3 THE REFORMATION:
DIVISION AND RENEWAL BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND MODERN TIMES

PROGRAM SCRIPT

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way.
>
> Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

MARTIN LUTHER

These are the opening lines from Charles Dickens' famous novel, *A Tale of Two Cities,* describing the spirit of the age on the eve of the French Revolution in the 18th century. But they also describe the mood and events on the eve of the Protestant Reformation (1517) in the 16th century. Seldom, if ever, has there been an age more similar to our own than the world into which Martin Luther was born in 1483.

It was the best of times! It was an age of exploration and discovery. Martin Luther was only nine years old when Christopher Columbus set sail for India and stumbled onto a new hemisphere. Back in Germany, the printing press had just been invented, making literacy and learning available to common people. In art and architecture, the glory of the Renaissance cast its spell over all of Europe. It was the age of Raphael (1483-1520) and Michelangelo (1475-1564) and Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519). It was the age of Johannes Keplar (1571-1630) and Galileo (1564-1642), whose invention of the telescope opened the heavens to the human eye.

But it was also the worst of times, for it was an age of violence and death, an age of great anxiety about the very meaning of life itself. What AIDS and cancer are to us, the Bubonic Plague or "Black Death" was to the world of the Reformation, a devastating disease without a cure. Peasants revolting against their lords, kings against the emperor, thousands of so-called "witches" put to death in a frenzy of persecution.

The "Dance of Death" was a prominent motif in church painting and architecture of the period. The skeleton-figure of death, often laughing, is shown leading a parade of nobles, peasants, artisans, and clerics to a common grave.

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THE REFORMATION: DIVISION AND RENEWAL BETWEEN MEDIEVAL AND MODERN TIMES

As William Shakespeare (1564-1616) described it,

> What raging of the sea! Shaking of earth! Commotion in the winds! Frights, changes, horrors, divert and crack, rend and deracinate the unity and married calm of states quite from their fixture. Oh, when degree is shaped, which is the ladder of all high designs, the enterprise is sick.

And right in the middle of it all sat the Church. The Church of Jesus Christ, against which, he had said, the gates of hell would never prevail. ("And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it " [Matthew 16:18, NIV].) But the Church had become corrupt in many ways and beset by sexual immorality extending even to the papacy. Alexander VI (1492-1503), one of the most notorious of the Renaissance popes, boasted numerous illegitimate children, some of whom he had elevated to high offices in the church.

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS

One of those who protested against such abuses in the church was a scholar from Holland named Desiderius Erasmus, himself the illegitimate son of a Dutch priest. Erasmus was a moral reformer. He saw little value in external religious rites such as pilgrimages or the rosary or relics.

"Oh," he said, "the folly of those who revere a bone of the Apostle Paul enshrined in glass and feel not the glow of his spirit enshrined in his epistles!"

Erasmus' solution was to go back to the sources of classical and Biblical antiquity, especially the New Testament. In 1516, he published the first critical edition of the Greek New Testament. It was this very volume that Martin Luther would use to develop his own far more penetrating critique of the Medieval Church.

1. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

The Reformation began on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. He was protesting the religious "hucksterism" of a Dominican friar named Tetzel who had come into his territory hawking indulgences on behalf of the pope. Through the purchase of an indulgence, one could receive great spiritual benefits including release time from purgatory.

Luther was incensed.

If the pope had so much control over purgatory, he said, why doesn't he just open the door and let everybody out? The true treasure of the church, he said, is not the accumulated merits of the saints, but rather the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when Jesus said, "Repent," He did not mean (as the Latin

Vulgate [the Latin translation of the Bible]) had translated it, "Do penance," but rather (as Erasmus' Greek New Testament had shown), he called for a change of heart and mind. He meant for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

Luther was protesting against "cheap grace." He fought the church, not because it demanded too much, but because it demanded too little.

But how did Luther come to this insight?

"I did not learn my theology at once," he said. "I had to follow where my temptations led me. It is not by reading or writing or speculating that one becomes a theologian. It is rather by living, dying, and being damned that makes one a theologian."

In fact, Luther had no intention of becoming a theologian when he started his academic career. His father had wanted him to be a lawyer. Luther had taken up this discipline at the University of Erfurt. Returning home on spring break, he was caught in a terrible thunderstorm. And he cried out, "Saint Anna, help me, I will become a monk!" So against the wishes of his father and his friends, Luther joined the order of the Augustinian Monks.

In the monastery, he sought to find an answer to the question which plagued his soul day and night: "How can I find a gracious God? How can I know that God is for me, not against me? What can I do to please God, to satisfy God, to constitute some claim upon God?"

Luther was not just a regular monk, but a scrupulous one. The earliest woodcuts we have of him show his face emaciated, his cheeks protruding. "If ever a monk got to heaven because of his monkery, it was I," Luther later recalled. He would go without food and water for days on end. In the wintertime, he would sleep on the stone floor of his monastic cell without a blanket until he shivered to the bone. But he was always asking himself, "Am I hungry enough? Am I cold enough? Have I suffered enough? Is there ever any 'enough' to satisfy God?"

Martin Luther would go to confession, time and again, pouring out all of his sins, but still there was no relief. He even began to doubt the goodness and mercy of God.

"Man," said his confessor, "you're making it too hard. All you have to do is just love God."

"Love God?!" retorted Luther. "I hate Him!"

Luther found his way through this dark night of the soul by turning to the scriptures. Day and night he would pour over the text of the Bible. In reading through the Psalter, he came to this verse in Psalms 22: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1, KJV). Luther realized, of course, that these were the very words Jesus had quoted on the cross (Matt. 27:46). Forsaken. Jesus forsaken.

"That's exactly the way I feel," thought Luther. "And I thought that I was the only one! How could it be that Jesus, the sinless son of God, felt Himself

estranged from His Father, on our side, crying out in the darkness the very question that I have asked a thousand times, 'My God, my God, why?'"

Luther then came to Romans 1, where Saint Paul quoted the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk: "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith (Romans 1:17, NIV). Luther had always understood that verse to refer to the righteousness by which God punishes the unrighteous. He thought of Christ, as Michelangelo had painted Him on the Cistine Chapel, the Judge sitting on the rainbow, consigning men and women, sheep and goats, to His right and His left. It was this God whom Luther could not love, but rather hated and murmured against in his heart.

But as Luther studied that expression, "the righteousness of God," he came to see that it refers to the righteousness by which God, because of Jesus Christ, accounts the sinner acceptable in His sight. Justification by faith, "*allein*," as Luther said in German, "alone," apart from good works and self-earned merits.

When I realized this, Luther said, I felt as if the gates of paradise had opened and I had entered in. It was as though I had gone from the darkest midnight into the brilliance of the noonday sun. I felt as if I had been born again.

The entire Reformation grew out of Luther's fundamental insight into the gracious character of God. Luther had come to this insight through his study of the Bible.

"Everyone," he said, "should be able to take the Word of God in their hands and read it with their eyes. The farm boy at his plow, the milkmaid at her pail, as well as the learned clerics and scholars in the university."

Perhaps Luther's single greatest contribution to the Reformation was his translation of the Bible into his native German tongue. In 1519, Luther was drawn into a public debate with the Roman Catholic theologian John Eck, the relative authority of scripture and tradition. Luther had great respect for the writings of the early church fathers and the decisions made at early church councils. But all of these, he believed, should be subordinated to the authority of God's written Word in Holy Scripture.

