick, [God] gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require."

18. Cf. Jonah 4:2.

19. Proverbs 27:6.

A PASTOR WITH THE PEN

While Knox assumed the position of prophet in the pulpit, emphasizing the law of God and his impending righteous judgment of sin, within his personal correspondence, Knox's Christ-centeredness is brought out vividly.

Richard Kyle has observed that sermons are somewhat ephemeral things, with their impact "largely depend[ing] on chemistry, charisma, and emotions—subjects that are not easily measured by biographers."²⁰ As any preacher knows, the same sermon can elicit different reactions and responses within both preacher and congregation depending on where, when, and how it is preached. Martyn Lloyd-Jones observed, citing Jonathan Edwards, "The first and primary object of preaching is not only to give information. It is, as Edwards says, to produce an impression. It is the impression at the time that matters, even more than what you can remember subsequently."²¹ And so the product of Knox's pulpit can be a difficult source for his application of the gospel to his audiences. A much more reliable source is found in his personal correspondence in which we find the Reformer addressing particular people, in particular situations, with a particular emphasis on how they should relate to Jesus Christ.

It is in his correspondence that Knox turns from the indiscriminate call of the prophet (calling any who might hear to turn from their sin) to a more focused and personal appeal. As Knox addresses particular individuals in his correspondence there is a discernable change in tone and approach. Certainly, with his opponents he is still not shy about warning about the judgment of God, but with it there is a personal, pastoral concern. There is a personal pleading that comes through as he seeks to convince his reader of their need for repentance, and their need to turn themselves to Christ in whom salvation could be found. In his personal correspondence with his opponents, Knox appears as a man concerned not simply with national fortunes but also with the personal fate of his interlocutors.

MARY OF GUISE

A good example of this is found in Knox's letter of May 1556 to the Queen Dowager, Mary of Guise. With the two being on opposite sides of the rising tide of Protestantism in Scotland, it is to be expected that this letter

20. Richard G. Kyle, "The Thundering Scot: John Knox the Preacher," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 64.1 (Spring 2002): 135–49, at p. 136.

21. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh, 1987), p. 360.

carry with it Knox's notoriously strong and direct tone. However, even in this more polemic letter, there is a distinct pastoral desire, not simply to win an argument or to score a point, but to win the Queen Dowager to the Protestant cause, to see her repent of her resistance to the crown rights of Christ, and to submit to him in humble obedience. Knox is not seeking to make Mary subservient to himself as a political rival, but to Christ as her ultimate Sovereign. The letter is essentially an extended plea that Mary see the glories of Christ, hear the mercies of the gospel, and repent.

This, of course, was not how Mary understood the letter. Knox himself records the reaction of the Queen Dowager in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, recording that she gave it to the Bishop of Glasgow to read, mocking it as a "Pasquil" (*Works*, 1.252). To discount the letter as nothing more than a piece of satire shows that Knox's intended aim was not achieved, and was not even given the dignity of being received simply as another piece of political posturing. This is what precipitated Knox's public defense of this otherwise private letter, annotating it and publishing it in 1558.

That the letter did not achieve its intended aim is not to prove that the aim was not there in the first place, and a careful reading of the letter reveals a masterful weaving together of the threatenings of God's law against those who would usurp the place of Christ and obstruct the true practice of religion, and the merciful offers of the gospel to those who repent. The letter opens with a confident assertion of God's sovereignty over the fortunes of his people. Knox writes:

All thingis [the elect of God] sustene at the commandment of Him who hath apoyntit thame to suffer, being most assuredlie persuadit, that then onlie thai triumphe, when all men judge thame oppressit; for in the cross of Chryst alwayis is includit a secreit and hid victorie, never well kawin till the sufferer appeir altogether to be (as it wer) exterminate (*Works*, 4:75).

By opening in this way Knox framed the terms of his communication, asserting that he is writing from a position of confidence and authority. Contrary to the assumptions of the Queen that she held the fortunes of the church in her hands, Knox is keen to demonstrate to her that her power was a delegated and subordinate power. Even if she should pursue a systematic persecution of the Reformed, there was no danger that she could truly win the day because even in those persecutions, the victorious work of Christ is at work to bless and bind up the people of Christ.

This confident beginning is then followed by a demonstration of how God made clear throughout the Old Testament his commitment to save his people in and through the distress that was caused to them by worldly rulers. Knox is setting the terms of his letter, confident in the ultimate victory of Christ over any who would assault his church. Mary may well be a powerbroker on earth, but her actions are under the rule of a sovereign God who can, and has, worked earthly evil to be the venue in which he has demonstrated his “invisible power and love” to his people (*Works*, 4:76). However, this is no powerplay or psychological manipulation. Knox is simply making clear the “veritie,” or truthfulness, of the situation in which the Queen finds herself. It is in this very framework that Knox believes that the current situation must be understood if it is to be resolved properly, and even resolved safely for Mary.

