

John Knox and education

**Author:**Graham A. Duncan¹ **Affiliation:**¹Department of Church History, Christian Spirituality and Missiology, University of South Africa, South Africa**Corresponding author:**Graham Duncan,
graham.duncan@up.ac.za**Dates:**

Received: 22 Oct. 2016

Accepted: 08 Dec. 2016

Published: 30 June 2017

How to cite this article:Duncan, G.A., 2017, 'John Knox and education', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3), a4346. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4346>**Copyright:**© 2017. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

John Knox the 16th century Scottish reformer made a lasting impact on the Scottish nation in the fields of society, politics, church and education. He is remembered mainly for his reform of the church but he also made a significant contribution to the reform of education, which has lasted until the present day and has impacted on other contexts. Although much of his vision was not realised during his lifetime, his mission continued nonetheless. He was a product of the late Medieval age and his transformation was completed by his experience alongside John Calvin in Geneva. This was then contextualised in his own Scottish situation. Here we examine his work in the field of education with particular reference to the *First Book of Discipline*. The outcome of his labours was a compulsory, universal system of free education, which involved character formation and enabled all to achieve the limit of their potential.

Introduction

John Knox (1513–1572) was born and raised in Scotland at a time when it was known as 'the most culturally backward nation in western Europe' (Percy 1936:378). His education was almost totally in the Medieval mode with a smattering of humanism. Yet, he developed into a revolutionary leader in the Scottish Reformation following a time of formation in Calvin's Geneva. Apart from ecclesiastical reform, Knox busied himself inter alia with reform of the educational system. This article will progress from an analysis of Medieval education, John Knox's personal development to an examination of his educational organisation with particular reference to the *First Book of Discipline*, which has been a neglected area in John Knox studies and his educational legacy.

Medieval background

Grammar schools did not have a fixed curriculum, but Holloway (2011:48), drawing on extant evidence from Andrew Melville's (John Knox's colleague and successor as the leading Scottish reformer) education, suggests that it consisted of Greek, Latin, grammar, syntax, etymology, French pronunciation and reading as well as the study of selected Greek texts. Medieval higher education originated in monasteries (by monks) and urban schools (by scholastics) and existed to train clerics. The core educational principle was: 'Belief preceded understanding; the latter clarified and reinforced the former' (Madigan 2015:258). Here we see the early elements of commitment and passion. The content of education was that recommended by Augustine and consisted of the *trivium* [grammar, rhetoric and logic] and the *quadrivium* [mathematics, physics, metaphysics and ethics (Holloway 2011:81)] where sufficient teaching resources were available. Many scholastics were peripatetic (*vagantes*).

Teaching consisted of reading ancient texts, followed by reflection on the texts from the field of study, for example, theology and the harmonisation of inconsistencies based on Aristotelian logic. This was followed by oral discussion (*disputatio*) in which students would demonstrate their acquisition of dialectical skills (reflective *praxis*). This method is still employed in modern universities. The rise of mendicant orders facilitated the development of a 'fusion of most of the main characteristics of Aristotle's philosophical system with the content of biblical revelation so as to establish a new and enduringly influential scholastic theology' (Madigan 2015:279), despite some of Aristotle's convictions being inconsistent with revelation. However, by and large, the old church failed to educate the average layperson.

Prior to 1560, the Roman Catholic Church took several steps in the field of educational reform. During the 15th century, it supported the foundation of the universities of St Andrew's (1413), Glasgow (1451) and Aberdeen (1495), with the aim of combatting heresy and revolution, that is, their focus was conformity. In addition, they were institutions where 'higher education was advancing' (McNeill 1962:291). In 1543, the church supported the passing of an act of parliament allowing citizens to possess and read the Bible. In 1549, the Provincial Council passed inter alia a statute that made provision for instruction in scriptural writings. In 1552, the same Council

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

ordered that a Catechism be issued to enable the teaching of clergy and their members. Then, in 1559, it ordained that clergy who were weak in preaching were to be sent back to school (Scotland 1969:43).

At the time Knox went to university, all Scottish universities were Medieval institutions. Although Medieval education in Europe varied according to context in most countries, it was governed by the church, which determined the curriculum and nominated the teaching staff. This enabled the church to mould the students to conform to and follow its doctrine. Church institutions focused more on language, the arts and canon law. The variety in forms of Medieval education can be found in the different approaches adopted in England and Scotland. England employed a very rigorous authority model, whereas Scotland adopted a decentralised system of authority, witnessed in the development of universities that were open to all and admitted serfs who had their education fees paid by local lairds (if the laird saw promise in them – the lad o’ pairts [see below]), and where women also had some access to education. Havlidis (2015:1) is correct in describing it as ‘a force of freedom and submission’.

Prior to his first association with Reformed thinking, Knox may have received his training at the University of St Andrew’s. However, Brown (1895:22–31) takes the view that he studied at Glasgow University (1522–1526) at which, like the other universities:

the ecclesiastical authority of the mediaeval church was supreme. ... Mediaeval theology and Mediaeval philosophy, as they had grown out of the spiritual and temporal necessities of the papacy, were taught in profound indifference to the intellectual revolution in which Italy had been leading the way during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. (p. 22)

Therefore, no matter which university he attended, it is not difficult to comprehend the Medieval mindset Knox adopted. For him ‘secular studies were valuable only so far as they served the practical apprehension of divinely revealed truth’ (Brown 1895:29). John Knox was reared in such a context prior to his exposure to Calvin’s humanistic theology, although this ‘new learning’ was already becoming evident in the curricula of Scottish universities (Holloway 2011:48–53).

