

AColyte

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A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things
at Austin College



YOU'VE GOT MORE IN COMMON WITH THESE WHITE GUYS NAMED JOHN THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

(or be comfortable admitting)

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

From St. Andrews Castle, Scotland on January 4, 2015
to Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh, Scotland on February 28, 1638
to the Texas State Legislature on November 22, 1849
to Baker Hall at Austin College from September 1980 to May 1983
to the entire Austin College campus right now

We didn't start the fire.
--Billy Joel



So the white guy on the left named John (as most of you know) is me.

- Born in 1962
- Austin College Class of 1984
- Presbyterian minister
- Currently Chaplain and Director of Church Relations at Austin College
- Occasionally seen in a black robe and funny hat very much like those worn by the other white guy named John in the photo.

That other guy is **John Knox**.

- Probably born in 1514
- Definitely died in 1572
- Primary figure in the Scottish Reformation and the founding & establishment of the Church of Scotland (known now as the Presbyterian Church)
- Preacher, Author, Revolutionary
- Probably an Accessory to the Murder of a Roman Catholic Cardinal
- Author of *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*
- Rumored to be the patron saint of the Duck Dynasty School of Personal Grooming.

Watch this!
--Dwight Yoakam,
"Intentional Heartache"

Like thousands of other Austin College graduates, I lived in Baker Hall for three years.

Room 216 in September 1980.

Room 322 from October 1980 to May 1983.

(QUICK ASIDE: There was an incident in Baker 216 in late September 1980 involving a wall painted neon orange over a weekend when I went home, a broken lap desk, Michael Jackson music, and someone who called himself “Cat Daddy”...I don't want to talk about it.)

DANIEL BAKER

Baker Hall was named after **Rev. Daniel Baker** (1791-1857).

The first words of Light Cummins' *Austin College: A Sesquicentennial History, 1849-1999* are:

*Presbyterian ministers concerned about education on the Texas frontier established Austin College in October of 1849. A group of prominent civic leaders, including two former presidents of the Republic of Texas, supported this venture by becoming members of the first board of trustees. **The Reverend Daniel Baker**, who emerged as the prime mover of this educational enterprise, picked Huntsville as the home for the new college (p. 1).*

(QUICK ASIDE: Austin College was the Presbyterian Church's idea.)

Daniel Baker was born and raised in Georgia.

After feeling/receiving a call to ministry, Baker began studying theology (or “Divinity” as it was known at the time) at Hampden-Sidney College in Virginia in 1811.

Issues related to the **War of 1812** caused Baker to leave Hampden-Sidney and move to Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey to complete his theological education.

He graduated with honors from Princeton in 1815.

(QUICK ASIDE: That last piece of information—about the War of 1812—comes from the article about Daniel Baker on the Texas State Historical Society website. The article was written by Thomas W. Currie, Jr. His father, Thomas W. Currie, Sr. graduated from Austin College in 1904. Thomas W. Currie, Jr. did not go to Austin College. But one of his daughters did—as did two of his granddaughters and the spouses of three of his children. I knew Thomas W. Currie, Jr. He was a good guy.)

(ANOTHER QUICK ASIDE: Unless otherwise noted, my source for details about the people I'm writing about is Wikipedia).

While he was at Princeton Seminary, Daniel Baker's Theology professor was Archibald Alexander (a former president of Hampden-Sidney College and the founding president of the Seminary).

Daniel Baker was taught by **Archibald Alexander**.

ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER

Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) was born in Rockbridge County, Virginia.

When he was 10 years old, his parents sent him to Liberty Hall Academy near Lexington, Virginia to be tutored by William Graham.

Alexander was licensed to preach in 1791 and ordained as a Presbyterian minister by Hanover Presbytery in 1794.

