JOHN MACLEOD, 1872–1948
SCOTTISH THEOLOGY

IN RELATION TO CHURCH HISTORY SINCE THE REFORMATION

John Macleod

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A scene resembling Loch Awe in Argyll,
by F. E. Jamieson (1834–99)
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Foreword

This new edition of John Macleod’s *Scottish Theology* (sub-titled *In Relation To Church History Since The Reformation*), first published in 1943, began life as a series of lectures given by Principal Macleod in 1939 at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. Although necessarily in some sense dated, Macleod gives us a sure-footed tour of the progress, controversies, intricacies and tensions that marked the life of Scottish theology in the four centuries following the Reformation. Macleod is no dispassionate commentator on the developments within Scottish theology (thankfully). The author is unashamedly partisan, believing as he did that the theology of the Reformation was little more than the teaching of the Bible. Consequently, Macleod not only traces the developments within Scottish theology through the lens of the men who most exemplified those developments, he does so highlighting as he proceeds the deviations and aberrations that found their way into the life of the church in Scotland, and often further afield.

*Scottish Theology* abounds in brief but insightful vignettes of men whose preaching and thinking made a deep impact on the
SCOTTISH THEOLOGY

life of the church in Scotland and beyond. We are introduced to men whose names were once lionised in the churches of the Reformation, Alexander Henderson, James Durham, Thomas Boston (to name but three), but who are sadly little known today. Macleod also highlights, among other developments, the significant theological controversies that powerfully impacted and shaped the life of the Scottish church. The Neonomian and Marrow Controversy of the early 1700s and the slow but sure introduction of the heterodoxy that ultimately enervated the spiritual life of the church in Scotland, are described and their influence deftly portrayed.

It is often remarked that a failure to understand the past leads to the inevitable repeat of its failures. Reading Scottish Theology will prove an enlightening, heart-warming, and sobering engagement with the past and will enable us the better (hopefully) to ‘contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints’ in the present.

IAN HAMILTON
Cambridge
January 2015

PUBLISHER’S NOTE
Throughout this new edition, the publisher has sought to provide additional footnotes to enable readers to identify some of the sources to which the author refers. Translations of Latin phrases have also been provided in some places. These additional footnotes have been marked —P.
EARLY in 1938 the Senatus of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA, did me the honour of asking me to give a course of ten lectures dealing with Scottish Theology since the Reformation in the light of Scottish Church History. This volume contains the lectures, which were delivered in April, 1939, just as the tenth year of the functioning of the Seminary was drawing to a close. The subject of these lectures fitted in with the object which the founders of Westminster had in view—the maintenance of the well-known Princeton tradition in the loyal defence, and the unambiguous exposition and avowal, of the Reformed theology. It has been my endeavour to handle my theme in a free and familiar fashion so as to avoid a coldly technical and stiff treatment of it, and to make it as instinct with human interest as the case permitted. This called for setting forth a theological discourse in a setting of real church life. Thus, if there is so much of discussion and exposition in the lectures, it is woven into a fabric of narrative; and repeatedly in the course of these pages American references occur which speak of the fact that the lectures were meant for an overseas audience. I
SCOTTISH THEOLOGY

need hardly say that I write from the standpoint of one cordially attached to the faith and witness of the Reformed churches. Though that faith is, for the time being, largely under an eclipse, its friends live in the hope that with a resurgence of evangelical godliness in days of reviving it will have an ample vindication, so that its future will in glory and in power surpass the best and brightest days of its past. The cause of the Reformed theology is one and indivisible in all the churches of the Reformation, and it is by no means a petty thing with a mere parochial or provincial outlook.

Part of two of the chapters has already appeared in another form; and in the last chapter, I take it that the writer is not a plagiarist when he quotes from an article which he contributed to the Princeton Theological Review.

It was a refreshing experience to come in close touch with the staff and students of the Seminary, and to enjoy their gracious courtesy and hospitality. The lecturer alone is responsible for the choice he has made of the material at his disposal, and for the estimates of values that he has ventured to put on record.

JOHN MACLEOD

Edinburgh
February 1943
Dr John Macleod, the author of this book, was undoubtedly one of the most remarkable men of his generation. If he was not as widely known as his rich scholarship merited it was partly because he was guided in his choice of service by strong religious conviction and not by any considerations of self-advancement; and partly because his varied activities made so many demands on his time that he had little opportunity—and, it may be suspected, little inclination—to submit himself to the domination of the pen.

A native of the West Highland township of Fort William, Dr Macleod distinguished himself in academic pursuits from his youth. He was only eighteen years of age when he graduated in Arts at Aberdeen University with first class honours in Classics, adding to other distinctions the Simpson Prize in Greek, the Seafield Medal in Latin, the Jenkins Prize in Classical Philology, and the Fullerton Scholarship. His Professor in Latin, Sir William M. Ramsay, and Professor Harrower of the Greek Chair, urged him to take up a Ferguson Classical Scholarship that fell vacant in the year of his graduation, and proceed to Oxford or Cambridge to specialize in Classics. Ramsay, indeed,
invited him to become his associate in his archaeological researches in Asia Minor. But John Macleod had early become a disciple of Christ, and it was to his service in the Christian ministry that he consecrated his talents.