John Knox and education

Following his university education Knox was appointed Apostolical Notary in Haddington, near to Edinburgh, and was a tutor in a wealthy household. Following a period at St Andrew’s castle as preacher to the garrison, as a slave in the French galleys and various ecclesiastical appointments in England, Knox fled to the continent as a refugee on the accession of Mary Tudor as queen of England. By 1545, Knox emerged as an ‘agent of the revolution’ (Brown 1895:31) as a result of his exposure to the Renaissance both in Scotland, which was ‘in organic connection with the leading continental countries’ and in Europe. The Renaissance opened minds to new ideals and provided fresh material and interpretations

that were to fuel the development of intellectual life. He spent the years 1554–1559 in Geneva and came under the powerful influence of John Calvin while the Genevan Academy was being built in 1559 (Reid 1974:198, 199). This was a free public school (Monter 1967:3) grounded in liberal studies (Monter 1967:112). It consisted of a *schola privata* (primary school) and a *schola publica* [academy]. No degrees were awarded but a certificate of attendance and good conduct was given. During that time he wrote concerning Geneva:

I neither fear nor eschame to say, is the most perfect school of Chrisat that ever was in the earth since the days of the apostles. In other places I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion so sincerely reformed, I have not yet seen in any other place. (Letter XIII to Mr Locke, 09 December 1556. Knox 1842:454; Reid 1974:132; Mullett 2011:207; cf. Monter 1967:231)

Perhaps this oft-quoted statement is the most significant comment John Knox made regarding 16th century education in the city-state of Geneva. It indicates that it was not only the school and university system that was established there but the entire workings of the city that provided an excellent example of a place in which to grow to full maturity. The broader context in Scotland was Reformation, which exercised a significant impact on the development of education (Moray House School of Education [MHSE]:1).

He later gave this testimony concerning the work of Calvin in Geneva:

No man ever worked harder at a task than did John Calvin. He preached several times each week, taught theology, wrote commentaries, superintended a whole system of schools, wrote books and pamphlets, carried on an extensive correspondence with Reformation leaders all over Europe, and took oversight of the Reform movement in Geneva. He was interested in everything that affected the lives and welfare of the people. He believed that Christianity should be carried into every relationship of life. (Chitty 2013)

Geneva was a place distinguished by its ‘atmosphere of freedom, constant theological debate, discussion with refugees’. Here Knox experienced a stimulation he had never experienced before (Knox to Mrs Locke, *Works*, IV:240). The French Calvin, a humanist by training, had adopted a broad and inclusive approach to a holistic educational model and Knox imbibed and promoted much of this in the model he developed.

A number of faith perspectives informed Knox’s educational mission and vision. By the end of the Dark Ages, the laity had lost the ability to read and were dependent on the clergy for access to the Bible; the clergy in turn feared the rise of heresy and Bible reading was prohibited from the 13th century. On the other hand, Knox and other reformers argued for the *perspicuitas* [intelligibility] of Scripture:

The word of God is plain in itself; and if there appear any obscurity in one place, the Holy Ghost, who is never contrary to Himself, explains the same more clearly in other places: so that there can remain no doubt, but to such as obstinately remain ignorant. (Knox *Works*, II:18)

For Knox, the Bible expressed 'a unity of revelation, and it is to be read in the light of the revelation which it, itself, communicates' (McEwen 1961:35). Teaching is a heavy responsibility and, therefore, needs to be facilitated by trained exegetes, theologians, preachers, that is, doctors of the church. In this way, Knox gifted the Bible back to the people along with the means to understand it. Group Bible study, therefore, was an important educational method. The authority of Scripture was of paramount importance. This is the means by which the 'Word of God' through grace enters human experience, heart and conscience. Hitherto, the church had failed to educate the average layperson (Brown 1895:198).

The sacraments were of great importance to Knox as they were the means by which the church was constituted (McEwen 1961:56). Again, *perspicuitas* operates to aid our understanding by seeing and doing as we participate in the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. They are foundational: 'The Church is founded on the Word – yes: but on the Word completed and fulfilled by the action of Christ in the Sacrament' (McEwen 1961:57). This was emphasised by Percy (1937):

Knox's conception of the central act of Christian worship set a lasting seal upon the Church of Scotland, differentiating it from all other Protestant Communions and making it, in the strict use of the term, a Eucharistic church. (p. 65)

The sacrament of Holy Communion was closely linked to the educational enterprise in its connection with church discipline (Duncan 2010). The nature of predestination and providence were also part of Knox's educational programme, which sought to develop this 'faith of the heart' (McEwen 1961:101–114) through obedience, which is a derivative of free will. As the result of conversion, God's will is revealed to humans by Christ through the Holy Spirit. Consequently, freedom allows for obedience which is the voluntary response of self-identification with the will of God.

