

Church History

Unit 6

The Swiss Reformation

Manuscript



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Church History

Unit Six: The Swiss Reformation

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ZWINGLI AND CALVIN

What do we mean by the “Reformed” movement? Was it larger than just the teachings of John Calvin?

Dr. Kenneth J. Stewart

We need to be able to distinguish between the Reformed movement and the teaching and career of John Calvin, not because they are opposed, but because they are distinguishable. They're distinguishable first on the basis of chronology. The Reformed movement came to be recognized as distinct from the Lutheran movement by 1529, because in 1529 it proved to be impossible for there to be complete agreement between Luther and his associates and Zwingli, Bucer, Oecolampadius, and other representatives of the Reformation as it had occurred in Switzerland. Their disagreement was about the Lord's Supper. But that proved from 1529 on that there were at least two aspects to the Reformation movement. But if we can distinguish these on the basis of chronology, we can also distinguish them on the basis of geography. The Reformation came to Geneva, the eventual home of Calvin, only in 1536. Geneva received the Reformation under the influence of an adjoining Swiss canton called Berne, where the Reformation had already established itself. And Berne's Reformation was introduced under the influence of Zurich, which was the first of the Swiss cantons to embrace the Reformation around 1521-22. So, we can say, certainly, that Lutheran and Reformed movements were distinguishable by 1529, and we can say that Geneva's reformation came later than the reformation of neighboring French and German-speaking cantons.

The other thing that comes with these distinctions is the recognition that Calvin belongs to the second generation of Reformers, and he was indebted to men of the first generation, which would certainly include Luther, but so far as the Reformed movement goes, he was definitely indebted to both Zwingli and Bucer. We know his indebtedness to Bucer explicitly because it was in Bucer's city of Strasbourg that

Calvin spent his three years of exile between 1538 and 1541, and Calvin found under Bucer the mentoring that he could well have used as a much younger man. So, the Reformed movement is older than Calvin. Calvin is, in some ways, the debtor of a Reformed movement that has existed before 1536. He is the continuator and the refiner of a movement already widespread and already led by figures of an older generation.

Dr. Sean Lucas

Unlike with Lutheranism where the key question for Luther's followers in Germany was, "What did Luther say and how close are you to it?", the Reformed movement actually develops quite differently. Far from being centered on John Calvin, there are actually three key centers in the development of the Reformed movement or the Reformed branch of the Reformation. You have Zwingli and his successor Henry Bullinger in Zurich. You have John Calvin and his successor Theodore Beza in Geneva, and you have Martin Bucer and his friend Peter Martyr Vermigli in Strasbourg. And each of those centers are actually key development centers for the development of the Reformed tradition. Zwingli and Bullinger were early leaders. In fact, Zwingli comes to many of his positions around the same time that Luther is himself discovering the Reformation in Germany. They operate on parallel tracks in many ways. When Calvin comes to Geneva in 1536, the Reformation in Zurich has already been going on for over 15 years or so. His friend Martin Bucer in Strasbourg has been working also for many years before Calvin arrives in Geneva. And in fact, in 1538, not necessarily voluntarily, Calvin will go to be with Bucer in Strasbourg to learn more, both of the Reformed tradition as it's developing, but also a sense of pastoral wisdom on how to lead the Reformation. Which is all to say that, unlike the Lutheran tradition, the Reformed tradition develops in these three centers, Geneva, Zurich and Strasbourg, which tells us some of the genius of the Reformed tradition — not centered on any one man but upon the Word of God as it reforms God's churches. That right there is the heart of the Reformed tradition as it develops.

What was Zwingli's main objection to Luther's doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Lord's supper. How did this disagreement affect the unity of the Reformation?

Dr. Timothy George

You know, the Reformation in Switzerland really began on January 1, 1519, when Huldrych Zwingli, who had been a parish priest, came into the pulpit of the *Grossmünster* Church in Zurich and began to preach chapter by chapter and verse by verse through the Gospel of Matthew. He emerged as one of the great leaders of the early Protestant Reformation, especially in Switzerland and southern Germany. Over the course of the next decade, however, he and Luther came to loggerheads over a number of issues, but especially over the question of the presence of Jesus Christ in the Supper of the Lord. Zwingli had a great verse in the Bible that he turned to again and again; it was John 6:63: "The flesh profits nothing; the Spirit is what counts." That was his great verse. Well, Luther had a great verse too. It was the words of

institution: “This *is* my body.” And he said the word “is” means *is*; he had a much more, we’d say, “literalist,” perhaps, understanding of the corporeal or bodily presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. Well, why couldn’t these two great leaders — and they were both great in their own way — why couldn’t they find a way to come together and preserve the unity of the Reformation? Well, because, ultimately, truth mattered to them, and though, when we look back upon it, it’s very sad that they came to a parting of the ways, as they did at the Colloquy of Marburg in 1529, and yet I am grateful for the fact that neither one of them felt they could compromise something that was so absolutely essential to the gospel as they understood it.

Zwingli’s fear was this: his fear was if you place so much emphasis on the elements, the bread, the literal institution of the Lord’s Supper, then you’re almost making it into an idol. His great fear was idolatry, and he felt Luther had not become quite an idolater but had bent in that direction too much. Luther’s great concern was, if you just reduce this to a memorial supper, to a remembrance of what Jesus did, where is Jesus Christ in that? You’re losing the Savior! So, his great concern was Christological. And over this issue, this very important issue, the Lutheran churches and the churches of the Reformed tradition stemming from Zwingli, and later Calvin, went their separate ways.

Dr. Scott Manor

Well, the Lord’s Supper is a major issue when it comes to different perspectives from the Reformed point of view during that time of the Reformation. Zwingli had a very different approach from that of Luther. Of course, Luther wanted to say that there is a consubstantial union of Christ with the elements in the Eucharist, the bread and the wine. And Zwingli wants to say, fundamentally, we can’t have that, in large part because we know through Scripture that Christ is risen and he is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. And so, his substance, his essence, where he is, is not physically with the bread and the wine in the Eucharist. It’s with God at his right hand up in heaven... Where that has ramifications for the sake of the unity of the Reformation is at the Colloquy of Marburg where there is a notion of, if we can get Luther and Zwingli — who is getting a lot of attention — to agree and perhaps join their forces, join those followers that are following both of them, that the power, the force of the Reformation could have been much stronger. And so, they got together, and there was a number of things that they agreed on. Luther and Zwingli could agree on a whole host of different issues, but the sticking point for them, of course, was whether or not Christ was physically part of the Eucharist. And because they couldn’t agree on that, that notion of a conjoined force within the Reformation never happened, and the result is, frankly, that the Reformation probably was not as strong as it perhaps could have been at the time had they been able to agree on that particular issue.

**What did John Calvin mean when he said that we should not despise
the truth wherever it might be found?**

Dr. Tim Sansbury

When John Calvin talks about not despising the truth wherever we find it, it's a recognition that God is the author, the source of all truth. He is the Creator of this universe. He is the Maker of everything that is and is the sovereign Lord of it... He has chosen to be revealed in what he has made, that therefore, when we go into disciplines that study the world, such as science, or experiences of artists, of thoughtful philosophers — people who come to recognize something about the world that God has made — where it is truth, it is God's truth... It certainly means that the further away we are from those places where people are intentionally subjecting their mind and their thought to God's will and to God's revelation in Scripture, we need to be more cautious to be evaluating what is being put forward as truth. But, ultimately, truth is God's truth. And so, we don't need to be afraid of truth, and often we can learn things from the rest of what God has made and the order that he has created that help us to understand better how to interpret Scripture. And there have certainly been times in the history of the church that what looked like the most obvious understanding of what Scripture said has changed, and we've come to understand more about what the intent of Scripture was. And John Calvin was well aware of that as he was writing at times of advances in astronomy that were ... significantly amending the way people understood Scripture in previous years. And he was happy for that and speaks positively about astronomy and speaks positively about the work that we do in being God's creatures, learning more about his creation, and seeking to bring all of that learning under the umbrella of a love of God and a recognition of him as the sovereign Lord and Creator of all.

Dr. Bruce Little

Some people have talked about John Calvin in his view when he said that we should accept truth wherever it is found. That led to a more general way of saying it, that "All truth is God's truth." That's pretty much the boiling down, and that's been more of a Reformed position. So, what did he mean by that? Well, if you read his commentary on Titus — also his *Institutes* — in one place in his *Institutes* he says that God the Creator has, in a way, given common grace. And he said, the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, and therefore, even though man is fallen, because of common grace, even the fallen man could know truth about the universe. And he said, to despise that truth would be actually offensive to the Spirit of God, which I would agree with. I think there is a great truth in that, that even though man is fallen, he is not — as [Francis] Schaeffer would say — he's not "a zero"; he can understand things about our world. Scientists have done marvelous things, unsaved scientists, the medical profession, all the way down the line, we just see people who have not trusted in Christ, and yet, because the world is one way and not another, and because we all live in the same world, why some of these people stumble upon, maybe they stumble upon, truth, and if it comports with the text, the Bible, then we should not despise it. We could even learn something from it. Now, having said that, I think that's a very good idea, I do think we need to raise a caution, at least as how it's used

today, because every truth today, everything that's set forth as truth, always comes out of a particular worldview. And back when Calvin was saying this, and even Augustine and Aquinas, I mean, they were saying about the same thing, there was a different state of affairs philosophically. So today, when people have what we call a truth, but it's a truth that came out of, maybe, a naturalistic worldview, but just common grace prevails, and they did see the truth. Here's the concern that I have: it's that, when we take that truth, that we don't drag some of the naturalistic thinking along with it. When a man has a toolbox, and he picks out one tool, well, seldom do we just get one tool in this work. We usually get the whole toolbox. So, unless we're very discerning, when we say, "yes, that's a truth," we must always make sure that it's a truth that we can substantiate from the text and that we don't let any of the worldview in which that truth was revealed come along with it, because that, I think, would be kind of dangerous. But as a comment, as Calvin made, that "all truth is God's truth," I think we have to say that is right because Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." I don't know where else truth would reside if it doesn't reside in God. And if this is his creation, then I would expect no matter who looks at it, if they get it right, they've got truth, and we should not despise it.

