

THE “FIVE SOLAS” OF OUR FAITH

Session Nine: From Luther to Us – Calvin, Knox, and the Presbyterian Church in Canada

Luther and his Beloved Katharina (Katy von Bora)

Katharina Von Bora was only eighteen at the time Martin Luther issued his now famous 95 theses from Wittenburg. She had lived in a convent since she was three; her father had taken her there after her mother's death. Katharina and several of the other nuns at the cloister heard of Luther's Biblical teaching. Once they believed the principles Luther taught, they wanted to leave the cloisters. When Luther heard of this, he encouraged a merchant friend to help them escape.

Herring merchant Leonard Kopp often delivered herring to the convent, and one evening in 1523, he bundled twelve nuns into his wagon in the empty fish barrels! Several of the nuns returned to their families; Luther helped find homes, husbands, or positions for the rest.

Within two years after their escape, all the nuns had been provided for except one--Katharina. Gradually, through the persuasion of friends and his father, Luther proposed to marry Katie himself.

Luther had been given the building of the Augustinian monastery at Wittenburg by the Elector, and into the monastery Katy moved after her marriage in 1525. She cleaned up the monastery and brought some order to Luther's daily life. Luther wrote a friend, "There is a lot to get used to in the first year of marriage. One wakes up in the morning and finds a pair of pigtails on the pillow which were not there before." After a year of marriage Luther wrote another friend, "My Katy is in all things so obliging and pleasing to me that I would not exchange my poverty for the riches of Croesus." Luther, the former celibate monk, now exalted marriage, exclaiming, "There is no bond on earth so sweet, nor any separation so bitter, as that which occurs in a good marriage."

Katy managed the finances of the family and helped free Luther's mind for his work of writing, teaching, and ministering. Luther called her the "morning star of Wittenberg" since she rose at 4 a.m. to care for her many responsibilities. She took care of the vegetable garden, orchard, the brewing of beer, the fishpond, and barnyard animals, even to the butchering of them herself. Often there were as many as 30 students, guests, or boarders staying in the monastery, all of whom came under Katie's care. Luther was often ill with kidney and digestive ailments, and Katy was able to minister to him in his illnesses with her considerable medical skill. Katy's life was not just concerned with the physical, however. Martin encouraged his Katy in her Bible study and suggested particular passages for her to memorize.

In time the Luthers had six children and also raised four orphan children; the family became a model for German families for several centuries. Luther viewed marriage as a school for character: Family life helped train Christians in the virtues of fortitude, patience, charity, and humility. "It is a right and proper part of the Christian faith for a man to join his wife at the wash-tub and wash the swaddling clothes."

After Martin's death in 1546, Katy lived six years. She lived to see her children, except Magdalena who had died young, achieve positions of influence.

John Calvin

Born in France in 1509, Calvin was exceptionally brilliant. Initially he intended to be a priest, but he entered the field of law, studying at different universities, including Paris.

About 1533 Calvin had a "sudden conversion." He said: "God subdued and brought my heart to docility." Apparently he had encountered the writings of Luther. He broke from Catholicism, left France, and settled in Switzerland as an exile. In 1536, Calvin published the first edition of one of the greatest works ever written, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. At the age of twenty-seven he had already produced a major systematic theology, a clear articulation of Reformation teachings.

His writings impressed Guillaume Farel, the Reformer of Geneva, Switzerland. Farel pressed Calvin to come and help the Genevan reform. Geneva was to be Calvin's home until he died in 1564 (except for a 3 year period when he was exiled from there, only to be invited back to leadership).

While there, his workload was staggering. Calvin pastored the St. Pierre church, preaching in it daily. He produced commentaries on almost every book of the Bible. He wrote dozens of devotional and doctrinal pamphlets, carried on vast correspondence, and trained and sent out scores of missionaries. (He managed to do all this while constantly battling various ailments, including migraine headaches.) He was supported by his wife Idelette de Bure. They were married only 9 years before her death at 40, following the deaths of 3 infant children.

The reformer wanted Geneva to be like the kingdom of God on earth. He had his work cut out for him. The Genevans had had notoriously lax morals before his coming, and they often balked at his attempts at improving morality. But Calvin's influence was everywhere—in schools, notably, but also as a kind of overarching presence, because he urged excommunicating church members whose lives did not conform to spiritual standards. And every citizen of Geneva had to subscribe to his confession of faith that had been adopted by the city council.

Geneva became a powerful moral magnet, attracting Protestant exiles from all over Europe. The Scot, John Knox, described Geneva as "the most perfect school of Christ since the days of the apostles." Through his moral authority, Calvin truly reformed Geneva. And through his French and Latin writings - the *Institutes* in particular - he gave Protestantism amazing vigour.

What is so grand about the *Institutes*? For one thing, no other Reformer ever stated Protestantism's beliefs so clearly. Luther wrote much, but never in one book did he bring all key beliefs together. Calvin's book -- which he kept enlarging throughout his life -- covered all the bases.

Book III of the *Institutes* has received much attention. In considering the Holy Spirit, Calvin examined the doctrine of regeneration—that is, how are we saved? He claimed that salvation is only possible through the grace of God. Even before creation, God chose some people to be saved. This is the bone most people choke on: predestination. Curiously, it isn't particularly a Calvinist idea. Augustine taught it centuries earlier, and Luther believed it, as did most of the other Reformers. Yet Calvin stated it so forcefully that the teaching is forever identified with him. Calvin said it was clearly taught in the Bible.

