

# Reformation: **501 Years** *and Counting*

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## John Calvin



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John Calvin (1509–1564) was a second-generation leader of the Reformation, born about a quarter century after both Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli. But it is Calvin's work and leadership in Geneva that enabled the Reformed tradition to spread over much of Europe during his lifetime and subsequently to become a worldwide movement.

The "Reformed tradition" includes denominations such as Presbyterian, Christian Reformed, and Congregational. Through these denominations, "united" churches such as The United Church of Canada have been strongly influenced by the Reformed tradition and see themselves as part of it.

What are the things we in the contemporary church particularly owe to John Calvin?

- Calvin not only gave a central place to scripture but also provided a compelling theological rationale for doing so.
- His key work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, provided a thorough theological outline of the Reformed tradition and functioned as such into the 20th century. Further, Calvin demonstrated how the key points of theology (or doctrine) he outlined in the *Institutes* had their basis in scripture. For Calvin, all theology should have its basis in scripture.
- Calvin was not a biblical literalist. But he did believe that through the reading of scripture and its explication in a sermon, the Holy Spirit can help us hear God's Word for us, in our time and place. His notion of the Bible as a means for us to receive a living Word, as a set of texts that can speak anew to every generation, continues to be our understanding.

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## Prayer of the Day

Wondrous God:

Thirteen billion years ago your creative spark called creation into being.

Two thousand years ago you lit a spark of new creation in Christ.

Five hundred years ago, your grace reignited the hearts of men and women with names like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Katharina Zell, Ulrich Zwingli, and Argula von Grumbach.

Just when we think all is settled, everything is finished, closed, your power and presence explodes on to the scene yet again, bringing newness, bringing life.

Fill us with your power and presence, O God,

so we may, like our grandparents in faith

carry your truth, your beauty, and your justice to the world you so love—a world in such need.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

From *God Reforms Us: A Service for Reformation Sunday* by Rev. Ryan Slifka, [www.united-church.ca/worship-liturgical-season/reformation-sunday](http://www.united-church.ca/worship-liturgical-season/reformation-sunday). © 2017 The United Church of Canada/L'Église Unie du Canada. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca>. Any copy must include this notice.



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