How did the Reformers critique the Quadriga that was so popular in Roman Catholic circles?

Nicholas Perrin, Ph.D.

The Quadriga is an approach to Scripture that sees Scripture interpretation as occurring at four levels. You have the literal sense, you have the moral sense, you have the allegorical sense, and then you have the anagogical sense... So, this is a long, well-established mode of interpretation in the Middle Ages. However, in the later Middle Ages, the Quadriga was being abused. In other words, people were beginning to see in Scripture all kinds of things that weren't necessarily warranted by the text, and certainly weren't anchored in the literal sense of the text. So, part of what the Reformers are pushing back on is an abuse of the Quadriga. And sometimes the way these conversations work is if somebody's doing something, rather than saying, "Hey, I want to qualify what you're doing," is they can hit hard coming the other way. But the Quadriga continues to be used in different ways. For example, if you read Charles Spurgeon's sermons, there's elements of the Quadriga in how he approaches the text. There's another stream of interpretation in Protestantism which just says, "Hey, none of that; we stick just to the literal." I like to see the Quadriga used very, very carefully, but we have to keep in mind what the Reformers were concerned about, and that is fanciful, speculative interpretation.

Dr. Ryan Reeves

By and large, people aren't and Protestants themselves were not concerned about the Quadriga in and of itself. I mean, lots of folks will read, say, the story of Genesis, of Abraham and the fact that his prayers were unanswered, and he prayed for so long, and they'll have a bit of an allegorical interpretation there. They'll say, "What does this mean for me and my prayers when things aren't happening?" So, Protestants are

not so much concerned about a variety of different interpretations — or methods, you might say — but what they double down on, and therefore, what they critiqued the Catholic Church for, is that the meaning of Scripture, primarily, is the grammatico-historical meaning. What did it mean for Abraham, as the covenant man, to not have his prayers answered, and what does it mean in his day? That's the important thing. And what had happened over the Middle Ages is a kind of optimism that we can interpret the Scripture in a variety of different ways had completely eradicated some of the more historical perspective on the Scriptures. So, you could twist and bend anything with the fourfold model. You could suddenly come up, if you like a different answer, you can manipulate it to suddenly have a different answer. And so, when Luther and them come along — you see this in all of their commentaries — they say, “What we care about is what this means for them in that day and age.” Then you have a process of how do you bridge that till today, but you do the first part first — what does that text, that story mean in its day? The question about how you can then apply it to us is a secondary question or a question after you get the interpretation of Scripture right the first time. So, the Catholic Church had, you might say, taken on too many varieties of positions on each different Scripture. It's that they had too many answers, too many interpretations, that it was just kind of a madhouse of different ideas. And so, the Protestants said look, what matters is Scripture unto itself first, and that's the interpretation. It's the model to go with.

How did Calvin view the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper?

Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin

Calvin's view of the table is an attempt to strike a *via media* ... between Luther and Huldrych Zwingli. On the one hand, he argues with Huldrych Zwingli that there's no way that the very body and blood of Christ could be in the bread and the wine because that would mean that the genuine humanity of Christ was distributed over maybe 600 or a thousand parishes in Germany and Switzerland where the Lord's Supper is being celebrated on any given Sunday, and so it would deny, it would undermine one of the unique properties of humanity, which is that humanity, then *Christ's* humanity, is not omnipresent. Christ is omnipresent in his deity but not in his humanity.

On the other hand, Calvin did believe, and I would argue from Scripture rightly so, that Christ is present at his table. The way in which Zwingli's position has developed down through the years is almost what we might describe as the “real absence,” that Christ is not present at the table. And that is really quite odd in many respects. And Calvin argued that Christ was present, but he was present through his Spirit, not through his humanity, and that, by the Spirit, we were united with the risen and glorified Christ, and ... the Holy Spirit is, as it were, the link, and the Spirit provides the believer with a sense of the presence of Christ at the table. I think that's a very rich view, I think it's a biblical view, and I think it's a view that the church needs to recapture, to once again find that the Lord's Supper is a vital means of grace in her life.

Dr. R. Scott Clark

Calvin's view of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper was that, in the Supper, the believer receives and is fed by — by grace alone, through faith alone — the “true body and blood of Christ.” That's the language that he most frequently used... So, it's not a matter so much of Christ being in the elements as much as it is that we are being fed on the body and blood of Christ *through* the elements. And so, the disagreement that Calvin had, both with Luther and Lutheran orthodoxy and Rome, was not so much whether we're being fed by the body and blood of Christ, but how. And at that point he appeals to mystery. He says God the Holy Spirit lifts us up and communicates the true body and blood of Christ to us through the elements, and we receive that by grace alone through faith alone, so the believer is receiving the true body and blood. And that language is the kind of language you see, for example, in the French Confession of 1559, and then Guy de Brès actually intensifies that language a little bit in the Belgic Confession 1561 when he speaks of the proper and natural body and blood of Christ. So, we have a high view of the Supper, but it's not Luther's view, and it's certainly not Rome's view.

How did Calvin and Luther differ in their personalities and academic gifts?**Rev. Dr. Stephen Tong, translation**

I think it was according to God's particular design that the two Reformers, Martin Luther and Calvin, were born into this world some twenty years apart. The first one accomplished what many saints and reformers hadn't been able to do in hundreds of years. Luther clearly saw what the problems were, and God used this straightforward and brave German to blow everything up — to break the big, unyielding and sturdy walls. However, after the walls were demolished, only ruins were left, like a pile of debris. So, God waited another 20-some years, until the birth of Calvin, who had a clear and calm mind and a patient personality, to rebuild a Christianity that had been shattered. He rebuilt a real fort of faith which could never be torn apart again — a true restoration, just as in Jeremiah when God said that he would destroy, and he would build. So, the misleading system brought by Catholicism was hard to break without Martin Luther's personality, and the new system was hard to build up without Calvin's mind. They made a great team. Although Martin Luther sometimes detested Calvin, and claimed they were different, Calvin said that he would still call Luther father, “although he were to call me a devil.” Personally, I think the most faithful disciples of Martin Luther, historically, were not the followers of Lutheranism, but were those on Calvin's side.

Would it be fair to say that Calvin did not originate much new theological thinking but rather clearly articulated and systematized Reformed and Protestant thinking?

Dr. Timothy George

The most important thing to say about Calvin, with reference to the whole Reformation, is that he was a second-generation Reformer. He was born in the year 1509. In that year, Martin Luther got his first theological degree and began to teach at the University of Erfurt. So, Calvin came along a decade or so after Luther had broken with the Church of Rome, the Reformation was already being established in Germany and elsewhere, so Calvin's task was different than Luther's. He was not the one who pioneered through the forest. That had already been done. But what was needed in the time of Calvin was someone who could come and give clear, articulate expression to the Protestant message and who could also, as it were, put it into effect in a real, living, urban situation. Luther's reformation was mostly rural, it was territorial, up in northern Germany. But Calvin belonged to those whose work was done in the cities. The cities were very important in the time of the Reformation; that's where the printing presses were; that's where the universities mostly were. And so, this is where Calvin made his mark, by taking Luther's theology and giving it a reincarnated en fleshment in the city of Geneva, from which it spread throughout all of Europe and really around the world.

So, if you took Luther's theology and Calvin's theology — I know there are differences between the two, and whole books have been written on these differences — but if you were to take their theologies and park them out here in our parking lot, the “bumpers” would match. Their theology was very similar in its basic impulses, but the context for their theology was extremely different. And I would say one other thing: Calvin's big emphasis was on union with Christ and living out the Christian life in the real world. And so, he was concerned not only with, kind of, pure teaching, pure doctrine, reformation in your heart, and the great doctrine of justification by faith — all of which he believed with all of his heart — he was also concerned with how this doctrine was going to reshape society, what difference it was going to make in the cities, in the life of the countries in Europe. And so, I think there is coming out of Calvin and the Reformed tradition a greater activist impulse to go into the world, to preach the gospel, and to let it have a transforming effect on people. And so, Emile Leonard, who was a great French historian of the Reformation, wrote a chapter in his book on the history of Protestantism about Calvin, and it was titled, “Calvin, the Founder of a Civilization.” He was onto something.

