

# Was The Reformation Good News?

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**The Reformation Walk in Geneva.**  
Farel, Calvin, Beza, Knox

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## **Main Appendices**

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## **Bibliography**

Note: In this paper I use the terms 'Reform' and 'Reformers' to refer to the persona and work of the magisterial, or chief, Reformation leaders, notably Luther, Calvin and the people evaluated in chapter 5. The word 'reform' (with lower case r) and its cognates refer to the ordinary action of reforming.

**The Accusation to be answered:**

## **Did the Reformation Engender the Formation of Police States? Is Calvinism Repressive?**

The fact that this question has to be answered at all shows where the church is in this age. Unlike earlier generations, most modern Christians do not read; they especially do not read their Bible and so become susceptible to whomever they choose to listen to. Since they do not read works of sound Biblical and dogmatic theology, they are untrained to deal with Biblical and theological problems. But most glaring is the failure to read any history, which, as the epigram states, ensures that they will make the same mistakes as their forefathers. All this could be alleviated if there was a proliferation of godly and learned teachers instructing the church; sadly such is not the case. Thus, lacking discernment, they have been set up to accept whatever their favourite teacher tells them; if someone comes along with an *apparent* knowledge of history but makes wild statements about the past, they have no defence. This is what is currently taking place.

Some teachers with a dogmatic axe to grind, most often Arminian Dispensationalists, have recently sought to defend their unscriptural views by perverting historical facts in order to score points. The usual targets are Martin Luther and John Calvin, but many other Reformers and Puritans come under the hammer.

Now I have no desire to engage in hagiography. The Reformers were men, and like all men made mistakes. Some of their mistakes were serious, but in the light of what they achieved in the face of tremendous opposition, we should be careful about throwing any stones unless we are perfect ourselves. In any event, God uses imperfect vessels; no age has known perfection. As J. C. Ryle commented, God can do a good job with such an imperfect tool as a Sennacherib, Cyrus or Nebuchadnezzar. Even apostles, like Peter, made mistakes. The important matter here is: *What is the truth?* Are the Reformers guilty of the charges laid against them, or are these charges false? Is it, perhaps, that there is some truth in them but the historical circumstances provide explanations of mitigation? Was the Reformation of enormous gain to the church or not? This is what I want to evaluate in this book. What are the facts?

Before we get to this, we need to see the sorts of things that are being said today. One national Charismatic leader actually stated in my presence that Calvinism was demonic! This is an extremely serious charge that does not stand up to theological or even historical analysis. Because this man does not like the tenets of the Biblical doctrines of grace, preferring an Arminian, Dispensational foundation, he castigates what he does not like as devilish. This facile statement says it all for him. If the truth is that God initiated and energised this movement, the man came very close to blasphemy. We have proved that Calvinism is a term for a Biblical explanation of the theology of salvation elsewhere, but is there any ground in history to suggest that the effects of Calvinism are demonic? Is Calvinism harmful to society? Does it lead to repression and totalitarianism? We shall see.

To highlight the sort of statements that are being currently made, I will provide a selection from one international teacher who prides himself on his knowledge of these things, repeating them over and over in various publications. This person is Jacob Prasch and the

first selections are from his *Moriel Prayer Newsletter*. Several of his statements in his newsletter no. 7 seem to have been taken from Tom MacMahon's article in *The Berean Call* [Nov 1996] which appeared shortly before. This shows that there is little scholarly research, just the same old false chestnuts repeatedly banded about amongst prejudiced critics; the same slanders that the Reformers were accused of at the time.

### **A flawed religion**

The reformers misunderstood many things and left a mainstream Protestantism that could only degenerate because of the flaws in its very foundations. (7:10)

### **Earthly dominionism**

The Reformers simply failed to restore the idea of a Kingdom that is not of this world ... the over-realised eschatology of dominionism is (not) ... biblical. (7:7)

Jesus said plainly that His Kingdom "is not of This World"; the Restorationists say it is. This error was paramount during the 16th century. (6:5)

From this [Calvinism and replacementism (sic)] we have the Protestant theonomic reconstructionism, not only supposedly replacing Old Testament Israel's theocratic state, but certainly replacing the papal theocracy, with its Constantinian/Augustinian roots. (7:7)

The Reformers substituted Protestant versions of this [Dominion or Kingdom Now theology] and linked it with theonomic reconstructionism. (6:5)

Anglicanism is but one expression of the errors of the Reformers. Presbyterian, Lutheran and Reform churches all have the same built in error - a state church. (7:4)

### **Repressive police states**

Calvin's police state in Geneva, Zwingli's in Zurich, Knox in Scotland. (7:6)

One only needs to look at ... the police states of Calvin in Geneva and Zwingli in Zurich, or the Puritan witch burnings in Colonial America. (6:5)

The origins of the Vineyard or Kansas City Prophets belief in 'taking over the world for Christ before he returns and setting up the Kingdom - Now' ... is from the Reformed Post Millennial Calvinism and a recycled version of the theocratic Police states of the Reformed churches such as Calvin's Geneva, Zwingli's (sic) Zurich. Knox's Scotland, Cromwell's England and the Pilgrim Father's Massachussetts (sic). (10:3-4)

### **Social injustice**

It is curious that any time an extreme Calvinism ... permeated the social fabric with a church state influence the tragic results were gross social injustice. (7:6)

Reformed theology formed the basis of much colonial exploitation and class oppression in early industrial revolution England. (10:5)

18th Century English industrialists and American plantation owners ... used Reformed ideas to justify sweat shops, exploitative child labour, and slavery. (10:4)

The Reformed Pilgrim Fathers ... encouraged [men] to flog unsubmitive wives with a rod. (10:5)

### **The Anti-Semitic inspiration for the Holocaust**

The same Luther who inspired the Reformation also inspired the Holocaust ... Luther ended his ministry as a vulgar old murdering tyrant - like the popes before him - merely replacing the Roman Catholic Jew Hatred of the Spanish Inquisition with a Protestant Jew Hatred which helped inspire Germany's Third Reich. ... Luther's deranged viciousness...(7:9)

A Protestant anti-Semitism was then promoted by Luther whose sermons later inspired Adolph Hitler and the holocaust. (6:4)

### **Forced conversions**

The only way most Protestant followers of the Reformers sought to convert souls was by the sword.' (7:11)

One must simply understand Calvinistic determinism in light of Islam's Inja Allah to find the common philosophical root. (6:4)

### **Humanism**

We must remember that the reformers were humanists and their exegetical approach is humanistic, meaning it is man centred. (7:2)

### **Denial of the Biblical Gospel**

The Reformers did not rediscover the gospel. (7:5)

These claims are ubiquitous in Prasch's ministry. In his book *The Final Words of Jesus and Satan's Lies Today*<sup>1</sup> he derides the Reformers over and over again claiming that they caused the church to lose its way. In his introduction he says, '*There is only one question that you need to ask concerning this book and only one question that you need to have answered [he then quotes two questions!] Are the things in it true? Are they from the Word of God?*' The real answer is a resounding, 'No, many things stated by Prasch are, in fact, false.' There are many lies regarding historical events and much of his Dispensational, Arminian, Charismatic theology herein expressed is unbiblical. The book is riddled with historical errors and Biblical misstatements; even the doctrine of the atonement is severely compromised. Unschooled Christians reading this book will be deceived and, as a result, damaged. Examples of his anti-Reformation statements follow:-

Grammatical historical exegesis, which the Reformers derived from humanism. (p26)

Anabaptist sects which were in most fundamental respects closer to Biblical Christianity than mainstream Protestantism. (p43)

The anti-mission theology of extreme Calvinism. (p43)

The Reformers' mistake was that instead of returning to the four Gospels, they went back to Augustine. (p44)

Zwingli's police state in Zurich ... Calvin's theocratic state in Geneva. (p45)

Their failure to comprehend the New Covenant. (p45)

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<sup>1</sup> St Matthew Publishing, Cambridge, 1999.

Luther stated: *Cuis [sic] Regio Euis Religio* (“whatever your government is, your religion should be”). (p45)

The Reformation often did little more than replace Roman Catholic tyranny with Protestant dictatorship. (p46)

The social and economic injustices of the Calvinist perspectives which poisoned society, government and their institutions with a formula for repression. (p47)

Puritanism degenerated into witch burning and oppression in the United States. (p48)

The religious oppression that occurred in Zurich, Geneva. (p48)

Statements like these could be multiplied, this is simply a cross section. The charges against the Reformers are:

- Developing a repressive state church system.
- Creating police states.
- Producing gross social injustice.
- Originating dominionism and Reconstructionism.
- Forcing conversion by violence.
- Preparing the way for Hitler and the Holocaust.
- Anti-Semitism.
- Viciousness.
- Tyranny.
- Misunderstanding the Gospel and doing no good to the church.
- The motivation and method of the Reformers was man-centred humanism.
- The Anabaptists were more Biblical.

These are serious charges, if true; however even secular historians demonstrate that most of this is far from true. But even if just part of the charges are true, to select certain ‘facts’ from their historical context and give them a modern meaning is foolish. We must not make cheap points by extrapolating a misunderstanding of an historical event and transfer it into a modern situation. What is necessary is for us to understand the broad sweep of a historical period, see the wood for the trees, and then get to the real facts of a matter and understand it within its historical context. As it happens, much of Prash’s reading of history is jaundiced and superficial, leading to thoroughly erroneous conclusions. His statements are both crass and false.

We shall evaluate the historical facts under several different heads; figures like: Luther, Calvin and Knox; and states like: Germany, Geneva, England and America. While there will be an evaluation of the principal characters and states involved, and some detailed analysis, this is not a work which purports to give a full picture of all Reformation characters, events and theology. Such a work is outside the scope of this little work and would require hundreds of pages; in any event it is a subject that has been covered often enough.

# A Summary History of The Reformation in Germany

## The Renaissance

It is presumed that most readers are familiar with the important events in the development of the Reformation. However, for those who are not, the following pages provide a brief summary of the German situation. For more detailed information, there are very many excellent books on the subject; some of these are mentioned in the bibliography to these papers.

Just as God prepared the world for the birth of his Son and the spread of his Gospel, so the medieval world was prepared for the outbreak of light after so many centuries of darkness. The rediscovery of ancient classical literary treasures had initiated the flowering of the Italian Renaissance<sup>2</sup>, which in turn had elevated men's thought to higher things. Literature and the arts flourished and took giant steps forward. People generally began to think more creatively as the 'modern man' began to emerge. New classic works from the pens of people like: Dante Alighieri (who marks the end of the Middle Ages, 1265-1321), Francesco Petrarch ('the first modern scholar', 1304-1374) and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), began to appear. Some of the best paintings and sculptures in history were executed during this period when Michaelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Raphael Sanzio (perhaps the best painter ever, 1483-1520) all flourished. Florence became the new Athens as the cradle of the Italian Renaissance.

Slower to catch on, the Northern countries, over the Alps, fell under the sway of this progress. The humanist movement, flowing out of the Renaissance, led people like Desiderius Erasmus (Dutch), John Colet (English) and Johannes Reuchlin (German) to study Greek and read Biblical / classical sources first hand without interpretation. The Aristotelian logic of medieval scholasticism succumbed to the mystical Platonism and Neo-Platonism of the Florentine humanists. Latin classical authors were also much studied. Despite these influences, the 14th century saw a desire to express thought in the vernacular.

Crucial in implementing the spread of ideas and making available source material was the invention of the printing press with moveable type. This took place right at the critical time of around 1450. Gutenberg's machinery made the 'instantaneous' multiplication of books possible for the first time in history. It also meant that books could be cheap enough for many more people to purchase; literature became accessible. Before the Reformation German printers turned out about forty new books a year. After 1517 this increased to five hundred.

The Renaissance was many things, but it was not a moral movement; far from it, often it promoted licentiousness. Perhaps a key feature was that it signalled a breaking up of what John Howard Yoder calls: '*the Constantinian symbiosis*', i.e. the partnership of the Roman Church with the Holy Roman Emperor which had held Europe together for 1000 years. Although the church sponsored many works of art, it soon became the target of the

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<sup>2</sup> Literally, 'rebirth' i.e. the awakening, restoration, rebirth and revival of classical learning which started in Florence and spread throughout Europe. The term was not used until the 16th century. A key constituent was humanism and initially the movement was primarily one of literature not art.

humanists who could not condone its corruption. The widespread availability of the scriptures for the first time, and especially the opportunity to examine the Greek original text, led many people to understand that the interpretation of the pope did not concur with what was written by the apostles that he was supposed to follow.

All of these things led directly to an opportunity to seriously challenge the ecclesiastical status quo. The time was ripe to really effect the purging of an evil and polluted system; the problem was that no one, including the young priest and professor Martin Luther, wanted to make such radical changes.

In the century prior to 1517, three major challenges to the authority of the Roman church occurred: Savonarola in Italy and Hus and Jerome of Prague in Bohemia; all led reform movements and suffered death for it.<sup>3</sup> Earlier still John Wycliffe, in England (1328-1384), had attacked Roman corruption and proposed an number of revolutionary theological theses which made him anathema to the pope; the most provocative being that everyone should be able to read the Bible for themselves. He managed to survive the stake, only to be persecuted in the grave, when his body was exhumed for symbolic punishment. He has been called 'the morning star of the Reformation' influencing, among others, Hus and Jerome. His followers, the Lollards, tried to continue his reform movement but were crushed. It seemed that papal power was absolute and any threat, real or perceived, was doomed to failure.

## Enter Martin Luther

Martin Luther was proud to be born of humble peasant stock, but his father had done well in business and Luther was certainly not from a poor background. He entered the Augustinian order and was troubled about salvation for many years before God's truth enlightened his soul and he put his trust in Christ who gives faith for justification. His experiences branded the realisation on his heart that man's good works cannot gain access to God. At the same time he was becoming more aware of the corruption in the church, although initially he did not realise that the pope was at the source of this. A visit to Rome for his order sickened him when he saw the luxury and debauchery of monks and prelates.

As a university professor in Wittenberg in Saxony, his lectures on the Bible were gaining attention and the compelling need for reform, triggered by the sale of indulgences (salvation for money), eventually caused Luther to post 95 theses, or propositions, upon the door of the local church in 1517. (Whether these were actually nailed to the door or just put forward for discussion is now disputed.) Publication of these stirred long-held feelings of concern by all religious people. What Luther said made sense; he was really speaking for them.

The ideas fermented as all of Europe discussed these and similar proposals. The usual routes to nip heresy in the bud all failed as Luther proved to be of indomitable spirit and his ideas difficult to disprove as he based them squarely upon scripture. Cardinal Cajetan tried and failed; the famous, colourful theologian Johann Eck also failed (though he said he won the disputation at Leipzig). At this time others were coming to similar conclusions from their own studies, notably Zwingli in Switzerland, yet the pope did not yet realise that there was a very threatening situation brewing. Luther's determination was revealed in his

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<sup>3</sup> Hus was the most important as he left the Bohemian church behind; part of which became an Anglican prototype (the *Ultraquists*) and part became the United Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*).



public burning of his bull<sup>4</sup> of excommunication.

Luther's situation was different from previous reformers in that he had the continued support of his prince.<sup>5</sup> Frederick the Wise was a God-fearing, if not completely evangelical, man who was one of the seven Electors of the Holy Roman Emperor and, as such, was a very important ruler in Europe. Aware of the need for reform, and protective of his professor, he took careful diplomatic steps to ensure that Luther was not treated as viciously as previous irritants to the papal system, initially by insisting that Luther was heard in Germany where he could safeguard him.<sup>6</sup> The pope was finally convinced, by Eck, that Luther was a threat, but still did not realise how far his ideas were spreading, despite being told by his nuncio (Aleander) in Germany. Accordingly he excommunicated Luther when he refused to recant; this made him fair game and a legitimate target. Usually, a heretic would have been disposed of by this time, and Luther would have been if he had been taken to Italy for his hearing.

As a faithful protector of Roman Catholicism, the recently crowned emperor, Charles V, was being dragged into the problem. Anxious to uphold the 'faith', he was obliged to deal with an enemy of the church in his domain, but he still had to be careful about upsetting the German princes who were vital to the defence of the empire against the threatening Turks on the borders. The Germans felt that Luther had not been properly heard and an imperial meeting, called a Diet, was called for in the city of Worms (pronounced Deeyet of Verms) to examine Luther and his beliefs.

This tribunal is one of the key moments in all history and was a decisive one for the Reformation. Luther stood his ground, refusing to recant unless he could be proved wrong from the Bible. His statements that popes and councils could be wrong astonished listeners. Charles delayed his condemning pronouncements until Luther and the supporting princes had left. In itself this made them illegal and meant that the Diet had not resolved the issue at all, but it did make clear that Luther seemed likely to have a short life. Realising this, Frederick arranged for Luther to be captured by knights on the journey home and took him into protective custody at the Wartburg castle. Here Luther spent his time translating the New Testament into vernacular German, probably the most important thing so far in the course of the Reformation.

During this time Luther's young, scholarly colleague, Melancthon, was looking after the situation in Wittenberg. Things were not going too well. Pandora's box had been opened and some reformers were becoming fanatics. Other colleagues, like Karlstadt (or Carlstadt), were becoming overly radical proposing too much too quick. The social situation was becoming unstable and some knights began to loot monasteries and churches, more for material gain than lofty principle. Luther condemned these things from a distance, but nearly a year later, returned and began to take charge personally. He preached powerfully and effectively against fanaticism and his message and presence gradually brought equilibrium.

The power of Luther's message spread. His books were said to be snatched from the hands of the printer rather than sold. People came from far and wide to hear his teaching. Several of the German princes decided to follow this new doctrine. To what degree they did so for spiritual or material reasons is difficult to determine, but there is no doubt that many of

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<sup>4</sup> Papal document, from *bull*, Latin for 'seal'.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Hus initially had a sympathetic King in Wenceslas and aid from the nobility but the worsening political situation diminished this. The King was forced to abandon him completely.

<sup>6</sup> The treatment of Jan Hus, despite an imperial 'safe conduct', was familiar to all.

them were true believers seeking to do God's will. There were as many disadvantages as advantages in rebelling against the power of Rome. It was at a later Diet in Speyer that these princes were dubbed '*Protestants*' when they protested against the conclusions of the Catholic majority.

The progress of the Reformation is complex and cannot be fully explained here. The German Protestant princes formed a defensive league against imperial threats and suffered various setbacks, but eventually succeeded in gaining the power to determine their own religion and equal treatment with Catholic rulers at the Treaty of Augsburg in 1555.

### Timetable of key events to the death of Knox

Date	Reform event, movement, and publication	Secular history
	<i>Prelude</i>	
1350+		Rise of Italian Renaissance movement.
1384	John Wycliffe dies.	
1415	Jan Hus burned at the stake for heresy.	
1416	Jerome of Prague burned at the stake for heresy.	
1440+		Rise of the humanist movement.
1450+		Rise of Northern Renaissance movement.
1450		Gutenberg prints the <i>Constance Mass Book</i> .
1453		Gutenberg prints the Bible at Mainz.
1483	Birth of Martin Luther on 10 November (d. 1546).	
1484	Birth of Ulrich Zwingli.	
1494	Theocracy of Savonarola in Florence.	
1498	Savonarola burned at the stake.	
1498		Torquemada the inquisitor general of Spain.
1502		University of Wittenberg founded by Frederick Elector of Saxony.
1505	Martin Luther enters Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. Birth of John Knox (d.1572).	
1506		Activity of Johann Tetzel, the Dominican monk and seller of indulgences, in Germany.
1507	Martin Luther ordained to priesthood.	
1508	Luther a student at University of Wittenberg.	
1509	John Calvin born.	Erasmus lectures at Cambridge (until 1514), dedicates <i>In Praise of Folly</i>

		to Thomas More. Jews persecuted in Germany.
1510	Luther in Rome as delegate of his order until 1511.	Erasmus: <i>Institutio Christiani Principis</i> .
1511		Erasmus made professor of Greek at Cambridge.
1512	Luther made Doctor of Divinity, professor of Theology and Prior of an Augustinian priory.	
1513		Peasant revolts in Wurttemberg and Black Forest.
1514		Peasants revolt in Hungary.
1516		Erasmus publishes <i>New Testament</i> with Greek and Latin Text.
	<i>The Reformation</i>	
1517	In protest against the sale of indulgences, <b>Martin Luther posts his 95 theses</b> , on the door of the Palast church in Wittenberg on 31 October. This action kick-starts the Reformation in Germany.	
1518	Luther summoned to the <b>Diet of Augsburg</b> by Cardinal Cajetan but he refuses to recant. [Elector Frederick insisted he be heard in Germany.] Melanchthon appointed professor of Greek at University of Wittenberg.	
1519	Luther questions the infallibility of the pope in <b>disputation at Leipzig</b> with Johann Eck. <b>Zwingli (1484-1531) begins the Swiss Reformation by his preaching in Zürich.</b>	Charles I of Spain, grandson of Emperor Maximilian, becomes Holy Roman Emperor as Charles V.
1520	Beginning of Anabaptist movement in Germany under Thoman Müntzer (1489-1525). <b>Pope Leo X excommunicates Luther</b> (the papal bull, <i>Exsurge Domine</i> , rejected 41 propositions of Luther and declares him to be a heretic). <b>Luther publicly burns the bull.</b> Since <i>Exsurge Domine</i> had not caused Luther to recant, he was formally excommunicated in Jan 1521 by the bull <i>Decet Romanum pontificem</i> .	
1521	<b>Luther summoned to the Diet of Worms.</b> [Charles V had promised that no one would be outlawed without a fair hearing, many felt that Luther had not had this and resented the clerical condemnation as foreign interference.] Cross-examined by Cardinal Aleander (the papal nuncio). Luther is 'kidnapped' for his safety and 'imprisoned' in the Wartburg castle. Here he begins his translation of the Bible into German. Melanchthon caretaker in Wittenberg and writes	Henry VIII (reigned 1509-1547) writes against Luther and Pope Leo X confers upon him the title of <i>Defender of the Faith</i> . Charles V grants his brother, Ferdinand, certain Hapsburg possessions in Austria

	<i>Loci Communes.</i>	
1522	<b>Luther returns to Wittenberg and condemns fanatics. Finishes translation of NT.</b> (OT complete 1534.) 100,000 produced in next 40 years.	Turks capture Rhodes.
1524	Zwingli abolishes Catholic Mass in Zürich. Protestant princes meet at Ulm against Emperor Charles V. Division of Luther and the main humanist movement.	Peasants revolt under Müntzer.
1525	Luther marries former nun Katherine von Bora. Tyndale's translation of the NT printed in Worms. Death of Frederick the Wise, succeeded by his brother, John. <b>First baptisms of Swiss Brethren (Anabaptists) 21 January.</b>	First use of muskets by Spanish infantry of Charles V when he defeats the French and becomes master of Italy. <b>Peasants revolt</b> suppressed, Müntzer executed.
1526	<b>Tyndale's translation admitted into England.</b>	Invasion of Hungary by the Turks.
1527	Reformation begins in Sweden. First Protestant university founded in Marburg.	Ferdinand crowned king of Bohemia & Hungary. The sack of Rome by imperial troops marks the end of the Renaissance.
1528	Balthasar Hubmaier burned at the stake in Vienna. Reformation begins in Scotland. First Protestant martyrs burned in England.	
1529	<b>Colloquy of Marburg</b> (Luther & Zwingli). Publication of Luther's catechisms. <b>Diet of Speyer</b> opens. Lutheran minority (6 princes) protests against the decisions of the Catholic majority (hence term: <i>Protestants</i> ).	Turks invade Germany and besiege Vienna.
1530	<b>Confession of Augsburg</b> prepared by Melanchthon signed by Protestant princes. They form the <b>Schmalkaldic League</b> in defence against Charles V and his catholic allies.	Charles V crowned Holy Roman Emperor. (Last imperial coronation by a pope). Spinning wheel invented in Germany.
1531	War in Switzerland between Protestant and Catholic Cantons. Forest (Catholic) cantons defeated. Zwingli dies.	
1532	English clergy submit to Henry VIII, recognised as Supreme Head of the church. Calvin active in France, Reformation begins there.	
1534	Luther completes German translation of Bible. England breaks away from Rome. [Act of Supremacy makes the king the head of the church.]	Siege of Münster in Westphalia. Ignatius Loyola founds Jesuit order.
1535	Münster capitulates to Hessian army.	

	Catholicism prevails again.	
1536	<b>Act of Parliament declares authority of pope void in England.</b> Start of Church of England. Dissolution of monasteries. <b>Calvin produces first edition of <i>Institutes</i>.</b> Luther publishes <i>Table Talks</i> . Reformation begins in Denmark and Norway. Tyndale burned at the stake.	Erasmus dies.
1538	Calvin and Farel expelled from Geneva. Calvin settles in Strasbourg.	Charles V allies with the French against the Turks.
1539	Calvin: <i>Commentary on Romans</i> .	
1541	<b>Calvin invited back to Geneva.</b> <b>John Knox leads Calvinist Reformation in Scotland.</b>	Turks overrun Hungary.
1543	First Protestants burned at the stake by Spanish inquisition.	Henry allies with Charles against France.
1545-64		<b>Council of Trent</b> meets to formulate policy against the Reformation ('Counter Reformation').
1546	Civil war in Germany (Schmalkaldic War) Schmalkaldic League against emperor. Luther dies.	
1547	<b>Edward VI</b> (Protestant and godly) succeeds Henry VIII (reigns 1547-1553).	
1548	<i>Augsburg Interim</i> .	
1549	<i>Consensus Tigurinus</i> : Twenty-six articles on the sacraments drawn up by Calvin and Bullinger. Agreed the real but spiritual presence of Christ in the elements of the Supper, as opposed to the memorial only of Zwingli or the Consubstantiation of Luther. Published in 1551. This was accepted by most of the Reformed Swiss towns and also by Bucer, Melanchthon, & Cranmer. Introduction of the <i>Book of Common Prayer</i> by Cranmer in England.	
1552	<i>Second Prayer Book of Edward VI</i> . Protestants make compact with France at Chambord.	
1553		Edward VI dies. Mary I becomes queen of England (reigns 1553-1558).
1554		Catholic restoration in England.
1555	John Knox returns from exile in Geneva. <b>Peace of Augsburg</b> : Lutheran states to enjoy equal rights with Catholic ones.	
1556	Thomas Cranmer burned at the stake.	Charles V abdicates assigning Spain and Netherlands to his son Philip

		II and Holy Roman Empire to his brother Ferdinand I; retires to a monastery.
1558		Elizabeth I queen of England (reigns 1558-1603).
1559	Elizabethan Prayer Book. <b>University of Geneva founded.</b> Knox returns to Scotland to lead work of Reformation after exile in Geneva.	
1560	Melanchthon dies. Beginnings of Puritanism in England. Church of Scotland founded.	
1562	1200 French Huguenots (Protestants) slain at Massacre of Vassy; first war of religion begins. English Articles of religion of 1552 reduced to 39 Articles.	Third session of Council of Trent convenes.
1563	The term 'Puritan' first used in England. Death of John Calvin. Persecution of Huguenots starts in France.	Council of Trent ends. Counter Reformation begins in Bavaria.
1566	Bullinger unites Calvinism with Zwinglianism in <i>Second Helvetic Confession</i> .	
1571		Battle of Lepanto: Allied Christian fleet destroys larger Turkish fleet.
1572	Death of John Knox. The <i>St Bartholomew's Day Massacre</i> in France killing tens of thousands of Huguenots.	Dutch Rebellion [Dutch Republic starts 1579.]

## Key Reformers

### **Magisterial (main) Reformers and main place of ministry**

Martin Luther (1483-1546) – Wittenberg, Germany.

Ulrich Zwingli (1494-1531) – Basel (Basle) & Zürich, Switzerland.

John Calvin (1509-1564) – Geneva, Switzerland.

John Knox (1514-1572) – Scotland.

### **German Reformers**

Andreas Carlstadt (1480-1541) – was condemned with Luther and defended him against Johann Eck but later separated from Luther and influenced the Anabaptists.

Philipp Melancthon (1497-1560). Successor to Luther.

Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1585). Co-wrote Heidelberg Catechism.

Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587). Co-wrote Heidelberg Catechism.

### **Swiss Reformers**

Johann Oecolampadius (1482-1531). Brought Reformation to Basel; close friend of Zwingli.

Guillaume Farel (1489-1565). Involved in bringing Reformation to Berne, Neuchâtel and Geneva.

Martin Bucer (1491-1551). Led Reformation in Strasbourg.

Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575). Zwingli's successor in Zürich.

Theodore Beza (1519-1605). Calvin's successor in Geneva.

### **English Reformers**

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556). Archbishop of Canterbury 1533. Burned by Mary Tudor.

Hugh Latimer (1485-1555). Bishop of Worcester 1535. Burned in Oxford by Mary Tudor.

Nicholas Ridley (1500-1555). Bishop of London 1550. Burned with Latimer.

John Hooper (1495-1555). Bishop of Gloucester & Worcester. Burned by Mary Tudor.

# Martin Luther and the German Princes

It has become fashionable, in some Arminian circles, to castigate Luther as a murdering tyrant; a vulgar, despotic, Jew-hating manipulator. These are sad times. Previous church ages have consistently seen Luther as a champion under the hand of God, who fearlessly broke the hold of a persecuting, evil and corrupt ecclesiastical system. Living closer to his times, and often persecuted for the same faith themselves, our forefathers would not make such a tragic and erroneous mistake. But in our comfortable affluent lifestyles, middle class Charismatics, anxious to draw closer and closer to the Roman church, find more problems with Luther than the church he broke from. In opposition to them, Calvinist-hating leaders of the equally Charismatic Jewish Root/Messianic movement also deride the Reformation as Jew-hating rationalism, scholasticism and Dominionism. The important factor is - *what is the truth of the matter?* To answer this question we must look at Luther himself, the movement he unwittingly initiated and his relationship with the state.

## Luther's character

Luther is *the* German Christian personality that stands out in history. In his contribution to the church he ranks with the American Edwards, the English Owen, Augustine of Hippo or Athanasius of Alexandria. Luther was totally motivated to serve and obey his master, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the key part of that service was to open up the truth of God's word to his people: '*the true treasure of the church is the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God*', he once said.<sup>7</sup> This was why he laboured so intensely. Despite the lies of his defamers, Luther was not interested in money, although he lived to a reasonable standard from his stipend.

If the great pains and labour I take sprang not from the love, and for the sake of him that died for me, the world could not give me money enough to write only one book, or to translate the Bible. I desire not to be rewarded ... the world is too poor to give me satisfaction; I have not asked the value of one penny of my master the Prince Elector of Saxony, since I have been here.<sup>8</sup>

Wealth is the smallest thing on earth, the least gift that God has bestowed on mankind. What is it in comparison to God's word.<sup>9</sup>

The German people loved him because he was one of them. He could speak to them without pomp or erudition and yet be passionate and stirring in his clarity. His writing was also able to communicate deep truths about God in a way that the ordinary worker could grasp and enjoy. His writings still maintain that hold today. This is because he aimed to educate the lowliest among his hearers; he was concerned with getting the message across, not sounding clever.

Perhaps Luther's most publicised trait is his earthiness. In his refusal to put on airs and graces, he abounded in down to earth expressions, which could become caustic or even bawdy. His colourful language was the speech of a peasant, full of metaphors and superlatives but very able to express a point clearly, frequently with great humour. The problem was that he sometimes let himself run away with this and went too far. In his

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<sup>7</sup> From the 95 theses.

<sup>8</sup> *Table Talk*, p64.

<sup>9</sup> *Table Talk*, p67.



passion for a subject, especially if it touched God's glory, he gave full vent to his spleen and he could be unrestrained. However, it should also be remembered that Luther opened himself up to scrutiny unlike no other historical figure. His voluminous writings are candid, expressing his viewpoint on almost every topic. He is exceptionally frank about his inner strife, failings, shortcomings and weaknesses. Consequently, it is difficult to compare Luther's character with other historical figures as we know comparatively little about them. With Luther we know his fears, his dreams, his anxieties, his many maladies, his loves, his thoughts, his works, his relationships and so on. If ever a man wore his heart on his sleeve, it was he.

Despite Luther's simplicity, he was undoubtedly a genius and exceptionally creative. As well as musical and poetic abilities, his theological writings and sermons show unusual artistic command and originality of thought. Like Calvin, he was perfectly suited to the job God had prepared him for. Here was a man of immense courage and fortitude based upon his fear of God; he was so concerned with God's glory that he had no fear of man.

He did not rely upon his gifts or unusual abilities, but worked tremendously hard. It is said that he published at the rate of a new piece every fortnight.<sup>10</sup> He was a volcano of a man, fired up with God's truth, ignited by the Holy Spirit and continually erupting with teaching. His boldness made him all the more popular with the people, his eloquence carried all before him enchanted, his authority could make people tremble, his genius had strength and power.

Luther never originally intended to start an international Reformation, indeed he was a reluctant reformer at first; but as he became aware of God's task, he took up the cause with typical diligence and passion. He only abandoned tradition as he was led to no other choice from his reading of scripture. Indeed Luther often opened up the way by revealing a certain truth, leaving others like: Melanchthon to deal with theological issues, Bugenhagen constitutional ones and Philip of Hesse the political elements.

All these things added together made him a magnetic personality, larger than life. Indeed all the important personalities of the time were drawn to him and Calvin thought highly of him, though they never met face to face.

## **Luther's relationships with rulers**

Some have felt that Luther's association with the civil authorities was a case of, 'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours', that these princes were just out to secure their own interests and evidenced no Christian piety at all. Luther's dependence upon them was such, we are told, that the Reformation has been termed the 'Princes' Reformation'; the theological dispute only served political interests. This appraisal has now been totally discredited. Though some of the princes were half hearted in their avowal of Protestant faith and though they had one eye on political advantage, they were not generally impious. The Elector/Prince Frederick, Luther's protector,<sup>11</sup> though not as thoroughly Evangelical as Luther would have liked, was very religious but unenlightened (he revered a collection of relics for instance). His son (John Frederick) was partly educated by Luther whom he

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<sup>10</sup> Elton, p18.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick the Wise (1486–1525) protected him from papal and imperial forces because Luther was his subject and the best-known professor at his recently founded University of Wittenberg (1502). He used the court chaplain and lawyer Georg Spalatin as a go-between with Luther to avoid compromising himself more than necessary during the dangerous controversies of the day. *Christian History*, 34.

considered his spiritual father. He was an ardent, evangelical supporter of the Reformation when he ruled from 1532 to 1547. Frederick's brother John (who ruled from 1525–1532) was also a genuine believer in Luther's reforms.

Although there were potential gains for Protestant princes, there were also tremendous risks and dangers. There was a definite possibility that the Emperor would advance against Germany and take their land by force replacing them with more 'faithful' Catholic electors. It was only the complex political situation and the threat of the Turks<sup>12</sup> which prevented this, under the sovereignty of God. There were definite acts of courage and defiance involved, including imprisonment for John Frederick and Philip of Hesse.<sup>13</sup>

On the other side of the coin, Luther frequently criticised the ecclesiastical princes,<sup>14</sup> especially early on, and harshly pounded the secular princes during his later years.<sup>15</sup> He also developed the initial theory of resistance to political power. He was no fawning 'yes man', dependent upon a ruler. Why did Luther not fear biting the hand that fed him when he severely criticised the nobility? Answer, because he felt that his duty to God and His word was more important than keeping in good relationship with his protectors. He would not be diverted from his pastoral responsibilities, even towards rulers. If they were wrong, he told them so. The Reformation was clearly a spiritual event based upon a fresh revelation of truth, not something primarily political, although there were political overtones and implications.

### **The rule of the prince**

Like Calvin after him, Luther was anxious that the church and the state worked together to establish a better rule of God in a just society. Luther's general view on government can be seen in this quote:

The spiritual government or authority should direct the people vertically toward God that they may do right and be saved; just so the secular government should direct the people horizontally toward one another, seeing to it that body, property, honour, wife, child, house, home, and all manner of goods remain in peace and security and are blessed on earth. God wants the government of the world to be a symbol of true salvation and of his kingdom of heaven.<sup>16</sup>

It was the Roman Catholic Church which sought to dominate the state, not Protestantism. For Luther, God's kingdom is worked-out through the Gospel in the church; but God also works through the civil authority to control justice and social order.

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<sup>12</sup> The Ottoman Empire lay poised to attack central Europe from 1520 onwards.

<sup>13</sup> Elector Frederick of Saxony was the only human reason Luther survived the early years of the Reformation. He insisted that his professor was examined in Germany instead of Rome in 1518, he refused to recognise the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* in 1520, and he demanded that Luther be heard before the German Diet in 1521 as well as 'kidnapping' Luther and hiding him in the Wartburg castle. Although Frederick was a powerful political force in the empire, this was a very dangerous game to play. When the outnumbered princes appeared at the Protestation of Speyer in 1529, their hopes were small and they acted sincerely. They were the first people in imperial history to stand against the emperor at a government meeting. In the 1540's when the emperor arrived with Spanish troops to crush them they still would not yield. Appropriating a few church goods and lands was not worth this risk; there had to be more. The humble sincerity of the landgrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach was typical of most of them.

<sup>14</sup> In his writings and preaching, Luther frequently urged rulers to restraint and justice.

<sup>15</sup> Luther identified the culprits when he berated evil princes, unlike others less bold. His attack against the Catholic Georg of Ducal Saxony, for instance, combines theology and powerful sarcasm. He once said of politicians that they '*are generally the biggest fools and worst scoundrels on earth, but God will find them out, better than anyone else can, as indeed he has done since the beginning of the world.*' *Christian History*, 34.

<sup>16</sup> *Commentary on Psalm 101*, 1534.

God gives to the emperor the sword, the emperor delivers it to the judge, and causes thieves, murderers etc. to be punished and executed.<sup>17</sup>

Government is a sign of the divine grace, of the mercy of God, who has no pleasure in murdering, killing, and strangling. If God left all things to go which way they would, as among the Turks and other nations, without good government, we should quickly despatch one another out of this world.<sup>18</sup>

A good ruler worked together with God. Luther likened the prince to a fishnet in a lake into which God then drives all evildoers for punishment. However, as they only operate under the authority of God, if princes do not maintain the rule of good law, then they too will be condemned by God. Luther warned the princes that they were accountable for their decisions and would have to answer to God for their own misdemeanours. Fundamental to a good society was that the Gospel should be held in honour. The prince should, therefore, support and undergird the church. A society which preaches the true Gospel will be aided in the proper ordering of society.<sup>19</sup>

Good magistrates were worthy of honour and should be prayed for, especially as the position led easily to corruption. A well ordered community is a testimony to God just as anarchy and injustice is abhorrent to him. Hence Luther could use terms like: *father*, *helper*, *caretaker* and *God's official* for the ruler. But a prince who ruled without law, following his own subjective feelings, is considered by Luther to be a monster, worse than a wild beast.<sup>20</sup>

### **The rule of law**

So, the magistrate works on the basis of the natural law of love and operates under the authority of God. The social statutes did not just punish sin (as Augustine emphasised) but had a positive effect for good as well; but punishment and a deterrent was its most important social use:

This is the first point concerning the law, that it must be used to deter the ungodly from their wicked and mischievous intentions. For the Devil ... allures people to work all manner of sin and wickedness; wherefore God has ordained magistrates, elders, schoolmasters, laws and statutes [to] ... bind the claws of the devil.<sup>21</sup>

Like Calvin, Luther did not favour a rigid adoption of the Law of Moses in German society, unlike modern Reconstructionists (Theonomic dominionists). Mosaic Law was solely for Jews. Only the moral law (natural law) as summed up in the Ten Commandments was applicable to all societies. In this law, God shows men what his will is and how evil should be punished.

