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Is Protestantism the Source of Modern
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Is Protestantism the Source of Modern Freedoms?

Valentine Zuber *

Following the upheaval of the French Revolution, there were violently divergent ideological-religious interpretations of French history in the intellectual sphere. It seems necessary to set out the main theological-political theories that never stopped wondering about the ideological origins of Human Rights and explore the deep conviction of many French historians who, at the end of the 19th century, still professed the eminent superiority of the Republican and liberal political structure that had been inherited from political Protestantism.

Following the upheaval of the French Revolution, there were two violently divergent ideological-religious interpretations of French history in the intellectual sphere. One of the issues in this political reappraisal is the interpretation that it is appropriate to apply to the introduction of the Reformation to France in the country's history. A romantic, and then liberal, historiography was keen to stress the role of the Reformation in the 16th century as a catalyst in the emergence of the modern era in the West and its effects in contemporary society. Conversely, a reactionary account of history made efforts to find in the introduction of the Reformation to France the prime explanation of that mortal "decadence" that it revealed in post-revolutionary French society (Joseph de Maistre¹). For the counter-revolutionary thinkers (from Louis de Bonald to Louis Veuillot), the Reformation was indeed the original source of all the vagaries of the Revolution that were still making an impact on the society of their time². The romantic, and then the liberal, thinkers of the early 19th century

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¹ Joseph de Maistre, "Réflexions sur le protestantisme dans ses rapports avec la souveraineté" (1798), in *Œuvres complètes*, Vitte et Perrussel: Lyon, 1884, vol. VIII, p. 64-93.

² *Réforme et révolutions. Aux origines de la démocratie moderne*, ed. Paul Viallaneix, Réforme-Presses du Languedoc: Montpellier, 1990 ; see also, Yann Fauchois, "Révolution française, religion et logique de l'État", *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, n° 66/1, 1988. p. 9-24.

(such as Germaine de Staël¹ and Benjamin Constant) attempted at first to extol the civilising role of Protestantism as they saw it at work in the neighbouring Protestant countries. It was François Guizot in particular, during his career as a historian prior to his role as a politician, who showed even more systematically that the Reformation in the 16th century allowed the birth of a political emancipation movement of which the 19th century was the direct heir, in his view². Edgar Quinet and Jules Michelet extended this analysis by customising it. Later, Protestantism was sometimes presented as a pioneering but incomplete stage in the arrival of the “religion of humanity” at the positive age (Saint-Simon³, Augustin Thierry and Auguste Comte).

It seems necessary to set out briefly the main theological-political theories which made an imprint on an entire historiography that never stopped wondering about the ideological origins and deep-seated causes of what was seen, in the period when it was being formulated, as the political failure of the French Revolution⁴. They are the solid basis of the argument that supported the deep conviction of those French historians who, at the end of the 19th century, still professed the eminent superiority of the Republican and liberal political structure that had been inherited from political Protestantism (Paul Janet⁵, Alphonse Aulard⁶, and Charles Borgeaud⁷).

This theory was spectacularly reasserted by Georg Jellinek at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, to the great dismay of French anti-clerical philosophers. There no longer seems to be any doubt, however, regarding the direct religious lineage of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, via the American Revolution, which was inspired by the writings of John Locke or the para-Protestant theories of a native of Geneva like Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

¹ Germaine de Staël, *Considérations sur la Révolution française*, Delaunay, Bossange et Masson: Paris, 1818, 3 vol., rééd. Charpentier: Paris, 1862, 2 vol.

² François Guizot, *Les vies de quatre grands chrétiens français*, t. II, *Calvin*, Hachette: Paris, 1873.

³ Claude-Henri de Saint-Simon, *Nouveau Christianisme, dialogues entre un conservateur et un novateur*, Bossange père: Paris, 1825.

⁴ For a more detailed study of these various ideas, see Valentine Zuber, *L'origine religieuse des droits de l'homme. Le christianisme face aux libertés modernes*, Labor et Fides: Genève, 2017.

⁵ Paul Janet, *La philosophie de la Révolution française*, Germer Baillière: Paris, 1875.

⁶ Alphonse Aulard, *Le Christianisme et la Révolution française*, F. Rieder et C^{ie}: Paris, 1925.

