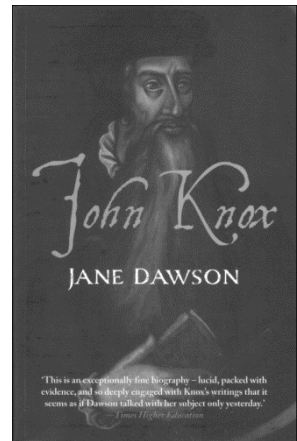


Historical Theology

John Knox. Jane Dawson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. 321 pp. & indices, paper. ISBN 978-0-300-21970-8

Jane Dawson's impressive biography of Knox, first released in cloth covers in 2015, is now available in paper covers at a more modest price. That this edition has followed so rapidly after first publication is an indication of the demand for the biography, penned by the Reformation historian of New College, Edinburgh. This biography is noteworthy not because it is the first life of Knox to be written by a female writer: that honor belongs to Elizabeth Whitley, whose *The Plain Mr. Knox* appeared in 1960 (and is happily still in print). But Dawson's work is the first major biography of the Scottish Reformer written by an academic historian since 1974, the year when the Canadian historian, W. Stanford Reid, released his *Trumpeter of God*.



Does the elapse of forty years, by itself, warrant a new biography of this famous Scot? The drastic numerical decline of the Church of Scotland in those intervening decades would suggest a diminished interest in the biography of this man about whom Scots have long been deeply divided. Yet, there are two reasons for insisting that the appearance of Dawson's *Knox* is especially noteworthy.

The first is that it represents 'part two' of a writing project that commenced with Dawson's release of a volume in the 'New Edinburgh History of Scotland': *Scotland Re-formed: 1488-1587* (2007). There she displayed a comprehensive grasp of the political, military, and religious history of Scotland in this period. Her *John Knox* both benefits from and reflects the spade-work in the earlier volume. Has a Knox biographer ever come to the task better prepared? There is also a second reason.

It is that there is fresh discovery serving as the basis for the release of this new volume; Jane Dawson happily discovered a trove of documents which were the possession of Knox's former associate, Christopher Goodman (1519-1603). Goodman was the English Marian exile theological professor

with whom Knox – also a Marian exile – became fast friends at Geneva in the years when English Protestant leaders who remained in England were being tried and burned. Goodman had returned to Scotland with Knox and served at Ayr and St. Andrews before being forced to return to his native England in 1565. Their friendship, forged in shared adversity, resulted in a literary legacy only recently discovered by Dawson at Chester, England. This Goodman material shed considerable fresh light on Knox – both as a fugitive in Europe – and as leader in Scotland’s tempestuous early Protestant years.

The reader of Dawson’s *Knox* will plow through more than three hundred pages of text. It is worth noting that the smaller page size of the paperback edition (pagination is standard) does make the reading more arduous. As one reads, he or she experiences a pendulum-swing of reaction at the Knox presented by Dawson; he is alternately fierce and yet vulnerable, bombastic and yet capable of being tender. It is the very assiduity of Dawson in drawing on so many original sources (among which are Knox’s own tracts and his *History*) which gives the reader the sense of being overwhelmed with detail about Knox. But there is not only detail beyond what we could imagine or ask for (e.g. about Knox’s role as chaplain in the religious war which secured the Reformation by August, 1560, or as minister of St. Giles in the civil war that fragmented the nation later that decade over the divisive course pursued by Queen Mary); there is also interpretation and it here that different readers will judge Dawson differently.

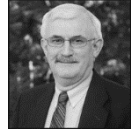
Dawson cannot fairly be reckoned an admirer of Knox; recall that she is a female historian investigating the one who is remembered for his *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558). She makes no apologies for Knox, who with his friend, Goodman, was definitely a misogynist as to female rule. The question then becomes one of whether, in her determination to be thorough (an aim at which she succeeds admirably), Dawson also portrays Knox in a judicious way. This reviewer concludes that Dawson has been judicious. No one will say that she has “buffed” the legacy of Knox; but most should grant that she gives us a Knox who – rather than appearing in black and white – appears in many shades of tint.

