

TRANSITION AND REVOLUTION

Problems and Issues
of European Renaissance
and Reformation History

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Was the Protestant Reformation a Revolution? The Case of Geneva

WAS THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION a revolution? The question should be of interest to a number of different students. It should interest those who are attracted to the period of the Reformation, who want to understand as fully as possible just what happened in that movement and what its full significance was. It should interest those who are curious about the nature of violent social change and who want to know more about the origins of the revolutions which have been such an important part of recent world history. It may even interest those who regard themselves as spiritual descendants of the Protestant Reformers and who want a clearer idea of the precise nature of their heritage.

Before we can answer the question, however, we must establish a definition of the term "revolution." This is not an easy task. The word has been used in many ways and much of this use has been by men passionately committed either to the glorious triumph or the complete eradication of a revolution. The term has thus come to carry strong emotional connotations. It is not easy to discuss it objectively and to define it in a way most people can accept. Nevertheless we must try.

Very few men at the time of the Protestant Reformation would have called it a revolution. In those days the term did not have a

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political or social meaning. It was basically a scientific term, used primarily by astronomers. Its best known usage was in the title of the famous treatise in which the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus advanced his radical new theory that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the solar system. This treatise was titled *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies* and was first published in 1543. In this context the term "revolution" referred to the motions of heavenly bodies in orbits around either the earth or sun. There are two aspects of these motions which we should note. They involved constant return, as each heavenly body, in describing its orbit, returns again to each place it has been before. They also involved inevitability, as each heavenly body moves without interruption or distraction along a path which can be predicted with complete confidence by a trained astronomer.

There are obvious ways in which this astronomers' term can be applied, by analogy, to certain political and social changes. One can find a few examples of such an application during the sixteenth century. For example, one observer in 1525 called the rebellion of the Comuneros in Spain a "revolution of the people."¹ But this usage is rare and its precise meaning is often uncertain. One can find more examples of this application in the seventeenth century. For example, a prominent English historian in 1674 called the overthrow of the ruling Rump Parliament and the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660 "the revolution." This particular application of the term is quite close to the original astronomers' meaning of the term. For 1660 witnessed a return to a form of government the English had challenged in 1640, with the meeting of the Puritan Long Parliament, and had abolished a few years later, following the English Civil War.² This application, however, is quite far from modern usage.

Only in the eighteenth century did the term "revolution" come to be used commonly in a way we would recognize. It was applied then to the two great upheavals which we know as the American and French Revolutions. It still contained some resonance of its original astronomers' meaning. Both American and French revolutionaries thought they were returning their governments to earlier and purer forms, found in a historic state of nature or in some government of classical antiquity. Their knowledge of classical

¹Cited by J. H. Elliott, "Revolution and Continuity in Early Modern Europe," *Past and Present*, no. 42 (1969), p. 40.

²Noted by the *New Oxford English Dictionary* as meaning 8a of the word "revolution." Cf. the comments in Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 36; Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution*, p. 40.

political thought was impressively detailed. And their respect for classical political institutions, particularly those of republican Rome, is striking. It is reflected, for example, by the adoption of the Roman name "Senate" for the upper house of the American legislature. Both groups of revolutionaries also thought these returns to be inevitable and irresistible, part of an inexorable historical process, of which they were the destined leaders.

These men also conceived of their revolutions as being primarily political. The fundamental problem they saw facing their societies was the behavior of a form of government, monarchy, which they felt had become obsolete and tyrannical. They felt they could solve most of society's problems by creating a new form of government, a republic, which would be more sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the general population. Some later analysts, however, saw these same revolutions as fundamentally social. They involved the triumph of a rising new ruling class, the bourgeoisie, over a decadent old ruling class, the feudal nobility. In this view the political changes which are so obvious were relatively superficial. The two types of government, monarchic and republican, were institutions created by the two ruling classes to perpetuate their control. The best known and most influential of these analysts was Karl Marx. It is his view of revolution, involving explosive conflict between social classes and a consequent restructuring of economic as well as political institutions, which tends to prevail in the twentieth century. And the revolutions he forecast, in which another rising new class, the proletariat, would overthrow and replace the victors of the eighteenth-century upheavals, the bourgeoisie, have come to dominate modern thinking on the subject. In particular the Marxist revolutions which succeeded in reshaping Russia and China supply the type to which most modern usage of the term "revolution" refers.

Many contemporary thinkers have analyzed this modern view of revolution at length. Some have reduced their analysis to succinct definitions. One particularly useful definition is provided by Sigmund Neumann, an eminent political scientist who died not long ago. He defined revolution as involving "a sweeping, fundamental change in political organization, social structure, economic property control, and the predominant myth of a social order, thus indicating a major break in the continuity of development."³ It seems to me that this formula sums up modern opinion

³Sigmund Neumann, "The International Civil War," *World Politics*, I (1948-1949), p. 333, n. 1, quoted and used by Lawrence Stone, in *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529-1642*, p. 48.

successfully enough so that we can use it. Armed with Neumann's definition, we can now return to our original question.

Was the Protestant Reformation a revolution, in Neumann's sense of the word? At this point some scholars would object that to use the term "revolution" in speaking of the Reformation era is to adopt an anachronism. It forces phenomena from one period into a concept drawn from another period. Such forcing distorts both the phenomena and the concept and is thus the greatest sin any historian can commit. It seems to me that this objection is specious. In order to understand a period one need not restrict oneself to the language of that period. Indeed it is often possible to understand some aspects of a period in history even better than the men who lived through it, by use of concepts developed and refined since they died. Modern economic historians, for example, understand far more about the development of the European economy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries than did businessmen who participated in that development. Their superior understanding is based in part on the use of concepts derived from modern economics and mathematics, unknown to the Renaissance and Reformation. Modern scholars, for example, can construct price indexes which show exactly what prices increased or decreased during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and where and how. These indexes are most frequently derived from the accounts kept by convents, hospitals, and other institutions housing groups of people, of the prices these institutions paid for grain, wine, and other essentials they had to buy continuously year after year. Men of that period often complained bitterly of rising prices but not even the best educated of them would have been able to construct a price index. That does not prevent modern scholars from creating price indexes and then using them to explain many facets of the economic and social development of the period only imperfectly understood by contemporaries. These indexes, for example, help us to explain more fully than ever before many of the food riots of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. I would argue that the concept of revolution is like the concept of a price index. If it is used with care, by someone who knows both what it means and what happened in the earlier period, it can be enormously illuminating.

A far more weighty objection to the suggestion that the Protestant Reformation was a revolution comes from specialists in the period itself. Many of them would argue that the Reformation did not involve changes in political organization, social structure, economic property control, and social myths which were fun-

damental enough to be fairly labeled revolutionary. It was thus not a revolution in Neumann's sense. One thoughtful expression of this point of view can be found in the writing of Professor J. H. Elliott. He sums up his argument in these words:

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did indeed see significant changes in the texture of European life, but these changes occurred inside the resilient framework of the aristocratic-monarchical state. Violent attempts were made at times to disrupt this framework from below, but without any lasting degree of success. The only effective challenge to state power and to the manner of its exercise, could come from within the political nation—from within a governing class whose vision scarcely reached beyond the idea of a traditional community possessed of traditional liberties.⁴

Professor Elliott, to be sure, advanced this argument in the course of a debate on the meaning of early seventeenth-century political uprisings. He is a great authority on uprisings in Spain, particularly the revolt of the Catalans from the Spanish government between 1598 and 1640. He has not considered with equal care the uprisings which accompanied the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation, early in the sixteenth century. Still, he seems to believe that his conclusions apply to the entire early modern period in European history.

I would argue that the conclusion of Professor Elliott and others who share his point of view is defective as an explanation of Reformation changes because it overlooks one crucial fact: it ignores the role of the clergy in pre-Reformation European society. A revolution does not need to be aimed at the power of kings and aristocrats to be a true revolution. It can also be aimed at other ruling classes. The class against which the Protestant Reformation was aimed was the Roman Catholic clergy. In most of Europe before the Reformation, the Catholic clergy did constitute an important element in most political organization and in social structure, did control a good deal of the property, and were custodians of the predominant social myth. A challenge to the clergy thus had to be a radical challenge, calling for a revolutionary change in European society. It is my contention that the Protestant Reformation was such a challenge.

