Calvin

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LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES,
RIGHTS, AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

The Calvin 500 Series

DAVID W. HALL

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Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

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To Ann,

who is likely the greatest woman in history
and who has done an absolutely phenomenal job in rearing our three
wonderful children.

Without her love, support, advice, friendship, and humor, these books
and many other aspects of ministry would never have come about.

Contents

I

Standing on the Shoulders of Previous Giants

Below is one man's study of how one man's thought became a movement that changed the political landscape of modernity. Of course, the political involvement and ideas of John Calvin neither can nor should be expected to answer all or even the most begging current questions in this field. Calvin was, to be sure, not a political scientist or a campaign strategist. However, in addition to stirring the republicanizing wave that crested on the shores of most Western governments before and after the Enlightenment, his varied theological applications yield much political prudence. It is that wisdom, both practical and theoretical, that is valued and explicated in this work.

Numerous scholars have traced Calvin's political ideas.[1] Some have focused on the socioeconomic impact (M. Weber), while others have

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1. Among the scholars who have set their hand to explicating Calvin's political thought and impact are: Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: The Age of Reformation*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1898; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953); Robert Kingdon, *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources of Democracy* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1970); Ralph C. Hancock, *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Ithaca,

highlighted his ties to medieval thought (Q. Skinner), his fueling of a burgeoning democratic movement (R. Kingdon), and his impact on the development of Western law and human rights (J. Witte, Jr., D. Kelly et al.); and, of course, critics too numerous to cite accuse him of inhibiting liberty, humanity, or knowledge.

Compared with the heft of Calvin's international and multigenerational influence, seldom have the written words of a pastor fostered so much sustained political impact. Douglas Kelly extols the virtue of the "sober Calvinian assessment of fallen man's propensity to seize, increase, and abuse power for personal ends rather than for the welfare of the many." He further evaluates: "Governmental principles for consent of the governed, and separation and balance of powers are all logical consequences of a most serious and Calvinian view of the biblical doctrine of the fall of man."[2] While probably overstating (thinking of Calvin as "wholly medieval" and as advocating an "aristocratic theocracy in which he was dictator"), notwithstanding, historian Franklin Palm recognized Calvin's contribution as "emphasizing the supremacy of God and the right of resistance to all other authority . . . [H]e did much to curb the powers of kings and to increase the authority of the elected representatives of the people."[3] Further, Palm noticed Calvin's belief in the "right of the individual to remove the magistrate who disobeys the word of God. . . . Consequently, he justified many revolutionary leaders in their belief that God gave them the right to oppose tyranny."

NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 62–81; John Witte Jr., *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); John T. McNeill, "Calvin and Civil Government," in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, ed. Donald McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984); Herbert D. Foster, *Collected Papers of Herbert D. Foster* (privately printed, 1929); John T. McNeill, "John Calvin on Civil Government," in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George L. Hunt (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965); Douglas Kelly, *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992); Franklin Charles Palm, *Calvinism and the Religious Wars* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1932); Karl Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation* (Cleveland: Meridian, 1959); John B. Roney and Martin I. Klauber, *The Identity of Geneva: The Christian Commonwealth, 1564–1864* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998); and Keith L. Griffin, *Revolution and Religion: American Revolutionary War and the Reformed Clergy* (New York: Paragon House, 1994).

2. Kelly, *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World*, 18.
3. Palm, *Calvinism and the Religious Wars*, 32.

Recently, John Witte Jr. has noted how "Calvin developed arresting new teachings on authority and liberty, duties and rights, and church and state that have had an enduring influence on Protestant lands." As a result of its adaptability, this "rendered early modern Calvinism one of the driving engines of Western constitutionalism. A number of our bedrock Western understandings of civil and political rights, social and confessional pluralism, federalism and social contract, and more owe a great deal to Calvinist theological and political reforms."[4]

In various parts of the Calvin corpus of literature, he addresses the following questions, which are of vital interest to modernity and political theorists:

- Is the state or are its governors sovereign?
- What form should the government take?
- Is democracy an absolute?
- Who pays for government and how/how much?
- Who functions as governmental leaders?
- How much of human life should government cover?
- What other valid spheres should the government respect (family, church, school)?
- May citizens resist their government? Under what limitations or conditions?

His political writings were, to be sure, in part the culmination of a tradition. They followed decades of Renaissance thought and sat perched atop centuries of medieval and Scholastic theological reflection on political principles. We would not wish to be understood as suggesting that Calvin worked in isolation in formulating his principles; it was common for leading theologians of the period—leaders in society in that day—to expound matters of state. However, the subsequent expansion and replication of his thought by his followers virtually created a new trajectory of political discourse. It is no exaggeration to observe that *before* Calvin, certain political principles were viewed as radical; while *after* him, they

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4. Witte, *The Reformation of Rights: Law, Religion and Human Rights in Early Modern Calvinism*, 2.

became widely acceptable. Thus, this volume treats not only Calvin's thought but also the subsequent Calvinism, particularly with its impact on politics and human government.

Before observing his own teachings on political matters, we need to look at historical context. To provide this, the pages below in these opening chapters summarize important theological developments prior to him along with a short biography of Calvin.

Augustine

Calvin neither wrote in a vacuum nor originated all ideas frequently associated with his name. He would be quick to confirm that the best ideas stand on the shoulders of previous giants. One of the fathers on whom Calvin relied most was St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), certainly the dominant theologian in many religious matters for centuries. Even in Calvin's day, Augustine's shadow loomed large over discussions about matters of state. The classic work that addresses these matters, *The City of God*, attempted to illustrate the rival and antithetical strains characteristic of belief and unbelief (and, in this case, its impact on politics) throughout the history of mankind. For him, one city was organized around the prowess and pride of man, complete with its materialism, violence, unbelief, lust for domination, and oppression; on the other hand, the *civitatis Dei* was characterized by a profound love for God, valuing of the eternal over the temporal, high ethical standards, and equitable treatment of neighbors. Interestingly, Augustine's very taxonomy draws upon a political unit: the city. The recognition that people would organize themselves in civilized units, such as cities, occurred early. An ardent believer in human depravity and the limitations of the goodness of man, Augustine saw the necessity of government as a restraining mechanism for the good society. Augustine did not expect non-Christian thought to spawn good civil government, nor to be the seat of liberty: "Sinful man [actually] hates the equality of all men under God and, as though he were God, loves to impose his sovereignty on his fellow men. He hates the peace of God which is just and prefers his own peace which is unjust. However, he is powerless

not to love peace of some sort. For, no man's sin is so unnatural as to wipe out all traces whatsoever of human nature."[5]

Augustine's *City of God* was an apology for the Christian church and its ethical values. In answer to the secular critics who sought to blame the fall of the Roman Empire on Christian beliefs and practices (Rome fell during the reign of Honorarius, a Christian emperor), Augustine strove to demonstrate instead that the seeds of societal corruption rested in the very morals and concepts of pre-Christian Roman paganism. For Augustine, Rome's fall was but another chapter in the unfolding providence of God—a theme that would become a Calvinistic calling card. There was no reason to think that the Roman Empire, complete with its stunning collapse, should necessarily be seen as an apocalyptic fulfillment. It was perhaps merely the latest instance of God "bringing princes to naught and reducing the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown . . . than he blows on them and they wither and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff" (Isa. 40:23–24 NIV). Changes among the administrations of the City of Man were but epiphenomena— not the real substrata of important history. Nations would rise and fall, and those accessions and declensions were part of the plan of God. Nonetheless, Augustine refused to categorize a government as exclusively pro-God or anti-God, each having mixed strains of justice and injustice.

One Augustine scholar clarifies: "These two cities, divided on moral ground, co-exist within the same political and geographical limits. The *civitatis terrena* [earthly city], comprising all the cities that have existed, presently exist, and ever will exist in actuality, carries within itself the two mystical cities or societies . . . . Moreover, no external sign reliably identifies them as members of one or the other mystical city. . . . Consequently, the whole of human history, past, present, and future is marked by the co-existence of both moral types in all times and places."[6] George J. Lavere has observed Augustine's refusal to identify strictly the City of God with

5. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 454.
6. George J. Lavere, "The Political Realism of Saint Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980): 138.

a particular nation or institution. In so doing, Augustine does not accept the dilemma maintained prior to his writing.

Prior to Augustine, the two primary options were (1) to follow Origen (185–254) and Eusebius in blessing the Roman Empire as the divine means of God's providence and (2) to follow Hippolytus and other apocalyptists in viewing the Roman Empire as the satanic incarnation of the beast predicted in Revelation 13. Ambrose, Jerome, and other theologians tended to adopt the first view, while persecuted Christians such as Cyprian, Tertullian, and other martyrs tended to see a fundamental enmity between church and state. As Augustine reflected on these two major options, he split the horns of the dilemma and adopted a transformational view. Rather than condoning the Roman state as the means of God's decree, and instead of seeing the state as the instrument of the Antichrist, Augustine preferred to minimize the state's importance in the overall evaluation. Calvin would later broadcast a similar approach.

For Augustine, the task of the state was "remedial and protective," and "a corrective device for the restraint of self-centered human beings."[7] He saw the state as a necessary but unnatural institution, insofar as it was erected primarily to restrain sin after the fall. Human governments, according to Augustine, had their origin in the consequences of the fall, not in the order of creation.

Seeing the Edenic fall as the origination of human governments inherently delimited both the successes as well as defeats that Christians might experience in political matters. Such a view necessarily de-emphasizes the political, or restores it to its proper perspective as less than all-dominating. Christians in the fifth century needed this reminder, as do Christians of all centuries. Too close identification of any earthly *polis* with the heavenly *polis*, as both Augustine and Calvin taught, is a danger to avoid.

In his analysis of the absence of Roman justice, Augustine commented:

> It follows that, wherever true justice is lacking, there cannot be a multitude of men bound together by a mutual recognition of rights; consequently, neither can there be a "people" in the sense of Scipio's definition. Further, if there is no "people," there is no weal of the

7. Ibid., 141.

"people," or commonwealth, but only the weal of a nondescript mob undeserving of the designation "the people" . . . . If a commonwealth is the weal of the people, and if there is no people save one bound together by mutual recognition of rights, and if there are no rights where there is no justice, it follows beyond question that where there is no justice, there is no commonwealth. . . . Justice is the virtue which accords to every man what is his due. What, then, shall we say of a man's "justice" when he takes himself away from the true God and hands himself over to dirty demons? Is this a giving to each what is his due? If a man who takes away a farm from its purchaser and delivers it to another man who has no claim upon it is unjust, how can a man who removes himself from the overlordship of the God who made him and goes into the service of wicked spirits be just?[8]

"What fragment of justice can there be in a man who is not subject to God?" queried Augustine. "And if there is no justice in a man of this kind, then there is certainly no justice, either, in an assembly made up of such men. As a result, there is lacking that mutual recognition of rights which makes a mere mob into a 'people,' a people whose common weal is a commonwealth. . . . Careful scrutiny will show that there is no such good for those who live irreligiously, as all do who serve not God but demons. . . . I consider sufficient to show that, on the basis of the definition itself, a people devoid of justice is not such a people as can constitute a commonwealth."[9] In sum, Rome had substituted power for justice.