John Knox was the first reformer to demarcate the three reforming marks of the church clearly: the Word preached, the sacraments celebrated and:

ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's word prescribed, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished We affirm that in all these things necessary to be believed for the salvation of man. (*Scots Confession* XVIII in Cochrane 1966:177; cf. *Articles Declaratory*, Church of Scotland, VII in Cox 1976:391; Duncan 2010)

In this, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to 'sanctify and regenerate us' (*Scots Confession* XII in Cochrane 1966:172).

In August 1560, the Scottish Parliament passed a number of acts that resulted in Scotland becoming a Protestant nation, supported by strong emergent middle and landed classes. The Reformed Scottish Church recognised that education was a national priority, both for its intrinsic worth and also to ensure everyone could read the Bible. Therefore, it was faith based.

In 1559, Knox had expressed his clear vision for education in a reformed Scottish nation:

For the preservation of religion it is most expedient that scholes be universally erected in all cities and chief townes, the oversight whereof to be committed to the magistrates and godly learned men of the said cities and towns. (Knox 1559)

This was to be a joint venture between the church and the state with the parish as the defining administrative unit. James Scotland (1969:44, 45) is clear regarding the purpose that lay behind Knox's vision: 'to promote the moral culture of every child and the highest good of the community; schools were held to be necessary to establish the Reformed faith'. There is no question of that community (Scotland) being any other than Christian and Reformed:

Of necessity therefore we judge it, that every several church have a schoolmaster appointed, such a one as is able, at least, to teach grammar and the Latin tongue, if the town is of any reputation. If it is upland, ... then must either the reader or the minister there appointed, take care over the children and youth of the parish, to instruct them in their first rudiments, and especially in the catechism, and further, we think it expedient that in every notable town, and especially in the town of the superintendent, [*there*] be erected a college, in which the arts, at least logic and rhetoric, together with the tongues, be read by sufficient masters, for whom honest stipends must be appointed ... Last, the great schools, called universities, shall be replenished with those that are apt to learning. (*Book of Discipline* [BoD]1560: The necessity of schools)

Poverty was not to be a determinant in access and success in education:

The children of the poor must be supported and sustained on the charge of the church, till trial is taken whether the spirit of docility is found in them or not. (BoD 1560: The necessity of schools)

In this scheme, universality emerged as a fundamental principle allowing for the education of the *lad o' pairts* [gifted child from a poor family who has the ability to benefit from it (docility)] (Scotland 1969:372). Universities were to be upgraded.

The First Book of Discipline (Book of reformation)

The Scottish parliament approved of the *Scots Confession* in 1560. Then, as the result of parliament's request dated 29 April 1560, Knox submitted a proposal for the organisation of the Reformed Scottish church in the form of the *First Book of Discipline*. Here discipline refers to the totality of the common Christian life lived out within a reforming context as well as the manner in which the church deals with offenders (Weatherhead 1997:62) and disciplines its members as a missionary concern (Burleigh 1960:166). Its link with Christian nurture demonstrates its strong link to the educational enterprise.

Apart from its official need for the young church, the *First Book of Discipline* was for those who 'look for participation

with Christ Jesus' (Knox 1560:2) 'for the instruction of the kirk, and to make the man of God perfect' (Knox 1560:2). Here we see the link between teaching and spiritual growth in the form of character formation. This implies a life-long learning approach. This work demonstrates traces of Calvin's *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541, revised 1561; Burleigh 1960:165; Hall & Hall 1994:140–155) of which the Genevan Academy was one result. It provided for the formation of ministers who would be in the vanguard of education at the parish level along with schoolmasters.

Education was one of the three prerequisites in every Scottish parish:

of necessity it is that your honours be most careful for the virtuous education and godly upbringing of the youth of this realm, if either ye now thirst unfeignedly [for] the advancement of Christ's glory, or yet desire the continuance of his benefits to the generation following. For as the youth must succeed to us, so we ought to be careful that they have the knowledge and erudition to profit and comfort that which ought to be most dear to us - to wit, the church and spouse of Jesus Christ ... The fruit and commodity hereof shall suddenly appear. For, first, the youth and tender children shall be nourished and brought up in virtue, in presence of their friends; by whose good attendance many inconveniences may be avoided, in the which the youth commonly fall, either by too much liberty, which they have in strange and unknown places, while they cannot rule themselves; or else for lack of good attendance, and of such necessities as their tender age requires. Secondly, the exercise of the children in every church shall be great instruction to the aged. (Knox 1560:12–13)

The poor are to be equally catered for and the wealthy are counselled to educate their children to be model citizens 'and that they must do of their own expenses, because they are able' (Knox 1560). Education is to include religious formation aiming at admission to the Lord's table. 'And, therefore, these principles ought and must be learned in the youth' (Knox 1560:13). Thereafter, the three existing universities of St Andrew's, Glasgow and Aberdeen are to complete the education process. The programme was designed as follows beginning with St Andrews University:

... In the first college, and in the first class, shall be a reader of dialectics, In the mathematics, which is the second class, shall be a reader who shall complete his course of arithmetic, geometry, cosmography, and astronomy In the third class shall be a reader of natural philosophy; ... and who, after these three years shall be found sufficiently instructed in these aforesaid sciences, shall be laureate and graduate in philosophy. In the fourth class shall be a reader of medicine, who shall complete his course in five years; after the study of the which time, ... they shall be graduate in medicine.

... In the second college, in the first class, one reader only in the ethics, economics, and politics, In the second class shall be two readers in the municipal and Roman laws, who shall complete their courses in four years ... they shall be graduate in the laws.

