

FAITHFUL POLITICS, WEEK 6

Reformation Political Theologies: The
Anabaptists, Martin Luther, and John Calvin

Historical Context

1509	On the death of his father, and as the result of the death of his elder brother Arthur, Henry VIII becomes king of England
1516	Erasmus publishes an influential edition of the New Testament in its original Greek
1517	Martin Luther nails his 95 Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg
1520	Europe's new printing presses spread arguments for and against the Reformation
1521	Pope Leo X excommunicates Martin Luther, and Luther travels to Worms to present his case to the Imperial Diet
1522	The Edict of Worms makes Luther a criminal, forcing him into hiding in the Wartburg Ulrich Zwingli eats sausage during Lent in Zurich, launching the Swiss Reformation
1525	Conrad Grebel baptizes an adult, causing outrage in Zurich Thomas Müntzer leads the rebels in the Peasant War
1527	Gustavus I of Sweden appropriates the property of Catholic churches and monasteries
1529	The 'Protestation' of various German princes and imperial cities at Speyer identifies them as Protestants Luther and Zwingli disagree at Marburg on the nature of the Eucharist
1530	The Augsburg Confession, presented by Melanchthon to the Imperial Diet, defines the Lutheran faith

Historical Context

1531	The Protestant princes of Germany form the defensive League of Schmalkalden Zwingli is killed at Kappel in a battle between Protestant and Catholic cantons
1533	Henry VIII marries Anne Boleyn, and the archbishop of Canterbury declares Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon null and void Anne Boleyn has a child (the future Elizabeth I) but not of the sex her husband wanted
1534	Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy forces prominent figures in English public life to accept him as head of the Church of England
1535	Thomas More refuses to take the oath accepting the Act of Supremacy and is beheaded
1536	Henry VIII begins the process of gathering in the wealth of England's monasteries Anne Boleyn is beheaded in the Tower of London on unsubstantiated charges of adultery (Henry VIII marries Jane Seymour eleven days later)
1541	Protestant reformer John Calvin settles in Geneva and submits the city to a strict Christian rule
1542	Pope Paul III establishes the Roman Inquisition, with the specific task of fighting against the Protestant heresy
1545	3000 Waldenses are massacred as heretics in the villages of Provence The Roman Catholic convenes the Council of Trent to establish the tenets of the Counter-Reformation