Augustine was a pioneer in asserting that the divine will was more foundational in human affairs than even the greatest of human governments. According to Augustine (and Calvin later), "Divine Providence alone explains the establishment of kingdoms among men."[10] Even the Roman Empire did not rise and fall apart from the sovereignty of God, and those attempting to account for the rise and fall of governments were counseled not to ignore the active outworking of the provident will of God in nations: "God allows nothing to remain unordered and he knows all things before they come to pass. He is the Cause of causes, although not

8. Augustine, *City of God*, 469.
9. Ibid., 470–71.
10. Ibid., 99.

of all choices."[11] He applies this directly in that God gave rise to strong leaders in the early Roman Empire: "The power to give a people a kingdom or empire belongs [to God]. . . . The one true God, who never permits the human race to be without the working of his wisdom and his power, granted to the Roman people an empire, when he willed it and as large as he willed it. It was the same God who gave kingdoms to the Assyrians and even to the Persians. . . . It was this God, too, who gave power to me, to Marius and Caesar, to Augustus and Nero, to the Vespacians,"[12] etc. Contrary to the notion of human government being autonomous, Augustine asserted that the sovereign God raises and fells rulers, even though they may not be believers. Nothing escapes his decree.

Augustine also followed the Old Testament precept that the most fundamental unit of government was the home: "[E]very home should be a beginning or fragmentary constituent of a civil community."[13] He spoke of three main spheres of civil government: "First we have the home;[14] then the city; finally the globe. And, of course, as with the perils of the ocean, the bigger the community, the fuller it is of misfortunes."[15]

He also provided an early form of nullification of legitimacy, if a ruler lapsed into tyranny: "But if the prince is unjust or a tyrant, or if the aristocrats are unjust (in which case their group is merely a faction), or if the people themselves are unjust (and must be called, for lack of a better word, a tyrant also), then the commonwealth is not merely bad . . . but is no commonwealth at all. The reason for that is that there is no longer the welfare [the weal] of the people, once a tyrant or a faction seizes it."[16]

Augustine cast an enormous shadow over the next centuries of theology. His impact on Calvin is well known and should not be underestimated. Until the time of Aquinas, even perhaps until the dawn of the Reformation, the political wisdom of Augustine was the dominant paradigm in medieval constructions.

11. Ibid., 103.
12. Ibid., 116–17.
13. Ibid., 463.
14. D. J. MacQueen, "The Origin and Dynamics of Society and the State According to St. Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 4 (1973): 85, describes the family as the *seminarium civitatis*.
15. Augustine, *City of God*, 446.
16. Ibid., 74.

Politico-Theology from Augustine through Aquinas

During what is sometimes referred to as the Dark Ages, there was little recorded development in the theology of the state. The primary reason was that Christendom had attained a consensus on many matters of political custom. Moreover, with the absence of sustained external threat, there was little motivation to further refine Christian views of the state. In pre-democratic Europe, Christian thought was content with a feudal economy, a variety of city-states, and a morality compatible with the Decalogue. Thus, the latter half of the first millennium saw little deviation or progress beyond the concepts of Augustine and little challenge to the loose premodern confederations that were more similar to Old Testament forms of government than modern bureaucracies.

However, it is difficult to cite either a novel development or a political theologian of note between AD 600 and 1000. Most of the systematic theology (and contrary to much modernistic hubris, there was much systematic theologizing) in this period was devoted to fundamental matters of anthropology, soteriology, and polemics, rather than heavily skewed toward ethical or political concerns. Meanwhile, the market was free not so much by design, but because it was virtually unmonitored.

Medieval views on the state had progressed rather unobtrusively over time. Following his crowning as king of England in 1066, William the Conqueror ordered that popes not be recognized in England without his approval, a striking retreat for the separation of church and state. As an illustration of the commingling of powers, the Constitutions of Clarendon (1164) under Henry II were ratified by the English clergy, who voluntarily restored to the king civil authority over the church. This intrusion was protested by Thomas á Becket, who left the realm in protest—only to be murdered six years later.[17] A little later in Germany, Emperor Frederick I (reigned 1152–90) asserted that the state was of divine origin, as was the church, therefore coining the phrase "Holy Roman Empire" to signify the Christianization of the state. Carl Volz notes: "The revival of Roman law by Irnerius at Bologna around 1100 provided a theory of temporal

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17. Carl Volz, *The Church of the Middle Ages* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 109.

sovereignty that elaborated on Justinian's Code, which had said, 'God set the Imperial dispensation at the head of human affairs . . . [and t]he Emperor is not bound by statutes.'"[18]

John of Salisbury

Until the twelfth-century work by John of Salisbury, the political theology of Augustine reigned over Western formulations.[19] Twentieth-century theologian J. T. McNeill asserted that virtually all the political theorizing between Cicero's *De Republica* (56 BC) and Jean Bodin's *The Republic* (1576) was written by Christians with definite first principles and biblical perspectives in mind. As a consequence, "it was inevitable that theological writers should make political theory a province of theology."[20]

Many of the ideas espoused by Augustine were echoed in John of Salisbury's pre-Reformation work *Policraticus*. In several key respects, John of Salisbury was probably a more accurate precursor to Calvin than was Aquinas. In seven books comprising a quarter-million words, John of Salisbury (1115–80) provided the Middle Ages with a courageous argument to limit government. Thus, even prior to the Magna Carta (1215) and Aquinas, John of Salisbury affirmed that truth and obedience were not owed to an unjust ruler. He continued Augustine's line of reasoning when he wrote: "It is not permitted to flatter a friend, but it is permitted to delight the ears of a tyrant. For in fact him whom it is permitted to flatter, it is permitted to slay. Furthermore, it is not only permitted, but it is also equitable and just to slay tyrants."[21]

He carefully delineated the difference between the tyrant and the lawful ruler, saying that "the latter is obedient to law and rules his people by a will that places itself at their service, and administers rewards and burdens within the republic under the guidance of law in a way favorable to the vindication of his eminent post. . . . While individuals merely look after individual affairs,

18. Ibid., 111.

19. J. T. McNeill, "Calvinism and European Politics in Historical Perspective," in *Calvinism and the Political Order*, ed. George L. Hunt (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 11.

20. Ibid.

21. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of the Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 25.

princes are concerned with the burdens of the entire community."[22] In the same section, he concluded that "the authority of the prince is determined by the authority of right, and truly submission to the laws of princes is greater than the imperial title, so it is the case that the prince ought to imagine himself permitted to do nothing which is inconsistent with the equity of justice."[23] Thus, a moral standard was to govern political conduct and limit the scope of the ruling class. The prince, as Calvinists would later insist, was to be a servant to the law and not employ the law for his own pleasures.

Furthermore, John of Salisbury urged the prince to follow the Deuteronomic pattern and to keep the Mosaic law before him as inviolable. "All censures of law are void," wrote John, "if they do not bear the image of divine law."[24] Thus, the canonical Scriptures were to inform the practice of politics. The prince was to keep God's moral norms and guard his law. Upon coronation, the prince, following Old Testament precedent, was to write by hand a copy of the law and draw applications from it. He was not to stray to the left or to the right of it; the ruler's duty was laid out according to biblical standards.

During the century after John of Salisbury, the Magna Carta (1215), the formation of the Helvetic Confederation (1291), and the proto-Scottish independence movement offered further expressions of premodern republicanism. With an Augustinian plow, these events further tilled the soil for Calvin's work.[25]

The Magna Carta

Although it is seldom admitted by secularists of our day, medieval views were fairly well developed and robust. One of the highlights of medieval government was the Magna Carta.[26] When clause 39 of the Magna

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22. Ibid., 28.

23. Ibid., 29.

24. Ibid., 41.

25. Another important force in undermining excessively centralized governments was the Conciliar movement. Beginning with the Councils of Pisa (1409) and Constance (1415), and leading up to the Reformation, various ecclesiastical trends, such as the Conciliar movement, either reflected or led the incipient decentralizing tendencies.

26. Volz summarizes some of the tension surrounding this document, which established the principle that the king is under the law: "King John is especially known for his struggle with Pope Innocent III over the selection of the archbishop of Canterbury. Exercising the

Carta asserted that no person, regardless of status or condition, should be removed from his land, "nor taken, nor imprisoned, nor disinherited, nor put to death, without being brought in Answer by due Process of Law," that sentiment became so universal as to be contained later in:

- British law ("No freeman shall be taken or imprisoned, or be disseised of his freehold, or liberties . . . but by lawful judgment of his peers"; Magna Carta, clause 29, 1225 charter);
- American Colonial law, e.g., the 1641 Massachusetts Body of Liberties, the 1647 Rhode Island code of laws, and charters from South Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey all contained references to this notion;[27]
- The Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution ("No person shall be held to answer for a capital . . . crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, . . . nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law"); and
- The United Nations' mid-twentieth-century Universal Declaration of Human Rights ("All are equal before the law and are entitled without discrimination to equal protection of the law. . . . No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing . . ."; Articles 7, 9, 10).[28]

This revolutionary advance against political monopolism occurred when British nobles forced King John to approve the document with his seal at the meadow at Runnymede, south of Windsor, on June 15, 1215.[29]

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long established prerogative of kings, John insisted on his choice, the canons of Canterbury chose a second candidate, but the pope's man, Stephen Langton, finally became archbishop. During this struggle the pope placed England under the interdict (1208) and excommunicated the king (1212)." Volz, *The Church of the Middle Ages*, 109.

27. Helen Cam, *Magna Carta—Event or Document?* (London: Selden Society, 1965), 25. William Swindler notes that eleven of the thirteen original Colonies reiterated some aspect of the Magna Carta. William F. Swindler, *Magna Carta: Legend and Legacy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 224.

