



# The Reformations

## The Spread of Calvinism

Before 1555, Calvinism was growing but had not yet gained official status except in Geneva and the tiny Kingdom of Navarre, on the French side of the Pyrenees. It was not even recognized as an option by the German princes in the Peace of Augsburg (1555). Among European governing elites, it was generally regarded with suspicion if not contempt. The most promising area of growth was France, Calvin's own homeland. His message attracted many members of the urban middle classes, who had begun to feel alienated from both church and state. Missionaries from Geneva carried Calvin's message to France where the church was organized in a national system of congregations and synods. French Calvinists, or Huguenots as they were called, made up an aggressive minority of discontented nobles and middle-class urban citizens.

The new movement also enlisted a large proportion of women, drawn by opportunities for direct participation in the services. Many joined reading groups, where they discussed the Bible and theological issues. Early Calvinist women worked diligently for the cause, not only converting their husbands and families but also founding religious schools, nursing the sick, and aiding the poor.

Geneva became the most influential city in the Protestant movement. It represented the city where religion had been most truly reformed and changed for the better. John Knox, the Scottish Protestant leader, called Geneva "the most perfect school of Christ." Geneva's impact on Europe was huge for two reasons: Calvin did not want his belief to be restricted to just one area and he did not want Geneva to become a refuge place for fleeing Protestants.

The city was to be the heart that pumped Calvinism to all of Europe. This spread was to be based on a new educational system which was established in Geneva. Both primary and secondary schools were created and in 1559 the Academy was established which was to become the University of Geneva. Geneva was/is French speaking and Calvin spoke French.

It was expected that many French Huguenots would head for the university to train as missionaries. This was the main task of the university. In 1559 it had 162 students. In 1564, it had over 1500 students. Most of these were foreign. Calvin had some luck with his teaching staff as there had been a

dispute over the level of pay at Lausanne University and many of the teaching staff there simply transferred to Geneva as the pay was better and the financial structure of the university was on a stronger footing.

After their course at Geneva, the missionaries were given a French-speaking congregation in Switzerland, where they could perfect their skills, before moving on to France itself. The ease with which ministers could get into France was a bonus for Calvin. However, the size of the country was to be both a help and a hindrance to Calvinists.