Dr. Tim Sansbury

I think it's fair to say that Calvin didn't intend to be much of a revolutionary. He didn't intend to be much of an innovator. As he sees himself, he's trying to say what Scripture says, when it says it, and then when he's doing the *Institutes*, for example, bringing together what Scripture said, tell you when it said it, but pull it together into different sections that are by topic. But he wants to re-say what Scripture says. Now, in the course of doing that, it's not *just* about Scripture. He quotes heavily from

church fathers, and particularly Augustine, and they help him to be able to interpret what Scripture has said where it's not always clear. But still, as he describes himself, his goal is to re-say what has been said and not to innovate. I think what's not fair is to say that he doesn't innovate at all, because sometimes, just by doing that, it's innovative. The way that he has done things is innovative; it's helpful. I find it in some ways innovative even when he says, "You're arguing with me, but ... your argument is not with me; your argument is with Scripture." He's got this little treatise that was a treatise on the hidden providence of God... In this text, people are accusing Calvin of having eliminated free will, of having made God into a monster, and God's the author of evil. And over and over again, rather than trying to philosophically answer these puzzles that are being placed in front of what Calvin has said, what he is going to do is just say, "Why are you arguing with me? Here is the Scripture that says exactly what you're telling me can't be true. Don't argue with me, argue with God. God said it, not me." And that approach is, in many ways, refreshing and novel, and I'm sure was frustrating because he's not going into it trying to create an argument on his own. He's trying so hard to just say all of the things that Scripture has said and to acknowledge, then, even when it may not be possible, or he may not see how it's possible, to understand them or explain philosophically. I'm sure there have been other people in the tradition of the church that have done that, but that's rare. And most thinkers since Calvin, even in the Reformed tradition, have tried to do more than that. Sometimes helpfully, they've tried to answer places where Calvin has said, "This is a mystery," and people have tried to say, "It's not a mystery. Here, I'll explain it." There are times that's a good result, and they're able to help us understand something which Scripture said that was hard to understand. But other times, in trying to solve one particular puzzle, they have created a contradiction with something else that Scripture explicitly does say... and they would have found themselves being rejected by Calvin much the same as his opponents were, because, in trying to systematize some parts of Scripture, they were contradicting others, where he just wanted to say, "This is what Scripture says. I'm going to repeat it, and you can argue with God."

How should we view the relationship between Calvin and Calvinism or Reformed theology?

Prof. Brandon P. Robbins

Often in modern discussions we're trying to understand the distinctive between Calvin as a person or what he thought and believed, Calvinism — the theological system that came to be associated with his name — and more generally, Reformed theology. Usually, whenever we hear the term "Reformed theology" we should probably think more broadly. We start thinking more in the focus of anyone that focuses on the same soteriology that Calvin had, so the very simple doctrines of — not simple in their impact but just kind of understanding the realities of how one, or how individuals become saved. So, we think of depravity. We think of irresistible grace. We think of perseverance of the saints. We think of limited atonement. Those are all Reformed doctrines that are held by Baptists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals,

Anglicans. So, people from different denominations that believe very different things are generally considered to be Reformed. Calvinism, depending on who you talk to, sometimes refers to that, but sometimes it might be a little bit more succinct in thinking not only Reformed theology when it comes to soteriology, but many of the other doctrines that Calvin might hold. It might be associated with Calvin's view of church government, so you might have a more Presbyterian view of church government, or maybe even as far as understanding a little bit of covenant theology and understanding how God relates to his people through a series of covenants. You might get into that. And in all these things, those doctrines developed over a period of time, and then some of them would not have actually been articulated the exact same way by Calvin, the person, who was a man of his times seeking to minister to a people and train pastors in his age, and sometimes his beliefs on particular doctrines aren't exactly the same thing as what we understand Calvinism or Reformed theology to be today.

Dr. Tim Sansbury

If I were going to draw a line between Calvin and modern Calvinism, or Calvin and modern Reformed theology, in part it would be to say Calvin laid out a bunch of biblical pieces of theological information, and the tradition since then has often tried to close all of the gaps between all of those pieces of information. And at times, they've done so; they've closed up the system even more than Calvin would have ever intended. It's still a broad range. There are many people who would call themselves Calvinists. They'd call Calvin their theological father, even though Calvin would be driven crazy by that and not want it, or they would call themselves Reformed and see Calvin as being a principal figure in Reformed theology. But I'm troubled by both of those because so much of it goes back to Augustine, who one of my old professors used to say — Sherry McKenzie at Reformed Theological Seminary — used to say that Augustine was the first Calvinist. It was tongue-in-cheek, but it was on purpose because it was almost as if you couldn't get those who called themselves Calvinists, or called themselves Reformed, to appreciate Augustine unless Augustine agreed with Calvin, when Calvin was trying so hard to agree with Augustine. So, in good ways and bad ways, Calvinism can take on a life of its own using Calvin as a starting place, but forgetting his desire to be relaying what Scripture says first, and only afterwards to be adding helpful ways to pull together the different pieces of content, versus allowing theology and Reformed theology to go first and tell us what Scripture has to mean.

How did Calvin's training as a humanist help him as he developed his theology?

Prof. Brandon P. Robbins

As you study the life of John Calvin, you realize that he started his academic career as a humanist scholar and that he learned all the classical languages and that he would go back and look at the classical texts, not only the New Testament, but the early church fathers, and that began to help him develop his theology and understanding

where the church fathers were coming from, and having a deep understanding of the Scriptures in their original languages. And he used the skills of a humanist to persuade others, which helped develop his theology. Many scholars will tell you that his *magnum opus* of systematic theology, if you will, the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, was actually written with the desire to convert French humanists to the fullness of the Reformed faith, that there was a desire to change people's hearts to a true piety of true religion by understanding the fullness of the doctrines that the Protestant Reformers were setting forth, that it wasn't just an academic theology that Calvin put forth, but it was a pietistic theology that he sought, that if people understood what the Bible taught correctly that it would not only change their minds but it would change their hearts. And that was one of the most key aspects in understanding Calvin's theology.

Dr. Sean Lucas

Most people don't realize that Calvin's first book was actually a commentary on the Roman philosopher Seneca's book *De Clementia*, and it was an example of Calvin's passion as a humanist to go back to the sources, to these original texts, and comment on them as a way of exegeting, or bringing forth out of the text, the truth that's contained in them. That training that Calvin experienced as a humanist, as a lawyer, as a commentator on Seneca, proved to be invaluable to him when he came to embrace the Reformation because his humanist training shaped the way he viewed the text. He went back to the sources, the Scriptures in their original languages, and he sought to explain them, to exposit them, to exegete them, to bring out of them what's in the text. From this exegetical base in his commentaries, he then developed his theology. It's one of the reasons why, when we read Calvin, we don't simply read the *Institutes* by themselves, but we read the *Institutes* along with his commentaries and his sermons, because for Calvin, to understand his theology, you have to go back to the sources, to those biblical texts and comments that Calvin gave. And so, his training as a humanist was invaluable to his later career as a reformer.

What does Calvin's early writing about Seneca's work *De Clementia* teach us about who Calvin was?

Dr. Ryan Reeves

Calvin, before he wrote the *Institutes*, and before he even began to write on theology, he wrote this commentary on Seneca, on *De Clementia*, which means "on clemency; on friendship." And it's a very intriguing book because it shows Calvin when he wants to be a French humanist. If there's any movement that is dominating France, it is this humanist movement. And the ideal was that you would be a shrewd interpreter, that you would study texts, that you would know the languages, that you would then offer commentary in this very humanist way. What it tells us about Calvin, though, is a couple of things. One, he was "going for the brass ring," we like to say; he was trying to actually make a name for himself. He took on a very hard work and offered a very, very mature analysis of this thing long before he had reached a mature age. So, it shows that he was precocious, one. Secondly, it shows he's different from

Luther. Luther was a monk and a scholastic. He had been trained in the older model of scholasticism. Calvin is a layperson. In fact, he's never ordained for the rest of his life, he remains a layperson and a teacher. But, what he wants to be is a humanist which is somebody who's very careful, very attentive to language and word choice and the way that a text is arranged. And so, what you'll see flowering in Calvin out of those instincts are, one, he's going to write something like the *Institutes*, a very careful, very arranged book that's meant to say his position, but also, this is how he interprets Scripture and how he engages with all of his writing, which is very clear, very lucid. He's not going to be a scholastic and merely be debating his position, he's also going to be trying to win you over to his side with the humanist model of writing and scriptural analysis and things like this. So already at a young age, you're seeing Calvin the humanist that will eventually be Calvin the theologian when he breaks from the Catholic Church.

Prof. Brandon P. Robbins

When we're looking at the biography of Calvin, we'll see that one of his early works was looking at Seneca's work, the *De Clementia*, which is Calvin going back, in the humanist fashion, looking at an early classical writer and trying to understand who he was and how he wanted to write, and really, how he used language in a rhetoric way on how to convince and change people's minds. And it reminds of a number of things about Calvin. One, he wanted to be a scholar... He really wanted to study ancient cultures in the early church and early church writings and the New Testament from a humanistic perspective. And it's important for us to understand his desire to understand the original writings and how they were from a scholarship perspective, and that he was a profound student of understanding the classical period, not only the Christian classical period but also secular history as well.

**How does Calvin view the use of the law in the Christian life?
Is his view worthy of being emulated by Christians today?**

Dr. William Philip

Calvin viewed that the law of God as the Torah, the instruction of God, which, of course, was principally and first given to God's people Israel to instruct the life of God's redeemed people in his land. And so, he emphasized that, I think, rightly because what greater privilege could God's people have than to have his instruction of his will for their lives? Most Christians are keen to know, "What's God's will for my life?" Well, the law of God, the instruction of God, gives us that instruction. It tells us what God's will is. Christians are often very keen to know God's will about their own circumstances and material things, but the Word of God teaches us that God's principal desire, his will for our lives, has to do with our character, has to do with morality. And Paul tells the Ephesians, you know, you need to find out what pleases the Lord; you need to live as children of light, not like the pagans, not like the Gentiles. And of course, he's turning them back, isn't he, to the Old Testament Scriptures, much of which is the Torah, the instruction of God. And so that third use of the law really, for Calvin and the main Reformed tradition, is the first use of the

law. It's the principal purpose of God's instruction for his children. And the Lord Jesus teaches us to be like our heavenly Father, to be as he is. That's the teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. And to know how to be like our heavenly Father, we want to know as much as we can of our heavenly Father's instructions for his people. And that was what Calvin and many other of the Reformers emphasized. And I think we're right to continue in that train today. It would be great folly, wouldn't it, to jettison great tracts of God's instruction for his people's life. The apostles don't do that. They turn us to the Old Testament Scriptures as to their own writings, and we should listen to that, and we should follow that today.