Neither Namaan the Assyrian, nor Job, nor Joseph, nor Daniel, nor many other good and godly Jews, observed Moses' laws out of their country, but those of the Gentiles among whom they lived... Therefore let us leave Moses to his laws, excepting only the Moralia, which God has planted in nature, as the ten commandments, which govern God's true worshipping and service, and a civil life.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Table Talk*, p130.

<sup>18</sup> *Table Talk*, p308.

<sup>19</sup> *Table Talk*, p308-9.

<sup>20</sup> *Table Talk*, p309.

<sup>21</sup> *Table Talk*, p131.

<sup>22</sup> *Table Talk*, p129-130.

### **Resistance when necessary**

Despite all this, Luther taught that it was necessary to resist a tyrant who violated God's natural law and the principles of justice. Everyone should seek to be a good citizen, obeying sound laws, but if a government establishes laws that are contrary to God's natural law, the citizen must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). This should take the form of disobedience and passive resistance. Like Calvin, Luther was anxious to steer clear of active or violent opposition (Rm 13:1) with the exception of those he saw were especially called and empowered by God to command a revolution, like Samson. He was no fool and realised that it may be simple to overthrow a government but not necessarily so easy to create a better one.

Luther followed this approach even when his own life was at risk. Between 1529 and 1530 he refused to sanction resistance by Elector John to the emperor until convinced by legal experts on the basis of imperial law.

### **The sharpness of Luther in later life**

As the Reformation progressed, Luther took on more and more responsibility for holding the movement together and was the main stabilising influence; but this tension led to changes in his character whereby the harder features were accentuated. He became more abrupt and dogmatic, leading him occasionally to cause offence. It did not help him to be treated like a pope by some people; indeed he could be arrogant and intolerant towards his enemies. Gradually, his never-ending controversies began to put a sharper edge on his pen; but he was never less than a creative genius.

Luther is famous for the caustic comments and earthy, pithy speech of these times. While this is typical of Saxon, peasant, social life to a degree, it still comes as a shock to us, and Luther was sometimes considered excessive even by his peers. While not excusing some of Luther's excesses, which continue to embarrass his biographers, we should be aware of contributing factors to his bilious outbursts.<sup>23</sup>

The first is that we must get the matter into perspective. Luther wrote about 90 volumes of theological writings and only a few pages can be considered at all vitriolic. He was not always a vehement writer but felt strongly about error, which he understood as emanating directly from Satan in opposition to God's work; as such he attacked it vigorously.

We must understand the pressures upon him. He was working hard: writing, preaching, counselling, dealing with rulers regarding affairs of state, dealing with crises in the church, encouraging the flock, looking after his large family. He took on fights denouncing the evils surrounding the work in tracts and letters. His help was sought from near and far. He was continually attacked by the Catholic leadership, humanist scholars and by schismatic groups. He grew sad as he saw the Lutheran church fail to grow according to scriptural principles and sadder to see an inadequate transformation of character in his congregation. He was also hurt by the division of the Christians in southern Germany and bitterly disappointed by the quarrels amongst theologians. His works highlight his

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<sup>23</sup> One example should suffice. In treating the subject of reason, in the context of coming to Christ in our own strength apart from grace, Luther states: *'Reason is the Devils' greatest whore; by nature and manner of being she is a noxious whore; she is a prostitute, the Devil's appointed whore; a whore eaten by scab and leprosy who ought to be trodden underfoot and destroyed, she and her wisdom ... throw dung in her face to make her ugly. She is and ought to be drowned in baptism ... she would deserve, the wretch, to be banished to the filthiest place in the house to the closets.'* *Works Erl*, 16, 142-148 (1546).

dejection most clearly. Despite all this, his family life and friends continually encouraged him to rise above it all, but such stress must have taken its toll.

Also, Luther was not a caustic, nasty person socially. He could laugh at himself. When congratulated by his church in Wittenberg for boldly facing the imperial and papal onslaught at the Diet of Worms, Luther stated that the Reformation took place while he and Melancthon were having a beer. An insight into his real character is shown in an incident on his wedding night. Finally left alone after the celebrations at 11 p.m., Luther's opponent, Andreas Karlstadt who had fled the city, knocked at the door. He was now fleeing the Peasants' War and needed shelter, Luther took him in.

Luther, like Calvin, was beset with various painful illnesses which increased in severity until he died from one of them [angina pectoris in 1546]. Arising from his vigorous practices as a monk he first developed digestive difficulties and delicate health. He then declined, developing: constipation, haemorrhoids, dizzy spells, tinnitus, kidney and gall stones, from which, at that time, there was no effective medication. He also suffered from: headaches, an ulcerated leg, insomnia, nightmares, anxiety attacks, and *Anfechtung*, ['inner turmoil', temptation or depression which he called 'bouts with the Devil'].<sup>24</sup> By the time he was 62, Luther was almost blind in one eye, hard of hearing, and subject to bouts of angina. He was also prone to anger, a common feature in men called to wage war or carry the standard alone in the face of great opposition. A thick skin was vital.

Yet his many ailments did not restrict his productivity. Excluding Bible translations, Luther produced some 360 published works from 1516 to 1530. From 1531 to his death in 1546, he added another 184 publications to this incredible total. At the same time, he lectured regularly at the university, preached for long stretches in the parish church, wrote hundreds of letters, advised princes in numerous memoranda, and closely followed the events of his day.<sup>25</sup>

Before one is quick to criticise, we should consider the large number of maladies he suffered, the pain he must have been in continually, the tiredness of so much work undertaken, and the desperate need to fulfil the work that he felt God had called him to do in the face of extreme Satanic opposition. We should also consider that he was in constant threat from assassination and suffered from continual slander and personal attacks. This does not excuse mistakes, but we must properly evaluate the context of them. We should also bear in mind that towards the end of his life, he became more peaceful, more like his old self.

It took a specific sort of tough personality to initiate the Reformation and continue to dominate its early development, defending the church against all sorts of vehement attacks on doctrine, practice and social stability. A retiring man of modest nature would not have lasted five minutes in the heat of battle that Luther endured for decades.<sup>26</sup> This is why God used Luther to be the hammer to break Roman political and religious domination, but used the more sensitive and retiring Calvin to systematise its thought and theology. God carefully prepares the vessels he uses for specific tasks. Despite this, Luther was aware of

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<sup>24</sup> An example of this would be the following: *'The Devil so assails me that I do not know whether there's any God or not'*. To this we must add that his trials brought Luther closer to God and built up his faith. In fact, he was sometimes so elated that he felt himself to be amid choirs of angels. Luther's work was never impaired by his black moods.

<sup>25</sup> *Christian History*, Issue 39.

<sup>26</sup> Even Luther died a physically broken and tired man at 63, worn down by hard work and illness, though his mind was still clear and he regained his serene temper.

his failings:

I cannot deny that I am more vehement than I should be ... But they assail me and God's Word so atrociously and criminally that ... these monsters are carrying me beyond the bounds of moderation.<sup>27</sup>

He found it difficult to control himself in his strong defence of the faith, but felt that he was like Christ in this:

What do you think of Christ? Was he abusive when he called the Jews an adulterous and perverse generation, an offspring of vipers, hypocrites, and children of the Devil?... The truth, which one is conscious of possessing, cannot be patient against its obstinate and intractable enemies.

I Was Born To Go To War and give battle to sects and devils, that is why my books are stormy and warlike.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps his successor, Melancthon, best summed up this matter while giving the funeral oration for Luther, no stranger to an occasional rebuke himself,

Some by no means evil-minded persons have complained that Luther displayed too much severity. I will not deny this. But I answer in the language of Erasmus 'Because of the magnitude of the disorders, God gave this age a violent physician'.<sup>29</sup>

## Recent misrepresentations of Luther's ideas

### Lie number 1: Luther supported forced conversions by governments.

Luther ... taught '*Cuis [sic] Regio Eius Religio*' ('What Your Government Is, So Your Religion Is' - if your government is Roman Catholic, so are you, and if Protestant - so are you).<sup>30</sup>

Luther stated: *Cuis [sic] Regio Eius Religio* ("whatever your government is, your religion should be").<sup>31</sup>

Statements like this are too crass to believe. It implies that Luther had no mission vision and cared nothing for the Gospel. If this is true, why did the Reformation occur at all? Everyone lived in a Roman Catholic state in 1517. What motivation would Luther have had for rocking the boat? Luther did not teach this at all. What is being referred to is the truce agreed with the emperor in 1555 at the Diet of Augsburg, regarding the situation as it stood in Germany at that time. Here, the Protestant rulers finally forced him to accept the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* — the princes of the empire are to determine the religion of their own lands. Requiring a political compromise, the emperor had to accede to the status quo, he had to accept the fact of the Reformation as established in parts of Germany. And by the way, Luther had been dead, at this time, for nearly ten years. This is another case where a convenient 'fact' is misrepresented to add weight to an argument (in this instance that Luther supported state control of conscience); but to add the lie that a political formula agreed by the emperor was a statement of the dead Luther is supremely crass.

### Lie number 2: Luther forced conversion at the point of the sword.

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<sup>27</sup> *Christian History*, Issue 39.

<sup>28</sup> *Christian History*, Issue 39.

<sup>29</sup> *Christian History*, Issue 39.

<sup>30</sup> Jacob Prasch, *Moriel Newsletter*, 7:5.

<sup>31</sup> Jacob Prasch, *The Final Words of Jesus*, St Matthew Publishing, Cambridge, 1999, p45.

Jacob Prasch insists that Luther and the early Reformers encouraged enforced conversion at sword point by the state, but Roland Bainton's authoritative biography of Luther says: Luther still held stoutly to his objection to any compulsion to faith.

He also quotes Luther as saying:

'I cannot admit that false teachers are to be put to death' ... Luther's concern was always that the faith be unimpeded. Anyone might help; no one might hinder. If the prince would render assistance, let it be accepted. If he interfered, then let him be disobeyed. This remained Luther's principle to the end of his life.<sup>32</sup>

We can add other words from Luther:

It is with the Word that we must fight, by the Word we must overthrow and destroy what has been set up by violence. I will not make use of force against the superstitious and unbelieving.... No one must be constrained. Liberty is the very essence of faith.... I will preach, discuss, and write; but I will constrain none, for faith is a voluntary act.... I have stood up against the pope, indulgences, and papists, but without violence or tumult. I put forward God's Word; I preached and wrote--this was all I did. The Word alone did all. If I had wished to appeal to force, the whole of Germany would perhaps have been deluged with blood...

God's Word should be allowed to work alone, without our work or interference. Why? Because it is not in my power to fashion the hearts of men as the potter moulds the clay.... I can get no further than their ears; their hearts I cannot reach. And since I cannot pour faith into their hearts, I cannot, nor should I, force anyone to have faith. That is God's work alone, who causes faith to live in the heart.... We should preach the Word, but the results must be left solely to God's good pleasure.<sup>33</sup>

### **Lie number 3: Luther hated Jews.**

Again it is vital that we get what Luther wrote into perspective. He was not an anti-Semite; in fact in 1523, Luther charged Catholics of being unfair to Jews and treating them like dogs, thus ruining the Gospel message to them. He recommended dealing gently with them and treating them cordially. Concerning his attitude to the Jews as a people, he considered them as better than Catholics and recommended love not force in contact with them:

What good can we do the Jews when we constrain them, malign them and hate them as dogs? ... We should use towards the Jews ... Christ's law of love...We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life. If some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either.<sup>34</sup>

In 1538 Jews began to cause trouble and hinder the work of Reformation so Luther wrote against them. He concluded that missionary work towards Jews was hopeless as God had deserted them; they had been deprived of their land and their temple. If God had despaired of them, and rejected them, then one might with good conscience ignore them. Luther did not, however, hold Jews responsible for the death of Christ. As he wrote in a hymn, '*We dare not blame ... the band of Jews; ours is the shame.*'

Later in life when he was often ill and beset by many severe trials and difficulties, he heard

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<sup>32</sup> Table Talk, p314

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in, *Civilization And The Protestant Reformation*, Trinity Foundation.

<sup>34</sup> Roland Bainton, *Here I stand*, Hodder (1951), p379.

news that Christians were being affected by Judaisers in Moravia. He responded with a severe tract<sup>35</sup> recommending that Jews be deported to Palestine or forced to work on the land (i.e. not by usury), their books confiscated and their synagogues burned. This formed part of a seven measure proposal of 'sharp mercy' that German princes could take against Jews: (1) burn their schools and synagogues; (2) transfer Jews to community settlements; (3) confiscate all Jewish literature, which was blasphemous; (4) prohibit rabbis to teach, on pain of death; (5) deny Jews safe-conduct, so as to prevent the spread of Judaism; (6) appropriate their wealth and use it to support converts and to prevent the lewd practice of usury; (7) assign Jews to manual labour as a form of penance. However, since most Jews had been expelled from Germany before 1536, Luther's counsel was implemented by few officials. Shortly before his death at the height of his illness Luther did say, '*We are at fault for not slaying them*'.

Yes this was wrong, but his error is not racist, it was response to a threat against the church and state. Did not Paul react to the same situation even more vehemently? He tells the Galatians that he wished the Judaisers (Jews) troubling the church would castrate themselves. (Gal 5:12). We have already seen that Luther reacted to threats against the church and the progress of the Reformation as if it was, in reality, orchestrated personally by the Devil himself. As such, he felt that vehement opposition was his only recourse to rid the community of such anti-Christian evil. From the distance of 500 years it is easy to condemn him for overreacting, but his contemporaries were less critical.<sup>36</sup> One must also remember that blasphemy was a civil crime everywhere, and for Jews to try to convert Protestants to Judaism using rabbinical teaching, was blasphemy. Luther could not '*have any fellowship or patience with obstinate [Jewish] blasphemers and those who defame this dear Saviour*'.<sup>37</sup>

To put this into perspective, we should compare his vehement words against the peasants after their revolt in 1525, an action which had become cruelly violent (see later). He wrote in very severe language against them at this point<sup>38</sup> because they threatened social stability, were violent anarchists and if this were not put down harshly it would endanger the whole work of Reformation (i.e. Catholic princess could say that Reformation leads to anarchy and social disruption). Luther's ideas had not caused this revolt, but had merely fitted in with the peasant's political aims. [It was this event which helped to convince Luther that further Reformation needed the political support of the princes.]

But if we simply took these words as an indication of Luther's feelings about peasants generally we would be very wrong. After the revolt he pleaded for the peasants and effected some releases, while the Catholic princes gave out cruel punishments. It is also noteworthy that the insurrection was absent, or very mild, in Reformed areas. He was a peasant himself and his whole ministry was directed to edifying the ordinary working man. He was always beloved by the peasants in his ministry and spent his life helping them. Vituperative words written in a time of social chaos for a specific political point (to discourage

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<sup>35</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543). The worst that Luther said is: '*Set fire to their synagogues or schools,*' Jewish houses should '*be razed and destroyed,*' and Jewish '*prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, [should] be taken from them ... their rabbis [should] be forbidden to teach on pain of loss of life and limb ... all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them .... [Jews should have] 'a flail, an axe, a hoe, a spade put into their hands' [so they could] 'earn their bread in the sweat of their brow.'*

<sup>36</sup> In his final years his friends did criticise his vituperation towards the Jews as excessive and rabid.

<sup>37</sup> *Christian History*, Issue 39.

<sup>38</sup> In his tract, *Against the murderous and thieving rabble of the peasants*. The publication of this after the peasants had been crushed by the Lutheran and Catholic princes gave it a different spin, making it look savage.



anarchistic rebellion) are not indicative of his overall position. The same is true regarding the Jews.

We should also consider that social stability was very important in the minds of all Reformers. The Islamic Turks were at the borders threatening to overrun Europe and social disintegration was all they required to gain the advantage. A prolonged and widespread civil war, which was not entirely prevented, would have made Europe easy picking for invasion. As it is, Europe only narrowly managed to hold back the Turks. This is why Luther, supported by everyone, was so hard on the peasants when they rebelled, and so set against the Anabaptists, as well as the Jews – they all threatened social stability. It was vital that the Reformation did not cause enough political disruption as to result in anarchy.

We must, therefore, keep in mind that Luther only reacted strongly to issues which, for him, confronted the cause of the Gospel, he was not driven by personal animosity towards individuals or ethnic groups. An example of his personal attitude towards Jews can be seen in this incident:

Two Jewish rabbis ... came to me at Wittenberg, desiring of me letters of safe conduct, which I granted them, and they were well pleased.<sup>39</sup>

We must also consider the accusation, of Jacob Prasch, that Luther inspired the Holocaust and Adolph Hitler. The National Socialists used Luther to support their jingoistic xenophobia, considering him to be a genuine Aryan. So what? The fact that Hitler quoted Luther is irrelevant. Despots frequently quote the Bible, does that mean that the Bible leads to tyranny? Charles Manson found violent inspiration in the Beatles' song 'Helter Skelter', but that does not make Paul McCartney a provocateur of murder. This is a facile conclusion to make and typical of poor scholarship leading to falsehood.

Jacob Prasch frequently picks out historical facts that suit his purpose and ignores others. He does not mention that Luther also criticised the nobility (at great risk) as well as peasants, clerics and other Reformers. None of us will ever fully realise the difficulties facing Luther in establishing and continuing the course of the Reformation and liberation of the church from darkness. Luther was also concerned, and responsible to a degree, for the volatile social situation and needed to continually consider the good of the general population and domestic security. In this he sometimes erred (theologically) in order to keep the peace. Who are we to judge? I have not been able to locate evidence for the references to inciting murder that Jacob Prasch mentions (unless he refers to his tract against the peasants); this would be contrary to Luther's theology. However, one must remember that in those days the civil law of most nations prescribed execution for many more offences than today, including blasphemy. The putting down of rebellion with force by the legal government was also considered to be just by all honest citizens.

Luther was no racist. His attacks on the Jews were based upon theological presuppositions and the need to ensure social stability. In his early years his policy towards them was enlightened but as he got older and sicker, and facing increased threats to the work of God, Luther changed and wrote things which were clearly excessive.

#### **Lie number 4: Luther incited the murder of the peasants.**

Firstly, Luther once proudly proclaimed, *'I am the son of a peasant'*. His father had been of peasant stock but had worked hard as a copper-mining entrepreneur to become middle

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<sup>39</sup> *Table Talk*, p350.

class. Luther was not an aristocrat, or an upper class pedant who looked down upon the working classes; the ordinary working man remained dear to him all his life.

Regarding the Peasant's Revolt, Luther felt some responsibility since his theological stand had set an example of courageous defiance of authority. Luther was also no respecter of dignities; he had condemned inequality and taught Christian liberty (although meaning in the kingdom of God). In 1524-5, Southern German peasants rebelled and the uprising spread. Some moderate peasants hoped that Luther would arbitrate for them in the crisis; and he published *Exhortation for Freedom* (or, *Admonition to Peace*) analysing the 12 articles of the Swabian peasants, which sympathised with just grievances. He criticised the princes but rejected ideas of insurrection. In this document Luther blamed the unrest on the rulers who had mistreated their subjects. Many of the peasants' demands were just, he said, and for the sake of peace the rulers should help them. But Luther also warned the peasants for using scripture to justify their secular demands when the Gospel taught obedience to secular authorities and the acceptance of injustice.

It didn't work; in the spring of 1525 the Thuringian peasants rebelled, with Thomas Müntzer (a radical, mystical reformer) among their leaders, and it seemed likely that they would carry all before them. The revolt also became cruelly violent. These events swung Luther over to the side of the princes. Facing imminent social chaos, Luther wrote a virulent broadsheet in May 1525, *Against the Murdering and Thieving Hordes of Peasants*, in which he urged the princes to 'smite, strangle, and stab [the peasants], secretly or openly, for nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel. It is just as when one must kill a mad dog; if you do not strike him, he will strike you and a whole land with you'.

The tract needs to be read in historical context: it is not as vicious as Müntzer's hysterical, violent manifestos, and was published as an appendix to his equable tract on the 12 articles. Moreover, what was written facing domestic upheaval and anarchy reads very differently after the peasant's downfall at the Battle of Frankenhausen, May 15, 1525, when the peasants were brutally suppressed. Remember that Luther pleaded for the peasants and gained some releases from the Protestant princes while the Catholic rulers gave out cruel penalties. and that the rebellion was very mild in Protestant areas.

## Benefits of Luther's ideas to civilisation

Democracy, civil rights and liberties, constitutional government, religious liberty, and the free market all find their roots in the Reformation.<sup>40</sup>

Many of the benefits noted here will also apply in our study of Calvin. It was Luther who opened up most of the truths developed during the Reformation, at least in seed form. His teaching had far reaching effects on Germany and modern western nations. Apart from political repercussions, Luther established the form of German literary development with his translation of the Bible into the vernacular; in this work he is often likened to Shakespeare's effect upon English speaking people. It is still published and read today. In fact, Luther really fashioned the character of the German people to a great degree. But it is in society that we notice the most powerful effects (remember we are not here considering Luther's benefits to the church and theology<sup>41</sup>).

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<sup>40</sup> *Civilization And The Protestant Reformation*, Trinity Foundation.

<sup>41</sup> These benefits would take much more than the scope allowed in this paper. Luther's' contribution to the

European and American history have to be read in the light of the Reformation. This is the turning point of history. The development of democratic constitutions arose from the freedom which the ideas of Luther and others initiated. The Roman Catholic church's control over politics, rulers and social life was completely undermined and this gave rise to the modern view of politics. The Renaissance affected culture but it was the Reformation which changed society. Since the pope's consent was no longer necessary for new ideas, there was also a benefit to thinking. The narrow boundaries which the church imposed upon scientific advances were destroyed resulting in the swift formulation of new ideas and many new discoveries in an open field of science. The Reformation brought liberty.

There is a direct connection between the Reformation cry of sola scriptura and the American idea of the Constitution--not any man or body of men--as the supreme law of the land.<sup>42</sup>

Luther's teaching sounded the death knell for the discrimination against 'lay' people in the church. His emphasis upon everyone having a priestly role in the church's relationship with God released the ordinary person from the shackles of ineffectiveness in spiritual things. But it also led to a new understanding of the value of the individual. Spirituality was not to be maintained by shutting oneself away in a cloister or a cave, monasticism was heavily attacked by Luther; true spirituality was honouring God in whatever task one was called to undertake. The family and the normal professions were given credibility and respect.

Luther thus gave the death blow to the false basis of papal authority. He argued that Christians were free of the arbitrary control of the church or the state. God alone is lord of the conscience. A Christian should learn to obey the word of God and needs no spiritual, authoritarian master to dominate his thinking or insist that he should only believe what he is told by some despot. The importance of the individual and the rule of God's law applied by good government led directly to the modern concept of democracy.

Harold Berman of Emory University has pointed out that "the key to the renewal of law in the West from the sixteenth century on was the Protestant concept of the power of the individual, by God's grace, to change nature and to create new social relations through the exercise of his will. The Protestant concept of the individual became central to the development of the modern law of property and contract...." This, along with Luther's idea that all calling--all labour, not just the labour of monks and nuns--could be done to the glory of God, led to the development of the free market economic. A free society and a free market were the political and economic expressions of the religious ideas of the Reformation. Capitalism was the economic practice of which Christianity was the theory.<sup>43</sup>

We must be clear that Luther (like Calvin) was only motivated to preach the Gospel, he was single-mindedly focused on the glory of God and his kingdom, not establishing a new culture. His mind was upon a heavenly city and his practical task was to establish righteousness in the church. The changes to western civilisation were an unintended by-product of the Reformers' faithfulness to the Bible.

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religious life of the family is huge affecting: music, worship, catechising, sermons, theology etc.

<sup>42</sup> *Civilization And The Protestant Reformation*, Trinity Foundation.

<sup>43</sup> *Civilization And The Protestant Reformation*, Trinity Foundation.

One final benefit needs to be mentioned and, though speculative, it is frequently missed. Emperor Charles V had the greatest territorial power since Charlemagne and took his role very seriously. He was not afraid of the pope, although he was a devout Catholic. If he had not had the continual nagging problem of religious rebellion in Germany, from which he saw himself as the saviour of Christendom, it may have been possible that Charles could have consolidated his empire, defeated the Turks soundly and established a dynasty. If that had happened, we could have all been living now under a totalitarian, Roman Catholic state. Such a world empire was not in God's timing then and it was the Reformation which prevented it developing.

## **The shortcomings of Luther's achievements**

From our vantage point there is no doubt that the great weakness of Luther's reform movement was that it did not sufficiently change the church. The ecclesiastical system remained chained to the state and, in later years, assumed a superficial resemblance to the Catholic system.<sup>44</sup>

When Luther first received revelation of God's truth in the Bible, he began to see the idea of God's church applied to Germany in the purity of the New Testament form - a free gathering of believers who have been justified by faith. At this time he had great sympathy with the European Brethren movements and some German mystics. However, the mystics clouded the Gospel with wayward elements and the Anabaptists seemed, to him, to descend into the depths of anarchy and perversion. This drove Luther towards a conservative attitude regarding ecclesiastical polity and a closer relationship with the rulers to safeguard the Gospel and social stability. The temporal rulers supported Luther and the radicals separated from him. For Luther, this decision seemed to be confirmed by the Munster tragedy<sup>45</sup> which frightened all of Europe and spurred on the persecution of all subversives. There was also the continual pressure and opposition of the Roman machine, an ever present religious and secular threat to the work of reform, and even Luther's own life.

So the Lutheran state church gradually evolved out of necessity. The building of independent, pure assemblies, free from hierarchical control had to wait for its time, apart from the isolated Anabaptist groups meeting in secret. It has to be said that if this was not the case, it is likely that the work of the Reformation would not have survived. Luther went through great inward struggles over this abandonment of pure, independent congregations, but he saw no other choice open to him. He was not unaware of the faults and described the Lutheran church as 'provisional'. Although an inferior church resulted, and the ordinary believer was not allowed the freedom Luther originally desired, public

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<sup>44</sup> The church took on the Catholic system of parishes and clerical administration; the congregation included all members of the community by virtue of infant baptism resulting in mixed congregations etc. Luther's doctrine of consubstantiation (Christ's body is with and below the bread) was not that different from the Roman transubstantiation (the bread becomes Christ's body). A full and proper understanding of the Lord's Supper had to wait for Calvin's exposition, although others had anticipated much of it.

<sup>45</sup> Munster was a town in Westphalia. There, in 1534, extremists, under Jan Matthijs, preached millennialism and prophetic change, similar doctrines to those propounded by Thomas Müntzer earlier. The Anabaptists poured into the city and forcibly gained control in elections, making all those unwilling to be baptised to leave. The city was then declared the 'New Jerusalem' and the church became identified with society (a deviation from normal Anabaptist principles). The surrounding Catholic rulers did not accept this subversion and besieged the city. Matthijs was killed in battle and Jan van Leyden took over, a man who considered himself to be the third 'David' and ruler of the world. His emblem was inscribed 'king of righteousness'. Polygamy and forced communism was introduced in the midst of social chaos. The end came in 1534 when the besieging forces took the city and restored the legitimate authorities.

order was the principal factor. But the break with Rome was solidified and the seeds of individual freedom had been sown to bear fruit later. Luther had done more than any man previously by opening the door for reform, separating from the Roman church and revealing the truth about the Gospel, but much of the old church system remained. No one man could have accomplished more than this and we should be grateful.

There is also some truth in the charge that Luther so emphasised justification by faith, necessary to break with hundreds of years of Roman conditioning, that he did not stress sufficiently progressive sanctification. Certainly, there was evidence of a neglect of right conduct in the Lutheran churches as time went by, despite Luther's vehement warnings and exhortations. Luther himself was continually disappointed in the behaviour of his own congregation.

## Conclusion

Like all of us, Martin Luther was a man who made mistakes. As a figure who was larger than life, his mistakes could be similarly grand. Sometimes his advice to rulers was just plain wrong. Sometimes he misrepresented those who opposed him; often he let his words run away with him. But no one can deny his true passion for his Saviour and his genuine earnestness for the truth. Much of his teaching is of great value today and his works on justification by faith and the bondage of the will are still classics. Like Calvin, year after year his books are discussed in scholarly literature and reprinted in new editions.

In any analysis of this great man, one has to take into full account the times he lived in and the enormous nature of the task he reluctantly undertook. Very few people in history could have even come close to Luther's achievements in the face of the opposition he was subjected to. Critics need to understand this. Notwithstanding all these mitigating circumstances, very many of the modern accusations railed at Luther are either false or exaggerations of historical fact used for effect. I trust we have laid these to rest in our short evaluation of his life and work.



Martin Luther

Contrasts between mature Lutheranism and Calvinism		
	Lutheranism	Calvinism
	It should be noted that later Lutheranism departed from many of Luther's original teachings. On the doctrines of grace he was similar to Calvin. Melanchthon moderated and universalised these.	
Order of salvation	Regeneration follows conversion.	Order of salvation: conversion follows regeneration.
Grace	Grace is universal but effectual only for the elect. Received in baptism, or by preaching, to prevent resistance to the Gospel. Grace can be lost.	Grace is irresistible and only to the elect.
Repentance	A human action on responding to the Gospel that leads to faith.	Is a gift of God to the elect.
Faith	Produced by repentance.	Is a gift of God to the elect.
Baptism	Baptismal regeneration. Removes guilt and power of sin.	The outward sign of faith performed in obedience to Christ.
The Lord's Supper	Consubstantiation (Christ objectively present with the elements, above and under).	Christ is present spiritually and received by faith. [Zwingli merely proposed that the Supper was a memorial and no presence.]
Law	To reveal holiness and drive the sinner to Christ. No place in sanctification.	To reveal holiness, to drive sinner to Christ and to regulate the believer's walk.
Governments	State church	Church and state work together under God's authority for society.
Worship	Normative principle: whatever is not forbidden is permissible so long as it does no harm.	Regulative principle: Only what God specifically commands is acceptable. Whatever is not commanded is forbidden.

### Protestant views on church structure

Autonomy of the local church Separated from the state	→	Hierarchical government Connected to the State
Anabaptists		
Baptists		
	Congregationalists	
	Presbyterians	
		Lutherans
		Anglicans

## Protestant traditions emerging from the Reformation

1517 +	Lutheran	Luther, Melanchthon
1519 +	German Swiss Presbyterianism	Zwingli, Bullinger
1525 +	Anabaptist Brethren	Grebel, Hubmaier
1536 +	French Swiss Presbyterianism	Calvin, Beza
1536 +	English Anglican	Cranmer
1640 +	English Congregational	Puritans (e.g. Owen)
1612 +	General (Arminian) Baptist	Helwys
1633 +	Reformed Baptist	Bunyan, Keach, Gill

## Contrast between the Anabaptist and Reformed strategies

Reformers	Anabaptists
Reform church structures and make them Biblical as far as possible.	Rebuild the church as in the NT. Get rid of everything that is unbiblical.
Some compromises are necessary to avoid anarchy or destruction by Catholic forces.	Immediate change required; avoid all compromises; the church must be pure and Biblical. [In reality this was impossible in the 16 <sup>th</sup> century, apart from in a few small and isolated groups.]
Work with the existing concept of a state church but purify and reform it.	Utterly reject the concept of a state church. [If this had been implemented, the Reformation would have been crushed and the previous status quo return.]
Work alongside the Christian magistrate (governor). Magistrates protect the church but church decisions made by elders. Magistrates enforce Christian order in society.	The church is separate from state control of any sort. [In practice this varied greatly. Some moderates just wanted to be left alone; other fanatics sought to take over society to be a communistic paradise.]
State is divinely ordained but always evil. Christians participate in the state with honour and obedience to God, in faith.	State is just evil. Christians should not participate with it at all.
Infant baptism as a sign of the covenant.	Credobaptism (Believer's baptism).
Tendency to incomplete church reformation.	Tendency to anarchy or isolationism.

# Calvin and the City State of Geneva

## What was John Calvin really like?

When people criticise Calvin's theology and practices, they often resort to character assassinations to strengthen their case. From the beginning, even while he was still alive, opponents had called him: ruthless, a seeker of wealth, a miser, selfish, arrogant, a manipulator of individuals, and so on. Often one person's attacks would contradict another's. Beza, Calvin's friend and successor, answers these slanders in his brief memoir which appeared shortly after Calvin's death. He wrote this biography specifically to refute the lies which jealous and malicious men spread without shame. While not ignoring his weaknesses, Beza completely demolishes the false charges and establishes, what others have also confirmed, Calvin's true character.

Calvin was a serious, devout, humble man and a brilliant theologian, who worked so hard for the cause of the Gospel, that he developed many avoidable frailties and died at an early age.<sup>46</sup> Beza said that he had so little regard for his own life, in devotion to his study of the Bible, that it took a special work of grace to preserve him this long; indeed he never rested for more than 15 minutes. His infirmities meant that he worked most of his life in discomfort, or even great pain. Nevertheless, he laboured in lecturing, preaching, counselling and studying despite his illnesses (migraines, constant stomach upsets and diarrhoea, haemorrhoids, ague, rheumatic gout; later on fevers, a limp, muscle inflammation, lung disease etc.). He continued to work even when confined to bed and dying, which occurred in 1564 aged nearly 55.

His life has been described as godly, blameless and worthy of admiration. He was unusual in that he was both timid and stern, modest and aggressive. For him the cause of God and truth overruled his natural modesty and, when provoked by error, he could be a firebrand. He was loved and honoured by the great and the poor. Rulers came to seek his sound judgment and converse with him. Although married for nearly 10 years until his wife died, he had no children who survived infancy. He married Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist, in 1539 who died in 1549. She had two children from her first marriage and Calvin loved them as a father. Her death in 1549 resulted from difficult pregnancies, which Calvin had to nurse her through. Calvin never recovered from a broken heart and refused to remarry. From his letters we can see that Calvin loved his wife dearly and deeply mourned her loss. In also suffering the tragic loss of his children we see that he was no stranger to extreme suffering.

When he left Strasbourg (discussed later), his pastoral work was so successful, and he was held in such affection by the people, that many tried to prevent his departure. When this was unsuccessful, the authorities wanted him to retain the income from his stipend that had been allocated to him as a salary for his lectures in theology. Calvin refused to accept it and took not a penny.

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<sup>46</sup> Calvin was born in Noyon, Picardy, France, on 10 July 1509. His birth name was Jean Cauvin, Latinised to John Calvin according to academic tradition – all theological writings were written in Latin as an international language. Calvin originally studied law at Orleans and was probably converted when he returned to Paris where he became a leader in the Reform movement. He was forced to flee and travel through France and Switzerland; however, by 1534 he began to write tracts against errors. In 1536 his first, short version of the *Institutes* appeared to defend Reformed truth to King Francis 1, which became popular with many Protestants.



When necessary, Calvin showed great heroism and courage in condemning error and falsehood in the face of great opposition. He was totally focused upon the truth and would not suffer it to be denigrated in his sphere of influence. When the Genevan authorities were attacked from dissidents within or threatened by kings without for giving refuge to persecuted foreign ministers, Calvin took on the financial burdens himself.

### **His teaching**

Contrary to the popular image, Calvin was not a joyless, dour legalist out to place restrictions on his followers. He was a compassionate and humane person, as his letters demonstrate. Neither was his chief theological focus the doctrine of predestination, resulting in fatalism. Calvin was dominated by the desire to honour and glorify God in all that he did. Contrary to belief, his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* are not centred on predestination, but begins with, and sets forth, the doctrine of the holy and glorious God, drawing out subsidiary doctrines from this point. Theological historian William Cunningham called it, *'the most important work in the history of theological science'*.<sup>47</sup>

Despite modern misrepresentation, Calvin's theology was not contrary to evangelism; indeed he sent out one of the first Protestant missionaries to Brazil, and true Calvinism (a term he did not approve of) has always been accompanied by fervent Gospel preaching. Neither were his sermons academic; contrary to contemporary custom he did not read out written sermons, or even use notes. His method was to read the text from the original Hebrew or Greek and then comment on it from his vast knowledge to suit the needs of his congregation. Many of his sermons are published and read today, because (unlike other contemporary works) they are interesting and useful; indeed they were the first of the Reformers to be translated and widely distributed. Despite being a brilliant theologian he rather considered himself to be a pastor, called to teach his people the truth as it is found in God's word but with the aid of everyday images, clarity, empathy and spirituality.

### **A beloved influence**

That some supposed Christian leaders can call this humble and gracious man 'a despotic tyrant' who repressed Christian freedom and caused social injustice, is a wicked travesty. They should be ashamed of themselves since even unsympathetic secular historians would not agree with them; indeed many historians have praised Calvin, despite not being Christians [e.g. JA Froude].

The citizens of Geneva wept when Calvin died and claimed that they had lost their father; this is hardly the remark of repressed subjects of a despot. Claims by his enemies that he had amassed a huge fortune were also found to be lies when his will was read out; he lived modestly, even frugally, and gave much money away. There have been few Christian leaders as hard working, caring, godly and humble as John Calvin.

We have explained the massive international influence of Calvin's *Institutes*, which continues to this day, but it is largely forgotten that the western world would not be as it is without Calvin. Some of the best state leaders were Calvinists, including King Edward VI and William the Silent. Many schools, seminaries, universities, libraries, books, magazines, and charitable works owe their origin or development to Calvin. Of his own Academy in Geneva, John Knox said it was, *'the most perfect school of Christ on Earth since the days*

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<sup>47</sup> *Reformers & Theology of the Reformation*. T&T Clark, 1862, p295. He adds, *'[It] has exerted directly or indirectly the greatest and most beneficial influence upon the opinions of intelligent men on theological subjects.'*

of the apostles.’<sup>48</sup> Many religious movements, churches and even peoples were greatly influenced by him.

Some characteristics of nations resulted from his theology; all know of the Protestant work ethic that built certain prosperous societies. Yet we could also mention: Swiss neutrality, Elizabethan political power, Puritan ethics and spirituality, the work of Reformation in Scotland, England, America, and Holland plus the great 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary movement, which all owe a debt to Calvin. Other effects include parliamentary democracy, limited monarchy, civil and religious toleration, the rights of civil liberty, humanitarian aid, Christian culture and even scientific research. Just as Luther helped to develop modern German, so Calvin was instrumental in influencing modern French. I am told that students of Calvin’s linguistic contribution have even been converted while studying the language of the *Institutes*. Yet certain supposed ‘Christians’ (usually Arminians and Dispensationalists) continue to pillory this godly man.