(QUICK ASIDE: Eighteen years before they ordained Archibald Alexander [in 1776], Hanover Presbytery, a group of Presbyterian ministers and elders representing churches in Virginia, had sent a Memorial—like a memo—to the newly independent Continental Congress urging them to guarantee separation of Church and State in the new nation that had been formed by the Declaration of Independence. Those Presbyterians had a significant and benevolent influence on Thomas Jefferson and James Madison regarding religious freedom. Look it up: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-memorial-of-hanover-presbytery/>).

Archibald Alexander was taught by **William Graham**.

WILLIAM GRAHAM

William Graham (1746-1799) ran a school out of his house in Virginia for years before eventually receiving a charter for a formal school in 1772 which he named Liberty Hall Academy.

In 1782, a gift of stock from George Washington (Yes – **the** George Washington) enabled Liberty Hall to have enough resources to become Washington College.

(QUICK ASIDE: After the end of the Civil War, Robert E. Lee—yes **the** Robert E. Lee—served as President of Washington College from 1865 until his death 1870. After Lee died, the institution was renamed Washington and Lee University. That school still exists today.)

In 1789, William Graham became the first pastor of Lexington Presbyterian Church in Lexington, VA.

Archibald Alexander studied with William Graham on and off from 1782 to 1794, when he was ordained as a Presbyterian minister.

William Graham graduated from the College of New Jersey (now known as Princeton University) in 1773.

While at Princeton, he was taught Divinity (Theology) and Moral Philosophy by John Witherspoon.

William Graham was taught by **John Witherspoon**.

JOHN WITHERSPOON

John Witherspoon (1723-1794) left Scotland in 1768, where he had been a Presbyterian minister, to become the sixth president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton University).

Witherspoon was a respected intellectual who taught Speech/Rhetoric, History, Moral Philosophy, and Divinity at the College of New Jersey.

After preaching and publishing a pro-independence sermon called “The Domain of Providence over the Passions of Men” in 1776, Witherspoon was elected as a New Jersey representative to the Continental Congress. He was the only clergyman – and only college president – to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Witherspoon, whose full name was John **Knox** Witherspoon, was born in the village of Gifford in the East Lothian region of Scotland.

He attended Haddington Grammar School.

Haddington is five miles from Gifford.

John Knox was from Haddington.

As a young Presbyterian from East Lothian who later studied Divinity at both the University of St. Andrews and the University of Edinburgh, Witherspoon was greatly influenced by the Scottish Covenanters.

John Witherspoon was influenced by the **Covenanters**.

THE COVENANTERS

The **Covenanters** is a complicated story.

I'll try to do one part pretty quickly.

Bear with me, there's an Austin College tie at the end.

In 1637, King Charles I of England made it illegal for Christians in Scotland to have worship services that did not use the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.

The Scots, who had successfully separated themselves from the Roman Catholics in the preceding decades, resented and resisted being told by anybody when and how to pray and worship.

(QUICK ASIDE: According to a marker at the John Knox House museum in Edinburgh, the motto of the city of Edinburgh is “*Wha daur Meddle wi Me?*” — “Who dare meddle with me?” The Scots can be pretty prickly.)

Long story short:

On February 28, 1638 leaders from the city of Edinburgh gathered at Greyfriars Church and signed a document that had been drafted by Presbyterian leaders. It was called the National Covenant.

Addressed to the King, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and essentially the whole world, the Covenant begins by announcing that

[We] noblemen, barons, gentlemen, burgesses, ministers, and commons under subscribing; ... all, and every one of us underwritten, do protest,

and then goes on with a bewilderingly long list of complaints and grievances about the King, the Church of England, and Roman Catholicism.

Those details aren't relevant or useful for us in this context.

But that list of *who* is protesting is significant.

(You can see the entire text of the National Covenant at <http://www.constitution.org/eng/conpur023.htm>, but why would you?)

The notion – inherent in the Covenant – that the list of people who have a right to have opinions and advocate positions about the way their civil and religious communities should be organized includes “noblemen, barons, gentlemen, burgesses, ministers, *and commons*” is a new thing.

