



Reformation in Geneva

Transformation in only one generation

Based on the German version ¹

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1 World Crossroads of influence



Geneva is one of the key places in the world. With his reputation of neutrality and as an economic crossroads of the world, it was always a crucial place during history. There are over 20 major international organizations located in Geneva including the World Trade Organization, World Health Organization, International Labor Office, World Council of Churches, Red Cross, and the Geneva Office of the United Nations. More humanitarian and diplomatic work is done in Geneva than in any other place in the world.

500 years ago Geneva was a very poor, dirty city and the hygienic situation was horrible. The beautiful lake was dirty and foul smelling. In the 16th century reformers preached that change would be possible with one changing first himself according to the word of God, the bible. Geneva was transformed through the teaching of the reformers. During only one generation, Geneva became beautiful and prosperous where people could live in freedom and peace. John Calvin was one of the greatest reformers and was called the creator of the modernity. He had the ability to transform the thinking of the people and laid the new foundation for a new society.

“Post Tenebras Lux” is still the motto of the Reformation of Geneva. It means “After the Darkness, Light,” and is written in several places on the city’s walls, even in the UN building. It reminds us of the history of the Reformation and that changing of situations can happen even today, through transforming our minds and our lives. Let us take a closer look to the transformation 500 years ago, at the time of the Reformation and I learn something from it.

1.1 The Symbol of Geneva the Jet d’Eau (water jet)

This is the main symbol of Geneva that everybody knows. It shoots water 140 meters high at 200 km/h or 50 litres/second. Its force is 1360 hp. Originally the fountain was a blow off valve for the industries of Geneva. Every Saturday at 4 pm when the machines of the industry turned off, there was too much pressure in the pipeline and it was pushed out through a fountain in the lake. This became the symbol of Geneva even today and reminds us of the economical success of the industries after the Reformation.



2 History of Geneva

Geneva became very interesting for the trades and the politics even of long ago, because of its position in the centre of Europe. Cesar wanted to control the territory of Geneva and defeat the Celtics (Helveticas) in 4 BC as Cesar asserted in his journal. The Celts became Roman, but in their thinking and their rituals they did not live the roman way. There was still a lot of witchcraft and superstition. The Romans were not able to fully turn the wrong animistic thinking of the Celts, and the civilisation took only slow steps. But in the 4th century AD Europe turned to a new understanding of the reality, to Christianity. The faith in a personal God who gave us responsibility to change the world to a better place was vastly superior to the animistic thinking of the Celts. That faith changed the whole society. Europe and Geneva became prosperous and successful. In 381 AD Geneva already had his own bishop.

In the early middle age Geneva became rich because of its neutrality. When the French or Italians wanted to do free business without the control of the King, they

went to Geneva. The Place “du Bourg de Four” was called the crossroads of Europe because on that spot a main north-south commercial route crossed an equally prominent east-west trading route.

The Rhone River goes to the Mediterranean Sea, and a bit further north a small river called the l’Orbe flows to the North Sea. A lot of trade was done by ship and this made Geneva a crucial and important point for business and the exchange of goods. Geneva became a diplomatic and humanitarian crossroads the whole of Europe.

The King Louis XI of France in 1463 became jealous because of the amazing growth of Geneva. He threatened his people with the death penalty if they still did business in Geneva. Geneva lost its position and the traders didn’t come any more. It was only the thieves and prostitutes who stayed behind. Geneva became poor since there was less tax money and less people.

Through the 16th century a new understanding of reality rose up again in Geneva that man is not under the pope or the king. Every human being stands directly under God and is free to do what God allows. With this thinking Geneva became rich and successful again, a place where people could live in enormous freedom and peace. This thinking became the foundation of our western civilisation and spread over the whole world.

Today we can see the history of the Reformation on the great Reformation Monument (1909 – 1917) for the 400 year celebration of John Calvin. It reminds us of the big transformation from 500 years ago. The giant wall dominates the large Parc des Bastions. The focal points are the 15 foot tall statues of four Geneva luminaries. Guillaume Farel was the first to preach the Reformation in Geneva, John Calvin, leader of the Reformation movement and spiritual father of Geneva, Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor and John Knox, Scottish preacher, friend of Calvin, and founder of Presbyterianism in Scotland.



In 1814 Geneva became a member of Switzerland. Even today Geneva is one of the central places in the world.



