

2008

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James Edward McGoldrick  
*Cedarville University*

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## Recommended Citation

McGoldrick, James Edward, "Luther's Scottish Connection" (2008). *Faculty Books*. 87.  
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**Disciplines**

Biblical Studies | Christianity | History of Christianity | Nonfiction

**Publisher**

Solid Ground Christian Books

**Publisher's Note**

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**ISBN**

9781599251363

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James Edward McGoldrick



Rutherford • Madison • Teaneck  
Fairleigh Dickinson University Press  
London and Toronto: Associated University Presses



## Preface

There is no doubt whatever that the Protestant Reformation in Scotland received its principal direction from the indomitable John Knox, a rigorous and courageous adherent to the Reformed version of evangelical teaching as espoused in Geneva by John Calvin and his disciples. The stature of Knox looms large over the Scottish church and rightly so, for his contributions to its reformation were major and decisive. It is highly unlikely that the movement to reform that church could have succeeded without Knox, or at least without a leader of his conspicuous ability. Any serious examination of the Reformation in Scotland must therefore acknowledge his monumental importance.

Although even those who have only a casual acquaintance with Scottish history usually have some appreciation for the significance of Knox, few seem to realize that he was not literally the father of the Reformation in his homeland. There were several precursors of Knox who laid the foundations upon which he built, and those forerunners were, for the most part, disciples of Martin Luther. It is the purpose of this book to identify the most prominent Scottish Lutherans and to relate the roles they played in the first phase of Scotland's Protestant history.

The author makes no claim to originality. His objective is to bring together in one place information that heretofore has appeared only in articles and as relatively minor emphases in books narrating the Scottish Reformation. It has been well over a hundred years since anyone has published a book dealing at length and in a systematic manner with the Lutheran phase of the Reformation in Scotland, and even then some of the figures who appear in the present volume received only slight attention.

The present author has examined most of the primary sources employed by previous writers on this subject and has found that his predecessors have, for the most part, understood them well



and used them appropriately. I am therefore indebted to all of them, and I hope that I have done them justice in drawing upon their learning. The decision about which early Protestants to include in this study and the interpretations expressed and implied are, of course, my own. Although a few other personalities from the first half of the sixteenth century might have been included, those who do appear in this book were selected because, in my judgment, they were all important links in the chain of Luther's Scottish connection.



# 1

## Scotland in the Late Middle Ages

Although Protestantism in its Calvinistic or Reformed expression achieved almost total victory in Scotland in the sixteenth century, the northern kingdom of Britain was a stronghold of Roman Catholicism through most of medieval history. In their struggle to be free from English interference, however, the Scots became fiercely nationalistic and therefore somewhat resistant toward the political policies of the Papacy. Motivated by royal or baronial greed, the Scots enacted numerous laws to restrict papal prerogatives in their land. Such laws were sometimes intended to enhance the opportunity to acquire ecclesiastical revenues. Papal support for England during the period of Anglo-Scottish strife aroused considerable dislike for Rome, and, during the era of the Great Schism (1378–1417), when rival popes in Rome and Avignon contended for supremacy over the church, Scotland and England took opposite sides.

In order to gain effective control over lucrative church offices and properties, secular lords in Scotland sought to curtail the pope's authority. Since the Papacy had been weakened and somewhat discredited by the Great Schism, the Scots had a fine opportunity to pursue this design. In 1426 the parliament of Scotland forbade clergymen from seeking benefices from Rome. When King James I (1406–37) decided that he could not extract useful concessions from Popes Martin V (1417–31) and Eugene IV (1431–47), the monarch gave his support to the Concil of Basel, a general ecclesiastical body that Martin V had summoned shortly before he died. Eugene IV found that he had inherited a rebellious council that he could not control. The king of Scotland's willingness to support a council critical of the pope reflects James's determination to secure ecclesiastical autonomy for his kingdom.