"The Bible is God's Word clad in human words, just as Christ, the eternal Word of God, is incarnate in the garment of His humanity. Christ lies in the crib of the Scriptures," Luther says, "wrapped in swaddling clothes."

So alongside the doctrine of justification by faith alone, we place a second principle of the Reformation: the sufficiency of God's revelation in Holy Scripture alone.

2. THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

The last thing in the world Luther wanted to do was to start a new church. To the end of his life he saw himself as a faithful servant of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

But in 1521, Luther was brought before the emperor, Charles V, at the Diet of

Worms and was asked by the emissary of the pope to recant what he had written.

"Unless I am persuaded by reason and by conscience," he said, "I cannot and I will not recant. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."

From this time on there was little hope that the division in the church could be patched over. Luther's movement could not be stopped. Soon the cry for reformation was being heard all over Europe.

HULDRYCH ZWINGLI

In Switzerland, a parallel and yet distinctive movement for reform was led by a powerful preacher named Huldrych Zwingli. Zwingli had been deeply influenced by Erasmus as well as Luther. He committed to memory all of Paul's letters in the original Greek! On January 1, 1519, Zwingli was called to be the pastor of the famous Great Minster Church in Zurich. He entered the pulpit, opened his Bible to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter one, and began a series of expository sermons from the New Testament. Four years later, on January 29, 1523, some 600 citizens crowded into the Zurich town hall to hear a public disputation between Zwingli and John Fabri, a representative of the local bishop. Zwingli brought his Greek New Testament and Hebrew Old Testament to which he referred again and again during the debate. At the end of the day, the city council agreed that Zwingli could continue to preach God's Word and to lead the church to abandon those traditional practices which had no foundation in Scripture.

In 1529, Zwingli and Luther came face to face for the only time in their lives. They met in the city of Marburg, Germany, to discuss their differing views of the Lord's Supper. Luther, for all his dislike of the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation, still believed that Christ was bodily present in the sacrament of the altar "in, with, and under" the elements of bread and wine.

Zwingli, on the other hand, saw the Lord's Supper as a memorial feast. The same concerns which had led Zwingli to oppose images and to remove the organ from the church in Zurich also prompted him to oppose Luther on this point.

Salvation was by Christ alone, through faith alone, not through faith and bread, Zwingli said. The body of Christ is in heaven, at God's right hand, not on the various altars of Christendom when Christians gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

At the height of the debate, Luther took a piece of chalk and wrote on the table before him the Latin word *est*. This is my body, Jesus had said. To believe anything less was to deny the incarnation itself, Luther believed.

The two great leaders were never reconciled. As a consequence, the Protestant Reformation developed into two competing camps with different confessions: the Lutheran tradition and the Reformed tradition.

Today, the visitor to Zurich, Switzerland, is shown a statue of Zwingli near

the Limmat River. Zwingli stands with the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other. In 1531, Zwingli was killed at the Battle of Kappel wielding such a sword. But the movement he had started soon spread to other Swiss cities, including Basel, Bern, and Geneva. From Geneva, the Reformed tradition was given a new impetus under the direction of John Calvin, a brilliant Frenchman trained in law at the University of Paris.

JOHN CALVIN

We know very little about Calvin's conversion to the Protestant faith, which must have occurred sometime in the 1530's. He only referred to it once, and, then, in a very cryptic way:

"By a sudden conversion," he said, "God subdued my heart to teachability."

In 1536, Calvin found himself in the city of Basel, a refugee from religious persecution in France. Here he published a little book, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It was a brilliant, systematic introduction to Protestant theology. Calvin said he hoped that it would be "a key to open a way for all children of God into a good and right understanding of Holy Scripture."

During the course of his life, Calvin revised and expanded *The Institutes* numerous times until the definitive edition of 1559. The basic outlines of *The Institutes* follows the order of the "Apostles' Creed." It is divided into four books, each of which deals with a cluster of key theological ideas.

THE INSTITUTES:

- BOOK ONE is about the knowledge of God, His general revelation in creation, and His special revelation in the Bible along with the concern He shows for His people through His providential care.

- BOOK TWO focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ, His atoning death on the cross, which is God's remedy for the sin and guilt of lost humanity.

- BOOK THREE explores the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, the life of prayer, the mystery of predestination, and the Christian hope in resurrection.

- BOOK FOUR is about the church. In one sense, Calvin explains, the church is invisible. It is the company of all God's redeemed ones throughout all the ages of time. We can never be absolutely sure who is a part of this invisible church because God's elect are known with certainty only to Himself. But in this life, we are also concerned with the visible church, the blueprint for which is

> found in the New Testament. Calvin had very clear ideas about the organization of the visible church, its officers, sacraments, and responsibilities in the world. Calvin saw the church as a dynamic presence in the world, responsible not only for religious activities but for giving shape and direction to every aspect of culture and life. "The world," Calvin said, "is the theater of God's glory."

Calvin sought to extend the lordship of Christ into every area of life. In the 19th century, the great Calvinist prime minister of Holland put it, "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, 'This is Mine! This belongs to Me!'"

Unlike Lutheranism, which remained largely contained within Germany and the Scandinavian countries, Calvinism was an international movement of great political and social significance. From Hungary and Poland in the east, to the Netherlands, Scotland, and eventually New England in the west, Calvinism sought to give form and shape to an emerging new world. While the Anabaptists rejected the world as the domain of darkness and evil, and while Luther accepted the world as a necessary evil with which the Christian had to co-exist, Calvin sought to overcome the world, to transform and re-form the world on the basis of the Word of God and His providential purpose in creation and redemption.

The popular stereotype of Calvin as a "cold-blooded tyrant ruling Geneva with an iron fist" does not fit the facts of history. Calvin was, as Luther declared all Christians to be, at one and the same time both a sinner and a saint. Neither Luther nor Calvin was interested in promoting a personality cult. Luther was upset when some of his followers started calling themselves "Lutherans."

"Who am I," he asked, "poor, stinking bag of maggots that I am that the servants of Christ should be called after my evil name?"

Calvin died on May 27, 1564, and at his own request, he was buried in an unmarked grave. His life's goal was to be a faithful servant of the Word of God. No doubt, he would have agreed with one of his spiritual decedents, John Robinson, (1576-1625) the pastor of the pilgrim fathers: "I have followed Calvin no further than he has followed Christ. For the Lord hath yet more truth and light to break forth from His Holy Word."

A MIGHTY FORTRESS

Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin were men of great courage and conviction whose legacy lives on in our own faith today. Every time we stand to sing, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"; every time we reach for our Bible and open it to read a certain passage; every time we hear the preaching of God's Word or gather as a community of believers in a church meeting, we are bearing witness to the abiding validity of the Reformation. The torch lighted by these reformers

was carried forward by others, sometimes in ways that no one could have predicted.

Who would have thought in 1525, when Pope Clement VII awarded the title "Defender of the Faith" to King Henry VIII for having written a lusty treatise against Luther, that within another generation, England would become, by royal edict, a Protestant commonwealth, with the worship of the church forever enriched by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's liturgical masterpiece, *The Book of Common Prayer?*

Who could have predicted in 1520, when Luther published his treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian*, that some of his erstwhile followers, the Radicals and Anabaptists, would interpret freedom in a vastly different way, leading them to abandon infant baptism and to organize congregational churches for believers only?

Who, in 1536, could have foreseen the revolutionary consequences of Calvin's Reformation? Zwingli once compared the Word of God to the Rhine River: "One can perhaps dam it up for a while," he said, "but it is impossible to stop it."

Looking back on the Reformation, we can give thanks for the great achievements of that age:

- the recovery of the gospel,
- the translation and distribution of the Bible among the common people,
- the great doctrines of justification by faith alone,
- the priesthood of all believers,
- the lordship of Christ over all of life.

The Reformation was not an event which happened once and for all in the 16th century, for the church faces always anew the decision for faith or for unbelief, for obedience or for stagnation. And thus the reformers have bequeathed to us the concept of *ecclesia semper refermanda*, the Church always reforming and ever in need of further reformation. And so, in spite of their foibles, blind spots, and sins, we continue to build on the good foundation laid by these reformers. As the Swiss-born philosopher, Ernst Bloch (1880-1959), has written: "Despite their suffering, their fear and trembling, in all these souls there glows the spark from beyond, and it ignites the tarrying kingdom."

Luther and the Jews

Luther quotes taken from Wikipedia article

In his early writings, Luther expressed compassion for Jews and expected to convert them with pure gospel teaching that wasn't like popish errors. Luther wrote against anti-Semitism. In 1519 he wrote, "Absurd theologians defend hatred for the Jews. ... What Jew would consent to enter our ranks when he sees the cruelty and enmity we wreak on them—that in our behavior towards them we less resemble Christians than beasts?" "We ought...not to treat the Jews in so unkindly a spirit, for there are future Christians among them."

In his 1523 essay *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew,* Luther declared,

> If I had been a Jew and had seen such dolts and blockheads govern and teach the Christian faith, I would sooner have become a hog than a Christian. They have dealt with the Jews as if they were dogs rather than human beings; they have done little else than deride them and seize their property. When they baptize them they show them nothing of Christian doctrine or life, but only subject them to popishness and monkery...If the apostles, who also were Jews, had dealt with us Gentiles as we Gentiles deal with the Jews, there would never have been a Christian among the Gentiles ... When we are inclined to boast of our position [as Christians] we should remember that we are but Gentiles, while the Jews are of the lineage of Christ. We are aliens and in-laws; they are blood relatives, cousins, and brothers of our Lord. Therefore, if one is to boast of flesh and blood the Jews are actually nearer to Christ than we are...If we really want to help them, we must be guided in our dealings with them not by papal law but by the law of Christian love. We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us, that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate 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.

In 1528 Luther's prince Frederick banned Jews from doing business or traveling through his territory. Luther was asked to intercede on behalf of the Jews, but he refused. He said he didn't want any kindness of his to make them comfortable in their refusal to convert.

In 1543 Luther wrote *On the Jews and their Lies,* in which he said,

> God has struck [the Jews] with 'madness and blindness and confusion of mind.' So we are even at fault in not avenging all this innocent blood of our Lord and of the Christians which they shed for three hundred years after the destruction of Jerusalem, and the blood of the children they have shed since then (which still shines forth from their eyes and their skin). We are at fault in not slaying them. Rather we allow them to live freely in our midst despite all their murdering, cursing, blaspheming, lying, and defaming; we protect and shield their synagogues, houses, life, and property. In this way we make them lazy and secure and encourage them to fleece us boldly of our money and goods, as well as to mock and deride us, with a view to finally overcoming us.

Luther advocated an eight-point plan to get rid of the Jews either by religious conversion or by expulsion:

1. "First to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. ..."
2. "Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. ..."
3. "Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them. ..."
4. "Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. ..."
5. "Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. ..."
6. "Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them. ... Such money should now be used in ... the following [way]... Whenever a Jew is sincerely converted, he should be handed [a certain amount]..."
7. "Seventh, I commend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow... For it is not fitting that they should let us accursed Goyim toil in the sweat of our faces while they, the holy people, idle away their time behind the stove, feasting and farting, and on top of all, boasting blasphemously of their lordship over the Christians by means of our sweat. No, one should toss out these lazy rogues by the seat of their pants."
8. "If we wish to wash our hands of the Jews' blasphemy and not share in their guilt, we have to part company with them. They must be driven from our country" and "we must drive them out like mad dogs."

In the treatise, Luther writes that the Jews are a "base, whoring people, that is, no people of God, and their boast of lineage, circumcision, and law must be accounted as filth." Luther wrote that they are "full of the devil's feces ... which they wallow in like swine," and the synagogue is an "incorrigible whore and an evil slut ..." He argues that their synagogues and schools be set on fire, their prayer books destroyed, rabbis forbidden to preach, homes razed, and property and money confiscated. They should be shown no mercy or kindness, afforded no legal protection, and these "poisonous envenomed worms" should be drafted into forced labor or expelled for all time. He also seems to advocate their murder, writing "we are at fault in not slaying them."

David Feddes comment:
Luther said some atrocious things about Jews and suggested ways of treating them that were awful. He also encouraged extreme and vicious reaction by rulers against rebel peasants. Because of Luther's enormous stature and influence in Germany, his hot temper and harsh language helped prompt the massacre of many. His insights into God's grace remain sound, and we can thank God for Luther. But we also need to understand why some Jewish people (especially after the Nazi Holocaust) decry Luther's impact on history. Great people have a huge impact, for better and for worse. When they are right by God's grace, they can bring enormous breakthroughs. When they are wrong, theirs flaws and sins do more widespread damage than the faults of people who are not so extraordinary. Luther's own flaws, even after his conversion, show that all of us desperately need God's grace and pardon.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 28: 100 Most Important Events in Church History

1536 John Calvin Publishes Institutes of the Christian Religion

Either adored or abhorred, the reformer and his teachings live on in his monumental work.

> "There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice." These words were penned by a man who has been accused of generating a joyless Christianity. He is remembered as the man who taught predestination, an idea repugnant to modern minds. As historian Will Durant complained, "We shall always find it hard to love the man who darkened the human soul with the most absurd and blasphemous conception of God in all the long and honored history of nonsense."

Yet those who know Calvin well regard him as a saint. Philip Schaff wrote that Calvin "must be reckoned as one of the greatest and best of men whom God raised up in the history of Christianity."

Calvin's Geneva

This controversial theologian was born in 1509 in Picardy, part of France. Calvin was brilliant. Initially he intended to be a priest, but his father induced him to study law. Calvin studied at different universities, including Paris, sharpening his already logical mind and avidly reading the Greek and Latin classics.

About 1533 Calvin had what he called a "sudden conversion": "God subdued and brought my heart to docility." Apparently he had encountered the writings of Luther. He broke from Catholicism, left France, and settled in Switzerland as an exile.

In 1536, in Basel, Calvin published the first edition of one of the greatest religious works ever written, ***The Institutes of the Christian Religion***. The title, perhaps better translated as "Principles of the Christian Faith," introduced a book designed to "hand on some elementary teaching by which anyone who had been touched by an interest in religion might be formed to true godliness." At the age of 27, Calvin had already produced a systematic theology, a clear defense of Reformation teachings.