The flags show the relationship between the Bishop (the key of Saint Peter) and the free imperial city (eagle of the imperial). It came out of the 15th century and symbolised that Geneva was part of the Holy Roman Empire since the 11th century, but independent and was ruled by the people themselves through the Bishop of Geneva. It was not under the Kings or the emperor. Its citizens had a lot of freedom in contrast to the rest of Europe. Geneva has a long history of an independent republic and became the model of the modern world.

2.1 Guilliam Farel (1489 1565)

At the dawn of the Reformation, on the edge of the lake in the market area, open air evangelist and reformer William Farel from France preached that true change begins with God’s truth and transforms lives. In 1536 Farel, a young and passionate evangelist brought the people of Geneva to accept the Reformation. His strategy was to go into the city, do wild things to ensure that everybody heard the message of the Reformation and then leave right away. For example, once he kicked the priest from the pulpit and



started to preach himself. Once he pushed a priest into the lake. He always got kicked out of the city.

He spread the reform thinking to a lot of places in the western part of Switzerland. For example the citizens of Lausanne invited the famous reformer from Geneva to debate with catholic leaders in the cathedral. Through the help of John Calvin the Reformation was also accepted in Lausanne after the debate.

2.2 Jean Calvin (1509-1564)



Calvin was born in Noyon, France on the 10th July, 1509. He was born Roman Catholic, but when he was a young man he became a Protestant. Farel and Calvin fled from France under enormous pressure and under cover they travelled through Europe. If they would have been discovered, they would have been killed (burnt at the stake). Geneva was neutral and so several of the French refugees came here. Almost all of the reformers in Geneva came there as refugees mostly from France. The refugees were a cornerstone in Geneva's history. In 1553 at the ages of 25 Calvin escaped from Paris because of his affection to the Reformation.

The situation in Paris pinnacle in a fatal situation that during just one night 30'000 people were killed. (Bartholomew night 23/24 August 1573).

Calvin wanted to go to Strasbourg but for security reasons he first went to Geneva. For this young man who wanted to change the world Geneva was a horrible city where no serious person would stay and of course nobody who wanted to do something serious for the world.

Farel brought the Reformation and threw the bishop and the clerics out of the city. It brought a lot of freedom but also chaos. Everybody did whatever they thought it was right to do. As Farel discovered Calvin he suddenly he recognized that he would be the man who could bring structure and order to the city again. Farel knew Calvin. Calvin studied law and theology and had an understanding of the political and church order.

Farel spoke very strongly to Calvin, pointing his finger in the air and said "Your studies shall be cursed by God if you are not willing to help the people here". It would be an overcoming for Calvin to stay in this awful city. But for him the strong voice of Farel was like the voice of God and finally he was willing to stay.

Calvin and Farel preached much about repentance and the need to change oneself and one's attitudes. So they were kicked out of the city. Farel went to Neuchatel and Calvin to Strasbourg where he learnt a lot from Martin Bucer.

After three years the citizens of Geneva recognized their disastrous situation had not improved after rejecting Calvin. A delegation travelled to Strasbourg to ask Calvin to return and help them out of the disaster they created by living by their own rules.

From the time on Calvin stayed in Geneva until his death in 1564. We're not sure where he was buried because he didn't want his grave to have a name on it. He wanted the people to honour God, not him. His main goal was to write a book called "Institutio⁶" of the Christian Religion. He didn't want to reform Geneva or even thought about changing the whole world. With his writing he wanted to convince the King of France from the goodness of the Reformation, but it never happened.

Calvin always had bad health, he suffered from enormous asthma, dyspepsia and a cold. He married Idelette van Bure who gave birth to a son. His son didn't survive the childhood and Idelette died right after the birth. The pope and Calvin's objectors saw it as a curse of God. Calvin replied to the pope:

“Haven’t I ten thousands of children in the Christian world? And how many has the pope”?

Pope Pius IV. said about Calvin: "What the power of this heretic is, is that money means nothing to him". He died in humility on the 27th of Mai 1564 in Geneva.

2.2.1 Quote of John Calvin³

"I had many weaknesses, which you had to carry and even all that I did is basically of no value. The bad people take it for my downturn. But I said again that all my works are not of value and I am a distressed wretch. You are my witness that my endeavour always looked for the good. Therefore I ask you that you forgive my bad things. If there was something good than please take it and follow it."