Knox makes it clear that to live in the age of the New Covenant is not to move from the harsh threatenings of an Old Testament God into a more lenient age. In fact, it is to face an even greater danger because so much more has been revealed in Christ. He writes:

Wil [God] now, after that he hath opened his whole counsaile to the world, by his onely Sonne, whom he hath commanded to be hearde; and after that He, by hys Holy Spirit speaking to his Apostles, hath established the religion in whiche he willett hys trewe worshippers to abyde to the end: will He now, I say, admitte man's inventions, in the matter of religion, whiche before he reputed for damnable idolatry? If man or aungels wolde affirme that He will or may do it, his own veritie shal convict them of a lye; for this sentence, which he once pronounced, shall abyde immutable to the end: “Not that which appeareth good in thine eyes shall thou do to the Lorde thy God; but what the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, that do thou: adde nothinge to it, dyminishe nothinge from it” (*Works*, 4:81).

To this warning Knox then adds the following personal and pastoral appeal: “In this point, whiche is chief and principale, your Grace must dissent from the multitude of rulers, or els ye can possesse no portion with Christ Jesus in his kyngdome and glory” (*Works*, 4:81).

Far from a cold and harsh condemnation of a misogynist bully,²² we see here a tenderness in John Knox even for those who opposed him. We see a man who has internalized Christ's command from the Sermon on the Mount to imitate God the Father in extending love to enemies and praying for those who persecute the church.²³ We see a man whose care for his enemy is

such that he boldly tells her the truth about her spiritual condition, and writes earnestly out of a desire to see her repent in humble reliance upon Christ.

This is further brought out later in the letter, when Knox adds a direct and pointed appeal that his correspondent grasp the dangerousness of her spiritual condition. Specifically, he exhorts her to grapple with the implications of setting herself over and against the Gospel and with it over and against the crown-rights of Christ. Knox warns,

How dangerous soever it shall appear to the fleshe and natural man to obey God in promoting his religion, and to make warre against the Devill, in removing darknes, pryde, and superstition; yet if your Grace looke to have your self, or yet youre seede after you, to continue in a wordily honor, and after to possesse the lyfe everlasting, submit your self, by time, under the hande of Hym that is omnipotent, embrace his will, despyse not hys testament, refuse not hys graces offered (*Works*, 4:83).

Now, of course, to the cynical this can read simply as an attempt at manipulation on the deepest level, with Knox using the prospect of eternal torment to add the ultimate gravity to his argument. This, it would seem, was how the Regent read it, and summarily dismissed it. Undoubtedly many would be tempted to do the same, writing this off as typical of the misogynistic, bullying tactics of the author of *The First Blast of the Trumpet*.

There is no need for such a critical reading. While much of this rhetoric sounds like the prophet-preacher that we see in the more public works, it is not hard to discern the tender heart of a pastor-counsellor that underlies it. It does not take a great deal of insight to perceive that Knox's greatest desire is not simply to win political points or strongarm the Queen Dowager into submission. Rather Knox is revealed as seeing in Mary one who is in great spiritual danger, and who with the heart of a pastor-prophet, urgently implores her to repent and turn to Christ.

Knox is urging the Regent to see that the matter at hand—on both a personal and national level—is not simply one of politics. The core issue in Scotland is whether God will be worshiped in the ways he has revealed in Scripture, or whether superstition and the imagination of men will be the prevailing directive for

22. Roddy Martine, “Reforming Knox,” *Scotland*, issue 69 (June 2013): 9, quoted in David B. Calhoun, “John Knox (1514–1572) after Five Hundred Years,” *Presbyterian* 40, nos. 1–2 (Fall 2014): 1–13, at page 2.

23. Matthew 5:43–48.

life and godliness. He wants her to see that the latter path is to make herself an enemy of God, and to forsake the graces of the gospel and to enter into tremendous spiritual danger. He wants her to see that the ground on which she is standing is holy ground and that great care must be taken lest the wrath of God be provoked against her as a presumptuous creature.

This interpretation is strengthened by Knox's concession in the letter that it is not actually in Mary's gift to turn the heart of the nation. Perhaps to the surprise of the Regent, Knox freely admits that Mary is not able to bring about spiritual renewal, or even organizational transformation, simply by royal fiat—"Your Grace can not hastily abolishe all supersition, neither yet remove from offices unprofitable pastors, which onely fede themselves, the which to publique reformation are requisite and necessary" (*Works*, 4:83).

Instead, Knox urges her to pursue more personal, organic, ground-up effort towards reform. If she turns to Christ in humble obedience, then she can use her influence to counter the wickedness of false religion and lead a long-lasting transformation of her kingdom—"but yet, if the zeal of Goddes glory be fervent in your Grace's hart, by wicked lawes ye wil not mainteyn manifest idolatrye, neither yet will ye suffer the fury of Bishoppes to murther and devour the poore members of Christes body" (*Works*, 4:83).

