

The Reform in France

Before Martin Luther was heard as a reformer, in France at the University of Paris there was a professor named Lefevre who while researching ancient literature came across a Bible. He introduced the Scriptures to his students.

In 1512, before Luther and Zwingli began their reform work, Lefevre wrote, "It is God who gives us, by faith, that righteousness which by grace alone justifies to eternal life." With this, Lefevre put forth that the grace of God does not give license to an immoral life. Just the opposite, as members of the spiritual body of Christ, we should live a very holy life.

William Farel, one of Lefevre's students had been a devout Romanist but he began to teach the truth openly. The Bishop of Meaux and other educated teachers began to proclaim the gospel. People from all classes accepted the reform faith. The sister of King Francis I also accepted the truth and even the king himself showed tolerance toward it.

The bishop of Meaux removed priests who were immoral and ignorant of spiritual things and in their place he tried to put pious and educated people. Lefevre translated the New Testament and the bishop of Meaux endeavoured to give it to all the church districts.

For a time, the king gave permission to this work but in the end the papacy threatened the bishop of Meaux and the bishop denied the truth. In spite of their leader's fall, many people remained faithful to the truth. Many were martyred for their faith.

Will you, like the bishop of Meaux, deny Christ and salvation in Him to save your life? How can you be sure? If you rely on your own strength you will fall. But in the Bible is this promise:

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

In times of danger, rely on the power of Christ.

Louis de Berquin came from a noble family. When he read the Bible he found not the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church

but the doctrines of Luther, he was shocked. Berquin was an influential reformer. The papists threw him in jail as a heretic. But the king released him. King Francis was a fickle man. Sometimes he supported reform and sometimes he came against it. The struggle continued for years. Three times Berquin was jailed by the papal authorities and each time he was released by the king.

Berquin's greatest enemies were the theologians at the University of Paris. Berquin used their own writings to identify 12 doctrines contrary to the Bible. He appealed to the king to judge between right and wrong. The king commanded that the theologians prepare a defense. The theologians did not want to do this and they were looking for a way out.

Just at that time a statue of the Virgin Mary was mutilated. The papists shouted, "This is the fruit of Berquin's doctrines! Everything will be overthrown- religion, law and the throne."

Berquin was seized and the king withdrew from France. The monks were free to do whatever they wanted. Berquin was condemned. They took Berquin to the place of execution that very day so that the king could not interfere. But there was peace on Berquin's face. They strangled him and his body was burned. Those who preached the reform openly were driven from Paris.

During the persecution in Meaux, Lefevre escaped to Germany. Farel went to the east of France. Farel could not preach openly but he went from villiage to village sharing the faith in people's homes and in the fields. Sometimes he spent the night in the forest or in a cave.

At this time, in one of the schools of Paris John Calvin was studying. His cousin who had joined the reformation was also there in Paris. The two of them used to get together to talk. The Protestant Olivetan said, "There are but two religions in the world. The one class of religions are those which men have invented, in all of which man saves himself by ceremonies and good works; the other is that one religion which is revealed in the Bible, and which teaches man to look for salvation solely from the free grace of God." At first Calvin resisted the new doctrine but he could not shake his cousin's words from his mind. Later, while Calvin was thinking about the judgment, the

meditation of saints, church ceremonies and supposedly good works seemed powerless against sin. He saw that confessionals cannot reconcile the soul with God.

About the time he was thinking about these things, Calvin witnessed the burning of a heretic in a town square. But there was a peaceful look on the martyr's face. While the martyr was suffering a cruel death, his faith and courage influenced Calvin. Calvin was full of darkness and doubt about salvation. To discover the martyr's joy he began to read the Bible. In the Bible he found the peace he was searching for in Jesus Christ. Calvin left Paris. At first he began to share the gospel in people's houses in a town. Princess Margaret loved the gospel and protected reformers. Later, Calvin returned to Paris.

In general Paris had rejected the gospel but in God's providence Paris would hear the truth once again. The king, for political reasons was not completely on the side of the papacy etc. When the king was out of Paris, Princess Margaret who supported the gospel commanded that a Protestant minister preach in the churches. When the papal representatives rejected this, Princess Margaret opened the palace and people from all classes heard the sermons. The people flocked to the palace. Every day thousands of people gathered. Because of the gospel, the level of morality increased in the city.