3 The influence from the Reformation

The Catholic Church had not been good to the people it had ruled over by oppressing them. The church was no longer for the people but the people for the church. This was an enormous injustice and the people looked for salvation. The Reformation brought the thinking to take the power from the one and gave it to the many. However France was against this way of thinking. The people in power didn't want to lose their positions and their power. History shows that the Reformation was not only about church, it affected the whole at life.

The thinking behind the Reformation was that man is fallen and when he has too much power he will use it for himself. The king or the pope were no longer rulers over the people. Everybody was directly under God. The people were responsible before God and the Bible. The power could be separated because the Bible as an ethical measure stands over the people. The people could not do what they wanted to do, they were responsible to the word of God. This bound the society together. A social freedom without chaos was possible. We are all equal but we are responsible to one another. This was a new way of thinking. Neither the Church nor the state was standing over their decisions, it was the Bible. Everybody with the Bible in their hand can say that things are right or wrong. Living in freedom is only possible when you have a general absolute measure or ethical standard which you are accountable to. Our western thinking about politics and economy, the whole society, comes from a biblical understanding. When we will give up this foundation, we will also give up our western civilisation. Democracy cannot work without a standard over us. If we want to hold on to freedom and order we must turn back to this ethical standard of the Reformation.

Calvin thought first we must separate the power and secondly bind them under the authority of the bible. Calvin understood this better than anyone else including Luther or Zwingli.

The Reformation not only affected the Church, it affected the whole society. In the cities of Switzerland the citizen and the bishop came together in the churches for a debate to find out if the Reformation helpful and good for the people. There were four main issues to accept the Reformation. Firstly the churches must give the land back to the farmers, secondly the abolishment of peonage (like slavery in the 19th century), thirdly reduction the taxes, fourthly a right to say in political decisions for all citizens.

3.1 Reform of the education

Calvin saw for himself that people who could not read or write were dependent on others. Democracy or the separation of power could only function if people had the knowledge to handle it. Calvin taught that people and specifically the children first need to be educated before giving them authority. For the first time in history women were allowed to go to school. Women have the same ability to rule when they have the same education as men. Using the Bible, they taught children to read and write. Those children later became the rulers of the city.



The families were taught to set aside money for their children's education. The school Calvin founded, called the Academy, is today called the College de Calvin.

This building is one of the oldest public schools in the world. The two original buildings are still part of the campus. They commemorate the fact that French, German, Greek, Latin and Hebrew were taught in the college as well as grammar, logic and rhetoric. After seven years of pre-schooling, pupils could continue attending the lectures and exercises in the Academy. Young refugee pastors were educated and sent back to their home countries to bring the thinking of the Reformation. Often they lost their life because king and pope opposed them.

In 1872 Geneva Academy was made a university and relocated to the Parc des Bastions where it is today.

A lot of famous Universities in the world had their origin from the refugees who were trained at the Geneva Academy. Like Yale USA, Harvard Massachusetts, Heidelberg Germany, Leiden, Antwerpen and Amsterdam Nederland.

3.2 Reform of the defence

Before the Reformation only the King owned weapons. This can become very dangerous. A man with too much power is dangerous as the whole of history teaches us. When there is a conflict, the King will look first for himself and will oppress the one without a weapon to defend. Calvin taught that everybody in the city is responsible for defending. "In one hand the weapon, in the other hand the shovel." Even women were responsible for defending. It became a new understating of the military in the whole world. Switzerland still shows this system till today. Every Swiss man who can go to the military is a member of the national army. Each has a gun at home and has to do a certain number of services.

There was always a conflict between the Savoy, French and the "Eidgenossen" about Geneva. Because of its civil army that came out of the thinking of the Reformation, Geneva could defend itself and remained independent. Every year the Genevans celebrate their independence on the Escalade de Geneva (1602). Geneva won the war because of a woman who poured out her soup over an enemy who was under the city wall and thereby had time to alarm the citizens. To separate the power and give weapons to many can only work on a basis of an ethical denominator standard to which all people agree about. It was possible through turning back to the bible that everybody has access to. The Reformation of Geneva was strongly influenced from the "Eidgenossen". They had this idea of civil army since their founding in 1291.

3.3 Church had to be reformed before society can be reformed



Underneath the Cathedral of St. Pierre is a Celtic excavation area. They had an altar for their Gods probably in the same place as the cathedral today. The back of the cathedral is in Roman (1160) style. The main building is Gothic. The iron tower is newly built because the original burnt down.