The power of the Catholic clergy in pre-Reformation Europe was revealed in many ways. One way was in politics. A significant number of clergymen exercised direct political power. The pope was the prince of a large state in central Italy, the capital of which was Rome. This state was one of the five largest and most

⁴J. H. Elliott, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

powerful in the peninsula. To maintain and protect this state, the pope controlled all the mechanisms used by any of the leading princes of the period. He directed an army and navy. He supervised one of the largest and best diplomatic services in Europe. He collected taxes and administered justice. In other parts of Europe prince-bishops exercised similar powers. This was particularly true in Germany. There the three prince-archbishops of the Rhineland not only governed their own principalities but also sat in the upper chamber of the imperial Reichstag, the legislature which assisted the Emperor in ruling all of Germany. Other prince-bishops possessed similar if less extensive powers in other parts of Germany. In addition, many clergymen exercised considerable indirect power. There were powerful bishops and cardinals in the councils of practically every king in Western Europe. At times these clergymen gained a significant share of sovereign power in these monarchies. Thus Cardinal Ximenes de Cisneros served as regent of Spain during the minority of Charles V; Charles de Guise, the Cardinal of Lorraine, was a leading figure in the governments of Francis II, Charles IX, and Henry III in France; Cardinal Wolsey dominated the government of Henry VIII in England on the eve of the Reformation.

Another way in which clerical power was revealed in pre-Reformation Europe was in legal systems. Over the centuries the Roman Catholic Church had created a large body of law, called canon law. This law was enforced in a Europe-wide court system, reaching into every community and climaxing in the papal appellate courts in Rome itself. Much of this law was designed to control the internal operations of the Church. But much of it reached out to touch the lives of men who were not clergymen. Most cases involving marital problems, for example, were handled in church courts since marriage was a sacrament of the Church. And even many problems that we would never expect to see handled by clergymen were in fact controlled by church courts in this period. In the province of Franche-Comté, for example, many of the loan contracts were enforceable in church courts. Debtors who had defaulted were hauled before the courts of the archbishop, not the courts of the king, and could be punished with spiritual penalties-like excommunication as well as by fines and imprisonment.⁵

⁵ Lucien Febvre, "L'excommunication pour dettes en Franche-Comté," *Au coeur religieux du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1957), pp. 225 and ff.

These extensive political and legal powers were sustained by formidable economic power. The economy of Europe was still basically agrarian and the fundamental means of production was arable land. A substantial percentage of all the land in Europe was owned directly by clergymen. Parish priests in villages would control land which provided income for their support and for the maintenance of church buildings. Monasteries and other church corporations would control large estates which supported the work of their communities. Bishops and their more important assistants would also typically control a good deal of land.

This considerable economic power was justified in part by extensive social services. Education tended to be a monopoly of the clergy. In much of Europe all of the schools, from elementary grammar schools to universities, were controlled and largely staffed by clergymen. Charity also tended to be a monopoly of the clergy. In cities it was usually administered in "hospitals," all-purpose charitable institutions, staffed by clergymen, with priests or monks in actual residence. These hospitals did much more than take care of the sick. Indeed, those who came down with contagious diseases were more likely to be treated at home or segregated in special pestilential hospitals. The normal hospital took care of orphans and foundlings, of people too old to care for themselves, and of the chronically sick and handicapped. They often also provided hotel services for newcomers and visitors, as did certain other ecclesiastical establishments.

All of this power was justified by a widely accepted social myth, rooted in a version of Christian theology. Every man was held to possess an eternal soul, which could escape damnation and enter into eternal bliss only with the active assistance of the clergy. This assistance could be provided only by clergymen who had been properly trained and ordained and who accepted the direction of the pope and his appointees within the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. Even the myth itself was monopolized by the clergy. Only clerical intellectuals could refine its meaning. Only clerical preachers could proclaim its essential message.

Of course, Protestants were not the only enemies to clerical power. In fact, much of the power of the clergy had been attacked and eroded in many parts of Europe well before the Reformation, during the Renaissance and even earlier. Emperors and kings had challenged the plenary powers claimed by popes; powerful aristocrats had challenged the less sweeping powers claimed by bishops;

petty noblemen had even challenged the local powers claimed by priests; cities had often secularized services previously supplied by the clergy. Furthermore, clerical power survived the Reformation in many areas and in many ways. In some instances it even grew in strength. However, Protestants, wherever they were active, invariably opposed the Catholic clergy, often with considerable vehemence and insistence. The Protestant Reformation can fairly be called, I believe, an anticlerical revolution.

To document this conclusion fully would require massive empirical studies of the growth and nature of anticlericalism all over Western Europe during the Reformation. That is clearly beyond the capacity of any one scholar or group of scholars. Some indication of the plausibility of this conclusion can be given, however, by case studies. I would like to present here one such case study. The case I have selected is of a European community in which I have lived and whose history I know particularly well, the canton of Geneva.

Before the Reformation Geneva was an episcopal city, part of an episcopal principality. Her temporal and spiritual ruler was a bishop. Occasionally, especially in the early Middle Ages, she had claimed to be a part of the Holy Empire, centered in Germany, but as an ecclesiastical principality rather than as a free imperial city. More important by the sixteenth century was the fact that she was then lodged securely in an orbit of the duchy of Savoy. This duchy, which straddled the Alps and included parts of modern Italy, France, and Switzerland, was the most powerful principality in the area. Almost all of the rural areas and villages surrounding Geneva belonged directly to Savoy. Many of them were controlled in the usual feudal manner, by noblemen who maintained fortified castles or houses for the defense of the area, and conceded allegiance to the duke of Savoy. For several decades before the Reformation the bishop of Geneva had always been closely connected to the court of Savoy. Often he had been a younger son or brother of the duke. Sometimes he had been consecrated in his office while still a child, and a vicar had to exercise all of his power. This arrangement had the advantage for Geneva of securing Savoyard support for the city. She could call on the ducal army for defense and her merchants could trade more freely throughout the duchy. It also meant, however, that the bishop was seldom in actual residence within the city. He had to spend a good deal of time in following the ducal court, in superintending other properties, or in handling yet other types of secular and ecclesiastical responsibili-

ties within the duchy. Some of the bishops also acquired charges outside of Savoy. A few of them were called to Rome to work for the central administration of the Catholic Church. Many of them acquired ecclesiastical property with attendant responsibilities in neighboring France. Still, the power of the bishop was always felt within Geneva. That power was symbolized graphically by the large cathedral church on the top of the hill in the center of the old city. It had been splendidly rebuilt and redecorated in the course of the fifteenth century, when the commercial fairs for which the city was famous in that part of Europe were particularly flourishing. It was visible for miles around, even from the high mountains which enclose three sides of the city from a distance. It easily dominated the city physically.

Within Geneva, the bishop's power was exercised by an episcopal council. The most important members of this council carried the titles of vicar and "official." The vicar was the bishop's chief representative in the city and presided over the council in the bishop's absence. The "official" was a judicial officer, responsible for supervising the administration of all ecclesiastical justice, both civil and criminal. There were also certain other agents of the bishop who sat in the episcopal council. This council acted as both an administrative body and an ecclesiastical court. The bishop was further assisted in his rule of Geneva by a cathedral chapter of thirty-two canons. Almost all of them came from prominent Savoyard noble families. The chapter was thus a microcosm of the Savoyard ruling class, technically presided over by a member of its most prominent family, filled out by members of many of its lesser noble families. Each of the canons was assigned a luxurious house near the cathedral of Geneva. Vacancies in the chapter were filled by the canons themselves, through co-optation. Their most important single function was to elect a new bishop on the death or resignation of an incumbent. However, they often saw their choice set aside by the pope. He retained the right to confirm any election of a bishop, and in the case of Geneva he reserved to himself the right to make his own final selection. Both the chapter elections and the final papal selections reflected very heavy political pressure from neighboring secular authorities. This pressure came primarily from the dukes of Savoy but it could also come from the French royal house and the Swiss cantons.