### **Summary of his ministry**

To summarise Calvin’s ministry in few words we could say that he was first of all determined to expound a truly Biblical theology. He wanted to understand what God had revealed and share it simply with others. In doing this he was a brilliant communicator; he once said that, *‘the chief excellence of an expositor is lucid brevity’*.<sup>49</sup> He was God-centred in his works and sought to explain God’s sovereignty and glory above all things. In his ministry he denied himself, even to the degree of damaging his health to serve others. He sought no glory or position of power, but merely wanted to serve God faithfully. James Packer summarises him best: *‘Bible-centred in his method, God-centred in his outlook, Christ-centred in his message ... [with] a passion that God should be glorified’*.<sup>50</sup>

It is really impossible to do justice to the contribution of Calvin’s ministry in this small space. Notable theologians have claimed to be only able to skim the surface in a series of lectures on him, so great was his work. I would simply recommend reading his *Institutes* and see for yourself, or even just the short first edition now available as, *Truth For All Time*, by Banner of Truth. Perhaps only Martin Luther, the spearhead of the Reformation, came as close as having as great a godly influence as John Calvin.

### **Sufferings and frugality**

It is necessary to give some further information regarding the hardships and frugality of Calvin’s life in the face of so many attacks and lies. Perhaps only Luther suffered so much from persecution, illness and slander.

Calvin lost his mother when he was three, was raised by a stepmother and had two brothers who died before him in infancy. He cared for his wife’s children by a previous marriage, though he was only just over nine years with her before she died. His own son died in infancy and he took these losses very hard, plagued with sadness and loneliness.

By nature he was weak and shy, but in ministry was a lion, strengthened by fortitude against suffering. In his 20s he was forced to flee Paris and wander through various countries evangelising. He was exiled from Geneva, but when he successfully returned he was constantly opposed, vilified and attacked. Indeed, though persuaded to return to Geneva, he said it was the last place he wanted to be and called it a ‘whirlpool’. It was here

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<sup>48</sup> Oft quoted, e.g. Hillerbrand, *The World of the Reformation*, p75.

<sup>49</sup> A quote I have used for nearly 40 years but have lost the reference for it.

<sup>50</sup> *Collected Shorter Writings*, 4.162.

that he had been chased out of his pulpit, attacked with swords in the street, had his family threatened and was shot at while in his house. Friends suffered for supporting him; one was poisoned. Rumours and lies were spread about him throughout Europe. People called their dogs, 'Calvin' and abused him in the streets.

Despite all this, he risked his life by visiting the sick and often supported many from his own pocket. He was filled with ailments that would have driven weaker men insane since he was in constant pain. He had continual headaches, piles, irritable bowel syndrome, kidney stones, asthma, arthritis, gout, malaria and finally TB. He had no interest in money, but could have been rich with his great talents and writings. He refused raises in salary, refused gifts and gave money to many charitable causes, especially French refugees. He lived in a small house and shocked Cardinal Sadoletto (who called in disguise) by answering his own door. Pope Pius IV stated that his dismissal of money was his strength and with a dozen Calvins could conquer the world.

Despite these trials he never ceased working, saying that he did not want to be found idle when the Lord returned, thus worsening his medical conditions. When very sick he worked from his bed, having a secretary to take notes, doing this up to his death at a young age. Luther was God's choice to break down the walls of Romanism but Calvin was the man to rebuild them right; the great systematiser of Reformation truth. He suffered for it.

People who claim to be Christian and lie about such a man raised up by God should fear to give an account for this at the Day of Judgment. In this paper I am not interested in praising Calvin or anyone else, since there are mere men, but I am concerned to state the historical truth and honour God's providence and gift.

### **Did Calvin take advantage of his position?**

Beza writes: *'When it comes to his personal integrity, no one was ever able to fault him over the exercise of his pastoral duties. He never let himself be influenced in order to please men, nor was he guilty of changing his doctrine or his way of life, or of slandering anyone.'*<sup>51</sup> It has been said that it is doubtful if anyone could find an equal for Calvin in his character and ministry. Only Luther comes close: both men worked prodigiously, both had to labour in the ministry and deal with affairs of state; but Calvin was the more balanced character, the more able expositor, the more careful theologian.<sup>52</sup> If Luther was the hammer that broke open the Roman stronghold on the church, Calvin was the systematiser that followed and brought Biblical balance to the Reformation. After all, Reformed theology is Calvinism; modern Lutheranism is something else.

Calvin was not some isolated, cold professor; he was so affable that both the young and the old found it easy to share their problems with him. He was gentle in dealing with the failings and weaknesses of others. He possessed an astounding memory, although he did not make a show of it. In tandem with this he was a man of great discernment which he utilised with frankness and openness. When the consistory<sup>53</sup> examined individuals for

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<sup>51</sup> Beza, p122

<sup>52</sup> Hillerbrand says: *He [Calvin] was the great theological system-builder of the Reformation, quite in contrast to Luther, who rambled through the theological thicket with the vigour of an exuberant genius, who was neither fearful of paradox nor hesitant of overstatement.* (p72). *Compared with the other outstanding reformer, Luther, Calvin was more systematic and less paradoxical.* (p74).

<sup>53</sup> The ruling body of the church. Church government in Geneva consisted of: *pastors* (ministers) who were to preach, admonish, exhort and administer the sacraments; *teachers* who instructed the congregation in religious matters, taught the young and trained future ministers; and *elders*, godly 'lay' men who supervised

misdemeanours, Calvin could remember their previous appearances and give the background and causes of offence. When the records were consulted, Calvin was shown to be right in every detail, even when the case was 10 years earlier. When he lectured he only had the Bible in front of him, yet if one reads his lectures one can see an orderly presentation of truth, despite often only having an hour to prepare. Such was his intellectual capacity, grasp of truth and knowledge of scripture.

He lived frugally and worked late into the night, despite the pleading of his friends - so urgent was the work to him. Even during his final illness he continued to work by dictating, despite his failing voice, until a week before his death. He did fail in seeing the importance of taking care of his health. He slept very little and usually only had one meal a day, sometimes he went without food for two days; only near the end of his life could doctors persuade him to have a little wine. Despite his tiredness, he never failed to be ready for his responsibilities. When he was not preaching, he prepared his writings from 5 am in readiness for dictation to a secretary.

His output was prodigious, even for a healthy man. He preached on Sunday to the church. In the weekdays he gave expositions of scripture; every other week he preached every day. He gave lectures on theology three times a week. His sermons fill several volumes and his lectures, on nearly every book of the Bible, fill 22 volumes (in the compressed modern edition). He wrote very many letters of counsel to all sorts of people as well as other books, catechisms and tracts on various subjects. His systematic theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,<sup>54</sup> can be justly said to have stirred all Europe. He sat as a member of the consistory whenever it met to deal with church discipline, giving a Bible study to it every Friday. He was faithful in visiting the sick and those who needed help, and advised the town council, being at their disposal continually. In addition he cared for the believers in France in every way he could and continued his own personal studies and writings.

We can see that Calvin forgot himself in order to serve God and his brothers. His ministry was one which was conducted in sincerity, holiness and a humble spirit.

During all of this, Calvin was subjected to very many slanderous attacks from jealous trouble-makers. They all failed, though they caused him much grief. It was said, by his contemporaries, that when men attacked Calvin, they waged war against God himself, because he was a true servant of the Lord. He dealt with heresies firmly and effectively penetrating to the root of the problem with skill and responding with lucid brevity.

In his personal life he was blameless. He dressed very simply and his house was poorly furnished. Beza reproduces Calvin's will in full, which includes an inventory of his possessions. It shows how little he had accumulated; he disdained possessions for he had no need of them. Apparently, his only normal rest from studying was a quarter of an hour after a meal, or half an hour if someone was with him, before returning to his desk. His commitment to the work was complete. Despite this, he was not a miser. He sought to keep his expenditure (e.g. on books, provisions etc.) below his income and considered himself well off for doing so. Once when he was awarded a salary of 600 florins by the council of Tours, he asked that he might receive less! *'He had such a respect for the Word of God that he would rather have died than make use of it as an enticement to further his own ambition or avarice.'*<sup>55</sup>

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behaviour and were the majority in the consistory, which met once a week. There were also *deacons* to administrate charity to the sick and poor who did not govern.

<sup>54</sup> First published in 1536 and repeatedly revised and developed thereafter until the final edition of 1559.

<sup>55</sup> Beza, p132.

Calvin was free from ambition and so was not tarred with the accoutrements of this flaw. He never drew attention to himself; he never wasted his time with fruitless erudition; he abhorred seeking superficial effect to augment an outward show of authority and he never misused scripture or history in order to strengthen his case.<sup>56</sup> He never abused his position, never sought a higher rank, he never mistreated even the lowliest of individuals and always engaged in a new project by first consulting his colleagues, following their advice.

### **But was he not harsh, quick tempered, strict and cruel?**

Despite the many slanderous attacks on his person, Calvin did not seek revenge, neither did he frequent the courts or continually consult lawyers. If the doctrine of scripture was attacked, Calvin would bring all his weight to bear on the heresy, including using the civil laws of Geneva; but he did not act that way in defence of himself. As it happens, a fair proportion of those opposed by Calvin, publicly testified to his honour and faithfulness. Some later begged his forgiveness.

It is true that Calvin was, by nature, prone to anger and he could be irritable and difficult. However, considering his alert mind, his many pressing responsibilities, his poor health, his painful labours and the indiscretions of some of those around him, this is hardly surprising. But far from excusing this himself, he was aware of his faults. Having said this, no friend ever took lasting offence at his actions.

As far as can be said of any Christian in this life, Calvin was a man who was humble but not lacking in courage, magnanimous but not proud.<sup>57</sup>

## **Calvin's involvement with the state**

We should be aware what the citizens of the city-state of Geneva thought about Calvin's association with the city council. Beza tells us that it brought about a '*state of tranquillity and happiness far in excess of anything this city had ever known*'.<sup>58</sup> Calvin had been invited by the citizens of Geneva to return to them, from Strasbourg, as their pastor in 1541, after being cruelly ejected as a political expedient earlier on (1538). Immediately, he again drew up constitutional regulations to guide the church in accordance with the Bible, and the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* were adopted by the general council of citizens in 1541. The central issue was that the church should be responsible for its own affairs, without being under the control (though not independent of) the civil power. The foremost sanction of this power was that the church, not the state, should be able to excommunicate sinful people from fellowship. It was 14 years before this matter was fully cleared up from the interference of councillors.

From the beginning, Calvin would only accept the position of church leader if a council of elders was drawn up to share the leadership. He also sought out effective co-workers. People like Pierre Viret of Lausanne, and William Farel also assisted as they were able. Calvin was no sovereign-like authoritarian; he practised partnership and teamwork. The consistory (church session of elders) were to determine who was admitted to communion. The key tensions about jurisdiction/authority were between this body and certain council

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<sup>56</sup> Note, for instance, that Calvin even refused to draw out the doctrine of the trinity from the plural pronouns in Gen 1:26 (see Com.), unlike nearly everyone else.

<sup>57</sup> Beza, p131.

<sup>58</sup> Beza, p70.

factions; not finally settled until the elections of 1555. One concession to the council, which surprises us moderns, was that the council (civil magistrate) retained the power to settle doctrinal disputes amongst ministers.

In his involvement with the magistrates, Calvin continually told them how God hates favouritism and explained the need to judge impartially. Those who condemn the innocent, he said, were an abomination; just as much as those who acquit the guilty. We should also remember that Calvin did not pass judgment upon anyone himself. He was a pastor, not a magistrate. When his advice was sought, he gave it, though it was not always heeded. It is vital to stress that Calvin was never a magistrate and was not even a Genevan citizen until 1559. Indeed, he was often opposed by certain council factions. Calvin's influence was achieved by the strength of his moral integrity, wisdom and preaching of the truth. As was common in those days, the government of the church had larger powers over civil moral duties and local laws enforced these, however Calvin's effect was more humane than the previous conditions.

Again we must stress that Calvin did not always get full support from the council. In his first stay at Geneva he had been exiled with Farel. When the political climate changed he was invited back, but from time to time, severe opposition arose from some members of the council. From 1541 until 1555 Calvin struggled with continual opposition in Geneva from rival factions, especially those which were hostile to foreign (French) influence. Calvin was often treated badly; he was sniped at, ridiculed in the streets, taunted, made to wait and left unsupported in difficult situations. But he was rarely openly confronted, the opponents could not cope with that, preferring guerrilla tactics. In all this, the opponents realised the value of Calvin and did not want to lose his gifts, they just wanted to control him. Calvin was a figure of international standing and repute, it would be political suicide for a party to eject such a man from Geneva twice. Most people knew Calvin was generally correct in his decisions, they just could not cope with his high standards, they preferred a moderate compromise.

Calvin's supporters in the council did not always get their own way. The most troubling conflict was the contention for supremacy by Ami Perrin and the *Libertines*, which continued until the Servetus affair when they lost public credibility for supporting such an unjust cause. After new elections in 1555, Calvin had considerable state assistance, exemplified in the consistory gaining the authority to excommunicate and immigrants being no longer refused citizenship. The consistory had a much freer hand in bringing wrongdoers to justice. It could now summon people without the prior consent of the Little Council. Calvin's influence over the council was now at its zenith. His advice was sought and accepted.

### **Effects on Genevan society**

Like all other Reformers (and in fact like certain Catholics had done previously), Calvin protested against social abuses and ungodly behaviour like: prostitution, drunkenness, wild behaviour and ostentatious bawdy dress. Where Luther left implementation to the authorities, Calvin felt that the church should be more directly influencing society through the magistrates.<sup>59</sup> The effect of his advice was most obviously noticeable in matters of

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<sup>59</sup> This is also linked to the *regulative* principle of worship. Luther felt that if an activity was not specifically forbidden in the Bible, it was acceptable unless it harmed others. Calvin, however, taught that believers should only do those things expressly commanded and approved in scripture. Pleasure and entertainment was more frowned upon in Calvinistic communities than in Lutheran ones. But one should not think that Calvin was above playing social recreational games. He would fondly do so at home with family when appropriate.

social behaviour. The famous Genevan nightlife of brothels, entertainment and rowdy taverns vanished. People's lives were supervised and the result was sober dress, modest behaviour, courteous speech and church going. This was possible because the council now backed up and enforced the consistory. Wrong-doers were disciplined.

The long-term success was questionable. Prostitutes frequently returned, if only to the borders, and his idea of a public house serving weak drinks and specialising in godly discussions was not popular. However, in general, most citizens were more than happy that order had been restored and the quality of life was improved. Calvin was also concerned that some of his followers took issues further than he thought advisable.<sup>60</sup> However, we should not forget that Calvin brought a radical new balance to women's rights in marriage. Prior to him, the wife was treated unequally, especially in dealing with adultery and separation, in Geneva this was corrected, as was the matter of forced marriage of children.

Calvin was also concerned about education and was frustrated in his plans for a long time due to lack of funds being available. In 1559 his Academy was officially opened, fulfilling the role of both school and university. Though intended for the local community, before long the Academy became a focus for Reformers throughout Europe and was noted for its excellence. Calvin viewed the Academy as one of the most pleasing fruits of Reformation in Geneva.

### **Was Geneva a theocracy?**

In other words, was the city ruled by religious leaders, under Calvin, who controlled society by the law of God and thus modelled the modern tenets of Dominionism? Did Calvin assume powers that rightly lay with the state? If true, this would make Geneva unique in the Continental Reformation. All other Reformed states had the power vested in the prince or city council.

The facts of the matter are:

- There were no constitutional changes made that would have allowed the church to exercise direct control.
- The church did not rule the main organs of government.
- Calvin frequently expressed that he had no political ambition.
- Calvin even made no attempt to become a citizen until pressed to do so in 1559.
- Neither Calvin, nor any other ministers, were members of any of the councils.
- Calvin discouraged the cult of personality, even insisting that he was to be buried in an unmarked grave.
- Calvin even felt that ministers and elders were not the source of church authority (let alone civil power), they were servants of the Word. It was the Holy Spirit who had the role of directing the church. *'All power resides in the Spirit himself'*.<sup>61</sup> Christ retains full authority in the church while blessing the ministry of his servants.
- Calvin only influenced the state on the basis of his wise counsel and Biblical teaching; there was no formal machinery for Calvin to control political situations. He was a mentor to the many individuals who collectively made up the government, and as such, was able to direct his influence to the adoption of godly principles of social justice.

It is true that Calvin did not believe in the strict division between secular authority and church that we do today. He considered the church to be the central organ of society; at the

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<sup>60</sup> E.g. those who passed a regulation forbidding the celebration of Christmas.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Comm. on Malachi*, 4:6. See also *Zech*, 2:9.

heart of the city; the church community, acting in love, forbearance and forgiveness, was to be a pattern and example for the rest of society. He understood politics, sociology and economics to be aspects of religion, as all life was under God's control. He felt that, under God's sovereignty, magistrates and ministers should work in harmony together in order to promote the establishment of Biblical principles of social structure and discipline. Government was indivisible and was focused on doing God's will. For Calvin, the two powers of civil and religious authority should be complementary, both working harmoniously to secure an orderly and righteous society.

As the magistrate ought by punishment and physical restraint to cleanse the church of offences, so the minister of the Word should help the magistrate in order that fewer may sin. Their responsibilities should be so joined that each helps rather than impedes the other.<sup>62</sup>

Thus 'lay' people had influence over the church, through elders, supervising conduct; and the ministers influenced state decisions. This meant that the state supported discipline against those the consistory considered to be leading ungodly lives; but the state did not control the church. The supervision of behaviour, which Calvin proposed, was not popular with all. However, the 1561 revision of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* while strengthening the consistory also safeguarded '*the distinction shown to us in the Holy Scripture between the sword and authority of the Magistrate, and the superintendence that the Church should exercise*'.

The consistory was not, therefore, tyrannical; it was not a clerical body. The majority were laymen,<sup>63</sup> not part of some pyramidal hierarchy, and a Syndic (see Appendix) was present. Its main power was that of excommunication (only properly exercised, free from secular control, after 1555). Excommunication (or 'the ban') was necessary for spiritual reasons, not civic. It was to prevent dishonour to Christ, to lead the culprit to repentance, and to prevent damage to other believers by bad example. Church discipline did not just rely upon the consistory but, in the first instance, parents and neighbours were expected to admonish evildoers privately before reporting them to the church. Even then, the consistory often repeatedly warned recalcitrant persons before applying the ban. Only after this does the minister tell the unrepentant sinner privately that he must abstain from the Lord's Supper. The *Ordinance* is also anxious to explain that discipline is carried out in moderation and no one should be unnecessarily overburdened. Criminal acts, however, resulted in an immediate ban without prior admonition. The articles of 1537 and 1541 state categorically that: '*beyond this reprimand the church has no further authority*'. '*Beyond the formal admonition of a delinquent and the pronouncement of excommunication they had no further powers ... the ban ... had [no] immediate legal effects outside the church*.'<sup>64</sup>

One should also remember that moral supervision was nothing new in those times.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Calvin, C.O. X, 273 (letters) cited in Kelly, p15.

<sup>63</sup> In the 1537 *Articles* these are called *Commisioners* and are simply representatives of the congregation. In the 1541 *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* they are called elders and, though 'laymen', are given a formal designation in the leadership with the other three office bearers. It is the elders who watch over the moral life of the congregation and peacefully admonish those erring and disorderly. This has to be referred to the consistory who collectively decide what steps are necessary. There are 12 elders: 2 elected from the Small Council, four from the Council of 60 and 6 from the Council of 200. The candidates are suggested by the small council, who first consult the ministers. The election is approved by the Council of 200 and decide annually who remains in office for another year. The *Ordinances* clearly state that the office of the elder is only ecclesiastical.

<sup>64</sup> Kuhr, p24, 30.

<sup>65</sup> In fact, Calvin had also been influenced, to some degree, by the example of John Oecolampadius in Basel, regarding church discipline, dating back to his yearlong stay there as a refugee in 1535.



Public regimentation of ethics was characteristic of late medieval society. What was different in Geneva was that this control was supervised by a body (the consistory) comprised from the ecclesiastical and political community. Also it must be borne in mind that if the majority of townspeople objected to this control, they could have overturned it at the next election, but they did not.

Although these elections of 1555 finally gave the Calvin party preponderant control, Geneva did not become then, nor was it ever, a theocracy.<sup>66</sup>

It is therefore inaccurate to speak, as people often do, of a theocratic confusion of powers ... each power had ... its well-defined domain.<sup>67</sup>

Calvin in Geneva had less power either in theory or in practice than had Archbishop Whitgift in England, and less again than had Archbishop Laud, or Cardinal Richelieu in France, for he had neither the authority of their office nor the consistent and powerful political support which they received.<sup>68</sup>

In its support for the church and for the good of society, the magistrate was to help establish true religion and prevent it from being corrupted and violated with impunity.<sup>69</sup> This included removing superstitions and idolatry, eradicating scandals and encouraging piety. This seems medieval to us since we are clear on the separation of church and state, but Calvin was presented with the opportunity of influencing a city state at the authorities request (see later). His ideas were influenced by his unusual situation, concentrated study of the Old Testament, and were conditioned by the times; it was another hundred years before toleration of other denominations and sects necessitated developing Calvin's views. Calvin's position was the normal understanding, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, all nations had a state-sanctioned religion. Only the Anabaptists differed on this matter, but how would they have reacted if presented with the same opportunity as Calvin? Certainly one group which took over a town (Munster) reduced it to total anarchy in weeks.<sup>70</sup>

It is odd that evangelicals are quick to falsely label Calvin a despot, while ignoring religious leaders, such as cardinals and archbishops, who had far more power and authority than Calvin ever had. Jesus' words remain true that those who most closely follow him will be persecuted as he was; even by those who should know better.

### **What about the harsh treatment of adulterers and heretics?**

In those days according to Beza, republics based upon sound law considered both things worthy of death. Geneva was no different from these states. Despite this, in Calvin's time, not one adulterer was condemned to death. Banishment preceded capital punishment. Anabaptists (seen by many as anarchists) were killed in many towns in Europe at the time, yet in Geneva they were merely exiled. This was also the usual punishment for heretics, indeed, some felt that the magistrates were unnecessarily lenient.

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<sup>66</sup> Kelly, p14.

<sup>67</sup> Francois Wendel, cited in Kelly, p14.

<sup>68</sup> Basil Hall, cited in Kelly, p14.

<sup>69</sup> *Institutes*, 4. 20. 3.

<sup>70</sup> For the Munster tragedy see 'Luther and the German Princes'. Extremists or not, the point is that faced with the need to control a city, these Anabaptists failed miserably. Though many Anabaptists were godly small, independent groups of radical reformers, they did not have the responsibility Calvin was given. It is easy to claim pure church practice if your total responsibility is a group meeting in a house; Calvin had to deal with a city-state of 20,000 people.

It is true that some measures became more draconian, but this was due to the previous soft treatment of offenders; adultery, for instance had become an accepted social custom. The number of executions increased but Geneva was far from being a police state. Only those who publicly displayed their 'aberrant' behaviour were dealt with and if those charged with a crime showed contrition, they were let off with a warning. The council genuinely wanted personal reformation not retribution. One must also remember that the majority of citizens agreed with this policy.

### **What About Servetus?**

Many modern evangelicals who oppose Calvinism condemn Calvin for the death of Michael Servetus, which they claim he orchestrated and supervised, even demanding slow burning on green wood (e.g. Roger Forster). They also promote Servetus as a modern thinker who was unworthy of punishment.

The Spaniard Michael Servetus (Miguel Serveto), was burnt at the stake in Geneva for heresy and sedition in 1553. Contemporary writers insist that never was a man so deserving of such a sentence. He was guilty of blasphemy, heresy and treason for over thirty years, leading many people astray in various countries. Servetus was a liar and a coward as well as being conceited. He suffered from delusions of grandeur and monumental arrogance, refusing to recant of his wild views even when they were proved to be false, or even when warned by his friends. Some historians have suggested that he was mentally disturbed.<sup>71</sup>

Despite his deceitfulness, he also possessed a spark of genius and was the first to discover pulmonary blood circulation. Once he even led a counterfeit life as an orthodox Catholic acting as the medical adviser to the Archbishop of Vienne, in France. His publication, *On the errors of the Trinity*, in 1531 made him anathema to everyone, Protestant and Catholic; but he also taught pantheism and many other heresies. Accordingly he was sentenced to death by the Inquisition in 1533 and condemned to burning. Calvin was reluctantly persuaded to contact the French authorities and denounce Servetus for his heretical views.

On learning of his true identity Servetus was arrested and condemned by the French authorities, but he escaped and fled. They burnt an effigy in his absence. Foolishly, Servetus turned up in Geneva and allied himself with Calvin's opponents, fomenting treason. Upon being discovered, a long trial ensued for heresy and sedition, and the friends of Servetus could not continue their support when they saw the depth of his radical errors. Geneva could not withstand the formal condemnation of Servetus by the whole of Europe, neither could it publicly oppose the King of France who was determined to have Servetus punished. The other Protestant churches/city-states of Switzerland wrote to the authorities in Geneva demanding that this arch-heretic be burned, and even some of Calvin's enemies agreed that this was now necessary, endorsing the decision by their vote on the council. Note that Calvin had no control over any of this.

In the 1530's Calvin tried to help him after receiving unsolicited requests for support in writing; but his many errors, his denial of the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Son made him repugnant to everyone, Protestant, Roman Catholic and Anabaptist. Servetus, however, had only written to Calvin to receive his commendation as an 'equal' ranking theologian, he did not want his aberrations pointed out. Calvin could have publicly denounced Servetus then had he been the vindictive person people make him out to be. Instead, in one of his letters, Calvin warned Servetus not to enter Geneva as he would be

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<sup>71</sup> Randell, p26.

risking his life.

We must bear in mind the times in which these events took place. Supporters of religious toleration were themselves viewed with extreme suspicion then. It was also common to accept the old *Justinian Code* as a legitimate part of the current civil law which prescribed death for heresy.<sup>72</sup> Servetus broke the civil law and common law, not just of Geneva but of all countries, and at the end of the day, it was the ruling magistrates who carried the responsibility for the sentence, not Calvin.

This was the period when the Reformation was fighting for its life and trying to gain ground from the far greater majority of Catholic states and nations, all hell bent on the destruction of the Reformation. Geneva could not possibly justify a tolerant judgment in this matter. Even the gentle Philip Melanchthon openly approved of Servetus' death in writing.

At the end Calvin tried his best to bring Servetus to his senses and even pleaded for a more merciful death by beheading. Despite many abusive attacks on him by Servetus (including calling him a murderer & a sorcerer), Calvin helped him to prepare his defence by providing books from his own library; he even prayed with him in jail. Calvin would have been considered unnecessarily lenient by his peers.

It is also important to know that though guilty of blasphemy and heresy, Genevan archives reveal that the principal charge against Servetus was sedition for seeking to undermine the government by creating a new political party and teaching rebellion. Indeed, his arrogant, obscene and violent behaviour shocked everyone and sealed his fate. The whole Christian world agreed on the execution of Servetus and Geneva had no option to let such a man go free.

Calvin neither instigated the trial, nor had any controlling influence upon it of any sort. The government of Geneva (which included supporters of Servetus and enemies of Calvin) executed Servetus as a subversive rebel, not just as a heretic. He brought his punishment on his own head by foolish behaviour and ignoring Calvin's warnings. The charges against Calvin are utterly false.

Calvin's personal view on personal retaliation (as opposed to the responsibilities of the rulers) can be seen in this quote from his sermon on 2 Samuel, 1:14:

No matter how much those who reign are enemies of the truth, no matter how tyrannical and cruel they are, an individual does not have the right to punish them. Why not? Because God is the one who has to take his sword in his hand. Let us understand, then, from this never to touch the authority that God has established and sanctioned in his name. Rather, let us patiently endure the shame, injuries, cruelties, and extortions of those who rule, until God has remedied the matter in a way that is unknown to us. Let us realise that it is his business to uphold those who are unjustly oppressed.

## **Calvin's Thoughts on Political Power.**

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<sup>72</sup> Kelly makes the valid point that we civilised 20th century citizens are quick to condemn these backward 16th century radicals for condemning a small number of heretics to death after due process of law, while tolerating the death of millions of babies by abortion; note on p35.

## Obedience to rulers

Calvin's position regarding temporal authorities (which he called 'magistrates' whether they were councillors, princes, emperors or kings) was initially similar to that of Luther and Zwingli – which emphasised the state control of the church under God, with church ministers advising the state. This was the accepted current opinion, which followed centuries of Catholic practice.

The magistrate was appointed by God as the ruler of society and should be obeyed as God's representative. Obedience should continue even if the authority acted badly or was vested in unworthy men. Correction of tyranny was the Lord's to avenge, not man's. Civil obedience is simply Biblical teaching on the subject (Rm 13:1ff; 1 Tim 2:1-4; Titus 3:1 etc). For Calvin, civil power and the use of law was directly related to the spiritual realm. It was to cherish and protect the external worship of God, to defend piety and to mould social behaviour into civil righteousness in order to generate peace. The church is distinct from the civil power but Christians are not severed from the proper authority of magistrates. Both are organs ordained by God for the good of society.<sup>73</sup>

The Reformers, thus, gave honour to the lawfully appointed rulers of states and this endeared many authorities to their cause. We should note that if this had not been the case, all the Reformers would have been outlawed and the Reformation would have died in the water within ten years. [Certain political leaders no doubt had political reasons, as well as religious convictions, for supporting the Reformation, especially in Germany. See 'Luther and the German Princes'.] This was why the Reformers had to condemn the actions of various groups of Anabaptists who put their subjective demands of conscience above obedience to rulers and considered (as Calvin understood them to say) all government to be polluted.<sup>74</sup>

However, Calvin later differed from Luther in setting boundaries to the authority of the magistrate and came to see that the church was not subservient to the civil power in the same way that Luther and Zwingli did.<sup>75</sup> Rulers were to be obeyed as long as they kept to the confines of power given by God. All human authority is limited; only God has unlimited power and in the church Christ is the head, not man. The civil ruler is, therefore, limited under law. Earthly princes are servants of God and the people.<sup>76</sup>

The actions of the King of France (1560's), Mary Stuart in Scotland (1560-67) and Mary Tudor in England (1553-58) in persecuting the church led to some changes. Initially Calvin only proposed passive resistance, but as the pressure on him increased and as hundreds of Protestants were murdered, Calvin altered his position. He built upon arguments used in Germany to justify the actions of Protestant princes in defying the Emperor<sup>77</sup>, and stipulated that elected first line magistrates had a duty to resist tyrannical superiors.

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<sup>73</sup> *'Christ's spiritual kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct'*. *Institutes*, 4. 20.1.

<sup>74</sup> Calvin's position on the Anabaptists is unfortunate and clearly excessive. There is no doubt that he misunderstood the position of many Anabaptists and tarred them all with the same brush. Like Luther, his concern was for order in society and viewed all the Anabaptists as extremist anarchists bent on overturning the social order; such terrorists had to be put down. The problem was that not all of the disparate groups were like this, many being God-fearing 'brethren' (their preferred term for themselves) who were simply seeking to obey Biblical principles more thoroughly than the Reformers, in certain areas (like church government). See appendix in 'Luther and the German Princes'.

<sup>75</sup> Although Luther had written his *Warning to His Dear German People* in 1531 which did introduce some idea of active resistance into Reformation politics.

<sup>76</sup> *Sermons on 1 Samuel*, Sermon 29.

<sup>77</sup> German princes were part of a system of electing the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and were called *electors*. As such, they could also depose an emperor

Magistrates were to moderate the power of despotic, cruel kings; if they did not, they connived in their sin of oppression. So was born the doctrine that resistance could be given to persecution as long as it was led by elected officials of authority. [This is called the *doctrine of interposition* – the moral duty of ‘lesser magistrates’ to restrain the unlawful wickedness of ‘higher magistrates’.]

During the mid-century threats to Protestantism, when there was a real possibility that the Reformation could be destroyed by the harsh Catholic reaction, Calvin took his ideas further to enable the resistance of the individual to an evil civil authority (the *Private Law* theory). Magistrates who abuse their power lose their authority to rule and can thus be disobeyed.<sup>78</sup> A civil ruler who dishonours God and becomes a tyrant, reverts to an ordinary citizen.<sup>79</sup>

While forced abdication by nobles (e.g. of Mary Queen of Scots) or ejection by Parliament (e.g. of James II) was lawful, he did not agree that armed resistance or rebellion was acceptable. It was later Reformers like Knox and Beza who consolidated this aspect of resistance. However, Calvin came to be seen as the enemy of monarchy and the defender of republicanism, a radical in political thinking; though he was not primarily concerned with this and did not systematically develop the idea of power vested in the people. He did support plural rule, for instance a system of aristocracy combined with democracy; a system where several authority figures can supervise and control each other, preventing excess and misrule by one person.<sup>80</sup> He certainly preferred an elective, representative republican type of government and hated the Roman Catholic subversion of states via the emperor.<sup>81</sup> Politically, this was Calvin’s lasting contribution to liberty in the modern western world. The development of the ideas of resistance to wicked rulers was to be undertaken by others, but the seminal beginnings came from Calvin. Far from being a repressive movement, western ideas of political liberty arose in the Reformation.

### **Government in action**

The basic Biblical doctrine underlying government is the fallen nature of man. This affects both the people, who are prone to sin, causing social disorder, as well as the ruler who is prone to despotic, selfish usurpation of power. In this situation both sound principles of government and good laws are needed. We have seen Calvin’s ideas regarding rulers, but this must be coupled with his ideas about law. The magistrate must govern according to principles of God’s law.

The foundation of this law is that man should worship God and men should act on the basis of love towards others.<sup>82</sup> The moral law is an inward thing as well as being enshrined in the Mosaic code. It is summed up in the Ten Commandments as well as in the law of love in the Gospels (Matt 22:37-39).<sup>83</sup> This moral law is known naturally to all humanity, being ingrained upon the conscience. The written law was added because of man’s dullness to listen to the moral law in his conscience. Both these things are a source of law for society and give rise to regulations which promote equity, the goal of law.<sup>84</sup> Different systems in differing countries would develop in diverse ways but underlying them should be the moral law of God. As long as they promote equity, they are equally valid. They do not have to be

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<sup>78</sup> *Institutes*, 4. 20. 32, (final edit. 1559).

<sup>79</sup> *Comm. on Acts*, (1552-54) chap. 4, 17; *Sermons on Daniel*, (1565) and *Comm. on Daniel*, (1561) chap. 6.

<sup>80</sup> *Institutes*, 4. 20. 8.

<sup>81</sup> See Calvin, *Sermons on 1 Sam 8:11-22*, *Comm. on Micah 5:5*.

<sup>82</sup> *Institutes*, 4. 20. 15.

<sup>83</sup> *Institutes*, 2. 8. 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Institutes*, 4. 20. 16.

framed like the Ten Commandments.

Every nation is left free to make such laws as it foresees to be profitable for itself. Yet these must be in conformity to that perpetual rule of love.<sup>85</sup>

So, for Calvin, the positive law of various nations is more directly related to natural moral law than the Old Testament code (natural law being understood in Calvin's sense not the modern or secular sense as unrelated to God - for Calvin natural law is God's moral law, impaired by sin in man, but not obliterated in the conscience, resulting in justice when applied). Later Calvinists (Puritans like John Cotton, and some contemporary Reformers like Viret and Bucer) applied the Old Testament civil law more closely. Calvin denied that the civil polity of Old Testament Jewish legislation was binding on all nations; he was no Theonomic Reconstructionist.

For Calvin, the effect of the moral law, enacted in society, had three results: it revealed God's righteousness thus identifying our sinfulness, driving us to Christ; it provides a deterrent of punishment, thus restraining sin; and it provides a positive guide to proper living.<sup>86</sup> For Calvin, guidance was the chief function while Luther felt that the condemnation of the law was its key benefit, with no value to regulate the life of the believer. The ultimate purpose of sound law was to glorify God in society by righteous behaviour; he was the source of true law. Founding natural law upon man's reason instead of God (as later erroneous theologians like Grotius did) was anathema to Calvin. Calvin was always centred upon God.

In all of this, Calvin's idea of the centrality of the church in the affairs of society is critical. The state is to glorify God by proper government, seeking order in society and righteousness in people; in pursuing this it works in tandem with the church which has the same aim of glorifying God and seeing righteousness abound through obedience to God's word. The state cannot be effective without the church.

For us this close involvement of the church with the state seems unusual, our sights are only set on our small congregations; we have no global ambitions of effecting serious social change (unlike modern dominionist thinking).<sup>87</sup> But consider Calvin's position: he was given the opportunity by the civil authorities to advise on the best way government could glorify and obey God. He did not assume control, he was asked to help in running society - what would you do? Geneva was a relatively small area and with a maximum population of about 20,000 in 1560. This means that these principles could be effectively carried out. The situation was small enough to be maintained, in purity, without a broad administrative base open to corruption. The society was much more God-fearing than we are used to. Most citizens genuinely wanted to live right and glorify God. Pleasing him and experiencing the benefits of salvation was a majority interest, unlike our 1-3% nominal church attendance today.

Despite his mingling of church and state, common to his age, Calvin can by no means be seen as the main springboard for modern Reconstructionism, far less Charismatic Dominionism.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, he was less prone to thinking in this way than some of his

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<sup>85</sup> *Institutes*, 4. 20. 15.

<sup>86</sup> *Institutes*, 2. 7. 6ff.

<sup>87</sup> Of course we are to pray for government and social situations, but will not have the influence that Calvin was given.

<sup>88</sup> Reconstructionism (or Theonomy) is the movement by some American Reformed theologians, who are Postmillennial in eschatology, to promote the rule of the Mosaic Law on all society in all its rigours. Charismatic Dominionism is also postmillennial but with a triumphal edge, affirming the future rule of the

contemporaries.

### **Summary of Calvin's teaching on the state** (see *Institutes*, book 4, chapter 20.)<sup>89</sup>

1. There are two kingdoms, civil and spiritual ('Two-powers' theory).
2. These are distinct.
3. Christians are not released from the authority of the state.
4. Civil government regulates order in society and also protects the aims of the church. The end is righteousness in both. This requires appropriate force if necessary (even war) and taxation.
5. Civil government is in three parts:
  - a) the magistrate (who is ordained by God, Rm 13:1-4);
  - b) the law (i.e. the eternal moral law as expressed in the Mosaic Law and implanted in the hearts of all men);
  - c) the people under law.
6. Calvin recognised three chief forms of government: a) monarchy; b) aristocracy; c) democracy. All may be legitimate, though he preferred a nonhereditary aristocracy-democracy (based on Aristotle's *Politics*). Due to total depravity, government by a team of equals is safer than government by one man in order to avoid despotism.<sup>90</sup> Calvin desired an elected, de-centralised, representative, republican style of government in an age of kings, princes and despots. He learned to prefer this from his studies in the Old Testament revealing the inherent dangers of one-man rule.

