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A Biblical Worldview To Win The Future

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The Roadmap to "Reforming All Things"

Do you believe that America needs to be reformed? Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines reform: "to abandon that which is evil or corrupt, and return to a good state; to amend; to correct; to restore." The proven pattern to reform is documented in history and summarized well by Miles Coverdale, fellow Bible translator with William Tyndale.

He said, "*Wherever the Scripture is known it reformeth all things, and setteth everything in order.*"

How did the Scripture reform nations in the past? The quest to uncover these answers leads us to the underdog heroes who have transformed nations from the bottom up, facing massive obstacles along the way. In the 16th century these reformers, as we now call them, lit such a fire of renewal that they transformed the world and laid the foundation for the best advances in every field. The story of their battle for truth against cruel, autocratic tyrants provides us with a roadmap of reform for all time.

Strasbourg Cathedral in the Middle Ages, August von Bayer

TYRANTS FALL AND LIBERATORS RISE

In the early 16th century the vast majority of Europeans were poor tenant farmers. They were faced with the constant struggle to eat each day. Droughts, pestilence and floods often drove thousands of people to become beggars. Long after the Black Death of 1345-49, the plague continued to devastate Europe in 1500. In Strasbourg, France alone, it took the lives of more than two-thirds of the people in one year and left 300 deserted villages in the region.

Taking advantage of this crisis, a small group of intermarried despots centralized power in their hands and accumulated most of the wealth of Christendom. Gone were the days of the accountable, local kings of the Middle Ages like King Alfred the Great. These new breeds of royal despots were, for the most part, Machiavellian connivers, who lavished themselves with armies of conquest, jewels and castles while taxing their own people into poverty.

The surest source of destruction to men is to obey themselves.

- John Calvin

TYRANTS VS. LIBERATORS

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THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH

Pieter Bruegel the Elder

What made this army of tyrants so dangerous was that they did not come as obvious pagan invaders but as angels of light. They misused the prelates and the power of faith and deceived most people to believe they had a supposed "divine right" to rule for God on earth. These despots kept the people ignorant and unable to read, especially the Scriptures.

But just as it seemed liberty and faith would be extinguished from Europe, a new force arose. It was a grassroots movement led by a few dozen pioneers of freedom. They began with almost no power, wealth or influence. They were opposed by the church establishment and faced inquisition and torture. But this small group of individuals from different nations would see much of Europe transformed and tyrants on the run within a century. Today they are called the Reformers and their movement is called the Reformation.

As these heroes of liberty faced off with the proud tyrants of their age, they had several formidable weapons for the battle: the pen, the newly invented printing press, the Scriptures and a willingness to die for its truths. The winners of this life-and-death struggle would determine the future course of nations for centuries. Here are some of the leaders from both sides in this conflict.

THE TYRANTS

Charles V was the ruler of the largest empire in Europe since the days of Caesar Augustus and the Holy Roman Empire. He was arguably the most powerful monarch of his time. He fought unceasingly for 35 years against the cause of liberty, killing millions. Charles sired the deadliest inquisitor and mass murderer of the age, his son, who became King Philip II of Spain.

Philip II of Spain became the richest king in Europe because of the discovery of the New World by Columbus and the gold plundered there by the Spanish. Phillip, as a misguided religious zealot, directed all of his efforts at destroying godly believers throughout Europe in a 30-year war of conquest and genocide. He slaughtered over 300,000 innocents in Holland alone.

TYRANTS VS. LIBERATORS

Henry VIII was the Renaissance king of England. Henry terrorized the people, murdered any who opposed him and ignored the common law of England. His wrath came down hard on his six wives, two of whom he had beheaded. One historian said that up to 50,000 people were murdered or tortured by him with the wave of his royal hand.

Queen Mary I, daughter of Henry VIII, became known as "Bloody Mary." She was a devotee of the Spanish Inquisition and married King Philip II of Spain in hopes of purging biblical Christianity from England. She had over 300 Christian leaders of the nation burned at the stake. She cruelly drove thousands of believers into exile in her brief four-year reign.

Catherine de' Medici was the mother of three kings of France. She was the embodiment of cold-hearted intrigue and debauchery. She was known to poison her rivals and kept an army of female courtesans who were spies at court. She and her son, King Charles IX, fired the first shot in Paris, which began an extermination campaign to kill or exile one-fourth of the French population - those who had become Protestants, commonly called the Huguenots.

THE LIBERATORS

Martin Luther was a German priest and professor who walked through the Alps to Rome from Germany in search of a deeper walk with God. When he began his quest to reform the church there was virtually no one standing with him.

William Tyndale was a young English college student and brilliant linguist from Cambridge University. He sacrificed his body to be burned at the stake in order to unleash the unstoppable weapon of freedom to the people of his age.

John Calvin, a brilliant young French lawyer in training, seemed an unlikely candidate to lead the battle for freedom. Yet through his conversion, his writings and his exile to Geneva, Switzerland, Calvin became a true father of American liberty.