For the exercise of his spiritual responsibilities, the bishop depended upon ordained clergymen. There were several hundred of them in pre-Reformation Geneva, out of a total population of

about ten thousand. They included secular priests, most of whom were attached to one or another of seven city parishes. They also included regular clergy, mostly of the mendicant orders, housed in some seven convents. The newest of these convents had been built in the century before the Reformation for communities of Augustinian hermits and Poor Clare sisters.

For the exercise of his temporal responsibilities, the bishop delegated some of his powers to laymen. Justice for laymen, in both civil and criminal cases, was supervised by an officer with the unusual title of *vidomne*. Some time before the Reformation, the bishops of Geneva had ceded the right to choose this officer to the ducal government of Savoy. The *vidomne* and his staff lived in a castle on an island in the middle of the Rhone river which cuts Geneva in half. That castle symbolized graphically the power of Savoy within the city. The bishop further allowed the lay population of Geneva to elect certain other officers to share in local government. The most important of these elected officers were four syndics, chosen once a year by the entire body of male citizens in an assembly called the General Council. These syndics had the right to act as judges in the more important criminal trials initiated by the *vidomne*. That right, along with many others, had been spelled out in writing in a charter of liberties of the citizens of Geneva promulgated by a bishop in 1387. Every subsequent bishop was expected to swear to uphold these liberties at the time of his installation. The syndics also chose a Small or Ordinary Council, of twelve to twenty-five men, who met at least once a week to handle local civic problems. Both syndics and Council members were normally relatively well-to-do Genevan merchants. Some of them were professional men. They were often older men, well enough established so that younger members of the family or assistants could keep their businesses going. To these men were assigned a variety of matters of purely local concern. They had to see to it that the walls and moats which fortified the city were maintained in good condition, that adequate food supplies were regularly brought into the city and stored with care, that the streets were kept clean. They also had to direct the collection and expenditure of much of the city's money. And they supervised a variety of educational and charitable institutions.

At this last point ecclesiastical and temporal authority overlapped again, for most of the educational and charitable institutions were staffed by clergymen. The education of clergymen had been handled within the cathedral establishment for a long time.

In the fifteenth century, an independent school for laymen had been established. It was financed and supervised by the city Council, but normally staffed by clergymen. The city had been awarded the right to establish a university, but had never done so. Charity was handled primarily by seven "hospitals." Most of them had been founded by the gifts or legacies of wealthy individuals, to provide for both the repose of their own souls and assistance to the poor. A typical "hospital" would be located in a converted house, perhaps itself part of the original bequest. Resident in it would be a priest, who would be in charge and would say masses for the souls of the founder and his family. He would be assisted by a "hospitallier" or administrator, who would assist the poor. Usually there would be a dozen or so poor people also in residence, a mixture of orphans, the handicapped, and the very old. From the middle of the fifteenth century, many of these hospitals were supervised by a municipal foundation, controlled by the Council, which also had supplementary funds to assist the poor who could remain in their own homes. In addition, the city maintained a pestilential hospital, outside the walls and near the cemetery, for people with serious contagious diseases. It was staffed by a priest, a doctor, and several servants. The city also maintained two small leprosaria outside its walls for victims of leprosy.

The control of public morals should have been the responsibility of the bishop, but he was seldom interested. There were always a good number of prostitutes in pre-Reformation Geneva, to service both visiting merchants and clergymen unable to keep their vows of chastity. Seldom was any effort made to drive prostitutes from the city. Instead they were regulated by the city Council. At one point they were asked to organize themselves into a kind of guild and elect from their number a "queen" who would represent them in dealings with the government. The prostitutes were also expected to live within an assigned quarter of the city, wear distinctive kinds of clothing, and limit their solicitation to specified times and places. If a sexual or marital problem required legal intervention, of course, the courts were prepared to act. Most cases of this sort were handled by the court of the bishop.

Geneva's ecclesiastical establishment was supported materially from a variety of sources. Church property and taxes within the city provided some income. A great deal of additional income came from a patchwork of rural properties scattered over the countryside around Geneva and belonging directly to the bishop.

These were superintended by episcopal officers who saw to it that order was maintained in each rural village, that local priests served the spiritual needs of the peasants, and that all the rents and taxes due the bishop were regularly paid.

After the Reformation Geneva was a secular city-state. The bishop and all his officers had been evicted, including the ones appointed with his permission by the dukes of Savoy. The clergy had all been forced either to leave the city or to convert to Protestantism and abandon clerical careers. Almost all of the ecclesiastical property, both within the city and in the countryside, had been confiscated by the new government. Many of the social services provided by clergymen had been secularized. A new Reformed Church had been created to minister to the spiritual needs of the population, but it was completely under the control of the city government. All of this had been engineered by the lay merchants and professional men of Geneva, led by their elected syndics and Council members. These changes began in the 1520s, with the whittling away of the bishop's powers. They reached a climax in 1536, with a formal vote by the entire male population to adopt the Protestant Reformation. They were not fully consolidated until 1555, when John Calvin, the new director of Geneva's spiritual life, finally won a definitive triumph over all local opposition.

The Reformation in Geneva began as a rebellion against the government of the bishop and his Savoyard allies. Step by step the syndics and the city Council seized powers that had heretofore been held by the episcopal government as parts of its sovereign prerogatives, until finally nothing remained for the bishop. The first powers to go were those of control over foreign affairs. This crucial attribute of sovereignty had naturally been claimed by the bishop. As sovereign lord of Geneva he had traditionally directed its relations with other governments. When he became allied to the House of Savoy, its government could help speak for Geneva. Now, however, the syndics and city Council, on their own initiative, opened formal negotiations with other governments, particularly with those of the free city-states of the Swiss Confederation. These were states with which Genevans had long had commercial relations. Merchants who dealt with the Swiss tended to have interests different from those who dealt with Savoy. That fact helped split the population into pro-Savoyard and pro-Swiss factions. These two factions began struggling for control of the Council. When the pro-Swiss faction won the upper hand, it tried

to consolidate its power by negotiating formal alliances with two of the more powerful neighboring Swiss city-states, Fribourg and Berne. After several false starts, an alliance which persisted was finally signed in 1526. Fribourg withdrew from the alliance several years later, after Berne turned Protestant and Geneva began considering Protestantism. But Berne remained as Geneva's staunchest ally and that alliance was important, for Berne was one of the greatest military powers in the area. This was the period of the zenith of Swiss military might. Crack troops of Swiss mercenary infantrymen were hired by royal governments all over Europe to fill in their own armies when really major military campaigns were planned. And Berne was an important recruiting point for the formation of these armies. That meant Berne could recruit for her own purposes a powerful army, powerful enough to defeat the ducal armies of Savoy, if that became necessary.

The Savoyards protested vehemently against this alliance, arguing that it amounted to usurpation by the Council of a sovereign power really belonging to the bishop. Pierre de la Baume, the incumbent bishop, however, did not back up this Savoyard protest. He had become alienated from the duke at that point, despite the years he had spent in the ducal entourage, and was trying to play an independent game. In the course of personal negotiations with the city Council, he fatefully conceded to that body the right to sign alliances. That occurred in 1527. He also tried to make himself a party to this particular alliance. The Bernese refused to admit the bishop to the alliance and the bishop tried to revoke his concession to the Geneva Council. But it was too late.

The next episcopal powers to be seized by the city Council were the rights to control justice, another crucial attribute of sovereignty. The syndics had already won much earlier, under the terms of the 1387 charter, the right to sit as judges in certain criminal trials. But the arrest and execution of lay criminals remained in the hands of the *vidomme* and his staff. Clergymen accused of crimes were tried by the "official" and tried in the bishop's court. All civil cases were handled by either the *vidomme* or the "official." And all decisions could be appealed to the bishop. The first of these powers to go was jurisdiction over civil cases. The Council persuaded the bishop to surrender it voluntarily in 1527, when he was eagerly trying to placate the city and win the Council's support. This meant that the bishop had surrendered some of the powers previously exercised by the *vidomme* and the

“official.” The concession of the *vidomne’s* powers made the Savoyards furious, since he was appointed by their government. Again the bishop changed his mind and tried to retract his concession, but again he was too late. Instead the city Council proceeded to take over more judicial powers. It blocked all appeals to superior courts outside of Geneva. It transferred to the syndics the right to execute criminal sentences. Finally a new elective magistracy was created, the office of the lieutenant, charged with supervising all criminal justice. By 1530 all the judicial powers once belonging to the bishop and his agents had been transferred over to the elective government of the city. Pierre de la Baume may have been trying to win these powers back in 1533, when he returned to the city in person, after a nasty religious riot in which a prominent canon named Werli had been killed. The council was quite prepared to bring the murderer to justice but unwilling to discipline certain others whom the bishop thought deserving of punishment. And it refused to grant the bishop any role in the judicial proceedings. He then left the city for good. Before long he transferred his entire court to the small neighboring town of Gex. A number of canons also left Geneva during these years of turmoil over judicial jurisdictions.

