
John Knox

1513-1572

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John Knox is credited as the founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Educated at St. Andrews he was influenced by the local corruption of the Catholic Church and literature imported from Martin Luther's movement in Germany. He lived in violent times, and he developed a violent response to the corrupt Christianity he believed needed to be overthrown.

The Catholic Church owned a majority of the land in Scotland and at the time drew nearly eighteen times the income of the Scottish Crown. Catholic clergy were more political than religious, the local archbishop, Cardinal Beaton, having fathered 10 children with various women. It took little more than the import of smuggled Lutheran literature to open Knox's mind to protesting against the horrid state of Christianity.

Knox joined in a rebellion that resulted in the murder of Cardinal Beaton, resulting in his arrest and exile. While exiled he worked for the Church of England, becoming a chaplain to King Edward VI. The death of Edward put a Catholic on the throne (Mary Tudor) and Knox was forced to resign and leave the country. He moved to Geneva and met John Calvin, then to Frankfurt to head an Anglican refugee congregation. But his teachings were controversial, ending any further participation in the Church of England.

He returned to Scotland and led the Protestant Reformation there, which overthrew the reign of Mary of Guise, putting Mary, Queen of Scots on the throne. She allowed him the freedom to lead the Protestants, and he in turn criticized her Catholicism. He chafed under the rule of women and believed a woman had no right to rule over men. He declared, "To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city, is repugnant to nature; contumely to God, a thing most contrary to his revealed will and approved ordinance; and finally, it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice." Queen Mary confronted him, and he

explained he was as content to live peaceably under her rule as the Apostle Paul had been to live under Nero's. Queen Mary defended her allegiance to Rome and Knox responded, "Wonder not, Madam, that I call Rome an harlot; for that Church is altogether polluted with all kind of spiritual fornication, as well in doctrine as in manners. Yea, Madam, I offer myself to prove, that the Church of the Jews which crucified Christ Jesus, was not so far degenerate from the ordinances which God gave by Moses and Aaron unto His people, when they manifestly denied the Son of God, as the Church of Rome is declined, and more than five hundred years hath declined, from the purity of that religion which the Apostles taught and planted."

Because church and state were involved throughout his life, Knox addressed these subjects with pen and sermon. He said, "Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God." And, "A man with God is always in the majority." Also, "Let a thing here be noted, that the prophet of God sometimes may teach treason against kings, and yet neither he nor such as obey the word, spoken in the Lord's name by him, offend God."

Knox was fearless and devoutly believed the Bible should be followed, not merely read. He believed it required him to stand up to corrupt church clergy, kings, queens and society. The force of his personal convictions still echo in Protestant thought beyond the Presbyterian Church he is credited with founding.