

**UPDATE**

Five hundred years of Protestant Reformation: A Calvinist worldview interfacing with bioethics

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Abstract

After five hundred years of the Protestant Reformation, it is possible to perceive ideas originating from this movement supporting today's worldviews. Specifically, it is possible to perceive the applicability of a Bible derived worldview, centered on a Christian belief system, especially that experienced by the reformer John Calvin. The goal of this work is to point out the influence of the reformer's thought, based on historical, theological elements, on the expansion of the capacity to interpret the current context of bioethics. Because it is characterised as a little-known intellectual construction, the Calvinist worldview, presented here, needs to be better understood and studied. Even with the obvious cultural, historical, economic, political and social differences between the context of the 16th century and the present-time, Calvin's worldview could contribute to the advancement of studies and debates for the 21st century in the field of bioethics.

Keywords: Bioethics. History. Morals.

Resumo**Quinhentos anos da Reforma Protestante: a cosmovisão cristã calvinista e a bioética**

Passados quinhentos anos da chamada Reforma Protestante, é possível perceber ideias oriundas desse movimento fundamentando visões de mundo na atualidade. Especificamente, nota-se a aplicabilidade de cosmovisão derivada da Bíblia, centrada em sistema cristão de crença, em especial a vivenciada pelo reformador João Calvino. O objetivo deste trabalho é apontar o reflexo de seu pensamento, a partir de elementos históricos e teológicos, na ampliação da capacidade de interpretar o atual contexto da bioética. Por se caracterizar como construção intelectual ainda pouco conhecida, a cosmovisão cristã calviniana, aqui estudada, necessita ser mais bem compreendida e trabalhada. Mesmo com as evidentes diferenças culturais, históricas, econômicas, políticas e sociais entre o contexto do século XVI e o atual, essa cosmovisão pode contribuir para o avanço de estudos e debates da atualidade no campo da bioética.

Palavras-chave: Bioética. História. Princípios morais.

Resumen**Quinientos años de la Reforma Protestante: la cosmovisión cristiana calvinista y la bioética**

Después de quinientos años de la llamada Reforma Protestante, es posible percibir ideas oriundas de ese movimiento fundamentando visiones de mundo en la actualidad. Específicamente, se puede percibir la aplicabilidad de una cosmovisión derivada de la Biblia, centrada en un sistema cristiano de creencias, en especial la vivenciada por el reformador João Calvino. El objetivo de este trabajo es señalar el reflejo de su pensamiento, a partir de elementos históricos, teológicos, en la ampliación de la capacidad de interpretar el actual contexto de la bioética. Por caracterizarse como una construcción intelectual todavía poco conocida, la cosmovisión cristiana calviniana, aquí estudiada, necesita ser mejor comprendida y trabajada. Incluso con las evidentes diferencias culturales, históricas, económicas, políticas y sociales entre el contexto del siglo XVI y el actual, dicha cosmovisión puede contribuir con el avance de los estudios y debates de la actualidad en el campo de la bioética.

Palabras clave: Bioética. Historia. Principios morales.

Declaram não haver conflito de interesse.

The German word *Weltanschauung* means “worldview”, a theme delivered by Sigmund Freud¹ in a lecture published in 1933 and defined as philosophy of life, *an intellectual construction which gives a unified solution of all the problems of our existence in virtue of a comprehensive hypothesis, a construction, therefore, in which no question is left open and in which everything in which we are interested finds a place*². Freud understands that worldviews are inevitable characteristics of the human condition and points to the existence of two fundamental world views, scientific and spiritual.

Freud stands in defense of the materialistic, scientific worldview and *seeks to convince others that a spiritual worldview, as found in religion, is childish*³. Worldview has recently been defined as *a general overview of knowledge, forming a totality of vision, a coordination of opinions intertwined with each others*⁴.

The biblical worldview shares a *commitment to the “good news of the gospel,” a message of reconciliation and restoration based on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ*⁵. Protestants believe in the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit - and *believe that the Bible is “the Word of God,” an infallible source and authority of truth*⁵.

