



JOHN KNOX 1513 – 1572

John Knox was a Scottish clergyman and a leader of the Protestant Reformation who is considered the founder of the Presbyterian denomination in Scotland. He was believed to have been educated at the University of St. Andrews and worked as a notary-priest. Influenced by early church reformers such as George Wishart, he joined the movement to reform the Scottish church and was caught up in the ecclesiastical and political events that involved the murder of Cardinal Beaton in 1546 and the condemning of the Catholic “Mary Queen of Scots” from his pulpit and in print. He spent 18 months as a galley slave on French warships and fled to Europe where he met leading Protestant theologian / reformer John Calvin in Geneva.

John Knox returned to Scotland in 1559 and preached against Catholicism. The following year a Parliament in Edinburgh severed contact with the Papacy and forbade the celebration of the Catholic Mass. The Parliament ordered Knox and five colleagues to write a *Confession of Faith*, the *First Book of Discipline*, and *The Book of Common Order* — all of which cast the Protestant faith of Scotland in a distinctly Calvinist and Presbyterian mode. Knox finished out his years as preacher of the Edinburgh church, helping shape the developing Protestantism in Scotland. During this time, he wrote his *History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland*.

Although tried and acquitted for treason and successfully alluding assassination, Knox remains a paradox to many. Clearly he was a man of great courage. He died at age 67. Knox’s legacy is large: his spiritual progeny includes some 750,000 Presbyterians in Scotland, 3 million in the United States, and many millions more worldwide.

The Presbyterian Church became a force for good not just in Scotland but wherever Scots went. Famous Presbyterians include John Flynn, visionary of Australia’s Outback; David Livingstone, the explorer; Mary Slessor, the missionary; and John Witherspoon, the educator. Most English speaking nations have strong Presbyterian traditions as do South Africa and South Korea, which Presbyterians evangelized. Under Knox’s leadership, Scottish families were transformed. Countless men led worship in their own homes. The singing of psalms in daily life became widespread. Because John placed heavy emphasis on universal education, the Bible was read in every Scottish town and glen.

Knox’s idea that a ruler is responsible to the people ruled influenced English and American politics. In Britain, the Parliament that overthrew King Charles 1 was largely Presbyterian; and in America, Presbyterians were prominent in the Revolution. Knox led by example: “I sought neither pre-eminence, glory, nor riches; my honor was that Jesus Christ should reign . . .”