These principles would be further developed and implemented by his followers, particularly the Huguenots, Knox and the American Puritans. Thus Calvin opened the door to modern political, democratic history.

## **Benefits of Calvin's teaching on citizenship and society**

### **The industrial work ethic**

Probably the most famous effect of Calvinism in the community was the 'Protestant work ethic'. Calvin showed that Christians have a responsibility to work hard and not be idle. They must provide for their families and seek the good of their neighbour. This means contributing to the good of society as a whole. The reaping of material benefits for such diligence was shown to be a blessing and not a curse. The generation of wealth, handled properly by godly people, would benefit society; Calvin was no ascetic. As a result of this, some historians have made the case that the origins of *capitalism* can be traced to the teaching of Calvin on the subject of the economy.<sup>91</sup> Although Calvinism is not responsible for the evils of capitalistic 'enlightened self-interest'<sup>92</sup>, it was the Reformation which took the Europe out of the feudalism of the Middle Ages and the countries which first developed a capitalist system were those where the influence of the Reformation was most keenly

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world by authoritarian apostles and prophets who have super powers. In both cases the perfected church rules the world. This eschatology fails to see the vital importance of many clear scriptures teaching the future persecution of the church under a fascist world government and the rise of a great apostasy and tribulation, not peace and security for believers. Dispensational eschatology is also false, teaching that Christ is not presently Lord of the earth, and only assumes control over the devil and sin in a future millennium when he rules through a Jewish, fleshly kingdom for 1,000 years.

<sup>89</sup> This section is indebted to Kelly, p15ff.

<sup>90</sup> In his sermon (29) on 1 Sam 8:11-22 he examines the defects of monarchs.

<sup>91</sup> E.g. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Calvinism*, R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Their ideas have provoked much controversy and discussion as the thesis is difficult to prove conclusively.

<sup>92</sup> Calvin taught and worked against this as did other Calvinistic states; e.g. the Puritan settlements of New England regulated against excessive profiteering.

accepted. True Calvinism freed godly people from the fear of making money but directed them to use it selflessly.

The German sociologist Max Weber wrote a book in 1908 titled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in which he argued that capitalism historically emerged in Protestant countries because they inculcated those virtues that led to the development of capitalism: hard work, honesty, frugality, thrift, punctuality. These virtues, coupled with the idea of a calling, provided the impetus ending serfdom and establishing a free political and economic order. The theology and values of the Bible, rediscovered by the Protestant Reformers in the 16th century, have been the principal ideas creating what we know as Western civilization.<sup>93</sup>

It is said that Calvinists worked harder and showed more enterprise than other religious groups. Decadent societies focus upon: self-interest, diversion, entertainment and pleasure; these were the very things Calvinistic societies disdained. Other religions over-valued introspective contemplation, mysticism or withdrawal from society; again Calvinism rejected these things, freeing up time for productive labour. It encouraged self-discipline and the pursuit of righteousness, which reined man's focus upon himself and encouraged his concern for those around him. Such ethical behaviour is conducive to good society. Working hard was a virtue and pleasing to God if done in his name. It was no longer necessary to avoid normal labour and escape into a cloister in order to delight God.

### **The use of money**

Extravagance was also frowned upon. Predestination explained that the rich are rich because God had allowed them to be in that position, but righteousness also taught that this brought great responsibility. Being rich was, therefore, not evil, but it was evil to fail to share excess wealth with the poor and needy. Good things came from God in order to be used as God directs. Calvin (and later Beza) was vigilant in ensuring that the poor were not economically exploited, and repeatedly criticised the council for inadequate care of them. The economic interests of the community must come before the interests of the individual.

Calvin, however, did not consider merchants to be parasites, which was the usual medieval view; and he did not object to lending money at reasonable interest rates set by the council. Usury came to be understood as charging *excessive* interest rather than just lending money at all, as it had earlier.<sup>94</sup> Calvin had also approved the establishment of a bank at Geneva, specifically to lend money at interest, the profits accruing to the city.

### **Emphasis upon righteous living**

Calvin was totally focused upon his teaching having practical effect in people's lives. He was not interested in erudition or popularity or developing an empire which he could reign over. He centred upon truth; he loved the word of God and found no greater joy than delving into its riches; but having done that Calvin was anxious to effect a change in his hearers/readers that would make them more like Christ and more obedient to God's word. In this way, through personal sanctification resulting from the application of the Bible, Calvin sought the good of the community through individuals being conformed to the image of Christ. This emphasis upon practical righteousness deriving from a focus upon God and his word was to have a powerful effect upon countries which embraced Calvinism's teachings. Any godly ministry will effect any community embracing it, but as Calvin's influence spread rapidly throughout Europe, it was his teaching on good living

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<sup>93</sup> *Civilization And The Protestant Reformation*, Trinity Foundation.

<sup>94</sup> This was why Jews became the great moneylenders of the medieval period since the church had taught that it was a sin to profit from lending money. This dependency upon Jews to provide capital added to the prejudice against them.



which most benefited 16th and 17th century nations espousing Calvinistic doctrine.

### **Political liberty**

We have seen that the emergence of political liberty stemmed from Calvin's initial development of the principles of resistance to wicked civil authorities and the limitations on government. Whatever our personal views on this matter as Christians, this is nonetheless a fact. Calvin was thus a progressive in this area. In other areas he was overly conservative by modern reckoning in that he rejected religious toleration and affirmed state involvement in church affairs. However, even here we have shown that this must be understood in the light of Calvin's unusual situation and also be evaluated in the historical context. To his contemporaries, Calvin was not irregular in these ideas.

The seventeenth-century Calvinists laid the foundations for both English and American civil rights and liberties: freedom of speech, press, and religion, the privilege against self-incrimination, the independence of juries, and the right of habeas corpus, the right not to be imprisoned without cause. The nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke referred to Calvin as the "virtual founder of America".<sup>95</sup>

### **Calvin on Christian unity**

Calvin made every possible attempt to consolidate unity with the Swiss Reformed Cantons; he even said that he would cross land and sea if by any means he were able to unify believers. However, he learned from his experiences at Strasbourg that attempts at unity with Catholic powers were useless; the Lutherans, like Melancthon, were still pointlessly trying to achieve this in the 1550s. Having attended a series of meetings called by the emperor to identify common ground and reunite the church, he knew that the Catholics would never compromise on vital unbiblical issues. Yet despite the failure of the Colloquy of Marburg, he still tried to re-unite Protestant churches, and to a measure succeeded after Zwingli died.

Though church leaders in Berne had earlier tried to discredit him, Calvin was more accepted in Zürich being distant from Berne's influence and led by Bullinger after Zwingli's death. Bullinger was respected by Calvin and was the most important second-generation Reformed leader, whose advice was constantly sought by Protestant leaders. Through open correspondence, followed by negotiations over a common statement of beliefs, the *Consensus Tigurinus* (Agreement of Zurich) was signed, and later accepted by all the Swiss Protestant churches. Though an important step, this was actually quite loose in certain areas in order to promote unity (something Calvin never did in Geneva). This shows his commitment to practical inter-church unity.

However, Calvin's hopes that this would eventually extend to incorporate the Lutherans were disappointed. This was largely due to general mistrust of Melancthon by Lutherans for his readiness to compromise in order to secure unity. Calvin's relationship with Melancthon would prove to be of little use. In fact emerging Lutheran leaders after 1546 (such as Joachim Westphal) stressed the uniqueness of Lutheranism against other Protestants and severely criticised Melancthon and Calvin. Calvin eventually gave up on hopes of reconciliation, sad that the only differences were based on emphasis rather than opposing doctrines; however in time these differences became more radical as Lutheranism became more compromised on the doctrines of grace.

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<sup>95</sup> *Civilization And The Protestant Reformation*, Trinity Foundation.

## Conclusion

Far from being responsible for introducing a merger of state and church, (it had existed for centuries) Calvin clarified the position and brought a measure of independent ecclesiastical control. Before he arrived in Geneva, the council's hold on the church was almost total. Calvin instigated independence in church matters, yet Calvin did not completely divorce the church from involvement with the state. For him the church was to support and guide the magistrate not just by example, but by counsel and direction. Similarly the magistrate should undergird and support the decisions of the church as it explained the requirements of the word of God.

His ideas about the control of social behaviour are surprising to us but they were a product of medieval norms and accepted by 16th century society. What Calvin did was to bring a more balanced view to this; state control of ethics was guided by Biblical teaching on righteousness. It was preferable, to him, that supervision of morals was undertaken by church elders rather than town councillors who may not even be true Christians. The word of God provided the motivation to live right rather than the previous repression of morals in an arbitrary way at the whim of various standards of different councillors. Remember, that if the people did not agree with this policy, it could have been overturned at the next elections. Far from this being the case, as time progressed, Calvin's policies were more and more supported by popular vote. Geneva was grateful for the influence of Calvin on society which had prevented the disintegration seen in other states. This is an area which we need to understand in the light of Calvin's contemporaries, not 20th century norms.

The charges that Calvin ran a theocracy and a police state are completely unfounded. The organisation of local government prevented this. Geneva was a democracy with a plural elected leadership. The charges of gross social injustice, repression and personal tragedies are, in fact, the opposite of the true situation. Compared to other states (especially Roman Catholic governments) Geneva was enlightened. Calvin brought true liberty to many areas where there had been previous repression (e.g: wives, children, religious refugees, democratic rule of law etc.); Calvin's teaching and political influence brought: peace, security and tranquillity to the people of Geneva (and other states). The accusations of man-centred, fundamentalist authoritarianism are the very reverse of the truth. Only someone who relies upon popular caricatures or who reads very superficially could think otherwise.

A sensible and balanced reading of history shows that Calvin was a godly, humble and modest man who was zealous for the glory of God and careful in his study of scripture. Like other great Reformers and Puritan thinkers, it is true to say that he was an intellectual genius, fitted by God for the task he was given - systematising and expounding the truths opened up by the Reformation. Far from taking advantage of his position, he continually refused to do so revealing a man of great integrity. He was no stranger to suffering and personal loss - he was not immune to love and compassion like some cloistered monk, he was loved and cherished. Despite these things he could be enraged by threats to God's truth and glory (not to himself) and responded vigorously to potential snares for the church. He was also a product of his time, he did not see everything (who could?) and, like Luther, the lack of clear separation of the church from the state seems strange to us. Yet in God's providence and timing, this probably saved the Reformation from destruction. God's true servants will always be disparaged by Satan to discourage people from learning from them. Calvin was one of these true servants.

It is odd that many of the recent attackers of Calvin have been church leaders who actually bear many of the marks of their own accusations. They have more autocratic power over their congregations than Calvin had. They have a more luxurious lifestyle and far more money than Calvin had. They have a more relaxed social life, more holidays, and even an easier ministerial life than Calvin had. This is to say nothing about better health and better access to modern conveniences, appliances, resources and health care. They also have far less intellectual acumen, theological gifting or rigorous ability. These opposites of Calvin should be ashamed of themselves.

## Interim appendices

### 1. Geneva

Geneva was an unusual city-state compared to the rest of Reformation Europe. While many states accepted the rule of their local prince, Geneva established an independent republic that lasted until it fell to Napoleonic France in 1798. It was formerly ruled by a prince-bishop, under the jurisdiction of the Dukes of Savoy.

Geneva had a relatively large population of about 10,000-20,000 people and these citizens had sought greater independence by joining the Swiss Confederation. The Reformation conjoined religious principles and political opportunity with the earlier aspirations of independence, which ultimately led to the bishop's ejection in 1526 and his replacement by magistrates. At this time limited reforms were made to the Catholic religious system through political convenience, but these had little real spiritual effect; however, veneration of saints, celebration of mass and fasting ceased in 1535. By 1536 the Protestants had greater influence and Protestantism was formally adopted under the leadership of Guillaume (William) Farel and Pierre Viret but the town council was too involved in trying to effect compulsory moral and spiritual change through laws. This caused division. This is why Calvin was necessary to bring a truly spiritual work of reformation.

### 2. Government structure and political factions in Geneva

1. THE LITTLE COUNCIL: The main authority resided with the *Little Council*, which consisted of 25 men who met several times weekly.
2. SYNDICS: Four members of the Little Council acted as virtual full-time governors, called *Syndics*, who were elected each year.
3. COUNCIL OF 200: This body elected the Little Council, confirmed its decisions and met when necessary.
4. THE GENERAL COUNCIL: contained 60 members who met twice a year to elect the Syndics.

Most leading citizens eventually found their way into the Little Council and the Council of 200 was usually expected to follow its lead. In the case of division, the Council of 200 assumed great importance; its greater number of members helped to offset the danger of individuals gaining too much influence. A further safeguard was that close relatives could not serve on the Little Council in the same year. The Syndics were unable to establish a power base by being unable to serve more than one year in office at a time.

Before Calvin's ministry, and to a lesser extent afterwards, Genevan government had suffered from bitter sectarianism; inevitably Calvin was identified with one of them. Despite the Genevan people speaking French, they did not consider themselves to be linked to France. One political faction was pro-France; indeed they saw the powerful French king as a defender against the Duke of Savoy, who was determined to take the city back into his control. Opposers of Calvin, himself a French immigrant, unfairly connected him with the political aspirations of this group. An opposing faction sought protection against Savoy from the Protestant City of Berne, even though Berne made it clear that the price was absolute subjection its authority. Those political factions who were set against any alliance with France chose to oppose Calvin merely out of political convenience. This basic confrontation led to further splintering of rival sectarianism and intrigue, the twists and turns of which was the complex political background against which Calvin had to manage during his entire ministry.

## **2. Farel and Calvin's first phase of reform in Geneva.**

At the age of 27 Calvin never intended to stay in Geneva more than one night, much less to have any influence there; indeed he was on his way to Strasbourg to live a life of academic study. However, in 1536 God providentially blocked the direct road from Paris to Strasbourg, forcing Calvin to take the much longer route south so that he arrived in Geneva unannounced. The town's spiritual leader, Farel, discovered<sup>96</sup> that Calvin (by now the famous writer of the recently published *Institutes*) was temporarily in the city and powerfully persuaded him to remain to assist in the work of Genevan Reformation. Indeed, he scared the young Calvin, who was apt to move on, by threatening that God would curse him if he did not remain. Calvin said that Farel strained very nerve to detain him and that he was stricken with terror.

Calvin's help was sorely needed; the city and the church were in complete disorder. Rival factions fought for power and the church was only in the early stages of spiritual reformation. Calvin's organisational skills came to the fore as much as his Biblical preaching; he took the disparate attempts of Reformation and welded them into a cohesive structure, providing social stability and reorganising the church more in accordance with scripture. Crucially this involved establishing the autonomy of the church and separating it from magistrate control. Secondly, the vital matter was to teach God's word and let truth change the hearts of the people so that doctrinal understanding had a moral effect on society. This first phase of Reformation angered many voices in the council as it reduced their power over certain aspects of community life (such as the power to excommunicate). The rivals of Farel and Calvin dominated and managed to force their exile in 1538.

### **Calvin and Farel's initial expulsion from Geneva**

When Calvin agreed to stay in Geneva his formal position was as an assistant to Farel. But he soon received great praise for his expositions of Paul's letters at St. Peter's Church. With some help from Farel, he drafted proposals for a church order, a catechism and a confession of faith, based upon the institutes. Part of the church order<sup>97</sup> was a requirement that all that should subscribe to a declaration of faith to identify God's people. In March 1537 the Large and Small councils approved the church order, but the public reaction varied. In many cases people refused outright to sign the declaration. Calvin, and especially the stern Farel, did not deal with this very sensitively, and so the political situation heated up. Their insistence that only the church should be able to exclude people from the Lord's Supper, or excommunicate offenders behaving wickedly, angered the rival civic authorities who had previously controlled the church and were watching their little empires and power over public morals degenerate.

In February 1538 Calvin's political opponents dominated the elections and caused a confrontation over the use of ordinary or unleavened bread at the Lord's Supper, and the use of a baptismal font. (The majority in this council wanted to encourage ties with Berne, which favoured using unleavened bread and the font.) This was merely a front in the fight for who would control church powers – the civil or ecclesiastical authority. The opposition in the council really wanted to keep the power of church discipline for themselves, whereas

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<sup>96</sup> Ironically the man who recognised Calvin and informed Farel later apostatised and returned to the Roman Church.

<sup>97</sup> *Articles concernant l'organisation de l'église et du culte*. These called for a more frequent practice of the Lord's Supper (weekly being preferred), proper exercise of excommunication, the introduction of psalm singing, compulsory catechisms for the young and establishment of a matrimonial court. Earlier Genevan acceptance of Berne's ordinances had resulted in communion only four times a year. Calvin's statutes are similar to those in Basel in the *Reformation Ordinance of 1529* (composed by Oecolampadius and others) and not unlike those agreed in other Reformed towns; thus these were by no means shocking or radical.

Calvin insisted that this was the property of the church alone. The leading council opponent was angry that a French foreigner had such power in Geneva. It was abhorrent to him that a Frenchman could excommunicate Geneva citizens. To provoke a problem, the council legislated that no one could be refused the Lord's Supper. In the ensuing dispute, Calvin and Farel refused to celebrate the Supper.

When Calvin and Farel acted on principle, refusing to comply with the council, they were forbidden to preach. When Calvin preached anyway they were banished on 22 April 1538, after merely two years of joint work. Farel went to Neuchâtel (Neufchatel) while Calvin accepted Martin Bucer's invitation to serve the French refugee church at Strasbourg where he remained three years, even becoming a citizen. Bucer and his work at Strasbourg was to have a big influence on Calvin. During this period he also met most of the European Reformers including Philip Melancthon.

Genevan politics and social stability fell apart. Two dominant factions developed in the council: the *Artichauds* wanted a treaty with Berne; the *Guillermains* (or supporters of Farel) were opposed. In 1540 the Guillermains achieved a majority in the elections for the Little Council, but in June riots sprang up. During the social chaos an Artichaud leader was executed, but all this ruined any proposed alliance between Berne and Geneva; thus eliminating a significant sectarian factor. Religious matters were no better; church leaders were ineffective, poor examples of spirituality and often guilty of gross misconduct. What did happen in the interim was that the seditious people who opposed Calvin were purged from the city.<sup>98</sup>

From mid-1538 to mid-1541 Calvin was in Strasbourg, and much relieved. This was a time of spiritual development and preparation for future labours. Yet he also tried to help the Geneva reformation from a distance, with no hard feelings. Indeed, he wrote on their behalf, against Cardinal Sadoletto who had written to the Geneva authorities trying to win them back to Rome. He also corresponded with various people in Geneva, encouraging their patience and godliness.

As Geneva seemed to be unravelling, the people remembered how Calvin had brought social stability, sound teaching, a godly example and enhanced public moral life; so they determined to bring him back. In 1541 supporters of the Reform movement gained power in the council and a formal request was issued for Calvin, Farel and Viret to return. Farel could not leave the church in Neufchatel and Viret was only allowed by the church in Berne to leave temporarily. Bucer and the church in Strasbourg were not keen to release Calvin, and neither did he want further strife, but eventually Calvin acceded to the urgent requests of the Genevans.

When he returned, on 13 September, he was to stay for the remainder of his life and, though he continued to have opposition from some council factions for many years and suffered greatly, overall he was beloved by the people who were grateful for the long-lasting benefits he brought. It is also worthy of note, in revealing what really motivated Calvin, that when he returned he immediately continued his Biblical expositions from where he had left off, as if there had been no interval. He virtually said, 'As I was saying...', thus showing that his prime interest was in expounding God's word faithfully to the people. It is in this faithful teaching of God's truth that Calvin is still fondly remembered by believers, not for his political effect on nations.

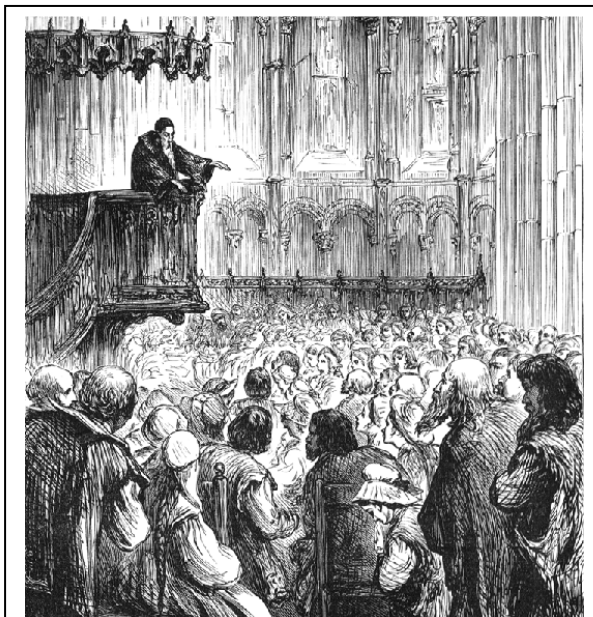
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<sup>98</sup> Beza, *Life of John Calvin*, p30.

Calvin immediately sought to reform church government along Biblical lines by organising a leadership of elders (presbytery) working by consensus, and a diaconate to deal with practical matters; even though this provoked many council members. He also separated church discipline from the council; but this autonomy enabled the church to develop spiritually and become the centre of the city's moral change. The powerhouse of spiritual guidance was Calvin's preaching in St Peter's Cathedral. On Sunday there were meetings at daybreak, 9 a.m., and 3 p.m. while at noon the children were given instruction. Preaching also occurred on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. This is to say nothing of Calvin's work in developing education and building a hospital. The power of his teaching affected families and practical matters, council meetings, strategic policy and individual counselling, as well as didactic instruction in church meetings.

### **Conclusion**

What is worthy of note is that the history of Geneva shows that Calvin's behaviour is the very opposite of the charges made by Prasch against him. He separated the church from the existing state control, which was the common position elsewhere. He focused upon God's word, teaching doctrine in order to achieve social and personal transformation. Police states existed everywhere under imperial rule, but not in Geneva where a true democracy, aided and influenced by the Biblical principles expounded by the church pastor, ruled the people. Calvin was also less of a starting point for Theonomic Reconstructionism that other men since he drew the basis of government from moral law and not from Old Testament civil laws.



**Calvin preaching**

# Zwingli and other Continental Reformers

We cannot pursue an in depth analysis of every Reformer regarding the issues before us. However, many readers, whilst having some knowledge of Calvin and Luther, may well be relatively uninformed about other Reformers. For this reason, we append a brief evaluation and criticism of Zwingli, and supply a snapshot of the key secondary leaders of the Reformation.

Although leaders like William Farel, Martin Bucer, Oecolampadius and especially Zwingli, were front line leaders of the Reformation, they do not have the influence of Luther and Calvin in establishing doctrine and precedents for us today, or for changing the course of nations. For this reason one feels less bound to spend too much time examining their character, history, position, practices and theology. Some, like Bucer, were unusually tolerant and as a result Strasbourg became a haven for many refugees of the truth; others, like Zwingli, we find less able to defend.

In addition to those on the front line, we must also consider the second rank of Reformers who held a significant place in the formulation of Reformed theology. Philip Melancthon was a very able theologian to whom Calvin dedicated one of his works. Even while Luther was alive, it was Melancthon who formulated many documents on his behalf, and who later developed Lutheran thought. Theodore Beza, likewise, proved to be an able successor to Calvin and a major theologian in his own right, as was Zwingli's esteemed successor, Heinrich Bullinger. Of these, Zwingli must be singled out for special treatment as he was an original Reformer spearheading the Reformation at the same time as Luther.

## Ulrich (or Huldrych) Zwingli

Zwingli (sometimes 'Zwingle') was born on 1 January 1484 at Wildhaus, Sankt Gallen, Switzerland, and died on 11 October 1531, near Kappel. He was the most important Reformer in the early Swiss Reformation and the only magisterial Reformer whose following did not develop into a church movement.

Zwingli was the son of a village magistrate who was educated at Wesen, Basel and Berne, entering university in Vienna (1498) and later Basel (1502), graduating in 1504. He was initially a teacher but was influenced the Reformer Thomas Wyttenbach and became a priest in 1506, continuing to study Greek, Hebrew and the Fathers and even corresponded with Erasmus.

After acting as a chaplain to the Swiss Army, he became a pastor at Einsiedeln in 1516 where he appears to have been converted. He soon began criticising the abuses of the Roman Church but somehow retained favour with the pope, gaining a titular honour and pension and was even appointed priest at the Zürich Great Minster in 1518. Being profoundly impacted by the effects of plague in 1519, which killed his brother and nearly killed him, he abandoned his humanistic tendencies. In 1520 the town council supported his desire to preach the Bible alone and his resulting ministry initiated a revolt against Catholic errors that kick-started the Swiss Reformation in 1522.

He published 67 Articles in 1523 for a debate with the vicar general of Constance; a result of which was the drafting of church reforms. The cathedral school was then used for children's education and training Reformed ministers. The next year images were



removed, organs dismantled (despite his own musical ability<sup>99</sup>), the Mass replaced and the ministry reorganised. Abandoning priestly celibacy, Zwingli married Anna Reinhard on 2 April 1524. In 1529 a vernacular Bible was introduced.

The Reform movement spread from Zürich to the canton of Zürich and neighbouring cantons. The forest cantons of Luzern, Zug, Schwyz, Uri, and Unterwalden resisted Reformation, aided by the famous Catholic theologian Johann Eck; but important centres like Basel and Berne followed Zwingli 1528. Zürich then negotiated a Christian Civic League between Basel and Berne, founded on common civil principles and an agreed confession of faith.

Zwingli and Bullinger's chief Reformed tenets were:

- The church is born of God's Word.
- The head of the church is Christ alone.
- Church laws are binding only if they are Biblical.
- Christ alone is man's righteousness.
- Scripture does not teach Christ's physical presence in the bread and wine.
- The Mass is a gross offence to the sacrifice of Christ.
- Prayers for the dead, purgatory and church images are all unbiblical.
- Marriage is lawful to everyone.

After 1525, Zwingli was beleaguered by confrontations with Anabaptists locally and by arguments with Lutherans externally. Against Luther on the Supper Zwingli correctly taught that the word 'is' ['This is my body'] has the force of 'signifies', not a physical presence but a spiritual presence of Christ. Luther's intransigence meant that the efforts of Bucer and Philip of Hesse for reconciliation at Marburg [1529] failed, despite complete agreement on cardinal doctrines. Zwingli's views are evidenced in, *On the Lord's Supper* (1526). While he correctly denies a physical presence, his view is over-rational, denying a reception of grace by faith in the memorial.

His work came under threat from a military alliance of the Catholic cantons, and there was further danger of imperial action. Zwingli's strategy was that offence was a necessary defence, and with an evangelical alliance attacked the forest cantons at Kappel, 10 miles south of Zürich in 1529, enforcing terms on the opposing districts. Attempts were also made to ally with Strasbourg and other Reformed cities, but these initially failed. Protestant divisions were also revealed at the Diet of Augsburg (1530), in which the evangelical groups manifested three different confessions, including Zwingli's *Fidei Ratio*.

Zwingli vainly tried to convince Venice and France of Reformed views. His *Exposition of the Faith* (1531) was addressed to Francis I of France to help clear up misunderstandings and perhaps even gain political support. This failed and the forest cantons attacked Zürich in October 1531, provoked by sanctions imposed by Berne. The Second War of Kappel, followed and Zwingli was killed in the battle, accompanying the Zürich forces as chaplain.

Like Luther, Zwingli was preoccupied with church / state politics, but this should not obscure his input to the Reformation; he sought to be Biblical in doctrine and practice, stressing the sovereignty of God. However, he had a weaker view of original sin and a more universal hope of salvation than Calvin or Luther. Like Calvin, he held to an acceptance of some secular council involvement in church government, but he was no Erastian (which

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<sup>99</sup> Zwingli, though an accomplished musician, considered that the function of music was to put the babies to sleep rather than to worship God.

teaches the supremacy of state authority in ecclesiastical matters); but, unlike Calvin, he managed to avoid debilitating conflicts with the council. His writings were uneven and somewhat over-intellectual, though he was a genial and friendly person.

### **An evaluation and critique of Zwingli**

Although one of the three key leaders of the continental Reformation, Zwingli's influence diminished after he died, and the areas where his teaching prevailed transferred allegiance to Calvinism or Lutheranism. Reformed students accept Zwingli's historical importance, but cannot defend his unnecessary intolerance; such as torturing Balthasar Hübmaier on the rack over believer's baptism to obtain a recantation, instead of being able to defeat his argument.

Zwingli could have shown an important example of toleration towards the Anabaptists when they arose in his region, but he failed; even though many of his friends were Anabaptists. This opportunity was ten years before the tragedy of Münster, which resulted in a widespread overreaction against them out of insecurity. History could have been very different if Zwingli had behaved in a more Biblical manner.

## **Short sketches of other principal characters**

### **Theodore Beza**

Theodore de Beze, was born in France on 24 June 24 1519 at Vézelay, and died in 1605 at Geneva. He was a writer, Bible translator, educator, and theologian who assisted and later succeeded John Calvin as a church leader in Geneva.

He was originally a lawyer in Paris and gained fame as a Latin poet. He was converted after a serious illness and went to Geneva to join Calvin in 1548. The next year he became professor of Greek at Lausanne. Beza travelled throughout Europe over the next few years defending the Protestantism, returning to Geneva in 1558.

In 1559 he established the Geneva academy with Calvin and became its first rector. Beza succeeded Calvin in 1564, and he remained the chief pastor for the rest of his life, contributing numerous works that influenced the development of Reformed theology.

Generally he followed Calvin's views, however placed a greater emphasis on ecclesiastical discipline and obedience to authority. Claims by some modern Arminian authors that he hardened and narrowed Calvin's theology by introducing a rigid, fatalistic scholasticism are unfounded; this notion has been destroyed by scholarship. It is normal for a scholastic tradition to develop over time, and some of Calvin's positions needed development, but Beza was faithful to Calvin's central theological positions. It is a lie to affirm that Calvin taught a universal atonement but Beza restricted this to limited atonement.<sup>100</sup> Universal atonement cannot sit with Calvin's teaching on election in eternity and reprobation ('double predestination'). Such a compromised idea had to wait for the Amyraldian heresy from the Saumur school in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Beza's sermons and commentaries were widely read internationally; but his lasting contributions were his Greek editions and Latin translations of the New Testament, which became fundamental sources for the English *Geneva Bible* (*Breeches Bible*, 1560,

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<sup>100</sup> See, for instance, *Protestant Scholasticism* (ed. Trueman / Cark); *Assurance of Faith* (Joel R Beeke) or the Banner of Truth abridged version; *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Vol 1 & 2), Baker, and *Christ and the Decree*, Richard A Muller, Labyrinth Press; *Calvin & the Calvinists*, Paul Helm, Banner of Truth.

continually republished until 1644 and most popular with Puritans) and the *King James Version* (1611). His *De jure magistratum* (1574) defended the right to revolt against a tyrannous government, this notion being prompted by the terrible St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572). This went further than Calvin's position on obedience to civil authority and achieved significant political importance, especially in the English Civil War.

In 1581 Beza donated the *Codex Bezae (D)* to the University of Cambridge (an important 5th century manuscript of Greek and Latin texts of the Gospels and Acts, accompanied by Beza's commentary). His gifts as a theologian and administrator were vital in continuing the work of Calvin in securing Calvinistic Reformation in Europe.

### **Martin Bucer**

Bucer [also spelled Butzer] was born on 11 November 1491 at Schlettstadt, Alsace, dying in 1551 in England. He is remembered for his continual attempts at conciliation between conflicting groups and his theological efforts affected the development of the Reformation on the Continent, as well as the progress of Anglicanism.

In 1506 Bucer became a Dominican monk, and at the University of Heidelberg he read Erasmus and Luther. In 1521 he left the Dominicans and worked for the count Palatine of the Rhine, one of the seven German electors. The next year he became pastor of Landstuhl and married a former nun. Having been excommunicated in 1523, he sought the protection afforded by his parents' citizenship in Strasbourg, where his charisma and intellectual ability gradually resulted in a position of leadership in Strasbourg and southern Germany.

Bucer's Reformed theology included the idea of a renewed society resulting from the Biblical preaching. This program of societal reform, through conversion, godliness, and discipline, found expression in 1551 in the substantial program for the English Reformation he presented to Edward VI.

Strasbourg was sandwiched between the area influenced by Zwingli (southern Germany and Switzerland) and that influenced by Luther (northern Germany), so Bucer sought to reconcile their opposing views on the Supper. He tried to facilitate this at the Colloquy of Marburg, but Luther even refused the hand of friendship proffered by Zwingli and Bucer.

Between 1524-1548 Bucer was involved in most Reformed conferences in Germany and Switzerland, including colloquies between Protestants and Catholics, and between German Lutheran and Swiss Reformed parties. Ever the conciliator, he sometimes used obscure language to avoid theological difficulties and promote peace, justifying ambiguity to achieve the prior goal of general reform, leaving detailed doctrinal issues to be dealt with later. This was a mistake.

Bucer was involved in the *First Helvetic Confession* (1536), considered by many Reformed theologians to excessively favour Luther's views, especially on the Supper. Bucer was also criticised for his part in the *Wittenberg Concord* (1536), which he hoped, would settle the problems between Lutherans and Reformed on the Supper. It failed. However, Bucer shone in the matter of religious toleration and there was less persecution of Anabaptists in Strasbourg than elsewhere in Europe.

It is noteworthy that Bucer's advice was sought by civil authorities in southern German areas to arrange political compromises. He saw these as a temporary necessity to effect further changes but again was criticised for situation ethics (the end justifies the means) and a lack of firm conviction. His biggest error involved the bigamy and political cover-up

of Philip of Hesse, where he helped to convince Luther and Melancthon to sanction a second wife on the basis of OT polygamy. This mistake did much damage to all concerned. His involvement with Emperor Charles V in the colloquy between Catholics and Protestants at Regensburg (1541) also did much harm. The rejection of the Regensburg Book led to the subjection of Protestants by force and the forced compromise of the Augsburg Interim in 1548. He did, however, reject this Interim as a backward step. Charles' army prevailed and Bucer was discharged and, with other leaders, left for England on the invitation of Thomas Cranmer.

In England, in the reign of Edward VI, Bucer supported the cautious Reform program of Cranmer and Nicholas Ridley rather than the more radical ideas of Zwinglian John Hooper or John Knox in Scotland. However, Bucer did point out the Lutheran emphasis in Edward's First *Prayer Book* (1549) and Bucer's conciliatory influence was valued in the compromises required as the English church was established.

### **Heinrich (Henry) Bullinger**

Bullinger was the assistant and then successor to Zwingli in 1531, but he made a lasting contribution to the work of the Reformation through his preaching and writing, and his work is of more value than Zwingli's. He was born on 18 July 1504 at Bremgarten, Switzerland, and died in Zürich on 17 September, 1575.

Bullinger became interested in Reformed ideas when he was at the University of Cologne. While teaching at a Cistercian school in Kappel (1523-1529) he became friendly with Zwingli, gradually accepted his theology, and assisted him in debates at Bern in 1528. The next year he succeeded his father as a Reformed pastor at Bremgarten until he took on Zwingli's mantle. He was gentle and conciliatory in tone and this helped him to gain considerable influence in other countries through correspondence, including with Henry VIII and Edward VI.

Like Bucer, he also sought to unite the Swiss with Luther over the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and helped to write the *First Helvetic Confession* of 1536. When this unifying effort failed he instead managed to reach agreement with Calvin in the *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549) and with other Reformed churches in his *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566). This became a widely-received and important document. His *Decades*, a series of sermons, remains popular today and has recently been reprinted.

### **Guillaume (William) Farel**

Farel was the prime reason for the introduction of Reformed theology to French-speaking Switzerland and without him Calvin would never have established the church in Geneva. He was born in 1489 at Gap in France, and died in 1565, at Neuchâtel.

While studying at the University of Paris, Farel became the friend of his professor Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (an important pre-Reformation theologian). Lefèvre assisted him to gain a post teaching grammar and philosophy at the Collège Cardinal Lemoine in Paris where Farel later became regent. His evangelical conversion occurred at some point before 1521 when he was made a preacher by the bishop of Meaux (Guillaume Briçonnet), a man who had Reforming sympathies.

Farel was forceful, impatient and could be stern (Beza said that Farel's word was like thunder), so he soon returned to Paris in 1523 to progress the work of reform more swiftly. However, open persecution of Protestants forced him to flee to Basel and a dispute with Erasmus resulted in his exile. Over two years Farel preached in Montbéliard, Strasbourg,

Basel, and Bern, before temporally settling down in Aigle, Valais, from 1526 to 1529. Then in 1530 he moved to Neuchâtel and subsequently Geneva (1532), which formally supported the Reformation in 1536. Having become the main French-speaking Reformer, he persuaded John Calvin (also forced out of France) to stay on as his assistant – though Calvin soon achieved an equal status as preacher and leader. However, in 1538 they were expelled from Geneva through political expediency. Farel wandered for a time but eventually settled in Neuchâtel in 1543, where he mostly remained.

### **Philipp Melanchthon**

Melanchthon's German name was Philipp Schwartzerd (meaning 'Black Earth', which in Greek becomes 'Melanchthon'; in those days it was common for academics to change their name to Latin or Greek equivalents). He was born on 15 February 1497 at Bretten in the German Palatinate and died 19 April 1560 at Wittenberg. He was an important Reformer, theologian, educator and the key friend and successor of Martin Luther. Gifted with great learning, he founded schools and universities and reorganised Germany's education system as well as being a key Lutheran theologian.

Before his conversion Melanchthon was interested in the occult, especially astrology and demonology, as well as humanism but he was also a great lover of classical literature. It was unsurprising that he was trained as a humanist since his great-uncle was Johannes Reuchlin, the famed Hebraist and humanist scholar.

At the universities of Heidelberg (1509-11) and Tübingen (1512-14), he studied philosophy, Scholasticism, rhetoric, humanism, the classics and ecclesiastical matters; becoming a lecturer on the classics and an author, including writing a Greek grammar *Rudiments of the Greek Language* (1518), that was repeatedly republished. He was of such international stature that the famous Dutch humanist Erasmus praised him.

In 1518 Melanchthon became the University of Wittenberg's first professor of Greek, where he immediately set about reforming the curriculum and met and became close friends with fellow professor Martin Luther. He quickly adopted the newly formed Reformation cause, which Luther had initiated the previous year and was soon defending the authority of scripture against Luther's opponent Johann Eck. His early commitment was strong, rejecting transubstantiation before Luther and making justification by faith the foundation of his theology. He even publicly separated from Reuchlin. Like Luther at this time, he was tireless, beginning his lectures at 2 a.m. to 600 students; but he found time to marry Katherine Krapp in 1520 and father four children.

In 1521 he published the famous *Loci Communes*, the first systematic treatment of evangelical doctrine, where sin, law, and grace were the fundamental subjects; total depravity, redemption by divine grace, and rejection of meritorious works were prominent. Eighteen editions were published by 1558. Luther praised it highly while the University of Cambridge made it required reading; Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) virtually memorised it so she could converse about theology. At this time it was nearly as important as Calvin's *Institutes*.

