

Part II: Confirmation and Membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Section Seven: Continental Origins

23. STRUGGLES TO REFORM

Focus: Reformers on the European Continent


MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546) was one of several people desiring to reform the Medieval Church. He nailed his 95 subjects for debate to the church door in 1517, and

- set the stage for his own TRIAL: and
- a REVOLT of the German people against the authority of the POPE.

The year 1500 marks a watershed for Christianity. The Mongols and Turks were conquering much of what is now eastern and central Europe. China had virtually closed its doors to the outside world. Trade




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MARTIN LUTHER



Luther's famous ideas became the basic pillars of the REFORMATION:

- Justification by FAITH
- Authority of the SCRIPTURES
- PRIESTHOOD of all BELIEVERS.

A few miles away in Zurich, HULDREICH ZWINGLI (1484-1546) was developing even more radical ideas about the LORD'S SUPPER.

ULRICH ZWINGLI

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routes to the east were broken or extremely dangerous to travel. Muslim leaders took over the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, including the headquarters of the Orthodox Church at Constantinople.

In western Europe, the monasteries, the clergy, and even the Papacy were more noted for their corruption than for their faith. The overall population paid lip service to morality. The nation-states were developing autonomy. The dominant way of life was moving from feudalism to a more metropolitan society based on commerce.

There was a vigor and vitality in some of the churches and, in geographical pockets, there was concern for the living of righteous lives. Christian mysticism flourished but there had been no great theological activity for many years. The monastic orders — the Benedictines, Cluniacs, Cistercians, Franciscans, and Dominicans — continued their work with strength and the debates between Christian humanism and Scholasticism seemed to be waning with the Christian faith prevailing. The people showed signs of actively being involved in the faith rather than passively authority. In short, the stirrings of popular faith were about to confront the authority of a considerably weakened establishment.

Into that setting were born several men who are generally called the Reformers. *Martin Luther* (1483-1546), the founder of the Lutheran movement, was certainly the most prominent of the Protestant Reformers. *John Calvin* (1509-1572), *William Farel* (1489-1565), *Theodore Beza* (1519-1605) and *John Knox* (1505-1572) stand together in the sculptured Reformation Wall in Geneva, Switzerland as the primary representatives of the Reformed wing of the Protestant revival. Others played important roles as well. *Menno Simons* (1496-1561) and *Jacob Hutter*, who was burned at the stake in 1536, were influential leaders of the Anabaptist wing of the Reformation, and mystics like *Sebastian Frank* (1499-1542) contributed substantially to the Protestant spiritual renewal.

In some cases, the Reformers mentioned above knew each other, debated with each other, studied under one another or were influenced by one another's writings. In other cases, it was as if a spark from a forest fire of reform drifted on the wind. As the fire itself was generated and set aflame, its sparks set a new fire in a new place.

The Reformers were by no means of one mind. Their debates on theological issues and their writings on the use and interpretation of the Scriptures show some striking contrasts. Nor were they of one mind in a desire to break with the Papacy. Some wished to reform and remain within the Roman realm. Others were more radical and sought to separate immediately.

The circumstances of history were right for reform in several key ways. In the geographic areas where the Reform flourished, both the Catholic and the Protestant phases of that movement met common con-

ditions which stimulated reform.

- Some ostensibly Christian governments in these areas were actually politically independent of Christian leaders and, in fact, far from Christian in their conduct of affairs.
- Areas in the north and west had never come under heavy Muslim domination and, therefore, had never developed the intense Christian loyalties that come in competition with another faith.
- New scientific discoveries, commercial growth, and colonizing of the new world were to come from these “reform” areas.
- There was creative enthusiasm in other disciplines as well, such as science, art, and philosophy.

The Reformers were aided in their ventures by circumstances over which they had little or no control. *First* of all, the spirit and desire for reform was running through many areas of the Church. In fact, what became the Protestant and the Catholic reformations were, in their origin, two sides of the same call for reform.

Second, while the Catholic reformers sought to remain in the Church and to give loyalty to the Pope, the Protestant reformers either immediately or ultimately broke with Rome as the source of authority. Some reformers held on to the elements of hierarchy, creeds, and Scriptural interpretations which they inherited from their Catholic grounding. Clearly, though, the Protestant reformers were unwilling to have the Pope direct their faith and life.