Mr Macleod’s record as a student in theology matched in distinction that of his arts course, and it was as a scholar well-grounded in the Reformed faith that he began his ministry. His first pastorate was that of the Free Presbyterian Church in Ullapool, Ross-shire; for he was one of the Free Church students who sided with the Free Presbyterian secession after the passing of the Free Church Declaratory Act of 1892. He was later translated to Kames, in Argyleshire; but when the remnant Free Church of Scotland, after the union in 1900 between the United Presbyterians and the Free Church majority, repealed the Declaratory Act of 1892, he felt it was his duty to return to the church of his youth. He was received into the Free Church in 1905, and in 1906 he was appointed Professor of Greek and New Testament Exegesis in the Free Church College, Edinburgh. In 1913 he accepted a call to the pastorate of the Free North Church, Inverness. During his ministry there his alma mater conferred the degree of Doctor of Divinity upon him in 1927, and in the same year he was appointed Principal of the Free Church College. In 1930 he was recalled to the teaching staff of the College as Professor of Apologetics and Pastoral Theology, a position which he held until his retirement in 1942.

To know Dr Macleod was to become acquainted with the best school of Scottish Reformed divines in whose succession he undoubtedly had his place. William Cunningham, John Duncan, Hugh Martin, George Smeaton, James MacGregor and James Gibson stood high in his list of Scotland’s great theologians, as this book reveals, and he spoke of them from such full and detailed knowledge as almost to suggest that he belonged to their generation. Certainly their own contemporaries were not more thoroughly acquainted with their thinking than he was.
John Macleod

A quarter of a century has passed since Principal Macleod’s homecall, but he is still remembered by the older generation of church folk in Scotland as a saint and a scholar. It is fitting that though dead he should, through the medium of the printed page, still speak. And modern Scotland will do well to hearken.

G. N. M. Collins

Edinburgh

December 1973

1 Dr George N. M. Collins (1901–89) served as Professor of Church History at the Free Church College, Edinburgh, from 1963 to 1983. This biographical introduction was included with the 1974 Knox Press/Banner of Truth reprint. For a fuller account of John Macleod’s life and work, see G. N. M. Collins, John Macleod D.D., (Edinburgh: Free Church of Scotland Publications Committee, 1951).
I

Introductory

SUFFER a few prefatory words. There is a course of the Cunningham Lectures which treats of Scottish Theology and Theologians. The author was himself a remarkably well-read and capable divine—James Walker of Carnwath. His Cunningham Lecture, which has seen two editions, is such a masterly work as to make it difficult for another to go over something like the same field and not invite a comparison with what is, in its own department, a classic. There is, however, in the title to the present course a phrase, which, if taken with a little latitude, will allow a measure of freedom to deal with the subject of Scottish Theology in a fashion less technical and academic than that of Dr Walker. There is thus no call to make an invidious comparison between our present course and the Cunningham Lectures for 1871. Any comparison indeed we deprecate.¹

¹ Originally published in 1871, James Walker’s series of lectures was re-issued in 1982 by Knox Press (Edinburgh) under the title The Theology and Theologians of Scotland.—P.
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We are to deal with Scottish Theology since the Reformation in relation to the history of the church. That is to say, we propose to treat our subject in the light of its historical character and setting, and this leaves room as it comes our way to discuss the practical outcome of theology as that is seen in the message of the pulpit and in the life of the church. Or it permits of a more concrete and perhaps interesting presentation of the subject than a severely academic treatment of itself would. The setting in the life of the church lends an element of personal interest to what might be exhibited in a shape which, if detached or abstract, orderly or scientific, would be more dry and formal and less attractive. The subject is shown in a more real and human light when it is handled in connection with its changing historical environment as various aspects of the faith were brought into the foreground of the picture. Even if an anecdote is given to relieve strain on the hearer it seems to make more picturesque a tale that might otherwise be of a less inviting character.

Let me add that justice could hardly be done to the theme of the lectures unless there were given more or less of an exposition of the principles which shaped the life, faith and worship of Reformed Scotland. And in this opening lecture we may before its close glance at matters that will meet us in historical connections as they were discussed in later days. It is not for the lecturer to magnify the value of his contribution to the discussion of his subject. Yet he may say that he has had an almost lifelong acquaintance, more or less thorough, with the field that he covers. He has never, however, looked upon himself as the possessor of the detailed and expert knowledge of such a specialist as he would covet to be; and though he prized and welcomed the honour of being asked to lecture on the subject proposed to him by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary, the request took him by surprise. He need hardly add that as he looks on his subject with his own eyes, no-one else is responsible for the judgments that he ventures to pass as an old-school evangelical. He is, however, satisfied that the ancestral theology of his country can be so set forth and
exhibited as to teach needed lessons to the present generation, not only in Scotland, but far beyond its borders.