As the fifteenth century unfolded, additional antipapal measures were enacted into law in Scotland. In 1482, for example, Parliament granted to the archbishop of St. Andrews the right to confirm monastic authorities in their offices without approval from Rome. Although antipapal laws were neither enacted nor enforced with consistency, such legislation was common through the century. By the early sixteenth century the Scots had largely achieved the degree of independence from Rome for which their kings and lords had been striving for about a century.<sup>1</sup>

The church over which the kings of Scotland desired to secure control was strongly Catholic in doctrine, and the monarchs intended to keep it that way. While they wanted to distance themselves from Roman authority, they had no desire to remove Scotland from the fold of the universal church, and the maintenance of Catholic orthodoxy was a prominent royal concern. This had become evident in the fourteenth century, when heresy made its debut in the land. In 1329 Pope John XXII, who reigned at Avignon, issued a bull that directed the rulers of Scotland to extirpate heresy. The pope declared that he would withhold the traditional anointing of the king if he did not implement the Vatican's decree against religious nonconformity. For the most part such threats were not necessary, because the kings were intent upon preserving the Catholic character of their state anyway.

The precise origins of heresy in Scotland are rather obscure, but by the early fifteenth century the teachings of England's John Wycliffe were exerting a significant influence there. Wycliffe (ca. 1328–84), a professor of theology at Oxford University, was a highly learned scholar who had been influenced by the writings of the church father St. Augustine (354–430). Through his reading of Augustinian treatises and his personal study of the Bible, Wycliffe came to believe that the church in his day had drifted far from its apostolic foundations, both in doctrine and in practice. He sought therefore to reform in church in accord with his understanding of Scripture. This led him to deny papal claims to spiritual and temporal supremacy over Christendom and to assert the independence of the king of England in all affairs of state.

Wycliffe's deviations from the doctrinal standards of medieval orthodoxy included a rejection of transubstantiation, the teaching



that the bread and wine of the Eucharist become the actual body and blood of Christ when consecrated by a priest in the sacrifice of the Mass. He held that the true church is the body of God's elect from all ages, and that it is not identical with the ecclesiastical organization formally called the Catholic church. Wycliffe was incensed over the material and political preoccupations of some popes, and eventually he called the papacy the "damned limbs of Lucifer," that is, Antichrist.

The influence of St. Augustine is particularly clear in Wycliffe's teaching about salvation. The English reformer held to *sola gratia*, the belief that salvation is a gift of pure grace that God bestows upon his chosen people. This contrasted sharply with the view then prevalent that salvation is a synergistic process through which believers earn eternal life by performing works of righteousness made possible by grace.

Although the medieval church was threatened by Wycliffe's nonconformity in matters of doctrine, his pointed attacks upon clerical corruption and abuses may have aroused even more ecclesiastical animosity. He maintained that the church had become corrupt through its alliance with and reliance upon civil authorities. Although this relationship had brought great wealth and influence, it had, in Wycliffe's judgment, distracted the church and its clergy from their spiritual responsibilities. As a remedy he proposed that clergymen be excluded from civil positions, that the church be deprived of the right to collect tithes compulsorily, and that bishops and priests be forced to live on offerings given freely by the people. Wycliffe wanted clergymen to give priority to preaching as a means to instruct their congregations in biblical doctrine in order to promote a revival of piety in the land. Since most priests in England at that time seldom preached, this was a revolutionary proposal.<sup>2</sup>

In order to advance his plan for ecclesiastical reform, Wycliffe believed it essential to translate the Bible into English and to place it in the hands of clerics who would then teach it to the people. It is not known for certain exactly how much of the translation was done by Wycliffe himself. He may have done the New Testament, while his associate Nicholas Hereford rendered the Old Testament into English. In any case, the translations from the Vulgate were completed by 1384. A revised edition appeared about 1388.