⁷ Charles Borgeaud, *Établissement et révision des constitutions en Amérique et en Europe*, Thorin et fils: Paris, 1893.

It was only in the aftermath of the Second World War that the myth of Protestantism's contribution to the modern definition of freedoms was seriously challenged by Protestant writers and thinkers. The painful history of the failure of a certain version of Protestantism to face up to the freedom-curbing and criminal actions of the totalitarian Nazi regime played a considerable part in this. Reformed Protestant theologians then pleaded for a more understated attitude, putting into perspective the Protestant-liberal myth that had been perfected all through the 19th century. Yet they still remained devoted to the promotion and re-appropriation by Protestantism of the humanistic ideals that it helped to introduce into the history of Western theological/political thought. This adherence to the modern freedoms enshrined in present-day human rights must not allow us to forget, according to these theologians, that human rights are primarily anchored in the respect of God's law, which is the sole guarantor of the rights of all men.



1. The precursors of a Protestant philosophy of history

One of the first liberal thinkers to show the essential causal link between the Reformation and the French Revolution was Charles de Villers. On the eve of the official promulgation of the Concordat, the *Institut de France* ran an essay competition which set the question: "What influence did Luther's Reformation have on the political situation in the various states in Europe and on the progress of the Enlightenment?" His *Essay on the spirit and influence of Luther's Reformation* won the first prize in 1805¹. His observations and conclusions were to be a

¹ Charles de Villers, *Essai sur l'esprit et l'influence de la Réformation de Luther*, a work that won the prize for answering this question, which was set at the public meeting of the 15th Germinal An X, by the Institut National de France: *Quelle a été l'influence de la réformation de Luther sur la situation politique des différents États de l'Europe, et sur le progrès des lumières?* Heinrichs, Metz, Collignon: Paris, An XII (1804).

great inspiration to liberal historians all through the 19th century. In the view of this author (who was not a Protestant), the Reformation indeed caused the Revolution, via the two English revolutions in the 17th century and in particular via the application of the Protestant principle of tyrannicide with the legally endorsed execution of King Charles I of England.

The politico-religious theory of freedom then spread to America and through the American Revolution in the late 18th century, the principles of freedom, the seeds of which had been sown in the Reformation, were taken up unchanged by the Revolutionary France of 1789. A century before Max Weber, Charles de Villers drew an idyllic picture of the societies liberated by a Protestantism that had paved the way for the Enlightenment all through the vicissitudes of the centuries. It was by breaking the “chains imposed on the human mind” that the Reformation made it possible to remove “the barriers that stood in the way of the free communication of ideas”. As a result of intellectual competition having been made possible, the growth of science was unrestrained and Protestant thought blossomed in the great mind of Kant who became the means of bringing these ideas into France.

Several years later, the theory was a great success in the most progressive French-speaking circles. Edgar Quinet, for instance, thought that the new political structures had been initiated by the Protestant nations (the Geneva of Calvin’s time, the English constitutional monarchy from 1688 on, and the democracy that emerged from the American Revolution). Protestantism became the ‘temporal moral code’ of these nations. The democratic spirit had therefore been at work for more than two centuries when the French Revolution finally rejected the monarchy. And it was this spirit that directly inspired the first revolutionary acts such as the relinquishment of privileges and adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Quinet stressed in particular the pre-eminently revolutionary role of the Reformation, which had acted as a political and religious paradigm for centuries in France and in Europe. Whilst the constitution of the Catholic Church—through the Council of Trento—made it possible to perfect the ideal of absolute power, the new political structures on the other hand were initiated by the Protestant nations. The democratic spirit had therefore been at work for more than two centuries when the French Revolution finally rejected monarchy by divine right. Yet he found it regrettable, paradoxically, that Protestantism had finally been excluded both from the ac-

tion and from the history of the Revolution¹. In *Le Christianisme et la Révolution*², Edgar Quinet thus demonstrated that the reign of Terror marked a turning point. This is because it was characterised by the abandonment of the Protestant model adopted by the first revolutionary thinkers. He saw it as the consequence of the cautiousness of the revolutionaries over following through with the promotion of freedom of worship. They confined themselves to merely proclaiming tolerance, when they should have undertaken real religious reform.

