

1560 ————— 1960

**The
PERSONALITIES and PRINCIPLES
of the
SCOTTISH REFORMATION**



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Introduction

IN the spring of this year the Committee on Protestantism commemorated the quater-centenary of the Scottish Reformation, with special reference to John Knox. The two addresses now presented in printed form were delivered in Cregagh Road (Belfast), Ballymoney, Rathfriland, and Victoria Hall (Londonderry). These meetings aroused much interest, and we trust that the publishing of the addresses will further serve the cause of Protestantism, in a day when the issues at stake in the sixteenth century have become blurred in the minds of many, and when the prevailing attitude to the Papacy is one of fraternisation.

F. S. L.

November, 1960.

The Personalities of the Scottish Reformation.

By REV. J. W. CALDERWOOD

BEFORE considering personalities it is essential that we should take a swift glance at the background of the Reformation. At the beginning of the sixteenth century darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people. The light which shone in the Church in the early days of Christianity with pristine purity had become darkness and how great was that darkness! The priests and other ranks of Church leaders sullied the glory of their sacred office by their neglect of the Word of God, by their worldly and often voluptuous lives, and by their love of honour and riches. An Archbishop, on discovering a Bible, declared, "Of a truth I do not know what book this is."

Pope Leo X, when he saw the coffers of Rome well filled with the gold and silver of the poor, deluded people, said with a cynical smile, "What a profitable affair this fable of Christ has been to us." One named Archibald Hay warned Cardinal Beaton that "clergy were being ordained who hardly knew the order of the alphabet, and that priests come to the heavenly table who have not slept off last night's debauch."

These facts should be sufficient to indicate how dense was the darkness which had descended upon the Church before the days of the Reformation. When we think of that gross darkness and remember that the apostate Church was then all-powerful we might well ask, How was the darkness scattered? How was the power of Rome broken?

Let us now endeavour to answer these questions.

The Church across the English Channel had been shaken to its very foundations by the mighty blows inflicted upon her by Luther. The distant rumblings were soon heard in Scotland. There, as in Africa today, the "wind of change" was beginning to blow. Many were spiritually hungry and thirsty and they became critical of a Church that could not point them to the Bread and Water of Life. This criticism began to find expression in rhymes and ballads which held up the Church to ridicule. One of these ends with the words:—

"For all your great pomp and pride
The Word of God ye sall nocht hide,
Nor yet till us na mair be guide,
The nicht is near gone."

These last words were prophetic; the dawn was near.

There were other writings which hastened the coming of the dawn. Those writings were the Scriptures. One historian says

that the Reformation of Scotland dates from the entrance of the first Bible into the country about the year 1525. Dr. J. A. Wylie says of this event: "The wonder and the ravishment with which the people gazed for the first time on objects so pure, so beautiful and so transcendently majestic, and the delight with which they were filled, we cannot at all conceive. There were narratives and doctrines, sermons and epistles, miracles and apocalyptic visions, and in the centre of all these glories a majestic Personage, so human and yet so Divine, very accessible to men receiving sinners and eating with them. As men and women were toiling amid the fatal pitfalls of superstition, suddenly this great light broke upon them. They now saw the open path to the Divine Mercy Seat and they entered boldly by the one Mediator, and stood in the presence of Him Who sitteth upon the Throne. The waters of Life were flowing through the land and spots of verdure were beginning to beautify the desert."

So the first and greatest of the Reformers was a Book. But that Book had a Divine Person at its centre and thus it became mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. The Word of God was not bound, neither could it be destroyed. That, however, was not true of the messengers of the Word. As soon as the Word began to multiply the Church of Rome took drastic measures to silence those who dared proclaim the truth. The fiery stake was set up in Scotland and Reformers were cast into the flames. It was an effective way of silencing the preacher but it was the very worst way of destroying the truth.