Despite the lack of any means for mass reproduction, the Lollard Bible, as Wycliffe's version became known, enjoyed considerable circulation, and more than one hundred copies are extant.<sup>3</sup>

For reasons not at all clear, the followers of John Wycliffe were known as Lollards, and by the early fifteenth century these "poor priests" ("mumblers," as they were sometimes called in derision) were active in Scotland, especially in the lowlands. The area south of Glasgow seems to have been a pocket of strength for the movement.<sup>4</sup> The extent of Lollard activity in Scotland is uncertain, because records of the Scottish bishoprics from that time are extremely fragmentary. This makes it difficult to know exactly how Wycliffe's teachings were carried to the northern kingdom, but Oxford University was a likely point of contact, for a number of Scots studied there. Although documentary evidence about Scottish students at Oxford is scant, it is clear that those who went there were in a position to absorb Wycliffe's ideas. Henry Wardlaw, who became bishop of St. Andrews in 1402, was educated at Oxford and went on to assist in the founding of Scotland's first university at St. Andrews. One ancient account relates that St. Andrews University was established as an institution to combat heresy. In 1416 that school decreed that all masters of arts had to denounce Lollardy and swear to uphold the Catholic faith.<sup>5</sup>

That Lollardy had become a serious challenge to Catholic authorities sometime before the opening of St. Andrews University is evident. The first reference to the Lollards in Scotland comes from Andrew of Wyntoun, canon of St. Andrews, who had become prior to St. Serf's monastery about 1395. Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle*, which he completed about 1420, is a vital primary source for the study of this era. In praising the duke of Albany for his strong profession of religion. Wyntoun remarked, "In all tym rycht devote, he was a constant Catholike; all Lollard he hatyt and heretike."<sup>6</sup>

Wyntoun entered the above remark in his chronicle in 1406, which shows that Wycliffe's doctrine had reached Scotland at an early date. Since Lollards were persecuted in England soon after Wycliffe's death, some may have fled north as refugees who carried his message as they went. In fact, it is possible that Lollardy was present there as early as 1402, for in that year the English bishop of Durham wrote to the monks of Kelso to seek their aid in apprehending three clerics of unorthodox beliefs who were be-



lieved to have fled to Scotland.<sup>7</sup> Evidently, the first Lollard in Scotland to suffer martyrdom was James Resby, an English priest and disciple of Wycliffe, who was executed at Perth in 1407. Resby was examined by Laurence of Lindores, inquisitor of heretical pravity, for forty offenses against the Catholic faith. The only charges that have been verified are that he denied that the pope is the vicar of Christ on earth, and that he contended that personal holiness is prerequisite for one who occupies the papal throne. The indictment depicts Resby as a Wycliffite, and it indicates that others in Scotland held to the same teachings. Among the charges brought against Resby, it is clear that his rejection of papal authority and his contention that the clergy had no control over the dispensation of divine grace were the most damning. The Lollards relied on preaching as the principal means of spreading their message, and it appears that Resby functioned in Scotland as a Lollard evangelist. Scottish Lollards denied the sacramental character of penance that involved oral confession of sins to a priest, a rejection that was a prominent feature of Wycliffe's doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

The next Scottish Lollard who can be identified by name was Quentin Folkhyrde, author of some letters sent from Scotland to Bohemia in 1410. This correspondence appears to be typically Lollard in content in that it contains strongly worded complaints about clerical laxity and corruption and calls for priests to study the Bible, to preach its truths in the vernacular tongue, and to administer the sacraments without charge. The author claimed that his quest for the reform of the church was his moral responsibility, and he feared the loss of salvation if he failed to pursue it.

Folkhyrde's call for reform was pointedly anticlerical. He called upon nobles and commoners to remove incorrigible priests, and he warned that those who tolerated evil clerics would share their guilt before God. In the second letter Folkhyrde said that nobles had a duty "to be acquainted with the law of God and to defend it, to protect the servants of Christ, and to crush the agents of Antichrist, . . . for this is the reason for their carrying the sword."<sup>9</sup>

In his letters (known collectively as *Nova Scocie*) Folkhyrde did not seek schism in the church, but his blunt criticisms of the clergy provoked strong opposition. He indicated that churchmen who felt threatened by his attacks had tried to enlist secular lords to



repress him. He said that he would, if necessary, sacrifice his life rather than be silent. His appeals fell on unresponsive ears, and no mention of Folkhyrde has been found in the literature after 1410. What happened to him is not known, but Lollardy continued to gain strength in Scotland, as the decision of St. Andrews in 1416 to require all masters of arts to oppose it bears witness. In 1420 several heretics were seized in Scotland for teaching Wycliffe's doctrines.<sup>10</sup>