Historical Context

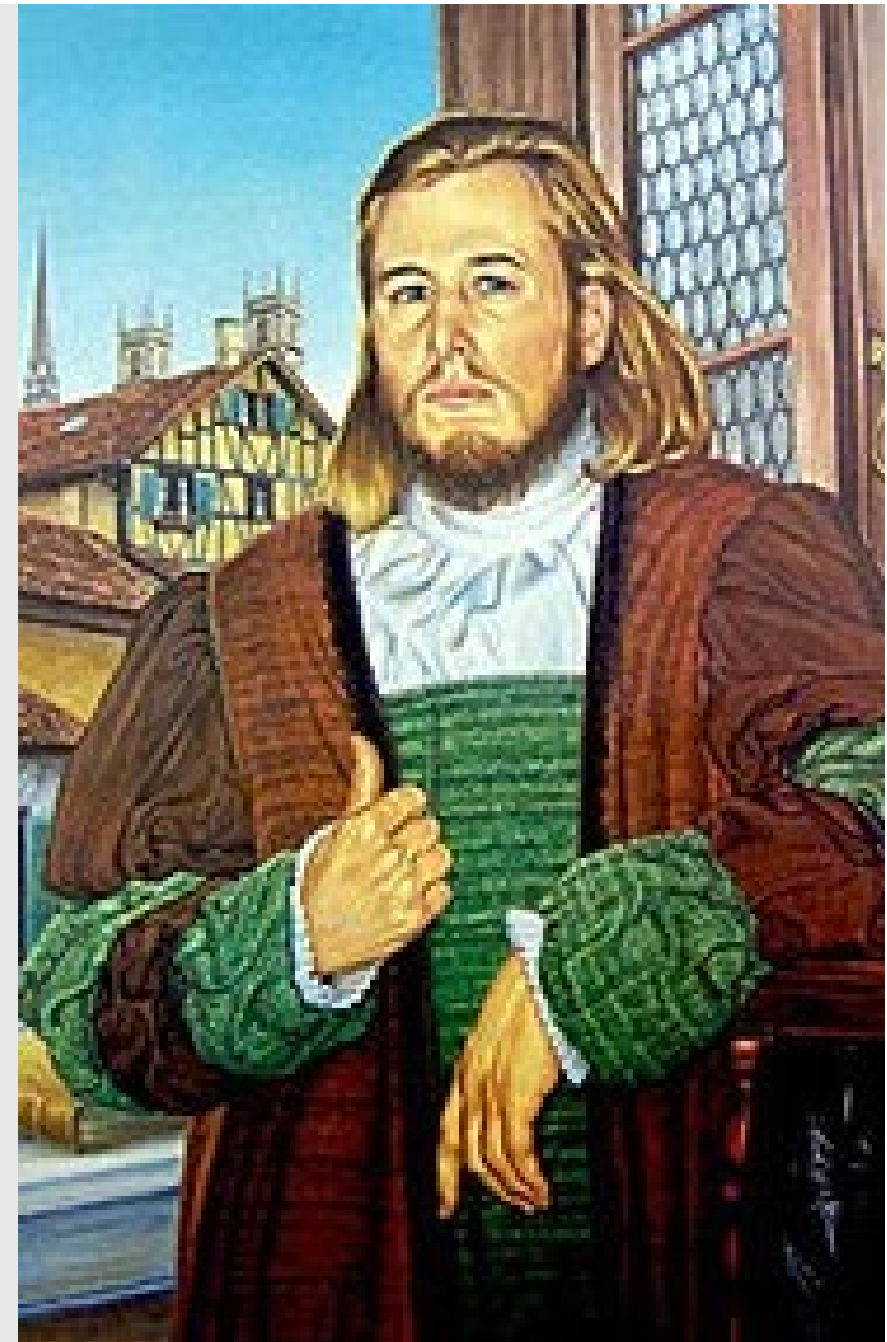
1547	On the death of Henry VIII his 10-year-old son becomes king of England as Edward VI
1553	Mary I succeeds to the English throne and seek to restore Catholicism in England (and marries the Catholic heir to the king of Spain one year later)
1555	The Peace of Augsburg achieves a compromise which for a while solves the religious tensions deriving from the Reformation
1556	Charles V abdicates, handing the Netherlands and Spain to his son Philip and the title of Holy Roman emperor to his brother Ferdinand (the division by Charles V of his territories creates two Habsburg empires, Austrian and Spanish)
1558	Elizabeth I succeeds peacefully to the throne of England, after the turmoil of Mary's Catholic reign Mary Queen of Scots marries the heir to the French throne, who a year later succeeds as Francis II
1559	John Knox returns to Scotland from Geneva and inspires the Protestants to march on Edinburgh France's Protestants, the Huguenots, convene a national synod in Paris
1542	Pope Paul III establishes the Roman Inquisition, with the specific task of fighting against the Protestant heresy
1567	The duke of Alba introduces a reign of terror in the Spanish Netherlands, by means of a tribunal known as the Council of Blood Mary Queen of Scots is deposed from the Scottish throne, with her one-year-old son succeeding her as James VI
1569	A rebellion in the north of England aims to put Mary Queen of Scots on the English throne

Historical Context

c. 1570	Pope Pius V excommunicates the English queen, Elizabeth I, causing a severe crisis of loyalty for her Catholic subjects
1572	A massacre of French Protestants, known as the Huguenots, begins in Paris on St Bartholomew's Day
1573	William of Orange declares himself a Calvinist and assumes the leadership of the united provinces of the Netherlands
1585	England's queen Elizabeth sends 6000 troops to support the Dutch rebels against Spain Catholics are now the martyrs in England, their numbers almost matching the Protestant martyrs of the previous reign
1586	Anthony Babington is involved in a plot to assassinate Elizabeth and place Mary Queen of Scots on the English throne
1587	Mary Queen of Scots, implicated in the Babington plot, is beheaded in Fotheringay castle Francis Drake sails into a crowded Cadiz harbour and destroys some thirty Spanish ships
1588	Seven provinces of the northern Netherlands consider themselves a new republic - the United Provinces
1593	Henry IV becomes a Catholic so as to secure Paris and the throne of France
1598	The Edict of Nantes secures the civil rights of France's Protestants, the Huguenots