We explain here the spiritual worldview with the aim of contributing to broaden the capacity to interpret themes and facts related to human existence and its conflicts in contemporary society. There is not just one spiritual worldview and there is not just one Christian worldview. Here, we will approach one of them, *in which God is the point of reference*⁶, which for reasons of didactic clarity, can be defined as “biblical worldview according to John Calvin,” understood as the *product of generalised social participation, which hard core (...) is constituting itself in the constant, daily acts of those who do not even imagine themselves as creators of worldview*⁷.

As well as authors who preceded us in approaching this theme, we present a worldview and a perspective of the life of Calvinists, *who can actually bring something relevant to the table in bioethics discourse if they are given a seat*⁸. *In so doing, we seek to open the discourse of bioethics to the possibility that many Christian traditions may offer compelling methodological and substantive resources for addressing the problems of modern bioethics*⁸.

In view of the above, we aim *to see the ethical problems involving human life through the lens of a “bioetoscópio” an instrument-symbol that carries knowledge of cultural values and human wisdom*⁹,

disseminated by the Brazilian bioethicist Leo Pessini. The daily use of the “*bioetoscópio*” gains importance in the current Brazilian context, marked by the loss of autonomy and independence of people in a society that commonly opts for the simulation of change and progress in the individual and social action in issues related to life. This option, as noted by Garrafa, prevents the implementation of changes and advances in respect *not only to universal themes such as citizenship and human rights but also with respect to the fulfilment of the national Constitutions of each nation, especially in the chapters referring directly to the health and life of the people*¹⁰.

Seeking to contribute to the transformation of this reality and running the risk of appearing to be on the “wrong side of history” by referring to Christian thinking in postmodern times marked by relativism and individualism, this work aims to recompose the pieces into a mosaic of ideas, developed from a bioethical perspective. For this, it reviews the thinking and acting of John Calvin, an agent/actor/subject/author¹¹ who experienced transitional times in the context of the emergence of the so-called modern era.

In recognition of the inexhaustible source of relevant perspectives for bioethics, the participants of the *Rijeka Declaration on the Future of Bioethics*¹², researchers with diverse backgrounds and diverse nationalities, highlighted in 2011 their desire for bioethics to become *a truly open field of meeting and dialogue of various sciences and professions, visions and worldviews, that have been gathered to articulate, to discuss, and to solve ethical issues related to life*¹².

In the case of this work, the bioethics discussion is anchored in the epistemological proposal denominated “intervention bioethics”, conceived by the *Cátedra Unesco de Bioética da Universidade de Brasília* (Unesco Chair of Bioethics of the University of Brasília). This proposal is committed, according to Garrafa, to embrace pluralistic approaches based on the complexity of the facts¹³ and *proposes a concrete alliance with the historically weakest side of society*¹⁴, *in the sense of adequately coping with persistent problems routinely detected in developing nations*¹⁵. A bioethics, according to Porto, understood as a tool to fight the inequalities that still mark our South American continent¹⁶.

Starting from this platform, it is proposed to visit the referential point of view as a contributory element to expand the possibilities of bioethics reflection, despite agreeing with Moraes that *dealing with Calvin’s thought is a challenge, for if*

we are faced with a formidable work that deserves to be investigated, there is also a deprecating tradition that attempts to reduce its importance in Western culture¹⁷. Complex and controversial, Calvin's influence is based on the mystery of God's sovereignty and the relationship between justice and divine grace. At the conclusion of his thesis, Moraes emphasises that influence of the reformer himself and of the Calvinists goes beyond the reductionist label that binds them to the doctrine of predestination¹⁷.

Even with this caveat, we continue with the intention of this reflection - to seek to understand the Calvinist ideology - relying on Daniel-Rops, who understands the relevance of John Calvin when he expresses that *few men left such a deep trail on the earth. Who can deny his greatness? He sowed great ideas, accomplished great things and determined great events. The story would not have been as it was if he had not lived, thought and acted with his relentless will*¹⁸. He also affirms that the reformer *belongs unquestionably to the very small group of masters who, over the centuries, have shaped the destiny of the world with their own hands*¹⁸.