Meanwhile Protestantism had begun to penetrate Geneva. It was introduced with powerful encouragement from Berne, which had itself formally adopted Zwinglian Protestantism in 1528. The leader of the campaign to convert Geneva to Protestantism was an inflammatory French preacher named Guillaume Farel, who repeatedly visited Geneva during these years in spite of fierce opposition from the leading local clerics. Farel’s impassioned sermons and public appeals plunged the city into further turmoil. Iconoclastic riots began, in which mobs of boys and young men pulled down altars, smashed religious statues, desecrated relics, destroyed stained glass windows. Catholic religious services were repeatedly disrupted, with preachers being publicly challenged on points of Bible interpretation in the middle of their homilies. Protestants seized certain of the church buildings, most notably the Franciscan convent, and began holding services and administering sacraments in them, in competition with the local priests. Finally in 1535 a public debate was held between a group of Protestant pastors and a few local priests. (Many of the Catholic clergy boycotted it.) The Protestants claimed that the debate had resulted in a decisive victory for them, and that the population was now generally convinced of the truth of their point of view. They demanded that the city adopt legislation to establish firmly a

truly Reformed service of worship. Many members of the Council seemed inclined to accept this claim, but the Council as a whole did not want to proceed too abruptly. It ordered a temporary suspension of the Catholic mass, until the problem could be fully resolved.

That step convinced most of the Catholic clergy who were still in the city that they could no longer remain. A number had already left Geneva, because of the constant popular turmoil and harassment or because they had been caught in intrigues involving the bishop. A few had abandoned their religious vocation, had publicly converted to Protestantism, had turned to secular occupations, and had even married. In 1535, after the great debate, practically all the remaining Catholic clergy left Geneva. This included the bishop’s vicar, the remaining canons, most of the parish priests, and most of the friars and sisters. A handful of priests who tried to stick it out were ordered by the Council either to leave or to conform to the Protestant settlement and regularly listen to Protestant sermons. The few who remained were relieved of all clerical duties.

Once most of the clergy had left the city, the Council seized control over all church property, both within the city and in the country districts heretofore controlled by the bishop’s officers. Some of this property was used to pay off a substantial debt contracted to Berne for armed defense against Savoy. The rest was allocated to charity. All the hospitals created during the Middle Ages to minister to the poor were closed down. A new Hospital-General was established in the building which had been the convent of the Poor Clare sisters. A civilian staff, including a “hospitallier” or administrator, a teacher, a doctor, and servants, was assembled and housed in the building. A special committee of the government was created to supervise the activity of this staff. The administration of charity was thus thoroughly laicized and rationalized in Geneva. Later Calvin was to give these laymen responsible for the Hospital-General, both on the supervisory committee and in the office of “hospitallier,” the additional ecclesiastical title of deacon. But they remained laymen without any clerical ordination or special clerical training for their jobs.

As a final assertion of sovereignty, the city Council authorized and supervised the coining of money. The new coins carried a slogan, somewhat modified from an earlier slogan used by the episcopal government, which was to become a rallying cry of the Reformation. It was: *Post tenebras lux*, “after darkness light.”

Naturally all of these changes increasingly alarmed the bishop,

the ducal government of Savoy, and the Savoyard noble families of the area surrounding Geneva. The bishop could see his power and wealth evaporating, the duke could see his claim on the city withering away, the nobles could see their relatives among the canons insulted and exiled. Considerable military pressure was brought to bear upon Geneva to stop this course of events. Armed bands of Savoyard noblemen, encouraged by the duke and the bishop, ravaged the countryside, interdicting much of the trade so vital to the city's economy and making it hard for the city to gather in essential food on a regular basis. By 1535 the city was virtually under siege. Geneva appealed for help in several directions and finally persuaded its Bernese ally to act. A sizable Swiss army came pouring down from the great plain to the north. There was little the Savoyards could do to withstand it. The army commanded by the Bernese effectively conquered all the Savoyard and independent territory surrounding Geneva. It even tried to take over the city itself, but the Genevans were able to resist that pressure.

With a ring of Bernese dependencies around her, Geneva was now free to go all the way to Reformation. In a special meeting of the General Council held in May of 1536, the final step was taken. It was voted that the city would henceforth live by the Gospel and the Word of God as it had been preached in Geneva since the suspension of the mass. It was further voted that "masses, images, idols, and other papal abuses" would no longer be permitted in the city.

That decision ended the power of Catholic clergy in Geneva. But it did not immediately create a Reformed Church. It really only left a vacuum, which was unstable and dangerous in an age when almost all Europeans felt it necessary to build their lives and their communities around some form of religious ideology. Farel, the most prominent of the preachers who had persuaded Geneva to abandon Catholicism, desperately tried to fill this void. He had the great good luck to recruit as his principal assistant a brilliant young French humanist lawyer who happened to be passing through Geneva only a few months after its fateful decision to become Protestant. This was John Calvin. He had only recently converted to Protestantism and fled from religious persecution in his native country to Basel. There he had composed and published the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a book which was to become, in its later and expanded versions, the most important single summary of Protestant doctrine produced in the century.

Calvin had not planned to settle in Geneva, but Farel managed to persuade him that it was God's will that he should stay and help build a Reformed Church in this place. Calvin was appointed a public lecturer in theology. Even with this help, Farel found it very difficult to organize a Reformed Church. For two years they worked together to announce the Christian truth as they saw it and to give it reality in the community by developing Reformed services and ecclesiastical institutions. They found it harder to control behavior than to persuade men to their belief. Calvin himself later reported that when he first arrived in Geneva, "the Gospel was preached . . . [but] things were very disorderly . . . the Gospel consisted mostly of having broken idols . . . there were many wicked people."⁶ They were frustrated at every turn by the Genevans, who did not want to trade what they regarded as Catholic clerical tyranny for a new Protestant yoke. Finally Farel and Calvin were both rather unceremoniously ejected from the city.

Now Geneva was really drifting, without any clerical leadership it could respect. Some thought the city might return to Catholicism. The liberal Cardinal Sadoletto of the Roman curia wrote from his diocese in southern France to urge the Genevans to consider this possibility carefully. Others thought the city might drift into some wild and eccentric religious experiment. This period of indecision finally ended when Calvin, alone, was invited back to take charge. He had settled in German Strasbourg, where he had been named pastor of the French refugees' congregation, and he was reluctant to return to Geneva. He posed strict conditions, and they were accepted. Finally, in 1541, he came back. He remained in Geneva until his death in 1564, and created there a Reformed Church which proved to be a model for Protestants in much of Europe and America.

Calvin accomplished this feat solely by moral suasion. He never possessed even a fraction of the legal power of the deposed Catholic bishop. He never commanded even a fraction of the material resources owned by the bishop, or for that matter by any one of the Catholic cathedral canons. Political power remained solely within the hands of the elected Council and syndics. Calvin and the other pastors were only employees of the municipal government, living on salaries paid by the city, most of them in houses owned by the city. They were far fewer in number than the

⁶Baum, Cunitz, and Reuss, eds., *Calvini Opera*, XXI (Brunswick, 1879), p. 43.

Catholic clergy whose places they took. Altogether there were only nine pastors in 1542. The number had risen to only nineteen by 1564, the year of Calvin's death. In addition, a few men with Protestant theological training secured positions as chaplains, teachers, or tutors. But the total of all these men was far short of the hundreds of Catholic religious who had served Geneva under the bishop. Furthermore, none of these Protestant clergymen was allowed to become a full citizen of Geneva. The city had become so suspicious of foreign pressures that it granted citizenship, with full rights to vote and hold office, only to certain native-born residents. All the pastors were immigrants, most of them from France, like Calvin. No native Genevan had been able to secure the type of advanced education the Council now decided was essential for this position. A few of the pastors became "bourgeois" of Geneva, an intermediate status which gave a man many political and legal rights, but not full citizenship. Calvin was granted the status of "bourgeois," but only toward the end of his life, in 1559.