For Calvin, God was -- above all else -- sovereign. Like all the Reformers, he hated the way Catholicism had degenerated into a religion of salvation-by-works. So Calvin's constantly repeated

theme was this: You cannot manipulate God, nor put Him in your debt. If you are saved, it is his doing, not your own. God alone knows who is elect (saved) and who isn't. But, Calvin said, a moral life shows that a person is (probably) one of the elect. Calvin himself was intensely moral and energetic, and he impressed on others the need to work out their salvation - not to be saved but to show they are saved. This emphasis on doing, on acting to transform a sinful world, became one of the chief characteristics of Calvinism.

Calvin's theology imported better than many other brands of Protestantism. It found a home in places as far apart as Scotland, Poland, Holland, and America. His spiritual descendants make up the World Communion of Reformed Churches based in Calvin's Geneva. This worldwide alliance consists of 178 denominations with over 50 million adherents in more than 80 countries.

John Knox

John Knox (1514 - 1572) was the key figure of the Reformation in Scotland as the founder of Scottish Presbyterianism. After serving briefly as a Roman Catholic priest, he became a Protestant through the efforts of the Scottish reformer George Wishart. After Wishart was burned at the stake at St. Andrews in 1546, and after Protestant conspirators assassinated Wishart's judge that same year, Knox joined other rebellious Protestants barricaded in St. Andrews castle. There he was urged to preach. His zeal and obvious ability made him an immediate leader of the Protestant cause.

When the castle of St. Andrews fell to Scottish and French Roman Catholics in July 1547, Knox was sentenced to serve on French galleys. Knox later spoke of the "torment in the galleys, which brought forth sobs of my heart." During those months, he contracted a kidney infection and stomach ulcers, ailments that vexed him the rest of his life. After 19 months his release was secured by English Protestant influence. Knox then lived for four years in England, serving as a parish preacher in Berwick and Newcastle and becoming (1551) a chaplain to King Edward VI. His objections to the Second Book of Common Prayer in 1552 paved the way for the later Puritan movement in England.

Knox fled to the Continent in 1553 when the Roman Catholic Mary I succeeded to the throne in England. He served as minister to English refugees in Frankfurt, met John Calvin in Geneva, and returned for a 9-month preaching tour in Scotland before settling as the minister of the English refugee church in Geneva (1556). Knox's theology, which stressed God's sovereignty, continued to develop along Calvinistic lines. He went well beyond Calvin in his political theory, however. In 1554, Knox had begun to justify resistance to faithless rulers who attack their dutiful subjects.

Knox returned to Scotland in May 1559 at the height of conflict between Roman Catholics and Protestants. His inspirational preaching and timely aid from England allowed Protestant forces to triumph. The return of the widowed Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1561 led to a famous series of face-to-face confrontations between the young queen and Scotland's foremost preacher. When Mary was forced to abdicate in 1567, Protestantism was secured in Scotland. Knox played the leading role in formulating the constitution of the reformed Church of Scotland, and he remained an outspoken preacher until his death. Incredibly, only two of his sermons were ever published!

Until this century, when a statue of Knox was erected in Edinburgh, there was no memorial dedicated to Knox in Scotland. Even today the spot where he is buried is covered by a parking lot.

How the Reformation - and the Presbyterian Church – Came to Canada

The roots of The Presbyterian Church in Canada are Scottish (our mother Church was the Church of Scotland which is Presbyterian), but our Canadian heritage includes the work and witness of French Huguenots (Protestant) settlers who came to Canada in the 1600s. Of course, many people have come, and continue to come, into our denomination from other branches of the Christian Church.

On June 15, 1875, the four Canadian Presbyterian churches - The Canada Presbyterian Church (June 1861); The Presbyterian Church of Canada in Connection with the Established Church of Scotland (1831); The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of the Maritime Provinces of British North America (1867); and The Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces (1866) - representing many of the parallel events and controversies within the Church of Scotland, joined together to form The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Although there were a number of Church of Scotland congregations, mainly from the Maritimes, as well as St. Andrew's Montreal, and a few others in Glengarry County Ontario, that resisted this union, many of these eventually entered the PCC into the early 20th Century.

As a united group, the PCC consolidated and grew all across Canada in both the established areas, and expanded into newly settled parts. Today, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has over 800 congregations with members coming from many national and racial backgrounds. For example there are now more than 40 Korean congregations. Within our denomination there are many different languages and styles of worship. There are congregations that worship in English, French, Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Hungarian, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic, among others..

Canadian Church Union

Initiated by the Anglican Church of Canada, talks of further unity, this time between Protestant denominations, were held, beginning around 1900. It was thought that the Evangelization of the West in particular could not be accomplished by attempting to establish a multitude of denominations in each hamlet and town. Incorporating the Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Baptist and Presbyterian bodies, talks gained great momentum, surviving even the Anglican post-war withdrawal (due to a massive wave of immigration from Britain).

Following years of debate, and postponement over World War I, voting on Canadian Church Union took place in the late months of 1924, and into 1925. This culminated in the formation of the United Church of Canada with an almost unanimous grouping of the Methodist and Congregationalist Churches in Canada, as well as two-thirds of the Presbyterian Church, on June 10, 1925.

Ecumenical relations

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is involved with relations between other Christian Churches. Presbyterians, along with Lutherans, Reformed Churches and others, are part of The World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The Presbyterian Church in Canada was a Charter Member of both the Canadian Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches, in 1944 and 1948 respectively. There is also "observer status" with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.