

The Gates Of Hell Shall Not Prevail...

Lessons from the Story of the Church

And Scotland Too

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.”

Romans 13:1

Protestantism was first carried to the Scotland of James V in the 1520s by merchants who brought Lutheran books and William Tyndale's English Bible from the Netherlands. The first outstanding Protestant teacher was Patrick Hamilton, a priest who had studied under Martin Luther in Wittenberg. He was burnt at the stake on February 29th 1528, a mere 24 years old, but his death stirred up discussion and unrest right across the realm.

Persecution

When Henry VIII broke the link between the English Church and Rome in 1534 persecution of those with Protestant leanings became more intense for then Protestantism was identified with English influence. Parliamentary acts decreed, among other things, that to deny the authority of the pope was punishable by death.

The death of James V brought a temporary reprieve when a pro-Reformation government, led by the Earl of Arran, came into power in 1542, the king's heir, Mary, being only a baby at the time. It did not last long. The following year there was a Catholic backlash and Arran's government was forced to revert to policy as it had been under James.

Never the less the Reform movement grew strong and in May 1546 a group of high ranking Scots broke into the castle home of Cardinal Beaton in St Andrews. Beaton was the leader of Scotland's Roman Catholic Church and was responsible for Scotland's tough anti-Protestant policy. James Melville, one of their conspirators, assured the terrified Beaton that they had nothing against him personally but were simply instruments in the hand of God bringing justice for the murder of his servants. Having explained this Melville encouraged Beaton to repent and then ran him through with his sword. The group took possession of the castle and were joined by others seeking refuge from persecution. One of those who joined them was John Knox who they set apart as their pastor.

Eventually they were bombed into submission by a French fleet (Scotland was closely allied with France at the time) and the conspirators were taken as captives to France where Knox became a galley slave in the French navy.

John Knox

John Knox, who was born in 1514, was ordained as a priest in 1536. We are not sure when he became a Protestant but it was likely in the early 1540s under the preaching of the chaplain of the Earl of Arran.

After the St Andrews castle siege, Knox was 19 months a galley slave, during which time he encouraged and emboldened his fellow captives, making confident predictions that God would liberate him to preach in Scotland. The prediction was fulfilled.

After gaining his liberty Knox went first to England. He became pastor of an Anglican Church and was later appointed as chaplain to King Edward.

When Mary Tudor came to the throne, Knox fled first to Frankfurt and then to John Calvin's Geneva. There he served as pastor to the English refugee congregation. His church worshipped according to a Reformed liturgy, drawn up by Knox and others, which was to become the official liturgy of the Scottish Reformed Church.

It was also during the Geneva years that his views on the role of women in leadership got him into hot water. His first book, which he tactfully entitled, "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women" was aimed primarily at Mary Tudor and argued

that female rule contradicted both the law of nature and the law of God and that female rulers must be deposed. Unfortunately, soon after the book was published Mary Tudor died and was succeeded by the Protestant queen Elizabeth I who took it personally. The book also outraged most of Knox's Protestant friends including John Calvin who had it banned in Geneva. Knox later complained, "My First Blast hath blown from me all my friends."

His second book, "The Appellation" met with more success. In it he appealed to the Scottish nobility to enact reformation. He argued that they had the right to depose an idolatrous monarch. Up to this time the mainstream Protestant opinion had been that whilst Christians must refuse to participate in idolatrous worship they should peacefully suffer the consequences of any necessary disobedience to government. Now there were those who were advocating a move from passive resistance to righteous rebellion and the taking up of arms against the government. Knox advocated this radical approach and although his writings were distasteful to many his position was eventually to be taken up by the Scottish Covenanters and the English Puritans.

Rebellion

Meanwhile, those who represented the Protestant cause in Scotland were gaining in power and influence. In 1557 the leaders of the Protestant nobility signed a covenant pledging to promote reform and freedom of Protestant preaching. They called themselves "The Lords of the Congregation of Christ" and under their protection Protestants began appointing preachers who conducted worship according to the Book of Common Prayer.

In 1558, Mary of Guise, mother of Queen Mary, acting as regent of Scotland summoned Protestant preachers to account for their activities. This provoked such a show of force that she cancelled the summons.

It was at this point that John Knox was summoned to return to Scotland. He preached with great effect in Dundee and Perth. These cities, along with Ayr, declared themselves to be Protestant communities. A new covenant was drawn up by the Lords of the Congregation for the defence of Protestantism and Mary of Guise mobilised an army of 8000 to oppose them. With financial and military backing from Elizabeth I of England, and encouraged by the preaching of John Knox the Protestant forces gained the balance of power.

A treaty — the treaty of Edinburgh — was signed and The Reformation Parliament of 1560 was called. The mass was outlawed, papal jurisdiction was abolished and Parliament approved a Reformed confession of faith for the Church of Scotland. The Book of Common Order was adopted to regulate the worship and government of the Church. Largely due to the influence of John Knox it followed the practice in Geneva both in liturgy and church government which was Presbyterian.

Mary Queen of Scots

In December 1560 King Francis II of France died. His wife Mary, the rightful queen of Scotland was now 18 and it seemed likely that she would return to Scotland. Being a Roman Catholic she was expected to overthrow the Reformation Settlement but in the event she sided with the pro-English Protestant nobility. Never the less, Knox continued to see her as an enemy of Protestantism, and said so often. "If there be not in her a proud mind, a crafty wit, an indurate heart against God and His truth, my judgement faileth me."

Following disastrous second and third marriages, Mary was forced to abdicate and flee to England for help. Expecting to be welcomed, she was imprisoned by Elizabeth I. Eventually she was executed in 1587 for her part in a plot to overthrow Elizabeth. Her son James VI, who was brought up a Protestant by those who ruled on his behalf until he reached maturity, also inherited the English throne on the death of Elizabeth.

John Knox died in 1572, in his own words, "weary of this world and thirsting to depart." It was said of him that he "Neither feared nor flattered any flesh."

Question for Discussion

Were the Lords of the Congregation justified in taking up arms to further the cause of the Reformation in Scotland?