Although Folkhyrde's precise connection with Bohemia has not been established, he did travel in England, where he had opportunities to meet Lollards, and perhaps it was there that he contacted people who had relations with Bohemia. By that time John Huss was waging a struggle to reform the church in his country along the same lines as those of Wycliffe and the Lollards in England and Scotland. In 1383 the English king Richard II had married Princess Anna of Bohemia, and after that Czech students began to study at Oxford University, from which they took Wycliffe's doctrines and writings to their homeland. The University of Prague then became a center of interest in the teachings of the English heretic, and John Huss (ca. 1373–1415) became leader of a movement that resembled Lollardy rather closely. The English influence at Prague was reinforced further when Peter Payne, principal of St. Edmund's Hall, Oxford, went there as a refugee from persecution at home and joined the Czech faculty of theology, where he became a leading Hussite scholar.

Whatever may have been the Scottish contribution to the Hussite movement, it is evident that Bohemia exerted some influence on the development of Lollardy in Scotland. In 1433 Paul Craw (or Crawar) appeared in St. Andrews as an emissary from Bohemia who aspired to communicate his theological beliefs to scholars and students at Scotland's only university. Craw was a learned man, a physician who had served the king of Bohemia. He went to St. Andrews, probably because he knew that town had shown some receptivity to Lollard teachings. There he had the misfortune of falling into the clutches of Laurence of Lindores, the inquisitor who had condemned James Resby earlier. Craw was accused of the following offenses: placing the Bible in the hands of the laity; denying the benefit of clergy, by which churchmen were exempt from prosecution in civil courts; and rejecting traditional church teachings on purgatory, Petrine succession in the



papacy, priestly absolution in the sacrament of penance, and transubstantiation in the Eucharist. He and those who had become his disciples were charged also with denying the final resurrection of the dead at Christ's return and were said to have advocated community of goods and to have lived immorally. The accusations of lewdness made against them were probably without foundation, a means to slander them and thereby to enlarge the indictment against them.<sup>11</sup> Craw was executed, and according to the account given by John Knox, a brass ball was forced into his mouth when he was tied to the stake for burning.<sup>12</sup> There is no record that any others were burned with Craw.

Although information about heretics such as Resby, Folkhyrde, and Craw is distressingly meager, the eagerness of civil and ecclesiastical authorities to cooperate in suppressing religious nonconformity appears to indicate that Lollardy enjoyed a considerable following in the land. In 1424 the Parliament of Scotland enacted legislation to support the church authorities in the prosecution of heresy, which is evidence that the government regarded the Lollards as a serious threat.<sup>13</sup> The law declared that civil authorities were to support the church in the apprehension and punishment of heretics, specifically, Lollards.

Further evidence that Lollardy was a growing phenomenon in Scotland as the fifteenth century moved on may be seen in the founding of St. Salvatore's College at St. Andrews in 1450. This was the work of James Kennedy, bishop of St. Andrews, who intended this school to be an institution that would prepare clerics for the defense of the Catholic faith and the refutation of heresy. Pope Pius II (1458–64), who is often remembered under the name Aeneas Silvius, because of his achievements as a humanist scholar before he became pontiff, assisted Bishop Kennedy financially by granting a plenary indulgence to all who contributed toward maintaining and expanding St. Salvatore's College. To qualify for this spiritual benefit, subscribers had to confess their sins to a priest and perform nine days of penance. In return for their contrition, confessions, and contributions, they were promised "plenary absolution and remission, . . . for all sins, crimes, and excesses, even in cases [reserved] for the Apostolic See [Rome]." The income realized from this sale of indulgences was to be divided, one-third to go to Rome, and two-thirds to be used for the benefit of St. Salvatore's College.<sup>14</sup>



In 1469 Pope Paul II authorized St. Salvatore's College to confer master's degrees in arts and theology. At that point it was able to compete with St. Andrews University.