How did the Reformers differ with each other on their views of baptism?

Dr. Carl L. Beckwith

When you look at baptism at the beginning of the Reformation, the first decade or so, you can identify four distinct views: there is the Roman Catholic view, there's Luther's view, the Anabaptist view, and then the Reformed or Calvinist view. The differences between these views have to do with faith. What is the place of faith in baptism? And this is where it gets interesting as to how these line up. For Roman Catholics, an infant is baptized not because of his personal faith but because of the faith of the church itself. There is no personal faith until the child comes of age within Roman Catholicism, until that child gets to confirmation and makes a public statement of faith, which means that until that happens, within a Roman Catholic understanding, baptism brings salvation because there is yet no sin committed by the infant until they come of age to the confirmation. Early on, Luther agreed that there was no infant faith, that it was the infant being baptized on the faith of the church or the faith of the parents. But then, very early on, he shifts to an emphasis upon faith. It is only faith that can receive the benefit of baptism. In baptism we are promised the gift of the forgiveness of sins, but it is faith that lays hold of that gift. And so, Luther begins to affirm infant faith. Now, let me come back to Luther on this. Early Calvin agrees with Luther that infants have faith, but as Calvin moves further in the editions of his *Institutes*, he abandons that position, and he steps back and thinks of it more in covenantal terms, which is a little bit different but somewhat similar to what Roman Catholics are saying — that the infant doesn't yet have personal faith but is entrusted to the care of the church and is brought into the covenant relationship with God by faithful parents. Now, the Anabaptists take a very strong position on faith. It is faith that must be present before baptism. Now, this is where I think it gets really interesting. You've got Luther and the Anabaptists agreeing on a central aspect of baptism, that, namely, apart from faith, this baptism has no legitimacy. Now, the Anabaptists will say that you must believe before you are baptized. That means that faith serves baptism. And Luther says no, baptism serves faith.

So now let me go back to Luther and explain what he means by this. For Luther, faith is ultimately trust. It is the heart clinging to God, and for Luther, it doesn't matter if you are a day old or 80 years old, this trust of the heart we all have. When you look at

an infant, for example, the infant clings to mom and dad such that, maybe, the grandparent who isn't around very often comes to grab onto that infant child, but the infant child doesn't know the grandparent, doesn't recognize the voice, doesn't recognize the smell of the grandparent and begins to cry. But as soon as the infant goes back into the arms of the mother, the voice soothes the infant, the smell is right, and the infant clings to the mother and stops crying. And Luther says that is what faith is. We cling to the arms of Christ, and we trust in him, and that is evident whether we are a day old or many, many days old. Now, for Luther, of course, faith will deepen, you'll come to a deeper understanding of what you believe and confess, but at the end of the day, it's always that clinging and that trust. And for Luther, that's present in the infant, and it is baptism or God's Word that brings about the faith of that infant, turning their heart to God such that they would cling to him. So, in the Reformation, baptism is a fascinating question to ask — How do they think of faith? Where do they place faith within the sacrament of baptism? And how do they then understand faith receiving the benefit of baptism itself.

How did the Sorbonne in the University of Paris lead to Calvin's expulsion from France?

Dr. Jim Maples

Calvin was expelled from France kind of in a roundabout way. His friend Nicolas Cop had been elected as the rector of the Sorbonne at the University of Paris, and in his inaugural address, Cop made the statement that men are redeemed by God's grace alone, which caused an uproar. In fact, Cop had to flee for his life. And then it was found out, or rumored at least, that Calvin was the one who wrote Cop's speech, and they came for Calvin. And it said that he literally escaped during the night with bed sheets out the window. And so, in 1533 Calvin is a fugitive from justice, at least in France.

How did Nicholas Cop affect the Reformation in France?

Dr. Ryan Reeves

So Nicholas Cop was a preacher and a leader at the University of Paris, or the Sorbonne, as we know it today. This is where Calvin was studying and working as a young man and a number of others that were humanists that were learning of the Scriptures and studying them, and Cop was something of a ringleader for them. And what happens is you get the sense early in France that a number of folks have come over to a Lutheran or a Protestant position on justification, but they have not had the pressure to leave. There has yet to be an inquisition, yet to be anyone on trial. All that's happened to Luther, of course, but at this point, France is a bit of a free state. They're allowing some people to engage with some ideas in a way that they weren't allowed to do in other countries. Cop, though, you might say, is the guy who throws the gauntlet down. He preaches in the official chapel and he preaches a message on justification, and immediately his room as well as some others are ransacked by the

government to see what is going on here. Why is this man fomenting a theology that is synonymous with Luther? And it's important because Cop, by his sermon, implicates Calvin as well. Calvin seems to have had a hand in the sermon. Some have suggested he wrote it; that's probably not the case, but nonetheless you have this idea that Calvin is being sort of drug along behind where now they have to make a decision to either conform and return to the Catholic Church or flee. And, at least with Calvin, he flees, and he goes down to Switzerland where he becomes the man that is the Reformer of Geneva.

How did Calvin end up in Geneva on his way to Strasbourg?

Dr. Jim Maples

John Calvin originally wanted to be a scholar. He thought that the place for him to be was Strasbourg. He was going to use his great legal mind and his newly-found theological training to go to Strasbourg and be a scholar. And he was on his way to Strasbourg, but the Habsburg-Valois wars, which was going on at the time, caused him to have to detour through Geneva in order to get to Strasbourg. And he spent the night in Geneva. His plan was to spend one night in Geneva. He was at the inn, and he met a fellow named William Farel who convinced Calvin to stay in Geneva — he must have been quite a salesman — and change his plans and minister there in Geneva.

What were some commonly held beliefs of the Radical Reformers (or Anabaptists)?

Dr. John Hannah

The Radical Reformer, that term, is a designation for a cadre of beliefs, actually. Typically, in the Reformation, the study is divided into the Magisterial Reformers, Luther and Calvin, and the Radical Reformers. The dividing line between them is their understanding of the role of ... the church within the state. In other words, the Magisterial Reformers interconnected the two; the Radical Reformers separated the two and saw the state as contrary to the gospel. A corollary to that, of course, would be their understanding of baptism. The Radical Reformers rejected the concept of a folk church — one church you're born into — and insisted that you be reborn into life, and therefore, they practiced, many of them practiced, adult believer's baptism. Once you get beyond their view of baptism and their view of church and state, then it becomes murky. Some held to what they called "the band," which was a bit of legalism. Some held to a pacifist point of view. But the essential division is Anabaptist or "Radicals," as they are called — they are only radical by the standard of the day — is that they separated church from state, which was novel, and they rejected infant baptism for believer's baptism, which was totally radical.

Dr. R. Scott Clark

The Radical Reformers held a number of beliefs in common, although finding exactly what's held in common by the Radicals, particularly the Anabaptists, is not an easy thing. In fact, the term "Radical Reformers" encompasses a wide range of views, some of whom would be Anabaptist, but some of whom would not. But if we focus particularly on the Anabaptists, we can isolate a few commonly-held beliefs. And not everyone is quite aware of this, people often assume that the Anabaptists were just another wing of the Reformation, and in fact, while sociologically, and in some ways maybe historically, we can speak that way, theologically that's much more difficult. For example, many of the Anabaptists, if not all of them, denied the true humanity of Jesus. So from the point of view of, sort of, historic Christian Catholic orthodoxy, they were not orthodox. They had a doctrine of the celestial flesh of Christ, so that he's not really truly human or a true man and true God... Most all of the Anabaptists denied the Protestant doctrine of justification. They were all suspicious, in the same way that Rome was suspicious that this notion of justification by grace alone through faith alone would not really produce obedience or sanctity or personal righteousness, and they were very critical of it. Menno Simons, in the second generation, begins to articulate something like the doctrine of justification. He's about as clear on it as Zwingli was, but the first generation are pretty universally opposed to the Reformation. And of course, they all rejected — the Anabaptists rejected — the historic Christian doctrine of the baptism of the children of believers, the children of professing Christian parents, which was in the 16th century a very radical thing to do, which upset people on a number of levels — socially, politically, theologically, ecclesiastically. And so, at least those three things. And then we could also look at their view of church and state, or their view of the Christian's relationship to the culture more broadly; their view of the Christian's participation in society; their view of Christian vocation, which tended to be arguably almost monastic and certainly not that shared by the Protestants or Rome.

What did Calvin do in Geneva to expand the gospel throughout Europe and into the New World?**Dr. Kenneth J. Stewart**

Calvin was very active in spreading the gospel, first across Europe, and then beyond Europe into the western world. Many people know, but more people should know, that Calvin trained missionary pastors in Geneva for service in France and what were then called "the Low Countries." There were Protestants in what is today Belgium and Holland, also in France, but there was no training facility in existence. So, Calvin would receive letters in Geneva from newly-emerging churches in these territories asking that pastors be sent. Sometimes the men trained to go back into these areas were themselves refugees at Geneva out of these areas which were under French and Spanish control. So, for decades, Geneva became the training center out of what we would call "church planters" were trained and sent back into areas of Catholic Europe. This not only was Geneva's influence westward into France and the Low Countries, but it was Geneva's influence eastward. As far to the east as Hungary and

Poland, young men came to Geneva to receive theological training. Geneva was not the only Reformed city providing this service, but it was probably the most famous, certainly during the career of Calvin and his successor, Beza.