*National Independence and What Came of It*

Had the unifying and aggressive policy of Edward I of England proved to be a lasting success there would have been no such country left as Scotland. It would have come to be but a subordinate province that served for the aggrandisement of England and its Norman crown. In the feeble hands, however, of his son and successor, the militant programme of the Hammer of the Scots ended in thorough discomfiture on the field of Bannockburn. The decision of that day of battle was one that had far-reaching results. Not the least important and significant of these are to be found in the region of church History, British, and, I may venture to say, American also. For the independence of Scotland as a national unit finds its reflection and remote outcome in the specific difference which marks out the character of the Reformation of its church, and in the type of ecclesiastical life and confession and tradition that we find in its history. These are the outflow of its distinction in nationality. The achievement of civil independence served to call out and foster a nationalism which extended to all classes of the population. In the Middle Ages the feudal system prevailed, and the common folk derived little good from a change of rulers. Yet a popular sentiment developed that was prepared to stand in defence of national independence; and this served to keep the Scots with a national identity of their own.

In the centuries that intervened between Bannockburn and the Reformation, Scotland, though it had national freedom, was an ill-governed country. It had a weak central executive, a turbulent aristocracy, a bloated church, and a down-trodden commonalty. Its internal history is a record of feud and faction which secured for the strong hand the supremacy of the local tyrant. There was hardly a country in Europe that was more backward in civilisation, or one in which life and property were less secure. As a nation the Scots served
in the old alliance with France as a pawn in the political game of the French kings as they contended with those of England. Their overflow of youth and energy found a field for the exercise of its activities in mercenary service as soldiers of fortune in European wars in the service of the French crown. At home, a clergy, who were at once licentious and rapacious, held in their hands well nigh half the wealth of the land. And the looseness of their living was matched only by the ignorance that prevailed in their ranks. Such a country stood, if any did, in need of a Reformation. It needed above all such a Reformation as would bring in its train purity of life and morals. The likelihood that such a change would take place in the recognised order of things was a very remote one indeed. Yet this backward country came under the power of the mighty Reforming movement; and when this happened, it reaped the benefit of the independence for which it had fought so stoutly, and had so hardly won, and which had proved to be of such little value before. As a land that was independent of England it had a Reformation that was not of the Tudor order, but one that asserted and vindicated with the freedom of the gospel the freedom of the church of Jesus Christ. In the case of England, the autocratic spirit of a Tudor queen, who, in domineering masterfulness, took after her father, laid civil restraints on the policy and activities of her Reformers, who would, had they their own way, have reformed their national church after a pattern very different from that which they were permitted to follow. It was in this connection that the national freedom of Scotland served to determine the distinction between the character of its Reformation when it came, and that of its sister country. Yet in the early stages of the Reforming movement in Scotland, it owed much to the help of England. Church and state were interlaced. Indeed, the policy of the Lords of the Congregation, as the Reforming barons were called, the policy, too, of John Knox, seemed to work for the reversal of the traditional hostility of their country to its southern neighbour. And it made in the end for the virtual unification of Great Britain. In the first days of the Northern Reformation the influence of England and of the English church told on the worship
of the early Scottish Reformers as for some time they made free use of the Service Book of the Reformed Church of England. This might have issued in a settlement of religion that would have been an echo of the Anglican Reformation. But there came to be at the head of the Scottish Reforming movement a man who was the Reformer of a nation—John Knox.

Knox

During the reign of Edward VI, Knox, as one of the great preachers of the gospel in the kingdom, had been active in promoting the work of Reformation in the Church of England. This work he was engaged in when preachers like him were few, and when they were highly valued by those who aimed at furthering the evangelical cause. But Knox was not only a mighty popular force by reason of his preaching power, he was a leader in the inner circle of the Protestant party. Such was the influence that he wielded that he secured the insertion in the English Communion Office of what got the name of the Black Rubric, which expressly disallows the worship of the consecrated elements in the Supper, and teaches that the posture of kneeling, on the part of the communicant, was not to be construed as an act of worship to the bread and to the wine. As Dean Weston puts it: ‘A ranigate Scot did take away the adoration or worshipping of Christ in the Sacrament; by whose procurement that heresy was put into the last Communion Book; so much prevailed that one man’s authority at that time.’ Knox was a man mighty in words, and not less mighty in deeds. Like Luther, it might be said to him—*Fulmina erant linguæ singula verba tuae.*

He had already done great things before his stay in Frankfort and Geneva, but it was his destiny to do greater things still, and the supreme work of John Knox’s life was to be done, not in England, but in his native land.

The reign of Edward VI of England soon came to an end; and he was succeeded upon the throne by his sister Mary, who

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1 Trans. each word from your tongue was a thunderbolt.—*P.*
'It has been my endeavour to handle my theme in a free and familiar fashion so as to avoid a coldly technical and stiff treatment of it, and to make it as instinct with human interest as the case permitted. This called for setting forth a theological discourse in a setting of real church life. Thus discussion and exposition are woven into a fabric of narrative.

I need hardly say that I write from the standpoint of one cordially attached to the faith and witness of the Reformed churches. Though that faith is, for the time being, largely under an eclipse, its friends live in the hope that with a resurgence of evangelical godliness in days of reviving it will have an ample vindication, so that its future will in glory and in power surpass the best and brightest days of its past.'

— Principal John Macleod