The Anabaptists' *Schleitheim Articles*

- The sword is an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and kills the wicked and guards and protects the good. ... But within the perfection of Christ only the ban is used for the admonition and exclusion of the one who has sinned, without the death of the flesh, simply the warning and the command to sin no more.
- Whether a Christian may or should use the sword against the wicked for the protection and defense of the good, or for the sake of love ... Now Christ says to the woman who was taken in adultery, not that she should be stoned according to the law of His Father (and yet He says, "What the Father commanded me, that I do") but with mercy and forgiveness and the warning to sin no more, says: "Go, sin no more." Exactly thus should we also proceed
- Whether the Christian should be a magistrate if he is chosen ... [Christ] Himself further forbids the violence of the sword when He says: "The princes of this world lord it over them etc., but among you it shall not be so."
- It does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate: the rule of the government is according to the flesh, that of the Christians according to the Spirit. Their houses and dwelling remain in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven. Their citizenship is in this world, that of the Christians is in heaven.



Martin Luther's *Temporal Authority*

- If anyone attempted to rule the world by the gospel and to abolish all temporal law and sword on the plea that all are baptized and Christian ... He would be loosing the ropes and chains of the savage wild beasts and letting them bite and mangle everyone, meanwhile insisting that they were harmless, tame, and gentle creatures.
- One must carefully distinguish between these two governments [the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world]. Both must be permitted to remain; the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds.
- Because the sword is most beneficial and necessary for the whole world in order to preserve peace, punish sin, and restrain the wicked, the Christian submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays his taxes, honors those in, serves, helps, and does all he can to assist the governing authority, that it may continue to function and be held in honor and fear.
- It is to be noted that the two classes of Adam's children-the one in God's kingdom under Christ and the other in the kingdom of the world under governing authority, as was said above-have two kinds of law. For every kingdom must have its own laws and statutes: without law no kingdom or government can survive, as everyday experience amply shows. The temporal government has laws which extend no further than to life and property and external affairs on earth, for God cannot and will not permit anyone but himself to rule over the soul. Therefore, where the temporal authority presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads souls and destroys them.



John Calvin's *Institutes* (Bk. IV, Ch. 20)

- [The object of civil government] is not merely, like those things, to enable men to breathe, eat, drink, and be warmed (though it certainly includes all these, while it enables them to live together); ... it is, that no idolatry, no blasphemy against the name of God, no calumnies against his truth, nor other offences to religion, break out and be disseminated among the people ... in short, that a public form of religion may exist among Christians, and humanity among men.
- How can magistrates be at once pious and yet shedders of blood? But if we understand that the magistrate, in inflicting punishment, acts not of himself, but executes the very judgments of God, we shall be disencumbered of every doubt. The law of the Lord forbids to kill; but that murder may not go unpunished, the Lawgiver himself puts the sword into the hands of his ministers, that they may employ it against all murderers. It belongs not to the pious to afflict and hurt; but to avenge the afflictions of the pious, at the command of God, is neither to afflict nor hurt.
- If we are persecuted for righteousness' sake by an impious and sacrilegious prince, let us first call up the remembrance of our faults, which doubtless the Lord is chastising by such scourges. In this way humility will curb our impatience. And let us reflect that it belongs not to us to cure these evils, that all that remains for us is to implore the help of the Lord, in whose hands are the hearts of kings, and inclinations of kingdoms. ... Although the Lord takes vengeance on unbridled domination, let us not therefore suppose that that vengeance is committed to us, to whom no command has been given but to obey and suffer. I speak only of private men. For when popular magistrates have been appointed to curb the tyranny of kings (as the Ephori, who were opposed to kings among the Spartans, or Tribunes of the people to consuls among the Romans ...). So far am I from forbidding these officially to check the undue license of kings.



Discussion Questions

- 1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Anabaptist view? Luther's view? Calvin's view?**
- 2. When it comes to how the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount should inform our view of government, which view—the Anabaptists', Luther', or Calvin's—do you find most persuasive? Why?**
- 3. How are each of these views manifested in today's political debates?**
- 4. What are some modern political issues where it might be necessary for Christians to consider whether the issue is properly the subject of government's coercive authority?**