This isn't recognized as much as it should be, but there's a very interesting case to be made for saying that John Knox — who spent three or four years in Geneva in the 1550s as a refugee — at his return to his native country in Scotland was himself being thrust out from Geneva much as these church planters were to France and the Low Countries. The distinction, however, is that Knox was already an experienced pastor and preacher, but he definitely went home to his native land better equipped than he was when he arrived. So, across Western Europe to the east and the west of Geneva there was this missionary sending initiative from Geneva, and this accelerated once, in 1559, the Academy of Geneva came into operation, because it was a formal school of higher education which included theology and biblical languages. But there was also at least one initiative from Geneva into the Western world that showed there was a missionary interest at Geneva beyond Europe. And this was an attempt, under French sponsorship, to establish a colony in the harbor of what is today's Rio de Janeiro. The French had, for their own commercial purposes, determined to establish a trading colony in what was a Portuguese sphere of influence. When French settlers would not volunteer to go on this trading mission, the way was open for Huguenots to go. And there were Genevans who went on this trip to Brazil, establishing a trading colony in the harbor of Rio de Janeiro, and they were there until the French government determined to close the colony and recall them. During that three or four-year period of time there were serious efforts to work among native people, to reduce their language to an alphabet, and to explain the rudiments of the Christian gospel to them. So, this is actually a very important milestone marking European Protestantism's early interest in mission beyond Western Europe.

Dr. Gregory R. Perry

Calvin himself was a refugee from France, and Geneva was located strategically right in the intersection of the borders between Switzerland and France and Germany, and there was a steady stream of French refugees, in particular, coming into Geneva. And one of the things that he did very quickly was to reestablish diaconal ministries, to recover the role of deacons in the church. And in his readings of Romans 12 and of Acts 6 and other passages like 1 Timothy 5 and Acts 9, Calvin did a lot to reestablish and recover the role of deacons and to establish a particular purse — he called it “the Bourse” — for the French refugees. And so, they would interview the refugees as they entered Geneva; see where they might find jobs for them.

The other thing that Calvin did, though, was to establish schools. In a letter to Bucer he talked about the paucity of ministers and how, by educating ministers, they could plant churches. Now, that wasn't his language, that's what we would call it, “planting churches.” But what we know from letters back, from where these church planters went, particularly back into France — which was very dangerous — is that over the course of less than 10 years, from the mid-1550s to the end of the 16th century, over two thousand churches were planted, and we can count from the letters back that

about three million people were affected by those church plants. The other thing that we know is that, in these schools, Calvin established printing presses, and over three hundred thousand Bibles and other literature were printed and distributed and, really, added to the spread of the Reformation throughout Europe. So, we see diaconal ministry, we see educational ministry, we see church planting, and then, interestingly, we also see cross-cultural missions. Calvin was involved in sending Huguenot missionaries to Brazil. And we see early on this commitment in his commentaries, even in the *Institutes*, that this is a worldwide mission that God's church is to reach the nations. And so, right there in Geneva, at an intersection in Europe, we see Geneva affecting the advance of the kingdom throughout Europe and even across the waters into Brazil.

Was Calvin responsible for the execution of Servetus?

Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin

Michael Servetus is one of the most interesting, in some respects, figures in the Reformation period, a Spanish figure, obviously Anabaptist. He was arrested by the Spanish Inquisition, would have been condemned and burned by the Spanish Inquisition in Spain, but was able to escape and wrote to Calvin in Geneva that he was planning to come to Geneva. And Calvin and Servetus had a history. They had already met in France. Calvin warned Servetus not to come to Geneva, plainly told him that because of Servetus' Unitarianism, his denial of the Trinity, he would almost definitely be arrested in Geneva by the civic authorities and put on trial. Servetus, however, disregarded the warning, turned up in Geneva and was caught actually listening to one of Calvin's sermons, recognized in the congregation. It would appear that Servetus had some sort of idea that he had to go to Geneva to have some sort of apocalyptic showdown with Calvin that would be part of the end times. It's a very, very curious aspect of Servetus' thought... And so, a number of civic figures put him on trial, and he's on trial for his denial of the Trinity. Calvin is called as a witness for the prosecution. "Is this man heretical in his view of Trinity?" and Calvin had to say, "Yes, he was." And on that basis, Servetus was condemned... Calvin sought to alleviate the punishment. The standard punishment in the world of the late medieval period and the Reformation for heresy was burning. You burned heretics. And so, he was condemned to death by fire. Calvin sought to have that alleviated by a swift beheading. We might see that as, well, either way he's a party to his death. But everybody in Europe basically was congratulatory of the town fathers of Geneva for having finally got hold of Servetus and executing him. That doesn't justify it, I think, from a biblical standpoint. I think from a biblical standpoint that the church has no right using the sword or the state to further its goals, and certainly not to condemn, to execute heretics. But having said that, it does help us place Calvin in context. Calvin was not the monster that sometimes later tradition has seen him to be in this issue. Everybody in Europe basically agreed pretty well, except for the Anabaptists, that church and state functioned as one and the state was to enforce the dictates of the church. And so, Calvin's role in the execution of Servetus was significantly limited, much more limited than later tradition would have us believe. Was he responsible for

the death of Servetus? No — the town fathers in Geneva. And Calvin, as I said, had actually warned Servetus not to come. That does not free him from any blame. He was certainly in agreement with the town fathers in their execution of Servetus.

Prof. Hezhuang Tian, translation

Michael Servetus was a heretic, and the greatest of his heretical beliefs was in denying the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Under that historical context, not only would the Protestants see that as a heresy, but the Roman Catholics would by no means allow such a heresy to continue. We could even say that Michael Servetus was a character who would've not been welcomed anywhere, and yet he insisted on his heretical beliefs, being unwilling to change or repent. The Roman Catholics had actually already arrested him in Lyon, judged him as heretical, and sentenced him to death, but he escaped from prison and made his way to Geneva. In Geneva, Calvin dialogued with him multiple times, because after he was arrested, he got a lot of chances to give up his heretical beliefs about the Trinity, but he refused. So, though Calvin was prominently involved in Servetus' execution, we have to remember that, in the historical context of the time, he would've been put to death in any country, not just in Geneva... At the same time, we are to understand that Calvin tried to treat the matter in the most lenient way possible, asking that Servetus be given a humane death. But the council still vetoed Calvin's suggestion and had Servetus burned at the stake. What we see from this event is that Servetus was an obstinate heretic who challenged orthodox doctrine, Calvin and Geneva.

What tensions existed between Calvin and the Genevan city council?

Dr. Ryan Reeves

Calvin and the Genevan city council is one of the great war stories of the Reformation, not in the sense of anyone got hurt or killed, but in some ways, it was a love-hate relationship. I mean, there were people on the city council that despised Calvin. There's one story of someone naming their dog after Calvin, actually, because they thought so little of him. But you have to understand, with Calvin, he is an outsider. It's too easy to assume that Calvin belongs in Geneva because we're so used to him there. But he's a Frenchman, and he's come down to Switzerland, and he is appointed by the city of Bern, which is a German-speaking city just to the north that has taken over Geneva by force. And they are a Protestant city, and this is a Catholic city, so they bring this French-speaker in and ask him to reform the city by their authority, and, as you can imagine, they don't like that very much. And Geneva wanted to see itself as autonomous and a great up-and-coming city, this type of thing, but what ended up happening is Calvin had to negotiate those boundaries. So early on, of course, Calvin gets kicked out of the city because he makes a bold stand on the sacraments and on some other positions, and the city essentially runs him out as a result, which was, at least, a thing that upped the tension between the city Bern and Geneva. But eventually what happens is Calvin learns to come back and get along with them enough, never permanently good friends. Calvin was always an outsider, but because he learns to work with them, there are improving relationships that kind

of arc up for the rest of his life, so that, by the end, Calvin is very much the voice of the church there in Geneva. And he is certainly the key Reformer, of course, but it's not Calvin the dictator from the beginning, ever. In fact, it's never Calvin the dictator because the city council, whenever possible, would let Calvin know that they're in charge and he's not, and to that end, he had to learn to be a good pastor and not simply just get his way because he asked for it.

What lessons can young pastors learn from Calvin's early failure in pastoral ministry?

Dr. William Philip

John Calvin was, early on in his ministry, was exiled from Geneva, and that must have been a very painful, painful time. In many people's eyes that would have been a real failure. Perhaps it is so, we don't know for sure, but what we do know is, in God's providence, that experience, along with many others, was one of the ways God formed him for the extraordinary ministry that, in the end, he'd find his way into, often not entirely by his own will... And I think there is encouragement, certainly encouragement for me, that somebody as great a figure in the church as John Calvin could have appeared in his life which seemed to be such failure to others and to himself. That's encouraging, I think, for normal mortals like the rest of us. But it's encouraging too to see how God works and that, sometimes, what we think is going to be the key ministry of our life may well come to an end or may change, and it may be that we feel this has been a disaster I have brought on myself, or it's a disaster the Lord has inflicted on me, or whatever it is. It may be nothing of the kind. It may be, indeed, part of God's crucible in which he's forming us for something different, which will indeed be our chief life work. And so, I think there's encouragement as we look to great figures of the past... Although, what we tend to remember about them is their greatness. We forget about their humanity; their normal experience like the rest of us. These are not the things that often get recorded in the books. But they encourage us, perhaps more than some of the great achievements they make because that's a point of connection. We're human flesh as they are. And it encourages us that God can use even things which seem like a disaster to us to be a stepping stone if we continue faithful, following him and trusting him, a stepping stone to the thing that he has for us, and that can flower and flourish in a way that, perhaps, we'd never imagined. So, it's great encouragement of reading of failures in ministry, although it sounds a strange thing, because it's not really failure if it's in God's hands.