A *third* reality was that, with only a few exceptions, the lines of demarcation between the Catholic and the Protestant Reformations were the boundaries of the Roman Empire. In general, those who had become part of the Latin culture before the sixth century remained loyal to the Church in Rome. This included Italy, Spain, Portugal, and, to a large degree France and Austria. In the border areas — the Low countries, Switzerland, the Danube area — both the Protestant and Catholic church continued. Beyond the borders of the Roman Empire — to the north in Europe and in Great Britain — where Catholicism had not permeated the fabric of the culture, Protestantism flourished. Some countries, such as Ireland, Poland, and Lithuania went through a Protestant phase of the Reformation but ended up as Catholic.

A *fourth* factor is that the Protestant Reformation seems to have sprung up among the lower social class and the Catholic phase of reform among the aristocracy. Luther and Zwingli were born and raised in peasant families. Calvin's background was a common life, though he was raised in an aristocratic environment. Cramner, in England, came from a farm family. Knox was of lowly birth.

A *fifth* reality was that printing by movable type had recently been invented in Germany by Johannes Gutenberg. People who were hungry and thirsty to learn and formulate their own ideas rather than simply be told what to believe, were ready to devour the new books being printed in their native languages. In addition, through the printing revolution, the Bible suddenly became available to much larger numbers of people.

A *sixth* circumstance was the impact of the political environment and the marriages among monarchs from various nations. Some of these alliances were “of convenience” to assure benefits for the nations — advantages in trade, relief from historic tensions, protection from attack, etc. Some of them brought accord, some further disunity. In many, the monarchs manipulated the religious practices of the uniting countries to suit their ventures. Likewise, the church leaders were not above taking advantage of the political climate to enhance the “state of the church.” In any case, many of these alliances were short-lived and the next wave frequently turned peace into oppression.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben on November 10, 1483. His parents were thrifty, frugal, and hard-working peasant folk. By the time Martin was a teenager, his father had become fairly prosperous by leasing land for iron mining and firing. It appears that their simple life at home provided a framework for a basic faith of that time: Martin grew up to fear God, to believe there was a Heaven and Hell and to believe there were angels, saints, a Devil, and demons. His fear of the judgment by Christ led conveniently to his belief that the virgin Mary would intercede for him. He learned the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten commandments and the Creed. His loyalty to the Catholic Church was unquestioning. His language, manner of speech, and writing bore earthy qualities in later years as well. He would frequently call on the patron saint of miners, St. Anne, for help.

He began his schooling at age seven and continued through the university. He studied at Erfurt under a scholar named Ockham with whom he later disagreed. One of Ockham’s strong teachings, however, was that the truths of the Christian faith cannot be understood by reason, but can be accepted only by faith on the authority of the church and the Bible. It may be that idea planted by his teacher, which grew into Luther’s thesis of “justification by faith.”

Luther was headed toward a career in law when a bolt of lightning struck — literally. In July, 1505, while he was out walking, a bolt of lightning felled him. Stunned, he called on St. Anne to help and in response vowed to become a friar.

As a friar, he struggled with continuing periods of depression as in his student days at Erfurt. He sought desperately for assurance in his faith, hoping and to be somehow free from his dreaded sense of God’s judgment. He spent hours in confession. He fasted. He mortified his

body. He longed to be acceptable to the Lord. His monastic order hindered his search for peace with a heavy administrative load, but aided him by assigning him to teach theology.

During studies in the Psalms, Romans, and Galatians, he finally read Romans 1.17 with a new and growing light that gradually became as brilliant as the earlier flash of lightning — “the just shall live by faith” became a distinctive Reformation principle.

Perhaps his inner struggles being calmed, he turned to other perceived abuses in the church — the sale of indulgences, immorality, political and temporal power plays by religious leaders. On October 31, 1517, Luther prepared his *95 Theses* on which he was prepared to debate and nailed them to the door of the castle church in Wittenburg — the town’s bulletin board. That event marks the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

The controversy that developed may well have been a surprise to Luther. It is fair to say, that at that time he had no design or intention to separate from Rome. The controversy swirled around “indulgences” and Luther’s opposition to their sale as assurance of a safe trip to Heaven. There was an initial flurry of letter and comment. Luther was an Augustinian friar and his order tended to defend him against attacks by the Dominicans.