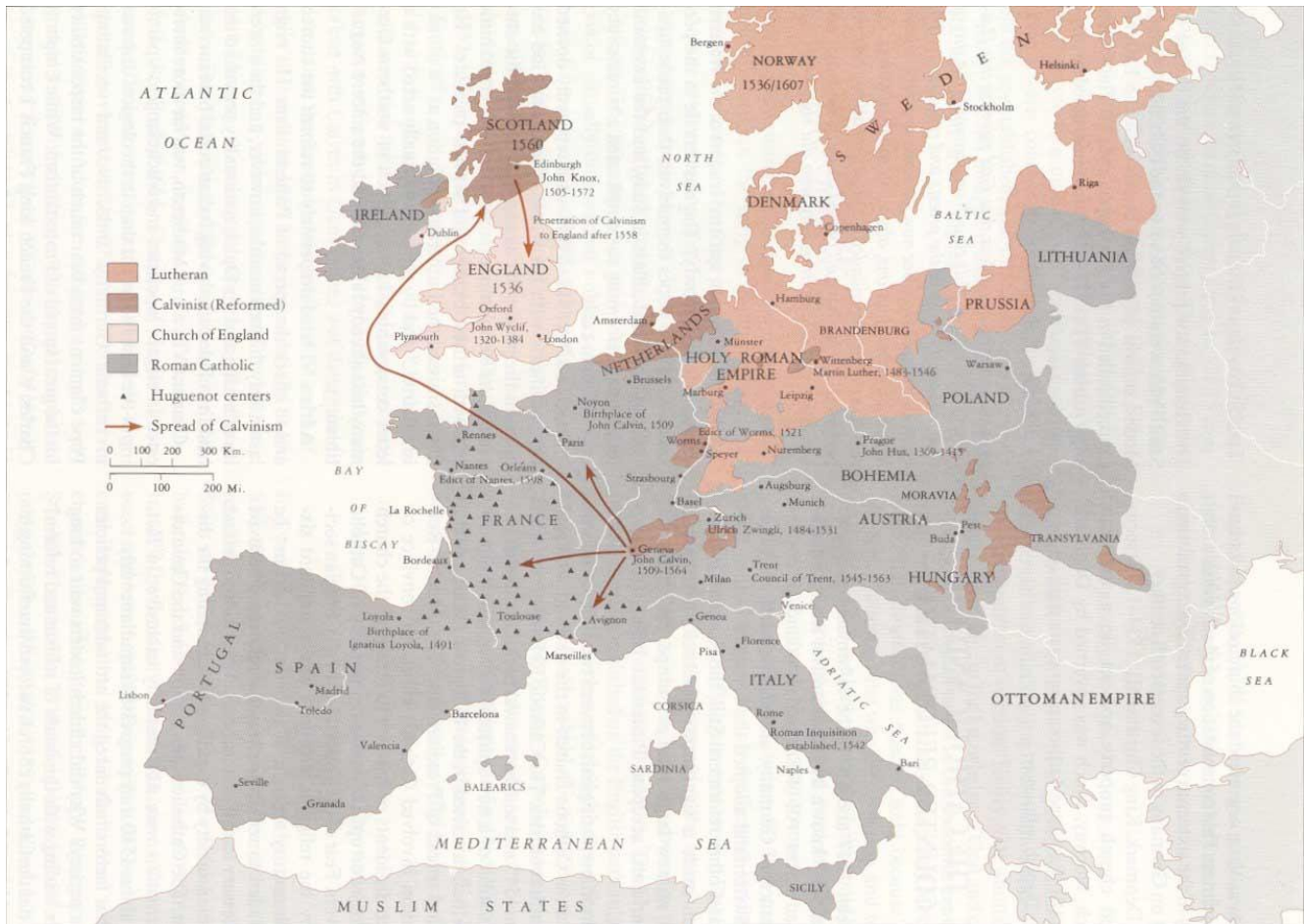
### **Calvinism in France**

French aristocratic women also promoted the growth of Calvinism. As the Renaissance moved north, many young French women were educated in the new humanism and began to question the traditional Catholic dogma. Margaret of Angouleme, Queen of Navarre (1492-1549) and sister of the French king, often petitioned her brother on behalf of Protestants accused of heresy and kept reformers at her court, where Calvin was sheltered at one time. Her daughter, Jeanne d'Albret (1528-1572), who became queen in 1549, established Calvinism in Navarre, having converted her second husband, the French aristocrat, Antoine de Bourbon.

Because Calvinism had enlisted many French dissident nobles who intended to resist royal power, the Bourbon leader hoped to gain their support and use it later to further his family's claim to the French throne. Jeanne, however, was dedicated to Calvinist principles, raising money and enlisting recruits among her contemporaries. She was a powerful member of the aristocratic Huguenot clique, headed by Admiral de Coligny and the Bourbon Prince, Louis of Conde. The first Huguenot (Calvinist) ministers arrived in France in 1553. The emergence of Huguenot churches in France surprised even Calvin because King Henry II of France was a strong Catholic.

Whereas his father (Francis I) had used Protestantism to help advance his power against the Parliament de Paris, Henry had no wish to have any association with Protestants whatsoever. In 1555 the first Huguenot congregation to have a permanent minister was established in Paris. By 1558, this congregation was worshiping in the open, guarded by armed sympathizers. In 1559, the first synod (national council) was held in Paris. In total 72 local congregations were represented by the elders, from each congregation.

Educated merchants were drawn to Calvinism. This occurred probably as a result of the impact of the Renaissance and as a reaction to the rigidity of the Catholic Church.



### Spread of Calvinism in Europe's 16th century

A number of noble families converted to Calvinism though there is not one common link to explain their conversion. Each family had its own individual reason. Ironically one of these reasons may have been patriotic. Catholicism was linked to Rome and since the Concordat of Bologna, the French had always linked their religion to national causes. By associating yourself with Calvinism, you would be expressing your belief that France should have no links to Italy.