Despite papal death threats for supporting Luther, Melanchthon wrote many powerful defences of his thought and attacked papal abuses. Both Luther and he published each other's work when one hesitated to put them in print. While Luther was in the Wartburg castle in 1521, Melanchthon led the work in Wittenberg, though he was much less effectual in this capacity. After the uncertain peace resulting from the *First Diet of Speyer* in 1526, he was sent to other Reformed states to oversee their church constitutions. This led to his

*Instructions for Visitors*, on doctrine and primary education, which became the first legal public school system in Saxony, being repeated throughout Germany. Melanchthon also prepared text-books, aided many universities and travelled as a training consultant to help successful implementation, thus rebuilding Germany's education system. All this work led to him being called, 'The preceptor ['instructor'] of Germany'.

Melanchthon was involved in the *Second Diet of Speyer* (1529) where the name 'Protestant' originated and was the chief Reformed representative at the *Diet of Augsburg* in 1530. He drafted the *Augsburg Confession*, which was to influence subsequent Protestant credal statements. However, in his desire for peaceful negotiations with Catholics he steered towards compromise, like Bucer, but his defence of the document (*Apology of the Confession of Augsburg*, 1531) resisted watering down Reformed proposals and both became authorised Lutheran statements. Another key document was his '*Appendix on the Papacy*', added to the *Schmalkald Articles* (1536-37). Here he refuted the idea of infallible papal authority but sadly he accepted papal church jurisdiction in order to keep the peace. Melanchthon's appeasing character enabled him to negotiate with Catholics in an effort to avoid war but this led to compromise, though he never denied justification by faith or the authority of the Bible.

After Luther died, the Battle of Mühlberg (1547) was a sore defeat for Protestants and there were efforts to find a compromise to avoid further fatalities. In the agreement of the *Augsburg Interim* Melanchthon fought for justification by faith as a fundamental issue but weakened on other matters. He accepted a confused form of meritorious works and the Catholic seven sacraments. This led to severe criticism from Reformed leaders. Further pointless discussions with Catholics continued until he died in 1560; he was buried in Wittenberg beside Luther.

Melanchthon's skill was in his academic qualities, which, when united with Luther's clarity, genius and evangelical passion, was a great force in the early years of the Reformation. But without Luther, he was much weaker and overly prone to compromise. His writing style and intellect made him a superb communicator of truth but his leadership qualities were second-rate. This was evidenced during Luther's captivity when progressive reform and social stability fell apart in Wittenberg. On Luther's return a week of solid preaching and firm decisions put matters right.

Melanchthon's ideas also changed over time. Though he initially agreed with Luther on the Lord's Supper, he gradually began to accept Calvin's position, solidified by 1540 in the *Augsburg Confession*. But the chief problem with Melanchthon was his development of Lutheran theology away from the doctrines of grace under political duress. He elevated the work of man in salvation, having originally followed Luther in rejecting free will and affirming irresistible grace. He seemed to reject election in his 1527 *Commentary on Colossians* and *Commentary on Romans* (1532). His 1535 edition of the *Loci Communes* affirmed that man is responsible for his salvation. This is further stated in *De Anima* (1540) '*God draws, but he draws him who is willing*'. This set Lutheranism away from the original theology of Martin Luther and towards universalism. In these matters there is little difference between Lutheranism and Arminianism.

He also differed from Luther on the importance of God's law in bringing faith and sanctification. Luther emphasised faith in sanctification; Melanchthon, in *Instructions For Visitors* (1528), demanded the threat of law on men to instil faith and produce repentance. A further problem (seen in his *Loci Communes* of 1535) was his stress upon good works as necessary for eternal life. Though he meant this as the necessary corollary of justification

by faith, it seemed to imply that meritorious works secure salvation. This resulted from his anxiety about public order and social stability.

To sum up, Melanchthon was a great academic who did much good in the early part of the German Reformation; indeed Luther often gave way to him, impressed by his keen intellect. However, he was a much weaker man than Luther and under pressure capitulated on key doctrines, leading Lutheranism away from God's word.

### **John Oecolampadius**

Oecolampadius, born Johannes Huszgen (or Hauschein) in 1482 at Weinsberg (Weinberg), died in 1531 at Basel (Basle) Switzerland, was a preacher, scholar and a brilliant philologist who led the Reformation in Basel. He had been trained in theology at Heidelberg University.

At first he was a tutor to the sons of the Elector of the Palatinate and a preacher at Weinsberg. From 1513 he studied at Tübingen and Stuttgart, becoming fluent in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, where he made contact with Reuchlin and Melanchthon. In 1515 Oecolampadius became a minister in Basel and assisted Erasmus in the preparation of the 1518 *Greek New Testament*, then produced translations of works by various Greek Fathers of the church. In 1518 he became cathedral preacher and pastor at Augsburg. Under pressure of work in 1520, his mystical leanings grew while his scholarly interests led him to enter the Brigittine monastery at Altomünster. However, his growing disillusionment with the Roman church and his increasing admiration for Luther soon made him to leave.

In 1522 he became a court chaplain to Franz von Sickingen but in 1523 he returned to Basel becoming Biblical lecturer at the university, where he had gained a PhD in 1518. He also became a minister, lecturing in three languages to large audiences at the university and preaching at Saint-Martin's Church, Oecolampadius soon became the dominant figure in the city and established the Reformed Church, promoting evangelical theology throughout Switzerland and befriending Zwingli. At Baden in 1526, he debated for Reformed truth, and again in 1528 at Berne. He also attended the *Colloquy of Marburg* defending Zwingli. On the authority of the council in 1530, images were removed from the church and the Mass abolished under his supervision. He also organised proper church discipline and encouraged lay ministry and eldership. However he opposed the dominant position of the council in church matters.

Oecolampadius became a famous preacher and writer. He defended Zwingli's view on the Lord's Supper, particularly in, *On the Correct Interpretation of the Words of the Lord* (1526) emphasising that it was only a remembrance and not a re-enactment of Christ's sacrifice. When Zwingli was killed at the Battle of Kappel (1531) Oecolampadius was overwhelmed by shock and died not long afterwards.

### **John Knox**

Now before anyone objects that Knox was not a continental Reformer, I should point out a few significant things:

- Firstly, he studied under Calvin in Geneva and had close connections with this church. The Reformation he supervised in Scotland was closely based on the pattern in Geneva.
- Secondly, he is one of the major leaders of the Reformation. The work he did in Scotland is of great significance; indeed, it is one of the most important of all. It covered a bigger area than Geneva and changed British history; without a strong Reformed church in Scotland the Reformation would not have survived long in England. Scottish Presbyterianism had a long and powerful effect in England, even at

the time of the Westminster Assembly.

- Finally, it is Knox who is included in the memorial statues on the Reformation walk in Geneva, along with Calvin, Farel and Beza. Knox, though less celebrated, is of more strategic importance than Cranmer, Ridley or Latimer.

### *Important background*

Before the Reformation, Scotland was a byword for a backward civilisation; Europeans regarded it as a poor independent kingdom on the edge of the civilised world. Nothing good was deemed to happen there. Any political activity amongst the fifty nobles was characterised by treachery, violence and deceit. Murder of opponents was so rife that it was rare for a political activist to die of natural causes. The Roman Church was even more corrupt than on the continent. The aristocracy and wealthy put their children into the leading positions as a source of income, thus the people gained little spiritual counsel from the unprepared curates, the priests being absent.

From 1520 Lutheranism gained a toehold, especially round the ports in the east which traded with Germany, but heretics were occasionally burned to dispel any popular support. However, in 1542 King James V died leaving his daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, as his successor.<sup>101</sup> This weakened monarchy, caused by the long period of her minority, gave time for rapid changes amidst factional feuding. Scotland's regent, James' widow, Mary of Guise (often called Mary of Lorraine), was from a prominent Catholic French family and became a powerful political influence, enforcing her authority with French money, advisors and troops. France was keen to support her to gain a political advantage over England, often sponsoring raids in the north of England. Thus Scotland became a great worry to the English Crown where French interests and the Catholic Church were being so powerfully pushed forward. However the political situation became more complicated as Scottish nobles saw Protestantism as an opportunity for political advantage, and England financially sponsored the growth of the Protestant parties.

Mary of Guise married her daughter off to Francis II of France and by 1559 it seemed likely that he, through his wife, would become King Francis I of Scotland. This aroused much nationalistic feeling and aided her political opponents to gain an advantage. Nationalism was becoming associated with Protestantism. The result was a short civil war resulting in the expulsion of the French and the death of Mary of Lorraine. In 1560 the young husband of Mary Queen of Scots died leaving France and Scotland without an heir. Her return to Scotland in 1561 meant that it became a Protestant state ruled by a Catholic heir.

### *The impact of Knox*

Many historians, even critics, accept that Knox is the greatest ever Scotsman; he certainly had the greatest Reformed effect on national history after Calvin. He was born about 1505<sup>102</sup> and schooled in Haddington, east of Edinburgh, completing his education at Glasgow University. He became a Catholic priest five years before fortieth birthday but also gave private tutorials to wealthy children to earn money. In 1545 he became a Protestant, being influenced by his teacher and friend George Wishart, who was burned at the stake for his Reformed views.

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<sup>101</sup> Mary (1542-1587) was the daughter of James V and Marie de Guise-Lorraine who became Queen of Scotland when only six days old. It was during her minority that the major events which shaped Scotland took place when she resided in France, becoming the consort of King Francis II. She returned to Scotland after thirteen years in France. She was regarded by Catholics as the rightful queen of England by virtue of her descent from Henry VIII and the alleged illegitimacy of Elizabeth.

<sup>102</sup> This is the traditional view. Modern historians now propose that he was born in 1514. No one can be certain.



By this time Knox was corresponding with Calvin and Beza, and though he initially dallied with Lutheranism, he soon saw this as only a partial Reformation and thoroughly embraced the Genevan system. In 1546 he joined the Protestant rebels who had taken the castle of St Andrews and assassinated the Archbishop. After teaching boldly at St Andrews (in his first sermon he denounced the pope as Antichrist) Knox was taken captive in 1547 by Mary's French troops and forced to row in French galleys for nineteen months, permanently damaging his health. On being released in 1549 he served in churches in England and was the royal chaplain to Edward VI for a time, having a hand in the compilation of the *Book of Common Prayer*. He was offered the bishopric of Rochester but he refused, believing the common order was not sufficiently Biblical (though oddly he was not against the role of bishops). The rule of Bloody Mary followed Edward's causing Knox to flee to Geneva in 1554. On Calvin's advice, his ministry in England was followed by a period of service in Dieppe, then Hamburg (to English refugees), and then to an English-speaking congregation in Geneva. However, he soon returned to Scotland where he was welcomed with open arms, and was even supported by the nobility. After establishing the basis of Protestantism he returned to Geneva.

For three years he had peace, learning from Calvin and accepting the Genevan model, finding time to write despite pastoring English refugees. This included a work against female rulers aimed at Catholic monarchs like Mary Tudor and Mary of Lorraine (regent of Scotland), which later caused a problem with Elizabeth I; as well as a defence of predestination against the Anabaptists which was accepted by the Genevan authorities. He also had a hand in the translation of the *Geneva Bible*.

Having guided the Scottish Reformation from Geneva, he returned after the death of 'Bloody' Mary Tudor in 1558, arriving home in May 1559. The civil war in Scotland, caused by Mary of Lorraine, immediately arose which continued until her death in 1560. This was due to Mary's duplicity; while courting Protestantism openly, her secret agenda was to make Scotland bow to France politically and to the pope religiously, in line with her background from the French House of Guise.

Knox was one of the reasons why she did not fulfil her aims. He was not even afraid to say to her that she was fighting against God and not man. Elizabeth, at Knox's request, sent an army and a fleet to help the Scots Protestants fight Mary's Catholic troops, most of which were French. Knox was tireless as army chaplain, a secretary giving political instructions, and liaison officer to Elizabeth. The Treaty of Edinburgh, following Mary's death, resulted in the removal of all foreign troops and the prohibition of any Frenchman holding senior public office. Protestantism was victorious in Scotland.

It was the Reformed faith that brought relative democracy and removed the threat of despotism and invasion. On 1 July 1560 the most important Parliament began in Scotland where Knox removed the jurisdiction of the pope and the celebration of the Mass. A Reformed Confession was drawn up and a book of discipline. Knox tried to use the property of Catholic lands to raise money for the poor, new schools and pay Reformed ministers, but was blocked by greedy noblemen. This stunted radical Reformation for many years. While many noblemen may have used the Reformed faith for political ends, beneath them there was a strong personal commitment to Reformed theology, notably amongst the lairds [landowners] in the country and the burgesses [merchants] in the towns.

But more trouble followed. Mary, 'Queen of Scots' returned to Scotland in August 1561, aged eighteen, determined to restore it to the pope. Knox was repeatedly summoned to her where he confronted her policies, especially her private celebration of the Mass, which he said that he feared more than an invading army. He also castigated the persecution of the Huguenots, which Mary had celebrated with a ball. Despite Mary's attempts to condemn him to death, Knox was vindicated by the council.

Mary's example and patronage led to Catholicism becoming more open and threatened the progress of Reformation, but in God's providence, her own actions caused her downfall.<sup>103</sup> She became a political liability, causing Elizabeth to distance herself. In 1567 she was forced to abdicate by Scottish nobles, in favour of her son James VI. Fleeing to England she was arrested for complicity in the murder of her husband Darnley and imprisoned in Fotheringay castle. After a series of Catholic plots to place her on the English throne, she was eventually executed for treason against Elizabeth I. Her beauty, sad story and ignominious death have left many sympathetic for this woman, but the truth is that she was very dangerous. If she had lived the history of England would have been very different. The Earl of Murray, a Protestant, was made regent and the Reformed church attained full legal status in 1567. Without Knox, none of this would have happened and Scotland would have become Roman Catholic; his weapon in this warfare was the truth, proclaimed boldly and simply in powerful preaching. His words were even compared to hail and bullets.

Knox was a thunderous voice against heresy. He vilified the papacy for its unbiblical practices, especially the mass, but also condemned the Anabaptists for their tendency to anarchy. He was a powerful challenger of error, able to lay bare the false arguments with blunt language, sometimes even harsh language, being bold in reproving wickedness. It was the speech of a pastor facing those who would threaten his flock. He wasn't fazed by dignitaries, and spoke plainly to Queen Mary straight to her face. He was also a fiery preacher, ablaze with the truth, but he was not a theologian of the order of those on the continent. However, at home he was a gentle father to his children, the product of two marriages and was a godly example to all. His younger second wife nursed him in his last illness. Regarding his ministry, one of his listeners remarked,

Others lop off the branches of the papacy, but he strikes at the root to destroy the whole.<sup>104</sup>

Though sometimes severe, since his love for the truth sometimes brought out stern responses, Knox was always dignified and gracious. Like Luther, he was God's man for the time and situation, which required a tough, single-minded preacher, not a soft spoken and eloquent pacifier. For this reason he was called 'the light of Scotland'. He died in 1572. The Earl of Mortoun said of him,

Here lieth a man who in his life never feared the face of man: who hath been often threatened with dag and dagger, but yet hath ended his days in peace and honour. For he had God's providence watching over him in a special manner, when his very life was sought.<sup>105</sup>

It is arguable that only Knox could have achieved the transformation of Scotland. He dominated religion, politics and social life in the way of an Old Testament prophet, thundering forth God's word in every conceivable situation with clarity, courage and

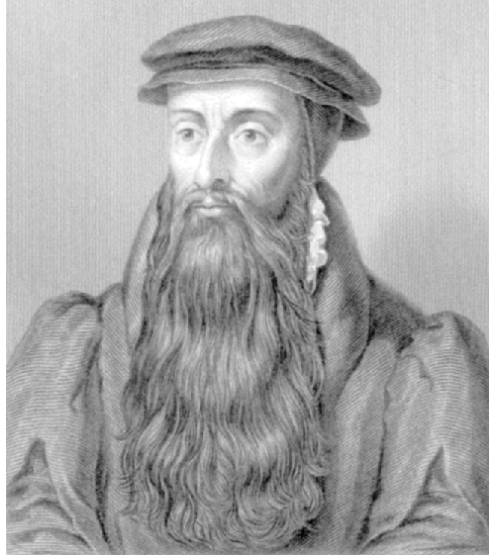
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<sup>103</sup> Such as, the favouritism of the Italian Rizzio and the murder of Rizzio by her second husband; but chiefly for marrying James Hepburn (Earl of Bothwell), the supposed murderer of her first husband Lord Darnley. Her son by Darnley was James VI.

<sup>104</sup> James Stalker, *John Knox*, p23.

<sup>105</sup> P Hume Brown, *John Knox: A Biography*, A&C Black, 2:288.

almost arrogant conviction of its truth. Unlike Calvin, he was happy centre-stage, undaunted by difficult circumstances and no respecter of persons. In the same way that only Luther could have initiated the Reformation in Germany and only Calvin could have systematised Reformed truth so effectively, so Knox is the only man of his time who could have brought long-lasting Reformation to Scotland.



John Knox

# Overview of the Spread of the Reformation

One reason for the significant influence of the Reformation was its rapid spread from central Europe outwards as far as America. It was the thinking of Calvin which gave the impetus for this expansion, both theologically and politically, after the death of Luther in 1546. It is not an exaggeration to say that Calvin's thought, chiefly expressed in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, caused a shock-wave in history which pushed the slowly changing Middle Ages into the Modern World. National and international politics changed from this point; feudalism ended, aspirations for liberty and democracy were spurred on and new nations were formed. Calvinism undergirded these as we shall investigate later. However, here we must give a concise evaluation of the impact in several countries.

## Germany

Of course most of Germany remained Lutheran after Luther's death in 1546; however, a number of states turned to Calvinism. During a 'Second Reformation', the Palatinate in the south (centred in Heidelberg) and a few other principalities, adopted partial Calvinistic reforms to its Lutheranism. Twenty-eight states became Calvinist, but most were of little political significance and claims that Calvinism was a powerful force in later 16<sup>th</sup> century Germany are overstated. However, it is also true that many princes were genuinely motivated by Biblical truth and this explains their change of allegiance. Calvinism, however, failed to win over many Hapsburg nobles, though many converted to Lutheranism. Without Luther, the power-house of Lutheranism had vanished; in fact it was already waning before he died.

While Calvinism seemed unable to break the natural barrier of German speaking people who considered Lutheranism to be their national religion, Calvinism made some impact in Transylvania and Poland, especially with the nobles. But generally in Eastern and Central Europe where Slavs and Germans were intermixed, Lutheranism tended to dominate.

## France

Unlike German provinces or Swiss cities, the Reform movement in France did not have widespread support from the ordinary person or from the authorities. For this reason the early gains failed to take hold and the country remained staunchly Catholic. As a result, great numbers of French Protestants (called Huguenots), eventually, either left the country or suffered death.

Under Francis I (1515-1547) there was only sporadic persecution of Protestants; indeed his sister made Navarre a centre for reform-minded humanists. Being dominated by political intrigue in his struggle for supremacy with the Hapsburgs, Francis wavered in his support and oppression. At first he favoured Protestantism by supporting the German princes who had openly become Lutheran against the emperor's wishes (he considered them potential allies in any war with the Hapsburg emperor). But as French Reformed numbers increased throughout the 1540s, this resulted in increased repression as Francis needed to cultivate good relations with the conservative Parliament and the Sorbonne or at times to placate the papacy. Many French Protestant refugees fled to the newly Reformed French-speaking Swiss cantons.

Henry II (reigned 1547-59) set up special courts for heretics resulting in many being burned; but the increased martyrdoms multiplied Calvinistic converts, helped by missionary support from Geneva. Some noble families, such as the Bourbons and Chatillons, adopted the Reformed faith. Calvinists formed a congregation in Paris in 1555, and over seventy churches were represented at a national synod in Paris in 1559. After Henry's death the situation worsened and militant Catholic aristocrats (like the Guise family) opposed any toleration of non-Catholic religion.

By the 1560s the Huguenots had gained effective control of southern, western and central France and there was a possibility that Calvinism could control all of France. As it was, 10% of the population (2 million people) were Calvinists (mostly urban middle class) and 50% of the nobility (some historians say that the figure was a quarter of the French population).<sup>106</sup> The leading Huguenot was Admiral Coligny, a member of the Chatillon branch of the Montmorency family. At one point it seemed that his ardent evangelistic efforts would convince the young King Charles IX (1560-74). Though the religious civil wars began in 1562, it was clear that Calvinism, in very adverse circumstances, had made more serious inroads here than anywhere else, partly due to the hundreds of preachers sent from Geneva.

Fearing Protestant control of the country, Catherine de Medici (Henry II's widow and the scheming and powerful mother of three French kings) panicked and arranged the assassination of Coligny. This failed and, partly to cover her plot, she authorised the killing of leading Huguenots in Paris. Thousands of Protestants, including Coligny, were brutally massacred on St Bartholomew's Day in 1572 by the Paris militia and a mob in this attempt to exterminate the Protestant leadership. The killings spread to twelve other towns where people were hacked to death in homes and the street. This did not destroy the Reformed movement in France but it radically altered the balance of power. Some Protestant theologians, such as Beza, reacted by developing an apologetic for rebellion against tyrants.

Due to the surrounding hostility, civil war erupted between the Huguenots, the militant Catholics and the 'politiques' (who wanted social stability and used religion to achieve political aims); religion and politics became enmeshed. The fanatical Catholic Guise family became the principal faction and issued a wave of persecution. However, Henry III was assassinated, of all things by a Catholic fanatic, which resulted in Henry of Navarre, the leader of the Huguenots, becoming king (1598-1610), though to reign he had to superficially adopt Catholicism to prevent a blood-bath ('Paris is well-worth a Mass'). The Catholics had allied with the king of Spain, threatening anarchy and open war unless Henry officially gave up his new faith. When the Protestant Henry IV began his reign in 1589 the reformers hoped for better things. He ended the civil war and issued the Edict of Nantes (1598) legally recognising Protestantism and granting the Huguenots toleration, civil rights and fortified towns. Ironically, historians mark this event as the beginning of the end for Calvinism in France.

After Henry IV was assassinated the Reformed cause grew weaker under Louis XIII (1610-43). Huguenot revolts resulted in the loss of all fortified towns, while internal controversy over the development of the Amyraldian weakening of predestination at the Saumur Academy didn't help. Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) waged war on Protestantism, notably at the Siege of La Rochelle (1628).

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<sup>106</sup> Fisher, *History of the Reformation*, quoted in McFetridge, p107.

When Louis XIV ('the Sun King') reigned (1643-1715) he determined to make France the most powerful state in Europe and the French Church autonomous from actual papal authority, though recognising the spiritual authority of the pope; in reality this subjected the French Church to the Crown (Gallicanism). Centralising power in the hands of the king meant only tolerating one national religion and destroying the military and political influence of the Huguenots. Measures were adopted to harass and persecute Protestants and Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, causing much harsher persecution for French Protestants (recant or leave). With Calvinism illegal, hundreds of thousands of Huguenots left France, many bringing their talents and Calvinistic work ethic to England, where they usually prospered. Those who could not afford to leave were sent to the galleys or killed. Isolated remnants held out in revolt, such as the peasants of the Cevennes in 1702 (the 'Camisards'), but most were gradually hunted down. What was left of the Huguenot remnant was accorded civil rights in 1787 with the arrival of the Enlightenment, but full toleration came only with the French Revolution. Napoleon recognised Calvinism as an established religion.

Since Calvinism did not have a proper opportunity to develop in France, and never really gained any widespread political support, it was never able to flourish and bring blessing to the nation. However, it is interesting that the Huguenot exile can be shown to have had a beneficial effect on England and The Netherlands.

1532	Reformation begins in France; Calvin active in Paris.
1555	First Reformed congregation in Paris.
1559	First Reformed national synod in Paris.
1562	1200 French Huguenots (Protestants) slain at Massacre of Vassy; first war of religion begins.
1563	Persecution of Huguenots starts in France.
1572	The <i>St Bartholomew's Day Massacre</i> .
1598	Henry of Navarre, the leader of the Huguenots, becomes king (1598-1610). Edict of Nantes legally recognises Protestantism.
1610	Henry IV assassinated, Louis XIII becomes king (1610-43). Huguenots rebel.
1628	Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) wages war on Protestantism, notably at the Siege of La Rochelle (1628).
1643	Louis XIV becomes king (reigned 1643-1715).
1685	Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

## The Netherlands (Low Countries or United Provinces)

As early as 1523 Dutch Christians were being martyred for Lutheran beliefs; however, in due course it was Calvinism that dominated the religious affairs of the Netherlands, which were then ruled by Emperor Charles V; when he abdicated they were transferred to King Philip I of Spain.

Religious reform was bitterly opposed by Philip and the Dutch became, almost by necessity, committed to developing political independence to protect their country and their faith. For this they suffered greatly, such as when the Spanish Duke of Alva killed 100,000 Protestants between 1567 and 1573. The growing demand for independence resulted in open rebellion and the northern Netherlands formed a federation under William the Silent (1533-1584, Prince of Orange).<sup>107</sup> This resulted in a long war (The Dutch

<sup>107</sup> William had been appointed as governor of Holland by Philip II of Spain in 1559 but joined the revolt.

Rebellion or Revolt of the Netherlands), out of which the Netherlands gained religious and political independence. The Dutch eventually defeated the Roman church and the Spanish king in 1648, becoming The United Provinces. The Southern Provinces (now Belgium & Luxembourg) were not successful and remained in the control of the Catholic King of Spain.<sup>108</sup>

The Dutch Reformed church held its first synod at Dort (Dordrecht) in 1574, and afterwards established a University at Leiden (1575); adopting the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, but drawing up its own pattern of church order. From this point the Netherlands were to have a global impact by exporting their brand of Calvinism far and wide, producing many fine theologians; they even established a large base in America that continues to be very influential. Their royal line would also come to the rescue of England after the damage caused by the Stuart dynasty.

1523	Dutch Lutherans martyred.
1556	Charles V abdicates assigning Spain and Netherlands to his son Philip II.
1572	Dutch rebellion begins.
1574	First synod at Dort (Dordrecht)
1579	Treaty of Utrecht marks foundation of Dutch Republic. William of Orange named as ruler.
1648	Treaty of Westphalia recognises the Dutch republic.

## Central Europe

The lands of central Europe had an ancient history of independent church movements, as well as spawning important reforming ministries. Two of the three continental precursors of the Reformation lived in Prague, Bohemia: Jan Hus (pron. ‘Yan Hoose’; Anglicised as John Huss, 1372-1415) and his friend Jerome of Prague (1371-1416).<sup>109</sup> All were burned for their reforming work. An old ‘O’ level question was: ‘Hus was the goose who laid the egg that Luther hatched – discuss’.<sup>110</sup> His followers (Hussites) initially supported Luther, but mainly became Calvinists later. Hus’ death, by the Council of Constance, was despite an imperial safe-conduct from Emperor Sigismund; they even stripped him naked but for his boots in order to humiliate him; wood and straw was placed up to his face. This travesty led to military action by his followers who inflicted a number of defeats against the emperor in the fourteen years of the Hussite Wars until overwhelmed by imperial forces, but not before Hus’ teaching had spread throughout Europe.

Luther praised Hus but did not agree with him on everything. Luther later wrote. ‘I could not understand for what cause they had burnt so great a man, who explained the Scriptures with so much gravity and skill.’ Luther also spoke of ‘his goose being cooked for defying the pope’, as a warning to his students. Many refer to a possible prophecy by Hus as explained here by Luther:

In God's name and calling, I will tread upon the lion and adder, and trample the young lion and dragon under foot. This shall commence during my life, and be

<sup>108</sup> The south remained Spanish until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 transferred it to Austria. The Austrian Netherlands were annexed by revolutionary France in 1792. The Congress of Vienna reunited the north and south Netherlands under King William of Orange-Nassau. However, historical differences, especially that the south spoke French, resulted in an uprising in 1830 of French-speaking people. In 1839 the South Netherlands were recognised as an independent neutral kingdom under Leopold of Saxe-Coburg with a parliamentary constitution.

<sup>109</sup> The other leader was Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) in Florence, Italy.

<sup>110</sup> Hus means ‘goose’ and derives from the town of his birth – Husinec, ‘Goosetown’.

accomplished after my death. St. John Huss prophesied of me, writing out of prison to Bohemia: 'Now shall they roast a goose' (for Huss means a goose), 'but an hundred years hence shall they hear a swan sing, [a swan was Luther's symbol<sup>111</sup>] that they shall be forced to endure.' So must it be, God willing.<sup>112</sup>

The prophecy he refers to is mentioned by historian d'Aubigne. Hus was encouraged while awaiting death by prophetic visions of a future successful Reformation of the church:

Prophetic words issued from the depths of the dungeon. He foresaw that a real reformation of the Church was at hand. When driven out of Prague and compelled to wander through the fields of Bohemia, where an immense crowd followed his steps and hung upon his words, he had cried out, 'The wicked have begun by preparing a treacherous snare for the goose which is only a domestic bird ... whose flight is not very high in the air [but] other birds, soaring more boldly towards the sky, will break through ... with still greater force. Instead of a feeble goose, the truth will send forth eagles!' <sup>113</sup>

Another variation, recorded by a priest at his death, is:

You are now going to burn a goose, but in a century you will have a swan which you can neither roast nor boil.<sup>114</sup>

It is said that this is the origin of the phrase, 'your goose is cooked', meaning that you are in big trouble.

There is another curious piece of information; on the night before 31 October 1517, the Elector Frederick of Saxony had a dream that was recorded by his brother. The dream concerned a monk who wrote on the church door of Wittenberg with a pen so large that it reached Rome. As the pope tried to break the pen, it became stronger. The monk explained that the pen was so strong because it, '*belonged to an old goose of Bohemia, a hundred years old.*' The morning he shared his dream, Martin Luther was posting his theses.

Whether all this is legend or accurate, the fact is that almost exactly 100 years after Hus' execution, Luther nailed his *95 Theses* on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church.

Later on, Bohemia was left desolated after the untold suffering which swamped central Europe in the Thirty Years War (1618-48) which began with a Bohemian revolt against future Emperor Ferdinand II. This then led to war between the Catholic Emperor and the Protestant German States, subsequently expanding to include France, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire (in the end, after 1635, it was chiefly a Franco-Hapsburg confrontation). It was the nearest thing to a world war before the Napoleonic Wars and 1914. Bohemia was also badly affected by the Counter-Reformation. These were years in which religious, political and national expansion issues merged into a complex web, causing massive suffering for the peasantry in the war zones.

The ideas of Reform were planted in Hungary in 1524 through theological students returning from Wittenberg; as in many other places, Calvinism later dominated. Rudolph II crushed religious liberty but Prince Stephen of Transylvania established it in the treaties

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<sup>111</sup> Some say that 'Luther' means 'swan', but this is not true; the name means 'warrior', or 'soldier' in Old German.

<sup>112</sup> *The Suppressed Evidence: Or, Proofs of the Miraculous Faith and Experience of the Church of Christ In All Ages*; (1832) p72-75. See also, *Miracles and Manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the History of the Church*, Jeff Doles, p128 and Foxe's *Martyrs*.

<sup>113</sup> *History of the Reformation*, J.H. Merle d'Aubigne, RTS (1846), p30.

<sup>114</sup> Lutheran Press: <http://www.lutheranpress.com/swan.htm>



of Nikolsburg (1622) and Linz (1645).

Hussites, following Luther, instituted reform in Poland. King Sigismund Augustus (1548-72) had been a friend of Calvin, and an agreement was established between Lutherans and Calvinists by 1570; however, the Jesuits and Socinians hindered further progress.

1415	Jan Hus martyred
1416	Jerome of Prague martyred.
1524	Reform begins in Hungary through German theological students.
1618-48	Thirty Years War.
1622	Stephen of Transylvania establishes Protestantism in Hungary by the treaties of Nikolsburg (1622) and Linz (1645).

## Scandinavia

The Swedish Reformation was instigated by Lutherans, notably Olav & Lars Petri and Lorenz Anderson, supported by the king, Gustavus Vasa. Lutheranism was legally established in 1527 and in 1593 the Synod of Uppsala formally accepted the Augsburg Confession as the basis of faith. Sweden retained bishops (who simply swapped allegiance) and a structure based upon a church-state union.

Denmark gradually came over to Reformation truths. The preaching of Hans Tausen and Jørgen Sadolin, who had studied under Luther, was used effectively by God. In 1524 the New Testament was published in Danish, while King Frederick I encouraged reform and appointed evangelical church officers. However, the ejection of Catholics resulted in a lack of ministers and preaching in some places.

With the reign of Christian III from 1536 a stronger Protestant church grew. Lands and property attached to bishoprics were removed by Diet of Copenhagen (1536) and, as with Henry VIII in England, these were transferred to the state. After seeking assistance from Luther, the theologian Bugenhagen was sent in 1537. He crowned the king and appointed seven superintendents, getting rid of the bishops and establishing new elders. Proper church order followed, including the establishment of synods, liturgy and a new Biblical translation while the University of Copenhagen was rejuvenated and Lutheranism legally recognised.

Norway gained the Reformation message from Denmark in 1536 and took on a similar pattern, resulting in most of the Catholic bishops leaving, those who remained were gradually replaced by evangelical ministers.

The Reformation in Iceland was politically imposed after it started a revolt as a result of Danish church reforms, with an Icelandic New Testament appearing in 1540.

1524	New Testament published in Danish.
1527	Lutheranism legally established in Sweden.
1536	Reign of Christian III encourages Protestantism. Norwegian Reformation begins.
1593	Synod of Uppsala formally accepts the Augsburg Confession as the basis of faith.

## England

We can only scratch the surface of this very large and complex subject here. It is said that on the Continent the Reformation began with religion and ended with politics, while in England it began with politics and ended in religion.

Seeds of Reform had begun with the Yorkshireman and Oxford lecturer John Wycliffe (1329-1384) in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a man who was to have a powerful effect on many nations. As Luther's books and English translations of the Bible were smuggled into England, Wycliffe's urgings for reform found ready ears. The Lollard followers of Wycliffe embraced Luther's ideas and soon politicians began to see an opportunity. The separation from Romanism by Henry VIII in 1534 was sheer political manoeuvring and greed, chiefly motivated by his desire for a divorce from Catherine of Aragon and for Catholic property. Despite his controversy with the pope, Henry had written against Luther in 1521 and remained a Catholic all his life. The statesman, Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540), was the administrative genius who dominated this period, a man who had strong Lutheran leanings and who supervised the early English Bible translation, *The Great Bible* (1539), providing a copy in every church. As Vicar-General he effectively controlled the church until beheaded by Henry in June 1540 (the same year he was made earl of Essex). In 1539 Henry issued the *Six Articles* which aimed to restore Catholicism.

Although Henry destroyed the authority of the pope in England, his Reformation was weak, compromised and politically motivated; however, it had initiated a strong Reformed movement in the country. When his successor, Edward VI (reigned 1547-53), came to the throne as a true Protestant, a spiritual Reformation could begin in earnest. This was dominated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) who had worked with Cromwell, with the support of Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer. Protestant theologians from the Continent also made contributions while lecturing at Oxford and Cambridge, such as Martin Bucer from Strasbourg, Peter Martyr Vermigli from Italy and John à Lasco (Jan Laski) from Poland who were Calvinistic rather than Lutherans. Gradually Cranmer's revision of the liturgy, with his first (1549) and then second (1552) *Book of Common Prayer*, broke away from the Catholic Latin Mass. The focus of church services became taking both bread and wine while kneeling at an ordinary table.

On Edward's early death, the fanatically Catholic Mary Tudor came to the throne (reigned 1553-58), seeking to restore the authority of the pope and re-institute Roman practices. The humanist and yet pious Cardinal Reginald Pole (1500-58), who had some sympathy for aspects of Protestantism, aided Mary as Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury from 1556 without being actively involved. The attacks and burnings of Mary actually did more to strengthen the Protestant cause. Two hundred men and women died at the stake, including the key Protestant leaders. But the flight of other leaders to Geneva, and other parts of Europe, helped to prepare them for the work to come.

When her half-sister, Elizabeth (reigned 1558-1603), came to the throne Protestantism found a protector, even though it is uncertain if she really had faith. Facing terrible circumstances, which included internal division and the threat of Catholic invasion from France and Spain, Elizabeth was an indomitable leader. She replaced the Catholic church leaders, restored Protestant church articles and Edward's *Prayer Book* and limited her title to 'Supreme Governor' of the Church of England, not 'Head'. The Act of Uniformity gave the Crown absolute power over the church, and this was the only reason that the politically sensitive Elizabeth tolerated Protestantism. While this ensured the protection of a degree

of Reformation, it laid the seeds of future problems. Reformed theology would advance, but church structure was hampered by monarchical control.

Elizabeth was a wily politician and was worried by the forceful writings of Knox, which even Calvin's letters of re-assurance did not change. Apart from Knox's attack on female rulers and proposals of rebellion against tyrants, she became convinced that thorough Calvinistic reform would always lead to civil war (as it did in France, Scotland and Holland and did later in England), something she was determined to avoid. For this reason a thorough-going practical Reform of the church was impossible; she insisted that the monarch must control the church in order to avert civil war, however, she was unconcerned by a growing Calvinistic prevailing theology in the church. Though the lack of practical reform led to the Puritan movement, desiring better church progress, she wisely tolerated this giving no excuse for rebellion. By her death in 1603 the church became an uneasy mix of Calvinistic and Catholic forms. The outward appearance and structure was similar to pre-Reformation days, but the teaching was Reformed; see the Lambeth Articles for instance.<sup>115</sup>

Note that it was true Calvinists who opposed this state control of the church, contrary to the allegations of Prasch. The lack of proper separation of church and state powers not only bred Puritanism but later drove many Calvinists away to Holland and America. The claim that Calvinists developed a state-controlled church is utterly false.

The Anglican Church thus retained episcopal government and a formal liturgy, which upset Calvinists returning from Europe who desired Presbyterianism, which soon prevailed in Scotland. Internal strife continued since the pope had ordered Catholics to oppose Elizabeth's reforms; there were many intrigues and plots, especially on Elizabeth's life. However, the work of Reform slowly continued as God spared the nation from internal disruptions and defeated the Spanish Armada, putting paid to any further plans of defeating England for a time; the financial cost alone was impossible. John Jewel and Richard Hooker continued the Reform movement, seeking to bring Biblical exegesis to bear on the work of Protestantism.

It was the later Stuart dynasty, as Catholic sympathisers, who brought despotism to bear upon England by emphasising the divine right of kings and demanding that no one could bring them to account, not even Parliament or law. The suffering that this brought upon the nation became too much in the end and initiated the English Civil War, resulting in the execution of Charles I and birthing the eventual Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell's government brought England back into being the major power in Europe from the degradation that Charles I had reduced it to. The Restoration of the Stuarts with Charles II in 1660 brought a return to despotism, persecution of Calvinist dissenters and general suffering until they were thrown out in 1688 and a Calvinist monarch (William of Orange, William III; 1650-1702) brought in to replace James II. William and his wife Mary (the daughter of James II) reigned as joint monarchs and ruled England wisely, making England powerful in Europe.

