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Cover Image

On the cover, a protestor wearing nitrile gloves and holding his fist, 31 May 2020.
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God and Politics: John Knox and the Scottish Reformation

Megan Tien

In spring 1547, a man ran out of a Church in St. Andrews, Scotland, shocked and in tears. Just a few moments earlier, this man had heard the preacher declare, “In the name of God, and of his son Jesus Christ and in the name of these that presently calls you by my mouth, I charge you that ye refuse not this holy vocation [...] that ye take upon you the public office and charge or preaching.” Afterward, the congregation replied in affirmation, “It was and we approve it.”¹ John Knox had just received a calling to become a minister to the Protestant Reformation. Rather than accept this calling in honor and joy, Knox was upset and confused. Knox was a man who thought of himself as merely a simple scholar, but now his life was about to change completely. After some consideration, Knox returned to accept this daunting task of being a minister as his new purpose in life. Because of this, Knox would end up spearheading a movement more significant than he could have ever imagined, the Protestant Reformation in Scotland.

This paper demonstrates how John Knox wanted to set up the Scottish Church, known as a Kirk, based on his religious beliefs and political authority perspectives. Scholars describe Knox as an outspoken man of passion and theology, noting his fiery approach to reform through his expressive opinions related to his work supporting Protestantism and against Catholicism. Knox condemned Catholic practices as “ungodly” and attacked Catholics like Queen Mary Stuart in the political realm. Scholars like John Gray criticize Knox for his intensity and “exaggeration.”² Quentin Skinner affirms this notion of aggression, describing Knox’s writings as “inflammatory.”³ Nevertheless, Knox remained an instrumental figure who helped advance Reformed thinking. Gray acknowledged that while Knox had a “habit of exaggeration [...] a serious flaw” in his character, this was due to his sense of desperation and urgency during a time when the direction of the Reformation in Europe was quite unpredictable.

Knox needed to take immediate and critical action to ensure that the Protestant cause would be pushed forward, even if he used what some people believed were intense “remedies.”⁴ Richard G. Kyle stresses Knox’s vision for the structure of all churches in general, which Knox had based upon the Old Testament and First-Century Church. He also examined Knox’s viewpoints on the roles of both secular and religious authorities. Kyle’s arguments about Knox’s basis for the Scottish Church are crucial to understanding how Knox saw himself as a reformer.⁵ While Knox was concerned with political influence on the church, his allegiance was not to any mortal being but to God. Knox did not care about pleasing people, such as the king, nobility, or commoners. Instead, he worked to assure that the truth of the Gospel be made known in whatever way possible, even if that meant coming off as combative and belligerent. Especially during a period when the Catholic opposition had a firm grip on Scotland, it was reasonable for John Knox to resort to extreme measures to reveal to the people what he believed was life-saving truth.⁶ Ultimately, Knox wanted to uphold his obedience towards God. To do so, he did his best to spread Protestantism to others.⁷ He did so not only because he believed that it was his religious duty to God but because he believed there were eternal stakes involved for each member of humanity. Because Knox thought that the Bible’s central message would affect one’s eternal life trajectory, it was vital for him to try

to spread his beliefs to many people. Above all, Knox did not want to see people being misled down the wrong path into an eternal life of destruction and separation from God.

In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation began to spread throughout Europe. During this period, political drama loomed over many people's heads and contributed to their social motivations. Knox's beliefs about church-building and politics remained constant in that his reverence for God remained central. Still, his efforts increased in urgency over time due to his imprisonment in the galleys, relocation to England, return to Scotland, and awareness of the rise and fall of monarchs in England and Scotland. Knox's *History of the Reformation of Scotland*, "A Faithful Admonition to the Professors of God's Truth in England," as well as his "Scots Confession of 1560," act as windows into Knox's views, helping to demonstrate how and why these changes occurred. Through these texts, we witness Knox's evolution from a figure who did not interact with political entities to someone who actively sought to work with or against political figures for the sake of building up the Scottish Church. Knox's three pieces of writing reveal both his evolving views on politics as well as his enduring commitment to being ultimately loyal to God.

Due to his position as a minister and reformer, Knox had an idealistic view of reform, best seen through his call to ministry and first public debate. Knox made his reformed theological beliefs known but lacked a specific plan for the structure of the church. Protestants were less concerned than Catholics about the performance of certain acts and particular behaviors to achieve salvation. They did not recognize the same number of sacraments as Catholics and believed that these acts did not affect salvation. Reformers were concerned with spreading the message of the Bible, directing all learning and meditation to the figure of Jesus Christ, who would ultimately be the only one to bring salvation.⁸ As a Protestant reformer, Knox had the same attitude as his evangelical contemporaries, whose fundamental beliefs would influence his decisions and visions for the Scottish Church. These Reformed beliefs ultimately influenced Knox when he began his role as a new minister in the late 1540s and continued to inform his actions when he helped lead the formation of the Scottish Church in the 1560s. Knox's Reformed beliefs were a constant in his ministry, from beginning to end.