The Huguenots were concentrated on the coast mainly in the west (La Rochelle) and in the south-east. They developed their own cavalry force and openly worshiped in their own churches. The sheer size of France aided them in the respect that the royal government in Paris found it difficult enough to assert its authority generally. The strict organization of the Huguenots made any attempt by the authorities to disband them very difficult. Added to this was the simple fact that la Rochelle was a long way from Paris. By 1561, there were 2150 Huguenot churches in France and Calvinists were estimated to be about 10% of the population - about 1 million people. It has to be remembered that the first Calvinist ministers only got to France in 1553. Calvinism within France became a large minority religion.

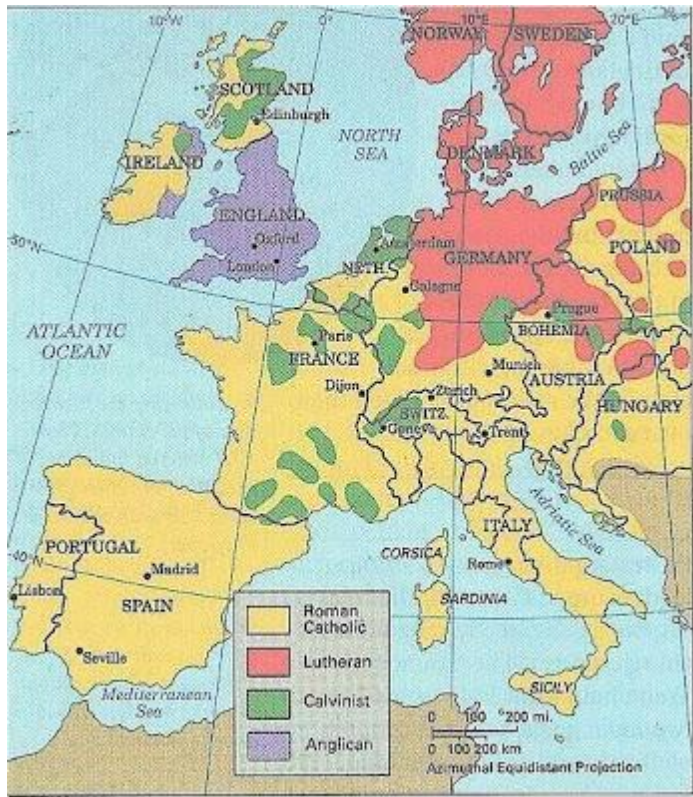
### Calvinism in Italy

Calvinism made gains elsewhere but did not win political power. In Italy, the Duchess of Ferrara copied the Navarre church service for her private chapel and harbored Calvinist refugees; and Zofia Olesnicka, wife of a Polish noble, endowed a local Calvinist church. A comparison map of places with Waldensian churches and the places where Calvinism quickly took root shows an impressive relationship between the promotional work was done by this congregational oriented non-Presbyterian group which indeed was Calvin's theological backbone in much of France and on continental Europe.



## Calvinism in the Netherlands

The Netherlands: Calvin made important gains in this state. Ministers first arrived here in the 1550's aided by Huguenot preachers who were fleeing from France. They made slow progress at first. By 1560, Calvinism had not spread far because the authorities were very active against it. In total, Protestantism accounted for 5% of the whole population in the Netherlands of which the Calvinists were just a small part. No noble men appeared to be interested as they were too concerned with their political power and economic well being. They knew that the Catholic Church was corrupt but they found the Calvinists far too authoritarian as the church told you what you could do and what you could not. Most Calvinists were from Antwerp, Ghent and regions near Germany.