The first Scottish martyr of the sixteenth century was a youth of royal lineage named Patrick Hamilton. The light of the Word of God had shone into his soul and he yearned for the salvation of his fellow-countrymen. In his preaching he did not fail to point out the errors of Romanism. "It is not," he would say, "the cowl of St. Francis, nor the frock of St. Dominic that saves us; it is the righteousness of Christ. It is not the shorn head that makes a holy man; it is the renewed heart. What doth the Lord require of thee, O man? To count so many beads a day? To repeat so many paternosters? To fast so many days in the year, or go so many miles on pilgrimage? That is what the Pope requires of thee; but what God requires of thee is to do justly, and love mercy and walk humbly." That was good doctrine, but in those days it was very dangerous doctrine, and soon Patrick Hamilton was arrested and brought before a tribunal which condemned him to be burned at the stake. The martyr manifested amazing courage as the executioners did their devilish work. The faggots would not burn and although the victim was badly scorched with an explosion of gunpowder he stood half-burned for six hours before the flames reduced his body to ashes. Near the end one called to him and said, "If thou still holdest true the doctrine for

which thou diest make us a sign." Two of the fingers of his right hand had already dropped off. Stretching out that hand, he held it high until the remaining fingers dropped off. His last words were, "How long, O Lord, shall darkness overwhelm this land? How long wilt Thou suffer this tyranny of men? Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The voice of this faithful witness was silent but the Truth went marching on.

After the death of this famous martyr, Henry Forrest was condemned for possessing a copy of the New Testament and consigned to the flames. One called James Lindsay was beside Archbishop Beaton when Forrest was condemned and he said, "My lord, if ye will burn any man let him be burned in hollow cellars for the reek of Patrick Hamilton has infected as many as it did blow upon." The advice went unheeded and the burnings continued; and the perpetrators of these evil deeds remained totally unaware of the truth that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, that death is life magnificently robed in blood and fire. "The blood the hierarchy was spilling was very fruitful. For every confessor that perished a little company of disciples arose to fill his place." The flames of persecution were kindled in all parts of the country and many suffered a cruel death.

The names of all who died for the faith shine with a wondrous lustre. One person, however, because of the far-reaching consequences of his death, deserves special mention. The name of that person is George Wishart. He was the most eloquent preacher that Scotland had known and crowds flocked to his ministry. He preached for a time in Dundee and then went on to Ayr and Kyle. There, it is said, he went to market crosses, to the fields, and, making of a dry dyke a pulpit, he preached to the eager and awed thousands seated around him on the grass or on the heather. He returned to Dundee, where a plague had broken out, and ministered to the sick and the dying. When the plague was stayed, as a result, many believed, of Wishart's prayers, he moved on to Edinburgh about the end of 1545, and preached in the towns and villages of East Lothian. During all this time there was one watching him with envy in his eye and murder in his heart. Cardinal Beaton had decided that this man of God must be silenced. Accordingly, on 16th January, 1546, Wishart was seized and carried to St. Andrew's. He was brought to trial on 28th February and condemned to be burned at the stake. He was to die because he denied that there are seven sacraments; that it is essential to pray to saints; that the sacrifice of the Mass is Scriptural; that the Pope has no more power than any priest; that there is any such place as purgatory, and that it is vain to build costly churches to the glory of God. At the stake Wishart said, "I suffer this day with a glad heart for the true Gospel which was given me by the grace of God. I fear not the fire and I

pray that you may not fear them that kill the body." The Cardinal watched the spectacle, reclining on an easy chair at his palace window. Wishart, casting a glance towards the palace, said, "He who from yonder place beholdeth us with such pride shall, within a few days, lie in the same as ignominiously as he is now seen proudly to rest himself." Not three months after Wishart's death these prophetic words were fulfilled, the Cardinal being stabbed to death inside his palace. This deed was rightly condemned by the Reformers, notwithstanding the guilt of the Cardinal.