... In the third college, in the first class, a reader of the Hebrew, and another of the Greek tongue, who shall complete the grammars thereof in half a year, and the remnant of the year the reader of the Hebrew shall interpret a book of Moses, the

prophets, or the psalms; so that his course and class shall continue one year. The reader of the Greek shall interpret some book of Plato, together with some place of the New Testament. And in the second class shall be two readers in divinity, the one in the New Testament, the other in the Old, who shall complete their course in five years; after which time, ... shall be graduate in divinity. ...

... That none be admitted to the class of the medicine but he that shall have his testimonial of his time well spent in dialectics, mathematics, and physics, and his docility in the last.

... that none be admitted unto the class of the laws, but he that shall have sufficient testimonials of his time well spent in dialectics, mathematics, physics, ethics, economics, and politics, and of his docility in the last.

... that none be admitted unto the class and siege of divines but he that shall have sufficient testimonials of his time well spent in dialectics, mathematics, physics, ethics, economics, moral philosophy, and the Hebrew tongue, and of his docility in the moral philosophy and the Hebrew tongue.

... in the second university, which is Glasgow, shall be two colleges only. In the first shall be a class of dialectics, another in mathematics, the third in physics, ordered in all sorts as Saint Andrews.

... In the second college, four classes; the first in moral philosophy, ethics, economics, and politics; the second of the municipal and Roman laws; the third of the Hebrew tongue; the fourth in divinity. Which shall be ordered in all sorts, conforming to it we have written in the order of the university of Saint Andrews.

The third university of Aberdeen shall be conformed to this university of Glasgow. (Knox 1560)

All programmes required a sound basis in the liberal arts no matter what followed. Until late in the 20th century, in Scotland it was required that an Arts degree (MA) precede a Bachelor of Laws (LlB) and a Bachelor of Divinity (BD) degree. These were by no means light programmes. They required a great deal of self-discipline taught prior to entering university to master the disciplines taught. However, discipline was defined as a legalistic process of care, nurture and formation or a specific field of study which aimed to bring the church of God to purity (Knox 1560:20), that is, 'all estates within this realm' (Knox 1560):

for the profit of the commonwealth. Which time being expired, we mean in every course, the children must either proceed to further knowledge, or else they must be sent to some handicraft, or to some other profitable exercise; provided always, that first they have the form of knowledge of Christian religion: to wit, the knowledge of God's law and commandments; the use and office of the same; the chief articles of our belief; the right form to pray unto God, the number use, and effect of the sacraments; the true knowledge of Christ Jesus, of his office and natures, and such other [points] as without the knowledge whereof, neither deserves [any] man to be named Christian, neither ought any to be admitted to the participation of the Lord's Table. And therefore, these principles ought and must be learned in the youth. (p. 23)

Here the purpose of education is 'usefulness' to the community. Knox (1560) was wise enough in his own time and context to recognise the necessity of church and state

working in harmony for the good of the entire 'commonwealth' (kingdom or community) as had happened in Genevan experience:

As that no commonwealth can flourish or long endure without good laws, and sharp execution of the same, so neither can the church of God be brought to purity, neither yet be retained in the same, without the order of ecclesiastical discipline. ... that boldly ye may punish vice and maintain virtue within this realm, to the praise and glory of his holy name, to the comfort and assurance of your own consciences, and to the consolation and good example of the posterities following. (p. 33)

'Usefulness' in community was to be an example to those of future generations, producing a truly Christian civil society. Where some deviate from this norm, the impenitent person is to be 'brought to a knowledge of himself' through the ministrations of those 'to call to God for the conversion of the impenitent', leading to repentance and salvation (Knox 1560:21). This can only happen through a 'feeling of his great mercy, by the operation of his Holy Spirit', though it is necessary that he be 'reasonably instructed in the knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Knox 1560:22). This responsibility belongs to the church at large, but also to 'every master of household' (Knox 1560:26), the reason being: for seeing that the just lives by his own faith, and that Christ Jesus justifies by knowledge of himself, we judge it insufferable that men shall be permitted to live and continue in ignorance as members of the church of God (Knox 1560:26). The concept of 'usefulness' contributed to an outcomes-based education.

John Knox's (et al.) *Book of Discipline* (1560) provided a blueprint for a national education scheme, which included parish primary schools, burgh grammar schools, high schools and the development of the three existing ancient universities of St Andrew's, Glasgow and Aberdeen. The purpose of such education was 'the vertue and godlie upbringing of the youth of this Realm' (MHSE:1) and was envisioned as a partnership between home, school and kirk. The Scottish parliament's failure to pass it into law is unfortunate but as time passed many of its educational elements were adopted.

Knox's national educational system provided for schools to be financed by the accumulated wealth of the church and monasteries, which were being overthrown in Scotland, but the nobles refused to approve this financial scheme because they wanted to divide the spoils among themselves (Burleigh 1960:176; Eby 1971:275). Thus, the poverty of the Scottish nation and a difficult political situation militated against the successful implementation of this project until the *Act for Setting Schools* was passed in 1696, which required all parishes to provide a school, a schoolhouse and dominie (schoolmaster). The Kirk was instrumental in the provision of this scheme, which was the origin of the high regard in which Scottish education came to be regarded by having the highest standard of literacy in Europe (MHSE:2).