The front of the cathedral above the entrance is in neoclassical style. It was built 250 years ago to portray the new worldview of Geneva. The Church always points upwards, to heaven, to God. The Greek style accentuates the horizontal.

The Greek in the ancient times freed themselves from their Gods. Now man is free to become everything he wants to.

With Enlightenment this worldview came back. The deliverance was no more from the Gods of the Greeks, it was now from the Christian God. They don't need God any more. And they wanted to show it through the most important building in the city. When you go into the Cathedral, normally our eyes go up, the architecture of the Church points you to God. This should always remind you of this reality. This grandiose entrance destroyed this.



The Auditoire of Calvin next to the cathedral was the first English church in Geneva. John Knox (1514-1572) was the pastor and spread the message to the English world. It spread through Scotland, England, Holland to North America. The whole English speaking world was taught by him about the reformed thinking of society. The Scottish Church is the modern day English speaking Reformed Presbyterian congregation that meets in this building. The thinking of Geneva became the foundation of the Presbyterians, the Puritans and the Anglican churches. The Anglicans stayed in the form of the catholic mass and they reformed the theology from Johannes Calvin.



The Printing Industry in Calvin's time was responsible for the rapid dissemination of Calvin's sermons and other writing throughout France and elsewhere within a few weeks of his writing. Geneva's later printing business served other reformers of society like Rousseau, Voltaire and Lenin. They tried to reform the society but without the teaching of the bible.

The teaching of the Reformation was that man himself must change first his own attitude and must be renewed in his heart through the teaching of the bible. In the church the power was separated in pastors, doctors, deacons and the elders, who were there to discipline the believers and were elected by every district. The church was ruled by their authorities, which consisted by the pastors and 12 laymen, controlled by the state council. The church in the Reformation in Geneva was the first adequate democracy based on the separation of power and base on a constitution. All of those were engaged to a moral standard of the bible and Calvin demands a high integrity and honesty. Priest, farmer or King, everybody must give account over his acting and must be punished if he did wrong.

The Bible is not only like Luther said to care for our sins but it is also there to create order in politics and society. The bible has more to say than just salvation, it has three main functions. First it leads us to know that we are sinners; secondly it gives us the principles for the state and civil laws, and lastly it shows us the way to salvation. Calvin was called the advocate of the Old Testament. Jesus in the New Testament only took the ceremonial laws away but not the civil laws.

The Church and government worked together. They had different spheres of authority, yet both of them were standing under the authority of the Bible.



Calvin lived very strictly. He did not take power in the government but he influenced it significantly. It was always a question of who had what authority. There is a famous painting showing the balance of city and church leadership in the Reform museum of Geneva.

No church is allowed to become the State church. Otherwise the other churches are less valuable. Calvin was interested in a synod of the Churches in Europe. He put a lot of effort into it. He wrote many letters to try to bring the different churches together.

3.4 Reform of the social system

3.4.1 Deacons

Before the Reformation, caring for the sick and poor people was the responsibility of the monks and the monasteries. Yet under Calvin's Biblical thinking, everybody was responsible. This thinking brought a lot of self responsibility to all people. The poor must give account to their neighbour who supports them and the rich must learn to look to their neighbours who are in need. The social system could become reformed through the time of the Reformation. It brought a lot of prosperity and order back to the city again.

Today in the social sphere the responsibility system is no longer with the people but with the state. This can become very dangerous. You delegate it, but you lose freedom and self responsibility too and it costs more and more. This reform could teach us a lot today too.

3.4.2 The refugees

The French named the refugees who accepted the Reformation "Huguenots". Many fled to Geneva because it was a neutral place. Calvin saw the potential of these people which they brought. He integrated and educated them. They were very influenced by the ethics of John Calvin. The French made a large mistake in their history by driving them away or killing them. Switzerland reaped a great blessing for reaching out to



bless 16th century refugees and others since. The port tower bears the sign "City of Refuge"

Advancement & prosperity came to Geneva partly as a result of welcoming refugees, many of whom were skilled craftsmen and scientists. Many refugees were French protestant Huguenots who fled religious persecution.

They became a strong pillar for the economy in the city and later on in the whole world.