#### *Excursus: Parliament's rebellion and Oliver Cromwell's commonwealth*

A word on this subject is necessary since Cromwell comes under so much criticism and has been accused of despotism. People forget that his efforts brought modern Parliamentary democracy to this country to ensure it could never again be ruled by a tyrant king using

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<sup>115</sup> These nine articles were drawn up by Archbishop Whitgift and his advisors in 1595 and evidence strong, consistent Calvinism affirming double predestination. They were disliked, for that reason, by Elizabeth and thus not formally introduced; but they were incorporated into Ussher's Irish Articles of 1615.

divine right as an excuse for despotism.

Cromwell was not ambitious for power or government but was a conscientious Calvinist who took his job as local magistrate and Member of Parliament very seriously. It was his job and duty under God to represent and stand up for the people he represented. By his time many Reformed theologians, and even Calvin, had amended their earlier views on passive resistance, essentially teaching that it was the duty of the lower magistrate (say MPs or local magistrate) to act to restrain or remove the tyranny of a higher magistrate (say king, governor or prince).

The relevant Biblical teaching is in Romans 13:1-5,

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

The dilemma is this:

1. Christians are everywhere told not to kill or fight by earthly means.
2. Christians are to obey their rulers, and these are to rule under God by his law.
3. In the face of an absolute tyrant, Christians must obey God's law, not man's, but must not rebel.
4. However, where there is a form of legal, representative democracy (as in England under the Stuarts) there are levels of authority. Faced with a despotic government, the lower levels of government must resist tyranny and bring about lawful change. The legal representatives of the people must act to protect the legal rights of the people. This is their God-given duty. Lower magistrates must remove despotic higher magistrates. They bear the sword for the common good.

It was this latter example that Cromwell was faced with. England was confronted by a king who was not only tyrannical, above the law and ruling by claimed divine right, but who also had seriously abused his office, damaged the life of the people, enacted unjust taxes, brought foreign armies to attack English people, sought to undermine the official state religion and had committed treason – a capital offence. In this situation, on the basis of law, it was the job of Parliament to restrain and remove the king for treason against the state, just as the Scots had removed Mary Queen of Scots for her crimes.

Thus Cromwell was not pursuing spiritual goals by earthly means; he was pursuing earthly goals by spiritual means. He considered his action forced upon him by his duty and office as representative of the people in Parliament. As an elected MP (magistrate in Calvin's terminology) his duty was to apply condemnation and punishment. This has nothing to do with the Christian's individual walk as a pilgrim but the duty of the magistrate to rule justly under God. The Reformed faith was the legal status of faith in England brought about by Elizabeth I. Cromwell did not have to fight to achieve this, it was there. He was doing his job of representing and protecting the rights of the people who had been seriously damaged by an unscrupulous king, who had also committed treason. Cromwell was merely properly defending the law as a conscientious MP, which was his job under God.

Cromwell as an individual was prohibited from fighting an illegal despotic king, but Cromwell as a magistrate was bound to obey God and do something about it. Those who joined the New Model Army needed to search their conscience to be able to fight. I could

not have done so; however, I could not condemn those who felt that it was their duty in obeying the law and their magistrate to wage war to defend the law. Cromwell, however, was bound by his oath and duty before God to apply the law for the good of all – and that meant bringing the king to justice and defending the realm from foreign invaders paid by the king from unscrupulous taxes [the 1648 Scottish invasion].

The problem, simply stated in fundamental terms, is: at what point does the Christian’s necessary obedience to the state law, and to the magistrate, allow him to override his obedience to the divine command not to fight or kill? I have firm views that there is no point – I will not kill. But I cannot condemn those who choose to obey God’s command to obey the ruler, whose job it is to kill offenders. Both the instruction to not kill and the command to obey the rule of law to deal with offenders are Biblical demands. Thus a state executioner would be obeying God in hanging legally sentenced offenders. Each man must be fully convinced in his own mind regarding his priorities.

Regarding the situation after the execution of Charles I, Cromwell was three times offered the Crown, and three times refused it. He was forced by circumstances to deal with the situation after the Civil War when things could have easily fell apart, and nearly did due to weak and unscrupulous MPs. The rule of his republican Commonwealth was just and welcomed and he established England as the most powerful and feared nation in Europe. He reduced poverty, developed good schools, established an independent church government, invited exiled Jews to return, made just laws and restored power to the people.

Far from being despotic, Cromwell never sought authority and felt pushed into it by circumstances and conscientiousness; but in government, as Lord Protector, he had to tread the line between those who sought much more radical reforms (the Levellers); anarchists; those who sought the return of a Catholic king; Scottish invasions to restore Charles II; and unscrupulous former MPs with powerful influence and wealth. Despite this he carefully steered England to security and worked as far as possible with an elected Parliament until forced to rule by executive decree. As soon as he had gone, the return of the Stuarts plunged England into worse circumstances than had prevailed before, again forcing the ejection of the monarch (James II). Though we may not agree with all Cromwell’s methods, though we may recoil from his ruthless wars, it is impossible to accuse him of despotism or unscrupulousness. He was a man of genuine evangelical conviction believing that he served God in securing England from ruin.

14 <sup>th</sup> century	Reform work of John Wycliffe (1329-1384)
1534	England breaks away from Rome through the Act of Supremacy. [Henry VIII]
1536	Authority of pope annulled. Start of Church of England. Dissolution of monasteries.
1547	Edward VI succeeds Henry VIII (reigns 1547-1553).
1549	<i>Book of Common Prayer</i> by Cranmer in England.
1552	<i>Second Prayer Book</i> of Edward VI.
1553	Edward VI dies. Mary I becomes queen of England (reigns 1553-1558).
1554	Catholic restoration in England.
1556	Thomas Cranmer burned at the stake.
1558	Elizabeth I, Queen of England, (reigns 1558-1603).
1559	Elizabethan Prayer Book.
1560	Beginnings of Puritanism in England.
1562	39 Articles.
1603	Elizabeth succeeded by James I [James VI of Scotland].

1625	James succeed by Charles I.
1628	William Laud made bishop of London by Charles for his support of Catholicism.
1630	Puritan John Winthrop sails to Massachusetts with 1,000 settlers.
1633	Laud made Archbishop of Canterbury. Enforced re-introduction of Catholic forms.
1642	Civil War begins. Ends 1646.
1645	Laud executed for treason.
1649	Charles beheaded. Commonwealth begins.
1653	Oliver Cromwell becomes Lord Protector.
1655	Cromwell readmits Jews into England. Government decentralised.
1660	Restoration of Charles II
1662	Act of Uniformity; 2,000 Dissenting ministers ejected.
1688	William and Mary replace James II. 'The Glorious Revolution'.

## Scotland

The work of Reformation in Scotland is largely down to one great man, John Knox, who had studied in Geneva under Calvin. This former galley-slave has been described as *'the greatest of living Scotchmen ... [to whom the Scotch] owe their national existence'*.<sup>116</sup> Some historians claim that without the purity and power of Knox's teaching and successful strategy, the English Reformation would have fallen under the blows of a Scottish Catholic rebellion. A summary of key events can be found under the earlier short biography of Knox

1505	Birth of John Knox.
1545	Conversion of Knox.
1547	Knox captured and made a French galley slave.
1549	Knox released and serves in English churches.
	Flees to Geneva during Mary's rule.
1559	Returns to Scotland.
1560	Scottish Parliament removes authority of the pope and cancels the Mass. Reformed confession drawn up.
1561	Mary Queen of Scots returns to Scotland.
1567	Mary executed; Murray made Regent, Reformed church gains full legal status.
1572	Knox dies.

## Ireland

Like England and Wales, Ireland had known Christianity since Roman times. The Irish Celtic church was purer than continental early Catholicism and Irish missionaries had taken the Gospel to Scotland, England, Wales and even as far as France and Italy. After the Danish invasions, beginning in 795, Roman Catholicism gradually superseded the original Celtic church, being completed within 300 years by the Norman archbishops of Canterbury, Lanfranc and Anselm. In 1171 the pope allowed Henry II to annexe Ireland and establish English bishops, causing great anger. This lies at the root of the Irish problem.

The adoption of the Reformation by Henry VIII for political reasons necessarily resulted in

<sup>116</sup> JA Froude, *English History*, Vol. 10, p437.

Ireland following suit in 1537, but there was no spiritual change. Ireland neither had decent reformers or books, and many poor people were badly educated. The godly boy-king Edward VI introduced a Reformed liturgy and the English Prayer Book in 1551 (the first book printed in Ireland); but these gains were reversed by the Catholic militant Mary Tudor who deposed and punished the reforming bishops. Elizabeth I brought back English liturgy as well as an Irish parliament in 1560 by the Act of Uniformity, which formally established Anglicanism in her domains. None of this backwards and forwards religious imposition by the English gained much sympathy with the Irish, who had known a purer Christianity long before them directly from the delegates of the apostles.

Ireland was also settled by many English landowners, and then even more Presbyterian Scots who occupied the north (Ulster). Irish mercenaries were often used by English monarchs when they need help, and treated very badly. Rebellion was always flaring up and the rigorous warfare of Cromwell against the rebels created a lasting, seething bitterness that remains to this day. In 1689 the Christian king William of Orange tried to alleviate some of the Irish problems but the centuries of insensitive foreign government led to widespread spiritual atrophy. Gradually there developed a rigid Protestantism in Ulster and a formal Catholicism in the south, bot closely enmeshed with political striving.

The lack of opportunity to promote a proper Reformation, with spiritual leadership, education, church structure and political protection meant that Ireland suffered greatly and resulted in the complex and bitter situation remaining today.

	Tudors confiscate land and impose English settlers (plantations).
1537	Reformation enforced by Henry VIII.
1551	English Prayer Book of Edward VI published in Ireland.
1560	Elizabeth convenes Irish Parliament and Act of Uniformity.
1610	James I plantations.
1649	Rebellion crushed by Cromwell.
	Roman Catholic majority repressed by penal laws under all rulers.
1690	Battle of the Boyne. William III defeats his father-in-law James II, putting down rebellion to his rule.

## America

### **The Calvinistic founding fathers**

Again it is impossible to do justice to this massive subject in this short work, but Calvinism is absolutely crucial in understanding the history of America. It was the Calvinistic Puritans who originally founded the American colonies, though later Mennonites, Quakers and others settled. Dutch Calvinists also settled in New Amsterdam, renamed New York when recaptured by the British. Waves of immigrants came because the Puritans had established principles of civil liberty and minority factions could feel safe. The very reason the Puritan Fathers sailed to America was in order to avoid tyranny of thought, religion and government; America was founded on Calvinistic principles of liberty. It should be noted that the reason they left England was not the fires of Roman persecution but the despotism of British monarchs and the intolerance of the Anglican Church. Tens of thousands of Puritans, mostly Congregationalists, fled the persecutions of Archbishop Laud in the late 1630s and 1640s. Immigrants continued to arrive even during the Commonwealth period, but many more left England after the Restoration of Charles II.

In 1776 there were about three million people in the 13 Colonies and two-thirds of these had originated from a Calvinist connection. Most of 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century New England had Puritan Congregationalist antecedents with the middle and southern colonies being dominated by Ulster Scots and some Highland Scots. Apparently 200,000 Protestants (a third of the Irish Protestant population) left Ireland between 1726-1768. By the time of the revolution (1775-83) there were half a million Scotch-Irish in America, one sixth of the population.<sup>117</sup>

The Calvinistic theological background, especially prior obedience to God as king and the separation of church and state, engineered the principle of the citizen's right to resistance against wicked governments and paved the way for the revolutionary War of Independence from George III. Indeed, Calvinistic ideas were to influence American thinking, not only on church and state, but also on law, authority, public order and civil rights.

### **Early formation of constitutional government**

While all the Puritans were Calvinists, there were differences in the original townships. The New England Congregationalists drew up a covenant by the local church leaders, which was then agreed by the congregation. In the southern colonies, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians organised congregations under a regional presbytery requiring submission to the Westminster Confession. American Presbyterianism differed from its Scottish forbear in that organisational power flowed upwards, rather than downwards. In Scotland the General Assembly set up synods and presbyteries, while in America the local assemblies developed presbyteries and only later established synods and a general assembly. This upward flow of power remains entrenched in the American consciousness and is the opposite of despotism.

In those early days the congregation was virtually equivalent to the town population; thus congregational covenants led to the development of town charters and later a town or regional constitution. This became absorbed into a colonial constitution and eventually became the basis for the nation; thus America was founded upon a system of representation by the people with necessary checks and balances. The Calvinism of the early Puritans led directly to American principles of democracy.

The 1636 *Pilgrim Law Code* explains the basis of their political government insisting that the colonists had the same rights as Englishmen, including the right to have a government based upon the consent of those governed. Long before Thomas Paine was born in 1737 colonial Calvinists had established all the necessary principles of government by fair representation. Indeed, they quickly (within 20 years) developed the novel idea of a written constitution in one document, which was established by common consent of the citizens. These Calvinists anticipated much later enlightenment thinking on civil government. The French sociologist, de Tocqueville, said that these early documents were in advance of the liberties of his own age (early 1830s).<sup>118</sup> He added, '*In America, religion is the road to knowledge, and the observance of the divine law leads men to civil freedom*'.<sup>119</sup> Attempts by the English government to subvert some of these Calvinist charters, which had become colonial constitutions, were part of the reason for the ensuing War of Independence.

It is true that some Puritan aspirations for total reform of all aspects of society led to a desire to create a 'Holy Commonwealth', and this has inspired some later

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<sup>117</sup> Kelly, p120.

<sup>118</sup> Kelly, p124.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.



Reconstructionism ideas. The recently deceased theologian Rousas Rushdoony, in particular, has drawn inspiration from the New England Puritan vision.<sup>120</sup> This desire to build a holy society with the opportunity provided in a new nation is natural and reasonable. It is not a question of trying to take over the world in a theocratic state, but to build a righteous society having been given the opportunity to establish new governmental forms in a new land. Given that opportunity, is it not wise to build godly government rather than allow anarchy? Harsh criticism of this by Dispensationalists who actually expect exactly the same thing in a fabricated earthly millennium is a bit rich!

Since it was Calvinists building the new colonies according to their beliefs, why should they be criticised for not building a modern type of liberal government? They were Reformed men building a Reformed church in a new land with Reformed principles of government. They were not humanist individuals building a libertarian constitution. They cannot be criticised for this. As persecuted people who had fled to a new land to establish their own forms of government, it is not surprising that they were wary of dissenters growing in their midst and threatening what they had built. So it is not unexpected, for instance, that the Baptist, Roger Williams, was forced out of Massachusetts. He was not executed but allowed to go to Rhode Island and found his own form of settlement. This became the home of many denominations.

Outside of New England this idea was not so prevalent; the middle and southern colonies sought a Christian republic based on various forms of civil government. By 1776 there were different 'established' churches in the thirteen colonies: Congregationalism in New England; Anglicanism in New York State, Virginia, South Carolina; 'Protestantism' in North Carolina while there was religious freedom in Rhode Island, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Georgia. However, after the American Revolution most of the states disestablished this established denominationalism.<sup>121</sup> However the real springboard for breaking down denominationalism and provoking joint ministry was the Great Awakening in the 1730s and 40s. This helped them to work together for independence soon afterwards, but it also caused some local division over emotionalism. Eventually, individualism and greater concern for local church purity led to a diminution of concerns for a regulated righteous civil order, which led to an eventual legal separation of church and state.

### **The Calvinistic stimulation of liberty**

It should also be noted that although a chief reason for rebellion was the unjust taxes to a foreign Parliament without any representation in it, there was also a core of anger at the intolerance of an imposed episcopal church. Although most securely rooted in New York and Virginia, the English Church was gradually being forced upon everywhere where the British flag flew. People were taxed to support it even if they belonged to a different church. Intolerance to other denominations in key areas meant that Presbyterian preachers were forbidden to preach, land was refused for other denominations or even to bury the dead of other denominations. In 1707 Francis Makemie, a Presbyterian minister, was imprisoned by Lord Cornbury in New York City for being a 'strolling preacher'.

In 1815 President John Adams wrote that religion was at the core of the struggle for independence; other writers stated that religious toleration was the chief reason for the armed struggle. The gradual growth of intolerance by a state-imposed church was exactly what the Puritans had left behind when they fled England. The War of Independence was

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<sup>120</sup> RJ Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, p92.

<sup>121</sup> Kelly, p126.

partially, at least, a renewed struggle for religious toleration, a fight against monarchical despotism. Calvinists, almost to a man, supported and fought for independence, while the chief early leaders (George Washington – originally episcopal, John and Samuel Adams - dissenters) were theologically Reformed. The Mecklenburg Declaration, which was effectively the first draft of a declaration of independence, copied by Jefferson, was drawn up in 1775 by the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of North Carolina a year before the Declaration of Congress.

It is undeniable that Calvinism led to the principle of liberty in America and not despotism, *'John Calvin was virtually the founder of America'*.<sup>122</sup> But we need to briefly mention the other alleged faults of Calvinistic Americans, namely: social repression (e.g. of wives) and exploitation (e.g. of slaves).

### **Alleged repression of wives**

I have never read an actual example of a Calvinist leader mistreating his wife, though I have regarding a famous Arminian (John Wesley for instance). The overwhelming testimony is that, however fierce in the pulpit (like Knox), Calvinist leaders cherished their wives and nurtured their children in obedience to Christ. No doubt there may be exceptions to this, as in any denomination, but regarding known true Calvinists I have never seen any evidence to back this allegation up. A good case can be made that it was Calvinists that sought the equality of women, especially in America.

First it must be affirmed that all Calvinist preachers understood that women were equal with men in justification but subordinate in church authority; the problem was how this was worked out in practice. Chief Puritan, Cotton Mather (1663-1728), is stated by a woman author to have given women a measure of equality in his congregation and was sympathetic to their resources, gifts and mindful of their needs. Indeed many pastors had largely female congregations and could not avoid this.<sup>123</sup> In America after the Great Awakening, women gradually gained more and more influence in social life and in the congregation, but especially on the mission field. It should also be remembered that at this time Eastern nations were hobbling the feet of women, covering them in burkas, or throwing them on to their husband's funeral pyre. In 1855 women assistant missionaries outnumbered ordained male missionaries.<sup>124</sup>

Calvinist pastors in the early colonial period had to balance the recognition of a predominance of females in the congregation on the one hand with the Biblical teaching on function and leadership in church matters. Already the Quakers (who had assemblies in all the colonies by 1700) had ignored this teaching and established women leaders, the Shakers also arrived in New York State in 1774, who went further by establishing a female messiah in Anne Lee (1736-1781). Calvinists sought to avoid these aberrations.

As early as 1599 English Puritans condemned wife-beating as immoral and early American Puritans drew up a criminal code which included the following:

Every married woman shall be free from bodily correction or stripes by her husband, unless it be in his own defence upon her assault.<sup>125</sup>

Later there were further laws prohibiting wife-beating. Indeed, between 1633 and 1802

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<sup>122</sup> German historian, Leopold von Ranke. Note also Harvard historian George Bancroft, *'He that will not honour the memory and respect the influence of Calvin knows but little of the origin of American liberty'*; David W. Hall, *Genevan Reformation And The American Founding*, p ix (source for both quotes).

<sup>123</sup> *Women in American Religion*, University of Pennsylvania Press, (1976), p4.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p7.

<sup>125</sup> *Domestic Violence, Facts and Fallacies*, RA Davis, p49.

there were only twelve recorded cases of men being prosecuted for this. Penalties included fines and being whipped, in addition to being thrown out of the congregation.

It was English Common law, as well as the common law of many other nations, which allowed a husband to beat his wife if necessary, but always with restraint. The standard of this Common Law was that that it was only permitted if a stick no thicker than a thumb was used. Thus it can be seen that it was Calvinist governments that introduced higher standards for wives than existed in English Common Law. The accusation that Calvinism brought repression of wives is false.

### **Alleged encouragement of the burning of witches**

To further develop the matter of women's repression, we should mention the notorious Salem Witch Trials of 1692 in Massachusetts, often misrepresented. The rash of supposed demon possession has become the stuff of plays, films and books, all of which denigrate the colonial Puritan leaders. However, we must first remember that these were men of their age and that throughout Europe witchcraft was feared and was a capital offence. Calvinists did not originate this policy; indeed it was Calvinist governments that brought a more enlightened view.<sup>126</sup>

In Salem it was the local magistrates that inflicted the punishment for the offences, produced by what is now thought to have been ergot poisoning from contaminated rice. Calvinist preacher Cotton Mather, and many other ministers, counselled the town leaders to act with mercy and mitigate the sentence, but this was ignored. Rather than Calvinism producing such unmerciful treatment, the town elders acted against Calvinist counsel. Even so, all the girls who repented of witchcraft (about 50) were released but 22 were hanged (not burned). Later, in 1697, the Massachusetts magistrates publicly repented and apologised for shedding innocent blood when more facts emerged.

### **Alleged exploitation of slaves**

The question of slavery is far too complicated to develop here, but we must mention that the Bible does not condemn this practice, but rather accepts it as a fact of life. What is wrong is the harsh treatment of slaves. This was not an issue in Reformation Europe but the development of cotton and sugar cane plantations in America led to the appalling slavery routes across the Atlantic, which must be condemned. However, it is impossible to single out Calvinists as the cause of this.

It is true that in later years slavery became an accepted part of the American South, and that slaves were in the possession of many Calvinist land-owners. What is less understood is that these slaves were treated well by their Calvinist masters and often became like family members. The defence of the South in the American Civil War was supported by many famous Calvinists, including RL Dabney, whose motives are unquestionable. It should also be mentioned that a significant revival of religion occurred amongst the Southern army,<sup>127</sup> hardly indicative of divine judgment towards slave owners.

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<sup>126</sup> A Calvinist Parliament in Scotland first repealed the execution of witches in 1736, and the last burning is variously claimed as occurring in 1698 (Marion Lillie) or 1705 (several executed in Spott, East Lothian) or 1727 (Janet Horne at Dornoch in Ross shire). The last Englishman burned for heresy was in 1612 (Edward Wightman, a Baptist) and the last executions for witchcraft (usually by hanging) in England occurred in 1684. In contrast Catholic France was still legally executing witches until 1745 and it was in Poland that the last convicted European witch was killed in 1792. Witches are still being burned in Kenya to this day.

<sup>127</sup> The 1863-64 revival in the Confederate Army brought 150,000 soldiers into faith. While there were godly believers on both sides, there was no similar revival in the Federal Army.

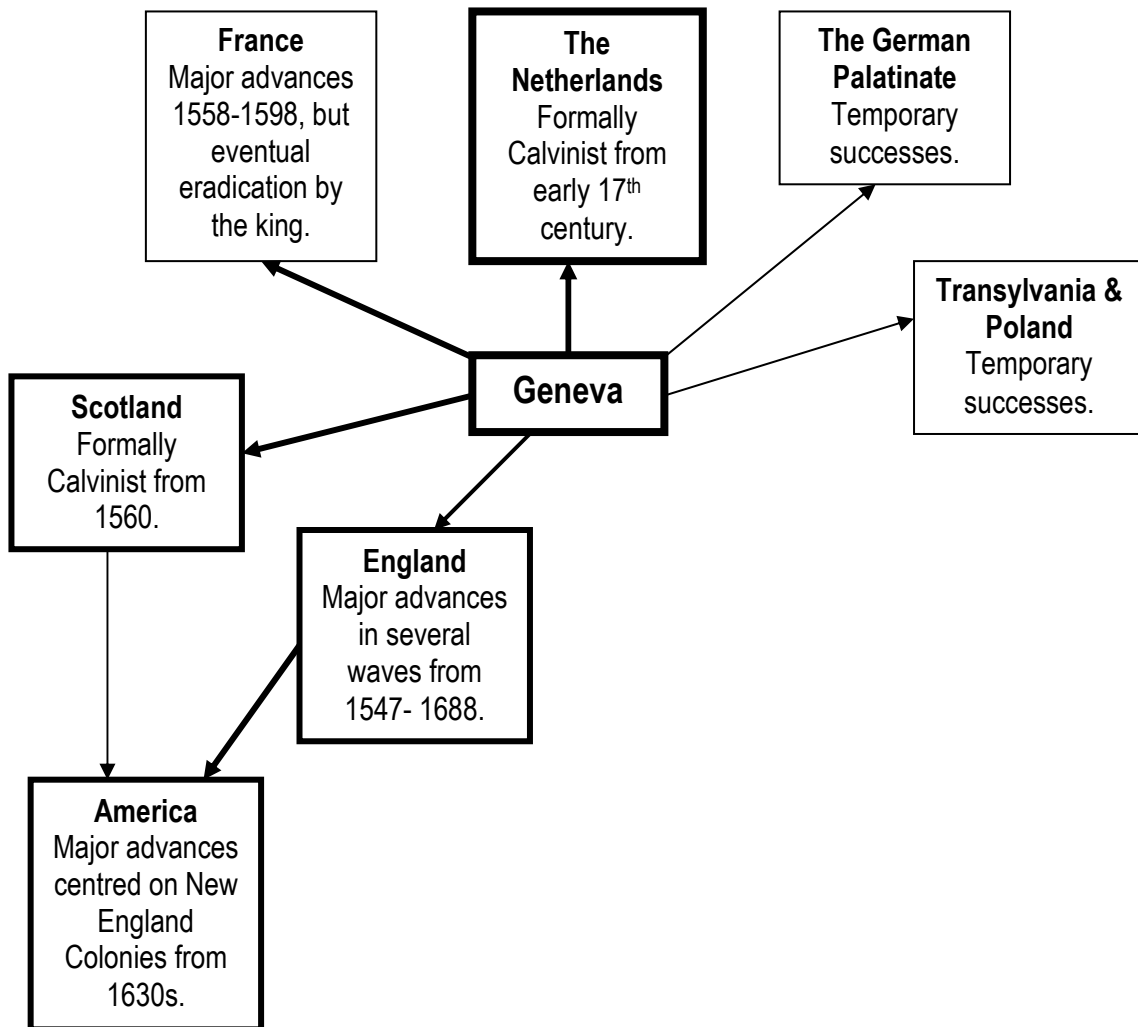
Though no doubt overly simplistic, in many ways the North symbolised humanism, federalism and liberalism while the South symbolised independent conservatism and Calvinism. The life of many slaves in the South was far better than they could ever have hoped for in Benin and after the freedom gained by the Civil War many slaves ended up much worse off, having no home or job, but still reviled for being black. Consequently, it is wrong to suggest that all the evils associated with American slavery are due to Calvinist oppression. Slavery was a fact of life for a time and genuine Calvinists treated their slaves well.

A final point to make is the impact of Reformed principles upon education. As in other Protestant countries, the Puritans saw the importance of godly instruction and the systematic education of the young. The basis of the education system in America was founded by the Puritans, and leading institutions (such as Harvard and Yale) were specifically established by Reformed men.

We cannot spend more time in discussing the American situation, but we have supplied enough information to show that all the alleged accusations are either false or exaggeration.

1630s	Immigration of Puritan exiles begins.
1643	Confederation of New England formed by Connecticut, New Haven, Plymouth & Massachusetts Bay Company.
1689	William & Mary recognise old charters of the English Colonies.
1692	Salem witch trials.
1725-60	Great Awakening – a series of revivals in American colonies, particularly in New England. Ministry of George Whitefield, Frelinghuysen, Gilbert Tennent, David Brainerd (to Indians) and Jonathan Edwards.
1773	Boston Tea Party. [Protest against tea duty.]
1774	Shakers arrive in New York State.
1776	War of Independence.
1783	Peace of Versailles, Britain recognises American independence.

## Overview of Calvinistic expansion



The fact that Calvinism made little lasting impact in the countries of southern Europe (e.g. Spain and Italy) has been long debated by historians, with no single conclusion being agreed. No doubt it was the combined effect of social, economic and political circumstances, the strength of Catholic governments, national character and specific local factors.

# **Calvinism's encouragement of the principle of liberty.**

The charges against the Reformers, which prompted this paper, centre around the idea that Reformation truth, and particularly Calvinism, produces repression, intolerance and promotes totalitarian states. These charges are so far from the truth, and so lacking in any historical evidence, as to be ludicrous. Secular historians deny such a claim and even the British school examination system used to feature a section on the positive influence of Calvinism on modern history. Only a fool would suggest otherwise. And yet church-goers today are so ill educated in truth that a forceful preacher can call Calvin a despot or say that Luther inspired the Holocaust and many will believe him. It would be more wise to say nothing than deny, or even slander, the great providential work of God, the sovereign of history, in changing the world for the better through the Reformation.

Although we have looked at some details of individual cases, it would be valuable to investigate the effects of the Reformation generally in promoting liberty. This is such a huge subject that, yet again, we can only give a general overview.

## **The root of principles of church and political government**

We must start with the fundamental principles of religion.

Calvinism is simply based upon the sovereignty of God; all is resolved in the affirmation that God rules and man is his creature. This is purity of religion – God is God. Thus man can do no meritorious works to assist his salvation; God is the author of salvation and the finisher of it (Heb 12:2). For a man to be saved God must provide all he needs: faith, repentance and perseverance. Truly 'salvation is of the Lord' (Ps 3:8, 37:39, 38:22, 50:23, 85:7; Isa 12:2; Jer 3:23; Lam 3:36; Jonah 2:9; Acts 28:28; Rm 1:16; Phil 1:28). Thus God must choose whom he gives this salvation to and scripture shows us that this happens in eternity (Eph 1:4-5; 2 Thess 2:13).

Pelagianism is the opposite of this, man can save himself, and few (though not all) alleged Christians would support such an idea for a minute. However, most will be happy to ally with Arminianism, which is but a form of Semi-Pelagianism; a sort of half-way house. Thus many 'Christian' theological systems are Semi-Pelagian, including Roman Catholicism, Methodism, evangelical Arminians, virtually all Dispensationalists – indeed most evangelicals. The basis of this system is that God provides a global salvation but the initiation of this is made by man. Unless man starts by accepting this salvation he will never know it. Thus Arminian Semi-Pelagianism teaches that man co-operates with God in achieving salvation. In some senses man is stronger than God since he can reject the salvation God provides, or lose his salvation once entered into. This is a poor and unbiblical definition of God. Fundamentally then, Arminianism is based upon works; the free-will of man is supreme and human works are necessary to being saved.

Now these two theological systems result in two root principles of government, first in ecclesiastical matters, then in the political sphere. Calvinism produces an independent government by elders working together as a team; true Calvinism despises authoritarianism. Arminianism always results in forms of episcopalianism (ruling bishops/leaders) of one sort or another. Semi-Pelagian churches lead to prelacy

(hierarchical clergy) – based upon works, ceremonies, rituals and external forms; Roman Catholicism being the most obvious form of this, but many Charismatic churches function in exactly the same manner. Arminian churches have no permanent presbytery (college of local equal elders), synods or general assemblies. The result of teaching salvation by the contribution of human works leads to a religion based upon the contribution of human works. It lays the foundation for external ceremonies and ritualistic service. In this, Charismatic emotional worship is no different from a Catholic emotional Mass; both are based upon external features triggering an emotional response: instrumental music, authoritarian leaders on a platform, set ways of participation etc. Churches that rely upon the senses (whether Roman ritual of Charismatic emotionalism) are essentially Arminian. They rely to a greater or lesser degree upon human activity.

These principles work out in political government also. Secular author and fatalist Henry Thomas Buckle noticed this:

It is an interesting fact that the doctrines which in England are called Calvinistic have always been connected with a democratic spirit, while those of Arminianism have found most favour among the aristocratic or protective party ... the first open movement against Charles proceeded from Scotland where the principles of Calvin had long been in the ascendant.<sup>128</sup>

Arminianism trends towards monarchy in civil affairs while Calvinism tends towards republicanism or democracy. For centuries nations that were dominated by Catholic Semi-Pelagianism (= virtual Arminianism) were happy to be ruled by monarchs working closely with the pope. It was only when the Reformation broke people free from this rule and established the Reformed faith that nations were steered towards democracy and liberty.

Another historian says,

Calvinism is a doctrine for the poor and Arminianism for the rich. A creed which insists upon the necessity of faith must be less costly than one which insists upon the necessity of works. In the former case the sinner seeks salvation by the strength of his belief; in the latter case he seeks it by the fulness of his contributions. ... The aristocratic tendency of Arminianism and the democratic tendency of Calvinism ... The more any society tends towards equality, the more likely it is that its theological opinions will be Calvinistic; while the more a society tends towards inequality, the greater the probability of those opinions being Arminian.<sup>129</sup>

Nathaniel McFetridge says that, '*Arminianism tends to beget and to foster classes and castes in society, and to build up a gorgeous ritual wherever it gains a foothold*',<sup>130</sup> while historian George Bancroft adds that, '*a richly endowed Church always leads to Arminianism and justification by works*'.<sup>131</sup>

Kelly agrees,

It is significant that the (Protestant) enemies of the Calvinists – particularly in England – were Arminians, whose theology represented a more man-centred approach, de-emphasising the sovereignty of God. The practical results of Arminianism for politics (though certainly not the intent of the Arminians) was like the results of Southern European Renaissance humanism: when God is de-emphasised, the state is enthroned, and the individual tends to be deprived of

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<sup>128</sup> *History of Civilisation*, Vol 1.611.

<sup>129</sup> *History of English Civilisation*, I p612-613; quoted in *Calvinism in History*, Nathaniel McFetridge, p15.

<sup>130</sup> *Calvinism in History*, p16.

<sup>131</sup> *History of the United States*, ix, p503.

liberty. ... In England, Arminianism tended to go hand in hand with monarchical absolutism (Laud was Arminian).<sup>132</sup>

Arminianism not only puts power in the hands of leaders and creates a clergy - laity split, but even secular historians note that it tends towards creating a power base for despots. The great tyrants of history since 100 AD were either Semi-Pelagian or atheists. It is hopeless to try to claim that some tyrants (like Henry VIII) were Calvinists since they were merely political opportunists who used Reformation truths to gain what they wanted and were not genuinely Reformed in heart.

The key religious difference is that Arminian churches put power in the hands of a few leaders, usually dominated by one man; Calvinism puts power in the hands of the people delegated under God. Thus Arminianism produces passivity in the people; true Calvinism stimulates active ministry. One system subjects the people to an authoritarian leader; the other elevates the people to equality in authority. In political terms, one leads to monarchy and despotism, while the other leads to democracy and liberty.

Theologian Charles Hodges agrees:

The theory that all church power vests in a divinely-constituted hierarchy begets the theory that all civil power vests, of divine right, in kings and nobles. And the theory that church power vests in the Church itself, and all church officers are servants of the Church, of necessity begets the theory that civil power vests in the people, and that civil magistrates are servants of the people. ... It was therefore by an infallible instinct that the unfortunate Charles of England said, 'No bishop, no king;' by which he meant that if there is no despotic power in the Church, there can be no despotic power in the State, or if there be liberty in the Church, there will be liberty in the State.<sup>133</sup>

In summary of this we can say:

1. Arminianism is associated with episcopal church government; Calvinism with government by the church, represented in a team of equal elders.
2. Episcopacy leads to notions of inequality in society, of single leadership and monarchy.
3. Arminianism is unfavourable to civil liberty; Calvinism is unfavourable to despotism.
4. Historical despots understood this and feared the republican notions of Calvinism.<sup>134</sup>

## **Calvinistic principles which tend towards democracy and liberty**

### **The priesthood of all believers**

A chief truth re-established by the Reformation was the priesthood of all believers. This explains that there are no mediators between believers and God; by virtue of their union with Christ, Christians are in God's presence and welcomed as justified children. Thus in their earthly worship, believers have no go-between; this means no priest or leader, nor any unbiblical rituals, ceremonies or systems of authority. The Christian simply relies upon the word of God as his objective authority and looks to Christ.

Arminianism puts layers of hierarchy and a supreme leader between men and God, in

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<sup>132</sup> Kelly, p99.

<sup>133</sup> *What is Presbyterianism*, p11. Charles I also explained that the reason his father James I subverted the republican form of government in the Scottish Church was that Presbyterian and monarchical forms of government do not harmonise. See HT Buckle, *Hist. Of Civilisation*, Vol 2, p206, note 5.

<sup>134</sup> McFetridge, p17.



practice. Charismatics have many layers of hierarchy that usually occupy authoritarian levels of power over believers, but also continually generate new rituals and external methods of gaining divine grace – especially a special and necessary second blessing experience. Jewish Root Dispensational ideas posit various mediatorial items on top of scripture, whether it be leadership, rabbinic interpretations, Jewish ceremonies, praying for Jerusalem and so forth. In the case of Jacob Prasch he (as a Charismatic, Dispensational, Arminian) is rooted in all of these – and yet he has the audacity to slander the Reformation for creating despotism.

### **The distinction between church and state**

Calvinism recognises the importance of both spheres and insists that there should be no control of one over the other, both should work together to serve God.<sup>135</sup> The root of this is the foundation of equality in church government; elders are to be equal in authority and representative of the people; matters of strategic importance are determined by all through consensus. Calvinism thus exalts the people, not the clergy. Similarly, Calvinism emphasises the rule of God's law expressed through consensual government formed by a true representation of the people. Parliamentary democracy is an outflow of Calvinistic theology. Both the state and the church have their own sphere of influence and should work together for the good of all, neither controlling the other, but working in partnership.

### **Calvinistic theology**

The focus of Calvinism is God, and especially his sovereignty and glory. Human existence is dwarfed by the believer's assurance that God is in control and fully governing all that occurs. Fear of men, or even of tyrants, is dissipated by fear of God. A spiritual and godly attitude to life on Earth and a desire for an obedient testimony, followed by the sense of pilgrimage towards a heavenly city, puts the power of human governors and earthly ambitions into proper perspective. Semi-Pelagian systems like Romanism tend towards inculcating an attitude of subjection and a failure to think for oneself. From this it is easy to be in subjection to rulers.

Divine predestination also releases Calvinists since it affirms that God is controlling the end from the beginning according to his good pleasure. This gives Calvinists great confidence and assurance. Historians have noted this; Bancroft, though not a Calvinist, said:

The political character of Calvinism, which ... the monarchs of that day feared as republicanism, is expressed in a single word – *predestination*. ... They went forth in confidence ... and standing surely amidst the crumbling fabric of centuries of superstition, they had faith in one another; and the martyrdoms of Cambray, the fires of Smithfield, the surrender of benefices by two thousand non-conforming Presbyterians, attests their perseverance.<sup>136</sup>

Predestination underlies God's sovereignty and inspires resolute freedom, fearing only God. Calvinists are more than conquerors. Arminians, who can never be sure that their works-based salvation will stick, can never be conquerors. No human political theory creates such a resolve for personal freedom as the conviction of God's favour and sovereign protection.<sup>137</sup> Faith in God's eternal Fatherhood brings freedom from all man's shackles. When your beliefs are labelled as heresy, for which your enemies threaten to burn you at the stake, only the greater fear of God can stir you on; only the greater stimulus of your eternal election can sustain you. Men who fear God alone are not afraid to die.

