



JOHN CALVIN 1509-1564

John Calvin was a giant in the Protestant Reformation and his writings are still studied and debated today. In 1509 he was born in France where he would study law and become a brilliant scholar. After reading of Luther and the Reformation movement, he had a spiritual conversion and left his native France to settle in 'free-thinking' Switzerland. In Geneva, he was convinced to stay and help reform the city from its notoriously lax moral standards.

While there, he published his first edition of his famous work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a systematic theology of Reformation teachings. He pastored and preached in St. Pierre church, produced commentaries on almost every book of the Bible, wrote devotionals, and trained missionaries. His influence pervaded the schools and churches, and Geneva became a powerful moral magnet which attracted many Protestant exiles fleeing persecution from the Catholic Church. His publications spread his ideas of a "correctly" reformed church throughout Europe, and Calvinism became the dominant theology of the Reformed Church in Europe. Its influence spread throughout America and South Africa through the colonization period.

Some important characteristics of Calvinism are the inerrancy of the Bible, salvation only by the grace of God, the predestination of the saved (his most controversial doctrine), the need to work out salvation with a moral lifestyle as evidence of being saved, and the symbolic presence of Christ in Holy Communion.

Much has been written about John Calvin's influence in the Church today, and due to the high moral standards which he expected Christians to live out, he has been accused of generating a joyless Christianity. The reality is that, although plagued with chronic illness and personal grief, John Calvin could write this: "There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice."