REVIEW

Jane Dawson. *John Knox*. New Haven: Yale, 2015. Pp. 373. ISBN: 9780300219708. \$32.50 (USD).

Jane Dawson's *John Knox* offers an original and interesting perspective on the most famous of Scottish reformers. It reveals a nuanced and expert understanding of this fascinating figure.

In addition to building on past studies, Dawson's narrative offers new and exciting ideas about Knox's life that have emerged from the first new documentary evidence related to Knox to emerge since the mid-nineteenth century. Her analysis of this correspondence between Knox and the English reformer Christopher Goodman reveals a tender and lasting friendship between the two, as well as intriguing and exciting evidence that they were planning a preaching tour of Ireland in 1566. Although the tour never took place, even its possibility excites the reader, as it shows evidence of the broad demand for Knox's preaching skills as well as his desire to bring a Reformed brand of Christianity to anyone who might lend an ear. The correspondence serves as important evidence of the personal and professional odyssey that was Knox's life.

The John Knox that is revealed in this book is certainly every bit the roaring force historians of the Scottish Reformation have come to know. He wears out his welcome in several locations; he rails against Catholics, fellow Protestants, and nearly all people who fail to see the world as he does. He holds grudges and refuses to spare the feelings of his enemies. But Dawson's portrait moves beyond the superficial and provides a fuller picture of Knox's sources of both darkness and light. He is shown to suffer several periods of depression and isolation brought on by his time as a galley slave and several periods in exile. In a more optimistic sense, Dawson's portrayal also uncovers a man committed to creating and participating in an international network of Reformed believers that required forming and maintaining relationships over distance and time. He is also seen as a loving parent, a loyal friend, and a

devoted husband, relying on these relationships to see him through his darker periods.

The book is impressive on many levels, but its effortless movement from descriptions of Knox's personal life to international politics to the complexities of Reformed theology are particularly excellent. Over the course of a few pages in chapter eight Dawson first discusses Knox's adjustment to married life as he balanced his ministerial duties with his obligations to his beloved and pregnant Marjorie. Dawson then moves on to provide a detailed analysis of Calvin's Reformed community in Geneva, and finally describes Knox's refutations of an Anabaptist tract on predestination. The seamless way in which Dawson approaches such a diversity of subjects is indicative of a scholar and biographer at the top of her game. It also reveals a mastery of her subject, and an understanding of how the personal lives of these so-called 'great men' are deeply influenced by both the women in their lives and the local and international contexts in which they operated.

This book is without doubt the definitive biography of Knox. As such it will have a myriad of applications within the scholarly community and beyond, and will be valuable in both university classrooms and for those wishing to understand more about this giant of Scottish Protestantism.

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