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<sup>135</sup> It was mature Lutheranism and Anglicanism that utterly relied upon a connection between princes and the church.

<sup>136</sup> *History of the United States*, Vol. 2, p461.

<sup>137</sup> McFetridge, p19.

## Calvinistic views on constitutional theory (the place of the state)

The basis of the Calvinist view are certain facts of life: the supreme authority of God's transcendent law; the depravity of man's nature and tendency to lawlessness; Christ's redemption through the church's Gospel and the necessity of the proper ordering of society.

### Calvin

*Two-powers theory* (similar to the medieval Catholic view): The church and the state are both established by God and neither rules over the other but both have authority under God's law in their respective fields.<sup>138</sup> Submission to God's law is required by both or they lose their authority. Civil resistance to tyranny, directed by 'lesser magistrates' is allowed if the state acts against God's law.<sup>139</sup>

### Huguenots and Beza

Generally followed Calvin. The chief end of civil government is the protection and safety of the people. Revolution is less based on theology than the legal contract between ruler and people (constitution). A government is only legal if it is formed by the consent of the people.

### Knox

Similar to Calvin – the magistrate protects an independent church. However, his view of civil resistance was harsher. The people can (and must) rebel against evil civil authorities even without the leadership of a lesser magistrate. The civil authority must establish Reformed religion. Knox was more reliant on the example of Israel's theocracy than Calvin for shaping legal institutions.

### Melville (Knox's successor)

In the face of absolutist monarchs (James VI) he emphasised the headship of Christ over the church. The people must take political action to secure the rights of Christ's authority.

### Cromwell's Commonwealth

Essentially retained the two-power theory, but with strong limits upon state authority over religious and civil liberties.

### Puritan views after 1660

The restoration of Charles II saw the return of the older English form of the one-power theory (the church is subordinate to the state and empowered by it). After 1688 the power of the state was limited, but it left the one-power theory intact but working through 'the crown in Parliament'. This was in conflict with American and Scottish theories.

### American Puritanism

Tried to limit the propensity of the civil authority to despotism by covenant limitations. Government must be by the consent of the people. Thus there is the right to resist tyrannical government. The rule of God's law supersedes the government and the people.

The result of developments in America after the Revolutionary War led to unprecedented civil and religious liberty, chiefly based upon the Calvinist concept of two powers. Christ is

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<sup>138</sup> *Institutes*, 4.20.

<sup>139</sup> This section is somewhat indebted to Kelly, p28 and 14off.

head over the church without civil intermediaries. Government by consent requires constitutional limitations on civil institutional power. Tyranny must be resisted.

### **Comparison**

By comparison we can add that radical Anabaptists believed that the Gospel freed people from the control of the state as servants of a higher, purer realm; while at the other end of the scale, Lutherans affirmed that the state authorises the church. Absolutists, such as Charles I, followed old Roman Empire jurists who taught that the ruler was above law, and was the living law [see Jean Bodin, *De Republica*, 1576]. Calvin taught that the power of the king was limited by law and was under covenant to the people [Sermon 29, 1 Sam, trans. Kelly, p66]. Calvin's view gradually changed over thirty years to reach this point in the early 1560s.

### **Interim conclusion**

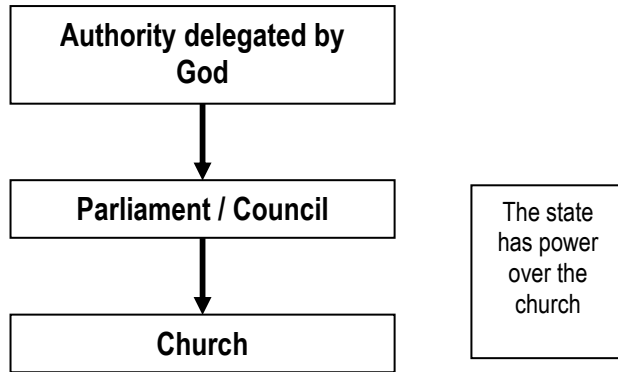
Scotland is the prime example of the effect of Calvinistic theology in changing the politics of a nation towards constitutional liberty. Before the Reformation it was considered a brutal, backward nation, engulfed in political intrigue founded upon murder. After the Reformation had consolidated, it led the way in developing modern political government for European countries. Three key principles emerged in Scotland:

1. The church was equal to the civil state.
2. The people had a covenantal right to hold government to account, which must operate under transcendent law.
3. The elevation of the ordinary citizen through democratic structures.

England would take over a hundred years to achieve something similar between 1690-1707.

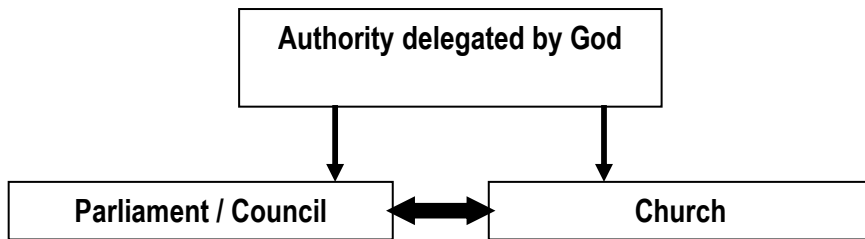
# Opposing forms of Civil Government

## One-Power Theory



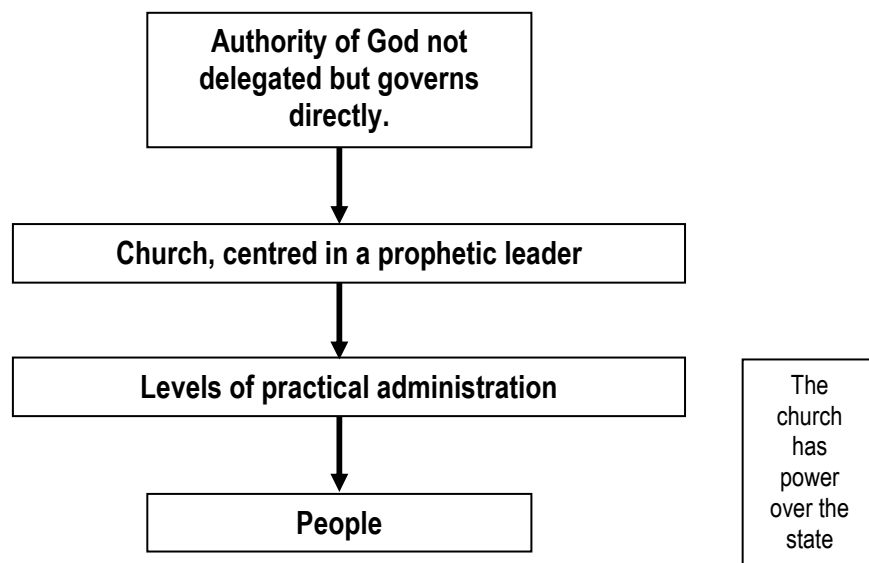
Example: Erastianism. English Anglicanism. The Revolutionary Settlement of 1688 in America (though this still separated the civil and religious powers). The 1711/12 Act of Patronage in Scotland.

## Two-Powers Theory



Example: Calvin's Geneva; early Scottish Reformation; Puritan view in early 13 American colonies. The Westminster Confession c.23, though 23:3 allows the magistrate the power to call synods and be present.

## Theocracy



Example: Israel in the wilderness; Vatican City; the radical Anabaptists at Munster.

## Calvinistic examples of democracy and liberty

Calvinism created the Dutch republic, arising from their forced rebellion against the King of Spain, becoming the first free nation that created a colonial mercantile empire. This little nation defeated a great and powerful monarchy. It emerged from Romanism, through Lutheranism to a mature Calvinism and thus established liberty of thought and democracy.

The fight for free speech and religious tolerance in France was waged, though lost, by Calvinists. The expulsion of the Huguenots from France resulted in great harm to its economy and benefited England and Holland where they mostly voyaged. The betrayal and massacre of over 100,000 Calvinists is a permanent stain upon French history enacted by Semi-Pelagian aristocrats. Many Huguenots later formed part of William III's army at the battle of the Boyne which sought to bring liberty to England in 1690.

In England the initial change of church polity made by Henry VIII was not pure because it was politically motivated by an unbelieving tyrannical king. But this was used by God to break with Rome's domination and enable later spiritual Reformation. It was not Arminians that worked this Reformation but Calvinists. The Lambeth Articles published in the reign of Elizabeth are thoroughly Calvinistic. Arminianism did not arise until later, and when it did it was associated with the sedition of Jesuits and the persecution of Archbishop Laud, being deliberately brought in to break the liberty of the English people and restore the rule of the pope.

When England again fell victim to monarchical tyranny, confiscation, imposition of Roman forms, dictatorial policies, undue taxation and even treason under the Stuarts, it was a Calvinistic reaction that restored liberty and released the English people from oppression, though it required a Civil War to do this. Whatever one's reservations and criticism of Oliver Cromwell, he was not only a genuine believer seeking God's will and genuinely concerned for liberty, but he transformed England from a second rate, bankrupt, dissipated nation into the most feared, disciplined and respected republic in the world. If Cromwell was the despot claimed by some, he would have accepted the crown when offered to him three times instead of rejecting it. The strength that his governance brought to England was greater than any experienced under a monarch and formed the basis of English Parliamentary democracy.

The Restoration of the Stuarts with Charles II again brought despotism and suffering to the nation, aided and abetted by Arminian archbishops and bishops appointed by the crown. Constitutional liberty was slowly being crushed, opposed only by Calvinist Puritans in England and Covenanters in Scotland. In the end the country preferred to be ruled by a Calvinist foreigner, William of Orange, rather than the Semi-Pelagian James II, William's father-in-law. Lord Macaulay has called the reign of William III *'the most successful and the most splendid recorded in the history of any country.'*<sup>140</sup>

The force of Knox's preaching in Scotland was dominated by the principle of liberty. He taught the Highland peasant that he was a free man, equal with any prelate in God's eyes. Through his work he destroyed Roman tyranny in Scotland forever and Mary Stuart, 'Queen of Scots', was said to fear his prayers more than anything else. Historian Thomas Carlyle called the effect of Knox's work in Scotland a 'resurrection from death'. The Scots only began to live as a result of the Reformation; Scottish literature, philosophy, industry and discovery (James Watt, David Hume, Walter Scott, Robbie Burns etc) sprang from the

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<sup>140</sup> *History of England*, Vol 2, p196-197.

Reformation. Carlyle adds, '*He is the one Scotchman to whom, of all others, his country and the world owe a great debt*'.<sup>141</sup> Regarding Scottish Calvinists generally Buckle says, '*They encouraged a democratic and insubordinate tone, which eventually produced the happiest results by keeping alive, at a critical moment, the spirit of liberty*'.<sup>142</sup> David Hume states that the freedom of the Scottish constitution was owed to the Calvinistic Puritans. We may not agree with all their methods, their fierceness, or all their behaviour – but what we cannot do is state that they produced despotism when instead they brought liberty.

We add a final word from a non-Calvinist historian:

More than to any other class of men, the political liberties of Holland, England and America are due [to Calvinism].<sup>143</sup>

While we can only make generalities in such an overview, and while many fighters for liberty had varying purity of purpose, the point is clear: the general thrust of Calvinism tends to liberty when it is founded purely in a nation. Forms of Semi-Pelagianism always led to domination by monarchs and despots.

The charge that Calvinism creates despotism is utterly false. The examples of history and the principles of Biblical theology prove this to be fallacious. It is Arminianism which leads to repression and subservience in both church and state.

### **Calvinistic examples of charity**

Continuing his theme of Calvinistic repression, Prasch claims that Calvinism lay at the heart of social injustice and exploitation in various spheres, such as the Victorian Industrial Revolution, class oppression, American plantation owners, and even saying that Reformed ideas justify sweat shops, wife beating and exploitation of child labour. This is so false that righteous anger is a justified response.

Now before we defend the Reformation in this, it is of course the case that in any movement there will be exceptions to the norm. There have no doubt been many supposedly Reformed people who have committed great sins and have exploited people. But the heart of Calvinism is that genuine faith will lead to genuine works of righteousness. Professing Christians who do not lead increasingly righteous lives have questionable faith. Calvinism cannot be blamed for the actions of unregenerate men who have merely adopted the outward forms of the Reformed faith.

While we must accept that many heretical branches of Christianity have also produced works of charity, there is no doubt that the Reformation has led to more good works in ratio to its numbers than anyone else. From the beginning the Reformers were almost as anxious to help the poor as to preach the truth. Most of them established schools, hospitals, universities and charity relief for the poor very quickly, as money was made available. This was equally true in all lands where the Reformation took hold, whether it was Scotland or Geneva. Luther's objective was to bring the truth to the ordinary peasant in order to enable him to think for himself without reliance upon clerics. Knowing the truth was foremost since this makes people free. But after bringing the truth the practical needs of peasants and the needy were met as much as was possible. This was not just true of Reformers but also of Reformed princes and kings. The message of the apostle James was

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<sup>141</sup> Quoted in McFetridge, p30-31.

<sup>142</sup> *Hist. Of Civilisation*, Vol 2, p185.

<sup>143</sup> John L Motley, *The Hist. Of the Netherlands*, Vol.3, p120-121.

not lost on these people.

Like other sections in this small work, it would take a separate book to evaluate the effect of the Reformation upon charitable works and relieving oppression. We have already noted how Knox was focused upon assisting the poor in Scotland and how Calvin worked tirelessly to support the needy. He established a hospital, a university, schools, refugee centres and charitable work in Geneva; but he also gave continually out of his own pocket to relieve foreign refugees, so that at his death he had little saved up. He literally cut back on his own lifestyle (which could have been wealthy) in order to help those in need. This example was a precedent for future Reformers.

Everywhere the Reformation spread it brought orphanages, hospitals, schools, universities, and poor-relief. Calvin even sent the first Protestant missionary out to Brazil to bring God's word to more primitive civilisations. He believed that true obedience to God was evidenced in loving your neighbour and living righteously. '*Calvin's piety can be characterised as intensely activist, a devotion to God lived out in the practical present daily world.*'<sup>144</sup> In his writings, sermons and personal letters, Calvin encouraged Christian charity, understanding that any worldly gifts were given by God to be used for the benefit of all. This contrasted previous Catholic charitable works as being the magnanimous gift of a richer to a lesser, resulting in spiritual benefit – earning salvation. Calvin also exhorted the wealthy to ensure that their employees, or the local poor, could observe Sunday meetings by not having to work. It wasn't just love that led people to help the poor, it was also obedience to God's call to everyone to keep his law.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, Calvin taught that self-centredness was a '*pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction ... whatever person we deal with, we shall treat him not only moderately and modestly but also cordially and as a friend.*'<sup>146</sup> Far from leading to selfishness, capitalism and exploitation, Calvin always urged the true believers did good to all, following Paul in Galatians 6:10.

Later Calvinists continued this emphasis, such as the American Jonathan Edwards in his sermon, *Christian Charity: Or, the Duty of Charity to the Poor, Explained and Enforced*. Wherever the effects of true Reformation were felt, this principle continued, but in time (especially as the unregenerate predominated in society) it was whittled away. In the American Colonies the Puritan New Englanders were not gloomy, rigid, morbid and repressive, as the stereotypes teach, but were dynamic, realistic and motivated in their duty to God to serve one another. Indeed, John Quincy Adams called Puritan New England, '*a colony of conscience*'.<sup>147</sup> However, within a hundred years of the first immigrants this godly motivation virtually disappeared as the population grew with much of it not being Puritan in heart. As it became, '*an economic powerhouse in fishing, trade, and colonial manufacturing. Theological compromise became commonplace.*'<sup>148</sup> Though this was countered to some degree in the Great Awakening and other religious revivals, the change only lasted a few years and the general direction of the nation was set on becoming a great capitalist global power. Later migrations brought waves of Catholics from Italy and other denominations. It is this move away from the original godliness and charity of the Puritan founders which led to exploitation based upon greed.

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<sup>144</sup> Hugh T. Kerr, "Reflections on Revisions", *Theology Today* Vol 47, No 2, Princeton Theological Seminary, July 1990, p249.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* p265.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* p 273, 275

<sup>147</sup> McFetridge, p79.

<sup>148</sup> Bill Potter, *John Calvin and the Puritan Founders of New England*, 23 April 2009; Vision Forum Ministries.

Pure Calvinism promotes evangelism, good works, acts of charity, relief of the poor, education, tolerance and an equitable, democratic society. It does this because it fears God and seeks to obey his word, which commands doing good to all. Calvinists fear God more than man and seek to do good in order to obey him. It is the departure from this pure Calvinism which results in exploitation and oppression.

## The stable root of Calvinistic morals

Another point is that Arminianism tends towards reliance upon the emotions. Since it believes that man determines his destiny, with free moral control, it naturally rouses the emotional part of his nature. This is evidenced in all Semi-Pelagian forms of worship which are either designed to stimulate, or naturally result in, arousal of the senses. External forms trigger a sensual response, which is mistaken for worship. All Charismatic worship forms, for instance, are based upon this appeal to the senses and stimulate emotionalism.

Since the origin of moral action stems either from the heart or the intellect, feelings or conviction, the result is either stability or instability. Convictions based on sentiment, or emotions, are not stable; moral character based upon principle applied by the intellect has a sure foundation. Arminian moral principles, being mainly founded on emotionalism, are unstable; its morality fluctuates, rising and falling upon the waves of feeling. Calvinism, while utilising the emotions in their sphere, is founded upon moral conviction. Its theology rests chiefly upon the intellect grasping truth and then teaching the conscience, which in turn drives the emotions, not the other way round. It rests upon God's word and obedience to Christ's law, not the stimulation of present feelings. The emotions must be subjected to truth and moral conviction; obedience to divine principle overrides feelings.

Thus Calvinism is founded upon the intellect while Semi-Pelagian forms are based upon the heart; the former has stability, the latter fluctuates according to sentiment. The great example of this is Roman Catholic Semi-Pelagianism, of which Arminianism is but another expression. Its moral principles are all based upon the same emotionalism that drives its liturgical forms. Consequently, its moral actions are riddled with instability and fluctuation. The result is the great moral failures that have riddled Catholicism from the earliest times. When he visited Rome Luther was so shocked at the moral degradation that prevailed, that he stated, *'if hell existed today, Rome was built upon it'*. The terrible and widespread immorality and paedophilia of the Roman priesthood of today is no different from medieval degradations. Lasting moral conviction cannot be built upon emotionalism.

Calvinism is utterly focused upon God. The foundation of its life is conviction of the truth, not an emotional response. In the realm of salvation it declares that man is unable to make any contribution; God must do everything; he is the author and finisher of faith. Thus the Calvinist always subjects himself to God's word, God's law, and does not trust in his feelings. He not only lives by faith in God's word but lives his life in the fear of God, working out his salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12-13). Calvin considered it to be a crime to stimulate a man's feelings in order to produce a moral effect. Instead he sought to teach the intellect God's truth and stimulate the conscience to dominate practical life. The Arminian relies upon touching the heart, hoping to stimulate a human response whereby a man accepts Christ out of his own free-will. Everything in this process rests upon the man, and chiefly upon his emotions.

The two systems could not be more different. When worked out, Calvinism results in moral conviction, whatever a man's feelings; Arminianism results in emotional responses and



fluctuating moral convictions. Calvinism convinces men of the truth; Arminianism stimulates man's emotions. This is why Arminianism always stimulates sense-based outward forms: Roman rituals, Charismatic emotionalism, large meeting hype, sacramentalism and external forms of Jewish ceremonies, diet, literary expressions and disciplines etc. Arminians think that they now please God because they have adopted new external forms of religion.<sup>149</sup> Calvinism is founded upon intellectual submission to God's sovereignty followed by consequent obedience; Arminianism is rooted in man's self-determination, which is usually prompted by emotionalism and expressed in self-will.

The Calvinist adopts charitable works because it is his duty to do so; it is obedience to God that leads to doing good to all, not whim. Convinced of the truth of this, the Calvinist continues all his life to seek to obey this divine command. He does not perform good works in order to gain divine favour or to receive more grace, but to obey God's law and evidence his faith. Thus all Calvinistic work evidences: thought, conscience, intellect, conviction, duty, responsibility, obedience and principle. This stands at odds with the world (which is naturally either Semi-Pelagian if religious, Pelagian or atheistic if not)<sup>150</sup> which demands that people follow their heart. It should, therefore, be no surprise that people's moral actions are all over the place. Following the heart has no thought for logical consequences; as one person follows the selfish dictates of their heart, a host of people associated with that person have their hearts broken (for instance when a person leaves their spouse to marry another). It is principle based on truth, not emotionalism, which determines true morality. True morality always leads to good works.

This focus on duty to do moral good destroys the false caricatures of Puritanism. They were not gloomy, clinical legalists out to ruin everyone's pleasure and repress social freedom; rather they were godly men exercised about their own duty to do good. They were men of conscience who judged themselves strictly, seeking to always obey God. This conscientiousness led to many personal sacrifices, not least when 2,000 of them lost their livelihood on the restoration of Charles II by refusing to compromise the truth.<sup>151</sup> True godliness always brings moral courage.

Anti-Calvinist, JA Froude, was forced to agree with this on consideration of the facts, If Calvinism is indeed the hard and unreasonable creed which modern enlightenment declares it to be, [why has it] possessed such singular attractions in past times for some of the greatest men that ever lived? ... How, being, as we are told, fatal to morality, because it denies free-will ... [did it] make the moral law the rule of life for states as well as persons? ... Why, if it be a creed of intellectual servitude, [was] it able to inspire and sustain the bravest efforts ever made by man to break the yoke of unjust authority?

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<sup>149</sup> In the case of Jewish Root ideas this includes the superficiality of: changing one's name to a Jewish equivalent, being circumcised, adopting Jewish terminology, practising Jewish feasts, praying for physical Jerusalem, fasting or adopting rabbinic methods of interpretation etc. While moderate Jewish Root teachers (as Prasch) avoid extremes (e.g. they don't advise circumcision) they are still doing exactly the same thing in lesser forms – teaching that grace is sacramental, it comes from what a man does; one pleases God by adopting religious certain forms of action. In this case it is adopting Old Covenant forms relative to Israel that God's word says have been cancelled and fulfilled in Christ. Even when they were commanded by God in Israel's history, they were only shadows at their best, and not the reality which is Christ.

<sup>150</sup> That is, unregenerate but religious minded people seek to co-operate with God, do things to seek his favour, which they think he has commanded, or try to gain union with God through various disciplines. Mystics do this through inaction and dying to self; sacramentalism does it through much liturgical action. Pelagians elevate man to God by their own action while atheists ignore God altogether.

<sup>151</sup> The 'Great Ejection' of Dissenting (Nonconformist) ministers under the Act of Uniformity of 1662 after Charles reneged on his agreement to reign with tolerance to religious views in the Church of England.

[He then mentions amongst others, William the Silent, Luther, Knox, Coligny, Cromwell and Bunyan, saying] These men were possessed of all the qualities which give nobility and grandeur to human nature – men whose life was as upright as their intellect was commanding and their public aims untainted with selfishness; unalterably just where duty required them to be stern, but with the tenderness of a woman in their hearts; frank, true, cheerful, humorous, as unlike sour fanatics as it is possible to imagine.<sup>152</sup>

## Calvinism and the family

While there may have been exceptions here and there from ancient times, in general it was Calvinism which elevated the work of the individual and the purity of home life. At a time when the rich were considered to be a better class of people, honoured by God and having an implicit authority, Calvinism explained that every man was equal in God's eyes and that the work of all men, performed honestly with reference to God, was of spiritual value. In one fell swoop the peasant was placed on an equal authority in his daily life with a king, with equal access to God and able to receive the same rewards for obedience to God.

In many societies the home was not a place of warmth, security and freedom. The husband's authority was to be respected with what amounted to a dictatorial tyranny. Wives were often treated with disrespect and even considered as the property of the husband. Even the more enlightened Roman laws did not change this (in fact Celtic 'barbarians' had more equitable family laws). In reality even if the wife was respected, her actual life was a terrible drudgery which amounted to little less than slavery. Husbands had the power to beat wives, sometimes mercilessly, without fear of punishment. The right of wife-beating was enshrined in common law. The husband was never expected to be faithful to his wife; fornication was considered to be inevitable and necessary; but a wife could be executed for adultery. Indeed, it was considered the norm for the wealthy and the aristocratic to have kept mistresses. The Prince Regent when living in the Brighton Pavilion, had engineers excavate a tunnel through the Old Steine to his mistress' house two hundred yards away. Children were also poorly treated, usually being uneducated and expected to work to contribute to the family income as soon as possible. In many backward modern societies this situation continues today.

Calvinism changed all this with its conception of honouring God in the home and at work as well as in church. One writer said that, '*Home, as we conceive it, was the creation of the Puritans.*'<sup>153</sup> Calvinistic teachers have written at length about this in numerous works from the very beginning. Self-control, personal righteousness and obedience to divine law meant that the Calvinist was being observed in his behaviour at all times and was never off guard. The marriage covenant was treated with huge respect as a mirror of the covenant between God and the church. Wives were cherished, children were nurtured and hospitality encouraged. Calvinists always built schools and promoted the education of all children, often providing the means for the poorest.

The family has a huge place in the ambit of Reformed thinking, especially with regard to the covenant, which is worked out through families. Family worship is treated with as much seriousness as personal piety and church services. The Christian family was an oasis of God's kingdom in the midst of a corrupt and fallen society and, as such, was to be preserved and encouraged. All this was new, at least in its strategic importance for church

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<sup>152</sup> JA Froude, *Calvinism*, p7-8.

<sup>153</sup> John R. Green, *A Short History of the English People*, Vol. 2, p280.

leaders.

Says Henry Ward Beecher,

There is no system which equals Calvinism in intensifying, to the last degree, ideas of moral excellence and purity of character.<sup>154</sup>

Take all the Calvinists out of a society, as happened in France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), and you remove all the moral stability, piety, virtue, fortitude, purity, charity and weaken the industriousness, temperance and liberality. The result is a growing degradation in society which will erupt in a French Revolution within 100 years (1789) and pave the way for a tyrants (Robespierre followed by Napoleon).

Calvinism breeds great men, virtuous men, men ready to sacrifice their lives for the truth. In every society that Calvinism touched, it produced such men, whether it was the Huguenots in France, the Covenanters in Scotland, the Puritans in America or the Nonconformists in England, it brought godly virtue and courage for the truth.

## Calvinism and evangelism

To close we must consider the greatest impact of liberty – the liberty of a sinner becoming a Christian by the work of sovereign grace. Critics of Calvinism claim that its system hinders the church witness and promotes a dour fatalism. Again the sheer facts of history show that nothing could be further from the truth. Calvinism has done more to bring liberty through its Gospel witness than any other form of evangelical Christianity.

Firstly, we have already outlined the massive expansion of the Reformed faith into Europe, England, Scotland and then America. Millions of people were converted in the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century alone. This was in a time when evangelical Arminianism did not really exist but was emerging. Within twenty-five years of Calvin's initial work there were two thousand places of worship with half a million worshippers in France alone.<sup>155</sup> By 1562 two million French people were Calvinists. We could repeat such significant statistics in many other areas.

But the same effectiveness accompanied individual Calvinist evangelists throughout history. In 1556 Ambrose Willie, a student of Calvin's, preached at Ernonville Bridge near Tournay to an audience of twenty thousand people. Peter Gabriel preached near Haarlem to 'tens of thousands' in the same year.

The ministry of George Whitefield in England and America is an example of superlative Gospel preaching, often to many thousands at a time; he was Reformed in theology though a minister of the Church of England. His preaching in the Great Awakening in America was accompanied by many other effective Calvinistic preachers such as Solomon Stoddard, Gilbert Tennent and later Edwards, Nettleton and Griffin. Regarding the awakening in England and Scotland we could mention James and Robert Haldane, Howell Harris (founder of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism) and Thomas Chalmers. It should also be mentioned that the chief minister of the revival of religion in England beginning in Bristol, often associated with John Wesley, was not an Arminian but Whitefield, who asked the Wesleys to help him. Up to this time John Wesley was a high churchman who baptised infants and was reticent to join the work in revival. He also said that saving souls outside a church building was 'almost a sin' and only joined Whitefield after casting lots. For this

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<sup>154</sup> *Leading Thoughts of Living Thinkers*, quoted in McFetridge, p88.

<sup>155</sup> McFetridge, p106.

reason Whitefield was called, 'the Calvinistic establisher of Methodism' since he brought many to faith in a locality, established a church and left it to others to continue.

We could mention the vast list of missionaries that have taken their Calvinistic Gospel to all sorts of foreign fields; David Brainerd to the Native American Indians, William Carey in India, WC Burns in China or Adoniram Judson to Burma for example. Regarding great evangelistic preachers who espoused Calvinism we could mention Charles Spurgeon, Murray M'Cheyne or John Gill who all experienced a strong measure of true revival. Evangelists and hymn writers include Augustus Toplady, writer of 'Rock of Ages', and John Newton, writer of 'Amazing Grace'. If we were to mention the many English Puritans who had successful evangelistic ministry the list would extend into the hundreds.

Calvin himself sent the first missionaries to Brazil, but sadly these perished before their work could begin. On 25 August 1556, M. Pierre Richier and M. Guillaume were commended to the care of the Lord with a letter from the church. Admiral Coligny had requested ministers to act as chaplains for Protestants who had established a Brazilian colony, led by Huguenot Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, in 1555. From 1555 to 1562 eighty-eight preachers were sent from Geneva into France, followed by more. There is no doubt that Calvin considered the work in Geneva to be a centre for missionary activity towards France first (his homeland) and then for the evangelisation the rest of Europe and the emerging New World across the Atlantic, soon to be exploited by the Portuguese and Spanish.

There is no doubt that not only is Calvinism an evangelistic spur, but history proves that its missionaries and evangelists have been the most successful. This is measured not only in terms of numbers but also of the solid Christian character of converts that was built and the emergence of new church spheres of activity around the world, at least until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After this time the promotion of Arminian crusade evangelism and other questionable methods, may have led to claims of bigger responses to preaching; however, the corollary is the fact that these have also led to the biggest statistics of falling away ever seen. Over 90% or even more than 95% have been admitted to falling away by evangelistic organisations. This is comparable to the admission, late in life, of extreme Arminian Charles Finney who admitted that he had hyped up his successes and that most of his converts did not stand the test of time. Such is always the case with large-scale Arminian professions of faith. The work of Calvin, on the other hand, is demonstrably proved to not only have remained, and not only built solid churches, but also changed nations, producing liberty.

The genuine evangelistic success of Calvinistic preaching, being based upon clear exposition of the truth and demanding spiritual fruit, is the final manifestation of the expression of liberty incipient in its system of thought. Far from promoting tyranny, Calvinism brings freedom – beginning with the release from the kingdom of darkness through the presentation of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

# Conclusion

It is of first importance, for a true Bible believing Christian, that he views history in the light of the sovereign purpose of God. Many of the detractors of the magisterial Reformers reveal their Dispensationalist tendencies<sup>156</sup> when they charge that the Reformation was an accident, that it was the chance configuration of fortunate circumstances (like the invention of printing) which caused its success. One example from Jacob Prasch will suffice:

It was simply the collapse of feudalism and the Holy Roman Empire, together with the rise of humanism that sprung (sic) from the Renaissance and the invention of the printing press to mass produce translated bibles that allowed the reformers to survive where others were exterminated by Rome and her agents. <sup>157</sup>

Apart from the historical errors in this statements (see footnote) this claim is like saying that it was just a lucky unusual wind which parted the waters of the Red Sea. Needless to say, the idea that God is not controlling the world according to his decree is unbiblical. The whole point of history is to see the hand of God determining his purpose and controlling his interests. 'Jesus is head over all things for the church' (Eph 1:22). Christ is not only sovereignly determining what takes place, but is doing so in order that the elect are gathered into his body and developed according to God's plan. I am disappointed and worried to read a statement like that above which detracts from the sovereignty and providence of God. These historical factors may well have been significant in supporting a climate favourable to the spread of sound doctrine, but who supervised this?

To imply, quite strongly, that it was some sort of accident that the Reformers survived and spread their teaching throughout Europe, and then blighted the church for hundreds of years (as Prasch teaches), is close to blasphemy. Most sound Christian students of history rightly see the Reformation as the strongest activity of the Holy Spirit in history; the brightest light to emerge from centuries of Roman darkness. Were the conditions which prevailed just prior to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, unifying the Mediterranean nations in peaceful government, transport and language, also an accident which just happened to aid the spread of the Gospel in the first century?

In order to understand the Reformation, one has to primarily see it as a spiritual event not a political one. That is certainly the way that the Reformers saw their role. They considered themselves to be teachers of the truth, not people out to establish empires. There is no doubt that the Reformation was the foremost revival of religion in world history.

The Reformation, and still more, Puritanism, have been considered from many aspects but it has been too often overlooked that the main features of these movements, as, for instance, the extensiveness of their influence, the singular position given to scripture and the transformation in character of the morally careless, are all effects of revival. When the Holy Spirit is poured out in a day of

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<sup>156</sup> Most Dispensationalist scholars, and all consistent ones, consider that Jesus is not Lord of the earth in this current dispensation. At the moment the Devil rules, Jesus will only assume authority in the next dispensation, the millennium. Some advocates of Dispensationalism have tried to maintain a Calvinist emphasis on salvation (e.g. John MacArthur) but such an approach is riddled with inconsistency.

<sup>157</sup> *Moriel Newsletter* 7:6. The statements are not all true anyway. The Holy Roman Empire did not collapse at the beginning, or during the consolidation, of the Reformation; it continued for hundreds of years. Although the Reformation initiated the dawn of a new era for the territorial rulers in Germany, the 'secession' of some of them was really only a concession of religious freedom for the Lutheran princes; but this did reduce the influence of the emperor (and the pope) in Germany. The demise of feudalism arose partially because of the Reformation and was not a contributory factor in its development.

power the result is bound to affect whole communities and even nations. Conviction of sin, an anxiety to possess the Word of God, and dependence upon those [things] which glorify God in man's salvation, are inevitable consequences.<sup>158</sup>

In order to protect and spread the truths of the Reformation, God ensured that there was a political edge to it. The control of the Roman church through the emperor, and other authorities, had always been able to extinguish emergent champions of reform because they were isolated and unprotected. The adoption of the new (i.e. original) faith by state princes, city-state magistrates or kings of nations enabled the *solas*<sup>159</sup> to affect more and more people as the light dawned.

When it comes to the great characters of the Reformation, critics of the Reformers can never be satisfied, in the same way that the Pharisees could not be satisfied with the behaviour of Jesus. These religious leaders condemned Jesus for mixing with sinners and feasting; yet they had previously opposed John the Baptist for being an ascetic. Similarly, Luther and Calvin were opposite personalities, uniquely fitted by God for their different tasks. Critics of Calvin ridicule his dour abstinence, while later criticising Luther for his outgoing, boisterous, humorous personality.

In examining the position of the Reformers on church-state matters, we should remember that the close ties between church and state were part and parcel of late medieval thinking. It was absurd for people living then to even consider separating the two concepts. The few sects which tried were seen as seditious anarchists, or even blasphemous revolutionaries, by everyone. Religious uniformity was considered essential to the tranquillity of society, openly expressed religious dissent was unthinkable.<sup>160</sup>

The Reformation did not materially change this but it did lay the foundations for subsequent change. What it did do was to change the balance; society could not have handled further revolutionary change at this time. Previously, the church had effectively controlled the state, now they were seen as two separate bodies, both vital in a partnership for the good of society, the ruler being required to support the church. The ideas of people like Jacob Prasch that the Reformation started a theocracy movement in the western church is nonsense. The Reformation took the formal power of the church out of manipulating governments, not into it.

*Politically, the eminent significance of the reformation was the comprehensive repudiation of ecclesiastical control over government.*<sup>161</sup>

It was left to later thinkers, like Thomas Erastus, to formulate the idea that the state controlled the church. It was in England that this idea degenerated into the monarch being considered as 'the supreme head of the church'; a position I do not subscribe to - Christ is the head of the church. The state also took on the moral responsibilities which were previously the domain of the church like: education and charitable functions. Religion became just another facet of state function like commerce. The identification of the church

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<sup>158</sup> Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, Banner of Truth (1971) p3.

<sup>159</sup> The key principles of Reformation teaching are enshrined in a number of *solas* (Latin for 'alone') i.e: Faith alone (*sola fide*), Christ alone (*solo Christo*), Grace alone (*sola gratia*), the Glory of God alone (*solus Deo gloria*), the Bible alone (*sola scriptura*) and also the continual reformation of the church (*semper reformandum*) and the priesthood of all believers. So justification was by grace alone, based upon Christ alone, through faith alone, to the glory of God alone resulting in the priesthood of all believers. The use of 'alone' is critical and not superfluous. Roman Catholics can espouse a justification by grace through faith, but not alone - they must add a number of other things to it like works, the ministry of the church and so on.

<sup>160</sup> Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The World of the Reformation*, p206.

<sup>161</sup> Hillerbrand, p205.

with a territory was not so much a mistake as a missed opportunity. The close involvement of the rulers with the church leaders secured the survival of the Reformation impetus but also prevented the establishment of a purified New Testament fellowship.

One should not take lightly the fact that Christians are in a war. The Reformation was the act of God to dispel the darkness which had descended upon the church and society for hundreds of years, and as such the warfare surrounding the key defenders of the faith must have been severe, possibly the most intense since that suffered by the apostles. Certainly, Martin Luther spoke openly about this which took many forms for him: illness, doubts, opposition, temptations, nightmares, slander and so on. We find here many reminiscences of Paul who knew what it was to be '**so unbearably utterly crushed**', slandered, oppressed, opposed, (even by supposed believers) and persecuted. In their stress, even apostles made serious mistakes. Peter had to be withstood by Paul when he erred (Gal 2:11-14) and James, the Lord's brother, stated that apostles made many mistakes (Jm 3:2). If the supremely gifted apostles could err under the pressure of the battle, how can we expect the Reformers to be perfect, who were not so inspired. It is also interesting that many of the current harsh critics of the Reformers are men who are themselves accused of unrighteous behaviour, scandalous unrestrained speech and false teaching.

The key areas of criticism, noted earlier, were that the Reformers were guilty of:

- Developing a repressive state church system.
- Creating police states.
- Producing gross social injustice.
- Originating dominionism and Reconstructionism.
- Forcing conversion by violence.
- Preparing the way for Hitler and the Holocaust.
- Anti-Semitism.
- Viciousness.
- Tyranny.
- Misunderstanding the Gospel and doing no good to the church.
- The motivation and method of the Reformers was man-centred humanism.