After the death of Paul Craw in 1433 there must have been significant heretical activity in Scotland, as the establishment of St. Salvatore's College bears witness. The evidence in hand, however, does not allow the verification of such activity until near the end of the fifteenth century, when thirty Lollards of Kyle and Cunningham in Ayrshire were apprehended and indicted before King James IV, his royal council, and Archbishop Blacader of Glasgow.

By 1494, when these people were arrested, Lollardy appears to have become a movement of laymen. Of the thirty people cited for heresy, the names of six have been preserved, and four of them were significant landowners—George Campbell of Cessnock, Adam Reid of Barskimming, John Campbell of Newmilns, and Andrew Shaw of Polkemmet. The other two, Helen Chalmers, Lady Polkellie, and Marion Chalmers, Lady Stair, were women of social standing.<sup>15</sup> The unnamed twenty-four could have been servants or relatives of the six.<sup>16</sup> The specific charges against the Lollards of Kyle were listed by Knox as, among others,

1. rejection of all use of images and relics in worship;
2. denial of Petrine succession and apostolic succession of papal authority;
3. contention that priests have no power to consecrate bread and wine, and that the eucharistic elements are not changed in the Mass;
4. refusal to pay tithes to the clergy;
5. assertion that all believers are priests;
6. rejection of indulgences, prayers and masses for the dead, as well as swearing oaths, prayers to the Virgin, and the authority of the church fathers;
7. assertion that the pope is Antichrist and that ecclesiastical authorities are thieves and robbers.<sup>17</sup>

Knox's account implies that the accused were acquitted, apparently because the king was disposed to be generous toward them. The monarch evidently knew them, an indication that they came from influential families. In the words of historian P. Hume



Brown, "Fortunately for the thirty heretics, the young king in whose presence they were examined was not of the stuff of which inquisitors are made, and he good-naturedly contrived to end the trial in a jest."<sup>18</sup>

The king's rather jocular attitude toward the Lollards of Kyle would seem to confirm the contention of Knox that the charge that they denied the king's right to judge in matters of religion was false. Had the accusation been legitimate, James IV would not have dismissed it so lightly. Knox concluded that the indictment was fabricated by people who wished to discredit the Lollard faith and to represent it as a subversive doctrine, and it seems that he was right.<sup>19</sup>

Like their counterparts in England, the Lollards of Scotland were eager to circulate the Bible in the vernacular language as widely as possible. Wycliffe's Bible as revised in 1388 by John Purvey became the basis for a New Testament version in the Scottish dialect by Murdoch Nisbet, who became a Lollard about 1500. In 1513 he went to Germany as a refugee, and there he obtained Purvey's rendition of the New Testament.<sup>20</sup> He later added a prologue that resembles closely Luther's preface to the German New Testament. In fact, Nisbet's translation/paraphrase may have been copied from Luther's work.<sup>21</sup>

Nisbet's contribution to the effort to make the scriptures available in vulgar tongues was, however, slight. His version of the New Testament was not printed, and the almost concurrent appearance of William Tyndale's New Testament in English prevented it from gaining wide acceptance. Until the advent of the Tyndale version, Scots had to depend on the Vulgate, which most of them could not read. An English-language Bible was fully comprehensible to literate Scots in the early sixteenth century, and the terms *Scottis* and *Inglis* were used without distinction by midcentury to denote the common language in Scotland. There were no major obstacles in written communication between Scots and Englishmen.<sup>22</sup>

During the Middle Ages the Roman Catholic church did not deny the supreme authority of Scripture. In fact, it was not until the Council of Trent (1563) that the church dogmatized the belief that ecclesiastical tradition is of equal authority with the Bible. The medieval church, however, did not encourage the production of vernacular translations of the Scriptures, although some



portions in the common tongues did appear in various liturgical books by the fifteenth century. The hierarchy discouraged the use of vernacular translations on the assumption that laymen could not understand the real meaning of Scripture in any language, and laymen who possessed vernacular Bibles were sometimes suspected of heresy. Interest in the reading of the Bible grew despite official opposition. Not only heretical groups but movements within the Roman church produced versions in the spoken tongues. Several German Bibles appeared prior to publication of the *Deutsche Bibel*, Luther's masterpiece.