28. Quoted in Sir Ivor Jennings, *Magna Carta and Its Influence in the World Today* (Prepared for British Information Services by the Central Office of Information, 1965), inside back cover.

29. Some historians debate whether the Magna Carta should be dated at 1215 or at 1225. King Henry III's charter of 1225 is the most frequently quoted in British constitutional

Shortly after the coercion subsided, King John asked Pope Innocent III to revoke the charter (which he did on August 24, 1215), but when John died a year later, the nobles rapidly reissued similar versions of the original under the name of England's young Henry III. Later, in exchange for permission to increase taxation, Henry III, of his own volition, reissued similar charters in 1225. This 1225 version rests at the head of the British statute roll. Since that time, this agreement between the ruler and the ruled has been acknowledged as a pillar of free government. Helen Cam comprehended the unreversed advance in political wisdom portended by this event at the Magna Carta's 750th anniversary: "Never before had a king of England been compelled to authenticate a document which, as he said, took the crown off his head and subjected him to five and twenty overkings. The event, without precedent, set a precedent."[30]

Reflecting the medieval theology of its time, this document was a benchmark of civic liberties, rooted in the Christianity of the day. The Great Charter addressed subjects ranging from inheritance laws to the payment of widows' debts, and from fair standards of trade (using only the "London quarter" for the measure of wine) to judicial protocols. This signal event, rather than indicating the crudity of unenlightened people (clause 42 included an early form of open immigration policy, with the exception that clause 51 banished foreign knights and mercenaries), was a sign of maturity in political thought. Moreover, this thirteenth-century British landmark was an example of the impact of Christian teaching on matters of government.

Witnessing to its religious fabric, the Magna Carta's preamble explicitly refers to the counsel of the clergy, including Stephen, Archbishop of Canterbury, and other bishops. Some experts believe that if the charter was not actually drafted by Archbishop Stephen Langton, he had at least been the animating force behind it.[31] It begins with an overt religious affirmation ("John, by the Grace of God, King of England"), and places

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history, although the original (in 1215) was no doubt the first attempt to articulate these liberties. See Jennings, *Magna Carta*, 9–10. This article refers to the original 1215 version. Cam (and others; cf. Swindler, *Legend and Legacy*, 82) dates the completion of the original agreement at June 19, 1215. Cam, *Event or Document?*, 9.

30. Cam, *Event or Document?*, 3.

31. Swindler, *Legend and Legacy*, 75, 82.

the signers in impressive company for an eternal purpose: "We, in the presence of God, and for the salvation of our own soul, and the souls of all our ancestors . . . to the honor of God, and the exaltation of the Holy Church and amendment of our Kingdom . . ." The purpose of the charter was to confirm certain essential constitutional agreements for posterity. Civic instability and flux were to be avoided by written covenants such as this one.

One of the first clauses granted freedom to the English church to elect its own leaders—an idea that was heretical for its day but one that later stood at the vanguard in other Reformation movements. The free church was to have a prominent role in politics, and one of the clauses even guaranteed that the king could summon archbishops, bishops, abbots, and other nobles for counsel. One of the earliest instances of the idea of legitimate resistance to control without consent was exhibited in this 1215 document. Further, the Magna Carta made plain that trials were to be fair, fines were not to be levied for inconsequential matters (as if the state were all-important), personal property was not to be confiscated without remuneration, taxes were to be raised only by "common counsel," and imprisonment was not to be allowed without "legal judgment of [the person's] peers or by the laws of the land." Moreover, previous unjust fines or confiscations of property were to be remitted, and a representative council of twenty-five barons was created "for GOD and for the amendment of our kingdom."

This pinnacle of premodern thought broke ground, although it did not create an international movement at first. Only with the return in Calvin's time to "biblical religion and its distinctive views of Deity, nature, man, and government, did people begin to grasp the idea of limited power in the state. . . . It was in this period that biblical attitudes toward secular power, and many other things, suffused the whole of European culture, and thereby created the institutions of the free society."[32] The Swiss city councils in Basel, Zurich, Bern, Lausanne, and Geneva, which blossomed centuries later, were the fruit of the Magna Carta.[33] Winston Churchill

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32. M. Stanton Evans, *The Theme Is Freedom: Religion, Politics and the American Tradition* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1994), 150–51.

33. Of course, the Magna Carta came about only after John was pressured into returning liberties to lower magistrates, similar to struggles documented in later chapters in this

estimated later, in a 1956 quote: "Throughout the document it is implied that there is a law which is above the King and which even he must not break. This reaffirmation of a supreme law and its expression in a general charter is the great work of the Magna Carta; and this alone justifies the respect with which men have held it."

Others would follow the path pioneered at Runnymede. Later, William Wallace (even if not quite as swashbuckling as Mel Gibson's *Braveheart*) would lead the Scots to resist another English king. What began as a council of twenty-five barons at Runnymede's meadow later expanded into a global movement supporting responsive and free government.

Puritans in seventeenth-century England would revive the Magna Carta as part of their justification for the overthrow of monarchy. Prior to the surge of Puritan political thought in England, medieval advances had set the stage for limited reform. In *A History of Political Theories from Luther to Montesquieu*, William Dunning argued that the propriety of councils to blunt the power of tyranny had become an acceptable notion by Calvin's time. From the Magna Carta on, these political notions would dominate. Earlier, medieval constitutionalists had asserted that "the king, while subject to no man, is always subject to law."[34] Notwithstanding, Dunning admitted that such rights of Englishmen prior to the seventeenth century were neither well defined nor clearly expressed in constitutions. The period from these medieval constitutionalists and the Magna Carta until the seventeenth century saw halting strides toward popular sovereignty. Principled formulation for limited government, however, was not grounded in lasting *theoria* nor accepted by the masses until after the Reformation.

Thomas Aquinas

Among the works of the great Scholastic theologians, the fullest and most mature discussions of these matters occur in those of Thomas Aquinas (1224–74). Paul Sigmund summarizes as follows:

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volume. To put it succinctly: few rulers voluntarily cede political power back to citizens, unless held accountable.

34. William Dunning, *A History of Political Theories from Luther to Montesquieu* (New York: Macmillan, 1905), 198.

In the century before Aquinas wrote, the intellectual life of the West had suddenly come alive. Philosophical speculation and argument developed rapidly, stimulated by the teaching and writing of Peter Abelard in Paris. John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* was evidence of the revival of political theory. Gratian's canon law collection (1139) provided the texts for the use by canon lawyers in the service of the papal centralization. . . . The twelfth-century revival of the study of Roman law at Bologna helped to give the emergent states of Western Europe a legal foundation. . . . In England a "common law" had been forged by the king's justices. . . . The first representative institutions were beginning to meet in inchoate form.[35]

Aquinas composed two works that discussed matters of state: *Politicorum Expositio* (*Commentary on Politics of Aristotle*, 1265–71) and *De Regimine Principum* (*On Kingship* or *The Governance of Rulers*) in 1272–74.[36] His *Summa Theologica* also addressed the status and nature of divine law. Aquinas argued that the precepts of the Decalogue, if rightly understood, were indispensable.[37] In fact, Aquinas's political theory sought to preserve the absolutes of the moral law as long as they were applied consistently with the intent of the Author: "Precepts admit of dispensation, when there occurs a particular case in which, if the letter of the law be observed, the intention of the lawgiver is frustrated."[38] An example of the application of the "general equity" of the law is: "The slaying of a man is forbidden in the decalogue, in so far as it bears the character of something undue."[39] Thus, capital punishment was permitted, but not to the overthrowing of the intent of the sixth commandment.

Aquinas also recognized that the judicial precepts of the law were not necessarily to be replicated by all states: "But if the state or nation

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35. Paul Sigmund, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), xiv.

36. Ibid. Sigmund states that Aquinas was asked by the king of Cyprus to write this work in 1265. Aquinas worked on this until the king's death in 1267, when Thomas apparently set the work aside. Cf. ibid., 14.

37. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2nd ed. (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1921), Q 100, arts. 5–8.

38. Ibid., Q 100, art. 8.

39. Ibid.

pass to another form of government, the laws must needs be changed. For democracy, which is government by the people, demands different laws from those of oligarchy."[40] However, Aquinas also believed that "the best ordering of a state or of any nation is to be ruled by a king: because this kind of government approaches nearest in resemblance to the Divine government, whereby God rules the world from the beginning."[41] Aquinas considered rulers essential insofar as "man needs someone to direct him towards his end."[42] Interestingly, he interpreted Proverbs 11:14, "Where there is no ruler, the people will be dispersed"—a hierarchical interpretation considerably different from most modern translations.

St. Thomas is more accurately understood, however, as advocating a constitutional monarchy synthesized with certain democratic elements. Like Calvin after him, for the best ordering of the state, Aquinas suggested that the form of government should combine the best elements of various schemes:

> Accordingly, the best form of government is in a state or kingdom, wherein one is given the power to preside over all; while under him are others having governing powers: and yet a government of this kind is shared by all, both because all are eligible to govern, and because the rulers are chosen by all. For this is the best form of polity, being partly kingdom, since there is one at the head of all; partly aristocracy, in so far as a number of persons are set in authority; partly democracy, i.e., government by the people, in so far as the rulers can be chosen from the people, and the people have the right to choose their rulers.[43]

Aquinas, as would Calvin, viewed the Mosaic government as an early incarnation of democracy: "Such was the form of government established by the Divine Law. For Moses and his successors governed the people in such a way that each of them was ruler over all. . . . Moreover, seventy-two men were chosen, who were elders in virtue . . . so that there was an

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40. Ibid., Q 104, art. 3.
41. Ibid., Q 105, art. 1.
42. Thomas Aquinas, "De regimine principum," book 1, chapter 1.
43. Ibid., Q 105, art. 1. In 1556, John Ponet would affirm: "For where that mixed state was exercised, there did the commonwealth longest continue."

element of aristocracy. But it was a democratical government in so far as the rulers were chosen from all the people."[44]

The purpose of government for Aquinas was "to promote the welfare of the territory . . . Thus the more effective a government is in promoting unity in peace, the more useful it will be. . . . Therefore government by one person is better than by many."[45] He also averred that "in nature, government is always by one." St. Thomas argued that human communities were best ruled by an individual, and those that were enjoyed the most peace, justice, and affluence. Sounding very Aristotelian, Aquinas opined, "Just as government by a king is best, so government by a tyrant is the worst. Democracy stands in opposition to polity as indicated above, since both are governments by the many. Oligarchy is opposed to aristocracy, since both are governments by the few. Kingship is the opposite of tyranny since both are governments by one person."[46] Following this scheme, he concludes that "tyranny is more harmful than oligarchy and oligarchy is more harmful than democracy."