I appreciated several features of Dawson’s *Knox* above others. She shows that Knox’s English ministry in the years 1549-1553 were years in which he had already taken up the stance of a nonconforming Anglican. The conflicts over ministerial costume and adherence to the *Book of Common Prayer* – having begun in England – were merely continued in a kind of “round two” in exile at Frankfort. Again, Knox (with Goodman) as co-pastors among the Marian exiles at Geneva are portrayed as the detailed preparers of the very service book and Psalm book which will be put to use in Scotland from 1560 onward. Knox and Goodman are depicted as being definitely schooled at Geneva in the matter of how the reformation of a compact region such as Geneva can possibly serve as the template for the reformation of the nation of the Scots. Knox and Goodman were in this sense like the French pastors-in-training who were at Geneva awaiting assignments in Catholic France. Most

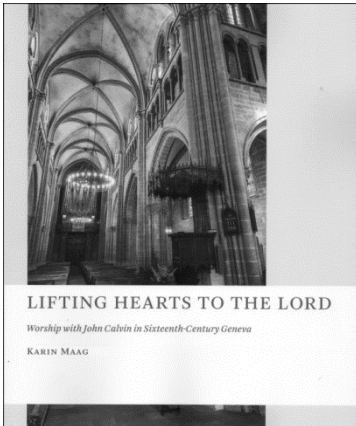
profoundly, Knox is shown from his 1549 period onward to be the Reformed preacher who consciously prefers the gathered church of the like-minded rather than the folk-church embracing the totality of the population.

Dawson's Knox provides an up-to-date and complex portrayal of what may be known today about Knox and Scotland's early Reformation era. It will not easily be surpassed.

Reviewed by Dr. Kenneth J. Stewart, Professor of Theological Studies in Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, Georgia.



***Lifting Hearts to the Lord: Worship with John Calvin in Sixteenth-Century Geneva.* Karin Maag. *The Church at Worship: Case Studies from Christian History*, eds. Lester Ruth, Carrie Steenwyk, John D. Witvliet. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016, 209 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8028-7147-3**



Karin Maag is a fine scholar of the 16th century and one with an amazing ability to communicate that scholarship in a comprehensible manner. She currently serves as the director for the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies and is professor of history at Calvin College, Grand Rapids. For readers of 16th-century Reformed thought and practice, Maag has furnished us with a most engaging and well researched text.

This volume is part of *The Church at Worship: Case Studies from Christian History*. This series ranges very widely with current studies and forthcoming volumes dealing with a variety of worship case studies both ancient, (for example, 4th century Jerusalem) and contemporary, (for example, Anaheim Vineyard Fellowship).

The series dictates much of the form and thus a standard structure emerges, one which must be added is very well thought-out by the editors and will be most helpful for classroom work, not just personal study. As specific case studies the goal is to allow “specific trees” in the “forest” of liturgical history to speak and not present a full forest perspective, as there are many other works which endeavour to do such.

The chief features of each volume are to first orient readers as to the time frame of the particular case study, including cautionary advisement; next, focus is upon the participation of that entire church community in worship (the key word here being “participation”); then follows primary sources, un-

der a whole range of categories and also attempts to be as interdisciplinary as possible; and finally the volume concludes with a section for devotional use and group discussion.

The overall layout of each volume is a wide-print text with sidebar comment or question done in red text and a glossary of names at the back and a listing for further study and sources cited. All of the above make for a highly readable and interesting series to allow many to benefit from such a study. My one disappointment was with the index, which I found very sparse, at least in this particular volume under review in the series.

Some specifics now about this volume by Maag. The time frame is basically 1541 to 1564, the years in which John Calvin returned and spent in Geneva following his three-year sojourn in Strasbourg. The bulk of the text concerns the worshipping community of Geneva during this time period as explored from the following angles: people and artifacts, worship setting and space, descriptions of worship, orders of services and texts, sermons, theology of worship documents, and polity documents.