Knox's Structure of the Scottish Church

While John Knox did not have a grand vision for the Scottish Church during the beginning of his ministry in the 1540s, he understood his role was to promote the integrity of God's word. Based upon his belief in Reformed theology, Knox declared that the church needed to be defined based on what was described in the Word of God and that it was through that basis that the church would remain authentic. He declared, "Before we hold ourselves[...], we must define the Church, by the right notes given to us in God's Scriptures of the true Church."⁹ This foundation ensured that the church's trajectory and type of religious culture that Knox wanted to cultivate would not stumble in the same way that the Catholic Church supposedly did, by deviating from Christianity's fundamental essence and becoming too embellished.¹⁰ This would ensure that the Protestant ideals that Knox wanted to uphold would be preserved in the future of the Scottish Church.

Knox also provided an unnamed article with nine points in his *History of the Reformation of Scotland* that laid out the core beliefs that he concluded based on his knowledge from the Bible. While these points did not describe any specific plan related to how the body of the Scottish Church should be organized, Knox made it clear through his points that the church leadership should ultimately come from God. He described that "no mortal man can be the head of the church," thus making it clear that absolutely no one could wield ultimate power over the church of Scotland.¹¹ Knox understood that, as per the Bible, it was God who had

ultimate authority. This same understanding also brought Knox to denounce the pope. Knox wanted to prevent a pope-like figure from rising to power in Scotland's future. At the same time, Knox supported the existence of bishops in the Church, as he asserted that bishops needed to fulfill their role as preachers. This may come off as contradictory to Knox's Protestant beliefs since the Catholic Church usually used bishops. However, it is likely that Knox's understanding of bishops was not one that fit the hierarchical mold employed by the Catholic Church, but rather a view more similar to that of the Protestant Church of England, wherein being a bishop meant being a preacher and shepherd, not an administrator of 'unnecessary' sacraments. Knox wanted to protect the doctrinal integrity of Christianity from wayward leaders, as is reflected in his insistence that no point of Christianity could be added upon or altered by humans. In Knox's mind, Christianity must always be grounded and defended solely by what was stated in the Bible. As part of this, Knox believed that only God had ultimate authority in life. He thought that the church could not be head of the state because even the church was not worthy of such power.¹² These were the main principles that Knox lived by in hopes that he could successfully build up a church of integrity in the future.

Before establishing his view of the Scottish Church, Knox first desired to rid Scotland of all Catholic influence. Before Knox began his ministry, Scotland was a predominantly Catholic kingdom, with a vast network of Catholic religious structures and thousands of Catholic clerics across the land.¹³ This strong Catholic hold significantly hindered the growth of the Protestant movement in Scotland. The sovereigns of Scotland in the 1540s, James V and his wife, Mary of Guise, were devout Catholics.¹⁴ As such, Knox took it upon himself to remove the Catholic stranglehold on Scotland so that the Protestant cause had a chance to reach the masses. Apart from it being one of his essential duties as a minister, one of the main reasons Knox felt compelled to begin preaching and ministering publicly was to challenge the Catholic figure Dean John Annand of St. Andrews. Referred to as a "rotten Papist" by Knox, Annand was a Catholic who had "long-troubled" John Rough, the Protestant preacher who had commissioned Knox to be a minister. Knox saw Annand as a reason for renouncing Catholicism.¹⁵ Knox argued that the Catholic Church wrongly believed that good works would bring salvation when the Bible declared that faith in Christ alone led to eternal life in heaven.¹⁶ Through revealing what he thought was an erroneous dogma of the Catholic Church, Knox could point out that specific works such as pardons by Catholic priests or sacraments during mass were not of Biblical origin and were instead part of a false system of 'justification by works.' Knox also had a public debate with another Catholic figure, Friar Arbuckle, at the beginning of his ministry. In their debate, Knox revealed the logos of Protestantism and exposed the faults of Catholicism to his audience. Knox asserted that the ceremonial aspects of Catholic Mass were embellishments created by humans, which went against Biblical doctrines such as not altering the Lord's commandments. In his debate with Friar Arbuckle, Knox boldly declared, "Now unless that ye be able to prove that God has commanded your ceremonies, that his former commandment will damn both you and them."¹⁷ By revealing these faults, Knox began the process of convincing people to turn away from Catholicism. Knox needed people to understand the merits of the Protestant path over Catholicism for the Reform movement to grow. In addition, denouncing Catholicism meant denouncing its hierarchical means of organization, which would later influence Knox's formation of the Scottish Church.