His writings impressed people, including Guillaume Farel, a reformer in Geneva, Switzerland. On his way to Strasbourg, Calvin stopped overnight in Geneva. When Farel learned that the author of the ***Institutes*** was in town, he sought him out and pled with him to stay and help the church in Geneva. Calvin refused, wanting only a quiet life of study. So Farel swore a curse on Calvin's studies unless he stayed. "I felt as if God from heaven had laid his hand on me," Calvin said, and Geneva was to be his home (with one brief exile) until he died in 1564.

Calvin pastored the St. Pierre church, preaching almost daily. He produced commentaries on almost every book of the Bible and wrote dozens of devotional and doctrinal pamphlets. (He managed to do all this while constantly battling various ailments, including migraine headaches.) He also married and fathered a child. Sadly, his wife died young, as did their son. Calvin refused to remarry, feeling his work would keep him busy. It did.

Calvin wanted Geneva, a city of notoriously lax morals, to be a holy city. His influence was felt everywhere, notably in the schools. He urged excommunicating church members whose lives did not conform to spiritual standards, and every citizen of Geneva had to subscribe to his confession of faith.

Some balked at the moral restrictions, but Geneva became a moral magnet, attracting Protestant exiles from all over Europe. One, John Knox, described Geneva as "the most perfect school of Christ since the days of the apostles."

Calvin's Institutes

What is so grand about the ***Institutes***? For one thing, no other reformer ever stated Protestant beliefs so systematically. Calvin's book, which he kept enlarging throughout his life, covered all the bases. The first edition of Calvin's ***Institutes***, a slim volume of only 6 chapters, was revised and expanded by Calvin five times; the final 1559 edition contained 79 chapters. It is largely the ***Institutes*** that has caused Calvin to be considered "one of the great seminal minds ... in the development of Western culture and civilization."

Calvin, ever logical, took a logical starting point: the ***Apostle's Creed***, accepted by all Christians. He saw that it has four major points: "I believe in God the Father ... Jesus Christ ... the Holy Spirit ... the holy catholic church." Those are the four divisions of the ***Institutes***. Drawing on his wide reading, and building on the work of other reformers, Calvin stated a theology and its practical application in church life.

Book III of the ***Institutes*** has received much attention. In considering the Holy Spirit, Calvin examined the question of regeneration—that is, How are we saved? He claimed that salvation is possible only through the grace of God. Even before creation God chose some people to be saved. This is the bone most people choke on: predestination. Curiously, it isn't particularly a Calvinist idea. Luther believed it, as did most of the other reformers. Yet Calvin held it so absolutely and stated it so forcefully that the teaching is forever identified with him.

For Calvin, God was—above all else—sovereign. Calvin's constant theme was this: ***If you are saved, it is God's doing, not your own***. God alone knows who is elect (saved) and who isn't.

But, Calvin said, a moral life shows that a person is (probably) one of the elect. Calvin himself, an intensely moral and energetic man, impressed on others the need to work out their salvation—not to be saved, but to show they are saved.

Calvin's ***Institutes*** also set forth the presbyterian system of church order. Book IV of the ***Institutes*** describes a church under the guidance of elders (***presbuteroi*** in Greek), moral leaders elected by the church. Other orders of ministry are pastor, doctor (teacher), and deacon. With modifications, this system is still followed in churches called Presbyterian or Reformed.

In emphasizing God's sovereignty, Calvin's ***Institutes*** also leads the reader to believe that no person —king or bishop—can demand our ultimate loyalty. Calvin never taught a right to revolution, but his teaching laid the groundwork for this idea. In this sense his works are amazingly "modern," and he is regarded as a father of democracy.

Calvin's Influence

A single article cannot do justice to Calvin's influence. Calvin's theology found a home in places as far apart as Scotland, Poland, Holland, and America. Volumes have been written about him, some applauding him, some calling him a puritanical fiend. But it is safe to say that few Christians have been more brilliant, more energetic, more sincere, more moral, and more dedicated to the purity of the Christian church.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 28: 100 Most Important Events in Church History

1525 The Anabaptist Movement Begins

Hated by Protestants and Catholics alike, these "radical reformers" wanted to not merely reform the church but restore it.

Living in an age of religious pluralism, we wonder why people in the sixteenth century would be tortured or drowned over the issue of mode of baptism.

When Luther, Zwingli, and others led their movements away from Catholicism, many practices were changed; but infant baptism, the accepted mode for most of Christian history, was not. Baptizing only adults—that is, people who chose to be baptized—was a radical idea that cut at the heart of both church and state. Yet it was just one of many revolutionary ideas typical of a diverse group called Anabaptists. Their movement is also known as the Radical Reformation.

Anabaptist Origins

The immediate issue creating the Anabaptist movement was not just baptism, however, but also civil government. (The two were related. To be baptized was a civil issue, and to refuse it tore a "seamless Christian society.")

Under Ulrich Zwingli and the city council in Zurich, the Reformation was proceeding. But Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and other associates of Zwingli didn't feel the Reformation was going far enough. They wanted to do away with the tithe, usury, and military service. Further, some of these radicals wanted a totally self-governing church, free of government interference.

Zwingli, who wanted gradual, orderly change, parted ways with them. On January 21, 1525, the Zurich council forbade the radicals from disseminating their views. That wintry evening, in a nearby village, the radicals met—and baptized each other. The name ***Anabaptist***, meaning "rebaptizer," was later given them by detractors.

Anabaptist Distinctives

These believers didn't want to merely reform the church; they wanted to wholly restore it to its initial purity and simplicity. Such a church, they held, consists only of people who present themselves to be baptized.

Congregationalism was another key belief. The Anabaptists could find no justification for elaborate church bureaucracies. Decisions should be made not by a hierarchical leader but by the entire local assembly. In fact, the Anabaptists were the first to try to practice democracy in the congregation.

Another central teaching was the separation of church and state. The church, they said, is to be composed of free, "uncompelled" people. The state is not to use coercion on people's consciences.

Jesus taught the way of nonviolence, the Anabaptists believed, and so pacifism became another important feature of their lives. Even the hated Turks must not be fought with a sword. By obeying Jesus' clear commands, his followers should be distinct from society, even a society claiming to be Christian.

Didn't Luther and the other great Reformers see the wisdom of the Anabaptists? They didn't—partly

because they thought the Anabaptists' theology was amiss, partly because the Anabaptists seemed disorderly. In one extreme case in Münster in 1534–5, Anabaptists came to power and took up arms (temporarily throwing aside their taboo on violence), practiced polygamy (citing Old Testament precedents), and claimed bizarre revelations from God. To both Catholics and Protestants these extremes justified persecuting the Anabaptists, executing them by fire or sword or drowning.

Anabaptist Development

In spite of persecution, the movement spread, mostly among the lower classes. Since the Anabaptists had no official sanction, they had to increase their numbers by outright evangelism, something new in supposedly Christian Europe. Some courageous leaders emerged, particularly the former priest Menno Simons (1496–1561), a gifted organizer whose name has settled on the group called Mennonites. Other leaders included Conrad Grebel, Thomas Muntzer, Hans Hut, Pilgram Marpeck, Melchior Hoffmann, Jacob Hutter, and Balthasar Hubmaier. As you can guess from the names, most Anabaphsts were from German-speaking territories, always the area of their greatest strength. Though no one person tied the movement together, Anabaptists shared many central beliefs, which were set forth in the Schleitheim Confession in 1527.

