

## John Calvin (1509-1564)

An intelligent member of the Catholic middle-class, Jean Cauvin (1509-1564) had the family connections to place him in good schools. He left home in Noyon, France, in 1523, and traveled south to Paris to study law on a church scholarship. There he was exposed to theological conservatism, humanism, and a movement calling for the reformation of the church.

Young Cauvin, his name Latinized to Ioannis Calvinus, completed his studies and settled in Paris. He experienced what he described as "a sudden conversion" and joined reform-minded activists who were taking stronger and more public stands on church reform. When his friend Nicholas Cop was installed as rector at the University of Paris in 1533, Cop advocated for church reforms in his inaugural address. Some believed Calvin authored Cop's remarks, which occasioned controversy and persecution, forcing Calvin to flee Paris.

The twenty-four year old Calvin relocated to Reformation-minded Basel, where he wrote his six-chapter distillation of evangelical faith: *Christianae religionis institutio*. This 1536 treatise was systematic and clear, addressing law, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments, false sacraments, and Christian liberty. Over time, John Calvin expanded on and refined his thinking in the *Institutes*; the last edition Calvin published, in 1559, was eighty-eight chapters.

The *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is hailed as the cornerstone of Calvinist theology. It was from Calvin that John Knox gained the knowledge of Reformed theology and polity that he used as the basis for founding the Presbyterian denomination.

Images: John Calvin, J. R. Rice engraving, Philadelphia, no date, based on H. Holbein painting; *Institutio Christianae religionis*. Geneva: Ex officina Francisci Perrini, 1569; Signature from 1541 letter.

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