That's a bigger and more inclusive understanding of who has authority in civil and religious communities than had been present in most European cities and nations before 1638.

With all its weird language, tacky statements about Roman Catholics, and naïve and questionable claims about “the true religion,” the Scottish National Covenant is worth remembering for its (relatively) inclusive picture of who makes up the community.

Growing up when he did and where he did, John Witherspoon would have known the Covenanters story in great detail.

The **Covenanters** were influenced to a great degree by **John Knox**.

JOHN KNOX

John Knox was an interesting and significant guy – and I'd be happy to talk to you about him.

But not now.

Some (okay – many) of Knox's ideas and writings seem backward and harsh and offensive when viewed through the eyes of well-educated Liberal Arts students in 2015.

But not all of them.

The story I'm telling right now is simply that

Austin College was founded by Daniel Baker;

who was taught theology by Archibald Alexander;

who was taught theology by William Graham;

who was taught theology by John Witherspoon;

who was influenced by the Covenanters;

who were influenced by John Knox.

JOHN KNOX

John Knox said:

*Seeing that God hath determined that His church here on earth
shall be taught not by angels but by men,
it is necessary to be most careful
for the virtuous education and godly upbringing
of the youth of this realm.*

John Knox held to the Protestant belief that the Bible--not hierarchy or tradition--was the ultimate authority in the Church, and therefore that everybody should be able to read their Bibles.

And he believed that there should be highly educated pastors in the Church to help individual church members study and learn from the Bible about God and the world.

That's essentially why Daniel Baker wanted to found Austin College.

Daniel Baker said:

Heaven bless the boys of Texas, they only need to be taught what is right.

His original concern was to train white males to be Presbyterian ministers in Texas.

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But that's not the whole story.

Remember that the Covenanters had a bigger, more inclusive picture of who should have a say about how the communities they were part of should be organized.

The Covenanter presumed that those decisions should be made by, not just some of us, but all of us.

(Although it's true that by "all of us" they meant "all of us men.")

Those Covenanters had a bigger picture of who mattered than the people who came before them did.

Weird and foreign and stale and restrictive and archaic as it seems, the Covenanters' story is ultimately a narrative of inclusiveness.

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Austin College started out seeking to educate white male Presbyterian ministers.

But our history has a touch of the Covenanters' vision.

First, the College recognized opportunities effectively to serve students who weren't necessarily going to become Presbyterian ministers.

Eventually, Austin College's understanding of the community it could serve grew to include

- lawyers,
- and soldiers,
- and women,
- and students from a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds,
- and non-Christian students,
- and non-religious students,
- and students with a variety of sexual orientations.

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On January 6, 2015 I stood in the yard outside Greyfriars Kirk – where the National Covenant was signed in 1638-- and told a version of this story that runs from Daniel Baker to John Knox to fifteen Austin College students who were taking Wayne Crannell's Jan Term course called: "Castles, Churches, Kilts, and Celts."



(QUICK ASIDE: That is the class, but it's not the Greyfriars Kirkyard. I couldn't take a photo there because I was telling these stories. This photo is of Bass Rock as seen from the grounds of Tantallon Castle.)

They were a great group of students:

- women and men,
- Catholic
- Protestant
- Hindu
- Episcopalian
- Presbyterian
- Agnostic
- the son of one of my 1984 classmates
- artists
- athletes
- at least one astrophysicist
- a future accountant
- singers
- fans of Texas music.

I don't know if John Knox or the Covenanters or Daniel Baker would have been completely comfortable with what we were doing in Scotland—or who we were doing it with—but their fingerprints are all over this Austin College story.

John Knox taught us that education needs to be available for everybody—not just a fortunate or select few people.

The Covenanters taught us that the relevant community is bigger than some people think.

Daniel Baker taught us that Texas is as good a place as any to have a college that tries to take the right things seriously.

