

JOHN CALVIN

Theologian & Reformer, 1509-1564

Feast Day: 28 May

Collect: Sovereign and holy God, you brought John Calvin from a study of legal systems to understand the godliness of your divine laws as revealed in Scripture: Fill us with a like zeal to teach and preach your Word, that the whole world may come to know your Son Jesus Christ, the true Word and Wisdom; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, ever one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.



Facts:

- Leading theologian and spearhead of the Reformed arm of the Protestant Reformation (origin of Puritans, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists (now United Churches of Christ))
- Grew up a devout Roman Catholic, but had a major conversion experience in 1534 and dedicated himself to the cause of the Reformation
- Premier text is *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which he first published in 1536 and continued to update until 1559
- Luther and Zwingli tended to respond to specific abuses and situations, but Calvin created a systematic Reformed evangelical theology
- Major themes include the sovereignty of God, election and predestination, the true nature of Christian life, and the proper understanding of the authority of scripture
- Wanted spiritual ideas to govern civil society by creating a moral framework for the people—tried to establish theocratic government in Geneva with mixed success
- His attempts at theocracy did result in the creation of hospitals, care for the poor and others in need, social goods such as better city sanitation, and even new jobs based on his expanded religious-social-civic agenda

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- TULIP: the Five Points of Calvinism
 - **T**otal Depravity: we are totally trapped in sin and can do nothing about it, we are lost, incapable, and at enmity with God
 - **U**nconditional Election: you are chosen for salvation not based on your deeds or characteristics, but by God's kind choice, before the foundation of the world (connected to predestination)
 - **L**imited Atonement: Jesus died only for the elect, not for everyone
 - **I**rresistible Grace: if God calls you to salvation, you don't get to say no, it's a done deal
 - **P**reservation of the Saints: you cannot lose your salvation, the elect will go to heaven no matter what

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- Why would the doctrine of predestination be attractive? What would draw people toward the TULIP system of theology?
- Calvin has what we call a "negative anthropology," a theory of humanity that posits that it is basically evil and worthless without God. What are the implications of this anthropology, both helpful and unhelpful?
- What are the pluses and minuses of having a systematic theology?
- How have you built your own systematic theology?
- How do you deal with the question of the sovereignty of God?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics:

JOHN WESLEY

Priest & Founder of Methodism, 1703-1791

Feast Day: 3 March

Collect: Lord God, you inspired your servant John Wesley with burning zeal for the sanctification of souls, and endowed him with eloquence in speech and his brother Charles in song; Kindle in your Church, we entreat you, such fervor, that those whose faith has cooled may be warmed, and those who have not known Christ may turn to him and be saved; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Facts:

- John was the 15th child of an Anglican priest, and his brother Charles the 18th
- Founders and leaders of the Methodist evangelical revival in the Church of England in 18th century
- Together wrote over 6000 hymns
- Ordained Anglican priests but found the Church deeply lacking in authentic religious experience
- At Oxford, gathered a few friends to join in strict observation the worship and discipline of the Book of Common Prayer, hence the name "Methodists"
- Brothers went to American colony of Georgia in 1735
- Had a conversion experience at a meeting in Aldersgate Street with a group of Moravians during a reading of Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans
- Later schism of the Methodists from the Church of England occurred after the death of both brothers
- John performed uncanonical ordinations of elders for America, which Charles bitterly opposed

Spiritual/Theological Teachings & Legacy

- Quote about his conversion experience: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”
- Formed small Christian groups for intensive and personal accountability, discipleship and religious instruction
- Appointed itinerant, unordained evangelists to travel and preach and provide pastoral care for these groups—“circuit riders”
- Under Wesley’s leadership, Methodists became leaders in social justice issues of the day such as prison reform and the abolition of slavery
- Preached against Calvinism and predestination

Questions Raised by Life & Work

- How do you find accountability, companionship and spiritual intimacy in community? What is your “small group” for discipleship? Do you have one? Do you need one?
- What is the relationship between emotional experience of God and the theology it gives rise to? What are the most tangible experiences of God that you have ever had? And how did they change what you think about the nature of God and your call?
- Is a schism still a schism if the person who started it says it isn't? Who decides who is part of a tradition and who is not?

My notes/observations/questions/prayer topics: