The Reformation in France
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Introduction

- Last week, we had our first discussion of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, focusing on the Holy Roman Empire. We learned how a theologian had single-handedly sparked the movement. We also noticed how the flexible governance structures and shared sovereignties of the Holy Roman Empire and the geopolitics intersected with the consolidation and growth of the movement despite hurdles such as the Schmalkaldic wars and the Thirty Years' War.
- Today, we will move out of the Holy Roman Empire and into France, as well as Switzerland and the Netherlands.

Introduction

- I will cite from two historians:

- Geoffrey Treasure, *The Huguenots* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).
- Alec Ryrie, *Protestants: The Faith That Made the Modern World* (New York: Viking, 2017).

The Leaders

- Let us begin by making a point, probably obvious, about the core and soul of the Reformation movement. Although geopolitics is an integral part of our story, we are quintessentially talking about a small number of extraordinary religious leaders who challenged the most powerful ecclesiastical institution and network of their times. So far, we have focused on Martin Luther. Today, we will add two more names to our list: a Swiss, Zwingli, and a French exile also in Switzerland, John Calvin.
- Between them, and as we will see today, despite mutual differences that hampered their unity, they radically changed the religious as well as geopolitical landscape of northern Europe.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

- Born in Noyon, Picardy, in France, Calvin was only eight when Luther launched his enduring challenge to the Catholic church.
- Calvin's pursuit of legal studies and sacred literature took him to Paris, Orleans, and Bourges. He converted to the Reformation while studying law in Paris in the early 1530s.
- His return to Paris in 1534 coincided with severe Royal reprisal against Protestants for a broadside someone had posted all around Paris, including the door of the King's bed chamber, criticizing the Catholic Mass.
- Calvin decided to leave France. He went to Basil first via Strasbourg, and with a gap of a few years, continued building a model Reformed Church at Geneva until his health permitted.

John Calvin

- At Basil, Calvin published his Institutes of the Christian Religion, which he addressed to the French king through a prefatory letter. He published a detailed version at Strasbourg during the intervening period of his two long spells at Geneva.
- Besides his theological publications, he spent his time teaching, addressing urgent questions about the Reformation theory and practice, and meeting individuals and religious leaders from various parts of Europe, building networks and confessional bonds, as well as countering attacks from the Catholic church and governments.

John Calvin

- Calvin commanded great respect in the Reformist circles. This is how his biographer Bruce Gordon and historian Alec Ryrie define him.
- Gordon says, “Calvin never felt he had encountered an intellectual equal, and he was probably correct.”
- Ryrie adds, “…he pursued any argument with unforgiving tenacity. While Luther's emotional theatricality gave his faults a kind of grandeur, Calvin was a man of reserve and passion. But he was a spiritual writer of luminous clarity, powered by a rousing vision of the light and sweetness of Christ” (Ryrie, 65).

John Calvin: the Model Church

- In 1541, the Geneva City Council regretted its earlier decision and convinced Calvin to resume his ecclesiastical work in Geneva.
- In Strasbourg, Calvin introduced the practice of singing David's Psalms at the church. Back in Geneva, Psalms remained part of the church service.
- For French Protestantism, psalms became the most intimate rallying point. The Reformers sang them alone or at the church or at public gatherings, reinforcing the unity among the ranks. They became a source of strength for the Huguenots, facing persecution and hostility from the local populations.

John Calvin: the Model Church

- Building a model Reformed church, Calvin insisted on the election of a Presbytery with the consent of the Genevese citizens. He also wrote a Catechism in French and Latin, which was later translated into various languages by Protestant followers.
- He also sought to guide his followers on the issues that divided the Reformists.

John Calvin: the Eucharist

- Lutherans and Reformed Churches commonly rejected the Catholic view of the Eucharist. They disagreed, however, over what the Eucharist meant. Calvin's advice on the Eucharist was to focus on how the sacrament spiritually nourishes believers. In 1549, he sought to unify the Swiss Protestant churches on the Eucharist.
- The views of a late Minister of Zurich, Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), posed a problem. The Swiss Confederation's independent cantons could choose the religious tradition they wanted to follow, effective in 1529. Zurich had been Protestant since 1523.

John Calvin: the Eucharist

- Zwingli affirmed that he had reached conclusions like Lutheranism on his own, but believed that the Eucharist was simply a symbolic memorial because Christ did not mean it literally.
- Luther, on the other hand, considered Zwingli as blasphemous and insisted that Christ's words were literally true. Luther, however, rejected transubstantiation. He argued that Christ was wholly, physically present in the Sacramental bread, just as the Son of God was wholly present in the man Jesus and just as the word of God was wholly present in scripture (Ryrie, 64).