Dr. Sean Lucas

Undoubtedly, when Calvin was exiled from Geneva on Easter Day 1538, he felt like a failure. After all, he had been brought to Geneva to bring about reformation, and here he was, a little over two years later, going north to Strasbourg. But, you know, even though he felt like a failed pastor, young pastors like us can learn all sorts of lessons from what Calvin experienced, both in having to leave Geneva and also in coming back. Perhaps the first lesson that we can learn from Calvin is that perhaps Calvin pushed too hard too fast. Calvin had a desire to bring about reformation without

tarrying for any and insisted on a particular project and plan in order to bring about reformation. But by pushing the people too fast, too hard, too soon, Calvin couldn't bring everyone along with him, and as a result, lost the support of the people. Young pastors can learn a lesson from that — don't push too hard, too fast, too soon.

But another lesson we can learn from Calvin is what he did next. He went to find older mentors, those who were doing this ministry of reformation with great experience and wisdom. And so, he went to Strasbourg and put himself under Martin Bucer, and there not only experienced healing, but also observed Bucer's wisdom in dealing with the city council and the way that he sought to care for those who really desired to reform their lives within a larger city church. And also, how Bucer took a struggling young pastor and deployed him for ministry. It was there in Strasbourg, after all, that Calvin wrote his commentary on Romans. It's where he did the second edition, perhaps the most significant of the early editions, of the *Institutes*. And it was there that he met his wife Idelette de Bure. And so, Calvin going to find an older mentor was something that younger pastors need to learn, that sometimes when we feel as though we're struggling and we've failed, it's actually an opportunity to step back, to heal, to learn, and to find a mentor who will guide us for future usefulness.

But the third thing we can learn from what happened to Calvin is that God was gracious to restore him to ministry again. Having learned his lessons, having reflected and grown in his gifts, Calvin was brought back to Geneva. The city council asked him to come back because they saw that Calvin had grown, and he was useful for the reformational project in Geneva. And so that's another lesson we can learn, to not give up, to continue to pursue God's call on our lives, and having learned our lessons, to go onto future usefulness just like John Calvin learned.

How did Bucer help mentor Calvin to become a better pastor?

Dr. Robbie Crouse

Martin Bucer is not a common name that we hear, but he was an important figure in mentoring John Calvin. Calvin called Bucer a father of his faith. While Calvin was in Geneva he was exiled, and he went to Strasbourg where Bucer was the main pastor. Bucer saw the abilities that Calvin had and made him a pastor to the French exiles there in Strasbourg, and in many ways, mentored him in pastoral care. Calvin had great academic abilities and had already written on predestination and written on doctrines of the faith, but it was really Bucer who instilled in Calvin a sense of pastoral responsibility and oversight. We can see some of the writings of Calvin before and after his interaction with Bucer, and there's a tone of pastoral-ness that is now gained with his interaction with Bucer. Calvin became more interested in church government and the oversight of elders in the church. He writes now of a stronger view of communion and its importance in the Christian life. So, Bucer, in many ways, had a profound effect on Calvin and, in many ways, made him a better pastor as he returned to Geneva the second time.

Dr. Timothy George

Martin Bucer was in some ways the spiritual father of John Calvin. And three of the happiest years of Calvin's life — 1538 to 1541 — he spent in the city of Strasbourg where Martin Bucer was the Reformer. They worked so closely together in many ways. For one thing, Bucer had Calvin teach in the academy there. That gave him the idea of when he went back to Geneva, "We ought to do something like that here." It was the genesis of the Genevan Academy out of which grew, really, the first Protestant seminary in Calvin's Geneva. And not only that, but also Martin Bucer put a great deal of emphasis on pastoral care, nurturing and caring for those who were suffering. Many of them were refugees in Strasbourg. Calvin himself was the pastor of what he called the *ecclesiola gallicana* — the "little French-speaking church" — in the midst of a large German-speaking city. Calvin did pastoral work day-by-day, visiting the sick, those who were afflicted by the plague, and leading the church in matters of church discipline. That was another big emphasis Martin Bucer brought to John Calvin.

Another thing I would say is that it was really Bucer who encouraged Calvin to start writing commentaries on the Bible. The first of Calvin's commentaries on the book of Romans was published at Strasbourg in 1539 at the encouragement of Martin Bucer. Well, if you look at Calvin's whole life, I mean, that's one of the great contributions he made to the history of the church to this day, and I think we have Martin Bucer to thank for that in large measure. So Bucer had a great influence on Calvin in shaping the way he did reform, the way he understood the church, the way he lived out his life in so many ways there in the city of Strasbourg.

Another contribution Bucer made was in the singing of the Psalms. That was done in Strasbourg. And again, when Calvin goes back to Geneva he begins to teach the singing of the Psalms to the *Genèvois*, the people in Geneva. And this becomes one of the great hallmarks of Reformed worship, the singing of the Psalms, sometimes in later history to the exclusion of hymns. Well, I'm all for hymns, but I think we have neglected the Psalms, and we can learn a lot from Martin Bucer and John Calvin about psalmody.

THE SPREAD OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

How did the Marburg Colloquy damage the relationship between the Swiss Reformed and Lutheran branches of Protestantism?

Dr. Timothy George

Well, in 1529, Luther and Zwingli had this great confrontation over the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. They went their separate ways. The plan was for the two Reformers to have communion together at the end of that colloquy. It never happened. Luther and Zwingli would not share together the same table of the Lord.

And really, out of that event, the splitting apart of the Reformation into these two camps — we call them the Lutheran and the Reformed to this day — represent two different traditions stemming from the same Magisterial Protestant Reformation. Now, that's very sad that that happened in the 16th century. A lot of other acrimony entered into it, and so you begin to get a division within the period of what historians call "confessionalization," so that the Reformers become followers of their own camp, and they cease, in a way, to emphasize the common core gospel that Luther, and Calvin too, had articulated so well in the 16th century. And so, we could look with regret upon that, but I would also like to point out the importance of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. It is worth fighting over. It maybe isn't worth dividing over the way they did, but let's not trivialize it. Too many people today take it for granted. Too many people today brush it aside. It mattered to these Reformers because God's Word mattered, and the experience of coming to the communion table where Jesus Christ is offering himself to us really mattered to them. I hope it will come to matter to us again today in our world.

Why was the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* so influential for the Reformers?

Dr. Robbie Crouse

John Calvin's great work the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* were quite influential in the Protestant Reformation, and that's for several reasons. Many of the first-generation Reformers like Luther and Zwingli wrote *ad hoc*, that is, answering specific questions as they came their way, answering Catholic responses, but they never systematized a kind of doctrine together of, "What do Protestants believe?" There were smaller confessions of faith like the Augsburg Confession, but Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was really a first work of systematic theology, of putting together, really, all our comprehensive doctrines of the faith. It was also influential because Calvin tried to connect Protestant doctrine to the continuity of the church — that this is what the church has believed — also distinguishing it from Catholic, present-day Catholic doctrine, and also the Radical Reformers' views. Calvin addressed, taught, such topics as infant baptism and why the Reformers kept the tradition of infant baptism, and rooting it in Scripture, he emphasized the Old Testament and New Testament continuity, the comprehensiveness of the Bible and how it connects together in Christ. He even included in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* a plan for church government and civil government — ways in which a view, a kind of world and life view that was given, that the *Institutes* could help the Protestants as they tried to renew the church, doctrine, even civil life.

Prof. Hezhuang Tian, translation

As Calvin's seminal work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* wasn't just important in its own time, but became very influential in later eras. But, let's just look at why it was important to the Reformers of that time. We should keep in mind that Calvin was a second-generation Reformer. Luther represented the first-generation of Reformers. Luther's reformation almost overturned the entire Roman Catholic empire, but while

he went about destroying the old, corrupted ways, he didn't have the chance to build up a new system of belief. During this process of destruction and rebuilding, the entire Reformation movement fell into chaos. There were many voices from within the movement that claimed their own orthodoxy, leading to disunity. At the same time, they were facing severe persecution from the Vatican. Facing pressures from within and without, the new belief system hadn't yet been established, and didn't have a complete, clear, systematic expression of the Bible's absolute authority, the grace-nature of faith and the gospel, the unity of the church, etc. The Reformation movement was in a precarious state, without clear direction, and facing the possibility of coming to an abrupt end.

It was at this time that the second-generation Reformer Calvin published his *Institutes*. Suddenly, the Reformed movement had a new, clear direction in which to continue reforming, because this work answered all the questions that the Reformers had about the Bible, theology and doctrine — answers they needed to continue with the Reformation. What this book accomplished, then, was it pointed out a clear direction for continuing to reform, established a new framework for truth, emphasized the authority of the Bible, emphasized the unique grace-nature of our salvation, and emphasized the unity of the universal church. Looking at everything from this perspective, *Institutes* was truly a work that was indispensable to helping the Reformation continue forward.

Of course, if we were to discuss the book's influence on future generations, it's even more fruitful, greater, richer, and more comprehensive. For example, some people focus on the book's literary contributions, its economic contributions, its political contributions. Besides its theological contributions, it has had incomparable contributions towards the establishment of the economic system of modern capitalism and democracy. This shows us that the importance of *Institutes* wasn't just in its own time, but continues to this day, and it remains a classic, indispensable book for each generation of Reformers.