This does not mean that Calvin and the other pastors did not exercise considerable political power in Geneva. But it always had to be exercised indirectly, usually through preaching or consulting. Calvin used both means to win great power for himself. He became an eloquent preacher, who clearly commanded the respect, if not always the affection, of his audience. This was in marked contrast to many of his predecessors both in the Catholic clergy and among the earliest Protestant preachers. He also became an active and useful consultant to the city government. The Council found his skill as a trained lawyer and his first-hand knowledge of the greater world of international politics to be extremely useful. He was often called in for consultation and his advice was usually accepted.

One of the first things Calvin did on returning to Geneva in 1541 was to draft a set of ecclesiastical ordinances, to give institutional shape and legal standing to the newly Reformed Church. His right to do this had been part of the bargain that led to his return. After some discussion and a few minor amendments, these ordinances were enacted into law by the government. They organized the Genevan Church by creating four categories of ministers and then building institutions through which the work of each could be channelled. The categories were: (1) the pastors who were to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments, (2) the doctors who were to study the Word of God

and teach, (3) the elders who were to maintain discipline within the community, and (4) the deacons who were to supervise the administration of charity.

The pastors were distributed among the parishes created before the Reformation both within the city and in the country villages it controlled. There were seldom enough men and resources to staff all of these parishes fully, but arrangements were made so that everyone had access of some sort to a pastor. The pastors' job was to proclaim the Word of God, as it had been discovered by Calvin, from the parish pulpits. They also had to administer the two remaining sacraments which the Reformed Church acknowledged as genuine, baptism and communion. For organizational purposes the pastors were grouped into a Company, which met once a week to handle routine church business, to discuss theology, and to engage in criticism of themselves and their colleagues. Calvin served as Moderator, or presiding officer, of this Company until his death. That was his only position of preeminence in Geneva. He also served as one of the pastors in the cathedral parish of St. Pierre, and occasionally also preached in the nearby church of the Madeleine, where many of the city's merchants attended services. The pastors were all chosen by co-optation, with the existing Company deciding on any new appointment. No choice could become final, however, until the candidate had also been approved by the city Council and presented to the parish in which he was to serve. The Council reserved to itself the right to dismiss without notice any pastor who displeased its members. Over the years a number were in fact dismissed, most commonly because they had offended Council members by things they said in sermons.

In the beginning, Calvin was really the only doctor. In addition to his pastoral duties, he spent a good deal of time in writing and lecturing on the Bible. His lectures attracted hundreds of eager young intellectuals from all over Europe. This teaching did not get formal institutional shape, however, until 1559, fairly late in Calvin's life. In that year Geneva created a new Academy, providing both secondary and university-level training in theology. Calvin, of course, was the star of this faculty. He was joined by a number of his disciples who had been teaching in neighboring Lausanne but who had recently been driven out by Berne. The Bernese, who controlled Lausanne directly, had come to object to some of the disciplinary and dogmatic ideas taught by these men. Material support for Geneva's Academy was provided primarily from property confiscated by the Council from native Genevans

who had been driven out of the city in a number of internal upheavals ending in 1555. These ejections had had the net effect of eliminating all opposition within Geneva to Calvin and fully consolidating his authority.

The other two orders of ministers, elders and deacons, were laymen most of whom served in this capacity only on a part-time basis. They were drawn from the same pool of wealthy merchants and professional men who served in the city Council and on the city's various governing committees. Near the beginning of every year, a meeting of the General Council was called to elect the syndics and Council members for the coming twelve months. At the same time members of a number of governmental committees were elected, from slates prepared by the outgoing government. These committees included ones to maintain the city's fortifications, control its grain supply, keep the streets clean, act as courts to judge certain legal cases. Calvin's ecclesiastical ordinances added two new committees to the list: a committee to maintain Christian discipline, staffed partly by elders; a committee to assist the poor, staffed by deacons.

The committee upon which the elders sat was called the Consistory. The pastors were also members of this body. It acted as a kind of ecclesiastical court and met once a week. One of the Syndics served as its presiding officer. The elders were chosen so as to represent all of the "dizaine" districts into which the city was divided. They reported to the Consistory names of residents whose religious ideas were suspect, who still clung to Catholic practices, and who did not behave properly. A high percentage of their cases were of people accused of sex crimes—prostitution, fornication, adultery, sodomy, rape. They examined each case. If the fault was minor and the accused penitent, he might be let off with a scolding. If the fault was more serious and the accused stubborn, he could be excommunicated. This was a serious penalty in a population which took its sacraments seriously, and could cause great distress. If the accused had done something of a criminal nature that required further punishment, he would be referred to the city Council.

This was the most controversial single institution established by the Reformation in Geneva. Calvin insisted on its creation when he returned in 1541, and threatened to resign when its power to excommunicate was threatened in later years. Few Protestant governments elsewhere in Europe were willing to grant judicial powers of this kind to an ecclesiastical body of this type. But Calvin ultimately had his way, the opponents of the Consistory

were discredited and driven out, and a moral "reign of terror" followed. All of this helped to create that particularly austere pattern of behavior which has come to be labeled "Puritan."

The deacons worked with the Hospital-General. Their positions had actually been created before Calvin's arrival, in the series of events which led up to the final break with Catholicism. Calvin simply made room for them in the Ecclesiastical Ordinances and found Biblical warrant for their assignments. In effect he sanctified this office, gave it a special religious character, and in so doing made it a more highly valued and respected feature of Genevan society.

The Ecclesiastical Ordinances required the Council to consult the pastors when it drew up its slates of nominations for elders and deacons before the annual elections. However, this rule was not followed invariably. It was followed more often in the choice of elders than of deacons, and was followed quite scrupulously in the selection of both after Calvin's power had been fully consolidated toward the end of his life.

This ecclesiastical structure was an outstanding success in consolidating the Reformation in Geneva. Much of it persists in that city down to the present. It helped win for the city the international reputation as a center of Reformed Protestantism which has accounted for much of Geneva's distinctive character over the centuries.

Taken all together, it seems obvious to me that the changes in Geneva between 1526 and 1559 constitute a genuine revolution. They meet every requirement of the definition of a revolution laid down by Neumann which we adopted earlier. There was a fundamental change in political organization: a government run by a bishop assisted by canons, chosen according to Church law, was overthrown; a new government run by a Council of local laymen elected by the people took its place. There was a fundamental change in social structure: several hundred Catholic clergymen, a number of Savoyard noblemen, and ordinary laymen hesitant to go all the way to Calvinism were all driven out of the city; their places were taken by hundreds of immigrants, most of whom were artisans and merchants and most of whom came from France, as had Calvin. There was a fundamental change in economic property control: large amounts of property were confiscated from the old Church and its supporters and in effect socialized, put at the disposition of the entire community as represented by its government, rather than being distributed to private individuals. All of

these changes were justified and sanctified by the most obvious change of all, in the predominant myth of social order. Roman Catholic theology was brutally rejected and a new variety of Protestant theology was created to take its place.

There remains one final problem that must be explored, however, before we can answer our initial question satisfactorily. We must consider the extent to which the Reformation in Geneva was typical. Even if the Reformation clearly meant revolution in this particular city-state, it may not have had the same meaning elsewhere. Geneva may have been unique, and thus not a case upon which generalizations should be built.

To resolve this problem would require extensive comparative studies. Even some tentative and preliminary studies of this sort do make one thing clear: the Reformation in Geneva was obviously more radical than in many communities. In few places had the power of the Catholic clergy remained as strong and as pervasive as it was in pre-Reformation Geneva. Cities all over Europe had once been controlled directly by bishops. For example, in Germany most cities had been ruled by bishops back in the tenth century. Since that period, however, new secular cities had been founded and many old cities had broken loose from episcopal control. By the time of the Reformation only a few German cities remained under the effective direct control of bishops. Most of the cities of importance had become free imperial cities, acknowledging allegiance to only one sovereign—the Holy Roman Emperor. Remnants of episcopal power remained in most of these cities, but most temporal power was concentrated in elected city councils like those of Geneva.