Today you would not find a listing for "Churches-Anabaptist" in your local Yellow Pages. You would probably find listings for their descendants—Mennonite and Brethren churches, for example. There are hundreds of such churches in the U.S. and in the world. Though small in numbers compared with, say, Baptists or Methodists, their influence has been great, particularly in the areas of pacifism, community, and service.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 28: 100 Most Important Events in Church History

1545 The Council of Trent Begins

Responding to the Reformation, the council charted the Catholic church's course for the next 400 years.

If 1517 marks the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, then 1540 (the founding of the Jesuit order) and 1545 (the opening of the Council of Trent) mark the beginning of the Catholic Reformation, also known as the Counter-Reformation.

When Luther sounded the call for reform, not all Catholics fled their church and became Protestants. Instead, many stayed, hoping for renewal. Pleasure-loving Pope Leo X was not the right person to bring reform. But a later pope, Paul III (1534–1549), appointed a commission to examine the state of the church. The commission's report, ***Concerning the Reform of the Church***, was pointed: Popes and cardinals had become too worldly; bribery to gain church office was widespread; monasteries had lost their discipline; and the selling of indulgences was widely abused. (Protestants obtained a copy and published it as evidence of the church's corruption.)

Conflicting Interests

In 1537, Paul III called for a council, but political squabbles postponed its opening for eight years. The council finally began, in the northern Italian city of Trent, in 1545. The council held a number of meetings, with the three main sessions occurring in 1545–7, 1551–2, and 1562–3. The drawn-out sessions, and long delays between them, meant that representatives changed over the course of the council. And attendance was small; the opening session attracted only 34 leaders, and the largest meeting of the third session had only 255.

The council brought together a variety of competing agendas. Some churchmen, particularly members of the papal curia, resisted any reforms that would hinder their lifestyles. Bishops from Spain and France wanted a stronger, independent role. The Jesuits, on the other hand, stood firmly for papal supremacy. Some council delegates, like Emperor Charles V (who faced a Protestant challenge in his realm, the vast Holy Roman Empire), wanted Protestants and Catholics to reach a compromise. (Under his pressure, the council allowed Protestants to attend the second session, and informal talks were held. But when Protestant demands were not put on the agenda, the Protestants left, in 1552.) In a few instances, the delegates came to blows.

Resolutions

Reform was high on the agenda. On the issue that had sparked the Reformation—the selling of indulgences—the council abolished indulgence sellers and halted some of the worst abuses. In addition, the council passed numerous measures to halt clerical corruption. Acknowledging that Luther's revolt had been prompted by the "ambition, avarice, and cupidity" of clergy, it called for leaders to avoid "even the smallest faults." Many abuses were condemned, such as holding several cathedral churches, offering favors to relatives, and having mistresses.

The council dealt extensively not only with morality, but also with doctrine. It reaffirmed the traditional medieval understanding—and rejected contemporary Protestant teaching—on nearly every subject.

The council held that there are seven sacraments, not two as the Protestants claimed, and that these are necessary for salvation. All the Protestant interpretations of Communion were condemned, and

transubstantiation (the belief that the bread and wine become in substance the body and blood of Christ) was re-affirmed. Protestants were worshiping in their own languages, but the council upheld the Latin Mass, and it defined more precisely the sacrificial understanding of the Mass.

On the critical issue of justification, the council could not support the Reformation understanding of salvation by faith alone. It affirmed that no person can know for certain he or she is justified, and that good works do contribute to a right standing with God.

On the issues of Scripture and authority, the Catholic church moved further from Protestants. Reformers such as Luther had been translating the Bible into the common language of the people. The council held instead that the only official version of the Bible was the Latin Vulgate, and that no private interpretations of Scripture could depart from the church's teachings. It also rejected the Protestant view of "Scripture alone" and declared that along with the Scriptures, tradition as preserved by the church was a source of authority.

Results

The Council of Trent helped to bring much-needed reform to the Catholic church. It also refined the church's structure and marshalled its forces for the years ahead.

On matters of doctrine, however, the council made the gulf between Catholics and Protestants deep and lasting. Any remaining hopes of reunion were dashed.

The Council of Trent defined what the church would be for four centuries. Not until Vatican II, in the 1960s, did a major reexamination take place.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY
Issue 94: Building the City of God in a Crumbling World

On Earth as It Is in Heaven

What is the role of the government? Can we build a Christian society in this world? Protestant Reformers Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and John Calvin all grappled with those questions—and came up with different answers.

Tony Lane

In August 2001, Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore erected a 2.5-ton granite monument of the Ten Commandments in the rotunda of the state Supreme Court building—raising a storm of legal controversy that ended in the forced removal of the monument and the removal of Moore from office. In an interview with ***Christianity Today***, Moore insisted, "The acknowledgment of God is basic to our society, to our law, and to our morality." But for others, the mixing of religion and public justice went too far.

The questions raised by this controversy—very familiar ones for Americans grappling with the separation of church and state—are some of the same questions that have faced Christians in many different historical situations. What is the proper role of the government in relation to the church? Should Christians be trying to bring about a "Christian society"? To what extent can we place our hope in politicians and political processes to accomplish this?

God has established two kinds of government among men ...

These questions came to the forefront in the 16th century when Europe was caught in a struggle between the Roman Catholic Church and the emerging Protestants. We tend to think of the Protestant reformers as primarily interested in theological issues: justification by faith, the supreme authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers. But in a culture where religious life and civic life were so closely linked—where the pope fought battles and secular rulers appointed clergy, and where the ordinary lives of citizens were built around the beliefs and rituals of the church—it was impossible to escape the political ramifications of breaking ties with the Catholic mainstream.

The reformers developed their views within a political framework that was very different from ours, but the principles they set forth continue to influence Christian political involvement today.

Church and state

In 1517, Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation with his ***95 Theses*** arguing against the sale of indulgences, which the church granted to reduce a Christian's punishment in purgatory. Meanwhile, ulrich Zwingli was working for reform in Zurich, Switzerland. Significant differences between these two reformers ended up dividing Protestantism into two branches, Lutheran and Reformed. Martin Bucer began as a Lutheran, moved to the Reformed camp, and then spent his life trying to bring the two sides together. Bucer significantly influenced John Calvin, who spent most of his ministry in Geneva (now in Switzerland) and became the greatest of the Reformed theologians. These four mainstream reformers are often called the "magisterial reformers" because they believed in cooperating with the magistrates (rulers) to bring about reformation.

In the 16th century, church and state were inextricably intertwined, much as the different departments of state are in a modern government. The magisterial reformers did not question this; they believed that it was proper for the government to support true religion and to suppress error. Christianity was not just a private matter but also a public matter. If the Reformation was to succeed, it would have to reform the

entire fabric of society, not just the beliefs of individual Christians. In order to stand up to the highest authorities of the Roman church and bring about widespread change, the reformers needed the support of secular rulers.

