

DO BLACK LIVES MATTER TO WHITE CHRISTIANS?

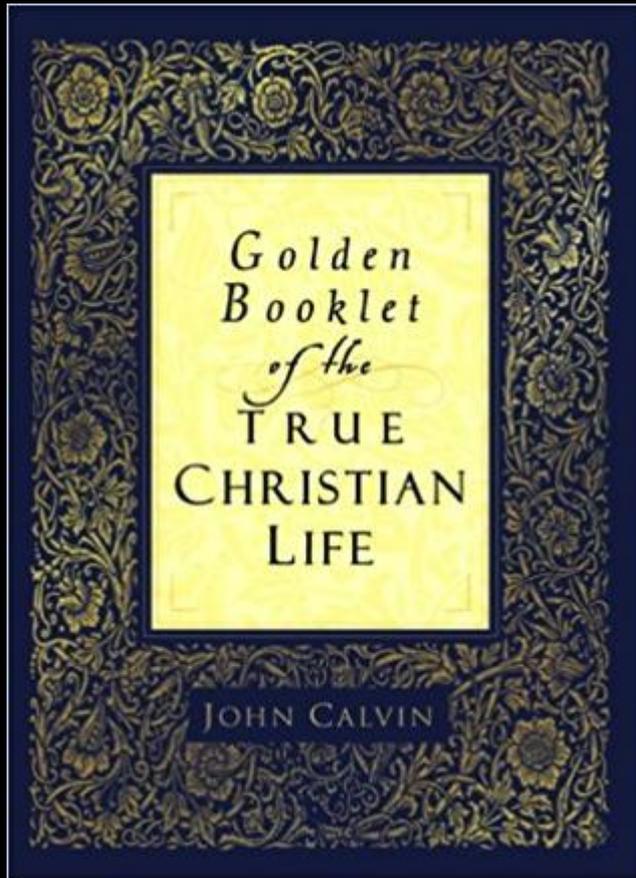
Webster Groves Presbyterian Church

Sept. 12, 19, 26

10:45 am



Reformed Theological Resources for Resisting
Racism



**“We are not saved by works,
yet not without works.”**

–John Calvin

A “Calvinist” Way of Life

- The practice of daily living as *response* to the grace of God through a life of *faith* and *obedience*
- Calvin emphasized the Ten Commandments as a guide to Christian behavior as interpreted through the Gospels and the Sermon on the Mount
- The Christian life has four central features:
 - Self-denial
 - Bearing the cross
 - Meditation on the future (i.e., heavenly life)
 - The use and enjoyment of this present life.