Finally the Pope called Luther to Rome in the summer of 1518, after clarifying that indulgences could only reduce the temporal penalties on earth and Purgatory, but could not release a soul from Hell. The meeting was transferred to the Diet at Augsburg where Luther refused to retract his statements. The sides became more clearly drawn and in tracts, sermons, letters and official communications, it became more and more obvious that Luther would not be able to stay in the Church. More and more issues were presented for discussion. The printing presses rapidly prepared each statement for distribution. Finally, at the Diet at Worms in April, 1521, Luther looked at the stack of his writings brought in by his accusers who asked him to recant and he spoke his famous words, “Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise.”

Though he had been granted safe conduct, he feared his end might be like that of John Hus, burned at the stake in 1415, who had been in a similar circumstance. It was only through powerful political rulers in Germany that Luther was able to continue his writings, leadership, and organization of what eventually became the Lutheran denomination.

Luther’s famous ideas became the basic pillars of the REFORMATION

- **Justification by FAITH**

Justification by Faith, or more completely, justification by grace through faith, bases our relationship with God on God’s act of salvation

in Christ. Our acts of goodness and righteousness are in response to what God has done, NOT acts done to earn salvation. Our good deeds can in no way influence God to forgive us or grant us salvation which comes to us through God's absolute grace and is received by us only through absolute trust that God loves us and that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has made our salvation possible.

- **Authority of the SCRIPTURES**

The second Reformation principle brought to the forefront by Luther is the *Authority of the Scriptures*. The Catholic position was that the Church, through tradition and teaching, provided the only correct understanding of the Bible. The Latin translation of the Bible could not be read by the common people and there were no Bibles in languages they could read. Luther declared that the people could be guided by God's spirit to interpret the Bible themselves. The Scriptures had authority for human life in and of themselves without the interpretation of the Church or clergy.

- **PRIESTHOOD of all BELIEVERS**

The third Reformation principle, the *Priesthood of all Believers*, departed abruptly from Rome by insisting that all people had access to God's love and power and were called to be in ministry to other people. It was not only the priests, who were ordained, who could serve as ministers. Luther believed that the ministry of the laity was available to all believers, and that all believers are involved in sacred vocations.

By implication, Luther also broke down the penitential system of the Roman Church with this principle. If the priest, somehow, stood between the people and God, that was a position of great power and control over the people who desired the Sacraments. Luther's principle declared that all believers could stand before the Lord, confess their sins, and be renewed at the Table for service in Christ's name.

In the next chapter, John Calvin will be dealt with at length. The roll of Zwingli and the Anabaptists deserve mention here.

A few miles away in Zurich, HULDREICH ZWINGLI (1484-1546) was developing even more radical ideas about the LORD'S SUPPER.

Huldreich Zwingli was born January 1, 1484 — only a few weeks after Luther. He, too, was from a peasant home in Switzerland. Schooled and trained as a priest, he settled in Zurich and studied and wrote materials that provided the basis for much of Calvin's work. In

December, 1520, the civil rulers granted freedom for the clerics to preach openly. Zwingli shortly came out against many Catholic doctrines and practices including monastic vows, clerical celibacy, intercession of the saints, existence of purgatory, the sacrificial elements of the mass and the teaching that salvation can be earned by good works.

Agreeing with Luther's thought in many areas, Zwingli broke with him as much on temperament as on theology. Zwingli had an intellectual approach stressing the sovereignty of God. Luther emphasized God's grace in Christ. The open division between the two was over the interpretation of the Lord's Supper — Luther holding that the presence of Christ's body was paramount, Zwingli wanting the memorial aspects to be the highest priority.

The *Anabaptist* movement involved many small groups in various parts of Europe. They were distinct from the other Protestant reformers in two ways: for the most part, they set out to separate from the Roman Church, and secondly they did not approve of the Baptism of infants.

There were other characteristics of the Anabaptists that led them to the more radical edge of the Reformation: a desire to return to a primitive form of Christian life of the first century, a refusal to work within the structures of civil governments, and a demand for strict moral practices.