If this letter was simply an attempt at cynical manipulation this would certainly be an odd way of going about it. Instead of flattering the Queen Regent, Knox seems to take a low view of the effectiveness or the influence of her authority. One cannot but help wonder if this was the part of the letter to which Mary took most offense. Regardless, it speaks to the genuineness of Knox's pastoral appeal. He understands Christ to be a King who will brook no rival, but also a Savior who will turn away none who come to him. At the heart of this letter lies an appeal that Mary would take Him as the latter, so as not to fall foul of him as the former.

*TO THE BRETHREN IN LONDON, NEWCASTLE, AND
BERWICK*

There is a similar dynamic found in the *Godly Letter of Warning or Admonition to the Faithful in London, Newcastle, and Berwick* written in 1554—a letter written to allies in the cause of Reformation urging them to remain faithful to the Protestant cause in the face of rising opposition from the resurgence of Roman Catholicism under the recently crowned Queen Mary Tudor.

Exiled on the Continent, Knox was unable to personally minister to these brethren amongst whom he

had enjoyed a successful and significant ministry under the Protestant ascendancy of King Edward VI. By taking up his pen and writing his circular letter—evidently written with the original intent of distribution among the Protestants remaining in England—Knox is able to address his former congregations personally and give them direct pastoral counsel about how to navigate the uncertain and increasingly threatening days of rising persecution.

Within this letter Knox maintains a strong emphasis on the impending judgment of God on those who would turn away from the gospel under the pressures of persecution. Using Jeremiah 2–5 Knox recounts how God has dealt with the infection of idolatry into his people in the past (*Works*, 3.171–175), proving his contention that

The Word of God planelie speikis, that gif a man sall heir the curses of Godis Law, and yet, into his heart, sall promeis to him self felicitie and gude luck, thinking that he sall haif peace, albeit he walk efter the imaginatiounis of his awn wil and heart; to sic a man the Lord will not be mercifull, but his wrath salbe kendillit aganis him, and he sall destroy his name from under Heaven (*Works*, 3.169).

The Protestant community was facing a rising pressure to conform to the resurgent Roman Catholicism, either facing the temptations to wholly return to Roman worship or simply develop an "Insider Movement," going through the motions of Roman Catholic worship while privately holding to Protestant doctrine. Into that difficult situation Knox writes this letter to strongly urge his brethren to stay the course and continue on in the path of faithful adherence to Reformed worship, and in no way yield to the "idolatry" of Roman Catholic worship.

It is particularly noteworthy that in this letter, while Knox appeals to the Old Testament and follows his usual pattern of making direct correlations with the church of the Old Testament and the contemporary situation in Great Britain, there is running through the whole letter a continual appeal to Christ as the explicit root and ground of their confidence in the face of this persecution. At the beginning of the letter, Knox grounds his whole exhortation by reminding his readers that the "onlie comfort and joy of the saule, is God by his Word expelling ignoraunce, syn, and death, and in the place of theis planting trew knowledge of him self, and with the same, justice, and lyfe be Chryst Jesus his Sone" (*Works*, 3.166) An exhortation that is mirrored by his closing admonition,

prepair in tyme, and determyne with your selves to abyde in Chryſt Jesus, and his croce ſall never oppreſs you as preſentlie ye feir. And thairfore, deirlye Belovit in our Savioure Jesus Chryſt, as ye purpoſe to avoid the grievous vengeance to cum, that ſchortlie and assuredlie ſall ſtryk all obſtinate ydolateris; as ye would haif the league betuix God and yow to ſtand ſure and inviolated, and as you will declare yourſelves to have trew faith, without which no man ever ſhall enter into life (*Works*, 3.214).

Explicitly Knox roots his exhortation in the surpassing worth of Chriſt. While the coſt of faithfulness is likely to be high under Queen Mary, Knox wants his readers to remain faithful not ſimply because of the fear of judgment, but because they ſee in Jesus Chriſt one in whom their whole lives are wrapped up. He ſpurs them on not ſimply with calls to avoid God’s judgment, but with calls to actively and conſciously “abide in Chriſt Jesus.” That is to ſay that Knox wants them to follow Chriſt’s exhortation of John 15²⁴ to purſue a conſcious, vital union with Chriſt in which their nourishment and ſtrength in the face of riſing idolatry and pressure to conform the Roman Catholic Eſtablishment is found in their union with Him.

This deſire that the Proteſtant communities of London, Newcaſtle and Berwick hold tight on to Chriſt grounds the almoſt Shakeſpearean exhortation,

For the tender mercies of God, arme yourſelves to ſtand with Chryſt in this his ſhort battell. Fly from that abominable idoll, the maintainers whereof ſhall not eſcape the vengeance of God. Lat it be knawin to your poſteritie, that ye were Chryſtianis and not ydolateris; that ye learnit Chryſt in tyme of reſt, and baldlie profeſſit him in tyme of trubill (*Works*, 3.208).