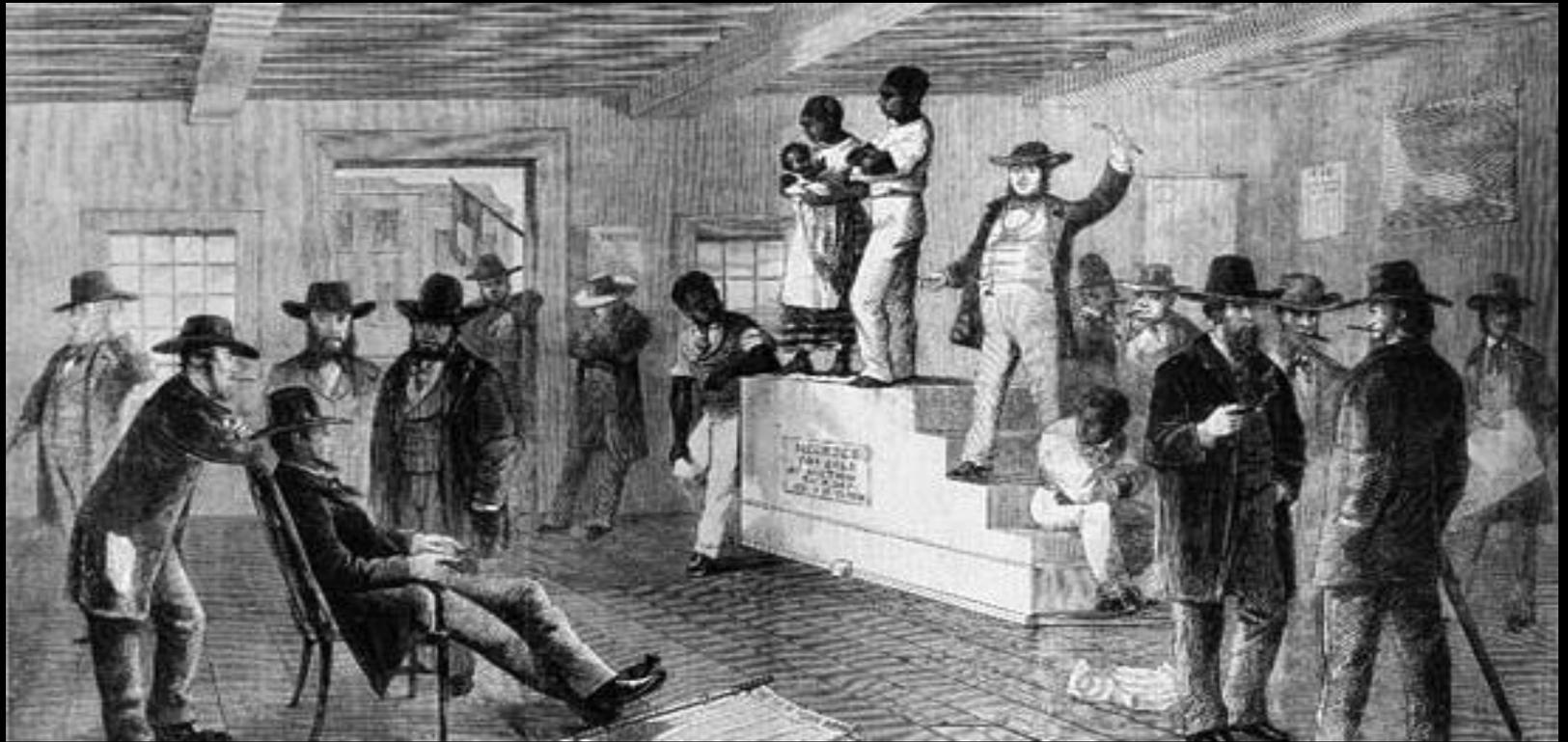
What can Calvin teach us about racism today?

- 16th Century Geneva was culturally diverse
- Migration of refugees caused by the Wars of Religion
- French, Spanish, Italian, Polish
- Very few Jews and no Muslims



Reformed Protestantism's sad legacy on matters of race...

- Dutch Reformed played a central role and profited from the Atlantic slave trade
- Northern Presbyterians had historically opposed slavery (1787)
- Presbyterians split between North & South over slavery (1861)
- Reformed theology was used to both justify and resist South African Apartheid