Along the same lines, "L'Osservatore Romano" published an article in 2009 that presented Calvin as *one of the few Frenchmen who have left such a lasting, visible and recognised mark on the face of the Earth*¹⁹. In that article, the author emphasises that *I see only two: Rousseau, no doubt, who has reshaped the nineteenth century, and also the XX and, even more influential, John Calvin*¹⁹.

The Reformation in the period before John Calvin

At first, it is necessary to emphasise that the prolific literary production of the reformer studied here is deeply marked by theological interpretation - applied theology, committed to the society of his time. In order to study it, it is necessary to keep in mind that John Calvin's anthropological understanding is the result of his theology. According to Costa, *Calvin is a theologian who, with deep knowledge of the Bible, strives to apply the teachings of the "Word" to the various spheres of human life, beginning with a genuine understanding of "who is the man" is and how God wants us to live in this world*²⁰. It is not possible, then, to understand the reformer without understanding his time and the historical and social circumstances.

In this sense, according to Ekelund Junior, Hébert and Tollison²¹, there are three causal hypotheses of the Protestant Reformation. *The first, advanced by Protestant theologians, maintains that the Catholic Church gradually lost influence because it became ethically and morally corrupt. The second, advanced by historians, asserts that circumstances forced the Catholic Church to take sides in a series of conflicts between emergent northern European states and emergent cities (...)* *The third, advanced by economists (...)* *holds that state-supported religious monopolies behave inefficiently in many ways, thereby opening up the possibility of entry by more efficient competitors*²².

In any case, the sequence of events leading up to the Reform in Geneva must be highlighted. Biéler²³, professor of social ethics at the universities of Lausanne and Geneva, where he worked until 1979, published a detailed study in which he approached the economic and social thought of the Reformer of Geneva. Biéler emphasised the importance of the Hundred Years' War between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as *an event that changed Europe's economic and social balance*²⁴. During this period, *the feudal world collapsed*²⁴ and the European crisis worsened in the political, social and religious areas.

The war led to a shortage of resources in Europe, plagued by the Black Death. Emerged, in this context, precursors of the Protestant Reformation such as John Wycliffe, a professor at the University of Oxford who led a movement in England proposing reforms and with vehement criticisms of the Church. Then came Jan Hus, incumbent of the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, who dared to remain faithful to his anti-papal convictions and criticism to the Church and was burned at the stake by a decision of the Council of Constance in 1415.

The work of Biéler details other events that generated tensions at the time, *describing the religious and social revolutionary movement that, after multiple generations, was "strewn" between oppressed peasants and the urban proletariat. This movement which had been supposed to suffocate in the blood after the condemnation of Jan Hus, awakens with new ardor*²⁵. In this context, it is important to point out that *more than four hundred editions of the Bible*²⁶ *were published from 1457 to 1515.*

Then the Augustinian monk Martin Luther enters the scene. *He sought primarily to reform the customs of the Church, let alone to separate from it, urging the return of the clergy to a living faith and piety and based essentially on the message of the*

*grace of Jesus Christ in the Word of God to subsist in the gospel*²⁷. Luther nailed his 95 theses to the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, seeking to deepen the theological debate on topics such as penance, indulgences and justification by faith alone - an act that remained for history as the initial mark of the Protestant Reformation.

In Switzerland, the reformer Huldrych Zwingli stands out. Zwingli, according to Mainka, *was not only the most important theological leader in Zurich, but also the person responsible for the dissemination of the Reformation in the Swiss Confederacy. In addition, he created the theological and intellectual basis on which, a little later, John Calvin was able to continue and develop his conception of theology, economics and even "missionarisation"*²⁸. The religious reforms proposed by Zwingli in Zurich are consolidated in social reforms.