Knox offered no detailed curriculum, perhaps because he felt the existing *trivium* and *quadrivium* would suffice as they had done hitherto; these would include Catechism, grammar,

Latin, philosophy, languages and arts – in sum a broad-based liberal education. Apart from the outcomes-based nature of the educational process, Knox's support of the liberal arts also acknowledged the value of education for its own sake and as a basis for further professional studies, for example, in medicine or law. In larger schools, classical languages, rhetoric and logic would be added. Then, learners might proceed to universities that were to be upgraded. The 3-year arts programme was to be followed by a 5-year professional qualification (Scotland 1969:46). The curriculum at St Andrew's consisted of Arts at St Salvator's College and then proceeded to other colleges, for example, St Mary's for divinity. An innovation was that specialist professors were appointed and paid a fixed salary.

With regard to the content of early education, the alphabet would be learned through the Shorter Catechism, and from 1616, all children had to learn the Catechism by heart. Reading progressed through the Proverbs to the Bible itself. The minister would examine the pupils on their ability to read the Bible. The majority of children would not progress much beyond this stage of reading. However, some older pupils would advance to arithmetic and Latin and a few to writing. A number of parish schools prepared their more able pupils for direct entrance to university, where, according to Knox (1560) they should remain 'till the age of twenty-four years'. In the Lowlands of Scotland even this basic education meant that there was almost universal literacy. The local dominie often worked in isolation from others in his profession. Devising his own methods, he would endeavour to teach his class despite its wide range of ages and abilities. He might take the older more able boys in a special class before or after the rest of the school. Some of these would progress to the larger burgh schools, and a few to university usually at the age of 14 or 15. Knox was less concerned with methodology in education than its outcomes and was an early promoter of outcomes-based education.

Knox envisioned a situation where every Scottish parish would have a dominie, doctor and minister, thus providing for the nurture of body, mind and soul. The role of the dominie was critical for leadership in the local parish for, being next to the minister in education. Those appointed had to subscribe to the *Scots Confession of Faith* (1560) (Cochrane 1966:159–184).

One final word is necessary. John Knox was opposed in general to women taking leadership roles in church and society. It is interesting to note that gender issues do not feature in his educational design. However, the lords of the congregation added to the text of the *First Book of Discipline*:

And the same we require for their daughters: to wit, that they be virtuously brought up, and honestly doted [dowered] when they come to maturity of years, at the discretion of the kirk. (Knox 1560)

After the reformation

The system of national education prefigured by Knox, insofar as it was implemented, remained the norm until the *1872 Education (Scotland) Act* was passed. This marked

a turning point in Scottish education. Only then did elementary education become compulsory for all children aged between 5 and 13. Existing parish and burgh schools were taken over by the state and managed by locally elected School Boards. This novel system was co-ordinated nationally by the Scottish Education Department with the curriculum emphasising the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic (the three 'Rs'). The churches made a crucial contribution to the new system by handing over their schools without charge to the School Boards. At this time, the Free Church supported 548 schools across Scotland together with 584 teachers. This system with regular modifications has remained to the present.

A significant change in higher education took place in 1998 when the Labour government introduced university fees throughout the United Kingdom. In Scotland, this sensitive decision was reversed by the new Scottish Parliament in 2007 (Student Awards Agency for Scotland [SAAS] s.a.:1) with the aim of, once again, making higher education accessible to all.

The missionary era in Africa

During the colonial/missionary period in the 19th century, Presbyterians, following Knox, were in the vanguard of the provision of education. Schools and colleges were established within mission stations to continue the tradition of learned clergy and to encourage the general development of all young people. A comparable commitment has characterised Presbyterian mission outreach in South Africa among black peoples as is evidenced in the opening of Lovedale Missionary Institution in 1841. Lovedale was to become the pre-eminent educational centre in southern Africa (Duncan 2003:1) with its emphasis on character formation (Duncan 2003:188–197, 262–289). This commitment has been a noble characteristic of global mission.

Knox's educational philosophy and the contemporary context in South Africa

South Africa as a democratic society in the – 21st century recognises that in an information-based age, social survival is directly related to the literacy and skills educationally provided to all children and young people and failure to meet the educational needs of students who are socially or economically disadvantaged eventually handicaps all members of society and society itself.

The South African Bill of Rights (1996) states (Bill of Rights, para. 29. Education):

Everyone has the right:

1. to a basic education, including adult basic education; and
2. to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.

In terms of international obligations, according to the International Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26).

Education should:

- Develop the human personality.
- Strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups. (Co-ordinating Committee for the National Action Plan [CCNAP] 1998:122).

Knox would be totally in agreement with this universal statement, perhaps with the exception of 'religious groups'. But then Scotland in the 16th century was a much more homogeneous nation than 21st century South Africa.