While Knox previously held a more generalized and theoretical view of the proposed structure of the Scottish Church, over time, his motivation to eliminate Catholic influence in daily life increased, and Knox started to consider the impact of political figures in bringing about religious reform. Knox's work was put on hold after the fiery start of his ministry in

Scotland when he was arrested. Initially, in the 1540s, it seemed like the Protestant movement in Scotland was on an upward trajectory because parliament allowed for Bibles to be printed in common languages. Despite this success, Scottish reformers expressed concern that they would face obstacles and setbacks. Their worries came to fruition in 1547 when the French-Scottish alliance allowed for Catholicism to regain control in Scotland. The French Navy seized Knox for his Protestant rebelliousness, and he was sent away to a galley, a ship that depended on forced laborers to row and propel the vessel forward. Knox labored on boats like this before being released after a few years.¹⁸ Instead of returning to Scotland, where Catholicism was steady, Knox first went to England, where Edward VI was the Protestant monarch for a brief period.

Knox and Political Figures

During the reign of King Edward VI in England, Knox came to understand that earthly political authorities could help push reform and that even if a political figure failed, God would still sustain his people. In his writing of the “Faithful Admonition to the Professors of God’s Truth in England” of 1554, Knox expressed his support for the “elect and chosen vessel of God,” whom Knox believed was King Edward VI, due to their similar religious beliefs and Knox’s high view of royalty.¹⁹ According to Gray’s “The Political Theory of John Knox,” Knox believed in the king’s authority, or the highest civil power, as an ordainment by God.²⁰ This does not mean that Knox believed in kings as the ultimate power holders, but rather that kings were placed in such an influential position to use their power to preserve the integrity of the church, especially against papal authority. However, if the monarch’s power was corrupted and went against God’s commands, Knox felt it was righteous to admonish them.²¹ Knox also believed that lower forms of political authority, such as princes and officials, could use their status to uphold godliness. Referencing Jeremiah 26, Knox described that the prophet Jeremiah prophesied and warned that discipline would come to Jerusalem if its people did not repent and change their wicked ways. In the Bible passage, the priests who heard this message reacted in anger and wanted to put Jeremiah to death. However, officials, or “princes,” intervened and demanded that the prophet Jeremiah be left alone because he was speaking truthfully and out of a desire to uphold godliness amongst the people.²² Ultimately, the reign of Edward VI in England created a friendly environment for Knox to do reform work. This allowed Knox to understand that using the right political climate could be pivotal for his ministry work. He would have to wait for the opportune moment of political leniency towards Protestantism in Scotland to enact his visions of reform.

While Knox exalted the power of Edward VI in England, he did not exalt higher civil powers without any qualifications, as Knox would only support a ruler if he believed they met his standards of obedience to God. Knox’s prioritization of God was evident when he “was too completely intoxicated with God to pay any attention to the values of monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, or ecclesiocracy in themselves.”²³ In the mind of John Gray, Knox was not concerned with the “absolute supremacy of the king,” instead of being “interested only in the sovereignty of God, and was indifferent with regard to the servants He might use.”²⁴ Knox’s primary concern in life was that all people in the world, especially in Scotland, would obey God. Knox did acknowledge that the welfare of a kingdom depended on the morality of its king or queen.²⁵ Knox stated that rulers were “God’s lieutenants,” meant to obey and honor God while on their thrones. According to Knox, the role of a “lieutenant” was to carry out their assigned responsibilities and conduct their duties appropriately as someone with high authority and responsibility. In this light, rulers were not operating out of their independent discretion but held accountable to God. These rulers were then supposed

to use their powerful positions to uphold the values of God.²⁶ They were to preserve the church's integrity and the faith of their constituents, especially against the papal authority of that early modern period. Because of their status, rulers had significant influence over the religious state of their kingdom, for better or for worse.²⁷ Given this expectation, if a ruler disobeyed and disrespected God, then the trajectory of a kingdom could go towards destruction, and on a more practical level, prevent Knox from achieving the reform work he desired to accomplish. Knox's own words on rulers were quite sharp when he described that if a ruler were a "murderer, adulterer, or idolater," he would be held accountable by God. The ruler would not get preferential treatment as a higher power but instead be treated as any other offender in society. The ordinary people justifiably put the law into execution.²⁸ Knox found potential new allies in influential political figures, such as the English King Edward VI, who could make the work of Knox's ministry easier. With this trust in the proper political authorities to help move the reformation forward through their influence and power, Knox realized that he could find potential allies in politics to help build up the Protestant church.

There were still many threats to the Protestant Reformation due to different political powers strongly connected with Catholicism. This caused Knox to become even more motivated to weaken Catholic influence. Upon the death of King Edward VI in 1553, shortly after Knox arrived in England, the Catholic Mary Tudor ascended to the throne and immediately oversaw the persecution of Protestants. Knox was forced to leave England, shaken by the undoing of the Protestant movement in such a quick time.²⁹ He worried about the fate of England because Mary Tudor's extreme power meant that she could force the English people to comply with her idea of the "right" religious beliefs.³⁰ Though this situation did not directly affect Scotland, it would set back the course of Knox's ministry and prevent people from receiving true salvation in his ultimate desire for people to turn to Protestantism.