Because of their tendency to separate themselves from both the civil and the religious bodies, the Anabaptists were often persecuted by the state, Catholics and Protestants.

NOTES AND DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

1. Watch for the theme of conflict and conflict management in these first chapters of the material. You might ask someone to come in to guide the class in some training models of handling conflict in a way that brings constructive outcomes.
2. Emphasize that the reformation provides the headwaters for the denominational streams. It is important to realize the beginning of each. Check with the participants to see in what other denominations they have been involved and in what ways they differed from Presbyterians.
3. The ecumenical cause is served best when each participant from various denominations knows his or her own heritage and brings that as a gift to cooperative ventures. While the Reformation marks the separation from the Catholic Church, be sure that you bring the participants back to present day awareness of the Roman Catholic Church. Stress the cooperative relationship rather than divisiveness.

4. Later in the classes there will be an opportunity to write a missionary. You might want to arrange for some names and addresses.
5. Later, also, there will be guidance on “journaling.” Look ahead in the material and consider starting the journaling now.

24. BELIEFS ARE FORMED

Focus: John Calvin and his contributions to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Perhaps more than any other Reformer, JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564) formulated the BELIEFS and the FORM OF GOVERNMENT that became the basis of the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

- Both Luther and Calvin influenced people over much of Western Europe with their writings.
- Luther was deeply emotional, with his faith molded from his life-threatening experiences. Calvin was intellectual, logical, and unemotional on the surface.
- Calvin sought to bring about social change and ideal Christian communities. Luther spent little time on the social order.
- Both streams agreed on the majesty and sovereignty of God.
- Both looked to the Scriptures as authoritative.
- There were different understandings of the nature and presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, but Calvin was closer to Luther than to Zwingli.

Born in France and never ordained, Calvin wrote his beliefs in a systematic way at age 26 in the

- **INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION**

Huldreich Zwingli and *William Farel* set the stage for John Calvin in Switzerland. By the time Calvin was born July 10, 1509 at Noyon, France, about 60 miles northeast of Paris, Zwingli was in Zurich greeting Luther's writings with enthusiasm. After Zwingli and Luther real-

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JOHN CALVIN (24)

ized they had differences in thought, it was Zwingli who tried to work toward a creedal statement that would reconcile those differences. The First Helvetic Confession was drafted in Basel in 1536, but was unsuccessful in winning the Lutherans.

While Calvin was growing up, *William Farel* was an impetuous, fearless, young man preaching fiery sermons in France and Switzerland. Too outspoken, he was not welcome in any one place for long. Nevertheless, he trained and challenged people to preach. He nursed the sick and exemplified a sincere caring ministry. It was Farel who urged Calvin to remain in Geneva and organize for a religious life in that city.

Calvin's ancestry was of humble estate, but his parents made sure he was raised in an aristocratic style with accompanying manners. He was never ordained, but his father assured that he would be educated in all aspects of theology and philosophy. He attended the University of Paris studying to be a lawyer. There, he continued to express a very religious nature and to live a life that seems to have avoided the vices of some of his friends. It is ironical that two important Catholic Reformers also attended the university while Calvin was there — *Francis Xavier* and *Ignatius Loyola*.

Calvin began to study law at age 19. At about this same time, he had what he referred to as a sudden conversion experience referred to as a sudden conversion experience. Little is know of the circumstances, but it apparently had a profound, yet not very visible effect, on his life. When he finally left Paris at about age 25, he was imprisoned for a short time, released, and found a haven in Basel, Switzerland which had become a strong Protestant center. That was about 1534, only 17 years after Luther nailed his Theses to the door.

A year later at Basel, Calvin finished his book, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He translated it from Latin into French and continued revising it until just before his death.

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While Calvin was in Basel, Farel convinced him to come to Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin and Farel worked closely together, attempting to make Geneva a model community, a theocracy in which the church and state worked together in harmony. Their dream seemed to have soured after two years when they were banished for refusing to comply with an ordinance.

Calvin fled to Strassburg, Germany where he ministered and preached to French refugees. He was extremely happy during those three years. He married there and his wife and he both suffered ill health. He attended meetings with other Reformers and became close friends with another scholar, the Lutheran, *Philip Melancthon*.

Back in Geneva, a political change brought friendly leaders to the city. Farel and others urged him to return to the city which was his laboratory of faith for the final 25 years of his life.

In Geneva, Calvin experimented with the relationship of his Institutes to real life. He was not without challengers, the most notable one coming from *Servetus*. Servetus was a Spaniard and a physician. He was a scholar and a radical Reformer with a penchant for confrontation. He had denounced several of Calvin's teachings and Catholic teachings as well. Recognized in Geneva in 1553, as he was fleeing a heresy trial in Vienna, he was tried and burned at the stake, while he cried through the flames: "O Jesus, thou Son of the eternal God, have pity on me."

Calvin sought to make Geneva a haven for oppressed Protestants from many lands. He wanted to train people to return to their countries and begin Protestant communities modeled after Geneva. He sought also to establish a church/state organization that would maintain church order and effect community improvement at the same time. He developed commerce and a weaving industry. He established a banking and money lending organization, urging fair interest be charged. He worked ardently for schools that would educate the laity as well as the clergy. Calvin encouraged congregational singing of the Psalms.

Calvin's Institutes were both intended to be original thoughts, but a compilation of the teachings in the Church before what Calvin called the "corruptions" brought in by the Roman Catholic Church. If not original, Calvin's logical mind brought order to those theological fragments.

The *Institutes* set out to describe the mighty acts of God among the people of God, with the Apostles Creed as a pattern.

- God as creator, preserver and governor of the universe
- Redemption provided by God in Christ
- The Holy Spirit
- The church and its relation to civil governments

His approach was not one of refutation of others' errors, but of a positive and systematic statement of the faith

God, Calvin wrote, transcends all human thought. It is however, possible to comprehend something of God in the study of the universe, and through the study of the Scriptures. So profoundly did Calvin

believe in the sovereign reign of God that “nothing happens in it without His counsel.” The providence of God implies that God is vitally concerned for each person, but that God does not relieve individuals of responsibility for their own actions.

The creation of humans was god’s noblest act, created in God’s image body and soul. Sin is described as rebellion against the authority of God — expressing itself in pride, ambition, and lack of appreciation. The salvation of humankind is entirely God’s initiative.

The Law was provided by God to keep hope alive until Christ came. Christ, fully God and fully human, fulfilled the Old Testament promise of the Messiah. Christ experienced total loss and in His Resurrection provides hope for us.

The function of the Holy Spirit is to guide the sinner to faith in what Christ has done. Justification is by faith. Faith is not just agreeing with something as intellectual truth. It is the realization that God’s great gift in Christ is real and can be the basis for our hope.

Good deeds and works are evidences that a person has entered that new relationship in Christ. Prayer and other means of grace are ways God’s spirit continues to guide us.

The church, for Calvin, is Catholic or universal, not narrowly sectarian. Christ is head of the church. The church exists “wherever we find the word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ.” The fact that there are flaws and faulty people in the church does not in any way deny the validity and power of the church. He proposed a structure and procedure to assure that in the church things would be done “decently and in order.”

Finally he declared that the holy community should combine both church and civil government. He suggested a division of responsibilities and some specific tasks for the civil government.

The one doctrine that stands out for many as distinctly Presbyterian is “predestination.” Actually, predestination is a Christian doctrine that predates the Reformation and was dealt with by almost all the Reformers in their writings. Briefly stated predestination is a doctrine that proposes that God has previously established that certain things should take place:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. ***Romans 8.28-30***

rejected in the New Testament. Calvin stated his belief that, in terms of salvation, God has predestined some to salvation, some to be lost. This is usually called “double predestination.” That particular doctrine caused Luther great pain, but it did not seem to bother Calvin as much. Calvin responded to the idea that God would predestine some to be lost by declaring it a mystery and that humans should not set standards of human justice to measure God’s justice. Anyway, Calvin continued, people should leave the question of their salvation to God and determine to put the glory and honor of God foremost in their thoughts.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its historic predecessors has had considerable debate on predestination. Finally in 1903 a *Declaratory Statement* was prepared to clarify the matter. That statement is an approved part of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

