Knox preaching in Old St. Giles Cathedral

In Scotland, the Protestant Reformation was led by the great reformer, John Knox (1514-1572). During his life in the 16th century, Knox was a tutor, a galley slave to the French, a royal chaplain of King Edward VI, a sword-wielding bodyguard, a scholar and writer, and a preacher of fiery sermons at Old St. Giles in Edinburgh. He was a leading figure in the Scottish Reformation, during which time Protestants fought for religious freedom in countries ruled by the Catholic faith. Knox instilled in his fellow countrymen the duty to oppose unfair government to bring about moral and spiritual change.

Portrait of John Knox, 1842

In 1559, the leading group of the Reformation movement, the Lords of the Congregation, militarily occupied various cities, including Perth and Edinburgh, where they elected Knox minister of St. Giles Cathedral. Later that year, after hearing Knox's Thanksgiving sermon, the Lords of the Congregation asked Knox and his colleagues to write a confession of faith. They obliged, and four days later offered up The First Book of Discipline of the Scots Confession. The Confession was adopted by Parliament in 1560 and remained the Scottish churches' official theological doctrine until 1647, when it was superseded by the Westminster Confession.

The adoption of the Scots Confession did not mean total freedom—rather, the return of the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots in 1561 erected a few more roadblocks for the emerging Reformation. But the flames of the movement had caught, and John Knox's influence continued to spread by and large as the Reformation forever changed the Scottish landscape.

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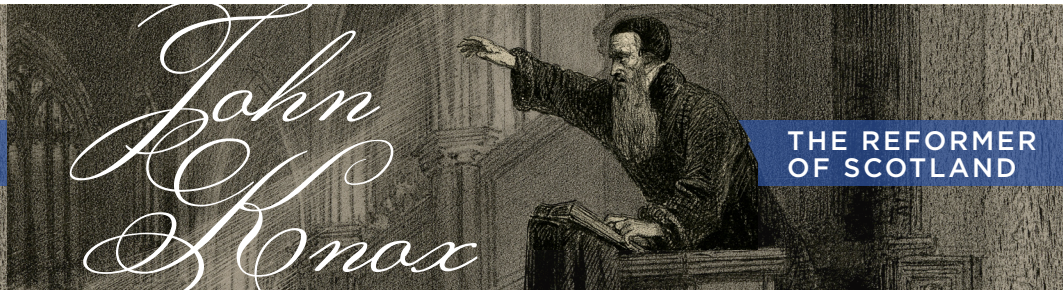
REFORMATION SUNDAY: OCTOBER 26



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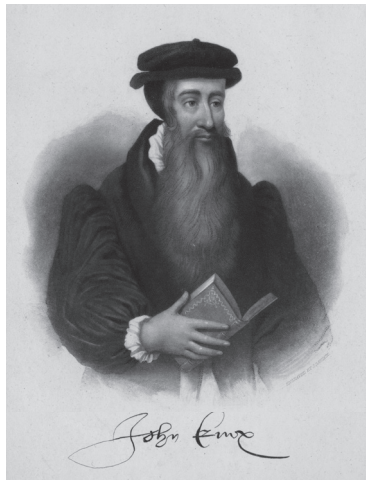

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