These criticisms can now be seen to be, at the very least, a misrepresentation of the facts resulting from a narrow reading of history, or at worst, plain lies to prove a point. Taking them individually:

- The Reformers did not develop a repressive state church system because such a system was already in being. What they did was to break the stranglehold of the Roman church upon state rulers and provide an opportunity for later reformers to make a break with the state altogether. This option was not truly utilised for a long time. Remember that '*semper reformandum*' was a key Reformation truth. The Reformers knew that they had not created a perfect church system and realised that later reforms would be necessary. Before we rush to criticise the Reformers for their lack of radical changes, we must understand that the world was not ready for a break of the church from close ties to the state and without the protection and support of the rulers, the Reformation would have failed.
- No serious student of history considers that Calvin (or others) created a police state. This is simply brash tabloid journalism.
- The charges that the Reformers caused gross social injustice are blatantly untrue.
- The real origin of dominionism and Reconstructionism is found in the policies of the Roman Catholic church, not the Reformers. If anything, the Reformers actively worked

against such an idea.

- The idea of forcing conversions by violence is totally opposed to the Reformer's theology and practice. There is no evidence that they ever did this.
- The idea that Luther prepared the way for Hitler and the Holocaust is so foolish as to cause one to smile.
- There is no evidence that any of the Reformers were anti-Semitic in any way. Luther's condemnation of the Jews was specific to a given situation and had nothing to do with anti-Semitism.
- Claims that the Reformers were vicious and tyrannical have no foundation. The only objective 'evidence' offered for 'viciousness' is the burning of Servetus, which has been proved to be a false accusation.
- The charge that the Reformers misunderstood the Gospel and did no lasting good to the church is laughable. Even secular scholars admit that Reformation teaching is a return to true Biblical principles, preached with unusual power. Christian historians have, for centuries, evaluated the doctrines of the magisterial Reformers as a revival of a Biblical based Gospel, effectually communicated in the power of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that the Reformation paved the way for all the subsequent movements of God to develop the church. Without it we would still be in the Dark Ages. The Reformers did not recapture everything, but without the Reformation, nothing would have been recaptured at all.
- To suggest that the motivation and method of the Reformers was man-centred humanism is utterly foolish. The reason for the subsequent clashes with humanist reformers like Erasmus was because the magisterial Reformers went way beyond what humanists thought was desirable. In addition, they saw that Reformed teaching struck at the heart of humanist dogma, which taught that with a little help from God, the heart of man could reach out and do all that was necessary to gain salvation and change society into a utopia. The Reformers taught that man's will was dead, his heart corrupt and his nature depraved. Only God could save man and society. The humanists, therefore, believed in man's power of self-determination for good, the Reformers did not. They were not humanists, even though some had emerged out of a humanist education.

Having considered all of the charges against them, one has to submit that they are false. The rabid attacks of modern teachers against people like Luther and Calvin are to be deplored as uninformed, unscholarly, exaggerated and biased. Many people in the Reformation gave their lives for the truth, even when the charges were seemingly trivial to the modern mind. Many died just for refusing to accept the doctrine of transubstantiation. In 1519 six men and a woman were burned at Coventry for teaching their children the Lord's Prayer and the 10 Commandments. In an age where 'Christians' are daily yielding great truths like: justification by faith alone and the sovereignty of God in the world, how dare we traduce the memory of great saints who died to ensure that their heritage would have these doctrines.

### **The importance of a focus upon Christ.**

The most important aspect of the Christian's walk is to continually look to Jesus (Heb 12:2); we are to fix our eyes upon Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. The believer that is constantly aware of his utter dependence upon Jesus and looks to him for grace to help in time of need, will not go far astray. Hebrews also tells us that it is good to look at the forerunners of our faith; not just the Biblical characters outlined in Hebrews 11 and other places, but also those who ran the race before us in church history. God promised to



always give gifts of men to the church to equip the saints (Eph 4:11-12); these include the great Reformers, theologians, preachers and missionaries of previous ages. It is wise to study these men as far as they gave witness to Christ to enable us to understand more about his truth.

For this reason it is good to establish the truth about the Reformation and its effects in history. Teachers today should warn their people about the heretics of earlier centuries and why their teachings are wrong, primarily because these doctrines are cropping up everywhere today. They should also advise believers whom to read and study because they were witnesses to Christ and speak the truth. It is therefore a great sin to lie about godly men, and an even bigger sin to slander their ministry when it was empowered by God for the lasting benefit of his people.

The folly of Jacob Prasch, and many other Arminians, is to misrepresent the Reformers and exaggerate their faults or diminish their achievements. In some cases the statements made by these modern critics are just plain lies that are even controverted by secular historians. When people like Prasch lie about Calvin or Luther they slander and dishonour God who raised them up as gifts to the church. When they misrepresent the Reformation they sin against the God who did such a powerful work to bring light to a church in darkness. I would urge them to repent, for such lies will certainly be brought to their account on the Day of Judgment.

The Reformers were men like us, and like us they made mistakes. However, the strength of their achievements, made at such great sacrifice, should humble us; as Spurgeon said, *'How those Reformers worked'*.<sup>162</sup> Godly men should be remembered; teachers of the truth should be noted and honoured; but those who also changed nations, fought heretics, took on the might of the world, lived humble sacrificial lives, counselled thousands, advised princes, established principles that still benefit nations today, and most importantly, witnessed faithfully to Christ – should be given especial honour. However, like their master, these men are today reviled and persecuted; though they are dead and buried and cannot defend themselves. What is such a travesty is that, often, the false witness is being taught by supposed Christians.

We should study the Reformers because they pointed to Christ. They loved, worshipped, honoured, followed and obeyed him. Their writings help us to understand the truth of Christ – in particular the works of Calvin – and are worthy of study today. Most modern preachers are not worthy of untying their shoelaces, let alone vilifying them. In the case of Prasch, as a Dispensational, Arminian, Charismatic (however moderate), Jewish Root teacher, he particularly sets up other features for Christians to focus upon instead of Christ, such as Israel or rabbinic ideas. The root of modern rabbinic ideas is the Babylonian Talmud, which contains the foulest blasphemies against Christ ever written. Thus believers who follow Prasch in denigrating the Reformers and follow his teachings, are actually following the ideas of the Pharisees instead of Christ and denying the true work of God in the witness of the Reformation to the Lord. This is the sorry state that modern Christians have come to. God have mercy on his people.

Calvin sought the glory of God more than anything else and in his teaching tried to turn men's eyes towards Jesus Christ as Lord. In all his sermons, tracts and books he constantly fought for God's honour against errors and set men's eyes upon Christ. If he spoke on the family, it was how the family represented Christ; if he taught on leadership, it was to

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<sup>162</sup> CH Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, on Luther's commentary on Genesis, no. 149.

encourage a true ministry that pointed to Christ; if he spoke to princes and magistrates, it was to impress on them the need to govern well as delegates of Christ. The testimony to Jesus was his great priority. God is glorified in Christ and Christians must focus upon him and lead lives worthy of their calling.

Luther also was enraptured with Christ. He never quite got over the power of his conversion and the change from his former life of struggling to please God in the flesh. The impact of grace in his life preoccupied his thinking all his life. He was clear in his understanding of human depravity and need, and exalted in the grace of God in Christ to bring the elect to salvation. The freedom he gained by being justified by faith, that doctrine which determines whether the church stands or falls according to him, was the focal point of his life. It delivered him from all the corruption and degradation of Romish doctrines and practices and this deliverance motivated him to serve tirelessly to bring about the evangelisation of his homeland by establishing a secure Reformation. In many ways Calvin was Luther's true successor, not the compromised Lutheranism established by Melancthon, which drifted from Luther's cardinal doctrines. This is why the systematisation of Reformation truths so lucidly by Calvin is what God used to push the Reformation out into the rest of the world.

We could continue in this vein by looking at all the Reformers, but enough has been said. These men were godly, serious and gracious; but they are great because they point us to Christ. Only in the measure that a man does this does he have any worth at all. Thus the Reformers are worthy of inspection because they point to the Lord. To misrepresent this in lies and exaggerations is wicked. May God give us grace to see the truth and glorify him alone.

# Main Appendices

## Appendix One

This paper is not primarily devoted to analysing the religious situation of Europe and the benefits of the Reformation; however, in addition to the social and political benefits noted earlier, we must outline the key spiritual benefits procured by the Reformers. This outline will be based on bullet points regarding the situation before and afterwards.

### Summary of the religious situation before the Reformation

- There were no vernacular Bibles in European languages, apart from a few copies of Wycliffe's translation of the Vulgate into English.
- There was little knowledge of the Gospel, very few knew how to be saved.
- Most priests had no knowledge of Biblical doctrines or scripture.
  - \* The results of Bishop Hooper's survey of the wealthy diocese of Gloucester, in 1551, revealed the following: Out of 311 clergy, 168 could not repeat the 10 Commandments, 31 of the 168 could not say where they appeared in the Bible; 40 could not say where the Lord's Prayer appeared; 31 of the 40 did not know who was the author of the Lord's Prayer.
- All the clergy did was: say Mass, repeat Latin prayers and chants, hear confession, grant absolutions, give extreme unction and take money for indulgences. There was hardly any preaching. [Prescribed quarterly sermons were not insisted upon. The focus was upon the Mass.]
- The clergy were opportunists:
  - \* their loyalty was secured by personal interests (e.g. after the Reformation began, many changed sides several times to keep their position in England under Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth I.
- The ordinary people could not understand a word of what was said in Latin during the services. This did no spiritual good at all. As a result, they had virtually no religion.
- The idea of escaping sin and holy living was reduced to celibacy and monastic orders. Shutting oneself away in a monastery, often in company with the opposite sex (nuns and monks), which usually had an adverse effect - immorality prevailed.
- Religion was based upon going to Mass, Mary-worship, saint-worship, image-worship, relic-worship,<sup>163</sup> pilgrimages, almsgiving, formalism, ceremonialism, processions, prostrations, bowings, crossings, fastings, confessions, penance, absolutions, and blind obedience to the priests.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> The use of relics was staggering in its appalling effrontery. In England they included: an angel with one wing, several spearheads said to have pierced Christ's side, enough splinters of the cross to make several large crosses, St Edmund's toe nails, the stone on which Christ was birthed, various items of clothing and some milk from the virgin Mary!

<sup>164</sup> Ryle, p7

## Summary of the religious situation after the Reformation

- The gross darkness of the Medieval Catholic Church was greatly removed. People could find access to the true Gospel by attending church, reading books or asking questions.
- The production of vernacular Bibles in all the lands touched by the Reformation is of inestimable value.
- Arising from the ability to read scripture developed the right and value of private judgment.
- The Reformation opened the way to God through emphasising the Gospel of Grace. Justification by faith alone without works of the law was taught with clarity.
- Spiritual worship was restored to the church. The ordinary person could hear the service in their own language and understand what was going on. In many areas he could also participate to some degree.
- Biblical teaching came to the forefront of church life and the people learned pure doctrine from catechising at home.
- A great emphasis was placed upon holy living.
- The dissolution of monasteries broke up many hothouses of iniquity and dispelled the fallacious idea that isolated confinement was necessary for holy living. The emphasis upon obeying God in our normal duty and calling was revolutionary. The seeds of moral, ethical living bore fruit in certain nations for centuries.
- The idea of clergy became focused upon servant-hood, teaching, evangelism and eldership rather than privileged priesthood (though the name 'priest' was retained).
- The religious mediation of priests, cardinals and popes was removed.
- A sacerdotal (sacrificing) priesthood was shown to be an error.
- The empty rituals, superstitions, mystical ceremonies, and vain formalism of the Roman church was shown to be false and removed from many places.
- The swindling of Roman priests was terminated.<sup>165</sup>
- Domination of people in their domestic affairs, by Roman clergy, was terminated.
- A great deal of immoral and ungodly behaviour amongst the priesthood was removed.

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<sup>165</sup> Blatant swindling included, indulgences shared between local clergy and the pope, paid masses to get relatives out of purgatory, demanding money for saint's shrines, demands for legacies of lands, false relics including the use of a vial of 'Christ's blood for those who gave alms, found to be duck's blood, and wire-rigged statues and crucifixes to appear to condone large offerings.

## Appendix Two

### Quotes regarding the importance of the Reformation

#### **De Tocqueville**

[Calvinism is] a democratic and republican religion.<sup>166</sup>

#### **JH Merle D'Aubigne**

[What] chiefly distinguishes the Reformation of Calvin from that of Luther, [is] that wherever it was established it brought with it not only truth, but liberty, and all the great developments which these two fertile principles carry with them.<sup>167</sup>

#### **Nathaniel S McFetridge**

This is the reason that [Calvinism] has made so splendid a record in the history of human freedom. Where it flourishes despotism cannot abide.<sup>168</sup>

#### **Douglas F. Kelly**

It is important to note in the history of thought that this kind of God-centred Calvinistic theology [as expressed in the Westminster Assembly] led to individual and national liberty and civil rights in balance with necessary state authority.<sup>169</sup>

The final limitation of monarchical power in England owed to the Calvinist antecedents.<sup>170</sup>

#### **John Leith**

Arminianism ... was ... associated with episcopacy and the divine right of kings.<sup>171</sup>

#### **J.C. Ryle**

I cannot agree with those who now tell us that the Reformation was a blunder - that the Reformers are overpraised - that Protestantism has done the country no good.<sup>172</sup>

I fear there is a strange disposition to undervalue the Protestant Reformation. Time has a wonderful power of dimming men's eyes, deadening their recollection of benefit, and making them thankless and ungrateful.<sup>173</sup>

Before the Reformation ... religion [was] without knowledge, without faith and without a lively hope - a religion without justification, regeneration, and sanctification - a religion without any clear views of Christ and the Holy Ghost ... As to the grand question, "What must I do to be saved?" probably not one Englishman in fifty could have given you half as good an answer as an ordinary Sunday School child would give in our own day. [late 19th century.]<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> *Democracy*, I, p384.

<sup>167</sup> *History of the Reformation in the Time of Calvin*, Vol. 1, p3.

<sup>168</sup> *Calvinism in History*, p25.

<sup>169</sup> *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World*, p98.

<sup>170</sup> *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World*, p113.

<sup>171</sup> *Assembly at Westminster*, p26.

<sup>172</sup> Ryle, p3.

<sup>173</sup> Ryle, p4.

<sup>174</sup> Ryle, p7.

We owe an enormous debt to the Protestant Reformation.<sup>175</sup>

The Reformation found Englishmen:

- \* steeped in ignorance, and left them in possession of knowledge
- \* found them without Bibles, and left them with a Bible in every parish
- \* found them in darkness, and left them in comparative light
- \* found them priest-ridden, and left them enjoying the liberty which Christ bestows
- \* found them strangers to the blood of the Atonement, to faith, and grace, and holiness, and left them with the key to those things in their hands
- \* found them blind and left them seeing
- \* found them slaves and left them free.<sup>176</sup>

### **Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

It is no exaggeration to say that the that the Protestant Reformation changed and turned the entire course of history, not only the history of the church but secular history too. There is no question about this, and it is granted by historians, that the Reformation laid the foundation of the whole democratic view of government. That is a fact of history.<sup>177</sup>

The Puritan Fathers ... were men who were products of the Reformation, and it was the desire not only for religious liberty, but also for democratic liberty, that drove them ... to establish a new life, a new state, and a new system of government.<sup>178</sup>

The Reformation gave life-blood to the whole democratic notion in the realm of politics, and the consequences, as judged from a social and from a moral standpoint, simply baffle description. ...[Scotland] from being a dissolute, drunken, and illiterate country, became famous throughout the world for her sober, righteous, able, intelligent people. And it was the Protestant Reformation that led to it.<sup>179</sup>

[Of Calvin's Institutes] One could say that no book has had such an influence on man and on the history of civilisation.<sup>180</sup>

[The Reformation] affected profoundly the modern view of politics and of law. Prior to the Reformation the church generally governed politics; she controlled emperors and kings and potentates, and governed the law of lands. All that has been changed.

But not only that, it has changed literature. It is very true to say that Martin Luther in a sense created the German language ... you cannot understand literature, particularly German literature, apart from him.

And when you come even to the realm of science it is being granted generally by modern historians that you would never have had modern science were it not for the Reformation. All scientific investigation and endeavour prior to that had been controlled by the church. There was no liberty of investigation ... Perhaps nothing is more important than the way it brought to the forefront the sovereignty of the individual conscience.<sup>181</sup>

It is right to praise famous men. There is a kind of piety that seems to think that this is

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<sup>175</sup> Ryle, p4.

<sup>176</sup> Ryle, p21

<sup>177</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times*, p95

<sup>178</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times*, p96

<sup>179</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times*, p96

<sup>180</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times*, p34.

<sup>181</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Luther and his Message for Today*, p2.

wrong. I dissent from that completely. Martin Luther is worth looking at. Would that there were more like him at the present time. God uses men. Do not forget that. He produces the men ... Luther was a wonderful man, and it is worth our while to have a look at him for a moment. He was an outstanding genius.<sup>182</sup>

Now some of the modern infidel historians think they can explain the whole of the Protestant Reformation in political terms. That, of course, is sheer nonsense. But it did come in, and God was behind it.<sup>183</sup>

You do not get reformations through an Erasmus; it is through a Luther. This is about the only man I have ever read of in history who could have done it; any other man would have been crushed.<sup>184</sup>

### **CH Spurgeon**

The longer I live the clearer does it appear that John Calvin's system is the nearest to perfection.<sup>185</sup>

Calvinism IS the Gospel, and nothing else.<sup>186</sup>

Among all those who have been born of women, there has not risen a greater than John Calvin.<sup>187</sup>

### **BB Warfield**

Calvinism is Religion at the height of its conception ... evangelicalism in its purest and only stable expression. Wherever we find religion in its purity, therefore, there Calvinism is implicit.<sup>188</sup>

### **Arthur Custance**

Calvinism is the Gospel and to teach Calvinism is in fact to preach the Gospel. It is questionable whether a dogmatic theology which is not Calvinistic is truly Christian.<sup>189</sup>

### **William Cunningham**

Calvin is the man who, next to St. Paul, has done most good to mankind.<sup>190</sup>

### **Jacob Arminius**

After the Holy Scriptures, I exhort the students to read the Commentaries of Calvin. . . . I tell them that he is incomparable in the interpretation of Scripture; and that his Commentaries ought to be held in greater estimation than all that is delivered to us in the writings of the ancient Christian Fathers: so that, in a certain eminent spirit of prophecy, I give the pre-eminence to him beyond most others, indeed beyond them all. I add, that, ... his Institutes must be read after the Catechism, as a more ample interpretation.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Luther and his Message for Today*, p17.

<sup>183</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Luther and his Message for Today*, p19.

<sup>184</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *Luther and his Message for Today*, p20.

<sup>185</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, Autobiography, Vol. I: *The Early Years*, Banner of Truth, p79.

<sup>186</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, Autobiography, Vol. I: *The Early Years*, Banner of Truth, p168.

<sup>187</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, Autobiography, Vol. II: *The Full Harvest*, Banner of Truth, p29.

<sup>188</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956, p498-499.

<sup>189</sup> Arthur C. Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979, p302.

<sup>190</sup> *Christian History Magazine*, Vol. V, No. 4, p2.

<sup>191</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Eerdmans, 1952-53, Vol. 8, p280.

**J. I. Packer**

For the latter part of his lifetime and a century after his death John Calvin was the most influential man in the world, in the sense that his ideas were making more history than those of anyone else during that period. Calvin's theology produced the Puritans in England, the Huguenots in France, the 'Beggars' in Holland, the Covenanters in Scotland, and the Pilgrim Fathers of New England, ... Also, it was Calvin's doctrine of the state as a servant of God that established the ideal of constitutional representative government and led to the explicit acknowledgement of the rights and liberties of subjects. . . . It is doubtful whether any other theologian has ever played so significant a part in world history.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, page number lost.



## Appendix Three

### The problem of the Anabaptists for the Reformers.

The real difficulty is the broad use of this term for all radical reformers, coined by their detractors. It was a 'catch-all' term that included a wide variety of groups who practised baptism of adults upon repentance only, instead of baptising babies (paedobaptism).

#### 1. Inspirationists

Firstly, it referred to the extremist factions, following the medieval mystics, who were out to usher in their apocalyptic vision of the imminent end of the world as confirmed by their raving prophecies. These were *the Inspirationists*, for whom subjective 'spiritual' illumination took precedence over, or even obviated, the Bible altogether. Such is best exemplified by the Munster tragedy noted earlier. These folk were not just radical in theology but were subversives and anarchists and had the real potential of undermining society and thus destroying the work of the Reformation. They were mostly of a mystical tendency, subjective, emotional, sometimes communistic and often prone to violence. Such groups frequently preached rebellion and incited the people to public disorder and ungodly behaviour. The 'Zwickau prophets' were typical of subjective, 'spiritually' inspired leaders who abandoned the Bible and caused disruption. Thomas Müntzer was one of the more able leaders of this erroneous theology, teaching even that the elect must slaughter the ungodly; his disciple Hans Hut was equally violent. Roland Bainton says that it is Müntzer who is the progenitor of the Protestant theocracies, not Luther or Calvin.<sup>193</sup> Caspar Schwenkfeld is also identified with the *Inspirationists*.

#### 2. Anabaptist Brethren

A second group comprised those reformers who had not been satisfied at the speed or extent of changes made by the magisterial Reformers and it is these who are *the Anabaptists* proper, though they preferred the term 'Brethren'. Focused upon scripture as their sole authority, they saw that there was a lot more to do than resting upon the laurels of a break with Rome. The first of these arose in Zürich. Dissatisfied with Zwingli's refusal to be more radical and Biblical, Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, George Blaurock, Dr. Balthazar Hübmeier,<sup>194</sup> Hans Denk and others of his associates separated from him. The beginning of division came when about twelve men gathered in Mantz's home on 21 January 1525. During a fervent meeting, and after prayer, they were gripped by the need to obey God, despite the consequences, and baptised one another, committing themselves to obey the Bible and follow Christ.

Gradually, they saw the need to do away with: infant baptism, dependence of the church upon the state, military service, usury, and the tithe. The key issue was to purify the church and restore it to New Testament simplicity. The church was for believers only and independent of outside control; church government was to be congregational not hierarchical. They were also pacifists, even in the face of the Turkish threat. These ideas were revolutionary in 16th century Europe and most people just could not cope with it. Zwingli wanted a much more gradual reformation, being concerned for civil order, and so the council forbade the radicals from preaching their views. Despite this, the movement spread, especially amongst the lower classes, as a result of effective personal evangelism. On 9 April 1525, Grebel baptised '*a huge throng*' in the Sitter River; 500 were said to be baptised during the initial stages of the movement in St Gall; under Balthazar Hübmeier's

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<sup>193</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p262.

<sup>194</sup> Or 'Balthasar Hübmaier'.

ministry, 6000 people were baptised in Nikolsburg in one year.<sup>195</sup>

There was no single, unifying mastermind and there was a great variety in the effectiveness of the leadership generally; most were godly and noble like Michael Sattler,<sup>196</sup> some were also gifted like: Dr. Balthazar Hübmeier, Menno Simons (leader of the Dutch Anabaptists, known as Mennonites) or Jacob Hutter of Moravia (founder of the Hutterite brethren); many were not. Most were from German speaking territories and the only real written summary of common belief is the Schleithem Confession of 1527; although this is more of a church manual than a doctrinal confession. Some claim that this group eventually gave rise to the Baptist movement.

### 3. Rationalists

Another faction was *the rationalists* who emphasised reason above the Bible, drawing from Renaissance humanism. Though identified with the Anabaptists, especially by Calvin, they were not really linked in any substantive way. They were anti-Trinitarian and some remained in the Roman church. Leaders included Michael Servetus, Sebastian Castellio and Juan de Valdes.

### 4. European Brethren

A fourth group can also be identified. This is the various *brethren assemblies* which had been in existence for hundreds of years before the Reformation. In 1524 in Germany, many of these groups came into the open declaring that they were independent congregations of true believers. They were not a new sect but ended up being persecuted with all the others because they practised believer's baptism. In the religious revival sparked by the Reformation, these groups grew rapidly, evangelising and printing many books and tracts. They had a number of effective leaders who travelled from church to church. In the beginning Luther and Zwingli had been strongly influenced by such teachers. These groups had various names and later became mixed up with the groups arising from the dissenters from Zürich. They included: the Paulicans, Albigenses, Bohemian Brethren and Waldenses. The 19th century Brethren movement saw these groups as their precursors. Some of the groups were not as doctrinally pure as the Zürich Anabaptists; the Bohemians and the Waldenses had sacraments, hierarchy, confession and Lent, for instance. Many are called heretics today, but the wild accusations of erroneous doctrine and practice were written by their enemies, who destroyed their records and killed them mercilessly; sometimes massacring thousands at a time.

We can thus see the confusion. The Reformation became a melting pot for individual religious expression as people were encouraged to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Certain areas assumed a territorial church expression: Calvinism in Geneva, Zwinglianism in Zürich, Lutheranism in Saxony etc.; which later coalesced into: Calvinism in Switzerland, South Germany, the Low Countries, Scotland and England and Lutheranism in North Germany. Amidst all this a myriad independent groups emerged and suffered persecution. Although these may have arisen from the Waldensians, other Brethren groups, the spiritual Franciscans, the evangelical humanists, the German mystics, Hussites, extremists of various sorts and the original Zürich Anabaptists, most were evangelicals who seceded from the Roman church acting upon conscience. All were called

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<sup>195</sup> Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p28, 64.

<sup>196</sup> The persecution, trial and martyrdom of Sattler had a profound effect upon contemporary people who read the details in Wilhelm Reublin's booklet; indeed some say that the influence of it remains to this day. In his unjust trial he was patient, respectful, wise and godly. His execution was appalling in its severity (under a Catholic regime). His wife and several colleagues were also killed. Sattler was largely responsible for the Schleithem document.

Anabaptists and labelled seditious.

The decision to kill Anabaptists did not arise from the Reformers but from imperial decree formulated at the Diet of Speyer in 1529, though the minority Reformers did nothing to oppose it. It reveals the depth of concern felt by all concerning the perceived threat they posed to social stability. The resulting persecution they suffered at the hands of Catholics and Protestants destroyed much of their literature and reduced their congregations. Like many radical groups, false ideas were attributed to them by their conquerors. Despite the mandate from the emperor to kill them all, they continued to survive in secret meeting places, new leaders always arising when others were martyred. Often, their godly behaviour and endurance under torture led their persecutors to Christ;<sup>197</sup> some tribunals even disregarded the emperor's command and refused to condemn them when they saw their godly lifestyle.<sup>198</sup> The work thus spread into Austria and surrounding areas.

The persecution of godly Anabaptists troubled Luther greatly. He said in 1527:

It is not right, and I am deeply troubled that the poor people are so pitifully put to death, burned, and cruelly slain. Let everyone believe what he likes. If he is wrong, he will have punishment enough in hell fire. Unless there is sedition, one should oppose them with scripture and God's Word. With fire you won't get anywhere.<sup>199</sup>

Luther only wanted the sanction of capital punishment to apply to sedition and blasphemy. What one believed was a matter of individual conscience but outward actions were to be accountable to society; though it must be said that actions we would consider minor, like avoiding military draft, construed sedition; and rejecting a part of the Apostle's Creed constituted blasphemy. If anything, Melancthon was even more stringent than Luther on this, arguing that protest against the punishment of blasphemy was itself blasphemy. This was because he feared that any rejection of the accepted state religion would cause the disintegration of society and the formation of sects that dishonoured God. Luther made a plea for severity to be tempered with mercy in 1536.

The situation facing the magisterial Reformers was extremely difficult. They did not have the benefit of hindsight as we do looking back in history. It is clear that there was a considerable mixing up of these groups in the minds of the Reformers generally, as well as the people at large. The word 'Anabaptist' conjured up images of anarchy, subversion or even terrorism as well as spiritual corruption. Certainly the fiasco at Munster frightened everyone and led to greater severity. With the progress of the Reform movement at a critical stage, civil order was paramount. Any threat or potential disturbance was treated stringently. In this confusion, many godly believers died but Luther and Calvin were not directly involved with this, they gave their approval to the civil leaders in keeping society under control. All subversive enemies of the state should be executed, the problem was that good people were tarred with the same brush as evil people because they all baptised believers. This is a stain upon the Reformation but it must be read in the light of the times. Luther's actions in this matter, however, are noteworthy more for his restraint than for his severity.

It is becoming popular, these days, for Christians to become enthusiastic about the

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<sup>197</sup> It is said that the steadfastness of Fritz Erbe, who died at the Wartburg castle after 16 years in prison, converted half of the population of Eisenach to Anabaptist ideas. (Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p377.)

<sup>198</sup> E.g: Philip of Hesse, Luther's friend. A Lutheran minister, who wrote against the Anabaptists, said that they helped the poor, acted humbly, prayed much, read the Bible, exercised authority over none, were concerned for their neighbour and gave freely holding their goods in common. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p375.

<sup>199</sup> Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p375-6.

Anabaptists, and for some of these people to be highly critical of the Reformers, because of the church/state issue. Anabaptists are sometimes held up as a model for us today. We need to be careful here; while we might have great sympathy for the radical reformers, we must observe that both sides made mistakes. The Anabaptists erred in withdrawing from the world while the Lutheran church was wedded to the world. If everyone had been converted to Anabaptist practices, society would have completely broken down. Anabaptists could be overly subjective and even mystical, demanding complete separation from the world to the point of avoiding the normal individual responsibilities of being a part of society.<sup>200</sup> It is hard to be completely balanced in this assertion because the groups were so varied and diverse and what developed under trying circumstances may not have done so in a time of peace.

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<sup>200</sup> For instance Felix Manz stated: '*No Christian could be a magistrate, nor could he ... punish anyone*'. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, p29. Several groups refused to pay taxes.

## Appendix Four

### Surprising evangelical support for Erasmus.

Several modern Charismatic Arminians want to load praise upon the humanist scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam. Usually this is because they see him as gentle and irenic and in opposition to harsh and implacable reformers. We will give one example.<sup>201</sup>

Jacob Prasch states: 'All of these (Luther, Hus, Staupitz, Lefevre, Calvin, Farel, Oecolampadius, Bucer, Cranmer), however were the natural result directly or indirectly of Erasmus, **the greatest Christian humanist**. Unfortunately, church history has never done him justice and blamed him for being indecisive, In fact ...he was ... foresighted and aware how Protestantism would end up.'<sup>202</sup>

Words fail me at this point! We will leave aside historical errors, such as that Hus died fifty-one years before Erasmus was born. Evangelical church history has ignored Desiderius Erasmus because he showed no signs of faith in Christ. Luther said of him that, '*he erred with great hurt*'.<sup>203</sup> In fact he debated (and lost) with Luther on cardinal issues of salvation doctrine, revealing that he clearly did not really understand what the Christian position truly was.<sup>204</sup> To say that the Christian scholars mentioned above drew anything spiritual ('the natural result directly or indirectly') from Erasmus is facile in the extreme and one of the most foolish statements I have ever heard. It is true that the early scholarly works of Erasmus, especially his Greek New Testament, had a profound effect on all the Reformers when they were young, but this is a far cry from saying that the truths they championed arose from him. In fact, Erasmus avoided theological niceties and disagreed with the Reformers' emphasis on doctrinal truth, especially justification by faith. He encouraged Christians to study Platonism for its own merits in his *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (1501), stating that Plato was of great use in interpreting the Bible, [incidentally, a philosophy Prasch condemns and wrongly attributes to other Christian leaders as the prime source of their theology].

Erasmus was a close friend of the Pope and Henry VIII and he wrote on the value of salvation by works which was endorsed by both of them (incidentally, both condemned Luther). His religious feelings were based upon being a part of the Roman mother church, even if he recognised that it needed reforming. His thesis on free will (*De libero arbitrio*, 1524) defended the place of human free choice in the process of salvation, going way beyond what scripture teaches. In reply Luther wrote one of his most important theological works, *De servo arbitrio*, (*Bondage of the Will*, 1525). Luther, at the end of his life, felt that if he only had one book which survived it should be this; many Christians agree that this is his finest work. Erasmus ineffectively responded with the lengthy two-part *Hyperaspistes* (1526-27).

As a leading humanist, Erasmus set out to unite man's moral consciousness and dignity with Christ's atonement. Worse than a Pelagian, he tried to blend humanism and grace demanding a recognition of religious truth and a spiritual essence in depraved humans. This is only possible by using unbiblical, ambiguous and contradictory theological statements. For him, Christianity was just the pinnacle of the same universal, moral,

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<sup>201</sup> Others include Roger Forster (see, for instance: *God's Strategy in Human History* end notes).

<sup>202</sup> *Moriel Newsletter*, 6:5, emphasis mine.

<sup>203</sup> *Table Talk*, p59.

<sup>204</sup> Luther, in fact, castigated Erasmus for not being a genuine Christian.

religious faith shared by everyone, everywhere at every time. It was the ancestor of erroneous modern liberal theology.

He also argued that the consensus of the Roman church through the ages is authoritative in the interpretation of scripture, and while in Basel (1522-29) Protestants called him a traitor to the Gospel. His struggle to establish a theological middle ground led to attempts to unify the Protestant and Catholic causes by trying to reconcile opposing ideas on justification by faith (e.g. in *De sarcienda ecclesiae concordia*, 1533, proposing an unexplained *duplex justitia*). This impossible task was only taken up later by heretics like Hugo Grotius. The Calvinists condemned him and the Catholics heavily censored him. It was only after the Enlightenment in the 18th century that Erasmus gained favour, being linked with thinkers like Voltaire and considered as an ancestor of European Liberalism. As an old man, Erasmus became a paranoid, angry and an unpleasant personality.

Erasmus was no theologian. Theology did not interest him ... His reforming ideals were based on an un-dogmatic Christianity, an eviscerated Christianity precisely because it was a Christianity **without Christ at the deepest level**. The epigram is irresistible - Erasmus was shrewd but shallow, a man of cool calculation rather than of burning conviction.

Christianity, to Erasmus, was essentially morality, with a minimum of doctrinal statement loosely appended ... That the life which pleases God springs only from living trust in Christ as the word of God sets him forth - **that is something that the great humanist never saw**. That is why he could profess to find so little pleasure in theological dogmatizing that he would **gladly side with the Sceptics whenever Scripture and the church allowed him to do so** ... His attitude was that what one believes about the mysteries of the faith does not much matter; **what the (Roman) church lays down may be safely accepted, whether right or wrong.**<sup>205</sup>  
(Emphasis - PF)

[Erasmus] failed to see that the enormity of man's sin needed more than instruction in righteousness.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> J.I. Packer & O.R. Johnston, Introduction to Martin Luther's, *Bondage of the Will*, James Clarke, p19,43.

<sup>206</sup> Estep, *Renaissance & Reformation*, p112.

## Appendix Five

### Misguided support for Caspar Schwenkfeld.

'The little known Caspar Schwenkenfeld, (sic) the reformer of Silesia ... was by far the most doctrinally sound of the Reformers.'<sup>207</sup>

It is easy to see why Jacob Prasch wishes to endorse Schwenkfeld as he opposed the state church system and emphasised the leading of the Spirit; but it is entirely foolish to pluck out one or two items of supposed benefit from a person's teaching, while ignoring their overall position.

Caspar von Ossig Schwenkfeld, (1490-1561), was a German lay theologian and diplomat, who led the Protestant Reformation in Silesia (until forced to flee in 1529). He was a Radical Spiritualist ('Inspirationist') but also an opponent of the Anabaptists (radical reformers). After first embracing Lutheranism, Schwenkfeld fell out with Luther (and everyone else) over several vital issues.

- He argued for the complete separation of church and state. This is a fair point and linked him to the Anabaptists on this issue. However, he did not consider the implementation of the New Testament pattern to be desirable; indeed he taught that believers should not be in a church but have small prayer groups.
- He opposed the Lutheran belief in the consubstantiation of the Eucharist, regarding the bread and wine as symbols only. At this point he had a more scriptural approach than Luther who was unclear on this matter; but Schwenkfeld suggested that the celebration of the Lord's Supper should cease as it had become a divisive issue and he himself had very mystical ideas about it. The Lord's Supper is a command from Jesus himself; for a theologian to suggest that a pragmatic issue can overturn a clear Biblical command is very disconcerting and dangerous.
- He considered baptism to be a mere superstitious act.
- He did not accept the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith, seeing in it serious moral problems. His ideas about justification were tied to a progressive deification. This is critical. Justification by faith was the keystone of the Reformation and is still an issue of vital contention today. To be unclear on this leads one to question the evangelical nature of his faith.
- As a chief Inspirationist, he taught that the leading of the Spirit was sometimes followed at the expense of the Bible and this led to a mystical understanding of the faith. In Schwenkfeld we can see a precursor of the current trend towards Gnosticism in the church; a mystical subjective word from 'the Spirit' is of more value than knowing and obeying the Bible. His remaining followers in Pennsylvania are similar to Quakers in practice and belief – in other words, utterly unbiblical and mystical.
- His Christology was erroneous in a number of ways, espousing a doctrine of the deification of Christ's humanity, and was he was accused by Luther of Eutychianism (this is the idea that Christ had only one nature).
- Earlier in his career he had also tried to unify Protestant and Catholic doctrine.

So, while Schwenkfeld had a couple of good, yet radical, ideas which linked him to the Anabaptists (whom he opposed), he was seriously unorthodox in some critical issues of the faith and was scorned by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. The most serious aspects were failing to understand justification by faith, erroneous ideas about the nature of Christ

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<sup>207</sup> *Moriel* Newsletter, 6:10.

and a tendency towards a mystical leading of the Spirit, which like modern Charismatics, led to him being soft on allegiances with the Roman church. In many ways he was a precursor of the Quakers. When he published a defence of his views in 1540,<sup>208</sup> he was denounced by Zwingli, Melancthon, Catholics and even by the tolerant Bucer, and was anathematised by the Lutheran Schmalkaldic league of Protestant princes. Escaping persecution, he went into hiding and wrote under pseudonyms for the rest of his life. He died at Ulm on 10 December 1561. Since men are known by their fruit, there is little reason to consider that Schwenkfeld was a true Christian.

This is the man whom Jacob Prasch states is the most sound theologian of the Reformation (though he cannot spell his name correctly, a repeated fault in Prasch's supposedly scholarly writings). Since Schwenkfeld had heretical ideas about salvation and Christ, such a statement beggars belief. Since justification by faith is a cardinal doctrine regarding salvation, anyone denying it cannot be considered to be a Christian. But worse, Schwenkfeld taught a progressive deification, which is mysticism.

Thus Prasch endorses two men in Reformation times who were almost certainly not Christians, and yet condemns some of the greatest saints the world has ever known, whose character and Christian godliness is even esteemed by secular historians. Such an undiscerning preacher cannot be trusted in the least.

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<sup>208</sup> *Konfession und Erklärung* - Confession and Explanation.



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Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version*

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