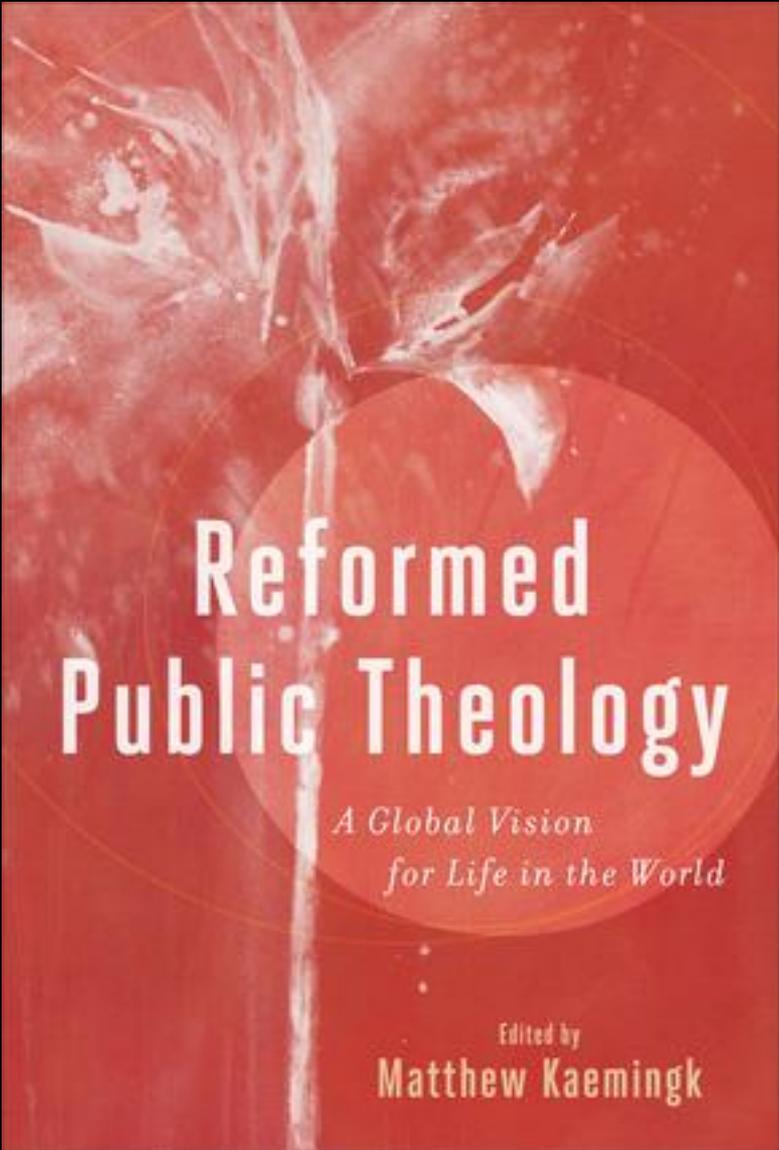


U.S. Presbyterianism and Racism

- In 1787 the Synods of New York and Philadelphia voted to abolish slavery
- In 1818 **Northern Presbyterians** said the following about slavery:
 - was a sin,
 - inconsistent with the laws of God,
 - irreconcilable with the Gospel, and
 - Christians had a duty to work for the abolition of slavery
- **Southern Presbyterians** responded by defending slavery:
 - Abraham was a slave owner,
 - the Law of Moses did not abolish slavery but regulated it,
 - Christ interacted with slaveholders without condemning them,
 - Paul exhorted slaves to obey their masters, and
 - runaway slaves are commanded to return and submit to their masters

Calvinist Resources for Resisting Racism

- John Calvin paid more attention to the doctrine of *imago Dei* than any theologian since Augustine
- “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27, NRSV)
- According to Calvin, considering the image of God in our fellow human beings is a sufficient reason for doing justice



**Reformed
Public Theology**

*A Global Vision
for Life in the World*

Edited by
Matthew Kaemingk

Institutes of the Christian Religion

“The Lord commands all men without exception ‘to do good’ [Hebrews 13:16]. Yet the great part of them are most unworthy if they be judged by their own merit. But here Scripture helps in the best way when it teaches that we are not to consider that men merit of themselves *but to look upon the image of God in all men*, to which we owe all honor and love. ...Assuredly there is but one way in which to achieve what is not merely difficult but utterly against human nature: to love those who hate us, to repay their evil deeds with benefits, to return blessings for reproaches [Matthew 5:44]. It is that we remember not to consider men’s evil intention but to look upon the image of God in them, which cancels and effaces their transgressions, and with its beauty and dignity allures us to love and embrace them.”

Law and Gospel in Calvin's Theology



A Reformed hermeneutic

- Scripture is our primary source
- God commands love of God and love of Neighbor
- The Law (commandments)
- The Gospel (grace)
- We can obey the Law *because* of the Gospel



The Immigration Crisis and US Policy



“Not a Bible issue”?



- In 2017, Franklin Graham defended President Trump’s executive order imposing a travel ban on seven majority Muslim nations
- Graham told *The Huffington Post*: “It’s not a biblical command for the country to let everyone in who wants to come, that’s not a Bible issue.” (January 25, 2017)

W.W.J.D.?