Some other reformers were revolutionaries who believed that the final struggle described in the book of Revelation was about to take place and that the godly should establish the kingdom of God by force. At the opposite extreme, the Anabaptists (who rejected infant baptism) believed that Christians should not be involved in the secular government at all, because the use of the sword to maintain order and administer punishment was contrary to the example set by Christ. The true church always stood in conflict with the world.

The magisterial reformers rejected both of these extremes. But they did not always agree about how to use politics to accomplish their spiritual goals.

Luther: Two kingdoms

Luther taught that there are two "kingdoms" or "realms." The spiritual realm involves issues of eternal life and salvation, which are the concerns of the church. The temporal realm involves issues of this world, such as politics and economics, which are the concerns of government. The spiritual realm is based on Christian revelation, the temporal realm on natural law. "God has established two kinds of government among men," Luther wrote, "the one is spiritual, it has no sword but it has the Word by which men ... may attain everlasting life. The other is worldly government through the sword which aims to keep peace among men, and this he rewards with temporal blessing." As long as sin exists, both gospel and government are necessary.

For Luther, it is appropriate for Christians to hold public offices: "Should you see that there is a lack of hangmen, police, judges, lords or princes and find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the job." But the state has a strictly limited role to play—restraining sin (Rom. 13:4) and keeping anarchy at bay by preserving law and order (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Christians should be loyal citizens, but they should not fall into the trap of imagining that the state can be truly Christian in this fallen world. Luther saw the state as secular—not in the sense that it is religiously neutral, nor in the sense that it should not punish those who undermine true religion, but in the sense that we should not look to it to bring about the kingdom of God.

Zwingli: The Bible and the sword

Luther was against the use of military force to defend, let alone spread, the Reformation. On a 1510 trip to Rome, he had been scandalized to see Pope Julius II in armor leading his troops to war. This was not what he expected from a Christian minister. Then he saw his fellow reformer ulrich Zwingli doing the same thing.

By 1525, Zwingli's reformation of the Church in Zurich was largely complete. The Catholic mass was abolished and replaced by a simple Communion service. His goal of a united evangelical Switzerland seemed within reach. But when he formed an alliance of Protestant cantons (Swiss states), the Roman Catholic cantons felt threatened and formed a rival alliance. The result was war in 1529. After a lull, fighting broke out again in 1531, and Zwingli was killed on the battlefield.

Luther interpreted Zwingli's death as the judgment of God. The image of Zwingli with a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other (as his statue portrays him today in Zurich) was for Luther a contradiction in terms. Lutherans in general were more subservient to the state. When rulers made demands that were against their conscience (such as imposing Roman Catholicism), they believed in passive disobedience, not rebellion. They were not pacifists—they believed in the state's right to punish heretics—but they

respected the established authorities as given by God.

Many in the Reformed tradition, on the other hand, accepted the legitimacy of armed rebellion against tyrannical regimes. In the Netherlands, they fought to expel the Spanish; in Scotland, they fought to protect the Reformation; in England, they fought against a king and eventually executed him; and in the American colonies, where the (Reformed) Puritan influence was strong, they rebelled against England.

Bucer: Blueprint for a Christian society

Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin viewed the role of the state more positively than Luther. They believed that government's responsibility goes beyond merely preserving law and order; it also has the responsibility to bring about God's rule. Christians are called to make the gospel visible in all areas of society—whether politics, economics, the arts, or the media.

Bucer spent most of his career leading the Reformation in Strasbourg, but towards the end of his life he became a professor at the university of Cambridge. His book ***The Kingdom of Christ***, written in 1550 (a year before he died) and addressed to King Edward VI, set forth a blueprint for a Christian England. Bucer's proposals encompassed not just church life but politics and economics. He argued that the laws of the land should be based on Christian principles—namely the two great commandments to love God and one's neighbor.

For example, Bucer proposed that begging should be outlawed so that the deacons of the church could administer effective relief, meeting the needs of those who were genuinely in need—not those who were simply too lazy to work. His vision of a comprehensive safety net for the poor, including steps to restore full employment and the goal of universal education, sounds amazingly modern. At the same time, he avoided one of the pitfalls of modern welfare states by taking care not to reward irresponsible behavior.

Unfortunately, Edward VI died in 1553 and with him any chance of implementing Bucer's blueprint.

Calvin: A model city

Unlike Bucer, John Calvin did live to see his vision of a Christian society take shape, at least in part, in the city of Geneva. Forced to flee France because of his Protestant beliefs, Calvin responded to a call to reform the church in Geneva. In the process, he transformed the city.

Calvin's goal went beyond the modest Lutheran aim of maintaining law and order; he wanted to build a godly society through the combined efforts of the ministers and the magistrates. In addition to preaching and administering the sacraments, the ministers kept a close watch over the spiritual health of the people, setting regulations on dress, dancing, Sunday behavior, etc. The government, for its part, maintained good schools, enforced godly laws, and punished wrongdoers. "These two things are widely different," Calvin argued, "because neither does the Church assume anything which is proper to the magistrate, nor is the magistrate competent to do what is done by the Church." Both, however had the same ultimate purpose: to restrain sin, encourage goodness, and build God's kingdom.

Calvin struggled not to impose a theocracy but to free the church from control by the civil magistrates so it could exercise its ministry to the full. This was not always easy, and he was forced to compromise again and again with stubborn magistrates. Moreover, many native Genevans found Calvin's rigorous discipline insufferable; these people, Calvin suggested, "should build a city where they can live as they want, since they don't want to live here under the yoke of Christ."

But the city also attracted many people, including refugees fleeing religious persecution, ministerial students, and others drawn by their admiration of Calvin. The Scots Reformer John Knox declared Geneva to be "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the apostles."

Tension and transformation

Who was right? How should the church relate to society? In 1952, Yale theologian H. Richard Niebuhr described five basic Christian positions in his classic work ***Christ and Culture***. The magisterial reformers represent the fourth and fifth positions, "Christ and Culture in Paradox" and "Christ the Transformer of Culture."

The Lutheran stance is "Christ and Culture in Paradox," which emphasizes the sinfulness of even "Christian" governments. As Luther put it, "It is one thing to change a government; another thing to improve a government." This position has many positive features: It is based upon a biblical view of human nature and sin, it avoids unrealistic expectations of politicians, and it avoids turning the gospel into a soon out-of-date political message. But on the negative side, one of the tragedies of the Nazi era was that the Lutheran approach helped persuade much (though not all) of the German church to accept Nazi rule passively.

The Reformed stance is "Christ the Transformer of Culture," which seeks, in a partial way, to bring about God's kingdom here and now. On the positive side, those holding this position have brought profound changes to society. Reformed (rather than Lutheran) Protestantism provided the cradle for capitalism and democracy. The Dutch, English, and American revolutions profoundly affected the course of history. The 19th-century struggle against slavery and the modern struggle against abortion are both attempts to bring a Christian voice to the political arena and show that Christ is the Lord of all of life, not just the "religious" part. However, one negative result of this position has been the use of military force and worldly weapons in the name of the gospel. Also, the current boom in political theologies has led many to confuse the gospel with secular agendas, just as Luther feared. In the words of Lutheran Mark Mattes, "The most important stance that the church can bring to the political realm is the truth that the political realm is never ultimate."