Standford Reid is undoubtedly correſt in his obſervation that the turmoil in Knox’s ſoul is evident in this letter²⁵ as he faced the future of an England ruled by the tyrannical Queen Mary. Knox knew that the handwriting was on the wall, and it was only a matter of time before the Proteſtants in England fell foul of Mary’s zeal to bring the nation back in line with the Roman Catholic church. This letter was written as ſomething of a parting miſſive—a perhaps final letter written by a man uncertain of what the future may hold, or when he would again, if ever, be free to preach the goſpel and perſonally build up the church of Chriſt. But his exhortation to them is not one of political revolution or even reſiſtance. It is notable that for one who has become famous in large part because of the legacy of his

juſtification of reſiſtance to wicked rulers, there is no call to arms. There is not even an extended contemplation on the philoſophical underpinnings of how they might honorably diſobey a lawful magiſtrate.

Instead, in this, at leaſt initially private correſpondence between Knox and the congregations amongſt whom he had been active, his word to them is diſtinctly paſtoral and ſpecifically Chriſtological. More than anything, he wants the men and women of theſe congregations to hold faſt to Chriſt. He wants them to ſet their eyes firmly on their Savior. As he ſees the ſtorm approaching, he wants them to laſh their ſouls to the croſs and determine that it would only be through the grace of Chriſt, and not in their own ſtrength or wiſdom, that they would make it through.

Knox underſtood that the ſtrength of the church could only be found in its relationship to Chriſt. It would only be in a conſcious and determined looking to him that they would be able to withſtand the pressures and temptations that were coming, and ſo Knox writes to them with the purpoſe of turning their eyes firmly on Chriſt ſo that they loſe ſight of all elſe beſides.²⁶

ELIZABETH BOWES

However, the moſt vivid introduction to Knox’s Paſtoral Chriſtology and the application of Proteſtant doctrine to the lives of thoſe with whom he interacted is ſeen in the wealth of correſpondence with his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Bowes. Theſe letters provide an extraordinary insight not only into the perſonal melancholia of Mrs. Bowes but alſo into the approach of John Knox to thoſe facing ſpiritual and emotional trouble, even to the point of conſidering apoſtaſy.

It might be expected that Knox’s approach with his mother-in-law would be one of tender patience. However, we muſt be careful not to impoſe our contemporary expectations upon our 16th Century ſubject. Additionally, it has to be admitted that Knox’s familial relations were diſtinctive, with a young fiancé, and a diſapproving father-in-law.²⁷ Combined with the mythical

24. John 15:1–5. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have ſpoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itſelf, unleſs it abides in the vine, neither can you, unleſs you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (ESV)

25. Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, p. 100.

26. Mary D. James, “All for Jesus!”

27. Dawson, *John Knox*, p. 64.

persona of the hardheaded Knox, the result is that we must put our expectations to one side when we come to these letters. When we take these letters at face value, we find in Knox a pastor whose heart is gripped by the mercy and grace of God in Christ, and who is keen that his afflicted reader find refuge in him.

In the letter dated June 23, 1553 Knox addresses the “doulour,” or suffering, that comes from the conviction of indwelling sin. It is notable that within this letter there is no great warning of the coming judgment of God, or how the holiness of God stands as the enemy of the sinner. Instead, there is an empathetic compassion extended to his reader, that is rooted ultimately in the knowledge of God’s justice, not as the enemy of the sinner but as the guarantee of God’s mercy.

Knox is keen that Elizabeth understand that the justice of God that stands as the guarantee of the salvation of the believer, writing “Mark the wordis of the Apostill, Gif we confes oure synnis, God man forgiven thame, because he is faithful and just” (*Works*, 3.341). This appeal to 1 John 1:9 is followed by a detailed explanation of the Apostle’s reasoning, in which Knox demonstrates for his troubled mother-in-law how the justice of God means that he cannot require a punishment twice for the same sin, and so if Christ has, by faith, stood substitute for her in his atoning work on the cross, then she has nothing more to fear:

Gif we understand of whom God requyris satisfioun, whether of us, or of the handis of his onlie Sone, and whais punishment is abill to recompense oure synnis, than sall we haif greit cause to reiose, remembering that God is a just God; for the office of the just man is to stand content when he hes ressavit his dewtie. But God hes ressavit alreadie at the handis of his onlie Sone all that is dew for our synnis, and sa can not his justice require nor craif any mair of us, ather satisfioun or recompensatioun of our synnis (*Works*, 3.342).

28. See, for example, the 1558 *Epistle to the Inhabitants of Newcastle and Berwick* in which Knox reprimands his correspondents for yielding to pressure and returning to Roman Catholic Worship. “Ye have declined, yea, and trayterously fallen backe frome God, and frome his veritie once professed as they dyd; but beware (I say) that ye defend not your impietie, that ye contemne not the threatenings of God, promising to yourselves felicitie and life, when He by his Worde and holy Prophets pronouncethe against you woe, deathe, and severe judgment.” Knox, *Works*, 5.483–84.

29. W. Stanford Reid, “John Knox, Pastor of Souls,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 40.1 (Fall 1977): 1–21, at p. 4. “It may have been that under constant pressure from her family, especially her husband, to return to the Roman Catholic fold, she was worried lest she had made a wrong decision in accepting the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone.”