Following his review of various forms of government in the Roman Empire, he argues in *On Kingship* that tyranny is more likely to evolve from a mutant democracy than from even a poor monarchy. Aquinas both warned of the great dangers that can attend excessive democracies and cautioned that frequently a subsequent tyrant takes his predecessor's oppression to new and higher levels. In his *Summa*, however, he noted: "A tyrannical law, since it is not in accordance with reason, is not a law in the strict sense, but rather a perversion of law. However, it has something of the character of law to the extent that it intends that the citizens should be good. It only has the character of a law because it is a dictate of a superior over his subjects and is aimed at their obeying law—which is a good that is not absolute but only relative to a specific regime."[47]

St. Thomas believed that "by its nature sedition is a mortal sin and all the more serious because sedition opposes the common good rather than the private good." Notwithstanding, "Tyrannical government is unjust because it is directed not to the common good but to the private good of

44. Ibid., Q 105, art. 1.
45. Sigmund, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 17.
46. Ibid., 18.
47. Ibid., 48.

the ruler. . . . Therefore the overthrow of this kind of government does not have the character of sedition—unless perhaps it produces such disorder that the society under the tyrant suffers greater harm from the resulting disturbance than from the tyrant's rule."[48] Earlier in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* (1256), Aquinas stated that Christians were not obligated to obey "someone whom it is legitimate and even praiseworthy to kill." Antedating the Reformation teaching by Theodore Beza (Calvin's disciple) and the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*,[49] Aquinas argued that Christians are "obliged to obey authority that comes from God but not that which is not from God. . . . Whoever seizes power by violence does not become a true ruler and lord, and therefore it is permissible when the possibility exists for someone to reject that rulership . . . ."[50]

Aquinas was in many ways the pinnacle of medieval theology of state. The Middle Ages were full of growth and development in political theology. Rather than adopting the historical revisionism, which frequently portrays medieval clerics as "agents of repression," the medieval church proved to be "the institution in Western history that did the most to advance the cause of constitutional statecraft. This resulted from its constant readiness, in the spirit of the Hebrew prophets, to challenge the might of kings and emperors if they transgressed the teachings of religion."[51]

Pre-Calvinist Micro-Republics

By the fourteenth century, weak institutions began to wear thin. Corruption in both civil and ecclesiastical affairs began to call out for reform. The early Renaissance was an expression, in part, of the needed reform in economics and politics. With the rise of guilds and with lurches

48. Ibid., 165.
49. Junius Brutus wrote: "The Holy Scripture does teach that God reigns by his own proper authority and kings by derivation—God from himself, kings from God—that God has a jurisdiction proper; kings are his delegates. It follows then, that the jurisdiction of God has not limits, that of kings is bounded; that the power of God is infinite, that of kings confined; that the kingdom of God extends itself to all places, that of kings is restrained within the confines of certain countries." Junius Brutus, *A Defense of Liberty against Tyrants*, trans. Harold J. Laski (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1963), 67–68.
50. Sigmund, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 65–66, n8.
51. Evans, *The Theme Is Freedom*, 150–51.

toward free markets, the feudal system would eventually be terminated. Corresponding political changes would follow the economic revolutions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Premodernism would become characterized by open markets, a consistent trend away from monarchies, and an incipient egalitarianism.

One of the most advanced treatises prior to the Reformation era was Marsiglio of Padua's *Defensor Pacis* (*Defender of the Peace*, 1324). Rousas Rushdoony summarized this work in terms of three theses: (1) jurisdiction over the state was based on reason, rather than revelation; the province of the state, therefore, became a matter of philosophy rather than theology; (2) the state's supreme function was to suppress strife, with coercion elevated above other values ("Marsilius sought every doctrine possible to separate the state from any moral oversight and correction by the church. Thus, the state as naked power was for him, as against the role of the church, the true salt of the earth and the preserver of society."); and (3) voluntarism—the will of the people—was the basis for the state's policy, along with detachment from the church.[52] Advocating that the state receive its authority from the people was, in some ways, a precursor to modern democracies. Among Marsiglio's theses were these two: "Only the whole body of citizens, or the weightier part thereof, is the human legislator; An elective ruler, or any other official, is dependent only upon election by the body having the authority therefor, and needs no other confirmation."[53] According to Marsiglio of Padua, the chief goal of governors was to keep the peace in a state—regardless of method or value.

Along with the refinements of medieval political formulations, the Italian Renaissance also brought advances in political formats that prepared the way for Calvin's thought. Students of history are frequently asked to trace societal developments by going back in time to identify the period of history before which a certain institution existed. If one is asked to identify early models of republican governance prior to Calvin, one finds few lasting examples. While Rome is often suggested as a pattern, it was

52. Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1986), 121.
53. Volz, *The Church of the Middle Ages*, 160.

actually a monarchy led by a *caesar*, often a military leader. During the first millennium, virtually no republican experiment lasted. It is only after developments of the thirteenth century that a few micro-republics came into existence.

The most noteworthy were the Italian city-states of Florence, Venice, and Milan. If one traversed back in history, one can scarcely identify a micro-republic (much less a macro-republic) prior to 1400, except Florence or Venice or one of the Swiss city-states below. These were also powerfully aided and transformed by free trade as much as anything. The Orient, the Southern Hemisphere, the Middle East, Asia, and the yet-undiscovered North America had no republics. Western Europe prior to 1400 could list only the following as tentative experiments of the republicanism that Calvinism would so firmly establish: the few Italian city-states, the beginnings of parliamentary government in England with the Magna Carta, an inchoate Scottish independence movement, and the Swiss cantons that would both serve and fuel Calvin's developments in political matters.

Pre-Calvinist Tokens of Swiss Independence (1300–1500)

To fully appreciate Calvin's work, his own context is important. Unlike the case in some modern democracies, faith and politics in Switzerland have a long history of beneficial interaction. By the tenth century, the early Swiss cantons had established a pattern of submission only to local authorities, unwilling to bend to the decrees of foreign clerics. By the late thirteenth century, three cantons would embolden themselves with this tradition and form one of the first republican confederations in modern history.

While the name "Switzerland" was not used until the fifteenth century, as a confederation of three small but fiercely independent communities (Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden), Switzerland began as a defensive pact toward the end of the thirteenth century. These three city-states united to defend one another against Austrian attack. Beginning "In the name of God, Amen," in good Old Testament fashion, those three cantons swore an oath that laid the foundation for Swiss

republicanism. The August 1, 1291, act was intended to "endure forever, God willing." It was in this context that the German term *Eidgenosse* ("Confederates") first appeared. This term would later become short-hand for a group in Calvin's day, the Huguenots, and the name itself referred to political beliefs as well as to religious commitments.[54]

As early as the mid-thirteenth century, Lucerne had begun steps toward freedom. In her "Sworn Brief" of 1252 certain democratic liberties were enunciated. These early cantons, or small states, retained autonomy over their local affairs, and kept their union primarily to resist external threats. Between 1291 and the 1490s, the confederating movement picked up steam among Alpine communities. The 1291 alliance, originally adopted to protect the three Alpine communities from foreign knights, went untested for twenty-four years until two thousand Austrian knights attempted to take the Morgarten Pass in 1315.[55]

Following the repulsion of those Austrian invaders, other cantons decided to ally in a protective confederacy. The next canton to ally with the Helvetic Confederation was Zurich, which had already secured limited self-rule from the Hapsburgs by the 1304 "Brief of Rights of the Burghers of Zurich." Zurich experimented with a conciliar form of government, composed of thirty-six burghers, twelve of whom were elected each year. On May 1, 1351, Zurich joined the "perpetual league" (with the four previous cantons), becoming the fifth member. The cantons of Glarus and Zug were added in 1352; Bern was added in 1353. A significant pre-Reformation instance of federalism was embodied in the 1393 Covenant of Sempach—an indication that Switzerland as much as any other land pioneered covenantal structures that would develop into something even grander after the Reformation.

By the turn of the fourteenth century, a total of eight sovereign city-states were allied together. The city of Bern even had a Great Council

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54. W. Carlos Martyn noted that the etymology for this term either extended to this word for "confederate," or was related to a Genevan leader, Hugues Capet (*A History of the Huguenots* [New York: American Tract Society, 1865], 224). J. H. Merle D'Aubigne agreed that the term bore primarily political connotation prior to the Reformation. The name was later used in France as a slur to connote those who were influenced by republican and Calvinistic ideas. See also Donald R. Kelley, *Francois Hotman: A Revolutionary's Ordeal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 116.

55. John McPhee, *La Place de la Concorde Suisse* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Gioux, 1983), 48.

of Two Hundred (which Geneva would imitate in Calvin's day),[56] and an early separation of powers existed among elected rulers in both Bern and Zurich. These councils, according to McCrackan, began to curtail oligarchical power, began meeting more frequently, and were declared supreme, constituting an early appellate court structure.[57]

A century before Calvin, the communities of Appenzell (1452) and St. Gallen (1454) were admitted to the Swiss Confederation. Meanwhile, the confederation, truly signaling nation status, had treaties with several German imperial cities and France (1452).[58] Even though it contained several autocratic provisos, the Covenant of Stans (1481) continued the republican advances begun by the Priest's Charter and the Covenant of Sempach. Thirteen cantons, including Fribourg and Basel, were allied by 1513 as Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli moved onto the stage.[59]

Following a shocking defeat by the French Army in 1515, the thirteen Swiss cantons inaugurated a tradition of maintaining neutrality.[60] Thereafter, religious diversity among the various cantons reinforced the policy of neutrality. With disparate resources and religious commitments, it was impossible to rally or commit the entire confederacy to foreign wars. Still, they had nearly ironclad ties to mutual defense, led by cantonal militia—a tradition that continues to this day.

The Setting for Calvin's Reformation: 1450–1550

Prior to the Reformation, the Conciliar movement within Roman Catholicism provided an early glimpse into what would become the modern norm of divided and limited powers. Gathering various clerics together to give advice or counsel to a hierarchical leader was nothing short of

56. W. D. McCrackan, *The Rise of the Swiss Republic* (1901; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1970), 185. One of Geneva's earliest historians, Francois Bonivard (*Chroniques de Geneve*, 1867), notes that Syndics were already being chosen by 1447 and that a General Assembly was already in existence between the first and second pacts with Bern (1:217).

57. McCrackan, *The Rise of the Swiss Republic*, 185.

58. Ibid., 219.

59. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (1910; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 8:235.

