

Reformation Sunday - and Calvin's 500th birth year.

Do not miss Sunday's celebration service! It is called Reformation Sunday and with readings, music and song we remember and celebrate our spiritual heritage as Presbyterians.

You can call it a "bash" if you want to, because we this year also celebrate the 500th birth year of John Calvin, the leader of the Reformation in Europe.

John Calvin was born on 10 July 1509. His life and ministry would change the Christian views of many millions of Christians, shaped the thoughts of tens of thousands of theologians and ministers of the Church, founded the Western views of just as many philosophers on the state, politics, democracy, science and every other important sphere of life! On Reformation Sunday, 25 October 2009, we celebrate the 500th birth year of this church reformer.

This is one birthday *everyone* can celebrate. Our values and beliefs that carry us every day, benefited from his genius, his humble faith and piety and his dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Calvin's theology is popularly summarised by quoting the five "sola's" or "only's", of the Reformed tradition, namely:

- *We should live our lives "only to the glory of God!"*
- *We know the Gospel truth "only from the holy Scriptures!"*
- *We are justified "only by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ!"*
- *We are saved "only by grace!"*
- *We are saved "only through faith!"*

Calvin became the leader of the Protestants in the city of Geneva in Switzerland, which became the centre of the Reformation in Europe. From Geneva Presbyterianism spread to Germany, to Scotland mainly through John Knox who studied under Calvin, and to England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Hungary, Scandinavia, America and eventually other parts of the world, including the Dutch and British colonies.

Today some 50 million men, women and children throughout the world belong to 'Reformed' or 'Presbyterian' Churches. The name Reformed refers to Calvin's intention to establish a Church reformed according to the Word of God. The name Presbyterian refers to our form of church government with 'presbyters' or elders.

His Bible centred teaching matched his passion for God centred living and God centred faith. This is the origin of Presbyterians passionately seeking a just society, up to this day. Calvin's vision to promote religious toleration challenged the Church and the State of his time. His views on the separation of the powers of Church and State, where each is independent of the other yet accountable to God for everything they do, later developed into the ideal of democratic freedom of both the individual and structures within society. Without these principles a free economy and science and technology liberated from both theological and political tyranny, would not have flourished.

Calvin's thinking influenced many over the centuries. It was for example the Calvinism of both President Woodrow Wilson of the USA and of Jan Smuts, premier of South Africa, which inspired the establishment of the League of Nations after the First World War. It became the forerunner of the United Nations as we know it today.

Lets contemplate the impact of this remarkable contribution towards the development of the ideals for a free Christian society, while seeking answers for our own challenges of today.

Lets also give thanks for a life lived to the glory of God, in service of the Church of Christ and for the liberation of humanity.