Another prominent Protestant reformer, also in Switzerland, is the eloquent Guillaume Farel, always cited as responsible for persuading Calvin to remain in Geneva in 1536 and to return in 1541, after having being expelled in 1538. Farel influenced the vote at the Council of Two Hundred in Geneva on November 14, 1535, creating the General Hospital, in order to assist the poor and sick, in the abandoned building of the Convent of the Poor Clares, where nuns had lived and worked.

It should not be forgotten that Geneva was known as the "city of councils". Lyra points out that *the members of these councils were elected by the people and had the purpose of exercising both executive and legislative power as well as the judiciary power. The councils were in number of four: the council of four syndics, which exerted the executive function; the little council of 25 that incorporated the four syndics and 21 other members; the Council of the 200, composed of 200 elected citizens; and the general council*²⁹.

Finally, John Calvin, born in 1509, in Noyon, France. Calvin studied arts and theology at the Collège de Montaigu in Paris. He graduated in law from the University of Orléans and graduated in Greek from the University of Bourges, where he studied with the Lutheran scholar Melchior Wolmar. Calvin also studied philosophy, latin, humanities and classical literature. Calvin is reference of this work, which describes his praxis in Geneva. The disciplined and erudite reformer faced fierce opposition: *People called their dogs by Calvin's name, openly reviled him in the streets, sometimes threatened his life, disturbed him in his studies, and vowed to do harm to his family*³⁰.

It is reported that *Calvin's authority in Geneva was somewhat limited, and he always had to negotiate with the city council, not always winning political disputes*³¹. *Money and pleasure meant nothing to him. He repeatedly refused more money offered him by the Council. He lived sparingly and without luxury. He was willing even to sell his beloved books when it became necessary*³⁰.

The situation experienced by the reformer studied here points to the consolidation of Switzerland, at that time, *in fact, as a European center for modernisation in theological and political thought*³². This theme is discussed next as a way of facilitating an understanding of the context in which the worldview in study germinated.

The Reformation in Geneva

As recorded, it was not Calvin's intention to settle in Geneva, and because of his dedication to studies and his literary production he also had no intention of assuming leadership of the Protestant Reformation there. He traveled from Paris to Strasbourg and was forced to spend the night in the city when Guillaume Farel met Calvin and urged him to stay and *help him with the Reformation*³³.

In November 1536, the French scholar became effective as a Reform leader in Geneva, in the context of transformations in Europe that absorbed the impact of Luther's message in the two decades prior to Calvin's arrival in Geneva. Centred on the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the Lutheran teaching, according to Ebeling, had been consolidating itself *as a liberating statement of meritorious pastoral practices. It re-defined theological concepts and pointed to a new Christian way of life which had salvation as its principle, not its goal. It has thus shaped the basis of a way of life: the justified way of living*³⁴.

Luther thus emphasised the theme of "justification by faith alone" that is, the possibility of the man being declared righteous before God even in the face of sin. Through his biblical interpretation, Luther understood that the cross, with the shedding of blood and death, is the guarantee of the liberation of the one who through faith in Christ gets rid of the bondage of sin. Calvin, in another way, reinforced the doctrine that deals with the union with Christ, the relationship between Jesus and Christians. Calvin himself explains how *this conjunction of the head and the limbs, this abode of Christ in our hearts, finally, this mystical union of Christ with us*

is established as of the highest importance, so that, made ours, Christ make us participants of the gifts of which he was endowed³⁵.

The work of the reforming scholar involved preaching the gospel, and he also cared for the oppressed and the poor, who were followers of biblical principles, reformed or not. He had the clear intention of building a city... guided by the principles of the Christian faith of Protestant orientation³⁶. At the same time, Matos addresses the Calvinist position on the relationship between clergy and government, stating that the reformer understood that there *should be strong cooperation between the two spheres, but not any subservience of the Church to the state. The magistrates' duty was to protect the Church and enable it to carry out its work, but the Church should have full autonomy to carry out its ministry*³⁷.