Maag has clearly focused upon Calvin but not exclusively; other voices are brought into the picture. One of the most intriguing I found was *Managing a Country Parish: A Country Pastor's Advice to His Successor* (pp. 66-72). I think in part it was because it showed the practical realities of rural ministry in the Swiss Reformed context and helps one be much more realistic and less uniform in describing worship in this period and ecclesiastical grouping. I say this because sometimes one encounters today a perspective that we must duplicate everything in this time period in churches of this tradition without actually being fair and honest to context. Some of the details in the book help to dispel some of these attitudes. For example, I rarely hear anyone today advocating separation of men and women in worship services in the West. It may be customary for some within Anabaptist traditions in the West or amongst some Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the global south, but I do not think the latter for sure are doing it out of following the Genevan practices!

Two other details I found also intriguing were about godparents at baptism, and also naming children at baptism and the names which were banned from being used. Both points could make for some very interesting discussion today, and I also suspect dissent from Genevan ways. Again, this reinforces my point: general principles are one thing but debate in the applications of those principles may not always be universal and binding. There is often an historical context and a reason for such. For example, a godparent was often a good patron for your child. Some may advocate such today, but it is doubtful if one can find a scriptural text to demand the practice. So this does raise some questions about the regulation of worship and its application which readers will need to face.

This book should be included as a text for all senior-level liturgics and worship courses at seminary level, especially in institutions which are Presbyterian or Reformed and should be in the library of any such colleges and

seminaries. It will also serve as a good theme text for Reformation Church History classes or Calvin courses. Working pastors will also benefit from the work and find helpful thoughts to enhance their worship leadership. It will also make for deeper thinking overall and less caricature.

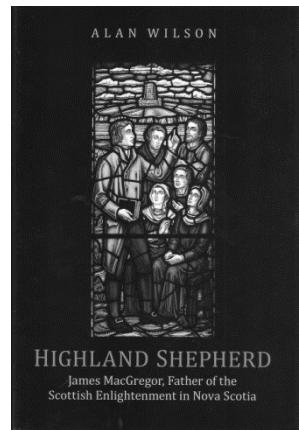
There are several illustrations which enhance the text. The author's introductory comments are in italic and are very precise, reliable, and never overtake the documentary sources. Overall a most helpful and well-published book at a reasonable price. One could find many of the sources in many other places but the benefit of this text is that it brings many of these together in one book. Some are in a new translation by the author and always read very well.

Reviewed by Jack C. Whytock

***Highland Shepherd: James MacGregor, Father of the Scottish Enlightenment in Nova Scotia.* Alan Wilson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015, 256 pp., hc. ISBN 978-1-4426-4451-9**

When I was appointed in 1963 by the Presbyterian General Board of Missions as a requirement for ordination to serve a five-point pastoral charge on the East River of Pictou County, I had mixed feelings and no experience in a rural congregation. Almost as soon as I arrived, I was told about James MacGregor, missionary to Nova Scotia, who came there at the same age I was at the time (25) and equally a greenhorn. He was annually commemorated in a service at an Elm Tree in Bridgeville on property owned by our Clerk of Session. I would preside over five such services, endeavoring each time to appeal to his example as an Evangelical preacher and missionary. The legends were many, the respect deep, the tradition strong, but MacGregor's faith needed to come alive.

Now we at last have a biography that does James MacGregor (1759-1830) justice and paints a vivid canvas of the early days of the Christian faith in the Maritime Provinces. Almost nonagenarian Professor Alan Wilson, founder of the History Department at Trent University in the early 1960s, has produced a scholarly work, weighted down with detail and an encyclopedic knowledge of relevant Scottish and early Maritime history that is truly phenomenal and also eminently readable. Dr. Wilson displays a grasp of 18th-century Scottish religious and cultural life that helps us to understand MacGregor's background, explaining the complex development of the Anti-Burger denomination as it split from both the established Church of Scotland ("the Kirk") and



the Burgers. What is fascinating is the reality that this small sect actually had the original vision and missionary commitment to reach out to the new colony of Nova Scotia, whose religious life was dominated by the Church of England with few viable alternatives for the Scottish settlers then arriving by the boatload except for the occasional Secessionist minister. Only later would the established Church of Scotland seek to recoup its losses in an unseemly rivalry with Scottish Dissenters, which Wilson chronicles in his book.