In Calvin's day, Geneva was a walled city with limited space. The influx of the Huguenots and other refugees created a housing crisis. Encouraged by Calvin, the city governors and the property owners worked together on a plan to suspend the building code that limited the height of buildings to four stories and allowed a fifth story to be built. The space that was provided was used to house refugee families. As a lasting testimony to this collaborative social action, the added floors reflect the architecture of the 17th century property owners. This distinctive top story difference can now be seen all over the city.



Crossroad of Europe

Calvin also strongly encouraged other reformed cities to take refugees. This theme was represented among the more than 2000 letters Calvin wrote to communicate the perspective of the Bible.

3.5 Reform of the economy

Calvin understood the situation of the poor, the social aspect, as well as how the financial market functioned. Wealth is a gift from God and not of one's own effort. Calvin taught that people's work and business were part of their worship. We are not allowed to use it as we want to. We are responsible to share our wealth and bless others with it. God tests the hearts of the rich and the poor. The rich must open their hearts for the poor and the poor shouldn't start to steal and become rebellious.

The idea of money for Calvin, unlike the Catholic Church, was not bad. You can enjoy the wealth and the beauty of the world. The problem is not money itself, it must only be used in a just way.

Before the Reformation, farmers worked for the King and the King was responsible for them. If you work for others, your work was probably not so effective. The farmers didn't work as hard as they should. Therefore the kings oppressed the farmers. There was injustice on both sides. The King had to support the farmers and they did a bad job. They had too many feasts and the King had to pay for it, but was no longer able to do it. The feudal system was in an awful situation. The people needed a new order.

The Reformation enabled businesses to grow. People no longer worked for the King or the Pope but for themselves. The free market brought enormous growth.

The sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) said that the spirit of capitalism came from Calvin. But this is not true. It was capital thinking but not capitalism. Calvin taught us that capitalistic thinking and social responsibility must work together.

3.5.1 Interest and credits

Before the Reformation, the Catholic Church forbade taking financial interest. But when interest was allowed, the rich people were willing to lend money to the people who want to start a business. Now it was possible to get capital which was impossible before the Reformation. To build up something before the Reformation was only possible for those who had already something. Before the Reformation the growth process was held back and the potential of many people was not used. The whole situation turned around and businesses started everywhere.

It was only allowed to take interest from people who started a business to earn money with it. To take interest from poor people who need money to survive was not allowed. The highest interest rate was 4 %, which remained in effect for 400 years. Calvin could wake up the potential in the people and gave them a platform that their abilities could grow. It brought superiority over the places that didn't accept the Reformation and is still visible today in many parts of the world. For example the superi-

ority from North America over South America. Both of them had resources the south even has more, but the reformed north became more prosperous than the south.

3.5.2 Capitalism and socialism

The enlightenment brought the idea that freedom of business is the most important aspect. The highest goal for a society was to develop and get rich. It brought the world into the time of industrialisation where a lot of injustice took place. A lot of people were oppressed by the capitalists and the world suffered enormous pain. The Reformation in contrast brought the view of development, but always with a social responsibility to help people with less ability to grow and take care of the people who are in need. But as the people lost the foundation of the bible, the view of society became biased. The enlightenment would not be possible without the thinking of the Reformation. It is built on the Reformation, but without the foundation of the bible so it lost the social aspect.

The backlash reaction was socialism. It was an understanding supposing there is no God. It was the thinking of a society where all problems could be solved by our social relationships. The people of the Reformation were focused on reaching and building new resources. They believed in an open system where God the creator could give more resources enough for everyone. The faith of the enlightenment turned into the thinking that we are living in a closed world where we must distribute what we have. Socialism focused on the distribution of resources and neglects the building of new resources. The shifting of the worldview turned the whole society upside down. Still today we live in this tension of these two views of society. We will not find a good economical solution when we are not able to bring the socialistic and capitalistic thinking together.

3.6 Reform in the politics

The thinking of the Reformation turned the world upside down. A totally new understanding of politics grew in this time. The idea that everybody is directly under God, accountable to him, and his word, brought the political application of separation of power and a constitution. It also brought an absolute standard whereby everybody can test what others do. The Reformation brought the concept of a voting system, where the population could decide who their ruler should be. It gave everybody the responsibility to bring order in a city. This led to a federal system where the political power is with the people. A society can only function when its own people take self responsibility and the reformer was able to build such a system. Still today Switzerland has one of the distinctive federal systems of the world. It gives the people the responsibility and demands accountability. With centralisation you would take the responsibility from the people and make them dependent. Today we can see it all over the world that our thinking turns back to a political order like it was before the Reformation. There people are no more able to carry responsibility.