Dr. R. Scott Clark

The *Institutes of the Christian Religion* were so influential among the 16th century and 17th century Reformed and the Reformers, the Protestants more broadly, for two or three reasons. One, as a Reformed fellow, I like to think because they were right, basically, that they were in line with Scripture. And I think that was for a number of reasons, one of which is that Calvin is such a good reader of texts. And he doesn't often get credit for this, but he was a humanist who really paid attention to the original context of things. So, he was always asking himself, "What did this biblical text mean in its original context and what does this text actually say?" So, he's always paying very close attention to the Scriptures and analyzing them and then asking, "Well, what do they imply? What can we infer properly from these texts?" And he did a really fine job in the *Institutes* of drawing good, solid inferences from Scripture. And then I think that gets us to the second thing that he did so well, and that is that he wrote very well. Even today, Calvin still holds up as a biblical commentator. If you read his biblical commentaries, they're still being published. They're still being read

because he is such a good, careful reader of texts. But also, his *Institutes* are still being read and used because he wrote so well. He's clear; he's concise... I think the third reason is that it's so well organized. He followed the traditional pattern, an ancient Christian pattern of organization, that goes all the way back to the third and fourth centuries and which picked up in the seventh century and dominated Christian instruction, which is really organized by the creed. Book one is God the Father, book two the Son, and books three and four, really, the Holy Spirit — the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption in three, and then book four, the church as that sphere that Christ has ordained where the Holy Spirit ordinarily operates to bring people to faith. So, if you think of those three things, they really help to explain why Calvin got such a hearing in the 16th century and even why he continues to be well regarded today.

Who was Heinrich Bullinger?

Dr. Jim Maples

Heinrich Bullinger was one of the key figures of the Reformation. He was largely responsible for collecting, defending, codifying Zwingli's work and promoting such. But he was very much in contact with the other Reformers, with the Reformed churches... Bullinger wrote to all of the Reformers, to the heads of state, kings and queens. It's quite a treasure for the historian to look and actually see the exchange between these people who were involved in the Reformation every day of their life.

Dr. Paul Sanders

Bullinger took over the head of the deserting church when Zwingli was killed in 1531 and found himself in a very difficult position as the leader of the church, but a very young man as well. A huge responsibility. If we look at the longer span of his life, we see a man who was quite complete in his pastoral, as well as theological work. He, in particular, in addition to writing theological treatises, in addition to having eight children, to having his home always open to guests coming from abroad, he wrote over fifteen thousand letters that we possess, which are, sort of, journals of current events in the Reformed world at that time. He was a man of peace, a man of reconciliation, and he was able to conclude with Calvin, in 1549, an agreement on the question of the sacraments, the Lord's Supper. And the nature of that agreement was a very interesting study in and of itself. A man who also was a preacher; he preached eight to ten times every week. He wrote and published over a hundred books, and you go on and on in the life of such a man. But to see how that God used him to preserve a church that was vitally shaken after the death of its founder and leader and was able to carry on and manage the legacy of Zwingli, both doctrinally, as well as practically, administratively, in the Zurich church.

What role did Knox have in Geneva during the reign of Mary?

Dr. Timothy George

John Knox was the great Reformer of Scotland, and many Presbyterians today look to him as, kind of, the founding father of the Presbyterian tradition. Well, early on in the

reign of “Bloody Mary,” we call her — Mary Tudor, the daughter of Henry VIII, the Catholic daughter of Henry VIII who became queen early after Henry VIII himself had died and after Edward had died — Mary introduced a strong kind of persecution against the Protestants. Over 300 of them were put to death in England itself. But a number of them escaped to the continent. John Knox led a group of those English refugees who gathered in Geneva. Some of them went to other cities like Emden or Frankfurt. But Knox had his little flock there in Geneva. They met in a church — you can still go and see it today, it’s called the *Auditoire de Calvin*, right next to the Cathedral of St. Pierre — and every Sunday, Knox would preach there. And so, Knox was a great galvanizing figure for English and Scottish Protestantism during the reign of Mary.

He also wrote a treatise, a very famous, *infamous*, treatise on the ... Regiment of Women. He wrote it against Mary, but by the time the treatise got published, there was a new queen on the throne in England. Her name was Elizabeth, the half-sister of Mary. And she didn’t take too well to what Knox had written and forbade him to come back to England. That was his original plan. And so, he was diverted back to Scotland. And looking back, we can say that was providential because that was really the beginning of the Scottish Reformation in earnest, when John Knox went back to Scotland, began to preach the gospel in Edinburgh and throughout the land of Scotland. But a lot of those seeds really took place when he was right there in Geneva with John Calvin preaching to the English refugees, working on new translations of the Scriptures, and holding forth the Word of God.

Dr. Kenneth J. Stewart

John Knox was in Geneva in the years 1556 to 1559 to be the pastor of a refugee congregation which was almost entirely made up of English citizens. Knox himself had been living in England when Mary became queen in 1553. He was one of approximately 800 who fled England and went to various European cities. He had paid a brief visit to Geneva on reaching the Continent, but he had not stayed there. He had gone initially to stay at Frankfurt, but a disagreement among the refugees broke out in Frankfurt, and it had to do with how closely they, as English refugees, should follow the policies already in effect in the time of Protestant King Edward, so far as the regulating of their church services.

Knox had already been of the opinion in Edward’s time that he could not follow *The Book of Common Prayer* strictly. He dissented from certain provisions of it, and he carried these convictions with him as a refugee into Europe. Let me illustrate. He was not in favor of kneeling to receive the communion, he was not in favor of an enforced, distinctive garb or costume for ministers, and he did not believe that we should be limited to using only prayers read from a book. He was not opposed to prayers composed in advance, but that we should be restricted to only those prayers printed in a book, he could not accept. Well, this became the basis of division of opinion in the refugee congregation established at Frankfurt. Knox withdrew because he could see that the divisions could not be healed. Meanwhile, John Knox’s progress had been monitored by Calvin from Geneva, and as these troubles were unfolding at

Frankfurt, Calvin extended an invitation to Knox and those who shared his convictions to come to Geneva and to make a fresh beginning. Calvin had confided to John Knox that he shared his misgivings about *The Book of Common Prayer*, kneeling at communion, and so on. So, John Knox arrived in Geneva in 1556. A congregation of about 150 English refugees assembled there, and they soon had a thriving congregation. And it was characterized by liberty on the questions about which there had been dispute at Frankfurt. They composed their own service book — this would be a book of liturgies — but it had written into it the provision that the pastor could modify these forms as the situation was requiring it. There was no prescribed dress for the minister. And, of course, there was not any requirement of kneeling at communion. Knox was not solo pastor. He had as his co-pastor an English refugee named Christopher Goodman, who would prove to be his lifelong friend. And in this congregation, there were elders and deacons elected by vote of the congregation, and it took on the form very much of what we would think of as a Presbyterian congregation. When the exile period was over, Knox would take the pattern that had been established in the Geneva congregation home with him to Scotland where it was largely adopted by the Scottish Reformed Church.

Now, all of this is to just speak of Knox in his capacity as pastor to refugees, first at Frankfurt and then at Geneva, but it needs to be added that Knox was very active at a second level in his time in Geneva, and that is as a writer, particularly a writer of controversial materials. Because there was great outrage and indignation at the persecution of Protestants back in England, Knox and Christopher Goodman both wrote very stormy pamphlets arguing against two things — the persecution which was going on back in England, but also the questionable role of national rule by a queen rather than a king. They could not foresee in writing these stormy pamphlets how these would boomerang on them because they had no concept of the approaching death of the queen that they opposed, and by their pamphlets, they ended up offending the successor to Mary, Elizabeth, who banned them from ever setting foot in England again. But they could not have known what the future held, so they were active as controversialists and pamphleteers. And let's just say that some of their efforts ought to have been saved, and they would have had greater freedom of movement after the age of persecution ended.

Who was Jacob Arminius, and how did he come to question his Calvinistic background?

Dr. Ryan Reeves

Jacob Arminius is one of these folks who is usually misunderstood. We're so used to the split between Calvinists and Arminians that we would almost assume that they started from different vantage points and entirely different perspectives, but it always shocks people to realize that Arminius was a Calvinist. He actually came from within the perspective. He was from the Netherlands. He went down to Geneva to study, and he studied with Calvin's successor, no less. In fact, one of the great ironies is that, when he went to be a pastor, Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, wrote a letter of

reference for Arminius saying, “He’s a man of upstanding character and good theology,” which, looking back, it is a bit silly because they become polar opposite on a few issues. What happens when Arminius goes back to the Netherlands, though, is he starts to get this impression that in the Reformed faith, the talk about God’s predestination in his election of folks was starting to be a bit glib — that might be exactly how he would say it in fact — that the conversation was all too familiar to say that God damned people before the foundation of the world. And Arminius’s main concern was that he felt that these perspectives made God the author of sin. Though no one would say that, his concern was that that’s what it amounted to, that you make God the one who damns people and saves people regardless of their perspective, regardless of their sin or their actual desire, or any of this type of stuff. And so, it made God sound like a tyrant, he thought, and so what Arminius starts to do is to change a few key doctrines within this Reformed theology that he had been taught. But what he eventually realizes is that by changing a few of those doctrines, he actually has developed a different system entirely, and it’s what starts the argument at the beginning between Arminius and between the Calvinists in the Netherlands, and it eventually leads to the Synod of Dort. But the reason Arminius is concerned about this is because, having been trained in Geneva, he realizes, or he thinks, that the talk of God’s election and talk of God’s damnation of folks was too glib, he thought. So, you might say that his issue wasn’t so much predestination as it was the problem of evil. He didn’t like the fact that God seemed to be involved with evil actions or with the damnation of folks, so he wanted to come up with a way of saying that it’s our fault — we chose; it’s us. And so, as a result you have the very famous split between the Arminian perspective and the Calvinist perspective which has, as we all know, endured all the way down until today.

Did Arminius intend to refute Calvinism or simply to revise and refine it?