Jules Michelet shared with his colleague—and for a long time his best friend—an awareness of the positive contribution of the Reformation in France. But for him there was a radical heteronomy associated with the Revolution, which is like a “new religion” in itself. The Revolution was like the Revelation of modern times, the birth of a new religion, enshrined in history by the *Fête de la Fédération* in 1790. In his work devoted to the Renaissance and the Reformation, he thus revealed his philosophy of history, which was full of admiration for this moment that represented the birth of freedom³. The concept of religious tolerance, the paradoxical conception of which he attributed to Martin Luther himself⁴, continued to proliferate until it became the world faith” in the 18th century. Protestantism invented “the idea of, the reality of, and the word Republic”. The discipline of the reformed churches in France and the election of the representatives of the faithful in the sovereign assemblies were the application thereof in the religious domain. The revolt of the Huguenot *Camisards* in the Cévennes was like a foreshadowing of the storming of the Bastille, and conversely, the actions of the Reign of Terror were revealed to be structurally identical to those of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Michelet differed from Quinet on the historical part that the Protestants of his time might be led to play. The Reformation was admittedly a magnificent human emancipation

¹ Edgar Quinet, *La Révolution*, (1865), Belin: Paris, 2009, Book I, Les vœux, XI, Vœux du clergé et de la noblesse, p. 109-110.

² Edgar Quinet, *Le Christianisme et la Révolution*, Comon: Paris, 1845.

³ Jules Michelet, *Renaissance et Réforme, histoire de la France au XVI^e siècle*, (1855), Robert Laffont: Paris, 1982, p. 794-795.

⁴ See with respect to the truly Lutheran heritage, the interesting historiographical study by Marion Deschamp and Marc Aberlé, “Le legs politique de Luther chez les penseurs républicains français du XIX^e siècle. Un héritage discuté”, in *Luther et la politique, Revue française d’histoire des idées politiques*, n°45, 2017, p. 89-120.

movement, but it finally failed from the political point of view in France. And it was partly its own fault because it had rejected the idea of a Republic, making the mistake of taking shelter under the wings of the monarchy. Moreover, it later paid a high price for refusing this recognition when it came to Louis XIV's *dragonnades* and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The impetus and the inspiration that the Reformation contributed to the conquest of freedoms did not prevent it from fizzling out because it was not loyal enough to its own principles. And for Michelet, it no longer had any part to play in history, at least in France. The Revolution therefore followed it as an emancipatory movement, without even having had the need for the political and religious caution of its direct ancestor.



2. The construction of the myth of the religious and protestant lineage of human rights

The view of the Reformation as introducing the idea of freedom into the modern world faded somewhat in the aftermath of the failure of the Second Republic and of its ideals of fraternity. The same authors tempered their enthusiasm by highlighting the paradoxical political effects. But this theory gained momentum with the consolidation of the Third Republic and the approach of the first centenary of the Revolution in 1889. Its American, Protestant, and liberal lineage was no longer disputed by French-speaking political thinkers. The myth of an emancipating Reformation was thus a bright star in the firmament of commonly accepted views at a time when the democratic ideals borrowed from it were about to become a reality.

The theories held by the Austrian jurist Georg Jellinek¹ on the ideological origins of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen then appeared

¹ Georg Jellinek, *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen, contribution à l'histoire du droit constitutionnel moderne*, Albert Fontemoing: Paris, 1902.

to be categorical enough to inspire the emotions of the French jurist and political thinker Émile Boutmy, founder of the *École libre des sciences politiques* in Paris¹. This controversy, which presented two contrasting versions of the ideological lineage of the Declaration (the Anglo-American one derived from the Reformation and the Rousseauist and philosophical version) and two contrasting philosophies (the liberal and the statist philosophy), remained a *cause célèbre* in legal and political philosophy circles. And the thinkers after this who occupied themselves with the origins and the formulation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, never omitted to call attention to it and sometimes to reiterate its content even if they considered it to be generally old-fashioned, simplistic, and even completely outmoded. At the time, however, it did appear to be ‘revolutionary’, at least for its French readers. We must, of course, bear in mind that the political context of the time was not yet favourable for a completely serene and peaceful view of the history and achievements of the French Revolution.