In other places²⁸ Knox lays out the justice of God as the enemy of sinners, and the compulsion to repentance, but here as he addresses one afflicted by the knowledge of indwelling sin, it is the justice of God that actually forms the foundation of his pastoral appeal and council. As God cannot, in his perfect righteousness and justice, demand punishment twice for the same sin, the knowledge of Christ’s penal substitutionary sacrifice stands as the guarantee of her salvation. It is the sacrifice of Christ that is to silence doubts and “doulours” and is to be the source of comfort under the conviction of sin.

However, Knox’s pastoral Christology is not just confined to the objective truth of the believer’s security in the sacrifice of Christ. Knox is careful to demonstrate the good purpose of God that lies behind, in, and under the sufferings which believers are called to face. Mrs. Bowes was regularly troubled by the notion that her sufferings were a sign that she was outside of the favor of God. Struggling with assurance of salvation she seems constantly to have doubted whether or not her faith in Christ was real and leaned toward seeing her afflictions as a sign that she was not loved by God.²⁹ Against these doubts and accusations of the conscience Knox wielded a powerful weapon in appealing to the sufferings of Christ.

In his letter dated December 22, 1553, Knox makes the connection between the sufferings of Christ and those of the believer:

As it is apoyntit be the providence of our Father, that the meberis salbe correspondant and lyke to the Heid, wha, in anguische of extreme doulour, cryit, “My God, my God! why hes thou forsaken me?” O wordis maist dolorous, and voce maist lamentabill, to be hard proceed from the mouth of the Sone of God! Consider, deir Sister, he was na debtour to syn nor deth; and yit, this did he suffer not onlie to make satisfioun to the justice of God, whilk we wer never abill to do, but also to put us in comfort that his suffering was not in vane, but evin for our exempill; that in maist extremitie, yit we sall luke for deliverance whilk we must neidis ressave, gif we thirst for the same (*Works*, 3.354).

Just as important as it was for Knox to make clear that the believer is eternally secure because of the atoning work of Christ, it was important to see the connection between the sufferings of Christ and those of the believer.

First, Knox wants her to see that Christ’s own sufferings mean that there is not always a direct correlation

between our sins and our sorrows. Christ was perfect—“no debtor to sin nor death”—but yet he was Isaiah’s Man of Sorrows,³⁰ and so if God’s son, with whom God declared himself to be “well pleased”³¹ could suffer as he did, then the believer can have grounds of confidence in this suffering. But secondly, and maybe more importantly, he wanted Elizabeth, as she shared in the sufferings of Christ,³² to see in Christ an example of how to faithfully persevere and push through, looking to God, in His compassion, for deliverance. These sufferings are not to be understood as something that is in opposition to the love of God for her in Christ, but something that comes as a result of God’s love for her in Christ. These sufferings are intended to draw her in more closely to the heart of God and rely upon him in faith more fully.

Indeed, in his letter written at the beginning of the year, Knox explained to Elizabeth how the sufferings and struggles that she was enduring were intended by God to purify her faith and draw her closer in to behold more of His grace. Writing on June 23, 1553 Knox exhorts his troubled mother-in-law to see the kind hand of God lying behind the sore providences she was experiencing:

the power of God is knawin be oure weaknes; and theis doloris and infirmities be maist profitabill to us, for by the same is oure pryde beattin doun, whilk is not easie uterhways to be done. By thame are oure miseries knawin, sa that we, acknowledging oure selves misterfull, seikis the Phesitioun. By thame cum we, be the operatioun of the Halie Spreit, to the hatred of syn; and be thame cum we to the hunger and thirst of justice; and to desyre to be dissolved, and sa to ring with oure Christ Jessu, whilk without this battell and sorrow this flesche culd never do (*Works*, 3.340).

Again, in a letter from Newcastle simply dated 1553, Knox writes “Be persuadit of the mercifull presence of our Lord God and Father, for he doith not trouble you in signe of his wraith, absence, or not regarding of yow: Na, deir Sister everie sone whom the Father loveth he chaistineth” (*Works*, 3.355).

Running throughout this correspondence is this theme of urging his mother-in-law to see the kind hand of God behind the hard providences that she was called to endure. Throughout his correspondence with his mother-in-law, Knox was careful and deliberate to point her continually to the compassionate hand of God that bore her through her sufferings. Drawing her back time and again, Knox unpacked the gospel for her, never seeking to chastise her for her doubts or her lack of

faith, but urging her on to see more of the riches of the finished work of Christ.

Donald Macleod has written that the

wording of these letters is consistently well-chosen and tender. In one of the earliest (written in February 1552–53) we can even see the sort of language later associated with Samuel Rutherford: tranquility of conscience, writes Knox, rests on the fact that we embrace Jesus as the only Saviour of the world “and that we learne to apply the sueitnes of his name, which precelleth [excelleth] the ordouris of all fragrant smelling sþyces, to the corruptioun of our woundis.”³³

In these letters to his mother-in-law, Knox plays the part not only of a patient and loving son, but more importantly he is a kind and gentle pastor, who with tenderness and beauty, brings this struggler back to Christ time and again to behold the glories of her Savior and the remember the confidence the gospel gives her before the face of God, and in the sufferings of life in a fallen world.