We have already referred to the far-reaching influences of the martyrdom of George Wishart. Like Patrick Hamilton, his reek infected many that it did blow upon. On that day in February, 1546, which was black with man's guilt, one, unnoticed and practically unknown, was standing within the shadows ready to take up the challenge with the foe. The voice of Wishart had been silenced in the flames, but one, destined to be the greatest leader of the Reformation, steps forward and lifts the banner that had fallen from the scorched and blackened hand of the martyr and carries that banner on to victory. That leader and Reformer was, of course, John Knox. There were two days in Paul's life that he could never forget: the day of his amazing experience on the Damascus road and the day when he witnessed the stoning of Stephen and kept the clothes of them that slew him. So there were two days that John Knox could not forget: the day when he cast his first anchor in the seventeenth chapter of John and the day when his best friend, George Wishart, was burned. F. W. Boreham suggests that it was after witnessing the martyrdom of Wishart that Knox cast his first anchor in John 17. He adds, "It is certain, however, that it was only after Wishart's death that John Knox stepped on the stage of Scottish history." It is known that the great Reformer enjoyed the private instructions and public sermons of George Wishart and it is suggested that the death of the latter sealed his teaching to Knox and brought him to the final resolve to break with Rome and cast in his lot with the Reformers. However, there was much heart-searching and much suffering before Knox became the outstanding leader of the Reformation.

After Cardinal Beaton was slain the Castle of St. Andrew's was seized and for two years about 150 men favourable to the Reformation held the Castle. Hearing of the views and the teaching of Knox, they invited him to come and teach them the great truths of the Word of God. After much thought and prayer, the Reformer consented. He preached and taught the Word in the Castle and at times also in the Parish Church of St. Andrew's. In his first public sermon he struck the keynote of the Reformation. "The Church of Rome," he said, "is the antichrist." It was remarked by some who heard him preach, "Others sought to

reform the existing Church and lopped off some branches of the Papacy, but he came with the axe in his hand to cut down the rotten tree." But the rotten tree was not felled by one blow. The hand that wielded the axe was, for a long time, forcibly restrained. On 4th June, 1547, French warships appeared off the coast of Scotland and in a short time the Castle was captured and Knox with all his followers were carried off to a foreign land. That was, apparently, a severe blow to the cause of the Reformation. Seed had been sown, however, and it needed time to germinate and grow.

We have several glimpses of Knox during his years of exile. For eighteen months he was a galley slave. Because of the stench and the violent physical exercise the slaves were stripped almost naked as they toiled for long hours at the oars. It was not only hard labour, it was degrading labour. Knox, however, was not degraded. His anchor cast in John 17 held during those dreadful months.

One day the priests presented to the galley slaves an image of the Virgin Mary and asked them to worship the mother of God. When it was passed to Knox he said, "Mother of God? This is no mother of God; this is a piece of wood; she is better for swimming, I think, than for worshipping," and he flung the image into the water.

When Knox escaped from slavery in the galley ship he travelled widely in Europe. He came to Geneva, where he met John Calvin. His converse with the latter and attendance at his Academy helped to deepen and enlarge all Knox's views and to strengthen him in his resolve to smite the Papacy in his own land and to smite it hard. In 1555, after eight years of exile, the Reformer returned to Scotland. His stay was again short, but it tended to consolidate the work of the Reformation. Several important nobles were now gathered around the Protestant banner. As one historian says, "In the days of Hamilton and Wishart the Reformation in Scotland was simply a doctrine, now it was a Congregation." Fearing that his presence might bring renewed persecution on the infant community, Knox retired to Geneva for a time. He had planted seed before he left Scotland over eight years ago. When he set out from his native shores a second time, he left behind him a living organisation, the growth of which nothing could now arrest. Even when Knox was in Geneva the cause of the Reformation in Scotland advanced from strength to strength. In the Midland Counties there were few places where there were no adherents of the true faith. They had, as yet, no preachers, but they met in such places and at such times as circumstances permitted for their mutual edification. The first town to be provided with a minister was Dundee, the scene of Wishart's witness. Dundee came to be called the Geneva

of Scotland and one writer says that "it was the earliest and loveliest flower of that springtime."

One important forward step at this time was the framing of a "band" or "covenant" by the lords of the Congregation, in which they promised before the majesty of God to employ their whole power, substance, and very lives in establishing the Gospel in Scotland, in defending its ministers and in building up its congregation. This covenant was entered into in December, 1557. The men who accepted the Gospel needed to be welded together by such a covenant, for there were still critical days ahead.