- These glib remarks represent a cold political compromise of core scriptural beliefs for the sake of worldly gain.
- Graham and others ignore:
 - the admonition of Matthew 25 to care for the least of these,
 - the Torah teaching concerning the aliens living among us (Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19).

Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

Parable of the Good Samaritan

- Jesus uses parables as subversive speech
- The priest and Levite are presented as hypocrites
- The Samaritan - a member of a hated ethnic and religious minority - is presented as the model of just moral action



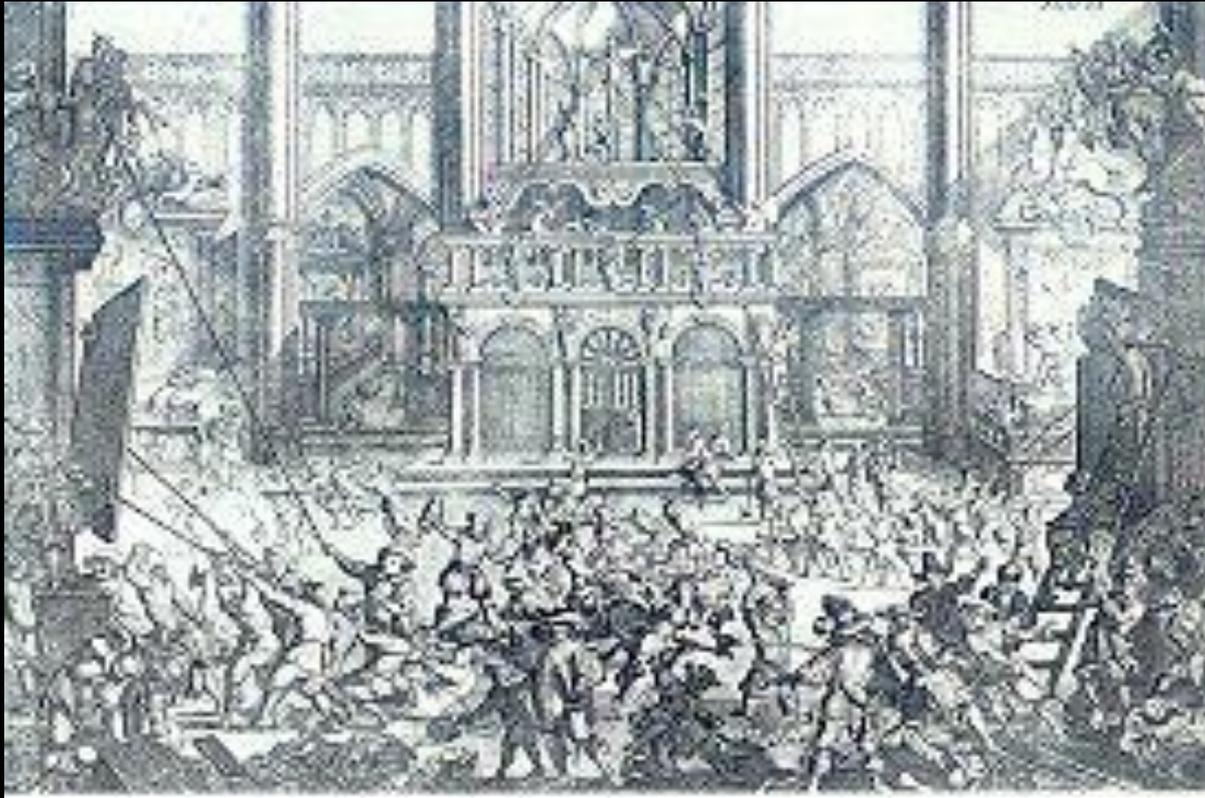
Calvin the Exile, Refugee, and Resident Alien

- For Calvin, this life is a journey and the “earth is but our place of exile” (*Institutes*, 3.9.4). We are *all* exiles...
- John Calvin leaves Paris in 1533, under a cloud of controversy after a famous and controversial sermon was preached by Nicolas Cop—a sermon Calvin helped write.
- Passing through Geneva he is drafted by William Farel to lead the Reformation in the city
- He is exiled from Geneva in 1538 over a difference of opinion concerning church discipline
- Returns to Geneva in 1541, lives most of his life as a resident alien
- Granted citizenship in 1559—five years before his death.