Under the South African Constitution, citizens have the right to establish independent schools, including religious schools. But the National Policy on Religion dictates that the state must not pay for the promotion of any particular faith. South Africa does not have a state religion; it is a multi-faith nation and may not give preferential treatment to any faith (Thelwell 2014:1). This is a strongly contested matter in a country which has a large majority Christian population, yet it is a reference point for equity. It is also a prime area for a discussion of the relationship between church and state, but South African history is replete with examples of skewed relationships in the field of education, for example, Christian National Education (for the benefit of white people) (Elphick 2012:242–243; Kinghorn 1997:136–138) and Bantu Education (to the detriment of black people) (De Gruchy 1997:162–162; Elphick 2012:283–284, 288–296). The post-1994 approach of the churches of 'critical solidarity' and 'critical engagement' have become contested terms as I have stated elsewhere. The SACC:

was credited with adopting the policy of 'critical solidarity' with the government. However, Velle (2013:178) credits Charles Villa-Vicencio's *Theology of Reconstruction* (1992) with this fabrication. Its policy represented 'critical engagement' and earned the disapproval of the ANC which then found a more compliant partner in the Pentecostal churches, especially Rhema under the leadership of Ray McCauley. (Duncan 2016b:708–709)

Perhaps 'critical distance' may have been a more appropriate stance for all the churches where they, like Knox, can display a reflective *praxis* based on the attainment of the common good. He certainly did not compromise his views in the face of authority but spoke truth to power without fear or favour. The introduction of religion studies and life skills may not fulfil a specifically Christian mandate, but they are designed and implemented 'for the profit of the commonwealth'.

The contemporary South African education system has degenerated into a state of disarray after the formation of a unitary educational system in 1994; rural schools are pitifully resourced and there is a lack of a stable school curriculum

that provides for life, work or for higher education. Higher education is beset by problems relating to access and success, and there is 'no clear consensus as to what a university is or what its aims should be' (McKenna 2013:1). Referring to the post-1994 policy discourse, Essop (2013) claims that:

This is not surprising. Higher education institutions, despite popular perceptions to the contrary do not exist in splendid isolation from the societies in which they are located. They reflect, reproduce and, to some extent, shape the social, cultural, economic and political values and relations that are characteristic of the broader society. This results in and gives rise to a range of tensions that are inherent in differing interpretations where all work together towards the achievement of the social and economic trajectory of a given society and the implications of the latter for the development of higher education. (pp. v-vi)

Knox would have understood this view because he had a holistic view of society, striving to achieve an integrated, co-operative, caring and wholesome community where the potential of all is determined and developed to its fullest extent. Whether it be for the professions, trades or manual labour, it would be employable, socially informed and politically enfranchised, capable and willing to participate in community life as well as being able to develop their own particular talents and interests.

A positive note in higher education is the promotion of a Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, which was defined in the:

National Qualifications Act 2008 (Act 67 of 2008). (Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2013:1)

The objectives of the NQF, as outlined in section 5 of the Act, are to:

1. Create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements.
2. Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education and training career paths.
3. Enhance the quality of education and training.
4. Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training, and employment opportunities. (CHE 2013:5)

John Knox expressed these very objectives, though in a different language and an inequitable context. A particular feature of Scottish education was 'payment by results' introduced in British schools in 1862. National funding for individual schools depended to a degree on the outcomes of examinations of the pupils conducted by school inspectors. The system was very unpopular with teachers and was abandoned in 1890. 'Payment by results' allowed progress through success annually and ensured that no one was hindered through lack of support, financial or otherwise. However, an aim of:

public education, equality needs to be by results that are broader than, though obviously inclusive of, the development of skills necessary to be employable in the economy at any given time. Capacities for reflection and for exercising discriminating judgment and discernment as participants in political and

community life are skills not easily measured. (The Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit [TECNMU] 1987)

What is needful is a system with multiple entry and exit points for a society that is far more mobile in terms of work. Few people end their working lives doing the job they did when they left school except for the severely disadvantaged. This testifies to the need for a more comprehensive approach to life-long learning as a way of life.

There is an unprecedented opportunity for private education providers in the current crisis. Unfortunately, many do not conform to the requirements of the South African educational system and offer programmes and qualifications of US origin and ethos, which deny the integrity of the context. The churches are no longer in a position to offer comprehensive educational programmes. Even at the time of the promulgation of the *Bantu Education Act (1953)*, they were struggling financially even with substantial state support. Also, following the end of apartheid, the churches lost the will to engage in ecumenically based education, for example, the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (1963–1993) (Denis & Duncan 2011). Existing church-based schools tend to be theologically conservative and often racially defined. In terms of public funding, despite attempts by the Minister of Finance to alleviate the situation, government maintains that it cannot fund free education. However, it is able to fund ailing para-statal institutions with funds, which have never been budgeted. Further, a concerted campaign against corruption would yield considerable funding for allocation for educational purposes.

One thing that is clear is that, related to the current and ongoing 'Fees must fall' crisis, it is vital that the development of a clear goal and programme of equal educational opportunity for all students will require considerable soul-searching and courageous commitment to become a reality in South Africa. For instance, it cannot be assumed that because some students have wealthy parents, they are rich students. Perhaps, here is an opportunity to resolve the crisis through the introduction of a form of 'payments by results'. Also, however good online support is, where it is adopted, it cannot substitute for full-time contact education except on a short-term temporary basis; it is not distance education which requires skills that contact staff cannot fulfil in a context where university lecturers are not required (compared with their colleagues in distance learning establishments) to have professional training in higher education. Furthermore, denying learners access to the resources they so badly need (e.g. libraries, computers, Wi-Fi) militates against the idea of access and the poor, as always, suffer more than any others. Group work as an educational method has had to be jettisoned despite its proven success as an educational tool. If students cannot gather together through university closures, co-operative and collaborative education and group work in the current networking society have to be foregone with its tragic results.