If the cause of truth was advancing, Rome was not watching its progress with indifference. The Queen Regent issued a proclamation prohibiting all persons from preaching or dispensing the Sacrament without the authority of the Bishops. This proclamation was ignored by the Reformed preachers and they were summoned to Edinburgh to answer a charge of treason. There were four preachers in all Scotland and these were sentenced to death and burned at the stake. This followed the burning a short time previously of Walter Mill, an old man of 82 years. Rome was aroused and was determined to crush the Reformation at any cost. When the Queen and the Bishops were met in Edinburgh to plan measures for the complete suppression of the Reformed faith a ship was sailing toward Scotland with John Knox on board. He landed at Leith on 2nd May, 1559. The Queen's Council was still sitting in Edinburgh planning the destruction of the Reformed faith when on 3rd May a messenger entered with the startling news that John Knox had arrived in the country. As Dr. J. A. Wylie says, "The news fell like a thunderbolt on the members of the Council. They sat for some time speechless and at last they broke up in confusion. Before Knox had uttered a single word, or shown himself in public, his very name had scattered them." In a few days Knox was proclaimed as an outlaw and a rebel. The great Reformer went forth to face the foe not in his own strength but in the strength of God the Lord. He went forth not with any material weapon but with the weapon of Truth, and that weapon was mighty and prevailed. In Perth he preached openly against the Mass and image worship. He thundered against the superstitions of the Romish Church, and when his sermon ended a priest, to show his opposition to the Reformer, began to say Mass. A boy in the crowd shouted "idolatry" and the priest struck him a blow on the head. The youth aimed at the priest but hit an image with a stone. That incident set in motion an orgy of violence which resulted in the destruction of images, altars, monasteries, and chapels up and down the land. Knox deplored this iconoclastic outburst, not "that he mourned over the idols slain, and nest of lazy monk and moping nun rooted out, but he saw that the violence of the

mob would be made the crime of the Reformers.” His fears were justified, for when the Queen heard of the happenings in Perth she set out with her army to wreak vengeance on that city. However, when she arrived she found that the Reformers were in a strong position to defend themselves and instead of offering battle she offered peace. The Queen promised many reforms, but her promises were not kept. A French army was in the country and the liberty of Scotland was threatened. The lords of the Congregation reviewed the whole situation and decided to set up the Reformed religion in all places where they were in the majority. A beginning was to be made in St. Andrew’s, which has been called the ecclesiastical metropolis of Scotland. In June, 1560, the lords of the Congregation were to meet in that city to inaugurate the Protestant religion. Knox, of course, was to take the most prominent part in the proceedings. The Archbishop sent a message to him on the day before the meeting stating that if he dared preach in the cathedral he would cause his soldiers to shoot him dead. Many advised Knox not to attempt preaching, as they feared for his life, but he was determined to proceed as he had planned. He said, “I desire neither the hand nor weapon of man to defend me. He Whose glory I seek will be my shield.” He did preach to a vast and influential audience and we are told that as he described the corruptions that had crept into the Church “his eye began to burn, his words grew graphic and trenchant, the tones of his righteous yet terrible reproof rang out louder and fiercer, till every heart quailed under the solemn denunciations.” He called on the people to “remove the abominations from the Church before the fire of the Divine wrath should descend and consume what man refused to put away.” When he sat down, it has been said, Scotland was then reformed. The magistrates and leading townspeople passed a unanimous resolution to set up the Reformed worship in the city. Other towns and cities followed the example of St. Andrew’s. Rapid and radical changes took place in the summer of 1560. In June the Queen Regent died. The Estates of the Realm met on 8th August and decreed the suppression of the Romish hierarchy and the adoption of the Protestant faith. On 24th August Parliament abolished the authority of the Pope in Scotland, forbade the celebration of the Mass and rescinded the laws in favour of the Church of Rome. John Knox, with five other ministers, were asked to draw up a document setting out Scriptural beliefs and principles. They produced this document, called “The Confession of Faith,” in the short time of four days, and this became the basis of Scottish Protestantism.