John Calvin: the Eucharist

- Calvin and Zwingli's successor in Zurich crafted the Zurich Consensus on the Eucharist in 1549. They agreed that in the Eucharist, Christ is received by faith.
- All Swiss Protestant churches adopted it. Luther had died in 1546. His closest associate, Melanchthon, refused to join the consensus.

Salvation and Predestination

- The Reformers also disagreed over the doctrine of predestination. The Reformation movements, therefore, allowed themselves a fair degree of disagreement.
- Predestination was a harking back to Saint Augustine. Most Lutherans, following Melanchthon, chose to soft pedal this part of their master's teaching. Predestination could be interpreted as determinism, which many Lutherans considered intuitively and morally offensive.
- Calvin, however, was fully committed to the doctrines' hidden logic. Following Augustine, he concluded: if God predestines some people to heaven, he must therefore equally deliberately predestinate the rest to hell. For him, it was a way to emphasize God's absolute sovereignty.

The Kingdoms

- The Reformation debated the extent to which obedience to a Prince was due.
- Lutheranism believed in the theory of two kingdoms: of heaven and an earthly Kingdom. Luther maintained that a Prince commanded obedience within the limits of his authority on earth, but if they commanded a believer to get rid of certain books, he would not obey because then the ruler is a tyrant and overreached himself. Luther even argued that if a Prince ordered his people to fight in an unjust war, it was their duty to disobey him. The operating principle, however, was that Luther required resistance to be passive. You should refuse an unjust order and then submit peacefully to punishment for that refusal.

The Kingdoms

- Reformed churches found no place for Luther's doctrine of passive disobedience to insolent secular governments. They also sought guidance from Saint Paul's dictum that all ruling powers ruled by God's permission: not just the kings and emperors, but also the lesser Princes, magistrates, and officials who held authority in a realm.
- The Reformists understood, however, that the act of resistance was different for private citizens and the lesser magistrates.

The Kingdoms

- Facing oppression, private citizens must resist, suffer, and possibly embrace martyrdom, but the lesser magistrates had the right and duty to stand firm for justice in the face of a tyrant (Ryrie, 58-59).
- In real life, everyone who had any power of any kind to resist could claim that they had the right to do so.
- Protestants came to believe that when no human power can direct or absolve the conscience, it is the conscience that becomes the true sovereign.

CATHOLIC/PROTESTANT DIFFERENCES IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY		
Issue	Catholic	Protestant
Religious authority	The Bible and church tradition as defined by pope and church councils	The Bible alone
Role of the pope	Leader of church	Authority of the pope denied
Ordination of clergy	Apostolic succession: direct line between original apostles and all subsequently ordained clergy	Apostolic succession denied; ordination by individual congregations or denominations
Role of clergy	Priests are generally celibate; sharp distinction between priests and laypeople; priests are mediators between God and humankind	Ministers may marry; priesthood of all believers; clergy have different functions (to preach, administer sacraments) but no distinct spiritual status
Salvation	Importance of church sacraments as channels of God's grace	Importance of faith alone; God's grace is freely and directly granted to believers
Status of Mary	Highly prominent, ranking just below Jesus; provides constant intercession for believers	Less prominent; Mary's intercession on behalf of the faithful denied
Role of saints	Prominent spiritual exemplars and intermediaries between God and humankind	Generally disdained as a source of idolatry; saints refer to all Christians
Prayer	To God, but often through or with Mary and saints	To God alone; no role for Mary and saints

Source: Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, *Ways of the World with Sources, Combined Volume*, 5th ed. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2020), 647.

Reformation: The Essence

- Luther also laid the fundamental principles of the Protestant faith, which remained common to various offshoots of the Reformation:
  - Salvation by faith, not works
  - The Bible as the sole authority; and
  - A "priesthood” made up of all believers.

Cuius Regio

- France and the Netherlands, as well as England, which we will study next week, become manifestations of how the principle of whose realm, their religion, affected most personal human choice, their religion.
- Unlike Switzerland, in France and the Netherlands, the Reformation encountered its major hurdles from the governance structure that interpreted a religious choice contrary to the Catholic ruler, Catholic subjects, as a symbol of rebellion against the regime.
- We will begin with Catholic France.

Gallican Catholicism

- The British had burned Jean d'Arc in 1431, but for the French, she symbolized the centuries-long French integration of state and church. Jean d'Arc represented not only the Catholic faith but the popular approbation of the church-state correlation. As an example of it, she had enabled the coronation of Charles VII at Reims, while projecting the English King Henry as a usurper.
- As Treasure surmises, "Clovis, Charlemagne, Saint Louis, Philip the Fair, and the maid, there was indeed a great depth and appeal in the idea behind the title: *Le roi tres chretien*. In the end, it would prove fatal to the Huguenots" (Treasure, 30).