Relying on external security to protect plant and act as a potentially violent deterrent, and even in some cases as a

punishment, to learners gaining access to educational facilities demonstrates a clear contradiction to the aims and objectives of the educational enterprise. A reflective engagement involving all parties, in a process of listening in depth, might yield greater results and be an integral part of the educational process. Lockouts achieve nothing except frustration for those who 'suffered outside the gate' (Heb 13:12) as happened at the University of Pretoria on 17 October 2016 when engagement sessions continued with a minimal presence of students. Such a step was alienating and conveyed a message that student presence was of little value. The situation may well have been judged to be risky but that is life. I (Duncan 2016a:11) have recently written of a university context. This is relevant here as:

a very uncomfortable place to be. Going backwards in such a situation is never a clever option. The only options are standing still, remaining with a commitment to what we know and are comfortable with or taking Kierkegaard's 'leap of faith' where the 'leap is the decision' (Kierkegaard 1847 in Hong 1993:102) into an uncertain and risky future and grasping all the opportunities that present themselves. That is no choice at all in facing the 'courage to be[come]'. (Tillich 1952:title)

What becomes clear here is that reformation is a dynamic fluid process (*semper reformanda* – always reforming), as Knox was well aware. Here is a wonderful opportunity to embrace a new paradigm for education in the community that includes not only home, school and church, but also business, industry, television, novel means of information processing, other types of emerging technology of communications and those cultural resources not yet drawn upon for their educational potential. Education is too important and too all-inclusive to be left to a single stakeholder or to the young alone.

Conclusion

Knox's educational ideas were firmly grounded in his experience of the Medieval system of education he received. This is evident in the development of Scottish university-level education. The national system developed in Scotland was based on the Calvinistic principles of schools being under state and church control. Although the Scottish parliament rejected Knox's educational system, it still impacted Scotland, England and America. Over the centuries, historians and educators have both praised and defamed Knox's work in education (Kyle & Johnson 2009:1). Despite the controversy, Knox's impact on education has several valuable points. The 'forward mindedness' (Reid 1974:196) displayed in the *First Book of Discipline* was crucial for both contemporary and future Scottish education. Students should receive a Bible-based education so they can understand the Scriptures for themselves. Teachers should be carefully trained in order to provide quality education to their students (Lloyd-Jones 2013:1). The ultimate value of the *Book of Discipline*, as it is encapsulated in Knox's vision, lies in the ideas of people with a long-term trajectory, concepts of which Scottish education became particularly proud. These included a compulsory, nation-wide education, education for all, a Christian faith-based approach, an organised university

system and an eminently practical methodology (Scotland 1969:47, 48; cf. McEwen 1961:2). The South African educational system has the potential to reflect such a vision with the replacement of a Christian faith-based approach with an open faith-based approach. We can only conclude with Burleigh (1960:174) that for Knox, education and reformation were 'inseparably linked'.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

References

- Bill of Rights (South Africa), 1996, viewed 24 November 2016, from <http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/chapter-2-bill-rights#29>
- Brown, P.H., 1895, *John Knox: A biography*, Adam & Charles Black, London.
- Burleigh, J.H.S., 1960, *A church history of Scotland*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Co-ordinating Committee for the National Action Plan (CCNAP), 1998, *National action plan for the promotion and protection of human rights*, CCNAP, Houghton, MI.
- Chitty, J.D., 2013, 'John Calvin: Erecting "the most perfect school of Christ"', viewed February 2016, from <http://capthk.com/2009/07/13/1307/>
- Cochrane, A.C., 1966, *Reformed confessions of the 16th century*, Westminster, Philadelphia, PA.
- Council on Higher Education (CHE), 2013, *The higher education qualifications sub-framework*, CHE, Pretoria.
- Cox, J.T. (ed.), 1976, *Practice and procedure in the Church of Scotland*, Committee in General Administration, The Church of Scotland, Edinburgh.
- De Gruchy, J.W., 1997, 'Grappling with a colonial heritage: The English-speaking churches under apartheid', in R. Elphick & R. Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social and cultural history*, pp. 155–172, David Philip, Cape Town.
- Denis, P. & Duncan, G.A., 2011, *The native school that caused all the trouble: A history of the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa*, Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg.
- Duncan, G.A., 2003, *Lovedale, coercive agency: Power and resistance in mission education*, Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg.
- Duncan, G.A., 2010, 'Church discipline – *Semper reformanda* in reformation perspective', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i1.789>
- Duncan, G.A., 2016a, 'Gateway to the future ... oopmaak van die hekke ... Transformation in the Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(4), a3424. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3424>
- Duncan, G.A., 2016b, 'South Africa', in I.A. Phiri & D. Dietrich Werner (eds.), *Anthology of African Christianity anthology of African Christianity*, pp. 703–711, Regnum, Oxford.
- Eby, F., 1971, *Early protestant educators: The educational writings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other leaders of Protestant thought*, pp. 273–297, Ames Press, New York.
- Elphick, R., 2012, *The equality of believers: Protestant missionaries and the racial politics of South Africa*, UKZN Press, Pietermaritzburg.
- Essop, A., 2013, 'Forward', in *The aims of higher education*, pp. v–vi, Kagisano, no. 9, Council on Higher Education, Pretoria.
- Hall, D.W. & Hall, J.H., 1994, *Paradigms in polity: Classic readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government*, pp. 140–155, Eerdmans, MI.
- Havlidis, D.R., 2015, 'Medieval education in Europe: A force of freedom and submission', viewed 23 November 2016, from <http://www.lostkingdom.net/medieval-education-in-europe/>
- Higher education – The Scottish system, viewed 23 November 2016, from <http://www.educationuk.org/global/articles/scottish-higher-education-system/>
- Holloway, E.R., III, 2011, *Andrew Melville and humanism in Scotland, 1545–1622*, Brill, Leiden.
- Kierkegaard, S., [1847], in H.V. Hong (ed.), 1993, *Upbuilding discourses in various spirits, concluding unscientific postscript to philosophical fragments*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Kinghorn, J., 1997, 'Modernisation and apartheid: The Afrikaner churches', in R. Elphick & R. Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social and cultural history*, pp. 135–154, David Philip, Cape Town.
- Knox, J., 1559, 'A brief exhortation to England, for the speedy embracing of the gospel heretofore by the Tyranny of Mary suppressed and banished', in *Selected writings of John Knox: Public epistles, treatises, and expositions to the year 1559*, Copyright © 1995 by Kevin Reed, Presbyterian Heritage Publications, P.O. Box 180922 Dallas, Texas 75218, viewed 04 March 2016, from <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/briefexh.htm>