60. McPhee, *La Place de la Concorde Suisse*, 52.

revolutionary. Despite the fact that the Swiss, the Irish, and a few others had already begun the practice in selective areas, it was virtually heretical for its day; this collegial model was a harbinger of the emerging trend away from centralization. Many would not think of such isolated religious councils as so important, but the inner dynamic of the ruler meeting with the ruled, often depicted as a Reformation contribution, began to grow within the church as the pre-Reformers, such as Jan Hus, risked their lives in pursuit of faithfulness and freedom.

Though medieval sources contained precedents for resistance to tyranny, Protestants became especially animated in their search for theological foundations for enhanced democratic expressions.[61] German historian Karl Holl summarized the major effects of Reformation thought as "on the one hand, a deepening of the theory of the state; on the other, a definite limitation of its powers." Moreover, he conceded respect to the Reformation "for being the first of all in modern times to have prepared the way for freedom of conscience in the state. All further victories with respect to tolerance rest on this first step."[62]

Of course, history does not always shift course abruptly. Often one trend blurs into another, revealing the new trajectory only long after the fact. These turning points are few and far between, and advance is often at an uneven pace. However, the quantum leaps from the years 1500 to 1580 were so monumental as to deserve notice as signal contributions. Calvin and his cohorts would be at the epicenter of this world-historical movement, and Geneva's International Monument to the Reformation memorializes these contributions. Theologians such as William Farel, John Knox, Theodore Beza, and John Calvin—larger-than-life figures on that monument's limestone wall—were important players in the political dramas that would unfold. Some understanding of their political principles is essential for an accurate understanding of Calvin's work.

Among their first tasks would be to challenge and alter several previously accepted dogmas; one of the more formidable hurdles for the

61. M. Stanton Evans believes that the movement from medieval to modern doctrine can be demonstrated by citing only Roman Catholic spokesmen. Evans, *The Theme Is Freedom*, 173.

62. Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*, 45.

Reformers to overcome was a long-standing article of Christian belief. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, the beginning point for most theologies of government rested on the Christian citizen's absolute obligation to submit to the civil ruler. Since Augustine's assertions of the providence of God had been taken so seriously, little rationale existed to overthrow a ruler.

Over time, limitations to this principle of unqualified submission became increasingly acceptable. In light of some of the excesses of civil rulers, most Protestants eventually approved a modified (passive) resistance if the ruler mandated something explicitly opposed to their consciences. Despite eventual Protestant unity on this issue, initially there was a division on the question whether it was permissible to *actively* resist the civil magistrate. And if such active resistance is warranted, to whom is this responsibility entrusted: the masses or the lower magistrates?

The tradition of John Knox (one of Calvin's disciples), for example, held that people should revolt against a tyrannical ruler, even going so far as to permit deposition and execution.[63] In 1558, Knox's co-pastor in Geneva, Christopher Goodman, published *How Superior Powers Ought to be Obeyed of their subjects; and Wherein they may lawfully by God's Word be disobeyed and resisted*. This Reformation manifesto affirmed:

> When kings or rulers become blasphemers of God, oppressors and murderers of their subjects, they ought no more to be accounted kings or lawful magistrates, but as private men to be examined, accused, condemned and punished by the law of God. . . . When magistrates cease to do their duty, the people are as it were without magistrates. . . . If princes do right and keep promise with you, then do you owe them all humble obedience. If not, ye are discharged and your study ought to be in this case how ye may depose and punish according to the law such rebels against God and oppressors of their country.[64]

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63. Keith L. Griffin, *Revolution and Religion*, in *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1895), 4:415–16.

64. See Patrick Poole's edition, posted at: http://www.constitution.org/cmt/goodman/obeyed.htm. A reprint (the original edition was published in Geneva in 1558) of this key work was released by Charles H. McIlwain, ed. (New York: The Facsimile Text Society by Columbia University Press, 1931). McIlwain, who ranked it as one of the most important political writings of the period, credited it with marking "the first definite shift of opinion

Yet Guillaume Farel and John Knox would not popularize those views until two other key leaders, Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli, had prepared the soil.

Martin Luther

It is difficult to appreciate Calvin and Farel without first understanding Luther.[65] Even though differing with the later Calvinistic developments, Martin Luther (1483–1546) believed that God had ordained both church and state as separate but legitimate spheres. Luther thought of these two basic institutions as each wielding its own sword: the church wielding the sword of church discipline, the state wielding the sword of civil force. So long as each tended its respective business, all would work well.[66] Luther's construction, however, did not resolve issues stemming from entanglements and confusion between the spheres.

German historian Karl Holl noted how Luther saw the state as indispensable: "Luther does not attempt to justify the right and duty of the state merely on the basis of its function to suppress evil. . . . The real Luther justifies the right of the state not by its negative aspects, but by its positive ones."[67] The German Reformer, according to Holl, "derives the state, not from below, but exclusively from above, from God's plan of salvation [and] insists on its distinct character as a state whose essence is authority." But, attributing to Luther a large role in the advance of civic freedom of conscience, Holl noted that "it was the Reformation that first set a rigid limit to the absolute power of the state."[68]

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under the pressure of religion away from the doctrines of almost unlimited obedience which characterize[d] the political thought of the first half of the century."

65. Skinner, *The Age of Reformation*, 2:4–8, provides a useful summary of Luther's thought. He depicts Luther as establishing "a decisive limitation on the general duty of political obedience" (ibid., 17).

66. For a helpful summary of Luther's thought, see Edgar M. Carlson, "Luther's Conception of Government," *Church History* 15 (1946): 257–70. The two "regimes," according to Carlson, are "the center from which Luther's utterances on social and political issues must be understood." See also the fullest modern study, W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984).

67. Holl, *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation*, 50.

68. Ibid., 51.

One of Luther's earliest commentaries on these matters was his 1520 letter to the German nobility. Addressed to the duke of Saxony, this treatise intended to set forth the relationship between church and state or, in Luther's terms, "secular authority and its Sword."[69] Specifically, the treatise sought to answer this query: "how can a Christian use be made of it [secular authority] and how far do Christians owe it obedience?"

Luther was trying to correct defective interpretations of New Testament passages[70] advocated by either Anabaptist groups or political leaders. Some interpreted such passages as prima facie evidence that resisting the civil government was always illegitimate. Luther, however, defined the problem in the following way: "These and others of the same sort are hard sayings, and sound as if Christians in the New Covenant were to have no secular Sword." Luther saw twin defects: "they [governors] really think they can command their subjects whatever they like and do with them as they please. And their subjects are just as deluded, and believe (wrongly) that they must obey them in all things." Even in his day, governors were calling for censorship of literature—in this case, his translation of the Bible into German— which Luther condemned as an unwarranted intrusion of the state into a matter of privacy. Not only was this tantamount to putting "themselves in God's place to make themselves masters of consciences and belief," said Luther, but it was essentially "undertak[ing] to give lessons to the Holy Spirit from what is in their addled brains." The early Protestant Reformers intuitively realized that government was innately limited and must be contained.

Rather than having an obligation to obey such usurpations, Luther saw these governors as "the devil's scales," or "scoundrels," unworthy of obedience. Luther took his stand; he could do no other: "Now, because the raging of these fools tends to the destruction of Christian faith, the denial of God's Word and blasphemy against God's majesty, I can no longer stand idly by and merely watch my ungracious lords and angry princes. I must resist them, even if it is only with words."

69. The source for the following quotations from Luther is Martin Luther, *On Secular Authority: How Far Does the Obedience Owed to It Extend?* (1523), repr., *Premise*, 5, no. 1 (February 1998), now posted at: http://www.calvin500.org/tracts/Luther.html.

70. E.g., Matt. 5:25, 39–40; Rom. 12:19.

Luther's first aim in this tract was to demonstrate that the state had its origin in the will and ordinance of God and was not founded upon a purely secular basis.[71] He indicated that the sword, a synecdoche for governmental coercion, was decreed by God first to provide protection of human life after Cain murdered Abel.

Centuries before James Madison echoed these thoughts, Luther proceeded to explain that if the world were a perfect place, civil government would not be needed ("And if all the world were true Christians, that is, if everyone truly believed, there would be neither need nor use for princes, kings, lords, the Sword or law, what would there be for them to do?"). The need for civil government, therefore, rested in the corruption of human nature. "Where all wrongs are endured willingly and what is right is done freely," wrote Luther, "there is no place for quarrelling, disputes, courts, punishments, laws or the Sword."

In a classic statement of his "two kingdoms" doctrine, Luther concurred with Calvin about human depravity:

> If there were no law and government, then seeing that all the world is evil and that scarcely one human being in a thousand is a true Christian, people would devour each other and no one would be able to support his wife and children, feed himself and serve God. The world would become a desert. And so God has ordained the two governments, the spiritual [government] which fashions true Christians and just persons through the Holy Spirit under Christ, and the secular government which holds the Unchristian and wicked in check and forces them to keep the peace outwardly and be still, like it or not.

Luther reinforced this distinction in these terms: *finis politiae est pax mundi; finis ecclesiae est pax aeterna.* By that, he meant, "The end purpose of the government is temporal peace, while the ultimate end of the church is not peace and comfort on earth . . . but everlasting peace. Caesar does not care whether I die a blessed death and come to everlasting life, nor can he be of help against death, but must

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71. For a brief summary of the same teaching, see Luther's sermon on John 10:11–16 in John Nicholas Lenker, ed., *Sermons of Martin Luther: The Church Postils* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 3:35–39.

himself die just like me. Death comes to him as to the lowliest beggar. Caesar's jurisdiction pertains to this temporal, transitory life; but where this temporal life ceases, there the rule of the Christian church intervenes."[72]

Luther encouraged an appreciation of civil government, urging his listeners to "value the Sword and power as much as the married state, or cultivating the soil, or any other trade instituted by God." As a person could serve God in any vocation, "if his neighbor's need demands it, so too he can serve God by the [exercise of] power, and he ought to do it, when his neighbor needs it." Analogously, he argued that, even though Christ did not bear the sword himself, "it is enough that he did not forbid or abolish it but rather confirmed it, just as it is enough that he did not abolish the married state but confirmed it, albeit he himself took no wife and taught nothing about it."

Still, Luther fell short of supporting resistance to an evil government—a later, Calvinistic distinctive. Luther said, "Where the secular authorities fail to do so, the Christian should allow himself to be abused and maltreated, and should not resist evil, just as Christ's Word says."