Gallican Catholicism

- France secured a bargain through the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourge in 1438. The Sanction provided for French bishops to be nominated, in fact, appointed by the king.
- The practice persisted till the Concordat of Bologna 1516 when Francis I gained the goodwill of the Pope by ceding much of the power to tax the clergy, but appointments would go on being a potential battleground, source of scandal, and focus for reformers (Treasure, 29).

Gallican Catholicism

- To French always felt confident of using the threat of schism when they wanted to gain further concessions in terms of appointments of archbishops and the collection of taxes.
- Pope Julius III wrote to Henry II in 1551, “…in the end, you are more than Pope in your kingdoms… I know no reason why you should wish to become schismatic” (Treasure, 31).

The Huguenots

- The French were resolved to suppress Huguenots, who grew despite persecution. By 1541, Calvin began sending missionary pastors from Geneva into his native France to organize underground struggles or congregations there for the next seven years.
- Ryrie's research shows that by early 1562, something close to a tenth of the entire French population, and nearly half of the nobility, were affiliated with Calvinist churches (page 91).

The Huguenots

- The Huguenots faced different phases of official persecution and public hostility. If the official persecution declined or ceased, vigilantism took over.
- On March 1, 1562, this trend marked the action of the Duke of Guise, leader of the Catholic hardliners. At Vassy, he stopped to attend Mass. A large Calvinist congregation had assembled there “illegally,” in a converted barn nearby. The duke’s men tried to break up the meeting. A scuffle broke out. Someone threw a stone at the duke. He ordered the barn to be sealed and burned to the ground. Dozens of Calvinists lost their lives (Ryrie, 92).

The Huguenots

- The 1562 massacre at Vassy started a series of civil wars that would last intermittently for 35 years. The violence ran both ways, although the majority had an edge in the acts of atrocities committed against the minority.
- During this period, the Protestant iconoclasts mutilated several statues of male and female saints in the Catholic churches.
- The Catholics projected their repressive campaign as aimed at purifying their communities, which they believed the heretics living in their midst had polluted.

The Huguenots

- In 1572, the Protestant leaders assembled in Paris as part of a royal peace plan revolving around the marriage of Margaret of Valois, the Catholic daughter of Henry II and Catherine de Medici, with a Protestant prince, Henry of Navarre, on August 18.
- Within four days of the ceremony, a sniper wounded Admiral Coligny, the leader of the Protestant army.
- Absent mutual communication, both sides suspected tragedy and plotted preemptive strikes.
- The King decided to eliminate the Protestant leadership at a stroke.

The Huguenots

- Alec Ryrie recounts, “Before dawn on Sunday, August 24, 1572, St. Bartholomew's day, royal soldiers murdered the wounded man and several other Protestant dignitaries in their beds…. the people of Paris could read the signals. Crying. The king wills. The Catholic mobs set out on an unprecedented orgy of destruction. In three days, some 3000 Protestants were killed along with any Catholics who defended them. Over the following month massacre was echoed in a dozen French cities with histories of bitter interreligious tensions; perhaps a further 6000 died” (93).
- Ryrie adds, Pope Gregory XIII struck a medal in celebration of the massacre and commissioned commemorative frescos.
- Geneva City Council lamented, “The whole of France was bathed in the blood of innocent people and covered with dead bodies.”

The Huguenots

- Protestantism vanished from large areas of the country. Many, scared, converted to Catholicism. The survivors dug into their strongholds in southern and western France.
- The civil wars continued until the mid-1590s when a new King Henry IV ended the wars by the 1598 Edict of Nantes.
- The edict granted clear but limited rights to worship, self-government, and self-defense to the “so-called reformed religion.”
- By then, writes Ryrie, the Protestant population was half the size it had been in 1562.

French Absolutism

- Henry IV had been able to offer some relief to the Reformed Church, although implementing the 1598 Edict of Nantes encountered several difficulties. The Huguenots finally received a fatal blow from the late seventeenth-century French absolutism.
- Louis XVI (1643-1715) wanted total harmony between a Catholic King and his subjects. He revoked the Edict of Nantes through the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685.

French Absolutism

- The Edict of Fontainebleau prohibited Protestantism in France, ordered the destruction of Reformed churches, forbade Protestant worship, education, baptism, and above all, migration. Only the Ministers had a choice to convert or leave France.
- Some 200,000 Christian subjects of Louis XIV, many of them divided families, clandestinely migrated out of France.