Knox rejected and admonished Catholic rulers like Mary Tudor. Mary, I was the daughter of King Henry VIII and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and Knox saw Mary I as evil and unhelpful to his reform work. Knox wrote the "First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women," which admonished women rulers and claimed that it was against the natural order of the world for women to rule, naming a section of his work "The Empire of Women is Repugnant to Nature."³¹ He quoted First Corinthians 11:8-10, which stated that "Man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. And man was not created for the cause of the woman, but the woman for the cause of man; and therefore, ought the woman to have a power upon her head." Based on this passage, Knox concluded that a woman should know that man was lord above her; and therefore, that she should never have pretended any kind of superiority above him."³² Knox believed that God designed women to serve men, and consequently, a woman ruling an entire kingdom would be entirely out of line. Knox acknowledged female authoritative figures in the Bible, including the judge Deborah, justifying her authoritative position by declaring that she was ordained and privileged by God for reasons unknown to humanity.³³ In this light, Knox was capable of seeing women as legitimate rulers. Still, because the female rulers of both England and Scotland were Catholics during much of Knox's ministry, Knox had much incentive to despise them and associate their femininity with their religion.

Influences of Calvinism on Political Views

During his exile from England, Knox further developed his views on the merits of working with or against political authority, reflecting the importance of political leadership in building the church. The fact that monarchs had the power to control religious practice was a significant threat to Knox and his desire to reform. During this turmoil in Europe in the 1500s, political

leaders influenced the religion practiced in their domains. Many Protestant reformers and scholars like Knox were considering how to respond to this perceived threat. The Calvinist, Protestant, response was surprisingly passive. A famous Genevan reformer, John Calvin, had only written a short description regarding this position in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, first published in 1536.³⁴ Calvin believed that it was important never to disrespect a ruler's authority, even if they were unworthy and even corrupted their holy ordination from God.³⁵ However, Calvin and most other leading Protestant leaders did acknowledge that magistrates, or civil authorities, had the right to "oppose tyrannical higher authority" because God divinely appointed both magistrates and higher officers.³⁶ So-called "lower magistrates" attempted to uphold godliness in rulers by holding certain rulers accountable for their actions.³⁷ However, if these magistrates were acting ungodly and oppressive, Calvin believed that the ordinary people were not supposed to resist or depose them actively. Calvin believed the common people did not have "the right" to expel any seemingly "tyrannical" ruler.³⁸ Calvin did acknowledge that ordinary people could resist tyrannical rulers passively, but he firmly believed that active resistance was inappropriate.³⁹ Calvin ultimately condemned the radical beliefs of those who thought it was necessary to pursue active resistance.⁴⁰ Eventually, as John T. McNeill wrote regarding uncooperative leaders, Calvin believed that obedience toward political leaders should be encouraged and that resistance was a hostile act.⁴¹ In the end, Calvin showed little interest in attaining the 'proper' form of government because he believed that God's will ultimately appointed all power.⁴²

Calvin's thoughts and documents most likely circulated throughout Europe, so his ideas were probably made known to John Knox. Knox's first exposure to Calvin's teachings may have been through the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, but it is equally possible George Wishart, one of Knox's university professors, revealed Calvin's doctrines to Knox. Wishart was a Scottish preacher who was likely exposed to Calvinist and other Protestant doctrines while traveling across Europe.⁴³ After his exile to mainland Europe in 1553, Knox had a close personal relationship with John Calvin. Calvin was a patron to Knox, and there are multiple accounts of discussions between the two men. Calvin was embarrassed to be associated with Knox after Knox published the polemical *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* because Calvin disagreed with Knox's negative statements toward females in authoritative positions.⁴⁴ In 1557, when Knox was hesitant to accept an offer to return to Scotland, Calvin charged Knox "to be faithful to his flock," which ultimately convinced Knox to return to Scotland.⁴⁵ Knox respected Calvin as a Reformed teacher, but he also had some ideological disagreements with him.

Knox shared Calvin's views that both men were not necessarily concerned with the type of government that existed and felt it necessary to obey and regard rulers highly. However, Knox deviated from Calvin's claim of passivity and relative inaction towards ungodly rulers. This can be seen as Knox grew in radicalism during the 1550s, something that worried many Calvinists. Knox was curious whether "an 'idolatrous sovereign' might be lawfully resisted by the nobility or other inferior magistrates."⁴⁶ While Knox believed that God rightfully ordained rulers and monarchs, he also thought they were not immune to corruption. Due to their fallible human nature, rulers had the potential to turn away from God. In this event, Knox believed that it was necessary to take action against rulers, a deviation from Calvin's statement of belief.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the Calvinists in continental Europe, English reformers with Calvinist backgrounds seemed to support the idea of lawful resistance against authority that Knox proposed. Protestant commentators John Ponet and Christopher Goodman declared that God ordained rulers to do godly work, not deviate from it. Ponet and Goodman

