JOHN CALVIN AND THE REFORMATION #8

THE YEARS OF TRIUMPH (1555-1564)

Prayer
Scripture: Psalm 117
Hymn: 470 "O Praise the Lord"

WHAT THE VICTORY OF CALVIN MEANT TO GENEVA:

Calvin's victory over the Libertines meant that in Geneva the Word of God ruled. The city had been won for the Lord. The honor of God became the first principle of the state. Second only to the honor of God was the salvation of the people, individually and collectively. Typical of the spirit of Calvin and of the city during the nine years of triumph was the exhortation Calvin gave the citizens before the elections of 1558: "Choose wise men who fear God. Remember your experiences and how much you formerly had to suffer because of culpable governments. All of us need to recognize our insignificance and that unless God is for us we count little or nothing in the fight against the convulsions and dangers which fill this world. The honor of God and good order, this be our motto."

Calvin really was the head of the church in Geneva, the recognized leader of French Protestantism, and the guide of the Reformed Movement that was spreading to all countries. Calvin refused every outward recognition. He did not put himself above the other preachers in public appearances. He would not accept a higher salary than his colleagues and persistently refused all gifts from the Council. He wanted to be known as the preacher of St. Peter's and the teacher of theology. He avoided all glitter of fame and sovereignty. Flatterers got no where with him. He was an unassuming servant of God.

Calvin worked as hard, if not harder than before the victory.

In church matters and in city and foreign affairs no important decisions were made without his advice. He was lawyer, business manager, and diplomat. Modestly dressed, pale and frail, he made his way through the streets and alleys of the city, going to preach, to visit the sick, to attend meetings of the elders, of the clergy, or of the Councils. He took the lead in completing the laws with supplements that eliminated all ambiguity. The victory of 1555 opened the way for Geneva to become a new community, the holy city of God. A powerful religious zeal laid hold on the entire population. The number of religious services was increased but still the churches were much overcrowded. The sermons were the center of spiritual life. Religious questions were the main topics of conversation. Everyone was ready to give an account of his faith. The renewal brought by the Gospel could be seen in the outward conduct of the people. The population of Geneva had become industrious, sober, and thrifty. The spirit of thrift and industry, as well as the religious spirit, was augmented by the unending stream of refugees--people driven from their homelands because of their faith. They came to Geneva as admirers of Calvin.

Geneva began to experience considerable economic progress. The weaving industry that Calvin had encouraged the Councils to establish grew into a major factor in the prosperity. Another important factor was Calvin's teaching that a fair profit in trade and a fair return on money were not contrary to Scripture, but wise and just. Calvin's goal was becoming a reality: to make Geneva an example of a Christian community, a refuge for oppressed Protestants, and a center of influence for the spread of the Evangelical cause.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA:

The crowning achievement of the victory was the establishment of the Academy that would become the University of Geneva. For Calvin
the spiritual and the intellectual were far more important than the material. Religion and education had to go together. A true faith must be intelligent. The school was an essential part of any effective church. Intelligence, not ignorance, was the mother of piety. Calvin's dreams for education in Geneva were greatly influenced by his experiences in the college of John Sturm in Strassbourg. In his Articles of 1541 he had given a large place to education. Geneva had been too poor to implement it and Castellio as rector of the Geneva school had been disappointing.

In 1556 Calvin briefly visited Strassbourg and returned determined to give Geneva an adequate school system. The conflict with Bern delayed his plans. In January, 1558, Calvin finally moved the Little Council to order the selection of a site for a college. The site was chosen in March and work was started late in 1558. Calvin stirred the people to a great pitch of enthusiasm and rich and poor alike made contributions for the college. The wealthy Robert Stephanus gave three hundred and twelve florins and the baker's wife gave five sous. During the building they ran out of wood, stone and money. The city increased all fines against offenders "for the college." All lawyers were ordered to urge their clients to give while alive and to remember the college in their wills. The buildings were far from finished at the formal opening in 1559. The builders did not move out until 1563. The next year when a storm blew out the paper windows, glass was finally installed.

Calvin was most diligent and indefatigable in searching for a faculty. The best would barely be good enough. His first choice was Cordier but he was committed to Lausanne. He tried, but failed, to get Marcier, the Hebrew professor at the College of France in Paris. Again he was disappointed when he tried to get Emmanuel Tremellius who taught Hebrew in Cambridge. Calvin got unexpected help from Lausanne in the territory of Bern.