The papists were very angry but the king gave permission for the spread of the gospel for two years. But although some people accepted the truth, most rejected it. At last the churches were closed to the Protestants and the stake was set up. When the authorities came to capture and execute Calvin, he escaped from a window. He went to the city of Portier and secretly in people's homes and in gardens he preached the gospel. As Calvin's listeners increased in number, the problem of security also increased. The people, going by different routes, secretly went to a cave outside the city. Calvin read and explained the Bible there. In that cave, for the first time in France the Lord's supper was celebrated. From there several evangelists were sent out.

Calvin returned to Paris but to preach the gospel openly meant certain death. After Calvin went to Germany there was a large attack on Protestants. The reformers wanted to awaken the whole

country against the superstitious beliefs of the Roman Church. To do this, in one night all over France placards against the mass were posted. Instead of advancing reform, it brought destruction. The papists, accused the Protestants as heretics saying that they threatened the country's stability and peace. Thus the papists found the excuse they wanted to destroy the Protestants.

Was it a reformer or a clever papist, it was never known, someone took one of the placards and placed it on the door of the king's bedroom. The king was furious and became wholly on the side of the papacy. He said, "Let all the Lutherens be executed."

Satan can use the extremely zealous but unbalanced people. To publish the truth or appose error it is not necessary to resort to the tactic of hanging ads everywhere which awaken the prejudices of the people. It is necessary to proclaim the truth. It is necessary to point out error. But it is important how it is done.

A traitor was found to arrest all the Lutherens in Paris. The papal representative walked the traitor through Paris under the threat of death. At every Protestant home he stopped and the residents were dragged from their homes and incarcerated. In every part of Paris the Protestants were executed with cruel tortures. The fires underneath the victims were kept low to prolong the agony. The executions last for days. But the flames could not break the Protestants' peace. Everyone saw it and was influenced. The executions were actually a great advertisement for the truth. The reform went forward.

In order to keep the fury against the Protestants at a peak the priests resorted to lies. The Protestants were accused of plotting a masscre of Catholics and of making a coup. But there was no truth to this.

With the destruction of the Protestants it was seen how many were the Protestants and how prevalent they were among all classes. Many artisans professionals and professors were eliminated. Positions fell vacant. When hundreds of people fled Paris, in some cases this was the first evidence a person's being Protestant. It was not known before.

The king of France devoted France against the Reformation with a huge execution ceremony. The priests said, "This can't be the gospel of Christ because its proclamation does not bring peace but war." But it was they themselves that brought war and violence.

Some people put forth the idea that in a country with a high culture that these type of events are not possible. But King Francis I who had highly supported education was the one who made these massacres. But now to resist the Protestants he prohibited all printing in France. An intellectual culture does not protect a country from persecution.

Before Farel and Calvin went to Geneva Switzerland it was already Protestant but these two men furthered the work of reform. Although Calvin's doctrine was not without error, for thirty years he defended important truths for that age. The pope issued anathemas against Geneva and sent powerful nations against it to destroy it. How could Geneva stand against the pope.

At this time, the order of the Jesuits was established. Its purpose was to destroy Protestantism.

It was a fundamental principle of the order that the end justifies the means. By this code, lying, theft, perjury, assassination, were not only pardonable but commendable, when they served the interests of the church. Under various disguises the Jesuits worked their way into offices of state, climbing up to be the counselors of kings, and shaping the policy of nations. They became servants to act as spies upon their masters. They established colleges for the sons of princes and nobles, and schools for the common people; and the children of Protestant parents were drawn into an observance of popish rites. All the outward pomp and display of the Romish worship was brought to bear to confuse the mind and dazzle and captivate the imagination, and thus the liberty for which the fathers had toiled and bled was betrayed by the sons. The Jesuits rapidly spread themselves over Europe, and wherever they went, there followed a revival of popery. {*Great Controversy* p. 235.1}

At this time also the Inquisition was revived and many people were executed by torture.

The reform offered the Bible to the world. In the Bible, God's law and the principles of heaven are clearly seen. France, by rejecting this magnificent gift sowed the seeds of anarchy and destruction. In the end there was the Revolution and the Reign of Terror.

In these events we see the truth spoken of in the Bible:

John 3:19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

How about you. Light is shining on you. Do you love light more than darkness? If you choose light are you ready to be different from the majority? This is impossible in your own strength but you can do it by relying on God. May the Lord strengthen you.