Furthermore, in many cities services that had previously been performed by the clergy had been turned over to secular institutions well before the Reformation. This was particularly true of educational and charitable services. The move to secularization of these services was especially pronounced in the great Italian city-states of the late Middle Ages. In fact it can be argued that the celebrated culture of the Italian Renaissance was made possible by the creation of secular schools and academies supported by municipal governments and wealthy laymen in communities like Florence. Similarly the administration of charity had been laicized and rationalized in communities like Milan which built and endowed large municipal hospitals for this purpose. Clergymen still staffed some of these institutions. But clerical control was gone and clerical participation was reduced if not ended. It can thus be argued that Geneva in the sixteenth

century was socially retarded and that she used the Reformation to catch up, to introduce changes which had already occurred in other communities.

It is also clear that in few places did the Reformation go as far as it did in Geneva. It was not common for the entire body of the clergy in a community to be deposed or ejected. More often Catholic parish priests were simply converted to Protestantism, with a greater or lesser appreciation of what that meant, and allowed to remain at their work. Only slowly was a body of clergymen fully trained in Protestant doctrine developed. This seems to have happened in most of the Lutheran principalities in Germany and in the kingdom of England. In England the changes must have been particularly bewildering. For there priests were expected to repounce the pope yet remain Catholic in doctrine under Henry VIII, become Protestant with permission to marry under Edward VI, return to Rome and put aside their wives under Mary, become Protestant again and remarry under Elizabeth I. A remarkable number of priests in England seemed to be able to make many of those changes.

However even if the changes accompanying the Reformation were seldom as abrupt and as far-reaching as in Geneva, there were always some changes. In every single instance, for one thing, a community adopting Protestantism rejected the authority of the pope and broke all ties with Rome. And this was not a trivial move. The papacy had long symbolized in a concrete institutional way the unity of all Western European civilization. Rejection of its power meant a move to some sort of particularism, often to some type of nationalism. This marked an extremely important shift in the most fundamental values held by Europeans, from one basic assumption about society to another. It was a shift which was to have tremendous consequences for the history of Europe for at least another four hundred years, until the middle of the twentieth century.

Another change that almost always came with the Reformation was the closing of all monastic communities and the confiscation of their often considerable property. On rare occasions convents or monasteries were simply walled up and not allowed to recruit new members, thus going out of existence when all existing members died. But more commonly all the monks and nuns, friars and sisters, were required either to leave or find new occupations. And they lost all of their community property. There is a good deal of debate as to how significant were the resulting massive transfers of property. In many areas wealthy noblemen who

already controlled much of a monastery's activities no doubt were able now simply to control this property more directly. But changes of some sort had to occur. And often they were brutal and of far-reaching consequences.

Yet another change that almost always came with the Reformation was the collapse of the system of church law and church courts. Appeals to Rome, of course, were always stopped. So at least that element in the Catholic legal system invariably disappeared. But a good many further changes usually followed. Church courts were either abandoned completely or their powers and the range of their jurisdiction were sharply reduced. New Protestant ecclesiastical bodies were seldom given many legal functions. In at least one aspect of legal practice, most Protestant communities went further than Geneva. Before the Reformation cases involving marital and sexual problems were normally tried before church courts. Geneva assigned these cases to a semi-ecclesiastic court, the Consistory. This court did not, to be sure, use Catholic canon law to settle these cases, turning instead to civil law and the relevant parts of the Bible as interpreted by Calvin. But clergymen were at least involved in this part of the judicial process in Geneva. In most Protestant communities they were not granted this right, and jurisdiction over marital and sexual offenses was jealously reserved to secular courts. Both Catholic law and the Catholic type of court were abandoned.

Taken together, the renunciation of papal authority, the closing of the monasteries, and the dismantling of the Catholic legal system were significant changes. They required some modifications in political organization, in the social structure, and in the economic control of property. They reflected a profound change in the predominant myth of the community. It seems to me that these changes can fairly be called revolutionary. Their full implications, to be sure, become obvious only when one examines an extreme case like Geneva. But they were always present. I would therefore conclude that the Protestant Reformation was indeed a revolution.

FOR FURTHER READING

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THE ESSAYIST'S SOURCES

1

Michel Roset, *Chronicles of Geneva*

While Michel Roset (1534-1613) was too young to have had a personal knowledge of many of the events described in his *Chronicles*, his account of the Genevan Reformation is valuable in several respects. Roset composed the work during the early years of his career with the city government of Geneva and completed it by 1562. He evidently was permitted some access to official records for the account is, in general, factually accurate. At the same time, the *Chronicles* reflect Roset's commitment to the Reformation and his intense civic pride. His father was an early and active follower of Farel, the first Reformer of Geneva, as well as a fairly prominent official in the municipal government. Upon

completion of his education at Zurich, Michel Roset received an appointment with the Genevan government. Within five years, in 1560, he was elected one of the four governing syndics. By the end of his life, he had served a total of forty-five years in the office of syndic. Roset was also an able diplomat, serving on missions to Germany, Italy, and the other Swiss cities. His greatest achievements were the Treaty of Soleure in 1579, and the *combourgeoisie* (alliance of cities) of 1584. Both pacts preserved Geneva's independence during the crucial years following Calvin's death and became the cornerstone of the republic's foreign policy for the next two centuries.

SOURCE: Michel Roset, *Les Chroniques de Genève*, edited by Henri Fazy (Geneva: Georg, 1894), translation by Raymond A. Mentzer, Jr. pp. 12-15; 174; 176; 176-77; 190; 195-96; 196-98; 200-202; 207; 210; 211; 212-13; 214-15; 227-28; 232-33; 238.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH IN PRE-REFORMATION GENEVA

Formerly there was a Bishop who was the spiritual and temporal prince; thirty-two canons who had their own jurisdiction and over whom a provost presided; eleven chaplains called Maccabees; six choir boys; seven curés and seven parishes: Saint Croix in the Saint Pierre quarter, Dame La Nove, Saint Germain, La Madeleine, Saint Gervais, Saint Léger and Saint Victor. There were also five monasteries, of the Franciscans in the Rive quarter, of the Poor Clares, of the Dominicans in the Plainpalais quarter, of the Augustinians at Notre Dame de Grace near the Arve river,* and of the monks of the Order of Cluny in the Saint Victor quarter. The Bishop had a Vicar, an Episcopal Council and an "Official" for ordinary justice. He also had a *vidomne*** a judicial officer from whom one could appeal to the "Official."

For the civil government, there were four Syndics elected annually, their Council and the Assembly of the Citizens and Bourgeois which was called the General Council. The Syndics were the judges of criminal cases, the magistrates of the city, and the masters of the port, the artillery and the munitions.

*Editor's Note: Roset appears to have made a minor mistake at this point. It was the Dominicans who had their convent at Notre Dame de Grace, in the Plainpalais quarter. The Augustinian house was near the Arve river.

**Editor's Note: Although theoretically a part of the episcopal administration, the office of *vidomne* had long been controlled by the House of Savoy. The *vidomne* exercised criminal justice within Geneva.

They possessed a written charter of liberties which the Prince Bishop reaffirmed when he took possession of the Bishopric. When the sun set in the evening, they alone had total jurisdiction and authority within the city. Some individuals claim that in years past the people elected the bishop as their leader. Because of his spiritual jurisdiction, he was confirmed by Rome. It is certain that the Syndics were elected by the people on the feast of Saint Martin. The four Syndics elected their own Council, each of them choosing five prominent citizens to be councilmen. They also elected a treasurer. The edicts or public proclamations were made on behalf of the Bishop, his *vidomne* and the men of experience and integrity of the city. When the *vidomne* and other episcopal officers captured a criminal, they delivered him to the Syndics within twenty-four hours and brought suit before them for judgment, from which there was no appeal. Only the bishop could grant pardon. They commanded the *vidomne* to execute their sentence. The *vidomne* delivered the criminal to the Castellan of Gaillard, an officer of the Count of the Genevois, dependent of the rear-fief of the bishopric. He executed the criminal near the city and within its franchise at a place called Champel where the gallows are still located today. Our ancestors have handed down to us the account that a certain bishop, in debt to the Prince of Savoy, mortgaged to the Prince the office of *vidomne* and the castle on the island in the Rhone river where it flows through Geneva. Later, the bishop, wishing to be free of the arrangement, met with a refusal from the princes of Savoy. The money was deposited at Rome where the dispute remained pending, although no one knew why or how. As a result, the bishops excommunicated the Dukes of Savoy as usurpers of the property of the Church. This much is certain, that still in the closing years of the papal reign in Geneva, when a church procession passed in front of this castle, they lowered the cross as a sign of interdict.