Calvin in the Netherlands

- Charles V, we met last week, as the Holy Roman Emperor and the Emperor of Spain. He combined in his person the kingdoms of Spain, with Milan and Naples, most of the former duchy of Burgundy, and seventeen Netherlands provinces, besides being the Holy Roman Emperor.
- In terms of *cuius regio, eius religio*, whose realm his religion, he strictly enforced anti-Protestant measures in his lands. The Netherlands was no exception

Calvin in the Netherlands

- The Netherlands also experienced the persecution of the Reformation at the hands of the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor. Beginning around 1566, the Dutch engaged in a grinding 80-year war with their Spanish Catholic rulers.
- The war finally split the Netherlands into a Spanish-ruled Catholic South and an independent Protestant North, marking the origin of the divide between the modern kingdoms of Belgium and the Netherlands.

Calvin in the Netherlands

- In 1609, the new Dutch won an agreement that granted northern provinces virtual independence. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia formalized it.
- The Dutch Republic granted freedom of conscience to its citizens, but not equally. They established the Calvinist church and restricted non-Calvinists' civil rights. They permitted Catholics simply to practice their religion in private, without large gatherings and certainly without the services of a priest.

Calvin in the Netherlands

- Although the Dutch Republic was officially Calvinist, only a minority of the population, perhaps 1/5th, says Ryrie, were members of the Calvinist church. Another third or more were loosely affiliated, attending services and bringing their children to baptism without accepting the discipline that went with full membership. The rest were scattered between all churches and none.

Calvin in the Netherlands

- In what historians tend to view as an inextricable link between Protestantism and capitalism, the Dutch Republic became a singular example.
- By the early 17th century, it was the wealthiest and most cosmopolitan territory on earth. In the 1630s, the city of Amsterdam allowed both Lutherans and Jews to build public places for worship. The Dutch focused on harnessing all the energies for their commercial interests.

Reformation Unpredictability

- Here are some examples of the proliferation of Reform movements.
- Anabaptism developed as an extreme form of the Reformation movement, which the Reformed churches unanimously rejected. The Habsburg rulers viewed another threat in them.
- Anabaptism means rebaptism. They believed that baptism should be reserved for adults based on their conscious choice.

Reformation Unpredictability

- Luther required that the princes suppress Anabaptists and other blasphemers.
- Anabaptists disagreed with Luther on the earthly Kingdom. They concluded that Christians should have nothing to do with the earthly Kingdom. They should obey its orders but not swear its blasphemous oaths, serve on juries that hang the hungry for stealing bread, or fight in armies that plunder the innocent; perhaps they should not even pay taxes that funded such things.

Anabaptism

- Anabaptists preferred to stage a pacifist withdrawal from a corrupt world.
- In 1534, led by Melchiorites, they took over the German city of Munster and expelled the bishop.
- The frustrated bishop raised forces and laid siege to the city. Beseiged, they seized all private property, held all goods in common, and legalized polygamy.
- Within a year, the Catholic forces reasserted control and subjected them to severe torture and executions.

Reformation Unpredictability

- In the Netherlands, followers of a Dutch theologian named Jakob Arminius, who died in 1609, challenged predestination. They pressed for it through a public Remonstrance, insisting that human beings can cooperate with God in salvation.

Reformation Unpredictability

- In Poland, a Calvinist leader abandoned the doctrine of the Trinity in 1565. His followers then organized an anti-trinitarian church in Transylvania. In this Unitarian church, they believed in what they called a rationalistic Christianity.
- In 1565, the Polish radicals organized a Minor Reform church, following Faustus Socinus, and called it Socinian or Unitarian Christianity, which became stubbornly established as part of the Reformist landscape.
- Both Lutherans and Calvinists staunchly opposed anti-Trinitarianism.

Reformation Unpredictability

- A Dutch Anabaptist, Menno Simons (1496-1561), launched the Mennonite movement. Simmons was a pacifist, as were his followers. The Dutch tolerated them as they were close communities that they did not find to be subversive.
- By the 1550s, they were divided into some six different sub-branches.

Conclusion

- We are navigating turbulent times. The Reformist movement reinvigorated its followers' quest for an intense relationship with God, which the ecclesiastical and a cross section of monarchical authorities of the epoch perceived as a threat to their faith and theology.
- In the conflict that ensued, princes acquired the power to choose the religion of their realms. Cuius Regio, Eius Religio produced a divergent impact within the Holy Roman Empire and continental European states of Switzerland and France, as well as the finally divided Netherlands

Conclusion

- Despite differences within the Reformist ranks, persecution and the horrific repression, particularly in France, the Reformation and its message endured.
- We will see next week that *Cuius Regio, Eius Religio* had a completely different dynamic across the channel as the reformation made its way into England, Scotland, and Ireland, and from there to the New World.