Dr. Ryan Reeves

Arminius probably thought of himself as a refiner or a recover “artist,” you might say, or someone going back to the original brand of Calvinism. This is probably what he thought of himself. He wouldn’t have said it that way. But here’s a man who studies in Geneva, and then he goes back to the Netherlands. And what he seems to be reacting to is the debate over supra- and infralapsarianism, which he took — and to use modern language — as a bit of hyper-Calvinism, trying to determine God’s thoughts on the elect and the un-elect before the creation of the world, this type of thing, ordering the decrees. He thought that was a bridge too far, far too speculative, and so, what he believes is he’s getting back behind that to an original, more — what he thought was — biblical faith. But what he ends up doing is he does tweak some of the core assumptions within Calvinism that was even there with Calvin himself. So, it’s hard to say that he merely wanted to critique it, but nonetheless, there were others that were not Arminian who had the same concerns. So, he was not alone in the concern over the supra/infralapsarianism debate. They all thought it was probably too speculative. And one of Calvin’s big lines was, “Where the Scriptures are silent, we

will be silent,” so this type of debate they thought was too far. So, there were lots of others that do not themselves become Arminian that have the same concern. So it’s probably the case that Arminius thought of himself as a refiner or a “reclaimer” — go back to the old days. But when he actually seeks to attack the question, he doesn’t just say, “Well, that’s a false debate or a debate we shouldn’t have.” He actually starts to change some of the core mechanics of the understanding of grace and the will and other things, which would have been not even allowable by Calvin himself. So, you might say, even if he styled himself as a refiner, when he gets down into it, he does start to really change some things, probably because what he thinks is if he changes a couple of those core things, the hyper-Calvinism that came out of Calvinism will no longer happen. But what he ends up doing, and this is where all the fight in the Netherlands happens, is they realize that what he’s done is come up with an alternative system itself.

What were the Remonstrances that were proposed by Arminius’ followers?

Vicent Bacote, Ph.D.

Arminius dies in 1608 from tuberculosis. He has followers in the Netherlands, however, and these followers come to be known as the “Remonstrants.” The Remonstrants is another word for people who have a protest. So, in 1610, the followers of Arminius, the Remonstrants, present five points of remonstrance, five points of protest. So, those five points are: they believe that humans have total depravity, which means that no one can — because of the Fall — no one can turn to God on their own. Well, they said, “We believe in total depravity.” They would then say that when it comes to how God chooses — because they believed in election; they believed that God made choices — they, like Arminius would talk about election as a *conditional* election. And the condition of election is foreknowledge. Foreknowledge, in their understanding, is God knowing a state of affairs in advance, knowing information in advance. And the information that God knows is those who will, through prevenient grace, respond to the gospel and, through subsequent grace, persevere to the end. So, God knows those who will believe and persevere and, on the basis of that knowledge, God chooses those. So those are the ones that he elects. Their third point is that when it comes to the salvation that comes through Jesus, this is a salvation that is, at least in terms of possibilities, it is one that could save everyone. So, they would say, “Look, John 3:16, ‘God so loved the world.’” So, the death of Jesus is for the world, it’s potentially for the world, even if it’s only efficient for those who come to believe. So, they would say that they believe in what you would call an “unlimited atonement” or “unlimited redemption.” The fourth point would be that, when it comes to God’s grace, God’s grace is unmerited favor, but the grace of God that comes to us for salvation is prevenient grace, which is a grace that makes possible the conditions for belief. It makes it possible, but it is not coerced, it is not guaranteed that people will believe, but it does create that sense of possibility. So, that grace by which people can believe is a *resistible* grace, they would say. In other words, because it doesn’t compel anyone, then yes, there’s the possibility of

belief but not the guarantee of belief, hence it's a resistible grace. And the same thing with the grace that is subsequent to salvation that one needs to persevere, that grace is also not one that is guaranteed to lead someone to persevere, but it's a grace that is also resistible. So, their fourth point is that grace is resistible. And their fifth point, when it comes to perseverance, is the point they could not agree about. So, some of them would say, "Well, that's right, because grace is resistible that means that some people definitely might actually authentically believe but also authentically fall away." Others would say, "No, if they're in, they're in." So, they could not agree among themselves as to whether those who truly believed will all truly persevere to the end. So, they had a difference about that. So, those five points of remonstrance are what sets up the five points that we call the five points of Calvinism. But, of course, Calvin is dead then, so really, it's the five points of the Synod of Dort, which is a legacy of Calvinism.

What was decided in the Synod of Dort?

Dr. Ryan Reeves

The Synod of Dort is, again, one of these moments that is culturally remembered apart from its actual historical record, at least in terms of how it's remembered with the acronym T.U.L.I.P. — the five points of Calvinism, so to speak. One, I always joke, Dutch people whose second language would be Latin would not have come up with an English word for their acronym for their theology. The Dutch word for tulip is "*tulp*," so maybe they left the "i" out is always my joke. But the idea is that they were not actually creating new theology. The Arminian perspective had come up with the five points *against* Calvinism; it was called the Remonstrance, and they had issued this to the government rulers in the northern part of the Netherlands during, really, at the tail end of the Dutch civil war — the civil war that split Belgium from the Netherlands. And the new Netherlands was going to be Calvinist-based, and the Remonstrance folks issued five points, five challenges to the traditional way that Calvinism was understood. Of course, what ended up happening is the Arminian perspective is suppressed by the government as well, and then the Synod of Dort is called to issue an answer point-by-point of the five points of the Remonstrance. So, you might say that the conclusion of Dort had already been decided, which was, "We have to give a cogent, solid answer to these five points." But also, the five points of Dort were not an attempt to define Calvinism as only five points; rather, it's, "On these five points, here's our answer." And so, the way Dort is often remembered is that it's *the* five points of Calvinism, it's just the five answers to Arminianism. They never would have thought of that as the essence of their faith or the core five convictions, this kind of a thing. But the tale has grown with the telling of it over the centuries, and so now, it's the five points of Calvinism, things like total depravity, limited atonement, these kinds of things. Very interesting when you actually read the document, though, they don't use that language. They use different language, confessional language that's more nuanced, biblical, that type of thing. But again, it's an answer to a critique that is using the critique back on itself, if that makes sense. And to that end, Dort was an answer. It was a response to an internal fight with the

Arminian perspective, and it was never supposed to be the be-all and the end-all of the Reformed faith.

Dr. Sean Lucas

The Synod of Dort had been convened as, really, a synod of international Calvinism. Not only those from the Netherlands, but really a cast of characters drawn from England, Scotland and other parts of Europe gathered together in Dordrecht in order to refute the five points of the Remonstrants, those followers of Jacob Arminius who were protesting the reigning Calvinist orthodoxy that was being taught in the universities. And so, in response to those five points, the Synod of Dort developed four canons in which they argued strongly for the sovereignty of God in salvation; for the depravity of human beings in ways that cause human beings not to be as bad as they could be, but to be sinful through and through; for God's atonement through Jesus Christ to be specifically for the elect — though it's infinitely valuable and sufficient for all kinds of sinners, it's actually effective for those God has chosen to save — and his grace powerful enough to draw men and women to Christ and enable them to persevere to the end. And so those Canons of Dort actually served as, really, the basis of the Reformed faith, of Calvinism moving forward. Drawn from an international cast, the Synod of Dort really stamped a key impress in these rules, in these doctrines that they affirmed against the Remonstrance.

What is the significance of the Synod of Dort?

Dr. Larry Trotter

The Synod of Dort was a gathering of pastors and theologians of the various Reformed churches around Europe in response to an objection of a number of ministers who were questioning what had become received Reformed thinking about what's called "soteriology." And soteriology is the doctrine of salvation — *soter* is the Greek word for savior. And so, the doctrine of salvation was what was in question in that Synod. They debated the objections of the Arminian party. The Arminians were the ones who were questioning the Reformed orthodoxy. And they answered them point by point. And these points that they came up with were five points, as they were eventually rearranged. What we know now are the "five points of Calvinism." The original points were in a different order, but what we have now, these five points of Calvinism, have become something of a touchstone of Reformed orthodoxy on soteriology, on the doctrine of salvation. And they become a useful way of identifying ourselves. You will hear people say, "I'm a five-point Calvinist," or "I'm a four-point Calvinist," or "I'm a three-point Calvinist." So, they become something of the yardstick, the measuring stick of where one is on the question of soteriology.

Why did the early Reformers have such a strong view of God's sovereignty and predestination?

Dr. Sam Pascoe

The early Reformers had a very strong view of God's sovereignty and predestination, I think, for primarily two reasons. First and probably most important is that it's a biblical doctrine. It's hard to read the New Testament and read through the Old Testament and not see God's sovereignty and God's sovereign hand drawing people toward himself, working out events of history. And so, I think they believed it because they were "people of the Book," and you can't read the Book and not see it there. The other reason that I think they believe it on a more existential level is because I think they needed to believe it to do what they were doing. They were going up against the most powerful institution in the world at that time, which was the Church. And they were standing up for kind of an abstract truth — the idea of salvation by grace through faith and the priesthood of all believers — over against a huge monolithic institution that controlled their lives in many ways. And they were putting their lives on the line, and many of them paid with their lives. So, I think, not only did they believe it because they saw it in the Scriptures and they were committed to that, and that would have been sufficient, but I also think that they needed to believe it not only in their heads but in their hearts to accomplish what they needed to accomplish and to be willing to put their heads on the line quite literally. I think it's no accident that we're told that we have the helmet of salvation. And the helmet is what enables you to stick your neck out, and they were sticking, literally sticking their necks out for the truth as they understood it.

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