Geneva was never a theocratic place. The State and Church are separated, but both are standing under the same law. Before the Reformation the church stood over the whole society, and it led the world in the crusades and into a situation of injustice. The separation of power of state and church made the western world strong. It will also not be good when the state stands over the churches. It leads to a similar situation of injustice, like dictators today show all over the world. For the reformer it was clear that church and state should stay side by side, but both under the same order of God.

3.6.1 Glorious Reformation in England (1688-1689)

It was a good example for the Reformation of politics. King William of Orange gave his power voluntarily to the parliament. Unlike later in the French revolution where it was taken from the King by force. This revolution in England was built on the thoughts of John Calvin. Power must be separated but not by rebellion. When you act in rebellion against injustice you are no better than the people who did wrong. The Reformation didn't destroy what didn't work well, it renews them.

Still today England is an institutional monarchy where the power to pass a law is with the parliament and not with the king. The main issue of the reform thinking in politics was not democracy it was the separation of power. The question will not be if nations are a democracy or a republic, the question will be who has the power and if the power separated or not.

3.6.2 Courts

People committing crime were kicked out of the Church. There were small courts in every district in Geneva which would take appeals. This is also one of the foundations of the current Swiss federalist system. This was bottom up ruling similar to the thinking in the Bible. Moses looked for men over 1000, 100, 10 to judge the people. It was the beginning of the thinking that we must have a court independent from the state (judicative).

The Reformation brought the understanding to have an independent court from the state and the church. But the court stays also directly under God according to the bible like the state and the churches. Paul Roberts painted a picture in the supreme court of Lausanne "The justice of the nation". Every judge who goes to the court has to walk by this painting and is reminded of biblical justice. The woman of justice painted on the picture points with her sword to the bible.



3.7 The bible is still today our foundation

3.7.1 The Red Cross



A young banker named Henri Dunant was part of a strong Calvinist family in the mid 1800's in Geneva. He was a member of a church that met in the building that currently houses a French and English congregation and has hosted other ethnic congregations. Seeking a meeting for his business with emperor Napoleon, Dunant arrived in Solferino, Italy the day after a major and bloody battle. He was so moved by the lack of attention to the wounded that he gave a report on his return to his church in Geneva. Touched by the teaching of the bible a movement started among businessmen and others, led by Dunant that produced the first document of the Geneva Convention and the organization that became the Red Cross. One man with conviction and compassion, leading in a network of influence has helped millions in the last 150 years! His labours exceeded his initial vision, and he became the first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

3.7.2 Human right declaration

René Cassin (1887-1976) was the author of the human right declaration. He received the Nobel Peace Prize and in 1948 the general assembly of the UN in New York signed his declaration. He wrote an article with the title "From the 10 commandments to human rights". He thought in the same way as the reformer that the human rights must have a deeper background than just humanistic thinking. He wrote that through thousands of years the moral authority of the bible has not changed and is still relevant to day.

Centuries have passed. Judaism has, throughout unparalleled trials, preserved its passion for justice and its desire to contribute to the defense of the rights of men of all races and origins, along the lines of the very principle with which it was entrusted two thousand years ago. The Ten Commandments, the first Code of the essential duties of man, have suffered many an outrage in history and continue to suffer. Their moral authority remains intact⁴.

3.7.3 Neutrality

Through the reformer and specially through John Calvin, Switzerland could handle the conflict between Catholics and reformed Churches well. Switzerland was not part of the 30 year war. In this war the whole developed Europe was destroyed and was thrown back for a 100 years.

Switzerland was not part of the First nor the Second World War. Switzerland never had a King and a revolution as the surrounding nations. Switzerland became very strong in its economy and politics, and became very interesting for the whole world. Today a lot of international Organisations are located in Geneva. The UN is doing 80% of its work in Geneva. The political understanding of Switzerland that came out of the Reformation is still today a model for the world.

The teaching of the Reformation has still a lot to say today. It is the foundation for our whole society. When we don't understand the reformer and the bible, we will not be able to understand western civilisation and that it brought us a lot of freedom and success.