First, with reference to Chapter III of the Confession of Faith: that concerning those who are saved in Christ, the doctrine of God’s eternal decree is held in harmony with the doctrine of His love of all mankind, His gift of His son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and his readiness to bestow His saving grace on all who seek it; that concerning those who perish, the doctrine of God’s eternal decree is held in harmony with the doctrine that God has provided in Christ a salvation sufficient for all, adapted to all, and freely offered in the gospel to all; that men are fully responsible for their treatment of God’s gracious offer; that His decree hinder no man from accepting that offer; and that no man is condemned except on the ground of his sin. *Book of Confessions 6.192*

NOTES AND DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

1. Spend ample time so that people understand the current statement of predestination, and are not fixed in an original one.
2. Calvin is seen as the one who provided the theological underpinnings for the Presbyterian church (U.S.A.). It is important to realize his voice is only one of several who have formed what is the current denomination.
3. Get some information on present day Geneva and notice ways that it is indebted to Calvin’s leadership.
4. You might begin to compile a glossary of terms and have available for each class, adding to it as you proceed.

25. PRESBYTERIAN WAY OF LIFE

Focus: Gaining appreciation for the unique qualities that are threads of the Presbyterian tapestry of life.

What has come to be known as the PRESBYTERIAN WAY OF LIFE was being formed in several places

- **In Geneva, Calvin shaped the BELIEFS and the FORM OF GOVERNMENT**

Calvin's contributions in Geneva and Knox's in Scotland probably stand out for many as the sources of Presbyterian belief and behavior. Those two certainly are important. There are actually many more and they all form the "Presbyterian way of life." Being a Presbyterian does not really involve subscribing to a set of doctrines. It does involve participating in a style of "doing theology" within a framework that speaks more of family than denomination.

- **In France, the HUGUENOTS emphasized that God alone is LORD OF THE CONSCIENCE, that the COMMUNITY OF FAITH provides SUPPORT in times of trouble and that TRUTH is in order to GOODNESS**

The Huguenots in France form an important part of the "warp and woof" of Presbyterianism. It has already been mentioned that France remained largely loyal to Rome. The Protestants in France were not segmented into a geographical ghetto. Instead, they were a tolerated minority scattered among the population. It is only to be expected that such toleration was dependent upon the immediate neighbors and upon who was in power at the time. The result was a constant uncertainty for the French Protestants, who came to be called *Huguenots*.

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- In France, the HUGUENOTS emphasized that God alone is LORD OF THE CONSCIENCE, that the COMMUNITY OF FAITH provides SUPPORT in times of trouble and that TRUTH is an order of GOODNESS.
- In the Netherlands, STRICT ADHERENCE to beliefs was stressed along with a solid system of PASTORAL CARE.
- In France, other political and religious factors overshadowed the Huguenots' efforts. In the Netherlands, REFORMED ideas flourished, setting the stage for migration to the NEW WORLD.

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Strong in the cities among the artisans and tradespeople, there were also rural pockets of Huguenots. It was the turbulence, political intrigue, and constant threats that brought the Huguenots to demonstrate the value of the cohesive family scattered over the country as a support base in times of struggle. They also fervently held to their desire to worship freely as a minority — a call that is still preserved by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) today.

The struggles among the French monarchs resulted in years of persecution of the Huguenots. In 1559, though, they called a national synod and framed a confession of faith based on some of Calvin's work. In 1562, a series of "Wars of Religion" began which lasted until 1694. **Henry of Navarre (Henry IV)** was a Protestant who was sympathetic to the Huguenots. In order to prevent further bloodshed and bring order and peace to the realm, he became a Catholic.

The Huguenots also asked for and received further assurances of religious freedom in the Edict of Nantes in 1598.

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In the Netherlands, the country was divided into the Protestant north and the Roman Catholic south. Leiden became the center of Protestant thought. The Protestants in the Low Countries provided an important document of faith in the *Belgic Confession*, and also in the *Heidelberg Catechism*. The Heidelberg Catechism is very personal, directed to human needs. It was probably the first Reformed document brought to the New World. These statements became foundation stones for the Dutch Reformed Church and its successors.