THE FINAL VISIT OF THE BISHOP OF GENEVA PIERRE de la BAUME, JULY 1533

The Bishop, de la Baume, accompanied by his advisors and several lords from Fribourg, returned to Geneva on 1 July 1533. He was received with great honor. He had the priests held for the tumult which occurred in April released. And, having required the General Council to assemble, he asked the people if they accepted him as their Prince. They answered yes, subject to their liberties and customs, written and unwritten. Afterwards, he commanded the Syndics to judge the prisoners held in the death of Werli.* Otherwise, he would try them in the city and his men would provide protection. He was beseeched not to endorse such armed men in order not to have bands in the

*Editor's Note: Pierre Werli, a canon of the Cathedral of Saint Pierre, had been killed in the course of an armed clash between Catholics and Protestants on 4 May 1533.

city. The Bishop asked that his councillors assist at the trial with the Syndics. The Syndics said that this was in violation of their liberties.

THE FINAL DEPARTURE OF THE BISHOP OF GENEVA,
PIERRE de la BAUME, 15 JULY 1533

In the midst of these troubles, there were some citizens who feared that the Bishop might have the prisoners, who had been given over to the Syndics for judgment, secretly taken from them. For this reason, these citizens took up arms and patrolled the city at night. As a result, the Bishop departed Geneva on 15 July 1533. It was commonly said that his departure was out of fear of the people who may have been irritated because of the aforementioned prisoners. He has not returned since.

APPEALS TO THE COURT OF THE BISHOP
ARE DISCONTINUED, JULY 1535

The Bishop, upon his departure, left serious trouble between the Syndics and his officers, concerning whom the Syndics had requested action be taken. Some claimed this was especially necessary because the persons who exercised the episcopal offices were prejudiced against the people of the city. Meanwhile, the trial of the prisoners took shape with suit being brought by the fisc of the Bishop. The syndics pronounced the sentence freeing the prisoners. The fisc then appealed the sentence. To this the Syndics responded: Because we have no superior, we do not admit your appeal. One of the prisoners, who confessed having struck Werli when he was fleeing down a back alley, was decapitated on August 6.

THE BISHOP MOVES HIS COURT FROM GENEVA
TO GEX, SEPTEMBER 1534

At the end of September, the Bishop had his Episcopal Council, his Vicar and his officers moved from Geneva to Gex. The Syndics tried by prohibitions to prevent this, but the officers proceeded to Gex against the Syndics' will and were thus regarded as rebels. The Syndics protested to the Chapter of Geneva which they asked to elect new officers for the city and not to consent to the aforementioned undertaking. Finally, on 7 October, they appealed to Rome against the Bishop and his fugitive followers. They wished to show that he broke their liberties and took away their jurisdiction. But such an appeal was not sent, because of the great troubles which followed step by step from

that time forth. Already, it was dangerous for Genevans to venture outside the city.

THE SUBURBS OF GENEVA ARE RAZED
FOR DEFENSE, MAY 1535

Already in the preceding year, some individuals from Geneva had advised that the suburbs of the city be destroyed. They estimated that the enemy could use them to surprise the city more easily. As the plan proceeded to execution, many murmured against it. Others, who had houses in these suburbs, opposed the idea in great numbers. However, after all considerations were weighed, it was decided to demolish them, except for the suburb of Saint Gervais which was fortified with ramparts and ditches. The final decree to leave nothing stand was given on 10 May 1535. It was afterwards executed little by little. The monasteries and churches of Saint Victor, Notre Dame de Grace of the Dominicans in the Plainpalais quarter, Saint Léger, and that of the Friars Minor in the city were also razed. The streets of the demolished suburbs measured 6,200 feet.

THE PUBLIC DISPUTATION
ON RELIGION, MAY 1535

Although the Council leaned heavily to the side of the Gospel, it could not adopt the change which many of the citizens requested, because there were still varying opinions. Meanwhile, idolatry and the abuses held sway as always among those who had not yet heard the truth of the Gospel. Among other things, the small children who died were carried to the Convent of Notre Dame de Grace to be resuscitated. At the convent, there were several old matrons who, by clever methods and pretenses, caused a fever which they placed on the mouths of the children to stir. And, by warming the children, they sometimes caused them to perspire or piss. Then they cried: "Miracle, miracle," and had the monks sound the bells. These miracles were judged to be false by the Council which on 11 May 1535 prohibited the monks from further action of this sort. Now, prior to this, Jacques Bernard, the guardian of the Franciscan convent in the Rive quarter and a citizen, who not long beforehand had been called to the knowledge of the Gospel, had presented to the Council five articles or propositions. These he, along with the other preachers, offered to maintain. On 20 May he obtained permission for publication of the propositions and Sunday, 30 May, was assigned as the day of open disputation with all those who wished to support the contrary of the propositions. The articles were printed and notice was sent to the priests and canons of Geneva and of the surrounding places as well as to Grenoble, Lyons

and elsewhere, along with a declaration of assurance and safe-conduct for everyone wishing to debate. The disputations were publicly opened in the great auditorium of the convent in the Rive quarter on the designated Sunday. The delegates of the Council, in the company of four secretaries, were present to preserve order. The propositions maintained were, in summary: justification of men by Jesus Christ alone; the government of the Church depends on the Word of God alone; the adoration of a sole God who is sufficiently satisfied by way of atonement for our sins by the unique oblation made one time by Jesus Christ; Christ is the sole mediator between God and man, from which it follows that those who attribute to themselves some power, thinking to justify themselves through their works, are in error; the human and papal traditions which are called ecclesiastical are pernicious; it is idolatry and against God's wishes to adore with honor the Saints and statues; the mass does not contribute to our salvation, nor do prayers for the deceased; the Saints are not our intercessors. The disputations were continued for several days before a large audience. Among those in attendance were two persons who supported the party of the priests. One was named Caroli, a Doctor of the Sorbonne, the other Chappuisi, a citizen of the city and a monk of the convent in the Plainpalais quarter. Both were defeated and confessed to it, following which they have since themselves preached the Gospel.

THE REGULAR CLERGY ARE EJECTED FROM GENEVA FOLLOWING A PUBLIC DEBATE, JULY-AUGUST 1535

After the disputations of July 1535, the Ministers and many of the citizens asked the Council for a declaration of judgment concerning these public debates. On the other hand, many persons protested that they wished to continue living like their fathers. The Council, which still hoped to avoid dangers and harmful consequences for humanitarian reasons, delayed, hoping to avoid trouble. On 23 July, it prohibited Farel from preaching at the church of the Madeleine, one of the largest parishes. He asked for an audience before the Council of Two Hundred, but he was denied the request. Nonetheless, on 8 August, he preached publicly at the church of Saint Pierre. As a result, he was reprimanded by the Council. On this same day, several citizens and small children entered the aforementioned church and broke the statues. From there, they went to the other churches. For this they too were summoned and reprimanded. However, they maintained that they had acted correctly. Their argument was so persuasive that the Council was unsure if it should chastise them. It did, however, suspend the destruction of that which remained until further and wiser deliberation. At the same time, it ordered a cessation of the mass and had the property of the convents inventoried because of the troubles. This was on 10 August 1535. Two days later, the leaders of the priests, the Vicar and the Canons, were questioned by the

Council with respect to the disputations. They were asked if they had anything more to add. Some of them answered that they were simple men who did not know how to respond, except to say that they were accustomed to living like their fathers. But the Vicar and the Canons said that they did not wish to hear anything more, nor listen to the aforementioned disputations, nor read the summaries of the disputations which had been presented them. Thus many of the clergy left the city, some out of fear of their enemies, others because of their devotion. In order to prevent this, the Council ordered on 13 August that those who wished to leave would have to renounce their right of bourgeoisie and that this would be recorded. Thus, three days later, many of them appeared before the Council and requested permission for three masses each day at the church of La Madeleine. The request was denied. The women known as the Sisters of Saint Clare obtained a place at Annecy. They withdrew to Annecy with their property at the end of August, after having asked the permission of the Council. Around this time, on 28 August, several companies of Peneyans and Savoyards approached Geneva in the vicinity of the pasture land called Eaux-Vives. Fear of these companies caused the alarm to be sounded in the city on that day. However, nothing more developed at that time. On 30 August, the Duke of Savoy prohibited, on pain of death, anyone seven years or older from consorting with the people of Geneva. If anyone from Geneva wished to withdraw to the lands of the Duke, and to live there as his subject, he would be welcomed. Because of these developments, the magistrates of Geneva maintained a more careful watch, for they feared their city would be depopulated. On 18 September, several citizens found a priest in the very act with a whore. On their own authority, they paraded him around the city on an ass and had the whore trail behind him as a lackey. Many similar excesses, under the cloak of the Gospel, greatly scandalized the papists.

