

“Two Birthdays”

There are two important birthdays coming up in July. The first is that of our country, its 233rd.

The second is that of John Calvin. Calvin was born in Noyon, France July 10, 1509. As you can see, we are approaching the 500th anniversary of his birth. It has led many in Christian circles to celebrate the life of one of the most influential theologians and writers in the last 500 years.

There is a reason I have mentioned Calvin’s birthday in conjunction with July 4. It is widely acknowledged that in addition to Calvin’s theological impact upon the Church, he greatly influenced the founding Fathers of our country, many of whom were shaped through the Puritans by Calvin’s biblically rich public policy..

John Calvin believed that the entire world and every aspect of life was a stage upon which the glory of God was unveiled. Not only were events and experiences within the walls of a church building important, but the Word of the God who was Lord over all was to have bearing upon all things.

Much of Calvin’s adult years were spent in Geneva Switzerland where he greatly shaped the public life and policy. In fact, it was his effect upon the public arena in Geneva, along with his accompanying public policy teaching, which set forth a backdrop for our founding Fathers.

In a recent *World Magazine* article entitled “Sticking By the Bible,” Marvin Olasky reminds us that the Geneva Reformer did not care much for monarchy or centralized government. Given man’s sinfulness, he disbelieved that one or a few should have that much power. They would eventually abuse it.

Olasky praised Calvin for his ongoing involvement with the poor (he practiced what he preached) and the fact that “He thought the best way to tackle poverty was not to distribute alms but to open a business and employ those who would otherwise beg.” In other words, Calvin had carefully thought through the biblical implications of both involvement in the public arena and also how to go about it.

So, as we approach two birthdays (233and 500) it is a good time to be reminded that our Lord called us to be salt and light (Mt. 5:13) within culture. What is more, our founders understood the importance of Christians’ preserving power in the same. John Adams astutely observed, “Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

There will be many Christians and non-Christians alike who will seek to convince us that it is best for us to stay in our small “religious circles” and leave the public square to others. Yet, the convergence of these two important birthdays remind us that we have a rich heritage (going all the way back to the Bible) shaping culture to God’s glory and our neighbors’ benefit. Thank God for the Geneva Reformer and the signers of our Declaration of Independence. May we ever take up their mantle!

Pastor Tom