- Knox, J., 1560, 'First book of discipline', in D. Laing (ed.) (1895), *Works of John Knox*, vol. 2, pp. 183–260, James Thin, Edinburgh, viewed 15 June 2009, from http://swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/bod_ch00.htm
- Knox, J., 1842, *The writings of the Rev John Knox*, Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia, PA, viewed 27 February 2016, from https://books.google.co.za/books?id=XV0QAAAIAAJ&pg=PA454&pg=PA454&dq=most+perfect+school+of+christ+on+earth&source=bl&ots=arRQ4iVZyl&sig=mSCsgZR6r13-gM6x41mOTjauWJw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEWinpo_vyJfLAhWBvxokHdBqArcQ6AEIZTAQ#v=onepage&q=most%20perfect%20school%20of%20christ%20on%20earth&f=false
- Knox, J., 1895, *Works of John Knox*, D. Laing (ed.) (1895), vols. 1 & 2, James Thin, Edinburgh, viewed 15 June 2009, from http://swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/bod_ch00.htm
- Kyle, R.G. & Johnson, D.W., 2009, *John Knox: An introduction to his life and works*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR.
- Lloyd-Jones, A., 2013, *John Knox's philosophy of education*, viewed 22 February 2016, from <https://coffeeshophinking.wordpress.com/2013/10/28/john-knoxs-philosophy-of-education/>
- Madigan, K., 2015, *Medieval history: A new history*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- McEwen, J.S., 1961, *The faith of John Knox*, Lutterworth, London.
- McKenna, S., 2013, 'Introduction', in *The aims of higher education*, pp. 1–4, Kagisano, no. 9, Council on Higher Education, Pretoria.
- McNeill, J.T., 1962, *The history and character of Calvinism*, Oxford University, New York.
- Monter, E.W., 1967, *Calvin's Geneva*, Wiley, London, Moray House School of Education (MHSE). Part 1: Education following the Reformation in Scotland. Part 4: The 1872 Education (Scotland) Act, viewed 22 February 2016, from <http://www.ed.ac.uk/education/aboutus/maps-estates-history/part-one>
- Mullett, M.A., 2011, *John Calvin*, Routledge, London.
- Percy, E., 1936, *John Knox*, Lutterworth, Lincoln.
- Percy, E., 1937, *John Knox*, Lutterworth, London.
- Reid, W.S., 1974, *Trumpeter of God*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.
- Rogers, D., 2010, 'Payment by results: What a great Victorian ideal!', *Times Educational Supplement*, 16 April, viewed 04 May 2016.
- Scotland, J., 1969, *The history of Scottish education, vol I, From the beginning to 1872*, University of London Press, London.
- Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), s.a., 'Higher education – The Scottish system', viewed 24 November 2016, from <http://www.educationuk.org/global/articles/scottish-higher-education-system/>
- The Education and Congregational Nurture Ministry Unit (TECNMU), 1987, 'The church and public education', in *A call to church involvement in the renewal of public education*, Presbyterian Church (USA), Louisville, KY, viewed 24 November 2016, from <https://www.pcusa.org/resource/church-and-public-education/>
- Thelwell, E., 2014, 'Does God belong in schools?', *News24*, viewed 26 November 2016, from <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Does-God-belong-in-schools-20140905>
- Tillich, P., 1952, *The courage to be*, Yale Nota Bene, New Haven, CT.
- Vellem, V.S., 2013, 'Ecumenicity and a black theology of liberation', in E.M. Conradie (ed.), *South African perspectives on notions and forms of ecumenicity*, p. 178, SUN Press, Stellenbosch.
- Villa-Vicencio, C., 1992, *A theology of reconstruction: Nation building and human rights*, David Philip, Cape Town.
- Weatherhead, J.L., 1997, *The constitution and laws of the Church of Scotland*, The Board of Practice and Procedure, Edinburgh.