referenced the book of Samuel in the Old Testament, wherein God's chosen people, the Israelites, asked God for a king. The two commentators pointed out that in this instance, God appointed a king. Still, God intended that the ruler steward their high societal position with reverence to promote godliness in their kingdoms instead of wielding unlimited power.⁴⁷ Knox shared Ponet and Goodman's belief in proper religious stewardship for rulers. One mark of Knox's developing awareness toward regulating and interacting with political authority was in 1554 when Knox asked Calvinist Heinrich Bullinger if one needed to be obedient towards a political leader "who enforces idolatry and condemns true religion."⁴⁸ John Knox asked this out of a sense of urgency and panic. In 1554, Catholic rulers held power in Scotland and England and acted with violence and force towards reformers to maintain Catholic religious unity.⁴⁹

Influenced by these radical thoughts, Knox understood that while rulers were to be respected, they also could not be above the rest of society, where they would remain untouched and unchecked. Knox and other radical Calvinists believed that the impetus for dethroning monarchs did not come from a political or moral right but rather out of religious duty.⁵⁰ Instead of political tyranny, Knox and his fellow radical thinkers believed that monarchs who acted out of line were heretics who went against the law and ordainment of God. In comparing these monarchs to "oppressors, and malefactors" who allowed "the Devil [to take] possession of the throne," Knox was convinced that their misconduct was a religious offense.⁵¹ Due to a high calling and spiritual commitment, Knox felt it necessary to resist ungodly rulers.⁵² This reinforced Knox's desire for action over passivity, in contrast to traditional Calvinists, and was a product of the understanding that political authority had significant influence over a kingdom's spiritual trajectory. Knox's mind, passivity toward an ungodly ruler would allow the nation to succumb to idolatry and harmful values. As a result, Knox believed it was essential to have the ability to resist Catholic political figures actively, further proof that Knox began to consciously realize that rulers had the potential to bring about spiritual growth or destruction.

Before Knox could do more, he needed to convince Scottish Christians to abandon their old ways of Catholicism. So, Knox spoke with even greater urgency, especially on the topic of idolatry. Knox observed that many Scottish people still performed the Catholic rituals he had tried to discourage since the beginning of his ministry. To dissuade this Catholic-related behavior, Knox emphasized the importance of the Bible by explaining how "the perpetual meditation, exercise, and use of God's holy word" was a spiritual necessity.⁵³ Knox claimed the Scottish people were going against God's holy word and therefore harmed their spiritual well-being by performing Catholic sacraments. Knox's great desire to stop these Catholic-based rituals came from his belief of what a "true church" should be, where there would be "preaching of the Word of God, right administration of the sacraments of Jesus Christ, and upright ministration of ecclesiastical discipline."⁵⁴ Knox most likely already held this belief during the beginning of his ministry in his vision for churches in general, and it would be specifically applied to the formation of the Scottish Church through the "Scots Confession of 1560". Knox's explicit reference to the proper use of sacraments indicated his awareness of the Catholic ceremonies as an obstacle to Protestant church reformation. This came from the understanding that a church was not defined by "lineage or historical significance" but rather by its identity in God.⁵⁵ This definition would shape Knox's ideas in the future, as he would articulate what the Scottish Church should be like as a congregation centered around God's authority. This attack on Catholic rituals was necessary for the Scottish people to understand the dangerous circumstances of their faith and help pave the way for a Protestant-centered church in the future. His appeals to the Scottish people reveal that Knox still maintained

religious integrity, despite evolving his views on political authority. Even after time passed and new perspectives on political figures were made, he was still focused on obeying God and not political rulers. Ultimately, Knox was concerned with his obedience towards God in spreading what he believed to be true and necessary to his people.⁵⁶

Through these experiences in the mid-1550s, Knox realized that political authority had the power to bring down or push forth a religious movement. Because of this realization, Knox was willing to accept the creation of the Scottish Protestant Parliament to draft an extensive declaration of faith and a design for what the Scottish Church should be like. Knox, along with fellow ministers John Winram, John Spottiswood, John Douglas, John Row, and John Willock, were called upon by the “Reformation Parliament” in 1560 to write out a multi-page set of beliefs called the “Scots Confession of 1560.”⁵⁷ Knox took advantage of this opportunity in which the political authority was Protestant-friendly, and the resulting “Scots Confession of 1560” ensured a stable foundation for the future of the reformation in Scotland. It also marked a shift for Knox, who previously did not interact much with political entities.

