

Literature Review

When studying the Scottish Reformation during the sixteenth century, it is essential to look at both primary and secondary sources to determine the causes and results of such a revolution in Scottish history. This thesis looks at the influence the work of reformer John Knox had on the Scottish Reformation and the political and religious dynamics of Scotland during the period. It looks at the social, political and religious influence Knox had on the progression of the reformation and how much his influence contributed to the wider picture of reform.

The literature that surrounds the Scottish Reformation is both intriguing and confusing. It is varied and like most history does, it focuses on the changes of a country attributed to the men who made it happen. Whilst it is important to acknowledge that history has traditionally been patriarchal and so many of the primary sources on this topic are written to present this, the secondary literature presents these changes as more than just due to the leadership of men, and more as the changes of the many. Traditionalist historiography focuses on the reformer John Knox as a hero, protagonist and leader of the reformation. Knox's own primary sources tell us a lot about the man himself and his visions for Scotland, whilst other sources compare him to a tyrant and radical reformer. To determine the research and possible conclusion to the presentation of Knox in history, a few variables will need to be explored. First the portrayals of Knox throughout the literature – From Knox's own presentation as a simple 'religious man' completing God's will to the man who determined a 'dramatic revolution'.¹ Or whether Knox was just one significant part to a larger and more complex system of reform. By comparing both these it can be assessed as to how far his work was responsible for the success of the reformation as a whole.

For this research, the history written by Alec Ryrie will prove crucial to the understanding of Knox himself and his role to play in the Reformation of Scotland. Ryrie's texts vary on their depth such as in his book *The Age of Reformations* (2017) it discusses both England and Scotland's Reforms and Knox is mentioned in many chapters however, the focus is not on the success of Knox's position within the Reform but more on Knox's appearances and actions, not how they contributed necessarily. Whereas, Ryrie's earlier text *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation* (2006) focuses on the many causes and contributors to the Scottish Reform and possibly compares them with Knox's pivotal role. It also details a lot about Knox as an individual and so can be used vividly to explore the man behind the 'revolution' in Scotland. What also makes Ryrie's contributions to the historiography crucial to the research, is that he places Knox in context. In his 2006 article *Congregations, Conventicles and the Nature of Early Scottish Protestantism*² Knox reminds the reader that Knox wasn't just a figurehead to the revolution, but also a priest, a member of a Congregation, and more importantly a preacher. He reminds the reader that although history has presented him as this 'Hero of the Scottish Reformation'³ as depicted by Cowan's text, Knox was at least in his early stages 'modest and more immediate' in reform and not in revolt but simply a priest trying to defend his congregation from 'seditioun and rebellioun' but also the 'abuses of

¹ Ryrie, Alec, *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2006 p.196-204

² Ryrie, Alec, *Congregations, Conventicles and the Nature of Early Scottish Protestantism*, 2006

³ Cowan, Henry, *John Knox: The Hero of the Scottish Reformation*, The Knickerbocker Press, G. P. Putnam's Sons New York and London, 1905.

Religioun'.⁴ Moreover, Ryrie's texts themselves also prove vital in the research on Knox due to his own efficiency in his research on the Reformation as a whole and the catalysts behind it. Ryrie presents pathways to further research and both contradicting and comparing texts to which Ryrie has based his own argument which therefore means readers can research for themselves and perhaps interpret and present a different argument based on the further research of the field.

Whilst secondary research is undoubtedly important to this research it is also essential that primary research is used for this topic as any documentation from the period can be crucial to understanding the historical context of the source and research. A key piece of primary source material for this research is John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* written in 1558⁵. This source demonstrates Knox's grievances about what was going on in both Early Modern Scotland and England. Whilst the source undoubtedly focuses on issues about female rulers, Knox's grievances are focused on how these rulers are not reforming their country's realm and Churches to the right standards. Knox's own sources also help to understand historical representations of Knox and how he was significant in the changes made in Scotland during the century. The most common representation of Knox in history is that he was a 'tyrant' and 'misogynist', views prompted by Knox's publication of *The First Blast* in 1558 that demonstrate his hatred of women. Knox's attitudes towards women within this text can be seen as fractious and very critical. However, with deeper analysis, it is clear that Knox's grievances are not with the sex of the rulers in question, but with the actions and religious convictions of them. Whilst, there is sufficient evidence to suggest Knox believed women incapable to rule, he did not have a misogynistic outlook as expressed by his relations with female friends and his early attempts to compromise with Europe's Queens. Knox lived in a world predominately ruled by women until 1567. The European countries to which he encountered due to persecution and tensions at home in Scotland were ruled by Catholic women who came to blows with Knox due to their differing ideologies. Therefore, primary texts like Knox's *First Blast* can aid the historical understanding of the period and the views of those who existed during these events.

To conclude, the primary resources such as John Knox's *First Blast* are crucial for understanding the thoughts, feelings and historical context of the period's events. Meanwhile, secondary research like that of Alec Ryrie helps to understand the long term significance of the events and individuals involved in the event to present why the topic is such an important one to study.

⁴ Ryrie, Alec, *Congregations, Conventicles and the Nature of Early Scottish Protestantism*, 2006

⁵ John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the monstrous regiment of Women* (1558)

References

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