John Knox of Scotland was a former priest, who after his conversion, became a bodyguard for George Wishart, the leading reformer in Scotland. When Wishart was burned at the stake, Knox was condemned to be a galley slave, chained to the oars of a French warship. But later, Knox would emerge as the father of modern Scotland.

MARTIN LUTHER VS. CHARLES V

Martin Luther, a promising young professor at a leading university, was nearly hit by lightning and thrown into a ditch. The experience so shook him that he felt he must go off to a monastery to become a priest. It began his pursuit of peace with God and forgiveness of his sins.

John Knox
Artist Unknown

The Scriptures of God are my only foundation and substance in all matters of weight and importance.

- John Knox

TYRANTS VS. LIBERATORS

In 1510, he walked barefoot from Germany to the "holy city" of Rome. But once there, he soon realized that Rome was not holy at all but filled with gross extravagance and debauchery, much of it emanating from corruption in the church.

Returning to Germany, Luther was driven to the Word of God for answers for his soul and for the truth. The words of Romans called to him, "The just shall live by faith." He was converted and forgiven. He wrote, "Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through gates that had been flung open."

On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church - a challenge to his colleagues to debate the church's practice of selling indulgences. These indulgences were signed contracts which, for a large fee, guaranteed forgiveness of sin and entrance into heaven for the person and their dead relatives. This unbiblical scheme was being promoted by the church to raise funds for the building of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome.

Within just a few weeks, the 95 Theses were printed and distributed widely, becoming a European phenomenon. Luther was excommunicated for his bold stand against corruption and false doctrine in the church. He was summoned to face trial by the Council of the Empire in front of the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V. In the city of Worms, Germany, Luther was interrogated with all of his books and writings in front of him and was asked to recant. Luther knew the penalty of the flames awaited him if he did not give in to the emperor's demands.

Luther's stand that day for the Word of God sparked a move toward liberty that to this day is spreading all over the world. Luther said to the emperor himself: *"I cannot submit my faith either to the Pope or to the Councils, because it is clear as day they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless, therefore, I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture... I can and will not retract... Here I stand ... I can do no other. So help me God. Amen!"*

The young emperor could have burned Luther at the stake that day, but he had previously agreed to Martin's free passage at the insistence of one powerful German prince named Frederick the Wise. For the rest of his life, Charles regretted that he had not killed Luther at the city of Worms.

The night after the trial, Luther was snatched from his carriage and blindfolded. But these alleged bandits were actually agents of Frederick the Wise who captured Luther to save him from certain death. They brought him secretly to Wartburg Castle, where Luther remained in hiding for approximately 10 months during which he translated the New Testament into German. This translation spread the light of God's Word all over Europe. This light would prove unstoppable.

WARTBURG CASTLE, GERMANY
Johann Wilhelm Jankowski
Wartburg Castle, where Luther translated the New Testament over ten months, after being kidnapped for his own protection by his friend, Frederick the Wise.

TYRANTS VS. LIBERATORS

JOHN CALVIN VS. THE TYRANTS OF EUROPE

If there is one reformer who has surpassed Luther in his influence over the creation of Western freedoms and prosperity, it is John Calvin. In 1536, when he was only 27 years old, he wrote the first edition of his Institutes of the Christian Religion. After the Bible and Augustine's City of God, Calvin's work is arguably the most influential book of all time. His systematic biblical reasoning and teaching were a dominant influence on the creation of biblically based re- publics in Holland, England, Scotland and America in the centuries to come.

Calvin's major emphasis was on the sovereignty of God in heaven and on earth and the priesthood of all believers. These teachings brought shivers of fear to the tyrants of Europe. If God were sovereign and the people had direct access to God through Christ, then neither the king nor the church was sovereign.

Because of Calvin's systematic, clear teaching from the Bible, believers across Europe were encouraged to stand for the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They demanded that kings and religious leaders be held to account to the people they were supposed to serve. Over the centuries, their stand for truth ultimately broke the caste and crony system. But first the tyrants launched a massive persecution of believers.

This persecution of believers helped build intelligent, uncompromising Christians. In the 17th and 18th centuries, millions of these believers arrived on the shores of America in search of freedom. Most of the settlers and exiles who came in the colonial era had been trained in the thinking of Calvin, especially the Scots, the English, the Scots-Irish, the French Protestants, and the Dutch. John Calvin is truly a forgotten forefather of the American republic.

JOHN KNOX VS. MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

This march of liberty finally found its full expression in America. Perhaps its greatest impetus came from an unlikely northern kingdom and a one-time bodyguard named John Knox.

In the 1540s, the burning of Protestants (those not submitted to the Church of Rome) was still being practiced in Scotland. As the nobility and prelates took their padded seats to watch the burning of reformer George Wishart, little did they know that Wishart's bodyguard and friend, John Knox, would liberate Scotland in the decades to come.