Today few theologians would accept the idea that the church should stick to religion and the state to politics, which is where the Lutheran "Christ and Culture in Paradox" approach can lead. On the other hand, experience proves that the Reformed "Christ the Transformer of Culture" approach can lead to baptizing secular ideologies or to treating politics like a holy war, damaging public perception of Christians as the bearers of Good News. While "Christ the Transformer of Culture" remains the ideal, it constantly needs to be challenged by the insights of "Christ and Culture in Paradox." Both Luther and the Reformed have positive lessons for us; both point to pitfalls to be avoided.

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Christianity and Government
By David Feddes

Dr. Pepper decided to make patriotic pop cans for American consumers. The soft drink company printed the American Pledge of Allegiance on millions of cans—but not quite the whole pledge. Two words were dropped. The missing words were "under God." Instead of saying "... one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all," the Dr. Pepper version says "one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." When someone called Dr. Pepper/Seven Up Inc. to ask why "under God" was dropped, a company official told her there wasn't enough space on the can. They couldn't find room for God.

Why was God considered dispensable? If there wasn't enough space for the whole pledge, someone mused, why not drop "indivisible" and keep "under God"? To tell the truth, I'm not eager to get God's name on pop cans—I don't believe in using a patriotic pledge to sell soft drinks, and I certainly don't believe in using God's name to sell soft drinks—but I still think it's revealing that a big corporation thinks that the least important thing about a nation is being under God.

America's founders had a very different opinion. Consider the Pilgrims who came to America on the Mayflower. Their agreement to govern themselves, the Mayflower Compact, was the first written constitution in the American colonies. They wrote that they came to America "for the glory of God, and the advancement of the Christian faith."

Eventually Americans declared independence from England, but they didn't declare independence from God. Patrick Henry made the famous declaration, "Give me liberty or give me death!" but he also said something else that doesn't make it onto pop cans or into school textbooks. Patrick Henry said, "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ! For this very reason peoples of other faiths have been afforded asylum, prosperity, and freedom of worship here."

Samuel Adams, another founder of the American republic, spoke of human rights and said, "These may be best understood by reading and carefully studying the institutes of [Jesus] the great Law Giver and Head of the Christian Church, which are to be found clearly written and promulgated in the New Testament."

Even Thomas Jefferson, one of the least Christian men among America's founders, regarded Jesus as an extraordinary person and saw the Bible as a source of great wisdom. In writing the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson didn't just say that people have rights but that "they are *endowed by their Creator* with certain unalienable rights." Jefferson also said, "Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis—a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?"

George Washington, the first president of the United States, spoke of justice, mercy, love, humility, and peace as "the Characteristics of [Christ] the Divine Author of our blessed religion" and said that without humbly imitating his example, "we can never hope to be a happy nation." In his farewell address, Washington warned, "Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

John Adams, the second president and a major contributor to the United States Constitution, said, "Our Constitution was written for a moral and religious people, and it is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." His son, John Quincy Adams, also served as president and said, "The Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer's mission on earth [and] laid the corner stone of human government upon the first precepts of Christianity."

President Andrew Jackson called the Bible "the rock on which our Republic rests." In 1892, a Supreme Court document went so far as to say, "This is a Christian nation." I could offer many other quotes, but you get the picture. Belief in God, Jesus Christ, and the Bible was not a minor footnote but the major source of wisdom for the founders and early leaders of the United States.

Earl Warren served as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court in the 1950s and 1960s, when courts and schools became more secular and said less and less about America's Christian heritage. But even Chief Justice Warren once said

> I believe no one can read the history of our country without realizing that the Good Book [the Bible] and the spirit of the Savior have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses... I believe the entire Bill of Rights came into being because of the knowledge our forefathers had of the Bible and their belief in it: freedom of belief, of expression, of assembly, of petition, the dignity of the individual, the sanctity of the home, equal justice under law, and the reservation of powers to the people.

Today if a nominee for the Supreme Court credited Christ and the Bible for improving law and government, the nomination might be rejected. If a public school teacher taught such things, their position might be in jeopardy. It's now politically correct to pretend that freedom depends on removing faith from public life. But that's false. The truth is, the influence of Jesus Christ and the concept of government under God have nurtured liberty and justice in the United States, in Canada, and in other countries with a Christian heritage. Many people don't know this—their schools never told them—but we need to know the truth. If we don't know how a free, well-ordered society got that way, we won't know when it is slipping away until it's too late.

It's hard to deny that the best countries to live in are generally those where many citizens are Christians and where systems of government were formed under the influence of Christian principles. I'm not saying that the United States or Canada or any other nation with a Christian heritage has always lived up to Christian principles or is the Lord's favorite. No nation or government has a special claim to being God's people on earth; only the church of Christ is set apart in that way. But the reign of Christ extends beyond the church, and the blessings of Christ are felt in many other spheres of life. A nation whose government is "under God" and seeks to uphold God-given rights and to honor God-given responsibilities will enjoy more blessings than one that is godless or that serves another god besides the God revealed in Christ. Pop cans, teachers, lawyers, and judges can pretend it's not so, but facts are facts. Christ is the fountain of freedom.

Fountain of Freedom

Jesus lived on earth at a time when his homeland of Israel was under the heel of the Roman Empire. Roman emperors claimed divine powers; the Caesars honored no law higher than themselves. Some people once asked Jesus whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus asked for a coin. On one side of the coin was a portrait of Caesar; on the other side was an inscription calling Caesar divine. Jesus looked at the coin and said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21). Paying taxes to government for certain services is one thing; worshiping government as a god is quite another.

Only one person has divine authority on earth, and that person is Jesus Christ, not any ruler or government. After Jesus rose from the dead, he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). His first followers honored Christ's supreme authority. An early Christian hymn recorded in the Bible says, "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow" (Philippians 2:10). The earliest Christian statement of faith was, "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9). That was a sharp contrast to the Roman claim, "Caesar is Lord." Many Christians died for refusing to call Caesar Lord and refusing to burn incense to Caesar. All must bow to Jesus as Lord, so no human may bow to another mere human as Lord. This is good news for human freedom and bad news for tyrants.

The supreme authority of Christ puts a limit on all merely human authority. When Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," he went on to tell his followers to make disciples of all nations. Their mission efforts upset authority figures who didn't want Christianity to spread. The authorities threatened the Christians and ordered them to stop preaching, but the Christians replied, "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29) If government orders clashed with God's commands, they had to disobey government and obey God. Still today, some rulers try to control churches and try to *stop* Christians from urging others to follow Christ, but whenever government contradicts God, the Christian response is, "We must obey God rather than men!" God's law is above man's law.

Christ's followers are not anti-government, but they believe in government under God, not government as God. The apostles of Christ told Christians to submit to government and to pay the proper taxes, not because rulers are gods but because rulers are God's servants for restraining crime and encouraging a better society (Romans 13:1-7). In the Bible, the apostles of Christ told Christians to pray to God for their rulers (1 Timothy 2:1-2) but never to pray to their rulers as gods. In this Christian view, rulers are not masters of the universe but servants responsible to God for the good of the people. Rulers are not gods but men who need prayers and God's help to do a decent job. Government has a limited, temporary purpose, so respect that limited purpose but don't put too much faith in government. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

Jesus put limits on the authority of government, and he also redefined the purpose of power. Jesus said, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). Christ himself set the pattern. He held ultimate authority but was willing to do the hardest, humblest jobs to serve others. He went so far as to wash his disciples' dirty feet, a lowly job for servants and slaves. Then he said, "You call me 'Teacher' and

'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash each other's feet" (John 13:13-14). Now if the supreme ruler of the universe used his power and authority to serve people, if the greatest of people is a servant, then the Christian pattern for rulers is to be public servants for the good of their people, not proud tyrants who exalt themselves at the expense of their people.