4 Reformer in Geneva without the biblical thinking

4.1 Voltaire (1694-1778)

Voltaire lived also in Geneva and printed his philosophic writing in this town. During his stay in England he saw the glorious Revolution and wanted the same for France, yet he had not a biblical understanding and it ended in the French revolution. "Egalité, Liberté Fraternité," Unity, equality and brotherliness was the voice of the French revolution but it turned into terror. The revolution devours its children. On a human foundation it was not possible to separate the power. It turned into a chaos where everybody did as he thought was right. Because the people were not able to deal with one another Napoleon came into power and centralised all for his own sake. Unity, equality and brotherliness were over and it turned in dictatorship where everyone was under control. After Napoleon's horrible time he was banished to an island and whole Europe had to be built up again in the congress of Vienna.

4.2 Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

He grew up a street further from where the house of Calvin is in Geneva 200 years later. He wanted to change society too but with a different view of reality and of man. He did not have a Biblical worldview. He thought that man is good by nature. What makes man bad is the environment, the bad authorities around him.

His solution for society was total freedom from all authorities. Both Calvin and Rousseau wanted to solve the problems of society but in an opposite way.

Rousseau hated the idea of sin. "I am the new man totally free, living in nature and I can do whatever I want to do." He was against any institution in society and wanted to destroy every structure or organization especially the families.

His ideas of a perfect society never became reality. His thoughts came from Plato and led to Napoleon and further into communism. The French revolution and especially Napoleon wanted to bring his ideas in reality. He took responsibility from the people and the society broke down. Still today he is mentioned in a lot of books and people believe in his idea about reality. But it is only a philosophy or a dream that never worked out in reality. Where people tried to build a society with his worldview it broke out in a disaster. It did not work because it was built on the idea that man is good. The bible says man is a sinner and this seems to me much more realistic.

4.3 Wladimir Lenin (1870-1924)

In the 19th century a man named Wladimir Lenin appeared in Geneva. He was a man who turned the world upside down. His thinking came from Karl Marx who proclaimed the complete emancipation of man. The dusty thinking of the middle age must be destroyed and replaced with a new view of socialism. Marx said "until now we spoke about a better world, but now we must do it, build a new world of socialism. A new man is born out of himself. Lenin took this world serious and brought it reality in Russia. He printed his revolutionary ideas in Geneva and sent them to Russia. The communist promised freedom and human rights. But the promise never became truth. In the beginning it looked like a justice system where every person had the same right, but the reality was much different. Instead of this promise came terror and Gulags. The Russian Revolution ended in an enormous disaster like the French Revolution. It went into a traumatic situation where 66 million people were killed under the dictatorship of Lenin and Stalin. The idea that the state should have all power and responsibility worked never out. It patronized man and destroyed self responsibility and innovation.

5 Inference

The Reformation was not only about church, it affected and reformed the whole society. It was not perfect, but it brought a major change. It set the people free from hierarchical bondage to Pope and Kings and laid a scripture based foundation, turning poverty to prosperity in just one generation with an impact that is still felt in some aspects today. The democratic system, the whole political system of our modern world was built on the Reformation. When we will lose the Christianity and the impact from the bible we will lose our freedom and our wealth.

Without a God man will become God. It seems impossible to build a neutral standard that everybody agrees to. It is the question if we really think that man can solve the problem by himself. In history we can discover this thinking ended in a disaster. Without God we end up in a huge power game of the "survival of the fittest". The view of the reformer is the only logical explanation how a society in freedom without chaos can exist.

The Christians are not better than other people, but they were able to build a better system out of their worldview that best fits with reality.

Annex

1. Based on the German version “Reformation in Genf ,Eine ganze Stadt wird re-formiert“ (<http://www.sbcw.ch/sbcw/files/Reformationstour.pdf>)
2. History (www.wikipedia.org)
3. from the 10 commandments to the human righth René Cassin (www.udhr.org/history/tencomms.htm)
4. quote of John Calvin translated from German: Studienausgabe Band 2: Gestalt und Ordnung der Kirche von Calvin. (Neukirchen-Vluyn)
5. IHΣ Jota Eta Sigma is the sign for Christianity based of 2 Kor.3.5
6. Christianae Religionis Institutio (www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutio1.toc.html)
7. “Post Tenebras Lux” is the motto of the Reformation for the city. It means after the darkness Light.
8. The emblem of Geneva is similar to its flag



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<http://www.sbcw.ch/sbcw/e-Reformationtour.htm>

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