As we are celebrating the quater-centenary of those momentous events, I do not propose dealing with the work and witness and earnest contendings for the faith of John Knox after the

year 1560. Suffice it to say in the words of Dr. Wylie, "He roused the country and he kept it awake. On the one side stood religion like an angel of light beckoning Scotland onwards; on the other stood the dark form of popery pulling the country back into slavery. The crown was before it, the gulf behind it. Knox purposed that Scotland should win and wear the crown." In the year 1560, under the blessing of God, the great Reformer saw his noble and holy purpose fulfilled. We enjoy a wealthy heritage today because of his labours and because the martyrs shed their blood for the preservation of that priceless heritage of Truth. Then, "hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Let us take one final glimpse at the great Reformer. As he lay on his death-bed his faithful servant, Richard Bannatyne, said to him, "Now, sir, the time to end your battle has come. It may be that when your eyes are blind and your ears deaf to every other sight and sound, you will still be able to recognise my voice. I shall bend over you and ask if you have still the hope of glory. Will you promise that if you are able to give me some sign you will do so." The dying man promised and the following lines tell us what happened:—

"Grim in his deep death anguish
the stern old champion lay,
And the locks upon his pillow were
floating thin and grey,
And, visionless and voiceless, with quick
and labouring breath,
He waited for his exit through life's
dark portal, death.
'Hast thou the hope of glory?'
they bowed to catch the thrill
That through some languid token
might be responsive still.
Nor watched they long nor waited
for some obscure reply,
He raised a clay-cold finger
and pointed to the sky.
Thus the death angel found him
what time his bow he bent
To give the struggling spirit
a sweet enfranchisement;
Thus the death angel left him
what time earth's bonds were riven,
The cold stark stiffening finger
still pointing up to heaven."

The Principles of the Scottish Reformation

By REV. H. J. BLAIR, B.A.

IT might well be asked why the year 1960 has been chosen as the four hundredth anniversary of the Scottish Reformation. The Reformation did not happen in Scotland in a single year: for nearly two hundred years the seed of Reformation had been growing secretly, and from the time of John Wyclif, "the Morning Star of the English Reformation," there had been those who had taught in parts of Scotland the pure doctrines of Protestantism. . . . Why then has 1560 been marked out as the year of the Scottish Reformation? The Scottish Reformation is dated in 1560, because it was in August of that year that the Scottish people through their Parliament emphatically repudiated the Roman Church and much that it stood for.

One of the most important Acts of that Parliament was an Act ratifying the Scots Confession of Faith "professed and believed by the Protestants within the realm of Scotland." Parliament had asked for a statement of the reforms in doctrine that were desirable; and in the incredibly short space of four days this statement, drawn up by six Johns—Knox, Willcock, Row, Douglas, Wynram, and Spottiswoode—was completed and presented and approved.

The fact that the date of the Scottish Reformation can be so accurately pin-pointed is of considerable significance for us in our consideration of the principles of that Reformation. For the date, so definitely stated, is the date of a formal statement of doctrinal principles. It has that in common with the Reformation in Geneva, which can be dated from Calvin's coming there after the publication of his Institutes in 1536. In both cases we have Reformation full-blown, concerned with the body of Christian doctrine taken as a whole. And that wholeness of the Reformation was its strength both in Geneva and in Scotland. The importance of that can be seen by comparison with the Reformation in Germany and in England. The Reformation in Germany is usually dated by Luther's publication of his ninety-five theses in 1517. But those ninety-five theses, nailed on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, were directed against only part of the perversion of the truth that is at the heart of Romanism, namely, the indulgences. A great deal more by way of Reformation had to be done in Germany after 1517, and some of it was never done.

The Reformation in England is still more difficult to date. The years 1531-1534 marked England's renunciation of allegiance to the Pope, and that is usually taken to be the beginning of the Reformation in England. But that was a political rather than a religious reformation, and what there was of real reformation came with the Puritans about twenty years later. Even then it was no more than partial.

The significance, then, of the dating of the Scottish Reformation in 1560 is obvious. Here was reformation complete—in so far as it can ever be considered to be complete, for the Reformers themselves maintained that the Church always needs to be reformed—reformation not of a part but of the whole, reformation concerned with every part of the truth. And so, to see the Reformation complete and full-blown, we look to Scotland in 1560.

It is not without significance that John Knox was in contact with the Reformation in each of the centres where it was manifesting itself. In 1549, after his release from the French galleys, he was in England, and was even offered the bishopric of Rochester in the Church of England, and he had a hand in the drawing up of the Second Book of Common Prayer. In 1554 he was pastor of a congregation of English refugees in Frankfurt in Germany, with opportunity of observing the Lutheran Reformation at close quarters. In 1555 he was in Geneva, where he found, as he said, "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles." When he came back to Scotland, therefore, it was to weave all the strands of Reformed truth into the Scots Confession of 1560.