Undoubtedly, a large part of Knox’s approach was informed by his own experience of the “dolors” to which he frequently refers. His own sufferings gave him an ability to empathize with his mother-in-law, which is seen dramatically when he recounts her messenger had found him in bed “after a sair trubill and maist dolorous nyght” (*Works*, 3.352). However, Knox does not lean on his own wisdom or experience when seeking to bring comfort. Instead he consistently points to the sufficiency of Christ and fullness of the gospel.

If Elizabeth was to know true and lasting relief from her sufferings then it was imperative that she learn not to lean on her son-in-law, but on Christ alone. While Knox’s sufferings enabled him to be an empathetic counsellor, it was only Jesus as her great High Priest, who in his incarnation had faced these same sufferings and temptations, that could be the source of her ultimate help. It was his throne of grace to which Elizabeth must flee, to find help in her time of need.³⁴

FRIENDS AND FAMILIARS IN JESUS CHRIST

However, it is not just with his mother-in-law that this side of Knox is evident. In the *Certane Epistillis and*

30. Isaiah 53:3.

31. Matthew 3:17; 17: 5.

32. Cf. Rom. 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philipians 1:29; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 Peter 5:1.

33. Donald Macleod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, p. 48, citing Knox, *Works*, 3.348.

34. Hebrews 4:15, 16.

Letteris of the Servand of God Johne Knox, Send Frome Dyverse Places to His Friendis and Familiaris in Jesus Chryst we see a continual desire to point his readers back to Christ.

To an anonymous “Sister in Edinburgh,” Knox writes to give this woman of evident Protestant sympathies counsel during the uncertainties of 1556. Writing to her from Dieppe, Knox writes to help her hold fast to her profession of faith in Christ. Perhaps due to some of the pressures that arose during the tumultuous days before Protestantism was secured for Scotland in the 1560 Reformation Parliament, Knox urges her to remember the “chief principallis” of her profession of faith,

First, that salvatioun nor lyfe is nane to be found without the bodie of our Lord Jesus; while anis offirit, and suffering the death, we, and all Godis elect children, do confes the onlie sacrifice acceptabill in the sychit of God the Father, for the offences of all believers. Be whilk sacrifice ar all the elect of God not onlie anis redemit, but also sanctifeit be the same, for ever. All sacrifices for sin, uther than the death of the immaculate Lamb, Jesus, we did opinlie protest oure selves to abhor and detest. And last, all religioun not groundit upon the Word of God, we feir not to proclame abominabill and wickit (*Works*, 4:223).

The year 1556 was in the heart of the troubled years of the Regency of Mary of Guise, in which she attempted to wrestle Scotland back onto a firmly Roman Catholic footing. Knox had enjoyed a brief return to Scotland which spanned the end of 1555 and the beginning of 1556, in which he had been able to encourage the embattled Protestants, and help in the establishment of “privy kirks,” secret house-churches that would provide a source of strength and encouragement in the face of official persecution.³⁵ When Knox left Scotland to return to Geneva he had been burnt in effigy and was “blown to the horn,” being declared an outlaw.³⁶ Little attempt seems to have been made to actually arrest and prosecute Knox during his not-so-secret visit, and so it would appear that these efforts were designed more as the rattling of a sword designed for the intimidation of the Protestant minority.

It was in this situation that the *Sister in Edinburgh* found herself, no doubt troubled by the “sweit songs of the Divill” (*Works*, 4:224) and tempted to renounce her Protestant faith, return to Roman Catholicism and

find temporal security. As Knox counsels her there is no extended meditation on the political situation, nor any word of comfort regarding the future of the Protestant cause. It would not be surprising to find a word of reassurance rooted in the strength of the Protestant movement that Knox had encountered, and an exhortation to stay strong in the hopes of a better day coming. However, there are no such temporal reassurances, only a casting her back to remember her profession of faith, and in doing that, to remember the Christ in whom she had put her faith and trust.

Her comfort and confidence were to be rooted in the finished work of Christ and the satisfaction of his atoning death. In the face of the temptation to be drawn back in to the “idolatry” of the Roman Catholic Mass, she was to hold fast to the knowledge that Christ’s sacrifice was once offered, to the satisfaction of the Father, and the justification and sanctification of the elect. Amid the great temporal trouble that she faced, this spiritual anchor was to hold her fast.

It is this same gospel-logic that underpins the letter *To His Loving Brother Thomas Upcher, Inglisman* (*Works*, 4:241ff.). In this letter written to an Englishman living in Basill, presumably as part of the British Protestant diaspora, Knox writes to help him in his fight against “inward dolour, anguische, and pane” (*Works*, 4:242). Much like in his counsel to his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Bowes, Knox here writes to help his brother see how the light of the gospel penetrates the darkness of his depression.