Jesus set a pattern where no ruler is too important to be a servant, and he also set a pattern in which every person matters. Jesus cherished individuals that others didn't care about. Jesus showed God's care for every person, not just for the rich and powerful. He said that he would take it personally if anyone harmed or neglected the last and the least of humanity. Christ's insistence that every last person counts has had an enormous long-term impact in government and recognition of human rights. Veteran journalist Malcolm Muggeridge said, “We must not forget that our human rights are derived from the Christian faith. In Christian terms every single human being, whoever he or she may be, sick or well, clever or foolish, beautiful or ugly, every human being is loved by his Creator."

The overall biblical vision of a great society, revealed by Christ and his prophets and apostles, is not a vision of big government or impressive monuments. The pagan, humanistic empires measured greatness by territory conquered and buildings erected. The countless soldiers and civilians who died in these conquests didn't matter. The many slaves it took to build the pyramids and pagan temples didn't matter. In the pagan vision, people mattered less that conquest and pomp and splendor. But the biblical vision is not of imperial splendor but of free people working hard and minding their own business (1 Thessalonians 4:11). According to Scripture, God's reign is seen where weapons of war are changed into farm implements, where every man sits in the shade of his own tree without fear, free to enjoy family and property (see Micah 4:2-5).

Jesus is the fountain of freedom. From Christ we learn that grand government goals do not outweigh dignity and opportunity for each person. Every person matters. Human rights come from God, not government. Rulers are servants, not gods. Every ruler will ultimately bow before Christ and answer to him. These principles are vital for good government and healthy society, and these principles have influenced the world for the better.

Saying No to Emperors

Faith in Christ as Lord enabled early Christians to be good citizens while rejecting every government claim to absolute authority. Jesus' first followers didn't seek any special privileges from government, and they didn't count on government to impose Christianity on others. They simply wanted to be free to worship God and serve the Lord Jesus without being persecuted.

Later, persecution of Christians ended and some emperors became part of the church themselves. However, emperors were still tempted to see themselves as above the law, answerable to nobody. They were also tempted to use their governing powers beyond their legitimate sphere, interfering in the affairs of the church. But those who believe in the supreme authority of Christ know that no government official can order the church what to believe and no government official is above the law.

One hero of history who insisted on government under God was Ambrose, bishop of Milan in Italy. On one occasion, the government ordered Ambrose to turn a church building over to Arian leaders, false teachers who did not believe in Christ as God and did not believe in the Holy Trinity. Ambrose refused to let the Arian heretics take over the church building, so the emperor's soldiers surrounded the church. Ambrose was told that "the Emperor was exercising his rights since everything was under his power." Ambrose answered that "those things which are God's are not subject to imperial power." Ambrose and his congregation barricaded themselves in the church for more than a week, praying and singing hymns. Finally the emperor backed down, and the church remained faithful to the Trinity.

Ambrose insisted that government cannot dictate doctrine to the church, and he also insisted that no ruler is a law to himself. This led to a confrontation with another emperor, Theodosius, who often attended his church.

A mob of people in the city of Thessalonica killed a Roman officer. When the emperor heard this, he was furious and ordered his troops to start killing people throughout Thessalonica. More than seven thousand men, women, and children were killed to avenge the death of that one man, with no regard for whether they were guilty or innocent.

The next Sunday, Emperor Theodosius went to church, expecting to receive Holy Communion. But Ambrose stopped him at the door and would not even let the emperor enter his church. "How will you lift up in prayer the hands still dripping with the blood of the murdered? How can such hands receive the body and blood of the Lord? Get away and do not heap crime upon crime." The emperor was shocked and offended. He was the emperor; his word was law. He could do as he pleased. How dare anyone talk to him like that? "The Church of God," he complained, "is open to slaves and beggars. To me it is closed." At last he humbled himself and repented. He grieved for his sin and said, "Ambrose is the first man who told me the truth." The brave bishop had reminded the emperor (who could have killed him on the spot) that even the most powerful ruler on earth must answer to the God of heaven.

No ruler is above the law, and no government has authority to dictate matters of faith to the church. These principles have made a huge, positive difference around the world.

Separation of Powers

Christians and churches have made far too many errors in political matters over the centuries, but where they have been faithful to Christ and the principles of God's Word, they have done much good. Christ is indeed a world changer. When Christians have asserted the final authority of Christ, limited government to its own proper sphere, and based human rights and responsibilities in God's authority, not man's, the influence of Christ has been a blessing in the political realm.

Christianity has helped to limit government to its proper place, and Christians also contributed to having separate branches of government: judicial, legislative, and executive. When some Christians read in the Bible, "For the Lord is our judge; the Lord is our lawgiver; the Lord is our king; it is he who will save us" (Isaiah 33:22), they reasoned that only Christ can be trusted with authority to be the supreme judge,

lawgiver, and king. No sinful human could be trusted with judicial, legislative, and executive powers at the same time. It would be better to separate those powers into different branches of government, as checks and balances to lessen the likelihood of too much power being concentrated in any one person or group of people. Followers of Christ were so aware of human sinfulness and so committed to Christ's supremacy that they didn't trust anyone but Christ to hold all the powers of government and be judge, lawgiver, and king at the same time.

No system of human government is perfect, not even systems that have been most influenced by Christian principles. Only when Christ returns will the nations be governed perfectly. In the meantime, though, there's no denying Christianity's important part in making governments and political structures better.

Some think the key to freedom is to secularize, to base government on atheism or agnosticism. That's what the leaders of the French Revolution thought. They were anti-Christian and came up with a whole new calendar based on the beginning of the Revolution rather than the birth of Christ. Just a few years earlier, Americans had claimed freedom but on a very different basis. The founding fathers of the United States, whatever their faults, were men who insisted on government under God and who professed the authority of Christ and the Bible. Most of these founding fathers were horrified by the anti-Christian principles of the French Revolution. What did the French Revolution produce? A bloody reign of terror, followed by the military dictatorship of Napoleon. What did American independence produce? A society which upheld freedom and opportunity for more and more people.

Societies based on non-Christian religions have placed few limits on political power. Societies based on atheism often promise freedom but end up with dictatorship. Without God, there is no power higher than the power of the state, and the state has final authority in every sphere of life. Secularism produced the French Revolution, communist dictatorships, and Nazi bloodbaths.

Clement of Alexandria said it well centuries ago: "Does it not seem monstrous that you—human beings who are God's own handiwork—should be subjected to another master, and even worse, serve a tyrant instead of God, the true king?" Christ the world changer is no friend of tyranny. Freedom is best served by government under God.

Resources:

D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?*

Alvin J. Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*

Vincent Carroll & David Shiflett, *Christianity on Trial: Arguments Against Anti-Religious Bigotry*