Knox now felt comfortable relying on political power, recognizing its importance in bringing about religious change. Knox favored the king and nobility, as he wrote about the importance of obedience to and acknowledgment of higher-ranking groups. However, if those in power disobeyed God’s will, Knox believed it was right to dispose of them and saw the ordinary people as a check against tyranny.⁵⁸ This would be important as it was reflected in Knox’s core belief that the Scottish Church would ultimately not be ruled over and controlled by a mortal leader. Knox believed that the Scottish Church should be united in common belief rather than in a centralized structural network. Not wanting to repeat the mistakes of the Catholic Church, which he believed focused too much on ceremonial aspects, Knox wanted to model the Scottish Church after the Early Christian Church from the first and second centuries. According to Gray, Knox believed that the true church was one that found identity in the core theological beliefs of Christianity from the first and second centuries CE, rather than in past cultural and historical significance that the early modern church based itself on.⁵⁹ The Early Christian Church was not under a centralized power, as there was no religious or mortal political head who dictated and controlled it. Moving away from the organization seen in the Catholic Church and the Church of England, wherein the Pope and King Henry were the respective mortal leaders, Knox instead preferred a church with God as its leader. While he respected earthly rulers, Knox would not compromise and allow them to hold power within the church.

Ultimately, the 1550s was a significant moment for the Protestant Reformation, with France becoming the location for the “first-ever successful Calvinist revolution.”⁶⁰ In 1559, Knox began penning his *History of the Reformation of Scotland*. Some claim that the first portion of this work (now known as Book II) was “a party pamphlet to justify the revolting Protestants” of that time, but in reality, the *History* was not published until the conclusion of such revolts.⁶¹ The rest of the *History of the Reformation in Scotland* was composed in the 1560s, during the latter years of Knox’s life, and ultimately Knox became the “only first rank leader of the Reformation who recorded in an historical narrative the events through which he lived.”⁶² Despite the *History* not being published until much later, crucially, in 1560, Knox was able to compose and publish “The Scots Confession of 1560.” Knox wrote “The Scots Confession of 1560” under the Reformed Scottish Parliament, and the document symbolized Scotland’s official adoption of the Protestant Faith.⁶³ Knox called for the “whole body of the godly people [to] rise up against the congregation of Satan in order to establish the congregation of Christ.”⁶⁴ This powerful, almost revolutionary declaration reflected Knox’s great passion for pushing forward the cause of Jesus Christ through the Protestant

Reformation. After his experiences in England and exile in continental Europe during the 1550s, in 1560, Knox, with his new understanding of his relationship to politics, applied his religious fervor to establish the structure of the Scottish Church. This structure ultimately reflected the fundamental yet straightforward core of Christianity that Knox found in the Bible and desired to see in society.

Knox's insistence on remaining true to the Reformed interpretation of the Bible continued and was concretely applied to the formation of the Scottish Church. In terms of understanding what had been commanded in the Bible, Knox insisted on relying on the Holy Spirit, rather than human wisdom, to interpret a passage, especially "when controversy ar[ose] about the right understanding of any passage or sentence of Scripture, or for the reformation of any abuse within the Kirk of God."⁶⁵ This ensured that the information people were learning was in line with God's will and not based upon human wisdom or whims. Knox mentioned that during disputes or confusion over scripture, people should not necessarily look to peers or higher rulers for the answers.⁶⁶ Although Knox believed monarchs were to be respected and revered, even they did not have the authority to make claims about God's word in the Bible. In terms of sacraments, Knox also only allowed for two to be applied in the Scottish Church, as he believed they were the only ones that the Bible acknowledged: Baptism and Communion, as they were "instituted by the Lord Jesus and commanded to be used by all who will be counted members of His body."⁶⁷ This was in contrast to the multitude of sacraments performed by the Catholic Church. Knox stated that he wanted the Scottish Kirk to be different from its contemporary counterparts, but also reflective of the "particular Kirks, such as those in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and other places where the ministry was planted by Paul."⁶⁸ This is a direct reference to the New Testament, where Paul, one of the early church leaders, corresponded with small groups of localized churches by region. They were united ideologically and were named by Paul as "Kirks of God."⁶⁹ Adopting this local structure without a central authority for Scotland, Knox desired that the Scottish people replicate the same gatherings in their cities, villages, and regional areas to reflect what he believed was the biblical view of the church.⁷⁰ This desire to create a Biblical church structure was due to his Reformed beliefs, as seen at the beginning of his ministry when he began preaching about following what was written in the Bible and not creating embellishments. Because the structure was localized, it would also prevent the Scottish Church from having a human leader and subsequent geographical center, pitfalls Knox believed were found in the Catholic Church. This smaller, localized structure of churches based upon the Early Church in the Bible became the model that Knox wanted to replicate for the Scottish Church.