As with the counsel to his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Bowes, there are no “pull yourself together” statements that we might expect from a man with such a reputation for being hard and bullheaded. Instead, Knox reminds his troubled reader of the grace and compassion of Christ towards his people. In the best sense, Knox takes the tact of “misery loves company,” and urges this poor Englishman to see how his experience is not as unique as it might feel in the moment.

Depression is isolating, and for the Christian often comes with a deep conviction of sin, and so Knox urges his reader to consider “the lamentabill voces whilk the most elect memberis and servandis of Chryst Jesus haiff left to us in testimony of thair battell; yea, of thair anguische and paine” (*Works*, 4:242). He wants his correspondent to see that he is not alone, and that his experience is consistent with that of believers through the ages, and even the saints in Scripture—specifically, he outlines the troubles faced by David, Job, and Paul. Undoubtedly because of his own struggles, Knox is clearly aware of the loneliness and self-accusation that

35. Steven Lawson, *John Knox: Fearless Faith* (Fearn, Ross-shire, 2014), pp. 43–44.

36. Renwick, *The Story of the Scottish Reformation*, p. 87.

can come with depression and melancholy, and so he points him to the testimony of Scripture to show him that what he is facing is not inconsistent with his Christian profession, but something that has been endured by many who have gone before him, even some of the pillars of the faith.

Crucially, Knox points out to him that his sufferings, like those of David, Job, and Paul, are wounds of grace, sent by God for the good of his children. The purpose, he writes, is to force us to contemplate our own weakness—to “dispairit of [our] awn strength”—and so cast ourselves all the more fully upon the strength of Christ:

That this may be the better understand, I say, that what the Halie Gaiſt did wirk in the hartis of the Israelitis and otheris, to whom Peter maid his first sermon efter the resaving of the Halie Gaiſt, by few wordis, and in schort process of tyme, the same, I say, doith God wirk in us his children all the dayis of oure lyfe; for evin as thair wer be the thundering voces of Peter brocht to the sensibill feilling of thair horrible enormitie, wha had murtherit, and consentit to the murthering of the verie Messias promissit; saw ar we, be the brightness of Godis Scriptures, disclosing to us the secretis of oure awn hartis, brocht to the feilling of Godis wrath and anger, whilk be our manifold offences we justlie haif provokit agains̄t us. Whilk revelatioun, dolour, and compugnioun, God sendeth not to us of purposis to confound us, but of verie love, be whilk he hath concludit our salvation to stand in Chryſt Jesus his Sone; and thairfoir, lest by pryde and fulische presumptioun, whilk, allace! too many haif of thair awn strength, justice, and merites, we suld refuse or lyghtlie esteame so precious a gift offirit, he suffereth us to prufe our awn forces; yea, he suffereth us to sink down with Peter; that unfeanedlie we may cry, Succour Lord (*Works*, 4:243).

As with his mother-in-law, Knox’s desire in counselling this Englishman is to help him to see the “very love” of God that undergirded his sorrows. It is of God’s grace that he brings us into seasons and situations in which we “sink down with Peter,” unable to say or do anything but cry out, “save, Lord.”

The Knox who appears in this letter is a distinctly compassionate and kind pastor. Undoubtedly, he had learned these lessons of Scripture from his own battles with the “dolours,” and he applies them skillfully to his troubled correspondent. Knox is eager to see that behind the frowning providence that he was experiencing was a gracious Savior who would only bring him through such things for his own good. He assures him

that this was no cruelty or neglect on the part of Christ, but an essential part of his saving love for this Englishman. It was an act of love that Christ would bring him to a point when he could no longer rely upon his own strength and wisdom, but have to, like Peter, cry “Succour, Lord,” and entrust himself more fully to the kind and careful hands of his Savior.

BROAD APPLICATION

When looking at a man like Knox the question must always be asked, “which interprets what?” Should the public interpret the private, or the private interpret the public? It seems truer to the man to let the direct and private interpret the general and public. To do so gives us a lens that shows that underneath his sometimes fiery rhetoric, Knox was a man whose first desire was simply the glory of Christ. His foremost desire in his ministry was that his audience, personal or public, turn away from superstition and self reliance and turn to the only sufficient salvation found in Jesus Christ. Mark Koller summarized it well when he wrote, “The towering figure that Knox presents to the modern scholar is one of stern and almost unyielding resolve. [However, as] an unexpected surprise to his many modern critics, and in spite of his own personal trials, he still proved himself to have the capacity of a tender pastor.”³⁷

There is a surprising warmth to Knox the correspondent, that gives us a fuller picture of Knox the Reformer, but this in turn gives us a fuller picture of the Scottish Reformation as a whole. Richard Kyle has stated that “[o]n a personal level, Knox set a standard for preaching in Scotland. His careful preparation, solid exposition, sound evangelical doctrine, and forceful presentations were imitated throughout Scotland.”³⁸ And it is fair to say that this is true not just of his preaching, but of his pastoring as well.