That “Frenchman” ...

- Strong dislike for Calvin personally, as evidenced by repeated references to him as “that Frenchman” (*ille Gallus*) in the city council minutes
- Historical demographers estimate that the population of Geneva grew between 1550 and 1560—the most active decade of Calvin’s ministry in Geneva
- As high as 21,400 from 13,100, an increase of more than 60%
- This influx of immigrants led to the creation of an Anti-Immigrant Party

Political tensions in 16th Century Geneva



Anti-immigrant sentiment in Geneva

- One can understand the resentment of many native Genevans
- In claiming their independence, they had rid themselves of the Catholic Savoyard nobility
- Now they found themselves surrounded by exile nobility—mostly French and Italian with much of the city's wealth in the hands of immigrants
- When the Academy of Geneva was founded, and during its first years, only one of its professors was a Genevan by birth
- Lists of physicians, lawyers, printers, and textile manufacturers, as well as of those claiming titles of nobility, were overwhelmingly French and Italian

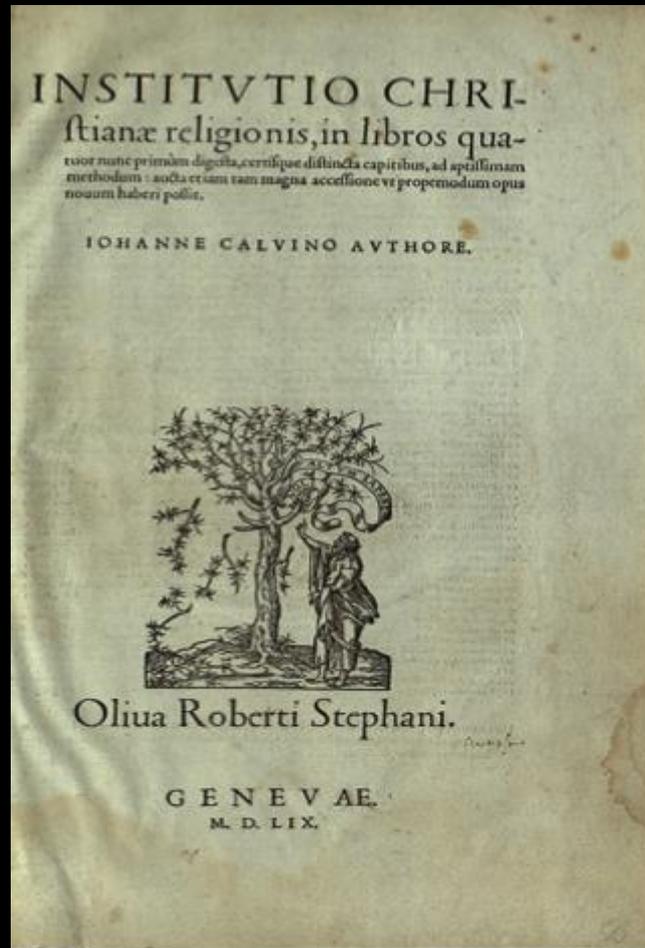
Ami Perrin and the “Libertines”

- In 1555 Calvin helped defeat an Anti-immigrant party led by Ami Perrin, who called himself a patriot
- Perrin wanted to drive Calvin and his “foreign” supporters out of Geneva
- In 1555 Genevan citizens crowded the streets chanting “kill the French” at the instigation of local business Ami Perrin
- Calvin stood in the midst of the angry crowd that was chanting, “Kill the French,” and proclaimed: “If you must shed blood, let mine be first.”
- Perrin sought to oust Calvin and his supporters by force of arms, but was defeated and exiled from the city

The aftermath of the Anti-immigration “protest”

- The defeat of Perrin in 1555 was a great setback for the anti-immigration party
- Until then, the city did not encourage immigrants to become citizens, but now the policy began to change
- By 1560 laws were allowing many immigrants to become citizens; Calvin himself had officially become a Genevan citizen in 1559
- It was not until 1559 that the first son of an immigrant was allowed to sit in the Council of Two Hundred
- And it was 35 years later, in 1594 —long after Calvin’s death— that the first son of an immigrant sat in the Small Council

Calvin's Theology of Exile



Calvin's Doctrine of Providence

“For until people recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that He is the author of their every good...they will never yield Him willing service.”