THE SECULAR PRIESTS ARE SUSPENDED FROM FUNCTIONING, OCTOBER 1535

On 15 October, the Syndics and the Council, having once again asked the priests if they wished to say anything more concerning the disputations, prohibited them from administering the sacraments further and from wearing their habits.

THE MUNICIPAL HOSPITAL IS ESTABLISHED, NOVEMBER 1535

In the midst of these troubles, the Council pursued the reformation which had started. Already on 29 September, the members had advised the

establishment of two hospitals in the city. They would be supported from the property of the churches. Because some of the priests refused to relinquish their rights, the entire matter was put before the people in the General Council on Sunday, 14 November 1535. There, it was ordered that there would be a large hospital for the poor in the convent from which the Sisters of Saint Clare had departed. The property of the churches would be used for its operation. And, they elected a *hospitallier** who afterwards in his will made the hospital heir to his property.

GENEVA ASSERTS THE RIGHT TO COIN MONEY, NOVEMBER 1535

The city of Geneva, surrounded by enemies who controlled the countryside, was drained of money as well as provisions of food. Therefore, the magistrates decided to mint the city's own money. This was decreed on 24 November 1535. They agreed among themselves that they could assert their right to coin money. To better establish this right, they searched among the funds of the merchants for old pieces minted with the stamp of the city. Because their ancient motto was *Post tenebras spero lucem* (After darkness hope for light), they had *Post tenebras lux* (After darkness light) put on one side of the coins. They removed *spero*, saying that they had attained light. On the other side of the coins, they put *Deus noster pugnatur pro nobis, 1535* (Our God fights for us, 1535). The motto was ordered on 4 December 1535.

THE PRIESTS AND CANONS ARE FORCED TO CONFORM OR BE EJECTED, DECEMBER 1535

From the moment that priests were forbidden to celebrate the mass, they continually complained throughout the city. Many of the citizens, principally those who were responsible for keeping the peace and maintaining the watch, lamented. Thus, by ordinance of the Council, the priests were once again, on 12 and 19 November, summoned to the town hall and called upon to respond to the disputations. Again they were told that if they did not feel themselves capable of a proper response, they would be permitted to have a learned individual of their choice to uphold their cause and to assure that they would be heard. Otherwise, they were enjoined to attend the sermons of the preachers. None of this changed them at all. Finally, on 5 December 1535, those who still had not left were summoned and told that if they did not wish to follow the Word of God, they must leave the city, never to return. Only a

*Editor's Note: The *hospitallier*, invariably a layman selected and supervised by the city councils, directed the actual care of the poor in Geneva's General Hospital.

few priests remained in the city and they were pensioned until their death. The Canons also now withdrew to Annecy.

THE RELIGIOUS RELICS OF THE GENEVAN CHURCHES ARE EXPOSED, DECEMBER 1535

In December 1535, when the city was continually besieged, the citizens sought out the idols and relics in the churches in order to leave nothing. Among others, four notable things were found. At the church of Saint Pierre, there was the arm of Saint Antoine upon which the most solemn oaths had been given. They found that it was the parched genital member of a stag. The brain of Saint Pierre, which had been held in great veneration, was found to be a pumice-stone. At the church of Saint Gervais, the priests said that under the main altar were buried Saints Nazarien, Celse and Panthaleon, called the holy bodies. They asked that they be canonized, but this was not done. If one pressed his ear to the monument, he heard beneath it a sound like the indistinct voices of men talking. There was also a hole through which the devout put their rosaries which were then so strongly held that they were not able to pull them out. The secret of all this was that under the altar there were great pots or earthen pipes situated so that they resounded at the least breeze. And, there were hooks cleverly placed below the hole so that the rosaries were held firmly. At the Dominican convent in the Plainpalais quarter, they found a very old picture of a monster. It had seven heads and ten horns and was expelling the popes from its backside. Below the popes, there was a furnace or abyss, filled with bishops, priests, monks and hermits. These four things among others, when made known and manifest, made the papist profession more odious.

GENEVA FORCES ITS COUNTRY DEPENDENCIES TO ADOPT THE REFORMATION, MARCH-APRIL 1536

The magistrates of Geneva already possessed Gaillard, Jussy and Peney. To these, they added Thiez in Faucigny, which was one of the dependencies of Geneva, the lands of the Chapter and of the Priory of Saint Victor, which are on this side of La Cluse, Céligny, the dependencies of Peney, Bellerive, and Gaillard. They received the fidelity oaths of the parishioners of these towns and provided them with castellans and judges on 21 February. They had the castles of Peney and Gaillard, which were a great nuisance, demolished. From the beginning, the Genevans exhorted these people to adopt the reformation such as they had in their city. Many who balked at this were induced by constraint. The priests of these lands were called before the Council on the following 3 April. The Council addressed them as it had previously addressed

the priests of Geneva and they were exhorted by Farel in the presence of Furbity* who was still in prison and yet approved of the entire matter. Some agreed to the demands of the Council. Others pleaded for permission to live as their neighbors and asked for a period of one month in which to respond. They were granted the delay. Meanwhile, all masses and other papal superstitions were abolished. At the end of the month, they agreed to conform like the others. These newly reformed lands did not include those of Thiez. The King of France, beseeched by the Dame de Nemours, required in letters sent on 1 March that Geneva not change the religion of the people of Thiez who, for their part, did not wish to change either. Thus, the people of Geneva, without destroying their idols and attacking their priests, tried to convert them simply through exhortations, but with little luck.

A REFORMED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IS ESTABLISHED AT GENEVA, MAY 1536

At Geneva, from the time of the Papistry, there was an elementary school which until now was still not properly reformed. Thus, the people, preparing themselves to continue in the reformed religion, established a new elementary school in the Rive quarter. The new regent, Antoine Saunier, made a profession of the Gospel, and agreed that small children were also to be instructed in scripture. This was decreed on 21 May in the General Council. By unanimous oath with raised hands, the people swore to God that they detested the papal doctrine, masses and all else which appertained thereto. They affirmed that in the future they would live according to His Holy Gospel. In as much as many of the persons who left during the time of war now asked to be received again and promised complete obedience, the Council admitted many of them, but restricted their powers. Since that time, on 18 November 1537, it was ordained in the General Council that those who had been suspected of or indicted in the past troubles and those who had been restricted would never be admitted to office, nor would they have a voice in the General Council.

JOHN CALVIN ARRIVES AT GENEVA, JULY 1536

John Calvin from Noyon in Picardy was passing through Geneva. Farel begged and beseeched him to remain for the edification of the church. He

*Editor's Note: Guy Furbity, a Paris Dominican, was appointed Advent preacher at Geneva in 1532. He bitterly denounced the reformers and soon found himself in prison. In January and February 1534, he was worsted in a disputation with Geneva's Protestants. Finally, after two years of imprisonment he was allowed to return to France.

stayed and began to lecture on theology. Since that time, he has become very well known through the richness and grace by which God has built His church through him. The church may well bless the day he was born and Geneva the day he arrived here.