While the leaders of the Scottish Reformation were attempting a project that was unprecedented in their attempt to bring Protestantism to bear on a national scale, the heart of the lead Reformer demonstrates that this was not a mere political imposition but a project that truly went after the hearts and the minds of the people of Scotland. If the heart of Knox, the undisputed leader of the Reformation in Scotland, revealed in his correspondence, gives us an insight into the heart of the project as a whole, then we can see that what was aimed at in Scotland was a devotional revolution that

37. Mark A. Koller, “The Development of the Scottish Doctrine of the Church: The Far-Reaching Ministry of John Knox,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 9.2 (2017): 169–302, at p. 276.

38. Kyle, “The Thundering Scot,” p. 148.

sought to captivate the people of Scotland with the loveliness of Christ.

Tom Torrance speaks to this in his analysis of the Scots Confession. Observing that the Confession has no separate article on Justification, he writes

What is absolutely central is Jesus Christ. Man's salvation is exclusively the work of God in Christ, God in union with Man, and therefore Man in union with God. It is an outstanding characteristic of all the documents of the Scottish Reformation that a place of centrality is given to the union of God and Man in Christ, and therefore of our "blessed conjunction" or "society" or "fraternity" with Christ.³⁹

Despite being authored by the "six Johns" (Knox, Spotswood, Willock, Row, Douglas, and Winram), the production of such a thorough document in the space of four days heavily implies that it was largely the work of John Knox, edited and refined by his co-authors.⁴⁰ Regardless of who the chief author was, the centrality of Jesus Christ demonstrates that what we find in Knox's pastoral Christology was not just unique to him, but rather captured the tenor of the Scottish Reformation as a whole.

This was, from the perspective of the lead Reformers, to be a devotional Reformation that was built on leading people to behold the loveliness of Christ. Despite being formalized by an act of Parliament in 1560, this was not to be a top-down imposition brought to bear on a vulnerable people by something akin to a "Tartan Taliban." At its very root and core the Reformation that John Knox was pursuing was one that was rooted in hearts and minds that had been captivated by the goodness of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The warmth that we find in Knox's personal correspondence reveals to us the general timbre of those who were at the fore of early Scottish Calvinism. They carried with them a force and an urgency, even an intensity, but this was not borne of some tyrannical desire to dominate but out of a earnest desire that the people of Scotland understand the depth of their spiritual predicament and then run to Christ for refuge.

39. Thomas F. Torrance, "Justification: Its Radical Nature and Place in Reformed Doctrine and Life," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 13.3 (1960): 225–46, at p. 226.

40. Renwick, *The Story of the Scottish Reformation*, p. 111.

41. Lewis, *English Literature*, p. 198.

42. Chesterton, "The Hammer of God," pp. 133–34.

43. James Begg, "John Knox and the Reformation," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 7 (2011): 31–32.

44. Stanford Reid, "John Knox," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1), p.20.

CONCLUSION

C. S. Lewis branded John Knox the "enfant terrible" of Calvinism.⁴¹ Such is the reputation that has been handed down through the ages. It is in part informed and directed by Knox's portrayal of himself in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, in which he sought to paint a deliberate picture intended to create a national lore surrounding the Reformation that would help the Reformation take hold in the unique attempt at establishing a national Reformation. But with the wealth of other material we have available, it is ultimately lazy and uncharitable, and it is a point at which our historic imaginations tip over and deafen us so that we cannot take the man at his word.

It is easy to think of the days of the Scottish Reformation in terms of Northern European noir—to think of the characters involved being as dark and brooding as the North Sea that lashes Scotland's shores. We can easily imagine Luther's Reformation as full of song and beer, Calvin's full of Continental refinement, but Knox's Reformation as one of angst and loathing, led by a man "who prayed on hills and high crags, and learnt to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven," as G. K. Chesterton famously condemned the "Scotch religion."⁴²

However, when we look into Knox's letters as sources that reveal the heart of the Reformer as he addressed friend and foe alike, free from the public persona of the pulpit, what we see in the lead Reformer of Scotland is a man who is principled, but yet tender and kind. As James Begg writes, there is in John Knox a "combination of cheery humour and the utmost firmness, of immense power and thorough disinterestedness, stern determination in public life, with a most remarkable tenderness of domestic affection, and also a deep feeling of sympathy with the helpless and oppressed."⁴³ He was indeed "a pastor of souls with a deep interest in the spiritual welfare of those who came under his care."⁴⁴

Knox's reputation in the pulpit is too well attested to deny the force of his oratory, but when we take him on his own terms and open his personal correspondence we see just what it is that this man would say when he was engaging a particular, personal audience. When we do, we see that he was a man who first and foremost wanted people to see and savor Jesus Christ. John Knox was a pastor at heart who more than wanting to impose a political, or cultural, or even religious agenda on Scotland, wanted people—as people—to see and savor Jesus Christ. What John Knox's letters reveal is a man who is tender and kind, who wanted those with whom he dealt to hold fast to Christ and live only for his glory. ■