This people-focused, localized church structure was important because it reflected a Biblical model and because it maintained godliness in Scotland in the context of accountability towards monarchs. Because the Scottish Church was structured in a localized way, the masses that were part of the church had a stake in what went on in their local churches and the spiritual well-being of the land. Knox believed that people were in a covenant with God to "uphold the rule of godliness and 'revenge to the uttermost of their power' any injuries 'done against His majesty' or laws."⁷¹ Knox viewed the nobility as people who could hold the king accountable. The nobility was not there to only please and affirm their respective rulers but also acted as a barrier preventing their king or queen from giving orders that went against the intentions of God.⁷² Rather than seeing the nobility as mere defenders of the crown, Knox also identified them as people who would ultimately "defend the crown rights of the Redeemer against the king."⁷³ Knox believed that it was a righteous act of faith to hold accountable those who did anything that went against the teachings of Jesus, even if they were of high socio-political standing, as regardless of their social position, their behavior was evil. To be a

bystander and not speak out against an offending party made one guilty by association, even if they did not commit the original iniquity.⁷⁴ However, Knox soon realized the unpredictable nature of nobles, comparing them to the likes of the Catholic pope or volatile rulers, which Knox held little respect for.⁷⁵ It was then up to the commoners to ensure the upholding of God's will in society. He claimed that the people should be able to punish their social superiors, including the king if these elites' ungodly actions threatened the eternal welfare of those around them.⁷⁶ This was a revolutionary way of thinking compared to other Protestant views, especially the anti-resistant beliefs of Calvin. Because Knox was concerned for the spiritual welfare of the people and his idea that rulers would not be immune to judgment, he believed that spiritual correction from across social classes was necessary, even if that meant challenging the nobility or ruling class. The Scottish Church structure's focus on local, small churches meant that any church member was significant regardless of social standing. Whether they be of noble or common background, the people, empowered through the structure of the Scottish Church, would be able to protect and advance the Protestant cause.

Ultimately, what Knox cared about the most was the glorification of God through obedience and authenticity. While Knox had high regard for the rulers of the time and saw them as ordained by God, he believed they could be rejected and deposed by their subjects if the monarchs acted out of line with God's commands. By understanding that rulers could easily be corrupted and try to control the church, Knox avoided the structure of a hierarchical church headed by a secular leader, as was seen in the Church of England. Also, Knox understood that people, in general, could become power-hungry and dishonest. People could end up trying to gain power through obtaining status in a religious context, as seen in the Catholic Church through the pope and the system of bishops. This was another reason Knox did not want to create a system of tiers evident within the Catholic Church. Instead, as reflected by his desire to maintain true to the essence of the Bible, Knox ultimately decided that the Scottish Church should be like the Early Church in Christian history. Grouped by small localities, these regional churches would eventually be connected not by a higher mortal power but by God.

Over time, through various events during his ministry, Knox ultimately recognized the importance of political figures in the movement towards religious reformation. When Knox was just a new minister in Scotland in the 1540s, he was merely concerned with the doctrinal aspects of Protestantism. He did not have a clear view of how he wanted to structure and establish a reformed church in Scotland. All he knew was that he needed to purify Scotland from the corruption and ungodliness that he believed came from the Catholic Church. However, Knox's life changed when French and Catholic-favoring Scottish forces came to arrest the Protestant reformers in St. Andrews, and he was sent to perform forced labor. Needing a safe place to go after being released, Knox arrived in England, where he realized the benefit of having a Protestant ruler in power because it would provide a safe place for the spread of the Protestant message. Later, when Catholic Mary I gained power, Knox escaped to continental Europe to learn more about Calvinism. It was through those life events during the 1550s that Knox came to observe how political authority brought kingdoms to glory or downfall in the eyes of God. With the continued desire to take action against Catholicism and the new understanding that he could depend on sympathetic political powers, Knox took the prime opportunity in 1560 to write the Scots Confession at the request of the Scottish parliament. John Knox was a fiery and passionate reformer for the Protestant movement, which ultimately wanted the Protestant Biblical portrayal of God to be made known to the people around him. While he did have flaws in his somewhat aggressive communication, he desired that the people of his homeland would have restored relationships with God. He

recognized that establishing a church meant ridding the land of old Catholic ways of life, creating a localized church structure, and teaching people what it meant to be a Protestant Christian. Knox learned that if political figures agreed with his beliefs, he could rely on their religious sympathy to enact reform across the land. Politics were not his primary focus, however, as he always ultimately put the will and supremacy of God first in his life.

¹ John Knox, *History of the Reformation of Scotland*, 2 vols., ed. William Croft (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc, 1950), 1:83.

² John R. Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," *Church History* 8:2 (June, 1939), p.146.

³ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought Volume Two: The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 302.

⁴ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 146.

⁵ Richard G. Kyle, "The Church-State Patterns in the Thought of John Knox," *Journal of Church and State* 30:1 (1988), p. 71.

⁶ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 146.

⁷ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 147.

⁸ James Kirk, *Patterns of Reform* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1989), p. xii.

⁹ Knox, *History of the Reformation of Scotland*, 1:83.