The strict adherence to Calvinist standards was evidenced in the controversy around Jacob Arminius. Arminius was a pupil of Beza and a professor at Leiden. His thoughts ran counter to the Heidelberg Catechism particularly in the view that God does not elect individuals to salvation or to damnation. That Arminian view was rejected by a gathering of representatives from most of the Reformed churches at Dort in 1618 and 1619. The clear development of concise theological terms and concepts and the teaching of them remains a hallmark of the Dutch Reformed tradition today.

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The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Has held in tension the adherence to the original documents of faith and the concepts in them and

the desire to interpret and relate those concepts anew. The statement of Beza, "The Church, having been reformed, always is being reformed," is one used and practiced by Presbyterians. It speaks of the desire to remain relevant as times change. It seeks to redefine the understanding of faith in ways that are authentic to God and that fit real life. It desires to be open to the spirit of God as God guides people in ministry.

There was another tension present in the European experience that has been built into the Presbyterian way of life. In each period of intense persecution there was the age old question of whether to stay and endure to uphold a cause, or to move to a new place to find greater freedom of expression. Certainly that is not a question that was faced only by Presbyterians. The way it was answered sometimes determined the pattern of the Presbyterian life in a particular area for a particular time.

The Presbyterian way of life is woven with several dynamic threads. There are many variations on the basic Reformed pattern but these threads are usually there:

- Presbyterians are a theologically thinking people. They are interested in and curious about God. They act like they will never know everything about God and can't learn enough about God. They want to know what God is up to. They want to know why God does or doesn't act.
- Presbyterians want to see a connection between the Bible, the preached word, and the Sacraments. They won't be happy with lectures or even well-turned stories about faith. They want to see where the Bible erupts with the truth that is being preached.
- Presbyterians insist that Christ be front and center. The worship, the architecture, the sermon, the studies, the testimony, and the training all bear witness to the power of Christ and the experience of each person with the Risen Lord.
- Presbyterians are praying servants, but not always pious. They will not let their piety block them from ethical actions or relationships with people.
- Presbyterians are clearly political and use their *Book of Order* as a guide and as a means of maintaining orderly relationships with each other.
- Presbyterians sometimes forget to smile in church but their reason for being there is in joyful response to the call of Christ.
- Presbyterians want to give, but sometimes they forget to give freely and graciously. They sometimes ask self-centered questions about what the money will do or, "what's in it for me?"

- Presbyterians are interested in other people, sometimes to the damage of their own faith experience. They will go out of their way to be relevant and active even if they are not quite prepared.
- Presbyterians are not afraid to be a conscience for the civil authorities. Far from being silent they speak on many matters. Sometimes their voice is in the wilderness. Sometimes it is a cry of support. Sometimes it is a challenge to an oppressive system. Sometimes it is a comforting sigh at the bedside of a dying comrade in the battles of life.
- Presbyterians want to be diverse and inclusive. They periodically dismantle the power structures and assure that new people, races, youth, women, and aging have ample voice.

While we are describing the Presbyterian way of life we can bridge time and an ocean to look at some descriptions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the United States.

- There are almost 12,000 congregations, located in all 50 states.
- The heaviest Presbyterian concentration is in Pennsylvania with more than 300,000 of the over 2,700,000 members and Maine, with 575, has the fewest.
- Churches with fewer than 50 members comprise 21% of the total and 66% of the churches have 200 or less members.
- Only 5% of the churches are over 800 members, and 34% of the members are in those churches.
- There are approximately 20,000 ordained Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, about 1,200 of them are women.
- There are about 700 predominantly racial ethnic churches — Black, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Native American, Puerto Rican, Mexican American, Hispanic.
- In 1996, Presbyterians gave \$1,615,229,705 or \$613.81 per member to their churches.
- There are Presbyterian Churches in rural areas, small towns, suburbs, downtowns and inner cities.
- There are magnificent cathedral buildings and store front missions.

NOTES AND DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS:

1. Emphasize that the Presbyterian style is one that is dynamic and not static. Note in your own church, ways the Session is “keeping up with the times.”
2. Far from rejecting the contributions of the past, Presbyterians seek to use them as building blocks. Note the building blocks of your church that are evident in current programs. Relate this particularly to the role of youth bringing new ideas.
3. Discuss how your church has influenced the civil government in your area to effect change.
4. These “notes and suggestions” sections are not intended to be exhaustive. Please add other exercises as you wish.