The firm positions of the reformer, as Moraes points out, make clear his demands on the people of Geneva for moral rigor (...), a conduct based on biblical values (...) [in] an attempt to offer a viable political proposal for those troubled days. *Ultimately, Calvin knows that a set of evil men [separated from God by original sin] needs clear normative guidance and an incisive and coercive State that tries to minimize evil as much as possible*³⁶.

It should be noted that John Calvin did not hold in Geneva positions in the public power or ecclesiastical leadership that would have given him the right to exercise authority similar to that of a pontiff or a monarch. Between 1536 and 1559, the French reformer did not even have citizenship rights in Geneva, which only came to happen in his last five years. Therefore it is not admissible to claim that there was a theocracy at the time when Calvin was in Geneva.

Taking a closer look at the Calvinist worldview in connection with bioethical reflection, it is essential to bear in mind the analysis of Azevedo³⁸. The author points out that nominalism understanding sacramentality *as no longer linked to the ecclesiastical superstructure, but to individuals before God (...). This idea, endorsed by Calvin, brings to the Christian the responsibility to assume in himself/herself the Christian experience and to manifest his/her vocation through a life in relationship (not inwardly). From this, the paradigm is not the fear of death and hell, but the notion of vocation to serve. The identity of the restored human being is manifested in this service. For this reason, Calvinist anthropology is strongly influenced by the nominalist conception because it sees in the*

*human being the potential to express, through life, salvation. Even though this expression is not the salvation element but the expression of it*³⁸.

Vocation to the service is, therefore, fundamental element of the worldview in analysis. Therefore, the bioethics discussion from the Calvinist perspective includes transcendence and materiality. Here the bioethics exposed in this study meets with the Calvinistic biblical worldview in the same platform, which sustains a rigorous reflection on life and plans the defense of life. Composing this platform is the bioethical element that encompasses the transformations of social relations, which adopts, according to Porto³⁹, the struggle against inequalities and which, according to Garrafa¹³, sustains a concrete alliance with the side that is historically more fragile.

On the other hand, the platform also includes the worldview instituted by a thinker of law, theology and philosophy who interprets life and human history from the Christian faith based on the Bible. It is an explicit worldview that reflects rigorously on life from what the Bible says. "Religion" is not, therefore, a constituent element of the platform.

The Calvinistic worldview and bioethical reflection

It is essential to clarify the definition of bioethics accepted in this reflection considering the diversity of concepts attributed to this field. The ongoing bioethical reflection emanates from the work of H. Tristram Engelhardt Junior⁴⁰⁻⁴¹, an American bioethicist, physician and philosopher with a Christian background. He was an author and publisher of global repercussion in the field of bioethics. It is essential to check the development of Engelhardt's literary production in two of his publications.

In 2000, the author published the book "The Foundations of Christian Bioethics"⁴⁰ in which he confronted the bioethics of a pluralistic society with Christian bioethics *and argued for a bioethics founded on the theology and mysticism of the first millennium*⁴². In this work, Engelhardt *asserts that bioethics rooted in Christendom of the first millennium will understand itself in the context of a globally comprehensive way of life that seeks union with God. No decision, no matter however trivial, must lack connection with this goal*⁴².

The reasoning goes on to cite that *the moral theology and bioethics based on the Christendom*

from the first millennium will be linked to a world of life transcendentally oriented⁴³. Still in the same work, the bioethicist says that Christianity is not a set of anonymous philosophical principles, an impersonal way of life, or a truth that comes to us without a history. Christian bioethics is linked to Christ⁴³. He emphasises that Christian bioethics must be understood in terms of a unique narrative of salvation in which people play important roles and in which God plays the crucial role through the redemptive act of his Son incarnate as the messiah of Israel⁴⁴.