All this means that the principles of the Scottish Reformation are simply the principles of the Reformed Faith as we hold them today—the doctrine of the Word of God as the only infallible rule of faith and conduct; the doctrine of justification by faith alone; the doctrine of the Divine sovereignty; and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. All that is possible here is to define these doctrines, to indicate their relative importance as parts of the whole body of truth, and to underline their relevance for today.

Historians have differed in their answers to the question, "Which of the doctrines of the Reformation is the fundamental and basic one, from which all the others are derived and on which they depend?"

Justification by Faith Alone

There are those who would maintain that the primary doctrine is the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It is significant that the Council of Trent, called by the Roman Church to consider the situation of the Church as affected by the work of the Reformers, took it for granted that the doctrine of justification

was the chief one to be debated. It was described as the matter on which all the errors of Luther were founded. "It was necessary," the Council declared, "for the establishing of the body of Catholic doctrine to destroy this heresy of justification by faith alone, and to condemn the blasphemies of the enemy of good works." Philip Schaff puts it in this way: "The Reformation was eminently practical in its motive and aim. It started from a question of conscience: 'How shall a sinner be justified before God?' And that is only another form of the older and broader question, 'What must I do to be saved?' The answer given by the Reformers with one accord, from deep spiritual struggle and experience was: 'By faith in the all-sufficient merits of Christ, as exhibited in the holy Scriptures.' And by faith they understood not a mere intellectual assent to the truth, or a blind submission to the outward authority of the Church, but a free obedience, a motion of the will, a trust of the heart, a personal attachment and unconditional surrender of the whole soul to Christ, as the only Saviour from sin and death." In short, the Reformation in Scotland was not primarily a theological Renaissance; it was an evangelical revival: the Reformers were not merely keen doctrinal debaters; they were eager evangelists.

This is crucial still. No Church has the right to call itself Reformed which has not evangelism at the very heart of its witness. Nothing else but the doctrine of justification by faith alone deserves the name "good news," and nothing less can meet the need of our sin-sick world today.

The Divine Sovereignty

It can be maintained that the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God is the central doctrine of the Reformation. William Hastie, one-time Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow, has written in his book, *The Theology of the Reformed Church in its Fundamental Principles*, "Undoubtedly the principle of the sovereignty of God is the ruling conception of the Theology of the Reformed Church." And he goes on to say, "The great strength of the Reformed Theology lies, in truth, in its deep apprehension of the sovereignty of God as manifested not only in the soul of man, but everywhere throughout the universe, in its least as in its greatest parts, in its atoms and in its star-systems . . . so that we cannot find ourselves anywhere in the universe where God does not reign." It was his belief in that Divine sovereignty that gave ringing assurance to John Knox's words to James Balfour, as they sailed past St. Andrew's, "Yes, I know it well, for I see the steeple of that place where God first opened my mouth in public, to His glory—and I am fully persuaded that I shall not depart this life till my tongue shall glorify His godly name in the same place."

This doctrine of the Divine sovereignty was at the heart of the Reformers' assurance. "This is the comfort of the believer," declares Calvin, "to understand that the Heavenly Father doth so embrace all things with His power, that nothing befalleth but by His appointment; and that he is received into God's keeping, and cannot be touched by any hurt of water or fire or sword, but so far as it shall please God the Governor to give them place. . . . And from thence proceedeth the boldness of the saints." What this meant for the history of the Scottish Reformation can best be estimated by what the Reformation had to face. It was this doctrine that put into the heroes and martyrs of Scotland the iron of the strongest faith that had ever entered into religious life and made them what they were.