–*Institutes*, 1.2.1

A Theology of Exile

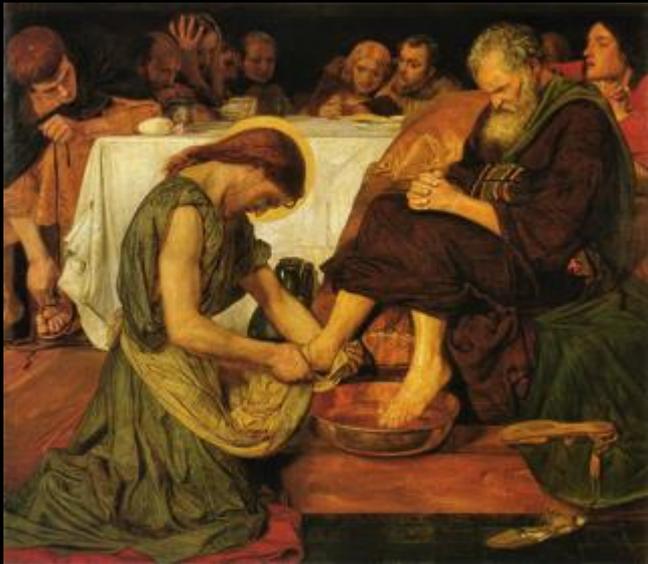
- The most adequate image for the Christian is that of a pilgrim or sojourner in this world, whose proper home is the Kingdom of God
- “Whatever kind of tribulation presses upon us, we must ever look to this end: to accustom ourselves to contempt for the present life and to be aroused thereby to meditate upon the future life.” (*Institutes*, 3.9.10)
- A theology of exile loves this life as a gift from God: “Away, then, with that inhuman philosophy which, while conceding only a necessary use of creatures, not only malignantly deprives us of the lawful fruit of God’s beneficence but cannot be practiced unless it robs a man of all his senses and degrades him.” (*Institutes*, 3.10.3)
- Yet this life is temporary: “For, if heaven is our homeland, what else is the earth but our place of exile?” (*Institutes*, 3.9.4)

The Diaconal Ministry

- The care of the poor (*diakonia*) is further subdivided into two kinds of deacons, those who administer and distribute the alms and those who minister physically to the sick and the poor (*Institutes* 4.3.9).
- The administration of the General Hospital was divided between the *procureur*, who served as financial administrator and oversaw the procurement of funds, and the *hospitalliers*, who directed the actual care of the poor.
- What develops in Geneva's diaconal ministry is a distinction between those responsible for the judicious fiscal management of poor relief, and those directing and conducting ministries of compassion.
- This two-fold, permanent ministry of the church allows for the efficient, long-term management of poor relief without detracting from or delaying the church's compassionate response to human suffering.

The French Fund (*Bourse française*)

- The city's General Hospital, used to serving the needs of an estimated 500 impoverished Genevans per year.
- 1544-45 persecution of evangelicals in southeastern France led to thousands of refugees streaming into the city.
- French refugees established the *Bourse des pauvres étrangers français*, commonly called the French Fund, circa 1545 during this period of intensified persecution in France.
- Records indicate that by 1549 the deacons were managing this fund as part of the church's comprehensive poor relief.



Religion in the Public Arena

- Calvin advocated separation of church and state
- But the state has a fundamental obligation of compassion toward those in need
- The church, and its pastors, have a duty to ensure the establishment of a just social order
- Calvin's exhortation to the Christian: "take as strong a stand against evil as we can. This command is given to everyone not only to princes, magistrates, and officers of justice, but to all private persons as well" (*Sermons on 2 Samuel*).