

# 16th Century | Part 3

*Bucer, Martyr, Calvin, and the Reformed Faith*

## I. A Reformation Losing Momentum? (1531–1541)

- The movement fractured into Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist camps; Catholic persecution intensified
- The question: Had the Reformation peaked? Answer: No — a second wave of reformers would carry it forward
- Their center of gravity: Strasbourg, Zurich, and Geneva — their faith would be called Reformed

## II. Martin Bucer: Architect of the Reformed Vision

- Dominican friar; converted at Heidelberg (1518); led Strasbourg's Reformation from 1523

### *Three Distinctives He Passed to the Reformed*

- **Church is distinct from the state — state uses force; Church uses persuasion only**
- **Christ rules through Scripture's offices (pastor, elder, deacon); excommunication belongs to the Church, not the state**
- **Scripture interpreted historically, with attention to each author's voice and the early Fathers**
- Lord's Supper: Christ's body and blood truly received by faith; unbelievers receive nothing

## III. Peter Martyr: The Italian Reformed Theologian

- Born Florence (1499); Augustinian friar; fled Italy 1542 on suspicion of heresy
- Taught at Oxford (1547–53); later at Zurich — a giant alongside Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli
- Combined Protestantism with Aristotelian logic; Catholic scholars feared him
- His *Loci Communes*: a standard Reformed textbook for a century
- On the Supper: bread and wine are instruments through which the Spirit feeds the soul with Christ's body and blood

## IV. John Calvin: The Pilgrim Pastor

- Not a gloomy theorist — gentle, long-suffering, devoted to friends, a lover of beauty and family
- Born 1509; trained in law; converted 1532–34; fled France for Basel 1534

### *The Institutes (1536)*

- Published at age 26 — clearest presentation of Reformation theology yet written
- Final edition (1559) structured around the Apostles' Creed: Protestants were not inventing new doctrine
- Deep Augustinian — did not invent predestination; his great contribution was his doctrine of the Church

### *Geneva and Strasbourg*

- Dragooned into Geneva by Farel (1536); clashed with council over discipline; expelled 1538
- Strasbourg (1538–41): happiest years — pastored refugees, learned from Bucer, wrote his *Romans* commentary
- Married Idelette (1540); she died 1549 — "I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life"
- Returned to Geneva 1541 — and stayed for good

## V. Calvin's Doctrine of the Church

### *Three Views He Engaged — and Synthesized*

- With Luther: the true Church is the spiritual body of all believers, known only to God
- With Rome: the visible Church is of supreme practical importance; must partner with the state
- With the Anabaptists: strong internal discipline; excommunication belongs to the Church, not the state

### ***Four New Testament Offices***

- Pastors (word, sacraments, discipline) · Teachers (instruction, training) · Elders (moral oversight) · Deacons (poor relief)
- Pastors + elders = Consistory, holding the power of excommunication — all offices required congregational approval
- This pattern of church government came to be called Presbyterianism

## **VI. Geneva, 1541–1564**

- Ecclesiastical Ordinances (1541): organized offices, discipline, and church-city cooperation

### ***A Dark Chapter***

- Severe moral laws consistently enforced — minor offenses (rebuke/fines) through capital offenses (execution for heresy)
- Execution for heresy was near-universal among Reformers and Catholics; Geneva's sin was consistency
- Servetus (mocked the Trinity) was burned Oct. 17, 1553 — Calvin tried to have the method changed to swift execution; Farel rebuked him for being "soft"
- The trial destroyed the Libertine opposition party; by 1555 Calvin was Geneva's undisputed leader

### ***Genuine Good***

- Free schools, hospital, homeless residence, employment agency, food hygiene laws, care for the poor

## **VII. Calvin's Theology and Worship**

### ***Lord's Supper***

- Against Rome/Luther: Christ's body is in heaven, not physically in the bread
- Against Zwingli: there is a real reception — by faith, through the Spirit, the soul is fed with Christ's body and blood
- Unbelievers receive only bread and wine — this became the standard Reformed doctrine

### ***Worship and Scripture***

- Simple and biblical; Lord's Day order: confession, pardon, Scripture, sermon, intercessions, Creed, Benediction
- Passionately committed to congregational psalm-singing (Beza completed the French Psalter, 1562)
- Faith: knowledge of God's promises + trust in them + assurance flowing from trust
- "This is eternal life, that they may know thee" (John 17:3) — his favorite verse

## **VIII. Calvin's Achievements and Legacy**

- Reformed Geneva by preaching, not force — four sermons/week, two lectures, constant writing, against chronic ill-health
- The Institutes: a clear theology; his commentaries: a treasury of biblical exposition
- Genevan Academy (1559): trained an army of Reformed ministers — made the Reformed faith a missionary movement
- Died 1564; still dictating his last commentary — "What? Would you have the Lord find me idle?"

## **IX. Looking Ahead**

- Next: The Heidelberg Catechism (Olevianus & Ursinus) and the Belgic Confession (Guy de Bres)