The relevance of this doctrine today can be illustrated by a striking coincidence from the fear-ridden days of 1939. At the beginning of that fateful year, the Editor of the *British Weekly* invited two of the most eminent preachers in the British Isles, Dr. J. D. Jones and Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, to give his readers a heartening message for the New Year. Writing quite independently, each based his message on the same great truth, the Sovereignty of God. "That was my own sheet-anchor," said Dr. Jones, "during the dark and testing years of the Great War. The ultimate issues were not in the hands of the Kaiser and his soldiers . . . The future of the world was not at the mercy of the big battalions—it was God's world, and it was His will that would get done." And Dr. Morgan wrote, "What is the message that was in the past, and is still, the one all-inclusive word that I am attempting to utter? It is that, to quote the old-fashioned phrase, of the Sovereignty of God. I am firmly convinced that the one fact is God, all other things are circumstances."

Is there any message we are needing more today than that God is still in control? There was a day when John of the Revelation sat down to write of a world that in its rebellion against God, its fear and its paganism was the same kind of world in which we seem to live today. And what did he write? This, that stands for every situation and every age, flung in the teeth of everything that seems to deny it—"Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

The Priesthood of All Believers

In his book on the Reformation Dr. T. M. Lindsay maintains that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is at the very heart of the Reformation—"the right of every believing man and woman, whether lay or cleric, to go to God directly with confession seeking pardon, with ignorance seeking enlightenment, with solitary loneliness seeking fellowship, with frailty and weakness seeking strength for daily holy living."

At the Reformation the rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers gave the laity their rightful place in the Church after fourteen centuries of increasing limitation of their rights and privileges. The effects of this were seen nowhere more clearly than in Scotland in the days of the Covenanters, when the Reformation was saved for Scotland by the witness and the service of the common, ordinary folk who are the strength of any cause. "Where is the Church of God in Scotland at this day?" asked Alexander Peden of his hillside congregation, and himself gave the answer: "I will tell you where the Church is. It is wherever a praying young man or woman is at a dykeside in Scotland: that's where the Church is." And because the Church was there, in the persons of humble believers, the cause of the Reformation in Scotland was safe, for here were common men and women prepared to witness, by life and death alike, for the truths which they believed and the Christ Whom they proclaimed.

A similar lay movement is our one hope today. There are so many people quite untouched by the clerical, professional department of the Church's witness: they will not be reached, they will not be won, except by our common commitment to the task that is laid upon us all alike.

The Word of God

The doctrine of justification by faith alone, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers—all these were emphasised in the Scottish Reformation. But beneath them all was the fundamental doctrine of the inspiration and authority of the Word of God.

It is perhaps true to say that each branch of the Reformed Church had its own special emphasis of one of the truths which they all held in common. For Luther the heart of everything was the doctrine of justification by faith alone. For Calvin the doctrine of the Divine sovereignty underlay every other truth. The English Puritans protested against vestments and the tyranny of ecclesiastical orders because of their loyalty to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Each branch, it seems, had its own particular emphasis. If that be so, there is no doubt where the Scottish emphasis was laid. The central, dynamic factor in the Reformation in Scotland was the exaltation of the Word of God as the supreme authority for the Church in doctrine, life, and worship.

It is significant that the Scots Confession of 1560 is the only Confession which specifically states its own fallibility, and relates that fallibility to Holy Scripture—"protesting that if any man will note in this our Confession any article or sentence repugnant

to God's Holy Word, that it would please him, of his gentleness and for Christian charity's sake, to admonish us of the same in writ, and we of our honours and fidelity do promise unto him satisfaction from the mouth of God; that is, for His Holy Scripture, or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss. . . ."

Knox was concerned that the Bible should be read and studied throughout Scotland, and one of the features of his policy was that groups of people should meet regularly for the study of the Word of God.

A similar acknowledgment of the authority of the Word of God today, and a similar concern to read and understand its message are imperative for the life of the Reformed Churches. Above all, we need to pray the prayer which is set down on the opening page of the English Bible in the Genevan version of 1578—"O gracious God and most merciful Father, Who hast vouchsafed us the rich and precious jewel of Thy Holy Word, assist us with Thy Spirit, that it may be written in our hearts to our everlasting comfort, to reform us, to renew us according to Thine own image, to build us up, and edify us into the perfect building of Thy Christ, sanctifying us and increasing in us all heavenly virtues. Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake." To which we say, Amen.



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REV. F. S. LEAHY, 429 CREGAGH ROAD, BELFAST, 6, N.I.