Six years later Engelhardt would edit a collection of essays about the successive failure to produce a universal set of norms for bioethics. The book is "Global Bioethics: The Collapse of Consensus"⁴¹, in which he contributed with two chapters. Engelhardt addresses in this publication the human moral condition. The book *brings us to confront the circumstance that the culture wars that fragment bioethical reflections into contending partisan camps are grounded in intractable moral diversity (...) people are not just in disagreement regarding particular moral matters, but often about the foundational character of morality itself*⁴⁴.

Engelhardt then advocates *that we do not and cannot in general secular terms come to substantive conclusions regarding matters moral and bioethical through sound rational argument*⁴⁵. The central question then arises: what the failure of moral consensus teach us?⁴⁶. He closes his introductory chapter with a call, or challenge: *At the very least, we can by default find procedures, strategies to live together as moral strangers in the face of irresolvable moral diversity*⁴⁷.

It is necessary to bring the theme of "moral strangers" to this reflection. These are *persons who do not share sufficient moral premises or rules of evidence and inference to resolve moral controversies by sound rational argument, or who do not have a common commitment to individuals or institutions in authority to resolve moral controversies*⁴⁸. According to Engelhardt, bioethics must be secular, a space for dialogue and respect, a space for tolerance and for peaceful and productive coexistence, even among people of different religions and ideologies. In a more recent publication, the author is emphatic in stating that *Postmodernity is this side of the recognition that morality and bioethics are intractably plural*⁴⁹.

From this statement it is possible to perceive in Carvalho's reflection an area of interaction between this bioethics and the Calvinistic worldview: *One lesson that the political evolution of Calvinism offers*

*is that an integral Christianity doesn't necessarily need to be fundamentalist or totalist. Christianity itself has the elements for the constitution of a pluralistic and free society, and there is no contradiction between Christian orthodoxy and the relative autonomy of the political sphere*⁵⁰.

Later, the same author points out that fundamentalist politics would in fact be anti-Christian and anti-Calvinist politics, and still challenges us to think of another perspective when expressing that, *on the other hand, it makes little sense to suppose that a modern pluralist state needs necessarily to be a completely "secular" state in the Enlightenment sense of the term; the interventions of religion in politics should not be considered "promiscuous" by principle*⁵⁰. Finally, Carvalho launches an inquiry closely linked to this reflection: *If Calvinism played an important role in the past for the development of a more advanced political practice, how can we be sure that new contributions can not happen?*⁵⁰.

From the reflection presented, we turn to the interconnections of this work from the understanding of bioethics, as already said, as *a field truly open to encounter and dialogue*¹². It is sought to contribute to the process of continuous improvement of the "*bioetoscópio*"⁹, with the accomplishment of coexistence among moral strangers that is committed to civility and cordiality, with the perfecting of Christian praxis of our times, specifically the Calvinistic praxis (yes, the "moral friends" as well). It follows, then, what is nuclear in this reflection, evidencing the contribution of Carvalho⁵¹.

In his research, Carvalho classifies John Calvin as the most complete and modernised realisation of Augustinianism at the time of the Reformation. The corruption of human nature, according to [Calvin], *was integral and profound, in such a way that all human acts, from the point of view of their theological significance, would be sinful (Calvin aligns himself, in this, with Luther, without a doubt). But this did not mean that human virtues and gifts had no value; they would be divine gifts, suitable for remarkable achievements, in regard to "things below." They would only be useless for the "things above." Calvin was thus not a "complete pessimist," but a pessimist when he ought to be, that is, in his Christian hamartology [the doctrine of sin]*⁵². Such a claim assumes seminal character in this reflection.

The relation of Calvinism to "things below" was the subject of six lectures given at the Princeton

Seminary (EUA), in 1898 by the Dutch author Abraham Kuyper, writer, journalist, theologian and prime minister of the Netherlands between 1901 and 1905. The lectures were perpetuated in an iconic book on the history of religions published by the author himself in 1931⁵³. In his second lecture, Kuyper⁵³ synthesised the subject in order to help the understanding that the Calvinistic worldview was structured by the restoration of the compassion of the conscience in order to restore moral firmness to the weakened public conscience.