¹⁰ John Knox, "The Scots Confession of 1560," [Apostles Creed](#), ed. James Richardson, 14, accessed 13 February 2019.

¹¹ Knox, *History of the Reformation of Scotland*, 1:87.

¹² Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 141.

¹³ Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation: Church and Society in Sixteenth Century Scotland*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), p. 1.

¹⁴ Kirk, *Patterns of Reform*, xiv, p. 4.

¹⁵ Knox, *History of the Reformation of Scotland*, 1:83.

¹⁶ Knox, *History of the Reformation of Scotland*, 1:85.

¹⁷ Knox, *History of the Reformation of Scotland*, 1:91.

¹⁸ "[John Knox: Scottish Religious Leader](#)," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed February 23, 2019.

¹⁹ John Knox, "[A Faithful Admonition to the Professors of God's Truth in England](#)," *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559*, ed. Kevin Reed (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995), p. 9.

²⁰ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 135.

²¹ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 137.

²² John Knox, *The Works of John Knox, no. 4*, ed. David Laing (New York: AMS Press, Inc, 1966), p. 472.

²³ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 145.

²⁴ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 145.

²⁵ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 141.

²⁶ Knox, *History of the Reformation of Scotland*, 2:44.

²⁷ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 137.

²⁸ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 140-1.

²⁹ "John Knox: Scottish Religious Leader," *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Knox>, accessed March 2, 2019; Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 190-191.

³⁰ "John Knox: Scottish Religious Leader," *Encyclopædia Britannica*,

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Knox>, accessed February 23, 2019.

³¹ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 293.

³² John Knox, "[The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women 1558](#)," *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559*, ed. Kevin Reed (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995).

³³ John Knox, "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women 1558."

³⁴ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 191.

³⁵ Calvin, "On God and Political Duty," p. 143.

- ³⁶ Steven Ozment, Carlos Eire, and Ronald K. Rittgers, "Protestant Resistance to Tyranny: The Career of John Knox," in *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*, (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 419.
- ³⁷ Ozment et al., "Protestant Resistance to Tyranny," p. 421.
- ³⁸ Ozment et al., "Protestant Resistance to Tyranny," p. 421.
- ³⁹ Ozment et al., "Protestant Resistance to Tyranny," p. 419.
- ⁴⁰ Francis Oakley, "Christian obedience and authority, 1520-1550," in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 188.
- ⁴¹ John Calvin, *On God and Political Duty*, ed. John T. McNeill (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1956), p. xvii.
- ⁴² Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 193.
- ⁴³ Gabriel Torretta, OP, "Our Lady Reconsidered: John Knox and the Virgin Mary," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67:2 (2014): pp. 172-3.
- ⁴⁴ Ozment, Eire, and Rittgers, "Protestant Resistance to Tyranny," pp. 429-30.
- ⁴⁵ Scott Dolff, "The Two John Knoxes and the Justification of Non-Revolution: A Response to Dawson's Argument from Covenant," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55:1 (2004), p. 59.
- ⁴⁶ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 216.
- ⁴⁷ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, pp. 221-2.
- ⁴⁸ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 189.
- ⁴⁹ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 189.
- ⁵⁰ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, pp. 239-40.
- ⁵¹ Knox, *History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland*, 2:44.
- ⁵² Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 240.
- ⁵³ John Knox, "[A Letter of Wholesome Counsel, Addressed to His Brethren in Scotland.](#)" *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559*, ed. Kevin Reed (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995).
- ⁵⁴ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 143.
- ⁵⁵ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 143.
- ⁵⁶ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 147.
- ⁵⁷ Alex C. Cheyne, "The Scots Confession of 1560," *Theology Today* 17: 3 (1960): p. 323.
- ⁵⁸ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 139.
- ⁵⁹ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 143.
- ⁶⁰ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 339.
- ⁶¹ John T. McNeill, "John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland, Edited by William Croft Dickinson. 2 Volumes London, Thomas Nelson and Sons; New York, Philosophical Library, 1950. \$15.00," *Theology Today* 8, no. 3 (October 1951): p. 403.
- ⁶² McNeill, "John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland," p. 401.
- ⁶³ McNeill, "John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland," p. 403.
- ⁶⁴ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 254.
- ⁶⁵ Knox, "The Scots Confession of 1560," p. 11.
- ⁶⁶ Knox, "The Scots Confession of 1560," p. 11.
- ⁶⁷ Knox, "The Scots Confession of 1560," p. 13.
- ⁶⁸ Knox, "The Scots Confession of 1560," p. 11.
- ⁶⁹ Knox, "The Scots Confession of 1560," p. 11.
- ⁷⁰ Knox, "The Scots Confession of 1560," p. 11.
- ⁷¹ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, p. 237.
- ⁷² Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 139.
- ⁷³ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 139.
- ⁷⁴ Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland*, 1:147.
- ⁷⁵ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 139.
- ⁷⁶ Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," p. 141.