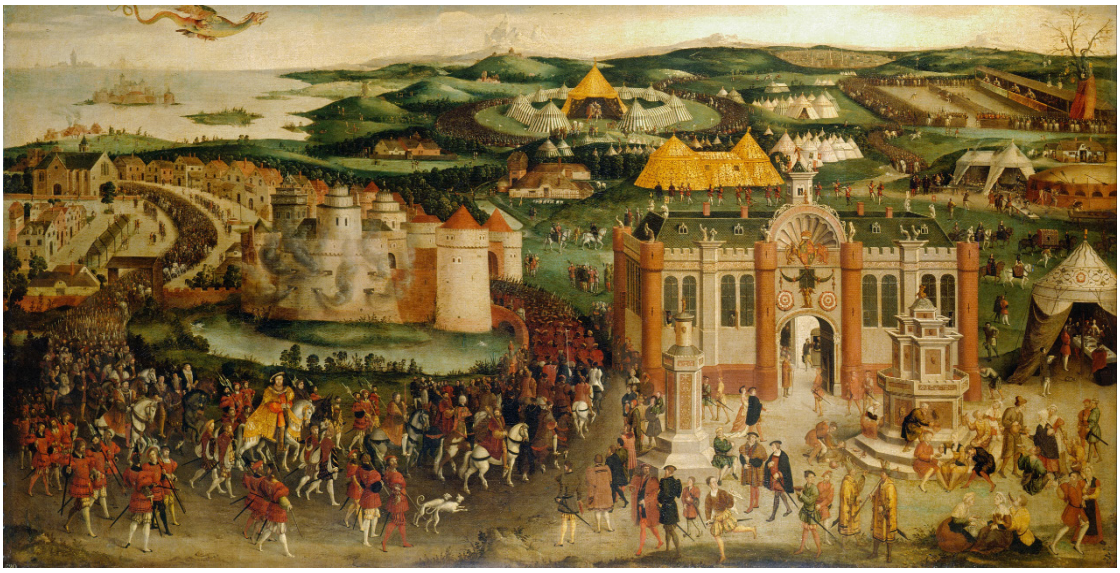
Right after Wishart's martyrdom, Knox was chained to the oars of a French warship as a galley slave. After two torturous years, Knox was freed. He soon became the chaplain of King Edward, the new, young Protestant king of England. But when Edward died and "Bloody Mary" Tudor came to the throne, Knox and thousands of others were forced to flee to the continent. He spent four years strengthening his mind and soul in Switzerland, where he pastored and worked with John Calvin at his school of reformers.

When Knox returned to Scotland in 1558, he was shot at and chased from place to place, yet he proclaimed Christ's Lordship with boldness.
He became the pastor at St. Giles Church in Edinburgh and personally challenged Mary, Queen of Scots regarding the true way of salvation. Later she proclaimed that she feared the prayers of John Knox more than an army of ten thousand men. Within a decade, Knox, the nobles and the people of Scotland had broken the power base of the Roman church and forced Mary, Queen of Scots, into exile in England.

The pastor ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep; and another, for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves. The Scripture supplies him with the means of doing both.

-John Calvin

TYRANTS VS. LIBERATORS



Scotland's transformation from clan warfare and ignorance to an intellectual and spiritual powerhouse of freedom was accomplished largely by preaching and the unleashing of the newly completed Geneva Bible to be read in every household. Under Knox's influence, Scotland became a "people of the Book" and adopted Presbyterian Church government. Believers began to choose their own spiritual leaders rather than bow before a foreign bureaucracy in Rome. This accountability of church leaders to the people paved the way for an accountable, elected structure for civil government as well. The inscription under John Knox's sculpture on the Wall of Reformers in Geneva sums up his life: *"One man with God is always a majority."*

In the next generation after Knox, the Scottish believers rose up and stood against the tyranny of King Charles I of England. They signed a National Covenant in 1638 to raise their children in their own biblically based schools rather than those of the heretical King Charles and his foreign bishops. For this stand for their faith, tens of thousands of Scottish believers were martyred or exiled to America over the next century. They were called the Covenanters or Bravehearts because they had signed the National Covenant. Europe, and even Scotland, struggled for centuries to rid themselves of the addiction to royalty. But the Christian Scots who immigrated to America by the hundreds of thousands in the coming centuries understood the biblical concept of God's sovereignty over kings. They understood the necessity of creating a decentralized republic to hold back tyrannical power. They are the forgotten, real heroes of liberty.

So, what does the Reformation have to do with us today? It is of critical importance. This 16th-century religious and cultural revival became the prime mover in creating our American culture. The Reformation reveals that a small minority of believers, with little power, wealth or influence, can transform a nation and even the world. Every one of America's unique cultural institutions has its roots deep in the biblical reasoning of our forbears. Regardless of what powers may be arrayed against us in the battle ahead, we can trust Him to "reform all things"!

From the writings of Dr. Marshall Foster 1945-2022

The meeting of Francis I and Henry VIII at
the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520
Hans Holbein the Younger

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