Concerning “things below,” the Protestant Reformation changed the language, imagery, and values of Christianity⁵⁴. Corrêa considers that Calvin’s actions in Geneva brought about a broad and profound reformation with a configuration that was not confined to a mere theological-ecclesiastical rearrangement but a configuration that, thanks to an institutionalising effort, redefined the city’s own political and juridical structure, evidenced by regulatory elements⁵⁵. He also underlines the importance of the Calvinist Christian worldview in the action of political organisation which occupies an important space in the work of the reformer, seeing that, for Reformed Christians, political responsibility was one of the proper forms of reverence and worship of God⁵⁶. The researcher comments that however ambivalent the identification of such postulates with modern notions of law and politics may seem, there lie some of the embryos of the legal positivism and modern democracy⁵⁵.

In a 2015 publication, Cahill highlights the points of contact between the Christian worldview and bioethics by pointing out that *the substantive center of Christian ethics is Jesus’s ministry of the kingdom or reign of God, and its preferential inclusion of the poor, the outcast, and the sinner. What defines a gospel-based bioethics is a hopeful, practical commitment to improve the health of those who are most vulnerable to illness and early death because they [lack] basic needs*⁵⁷.

Final considerations

The study of this worldview reveals, according to Tawney, that *Calvinism was an active and radical force. It was a creed that sought not merely to purify the individual, but to rebuild the Church and the State, and to renew society by the permeating of all sectors of life, both public and private, with the influence of religion*⁵⁸. This statement sums up the uniqueness of the worldview developed by John

Calvin, a scholar with vast knowledge in humanities, law, Latin, dialectics and philosophy, who structured his social thought from his theological premises.

Concerning “things above,” Calvin acknowledged special importance to the spiritual reality of intimate, mystical union *between Jesus Christ and his people by virtue of which Christ is the source of Christian life and strength*⁶⁰. This is the transforming relationship which was the theme of the reformer in his major work, the “Institutes of the Christian religion,” in which he declares: *We are God’s; therefore, let his wisdom and will preside over all our actions*⁶⁰.

On the “things below,” according to Costa, the biblical worldview, in accordance with Calvinist presuppositions, *provides us with glasses which lenses have the sense of God’s sovereignty as an indispensable and necessary perspective to see, interpret and act in the reality, strengthening, modifying or transforming it as needed. All this, in a constant effort to heed God’s call to live the Gospel with dignity in the world*⁶¹.

In a Geneva with a population of about 10,000 inhabitants, marked by oppression and social injustice, the reformer’s action was built on an ethical basis built from the Bible, which prompted him to adopt an active, daring and controversial conduct in the pursuit of a society ruled by the principles of equality, righteousness and justice. His ideas were decisive in sixteenth-century Europe. Throughout history, this worldview boosted movements such as that of the creation of the Academy of Geneva in 1559, which would become the University of Geneva in 1873.

It is worth noting that some of the most important universities in the world were related to Calvinism at the time of their foundation. Harvard University, for example, was established in 1636 having the Englishman John Harvard as its first and principal benefactor through the centuries. He was a Puritan, a radical protestant who had emigrated from his native England to America and who was strongly influenced by the Calvinist worldview. Yale University, established in 1701, had Puritan reverend Abraham Pierson as its first rector. Princeton University was established in 1746, and its first president was the Presbyterian Pastor Jonathan Dickinson, a champion of Calvinism in America.

Calvin’s ideas were also decisive in the field of politics, with particular emphasis on the work of the aforementioned Dutch statesman Abraham Kuyper, who incorporated the Calvinist worldview in the development of his actions in the sphere of public policies.

Being characterised as an intellectual construction still little known, the theological worldview of John Calvin presented here needs to be better understood and studied. Even with the evident cultural, historical, economic, political

and social differences between the context of the 16th century and the present-time, Calvin's worldview could contribute to the advancement of studies and debates for the 21st century in the field of bioethics.

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