Viret had started a school in Lausanne with theological lectures in 1537. The Bernese authorities gave it a regular foundation in 1540. Mathurin Cordier came to teach in 1545. Francois Berauld was added. Theodore Beza became professor of Greek in 1549. Jean Tagault, a French refugee and mathematician, joined the faculty in 1557. The faculty was highly respected and the school flourished. It was the only seat of advanced instruction for French-speaking Protestants. The faculty was sympathetic to the teachings and discipline of Calvin. In March, 1558, they tried to introduce the right of the ministers to excommunicate independent of the magistrates. The Bernese government would have none of it. Beza saw the storm coming and moved to Geneva where Calvin persuaded the Council to appoint him professor of Greek. Later he would be appointed the first rector of the Academy. He became Calvin's right hand man. He was a devoted friend and admiring disciple. For forty years after Calvin's death he would carry on Calvin's work with great success.

In January, 1559, the Bern authorities deposed Viret from his long pastorate in Lausanne and the entire teaching staff resigned. Calvin invited them to Geneva. Viret became a Geneva minister. Francois Berauld of Orleans, son of Nicolas Berauld who had been tutor of Admiral Coligny, and himself a poet in Greek and Latin, and the translator of Appian, became professor of Greek. Antoine Chevalier (he had been French tutor of Princess Elizabeth who became Queen Elizabeth) was appointed professor of Hebrew. Jean Tagault was made professor of philosophy. Calvin and Beza were to teach theology but Calvin did not want a title.

On May 22, 1559, Calvin presented to the Little Council for approval the constitution of his Academy. It provided for the "Private School" which would include primary and secondary education
and for the "Public School" which would handle the university work. The Private School was graded into seven classes with students grouped in tens according to progress and abilities. Calvin emphasized preparatory linguistic studies. The seventh or lowest class learned to read French and Latin. The next two years (sixth and fifth classes) were devoted to French and Latin grammar. The study of Greek began in the fourth class. Dialectics began in the second class. At the completion of the first class the scholar had a good command of French, Latin and Greek. He had a good knowledge of the literatures of these languages. He had read Virgil, Cicero, and Livy in Latin and Polybius, Xenophon, and Demosthenes in Greek for the language and for classical history. He was well trained in logic and had made a beginning in philosophy.

The university work of the Public School included Hebrew, more advanced work in Greek, philosophy, dialectics, rhetoric, the Arts (including science and mathematic), and theology. Instruction was free and students had great freedom to work at their own pace. No provision was made for degrees. A certificate of attendance and character was given that was highly respected because of the reputation of the Academy.

Calvin's object was twofold: to provide trained ministers for the church and trained servants for the state. From the first he wanted the Academy to be the theological seminary for Reformed Protestantism. Students flocked to the school from all countries.

The Academy opened with a great ceremony in St. Peter's on June 5, 1559. Beza in a Latin speech sketched the history of higher education from the Old Testament patriarchs to the modern university. Calvin made the final speech. Within five years (the time of Calvin's death) the Private School had over a thousand students and the Public School had over three hundred. The majority of the students were foreigners. France furnished more than any other country. England, Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and Switzerland were all represented. Among the scholars of the first three years were Kaspar Olevianus who would be one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism; Philippe de Marvix de Sainat-Aldegonde, a leader of the Reformation in the Netherlands; Florent Chrestien who would tutor Henry IV of France; Thomas Bodley who would found the Bodleian Library of Oxford; Francis Junius who would become the famous professor of the University of Leyden; Lambert Daneau, the second generation Calvinist theologian; and most celebrated of all was John Knox, the Scottish Reformer.

Geneva became the model for Reformed universities and seminaries throughout the world. For a century after Calvin's death no university ranked higher among Protestants. The Academy was the center of Evangelical life in Western Europe. Well-trained preachers carried Calvin's message to all the countries of the world. Many died for their faith, drawing comfort and strength from Calvin's words that not a drop of their blood would be wasted.

THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH IN FRANCE:

In 1555 the first Protestant church was organized in Paris. By 1559 there were thirty Protestant churches in France. That year delegates from these churches held their first national synod in Paris. Calvin had followed the growth of the work with great interest and wanted to attend the synod but the Little Council would not consider it. The Council feared and Calvin knew very well that his life would be in great danger—he probably would not return. The synod adopted a Confession of Faith based on the Geneva Confession.

Fierce persecution in France greatly increased the number of refugees in Geneva. They listened to Calvin and studied in the Academy and many slipped back into France to hold secret meetings.
to preach, or as courageous colporteurs to fill France with Calvinist books and pamphlets. The printing of books to be smuggled into France became a major industry in Geneva. It became one of the leading printing centers of Europe and books became its major export. The colporteurs often preached on the side and conducted Bible classes. The Academy turned out a steady stream of well-trained ministers for French churches. By 1561 there were 2,150 Protestant churches in France. By 1562 over one hundred ministers had returned to France. Pastors were needed for all the churches, but all that was possible for many was to meet to pray and read the Bible. The work of supplying the French with books and pastors was strictly an activity of Calvin and the Geneva ministers and the Academy. The Council asked Calvin to tell them nothing about it so that when the French authorities complained, they were able to disclaim all responsibility. Calvin's message to the French churches was: "Send us wood and we will send you back arrows." After Calvin's death one of Beza's major works was *A History of the Reformed Church in France*.

No land was so much the object of Calvin's pastoral care as his homeland, France. He remained a Frenchman and one of his major goals was to win his fellow countrymen for Christ. Geneva was the intellectual center of the French-speaking Reformation. The churches in France were set up and organized according to the Calvinistic model. Each had a council of presbyters who elected the pastor. From the very beginning the church was instituted apart from the state. The churches elected elders and pastors without any intervention or domination from the civil power. The state, urged on by the Catholic Church, was the bitter persecutor of the French Protestant Churches. The liberty and independence of these churches set them apart from the German churches and from the Geneva Reform, where the town councils nominated the elders and appointed pastors. The elders in France were elected by the assembly of believers.

When five young preachers were imprisoned at Lyon Calvin wrote them urging them to stand fast. He assured them that in Geneva they were praying for them and that God would never fail those who put their trust in him. When, after a year of imprisonment, they were condemned to be burned, Calvin wrote them that God was using their blood to sign his truth. His Spirit would be equal to their needs. God would use their death to win His battle. God would not suffer a drop of their blood to be shed in vain.

A new problem arose in France. The French Protestant Church contained a large number of nobles who were not accustomed to suffering wrongs patiently as was done by the middle and lower classes. They began to think of armed resistance. At the death of Henry II a Council of Regency was set up because of the king's youth. To the Protestant nobles this offered a favorable opportunity to overthrow the established church. They sought the opinion of Calvin. Calvin's answer was against the use of force. He urged them not to attempt anything not warranted by the Word. The Gospel should not be exposed to the reproach of sedition and tumult.

In his *Institutes*, Calvin had made it plain that rulers were to be obedient, even when unjust and cruel. The private citizen had no right to seek to overthrow his ruler. But Calvin made an exception. If the chief ruler should become intolerable it would be the duty of his ministers of State, his nobles of royal blood, and the parliament to withstand him. The magistrates should curb the tyranny of kings. The French nobles felt that the situation in France fit the exception. There were the three estates: clergy, nobles and commoners. Two princes of royal blood, the King of Navarre and his brother, Prince Conde, were Protestants. The nobles felt they were called upon to moderate the license of the king. Calvin wanted them to put pressure on the king through constitutional means and urged against bloodshed. He
warned that from a single drop of blood could at once flow streams that would drown France.

The nobles planned their conspiracy, claiming Calvin's support. They planned to arrest the Guises, the powerful Catholic family back of the king, and to replace them with Protestants. Conde would present the king with the Genevan Confession as a manifesto of evangelical liberty. The conspiracy was bungled leading to the first of the French wars of religion in 1562. Calvin was very angry at the amateurish execution of the conspiracy and at the terms the Protestants accepted in the Peace of Amboise in April, 1563, ending the first war. Calvin died before the second war.

After Calvin's death Calvinists would prove very troublesome citizens for tyrants. Their interpretation of Calvin was that if bad government could not be reformed it was a Christian duty to overthrow it. This stood in strong contrast to the Lutheran interpretation of Luther: "Be subject to the powers that he for they are ordained of God."