In medieval Scotland Catholics acquired some knowledge of the Bible from the sermons of the preaching friars—the Dominicans and the Franciscans—but clergymen as a whole were unlearned and therefore unable to expound the Scriptures to the people. The Lollards proposed to bring knowledge of the Bible to the common people through preaching, but they had no means for effecting the mass distribution of the Scriptures, because the printing press was not yet available to them. Lollard zeal in disseminating the teachings of the Bible reflects Lollard adherence to the principle of *sola scriptura*—the belief that the Bible is the supreme authority for the Christian life. English Lollards sought specific biblical warrants for all ecclesiastical practices, and it is highly probable that their Scottish counterparts did the same.<sup>23</sup>

The English New Testament in manuscript was being used by some Scots during the reign of James IV (1488–1513). John Campbell, laird of Cessnock, employed a priest to read the New Testament to him and his family. When the Campbells were accused of heresy for this practice, the king dismissed the charge. He was impressed especially by Mrs. Campbell's ability to argue on the basis of Scripture.<sup>24</sup> Since King James died in 1513, this must have happened quite a few years before the arrival of Tyndale's English New Testament, which did not appear in print until 1526. Copies of Tyndale's version began arriving in Scotland about the same time that they appeared in England, and the Scriptures were smuggled into both kingdoms from the Continent, where they had been printed.<sup>25</sup> The wholesale distribution of the Bible, which the Lollards would have dearly loved to accomplish, was reserved for the Protestants who succeeded them as advocates of *sola scriptura*.



In appraising the significance of Lollardy in Scotland it is clear that the evidence is much more useful in ascertaining what the Lollards opposed than what they actually believed. There were no noteworthy theologians comparable to Wycliffe among them, and the exact degree to which they may have adhered to or deviated from his teachings cannot be known. It is evident, however, that the Lollards in both British kingdoms were motivated by a sense of disgust over clerical ignorance and ecclesiastical corruption. In the case of Scotland, most of the priests and monks were ignorant men, but there were many learned exceptions. Higher clerics were often educated on the Continent, especially at Paris. Schools were few in Scotland during the Middle Ages; about eighteen are known to have been in operation prior to 1284, eight of them monastery schools. In 1496 an act of Parliament required basic education in Latin for sons of nobles and freeholders, but this affected the aristocracy and the gentry only. By the sixteenth century, however, an educational expansion was underway.<sup>26</sup> Three universities had been established in the fifteenth century, and their influence was having significant effects. These institutions were still not renowned, however, and those interested in theology, law, and medicine continued to be attracted to the Continent. The important advances made in education during the fifteenth century did not affect the parish clergy and monks very much, so the Lollard complaints about priests who were unable to instruct congregations were well founded.

The moral condition of the Scottish clergy during the late Middle Ages was, in the eyes of the Lollards, deplorable. A general statute in the thirteenth century had decreed that clerics "shall not in future presume to buy houses or lay properties for the use of concubines and their children. . . . [Priests] must leave nothing by will to their concubines."<sup>27</sup> This law seems to have had little effect on clerical behavior, for in the early sixteenth century Andrew Foreman, archbishop of St. Andrews, found it necessary to issue a synodal constitution forbidding clerics to engage in "unlawful acts." This decree threatened to deprive of their benefices "those who openly keep wenches and concubines, to the grave discredit and injury of the whole church." Foreman specifically commanded offending priests to "put away, eject, and renounce such wenches and concubines, so that . . . no suspicion or



population. It is evident, nevertheless, that however small the Lollard movement may have been, it did help to prepare the kingdom for the coming of the Reformation, perhaps because it gained adherents among university students and some of the lower aristocracy. When Lutheranism appeared in Scotland, it found ready acceptance in those areas where Lollardy had taken root earlier.<sup>33</sup>