The second part of his 1520 treatise also contained elucidations of his views on limited government that would be echoed in the American experiment. At the beginning, he noted that "we must establish how long its [civil government's] reach is, and how far it may stretch out its arm without overreaching itself and trenching upon God's kingdom and government." Luther cautioned that whenever "secular government is given too much freedom of action, the harm that results is unbearable and horrifying, but to have it confined within too narrow a compass is also harmful. In the one case there is too much punishment, in the other too little. But it is more tolerable to err on the side of the latter: it is always better that a villain should live than that a 'just' man should be killed. There always are, and always must be, villains in the world, but there are few just men."

Stating both the necessity and the limitation of civil law, Luther asserted that civil government extended only to earthly matters and outward goods. Where the soul was concerned, he wrote, "God neither can

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72. Eugene F. A. Klug et al., trans., *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1:103.

nor will allow anyone but himself to rule. And so, where secular authority takes it upon itself to legislate for the soul, it trespasses on [what belongs to] God's government, and merely seduces and ruins souls." The crucial line in the sand for Luther, one never forgotten with impunity, was: "No one can or should lay down commandments for the soul, except those who can point it on the way to heaven. But no human being can do that; only God."

Luther maintained that the civil state should be limited in scope according to God's commands: "If someone imposes a man-made law on souls, compelling belief in what he wants to be believed, then there will probably be no word of God to justify it." Luther compared distant governments' attempting to prescribe for local governments to "command[ing] the moon to shine at your behest." What sense could there possibly be, he asked, "if the people of Leipzig were to lay down laws for us here in Wittenberg, or vice versa? Anyone who tried it, would be sent a dose of hellebore [medicine] by way of thanks to clear their heads and cure their cold." The Reformers, if this text is representative, customarily favored small, decentralized governments.

Luther interpreted Romans 13 as "lay[ing] down a limit to both power and obedience." Of this limited government approach, he noted that "secular obedience and power extend only to taxes, duties, honor, fear, outward things. [Paul] is setting a limit to power: it is not to have mastery over faith and God's Word, but over evil-doing."

In typically colorful terms, Luther argued for limited resistance when a governor overreached by commanding the conscience to "believe this or that, or to surrender books." With an exclamation point, Luther said that to surrender copies of the New Testament to the confiscation of the civil ruler "is surrendering Christ to Herod . . . a murderer of Christ, as Herod was." Notwithstanding, he called on the faithful to "suffer their houses to be forcibly invaded and ransacked, whether it is their books or their goods that are taken. Evil is not to be resisted, but suffered." While a mature doctrine of resistance would not be developed until the next generation, Luther was an early champion of a free press.

Luther anticipated that free information and expression were grave threats to tyranny: "People will not put up with your tyranny and arbitrari-

ness any longer; they cannot and they do not want to. My good lords and masters, take heed. God [himself] will not put up with it any longer. This is no longer the world it was when you hunted and drove your people like game. Earthly rulers, therefore, should follow the pattern, jurisdiction, and character of the Prince of Peace."

Later Luther would extend these themes in his 1531 "Warning to His Dear German People."[73] Scorched by the Peasants' Revolution (1525) and other enthusiastic excesses, Luther distanced himself from publicly advocating rebellion. He wanted it known that "if a war or a rebellion should break out as I fear . . . I wish to testify before God and all the world here in this writing that we, who are derisively called "Lutherans," neither counseled it or consented to it, nor, indeed, gave any cause for it; rather we constantly and ceaselessly pleaded and called for peace."

Mustering all the restraint he could, he promised not to lift his pen to give any counsel whatsoever should violence erupt. Protestations aside, however, it is apparent that by 1531 Luther did not feel alone in legitimating self-defense as an appropriate action in the face of armed tyranny. He wrote: "Furthermore, if war breaks out—which God forbid—I will not reprove those who defend themselves against the murderous and blood-thirsty papists, nor let anyone else rebuke them as being seditious, but I will accept their action and let it pass as self-defense. . . . For in such an instance, when the murderers and bloodhounds wish to wage war and to murder, it is in truth no insurrection to rise against them and defend oneself." He distinguished between "sedition and other acts and to deprive the bloodhounds of the pretext of boasting that they are warring against rebellious people and that they were justified according to both human and divine law; for so the little kitten is fond of grooming and adorning itself. Likewise, I do not want to leave the conscience of the people burdened by the concern and worry that their self-defense might be rebellious. For such a term would be too evil and too harsh in such a case. It should be given a different name, which I am sure the jurists can find for it."

While Luther did not wish to encourage lawless individuals to over-throw governments, still he stated that resistance was appropriate, at least,

73. See Patrick S. Poole's posted version at http://www.calvin500.org/tracts/Warning.html. Searches for the quotations I have used may be performed with phrases on that page.

for freedom of religion.[74] It was legitimate for Protestants to refuse to become Roman Catholics even if commanded by the civil governor. His warning consisted in this: if any civil agent sought to enslave the conscience, a citizen could consider resistance an act of proper self-defense.[75] In the next generation, Beza and others would extend this logic further to include the right of people to resist unlawful acts of government, a justification later repeated during the American Revolution.[76]

A summary to this point is in order. The political seeds of Calvinism—a transcendent standard for politics, the pervasiveness of human depravity, the importance of law, a limited scope of government, and decentralization of power—were already beginning to root in fertile Protestant beds in the early sixteenth century. Even though they would not blossom everywhere they were planted in Europe, the harvest required soil that was free from political tradition, where fertile seeds could bloom into native flowers. Moreover, writing slightly before the time of Calvin, Luther enables one to see the sophistication of this theological commentary on politics over the rudimentary tracts of the previous centuries.

One historian of the nineteeth century noted, however, crucial differences between Luther and Calvin. Luther labored for the right relationship of the soul and did not seek to reform the sacraments or the liturgy of Catholicism; Calvin attacked the practices he thought were unsupported by Scripture. Luther "acknowledged princes as his protectors. . . . Calvin was the guide of the Swiss republics. . . . Luther resisted the Roman church for its immorality; Calvin for its idolatry."[77] American Pilgrims and many of their children were Calvinists; yet, we should not underestimate the following claim from a nineteenth-

74. Skinner, *The Age of Reformation*, 2:19, summarizes Luther's thought under two premises: (1) The New Testament was the final authority for social and political behavior, and (2) the "political stance which is actually prescribed in the New Testament is one of complete Christian submission to the secular authorities."

75. For a full treatise on the subject, see Cynthia Grant Shoenberger, "The Development of the Lutheran Theory of Resistance: 1523–1530," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 8, no. 1 (1977): 61–76.

76. Some later Lutherans in a 1550 work alluded to "the right of resistance by the lower magistrates to an emperor who in violation of his oath seeks to destroy the liberty of his subjects." McNeill, "Calvinism and European Politics," 14.

77. W. Carlos Martyn, *The Pilgrim Fathers of New England: A History* (New York: American Tract Society, 1867), 29.

century historian: "But for the Reformation led by Luther, there had been no Revolution led by Washington."[78]

The stage is now set to better understand the Swiss Calvinistic contribution to political theory. As another historian asserted: "If the Swiss Reformation had been only a feeble copy of the German, there would have been uniformity, but no duration. . . . The regeneration of Christianity in these mountains proceeded from forces peculiar to the Helvetic Church, and received an organization in conformity with the ecclesiastical and political condition of that country."[79] Switzerland, wrote Genevan patriot J. H. Merle d'Aubigne, was destined to confer to "many nations of the two worlds a more salutary and glorious impulse than that which had hitherto proceeded from its halberds and arquebuses."[80]

Huldrych Zwingli: Patriot Reformer of German-Speaking Switzerland

William Farel was the pioneer of the Reformation in Geneva, but closer to Germany another fiery minister preceded him by a few years. Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), a Swiss Reformer immediately prior to Calvin, also recognized that resistance was legitimate if a civil ruler ordered the suppression of true religion. However, he added that such resistance should occur only with the support of the large majority and without murder or war.[81] Nonetheless, by the Peasants' War (1525), Protestant extremists scandalized the movement with their sectarian rebellion against the princes of Germany. And this experience slowed the momentum of Protestant support for resistance.

Just prior to the emergence of Calvin, Zwingli, a contemporary of Luther, began his work in Zurich. Zwingli studied at universities in Basel, Bern, and Vienna. In 1506 he was selected to be the parish priest in

78. W. P. Breed, *Presbyterians and the Revolution* (1876; repr., Decatur, MS: Issacharian Press, 1993), 6.

79. J. H. Merle d'Aubigne, *The History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: American Tract Society, 1846), 4:261.

80. Ibid., 4:262. For those not familiar with these weapons, a halberd was a pole that had a spear atop a two-handed axe, and an arquebus was a muzzle-loaded, lightweight firearm that was a distinct advance over a musket.

81. Griffin, *Revolution and Religion: American Revolutionary War and the Reformed Clergy*, 4.

confederated Canton Glarus. Whether he was "an out-and-out democrat"[82] or not, he definitely tried to reform all of society from the church outward. He served as a chaplain in the fateful 1515 Battle at Marignano, a turning point for the Swiss *psyche*, and later accompanied Protestant troops in skirmishes against Catholics, dying a courageous death in a 1531 battle.

Zwingli first served as a pastor in idyllic Einsiedeln (still the home of one of the most ornate monasteries in the world) for two years (1516–18). He began his thundering ministry at Zurich's Grossmunster church on January 1, 1519, making him one of the earliest declared Protestants in the world. Throughout his tenure, Zwingli labored for political structures that conformed both religion and politics to the precepts of the Bible.[83] Although he never held civil office, he frequently advised local magistrates and served on numerous commissions to resolve diplomatic and political disputes. However, not all Swiss citizens agreed with him. While his colleague Vadianus convinced St. Gallen of the Protestant cause, and while Bern, Basel, and Zurich created a Protestant alliance, interestingly, the Forest states (the three original mountain cantons) preserved their allegiance to Catholicism.[84] An armed conflict between the two alliances was only narrowly averted by the Peace of Cappel, which legitimized the local choice of religion for each Swiss canton thereafter.

Recent studies have defended the consistency of his thought over time. Robert Walton vindicates Zwingli against the onerous charge that he advocated theocracy, that is, a direct political rule by the clergy. Certainly Zwingli expected cooperation between the two distinct jurisdictions of church and state. That cooperation, much like the practice of Colonial America, however, is not the same as assigning the care of both church and state to the same officers. Rather than confusing the terminology, the more precise way to understand the Swiss Reformer's position is to ask, as Walton does: What place did Zwingli assign to the magistrate and to the clergy in order to realize the rule of God?[85] Instead of attempting to

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82. McCrackan, *The Rise of the Swiss Republic*, 256.
83. Ibid., 263.
84. Ibid., 265.
85. Robert C. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), xi.

combine the spheres of government, Zwingli submitted, as Calvin would later, both sacred and secular jurisdictions to transcendental norms.