We owe them.

Remember the Billy Joel quote that I mentioned above?

In some important ways that we shouldn't overlook or take for granted,

We didn't start the fire.

Lots of people did lots of things that helped make Austin College the place it is today.

I smelled smoke with those students in Scotland.

Like I smell smoke on this campus every day.

We're some pretty good kindling.

We're part of some really big stories.

It's good to be us.

Until next time, I remain,
Just Another White Guy Named John,
Especially grateful to Wayne, Bobby, Jessica, Andrew, Daniela, Puja, Sarah, Suzanne, John, Vern,
Willie, Milo, Camille, Ben, Matt, Mandi, and Blair,

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain

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AND THEN THIS HAPPENED...

The night before I flew home from Scotland, most of the class – along with Wayne Crannell – went to a Pub in Edinburgh called Sandy Bell's (thanks to Bobby Graham and Jeff Francis for that tip).

Every night around 9:30, there's a Celtic music jam session at Sandy Bell's.

And the pickers are good.

It came to pass, for a variety of reasons ranging from the absence of vocalists at Sandy Bell's that night to my fondness for Celtic music, that I ended up singing a song.

Remember – I was actually invited to be part of the Jan Term class in Scotland to talk about the Scottish Reformation.

That's a part of a long and bloody story about conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the British Isles.

So Celtic music was already on my mind.

And the Protestant Reformation already was on my mind.

And – as is usually the case – I was feeling pretty good about Austin College.

So when Paddy, a Sandy Bell's patron who had perhaps been overserved, found out that I was a guitar player who knew some songs, I ended up getting invited and urged and cajoled to sing a song.

I protested quite honestly that I am nowhere near as good a musician as the guys who were playing in Sandy Bell's that night.

Paddy said, "But they don't sing! We need someone who knows the words to at least one song."

I relented and thought of a song I first heard in the old Austin College Pouch Club in 1983.

It was performed by a duo called Hot Shandy.

For a few years in the mid-80s, Hot Shandy regularly played to crowds of 500 or more in the Pouch Club.



They were awesome.

The guy on the right is named Jim Magill.

Thirty years ago he taught me a song he had written called "The Chamberpot."

So—Celtic music, good feelings about Austin College, the Protestant Reformation—it all came together and I sang Jim's song:

*One day, two nuns from Belfast town went driving along the road,
When they perchance ran out of gas, and they bitterly did moan,
"Oh sister dear, I greatly fear," the one of them did say,
"That the Good Lord works in wondrous ways and we must walk today."*

*"The Lord helps them who help themselves," the other nun exclaimed,
"His will be done," so off they went in search of gasoline.
They hadn't traveled very far, when a station they did sight
And, to the Station Manager had soon declared their plight.*

*"Good sisters, sure, the gas I have; enough to suit the Queen;
But I've nothing but a chamberpot to carry the gasoline
We'll put it to a nobler use than chamberpots have been."
So off two sisters went once more with the chamberpot between*

(QUICK ASIDE: A **chamber pot** (also a **chamberpot**), a **piss pot**, a **potty**, or a **thunder pot**) is a [container](#) with a [handle](#), usually used as a [urinal](#) at night. It is kept in a bedroom under a bed or in a [nightstand](#).)

*At length, they reached their motorcar and, to the Lord gave thanks.
They soon were pouring petrol from the pot into the tank.
And, as they stood there with the chamber pot all lifted high
A parson on his bicycle by chance did pedal by*

(QUICK ASIDE: **parson**—noun a member of the clergy, **especially a Protestant minister**, pastor; rector.)

*At such a sight, the parson stopped, and with open mouth did stare
Until, at last, he found his wits, and he solemnly declared
"I am a true-born Protestant, a parson by me trade
And you're Catholic – and your souls be damned –
But I do admire your faith."*

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And that—that whole thing; that whole story—is the Liberal Arts.