As a church planter, frontier preacher, and tireless evangelist, James MacGregor was a phenomenon, which comes out clearly in Wilson's book. From Pictou along the North Shore, to Stewiacke, and then reaching out to Cape Breton, over to Prince Edward Island, and on to New Brunswick, he appears to have covered most of the territory's Scottish settlers. He had a knack for finding and developing lay leadership, as I discovered five generations later. A direct descendent of Robert Marshall, one of the signatories of the Pictou Petition of 8 November 1784 that made MacGregor cross the Atlantic (never to return), Fraser Marshall of White Hill, Middle River, to whom I owe so much, was my mentor and guide in those early years of ministry. Indeed, as I myself travelled throughout Pictou Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Canada as Moderator subsequently, I got to know the congregations. So much of what Wilson says about those early days is confirmed by my experience of the seemingly unchanging characteristics of those communities. I found myself wishing that I had had all this information a half-century ago!

Wilson fully credits the "passionate evangelicalism" (p. 113) of MacGregor as the motivation for his entire life and labours, something that is not always recognized in other treatments of the same material. A telling sentence on page 196 summarizes beautifully MacGregor's burden as a gentle shepherd: "Like other ministers of the gospel he was a lonely man: he could never put off the role of shepherd which to some degree set him apart from the flock." Wilson has mastered the Communion season as a central part of Highland church life. His explanation of closed communion and the importance of MacGregor as a Secessionist no longer insisting on it very much grasps its spiritual significance. Wilson, in describing MacGregor's first communion service, shows an acquaintance with the Scottish Psalter which for someone like myself brought up on it is impressive and moving.

But Wilson stumbles when it comes to the theological and biblical context of MacGregor's ministry. From the telling citation of the last book of the New Testament as "Revelations" (p. 122) to his brief treatment (p. 191) of MacGregor's eschatology and his robust and responsible postmillennialism, he fails to show how that theology nurtured and strengthened MacGregor's whole mission and vocation. MacGregor's *Essay on the Millennial Age*, a topic (as Wilson says) that was very dear to him, deserves at the very least a doctoral student's Ph.D. thesis, placing it in the context of 18th-century, Scottish secessionist postmillennialism. He refers to "Thomas Hodge of Princeton University" as the author of a three-volume Systematic Theology (p. 191) –

presumably meaning Charles Hodge of Princeton Theological Seminary. Citation of some of MacGregor's Gaelic poetry is a brave move, which I discovered when writing about another minister-turned-poet. Gaelic spelling is fluid and unpredictable. But MacGregor's skill as a bard must be celebrated.

There is another issue I have with the book. Understandably, Wilson wants to catch (and keep) the reader's attention through a mass of detailed information. In doing so he fictionalizes some encounters: going beyond what we have specific evidence for, second guessing what was thought, where people were located, and even what they were saying. In a day of fake news, historians have to be careful to provide information that can be substantiated by hard evidence. This is particularly germane because this autumn two committees of the Presbyterian Church in Canada have been considering a denominational apology for past mistreatment of the LGBTQ community. Such discussions of the past must be based on facts, not skewed by political correctness.

The MacGregor Elm Tree is gone, killed by Dutch Elm disease. So is the MacGregor family church in New Glasgow, Westminster Presbyterian (before 1925 named United Presbyterian). On 8 January, 1986 that ornate MacGregor family church, full of their memorials, located on Temperance St., New Glasgow was destroyed by fire. It was located midway between two other Presbyterian churches (first, a union of several congregations including James Church, named after MacGregor, and the Kirk). The site of the MacGregor family church is now occupied by the charismatic "Lighthouse Ministry Family Worship Centre." And the East River pastoral charge, where I once served, has staggered Sunday service hours and a non-resident minister, their Manse having been sold. The faith and vision of James MacGregor calls out for renewal.

For Christians, particularly those of us of the Reformed faith, this biography is an engrossing narrative of the days when Protestant Christianity was first planted on our shores. Dr. Wilson is to be congratulated on a readable, informative, and fascinating treatment of a great and neglected Canadian original, giving James MacGregor his rightful place in the galaxy of Canadian pioneers. We look forward to his life of Peter, James' son, a founder of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1875. Wilson is making a valuable contribution to our understanding of our heritage.

Reviewed by Dr. A. Donald MacLeod research professor of Church History at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto. He is a widely published writer and biographer.