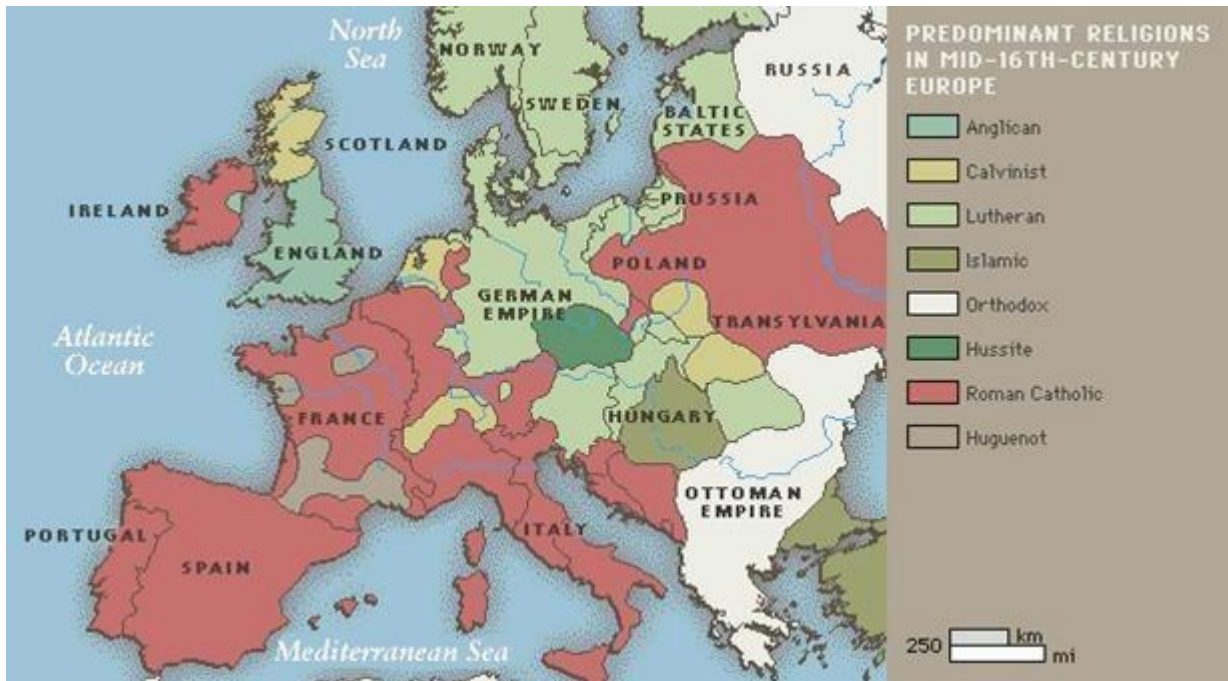


## Calvinism in Germany

In West Germany Calvinism first entered from the Netherlands in the 1560s and was first visible in the cities Cleve, Jülich, in East Frisian and Bentheim the connection to the Calvinist Dutch regions was strong too. Lutheranism had already taken root as had Anabaptism so Calvinism was seen as another protest religion in an ever crowded field. There

was also a lot of persecution in general against Protestants.

In 1524, Charles V introduced his own Inquisition to the region and in 1529 and 1531 new edicts were introduced ordering the death penalty to anyone who was found guilty of being a Lutheran or who would shelter them or help spread Lutherans beliefs. In 1550 Charles V removed the authority of city councils to try heretics. It was his belief that city magistrates were too lenient and that the provincial courts which took over this duty would have far greater control than the city magistrates. These measures did check the spread of Protestantism but of all three Calvinism was the most successful and the best equipped to survive. Its system of non-religious governments by elders allowed it to operate regardless of the authorities. The Anabaptists were too reliant on the role of the individual as opposed to strength in numbers and organization while the Lutherans were poorly organized and more open to attack from the authorities. Calvinism developed into a popular movement in NW Rhineland and Westphalia - both neighbors of the Netherlands. These were the only areas to convert. In 1562, Frederick III modeled churches in his territory on the Calvinist model which was contrary to the 1555 Religious Settlement of Augsburg which stated that churches could only be Catholic or Lutheran. Heidelberg became a leading intellectual center but the spread elsewhere was very limited due to Lutheranism and the input of Calvinism into Germany served to disunite the Protestant movement and help the Catholic Church in the Counter-Reformation. Elector John Sigismund of Brandenburg was to convert at a later date and his state followed.



**Calvinism, Lutheranism, Hussites and other Predominate Religious Convictions in Mid-16th Century Europe**