

# John Calvin – A 500-year-old success story



The impact of the work of John Calvin, the 16th century reformer, was not confined to the Church, and the French-born theologian's decisive influence on society as a whole continues to this day. Swiss Post is therefore issuing a special stamp to mark the 500th anniversary of his birth.

The French humanist John Calvin, who spearheaded the Protestant Reformation, was one of the most influential theologians of his age and throughout the modern era. In the early days of the Reformation, his work made it possible to disseminate the movement's ideas far beyond the German-speaking territory of Luther and Zwingli. From his Geneva base, he carried the word to France, the Netherlands, England, Scotland, Poland, Hungary and Italy. When he died in 1564, there were already some 100,000 Calvinist Protestants.

## Calvin, man of ideas

The lawyer and theologian played an active part in reorganizing political and social institutions. At the same time, he fought for a just balance between Church and State, developed legislative ideas that put justice on a sound ethical footing

and, above all, re-established the urban poor as a social concern. Perhaps his crowning achievement was to set up the "Collège" (College) and the "Académie" (Academy) (now two famous Genevan higher-education institutions), combined with a first-class apprenticeship system which was open to all without distinction and encouraged acceptance of the

## The calvin09 year

The 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth is to be comprehensively celebrated with performances, concerts, exhibitions, films, comic strips, excursions, lectures and debates – not only in Geneva, his city, with which his name is inextricably linked, but also in the other places where he lived and in countries all over the world where he had an indelible influence. The individual events are listed on the [www.calvin09.org](http://www.calvin09.org) website, where the handy cultural guide can also be ordered.

model of a dynamic, cosmopolitan society receptive to new developments.

## Man of the church

Calvin also made church offices more democratic, breaking the monopoly on power held by bishops and priests. Alongside pastors, he introduced the functions of deacons, elders and theological instructors, thus laying the foundation for a democratic system of managing a community's tasks.

Calvin placed God above any other authority. His experience as a refugee in Geneva bolstered his conviction that obedience was due first to God and only then to Man. The opposition which sprang from this idea was at the root of the movement of thousands of Christians who resisted persecution and dictatorship.



First-day cover motif



John Calvin is omnipresent in the city of Geneva. He preached in St. Peter's Cathedral for many years. The Reformation Monument recalls the international influence of the Genevan Reformation (Calvin is second from the left). A painting by Joseph Hornung dating from 1831 depicts Calvin on his deathbed.

Photos: Laurent Donner, Musée historique de la Réformation

benevolence, he created values which spread throughout the western world, thus proving that these need not be at odds with people's understanding of God and the message of the Bible.

### Great importance for Geneva

John Calvin, who came to Geneva as a refugee, turned this provincial city into one of Europe's intellectual capitals. Thanks to him, over the years Geneva attracted famous scholars, highly qualified craftsmen and humble families fleeing persecution. In so doing, Calvin contributed to the region's economic vitality, as witnessed to this day in the development of its watch-making industry and banking sector.

Simon Weber

### John Calvin

**1509** Born on 10 July in Noyon (Picardy)

**1528** Studied law in Orleans

**1533** Schism of the Roman Catholic Church

**1535** Flight from France; stays in Basel and Ferrara (Italy)

**1536** The Institutes of the Christian Religion (Institutio religionis christianae), first edition

**1536** First position as a minister in Geneva

**1538** Banishment from Geneva following a quarrel with the city council over the respective purviews of Church and State

**1538** Minister to the French refugee community in Strasbourg

**1540** Marriage to Idelette de Bure

**1541** Beginning of his second period as a minister in Geneva

**1559** Founding of the Geneva Academy, final version of the Institutes

**1564** Death on 27 May in Geneva after years of ill health

### The Calvin stamp

Sober simplicity as a foil for modern humanism. The three elements in stone symbolize the historic nature of the motif and emphasize the scope and immortality of Calvin's heritage. The light stands for the radiance of his personality, softening his occasionally stern features and bringing out the astounding humanity and vitality of the face carved in stone.

His sense of justice led him to support countless refugee families and poor people. Calvin strengthened the unity of belief and action and of freedom and responsibility. With his humanism and his fundamental optimism regarding God's

**Special stamp**  
500th anniversary of the birth of J. Calvin

**Sales**  
Philately:  
From 21.2.2009 until 31.3.2010, while stocks last  
Post offices:  
From 5.3.2009, while stocks last

**Validity**  
Unlimited from 5.3.2009

**Printing**  
Offset, 4-colour;  
Cartor Security Printing, La Loupe, France

**Sizes**  
Stamp: 28×33 mm  
Sheet: 140×195 mm (5 rows of 4 stamps)

**Paper**  
White stamp paper, with optical brightener, mat gummed, 110 gm<sup>2</sup>

**Perforation**  
13½:13¼

**Designer**  
Laurent Donner, La Chaux-de-Fonds (NE)

**First-day cancellation**