Certainly Zwingli and Calvin desired the rule of God over government. That is altogether different, though, from confusing the rule of God with the acts of certain politicians. A separation of legitimate jurisdictions (though not an immunization of the state from religion) is as apparent in these Swiss Reformers as it is in Colonial American pastors a century later. They did not strive to submit the city government to the church and its officers. If anything, Zwingli sought to deprive the clergy of the secular authority and wealth it had gained since the end of the eleventh century, because he believed that these secular concerns had diverted the clergy from its God-given function, the preaching of the gospel.[86] The clergy's role was to give revealed counsel, lest the city governors make mistakes for lack of the best wisdom.

Zwingli hoped to renew the church from within, and subsequently to have the church reform society. Of the inherent overflow of spirituality into ethics, Zwingli claimed, "Christianity has always served the public justice most powerfully." In later correspondence Zwingli would contrast the effect of the spread of biblical truths with those of secular reason, boasting of Zurich as the leading Christian municipality in adapting its laws and political officials to the Christian faith. Zurich's ethical overflow was noted as follows: "each desires to anticipate the other with kindness, to oblige with gentleness, to share the labor of the other, to lighten his burden, for each cares for all as brothers; blasphemy is abominated, piety is esteemed and is increased among all."[87] These Swiss Reformers believed that a view of life that included God's standards would result in humanitarian action by private citizens. The chief calling of the clergy was not to rule the city council but to reform the consciences of civil officers and citizens.

Accordingly, Zwingli distinguished between the inward thrust of the ministry of the church and the outer containment by the secular magistrate. In so doing, Zwingli circumscribed the domain of the civil officer. While they might supportively protect external matters of the church (e.g.,

86. Ibid., xii.
87. Ibid., 121.

church attendance, performance of duty by the ministers, the offering of the sacraments, the architecture of the building), secular officials "could not force one to believe, for the realm of faith, Christ's kingdom, had nothing to do with the world. The true church obviously did not depend upon the Zurich government, nor was it confined to the limits of the canton; it was universal."[88] Thus, he explained, "if your rulers wish to be Christian, they must allow the clear word of God to be preached and afterward let it work." Importantly, he also distinguished various jurisdictions, noting that "the authority which the government has over our temporal goods and bodies cannot extend over the soul."[89]

Several of his *Sixty-Seven Articles* (1523) directly addressed the role of the civil governor. In these articles, he rejected the notion that ministers should command civil matters, maintained that the good governor could promote measures that comported with biblical practices, and urged rulers to encourage "an externally pious Christian city."[90]

Zurich was governed by a Small Council of 26 and a Great Council of 212, similar to the form eventually adopted in Geneva.[91] The Zurich councils were involved in many areas of life, and Christian magistrates were to seek the common good. The magistrates were to maintain the faith and keep it from reverting to Catholic patterns. As early as 1450, the city of Basel stated its purpose similarly: "Above all, the government of each city is to be established for this: to increase and to consolidate the honor of God and to repulse all evil and especially gross sin and misdeed, according to the regulation of the Holy Christian World."[92]

The effect of Zwingli's leadership and preaching altered the treatment of the poor as Reformation ideas began to be implemented in the city. The Zurich city council, for example, refused to give assistance to beggars, pimps, drunkards, and adulterers, insisting on the distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Failure to attend church and other immoral behavior disqualified a poor person from receiving

88. Ibid., 123–24.
89. Ibid., 164.
90. Ibid., 173.
91. Ibid., 4.
92. Ibid., 5.

financial assistance.[93] However, this order was, rightly or wrongly, by the magistrate's authority, not by pulpit decree. Zwingli would continue to preach before the city council, but such moral guidance was wholly different from the pulpit's wielding the civil sword directly. Of the moral impact of this Reformation preaching, Zwingli's successor, Heinrich Bullinger, wrote, "Before the preaching of the gospel, Zurich was in Switzerland what Corinth was in Greece."[94]

In his 1522 *Godly Admonition to the Oldest Confederates at Schwyz*, the Zurich Reformer hinted that the early Swiss confederates had a unique covenantal relationship with God, much like Old Testament Israel. He indicated that recent defeats such as Marignano[95] were providential indicators of God's curse. In the process, he rebuked greed, bribery, violence, sloth, and wrongful war. Robert Walton summarizes Zwingli's tenets: "The cantons of the Confederacy stand in a covenant relationship with God; they are the Israel of the present. Political stability and national freedom depend upon the proper obedience to the Lord."[96] At this early stage it is evident that Zwingli sought social change by preaching and writing, not by political coercion.

On January 29, 1523, Switzerland, and much of the West through her, entered a new age. As a result of Zwingli's initiative and leadership, in a day when elections were rarities, more than six hundred people gathered to hear a dispute between Zwingli and a Catholic debater. This meeting (the first of many) introduced a virtually new style of decision making: citizens would have free assembly and free speech, and then they would

93. Ibid., 43. See the final chapter in this volume and my "Early Prototypes of Welfare Reform: The Reformation," in *The Arrogance of the Modern* (Oak Ridge, TN: Calvin Institute, 1997), 181–201, for discussions of how this Reformation practice is aiding the war against poverty in the United States and abroad.

94. Quoted in Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:40.

95. Hans Halbheer explains that Swiss neutrality originated with this battle, which occurred when Francis I of France attacked the Swiss who were allied with the duke of Milan. Halbheer explains: "The Swiss suffered an awful defeat due both to deficient discipline and to strongly divergent interests within Switzerland as to the country's best foreign policy. . . . Thus a policy of neutrality would both prevent the risk of defeat in war and also lead to domestic harmony, once the country was no longer faced with differing views over which side to choose in a European war." Hans Halbheer, "To Our American Friends: Switzerland in the Second World War," *American Swiss Foundation Occasional Papers*, no. 1/Spring 1999, 2.

96. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy*, 106.

freely choose which course to pursue. What began as a referendum on religion, i.e., whether to be a Protestant or a Catholic establishment, paved the way for many future civic choices.[97]

Walton has correctly observed a delicate balance of power in Zwingli's thought. He writes: "The division of power between the magistrate and the pastor was based upon his doctrine of divine and human righteousness. The magistrate exercised all secular power and had the right to direct the external affairs of the church. The Christian magistrate . . . made possible the preaching of the Gospel by the pastor. The knowledge of the Gospel that the pastor proclaimed prevented the ruler from becoming a tyrant."[98] Walton has made clear that the Swiss Reformers were not theocrats, but believed in each God-ordained sphere of government performing its own duty—and not usurping the jurisdiction of the other. Walton is also correct that Zwingli initiated only certain trends. It would remain for William Farel and Calvin to revive reform measures in the French-speaking part of the confederacy a decade later.

William Farel: Calvin's Colleague

Following Zwingli's death in 1531, Heinrich Bullinger succeeded him in Zurich, but it was the mercurial Frenchman William Farel who would establish another major beachhead in Geneva and lure Calvin there. Farel (1489–1565), originally from the south of France,[99] arrived in Paris in 1509 and studied under Jacques Le Fevre at the University of Paris, then known as the "mother of all learning, the true lamp of the church." As he had been reared in a Catholic home, his conversion to Protestantism was

97. Zwingli was also instrumental in overseeing a synod of presbyterial rulers in 1528; and under his leadership the Carolinum (a theological college) was begun as early as 1525, perhaps pioneering the models that Geneva would later emulate and perfect. In 1526, he also published a treatise on Christian education. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:62.

98. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy*, 225.

99. Tourn notes that Farel had a brother, Gauchier, who was cut from the same cloth. Giorgio Tourn, *The Waldensians: The First 800 Years* (Torino, Italy: Claudiana, 1980), 82. D'Aubigne lists Daniel, Walter, Claude, and a sister who "grew up with William, and shared his sports on the banks of the Buzon at the foot of the Bayard." D'Aubigne, *The History of the Reformation*, 3:328. D'Aubigne reports that all three brothers were later converted (ibid., 408). A century and a half ago, the manor house of the noble Fareau family still stood, surrounded by an orchard.

gradual ("fallen little by little from my head; for it did not tumble down at first shock") and well tested, making him all the more zealous to the end. He once wrote: "I had my Pantheon in my heart, and such a troop of mediators, saviors, and gods that I might well have passed for a papal register."[100] Farel began to read the Bible for himself as Luther would later, and with similar results. Farel became a Protestant (his conversion in 1512 predates Luther's, a fact often overlooked) under the teaching of Guon Brigomet, a disciple of Jacques Le Fevre. Le Fevre sought more moderate reforms, but Farel believed that a break with Rome was necessary. As the pioneer of reform in Southern Europe, he was somewhat like Luther in temperament—quick to take the axe to the root[101]—while Calvin was more deliberative. Still, when he met Calvin, himself a former student of Le Fevre, they had much in common. The University of Paris was the first revolutionary center of the Reformation, giving way later to the preeminence of Wittenberg, Geneva, and Strasbourg.

Fleeing persecution in 1521, Farel was sheltered by the Protestant-leaning bishop of Meaux (outside Paris) and eventually came into contact with the other Reformers in Basel in 1523. During this time, Erasmus of Rotterdam was in Basel. When Farel, the "Elijah of the French Reformation,"[102] shunned him as being more committed to humanism than to the Reformation, the philosophic antithesis erupted onto the stage. Erasmus retorted that no one was more "false, more violent, and more seditious than" Farel, whose "heart was full of vanity, his tongue overflowing with malice."[103] Erasmus, the author of *On the Freedom of the Will*, viewed the French Reformer as more insane than the Germans, cruel, and a furious tyrant. The probable undertow of this conflict, however, was

100. D'Aubigne, *The History of the Reformation*, 3:338.

101. Calvin compared Farel to what Cicero said about Cato: "He acts indeed with good judgment, but in counsel does not always show the best." Calvin thought Farel was occasionally carried away with zeal. Farel "does not always discern what is expedient, and neither does he foresee dangers or despise them, and there is to be added the evil, that he cannot bear with patience those who do not comply with his wishes." From a letter to Peter Viret on October 24, 1545, in *The Letters of John Calvin,* ed. Jules Bonnet (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), 2:25. See also David N. Wiley, "Calvin's Friendship with Guillaume Farel," in David Foxgrover, ed., *Calvin Studies Society Papers, 1995, 1997* (Grand Rapids: CRC, 1998), 187–204.

102. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:237.

103. D'Aubigne, *The History of the Reformation*, 3:419.

an irresolvable friction between principles: Erasmus depended on human ability, while Farel was suspicious of it, trusting more in divine providence. Though less revered at the time and less recognized today, Farel was a near-match to Erasmus in debating Scripture. During a dispute at the University of Basel, with Erasmus present, Farel impressed the scholars ("He is strong enough to destroy the whole Sorbonne single-handed") and persuaded many citizens since the priests feared to take up the gauntlet and debate him. Beza wrote later of his giftedness: "Farel excelled in a certain sublimity of mind, so that nobody could either hear his thunders without trembling, or listen to his most fervent prayers without feeling almost as it were carried up into heaven."[104]

Before being ejected from the city of Basel (at Erasmus's behest), Farel gained the respect of the city's leading Reformed pastor, John Oecolampadius, and also consulted with Martin Bucer at Strasbourg and Zwingli in Zurich. Having been ordained in Oecolampadius's home, Farel arrived at Montbeliard in September 1524. His preaching was so effective that Erasmus felt compelled to dog him, complaining about him to Roman Catholic bishops in Savoy.[105]

Farel's wide influence was also felt in Lyons, where, in 1525–26, the French King Francis I was halted by an army of twenty thousand republicans (fourteen thousand from Switzerland). The significance of this battle was that it would be nearly a decade before the French king would seek to conquer this territory again, allowing the Reformation seeds to sprout unhindered near Geneva for that period. Farel's ideas spurred independent-mindedness and, along with Calvin's, justified resistance to an oppressive monarch.

Farel traversed the rural areas of southwest Switzerland under the protection of the powerful Protestant canton of Bern, denouncing various Roman Catholic practices. From 1526 to 1532, he found that the Reformation often came slowly where tradition was well entrenched. When he discovered Zwingli's writings, Farel remarked, "With what learning does Zwingli scatter the darkness!" Farel, the usher of the Reformation, was removed from Aigle by the magistrate in July 1527.

104. Theodore Beza, *Life of John Calvin*, in John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 1:lxxvii.
105. D'Aubigne, *The History of the Reformation*, 3:426.

Farel was nearly as plainspoken and impulsive as Luther, once stripping a statue from the back of a priest as he passed on a bridge and throwing it into the river. He publicly disputed with monks and friars in Lausanne (which had become a free city in December 1519), Neuchatel, Aigle, Ollon, and Bern—using compelling rhetoric and frequently attracting a populist following. During Farel's time, democracy's march made forward strides. In 1526–27, an ethos of Reformation began to dawn over the mighty Alpine peaks, with peasants, armed with an authority higher than the local priest or tradition, serving as the infantry of liberty. If the Word of God is free, they argued, then the authoritarian traditions would have to surrender to it. With the newfound freedom under the Bernese protectorate, Protestants began to argue: "If the mandate of our lords accords to our pastors the liberty of preaching, why should it not grant the flock the liberty of acting?"[106] Farel agreed that both should occur. As Scripture was increasingly elevated so was personal freedom, along with a shrinking of the traditional hierarchicalism.

Farel came to Geneva in 1532 as a missionary under a commission from Bern. He was not only a spirited missionary but also a profound theologian who was conversant with the church fathers. His treatise, *Sommaire, La Maniere et Fasson*, was the first Reformed systematic theology in French.[107] His fiery temperament and unwillingness to compromise made him perfectly suitable to Bernese authorities who wished to expand the territory under Protestant control. He gained some success initially but was later exiled and returned for safety to Bern. However, he returned to Geneva in 1535 and was instrumental in convincing many citizens to repudiate Savoy rule once and for all.[108]

Seventeen years before Calvin's arrival in Geneva in 1536, a small cadre of revolutionary patriots, the Children of Geneva, banded together to liberate the city from control of the French duke of Savoy. Several key leaders—Philibert Berthelier, Bezancon Hughes, and Francois Bonivard[109]

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106. Ibid., 4:280.

107. Henri Heyer, *Guillaume Farel: An Introduction to His Theology*, trans. Blair Reynolds (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), i.

108. McCrackan, *The Rise of the Swiss Republic*, 274.

109. Although much myth surrounds Francois Bonivard (1493–1570), he followed his uncle as prior of the Cluniac priory at St. Victor (just outside Geneva) and quickly

(later immortalized by Byron's ballad about the Castle d'Chillon dungeon and later a resident on the same Genevan street as Calvin)—conspired to persuade Genevan citizens to ally with Fribourg and Bern in 1519; the pact was renewed in 1525. These patriots of this popular uprising, sometimes as motivated by the hope of overthrowing a distant ruler[110] as they were eager to further Protestantism, were given the name *Eidguenots*, drawing on Switzerland's previous confederate history. Geneva needed the assistance of Bernese commander Hans Franz Nageli (and 10,000 soldiers) to secure, once for all, Geneva's independence, which was achieved in 1536.[111]

Shortly thereafter, Calvin arrived on a midsummer's night in 1536 and was strong-armed by Farel to join the Reformation of religion and politics in Switzerland. Farel already knew of Calvin's recently published book, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. When he learned that Calvin was in the area, the warrior-poet of the Swiss Reformation, who was old enough to be Calvin's father and who had labored relentlessly for nearly fifteen years, could not resist urging young Calvin to join the work of the Reformation. The theater was then prepared for the entrance of John Calvin onto the world's stage, with Farel and Calvin's cousin, Robert Olivetan the printer, already positioned in Geneva.

Calvin's skills and knowledge were particularly needed in Geneva. Although these two Reformers were exiled two years later—when the city council viewed them as insurgents because they would not offer the Eucharist to the numerous bickering factions—they eventually returned

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joined the resistance to Charles III and the Roman Catholic bishop of Geneva. After a first imprisonment (1519–21), which meant the loss of his position, his resistance politics only intensified. He was imprisoned from 1530 to 1536 and later became a Protestant. In 1542 he began compiling *Chroniques de Geneve* (source material on the history of Geneva), which was submitted to Calvin for advice or correction in 1551 but was not published until 1831 (repr. 1867). He also wrote *De l'ancienne et nouvelle police de Geneve* (1555; *The Old and New Government of Geneva*). One modern study that takes Bonivard's role (also that of Antoine Froment and Michel Roset) seriously is William G. Naphy, "'No History Can Satisfy Everyone': Geneva's Chroniclers and Emerging Religious Identities," in Bruce Gordon, ed., *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Hants, UK: Scolar Press, 1996), 2:23–38.

110. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:497.

111. McCrackan, *The Rise of the Swiss Republic*, 275.

to Geneva and were provided with a forum to train scholars from England, Scotland, Germany, and Holland.[112]

Farel would continue to root out non-Protestant ideas in Neuchatel (1541), Metz (1542–43), Lausanne, Geneva (1548), and Zurich (1549), often serving as a roving missionary from 1541 until his death. In 1557, Farel and Theodore Beza traveled widely as ambassadors to other Reformation sympathizers in Switzerland and Germany. No other Reformer witnessed to more cities for the Protestant faith than William Farel.

During Farel's time, the Reformation buttressed the infant republicanism, but it did so by moral suasion, not by coercion. Farel influenced Genevan churchgoers to minimize festivals, to alter sacramental practices, and to simplify rituals.[113] These Swiss changes occurred by reformation, not by bloody revolution. These Reformers disavowed "despotism, servitude, stagnation, retrogression, or death."[114] Farel, the "French Luther," helped restore the voice to the people and began to rein in oppressive government.

Prior to 1536, Farel had been the premier spokesman for the Reformation in French Switzerland; during Calvin's first residence in Geneva, the Council (not to mention other religious leaders) honored Farel as a first among equals.[115] He was also instrumental in occupying erstwhile Catholic buildings for preaching services, leading Geneva's Small Council to affirm a separation of jurisdictions between church and state officers as early as 1534. He also filed an appeal to repudiate papal rule, which led to Geneva's May 1536 ratification of the Reformation.[116] The supportive party that ousted Calvin's opponents in 1541 even named themselves the *Guillermins* after Guillaume Farel. Yet it was necessary for him to stand aside so that Calvin might assume a more prominent role. Working dili-

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112. Ibid., 277.

113. Heyer, *Guillaume Farel*, 57.

114. D'Aubigne, *The History of the Reformation*, 318. D'Aubigne observed, "Reformation works by the power of the Word, of doctrine, cultivation, and truth; while revolution, or rather revolt, operates by the power of riot, of the sword, of the club. Christianity proceeds by the inner man, and charters themselves, if they stand alone, cannot satisfy it. No doubt political constitutions are one of the blessings of our age . . . [but] they must be written in the heart and guaranteed by the manners of the people."

115. Heyer, *Guillaume Farel*, 82.

116. Foster, *Collected Papers of Herbert D. Foster*, 10–11.

gently for Protestant unity, Farel "pushed Calvin to write . . . it is he who made the negotiations succeed; and if the Swiss churches adopted this profession of faith, it is in large part to him the honor is due."[117]

Farel would prepare the way for a younger Reformer, a powerful scholar-theologian, who, were it not for Farel, might well have returned to Bern, Strasbourg, or Heidelberg. He might even have moved to England (as did Martin Bucer), but international diffusion of Calvinistic ideas to Europe and later to New England would launch from Geneva's springboard.

McCrackan suggested a century ago that the reason why these Calvinistic principles blossomed in the New World, and not so much on the European Continent, was that the centuries between Calvin and Jefferson saw the demise of feudalism and the wane of monarchicalism; also, the American plantations had fewer traditional structures to overturn. In the wake of Calvinism's logic, McCrackan thought it would have been "an historical freak, pure and simple,"[118] for America to be an aristocratic or monarchical nation.

Farel and Calvin's ideas, namely that citizens should freely deliberate and that governors were servants of the people—first kindled in Geneva but later billowing into an international forest fire—ignited a veritable tradition. The disciples of these two giants would further clarify and extend the principles of limited government, suspicion of authoritarian power, the need for checks and balances, and the necessity of separation of powers, while at the same time permitting faith and federalism to grow symbiotically.

It is Calvin's own life that provides the backdrop for that story.

117. Heyer, *Guillaume Farel*, 83.
118. McCrackan, *The Rise of the Swiss Republic*, 113.