However, the act of establishing links between the achievements of the Reformation and those of the French Revolution was nothing new, as we have seen. Yet this ‘historiographical evidence’ was progressively undermined by some of the most patriotic historians of the French Republic, who were then stressing the truly French and philosophical origin of the revolutionary ideals, as Boutmy did. The fact that German researchers (Jellinek but also Weber² and Troeltsch in the same period) were again focusing their work on a re-evaluation of the contribution made by Protestantism (in its Calvinist or para-Calvinist form) to the modern Western political and economic sphere was extremely badly received by those French thinkers who subscribed to a heroic account of history that was, in their view, strictly national. The belated dispute between Jellinek and Boutmy thus occurred at the extreme end of this period. In France, the values of Protestantism then largely appeared to have been overtaken by a secular ideal that was better synchronised with the modern development of society, marked by an increasingly calmer coexistence between the Republic and Catholicism.

¹ Émile Boutmy, “La Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen, et M. Jellinek”, *Annales de Sciences Politiques*, 1902, p. 415-443.

² F. Chia, “Le fondement religieux de la liberté par l’égalité et les droits de l’homme. La présence de Georg Jellinek dans l’éthique sociale de Max Weber”, *Rivista internazionale di filosofia del diritto*, 76, 1999, p. 253-284.

As for the legacy of the Jellinek-Boutmy controversy, it is paradoxical. The American influence on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen is no longer disputed by authors. Even better, it seems to form part of the achievements of historical science. Among historians and sociologists of religion, some of whom are open to cultural borrowings and who have mastered the German language, the works of the jurist Jellinek are currently being revisited with productive results. The theory of the role of the Reformation as a catalyst and of the sometimes paradoxical repercussions thereof in the modern development of individual emancipation and freedom are now accepted by the majority of modern thinkers in the field of western secularisation¹. A recent collective sees this as a guaranteed achievement of historiography². On the other hand, there is a surprising silence from thinkers who study the French Revolution with regard to Jellinek's second proposition, which postulated a linear link between the religious freedom that resulted from the Reformation movement and the Revolution's promotion of individual liberties. In these academic circles, all that people often were willing to hold on to from this debate was the confrontation between obsolete sectarian and nationalist forms of pride.



3. The persistence of the Huguenot myth

It was the First World War, seen as the confrontation between German imperialism and 'world democracy', which finally put an end to the myth that, in most people's minds, identified Protestantism with freedom. The theory of the

¹ Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2003.

² *La modernité contre la religion? Pour une nouvelle approche de la laïcité*, ed. Jacqueline Lagrée, Philippe Portier, PUR: Rennes, 2010.

contribution made by the Calvinist Reformation to the world of freedoms was subsequently no longer defended by anyone apart from by Protestant historians whose sensibilities were as divergent as those of two pastors-cum-historians could be—Nathanaël Weiss¹, in the liberal camp, and Émile Doumergue², in the orthodox camp. This defence inevitably involved the rehabilitation of the great ancestor of the French Huguenots, Jean Calvin, since they shared the conviction that progress in theological-political thinking and the modern age had been the fruits of Calvinist thought. Claiming the combined authority of studies by Hornung³, Weiss, Doumergue, and Jellinek, the pastor Amos Vienney reiterated this again on the eve of the Second World War: “Political democracy grew out of Calvinist ecclesiastical democracy”⁴. The eminent economist Charles Gide likewise picked up the various arguments for Calvin’s rehabilitation that had been put forward during the Jubilee and ended his plea by asserting: “Calvin was, as much as, if not more than Rousseau, one of the forefathers of the French Revolution”⁵. Adopting the theories of Jellinek, whom he quotes explicitly, he thus portrays Calvin as the inventor of modern democracy, via Calvinist ecclesiology, which in his view, anticipated the modern form of democracy: “Calvinism, which in France is often presented as the Romanesque period in reverse, and as a stifling fanaticism, acted in the wider world as a tremendous breeding ground for the growth of civic freedom”. This political step forward, which was entirely religious in origin, was, however, an idea that was only taken up, he concludes with regret, by the Anglo-Saxon historians of his time. And then...

After the Second World War, this theory, which had become a veritable ‘Huguenot myth’, did not disappear completely in French Protestant intellectual circles. There are echoes of this, admittedly faint ones, in a number of academic studies that appeared around the time of the bicentenary of the French Revo-

¹ Nathanaël Weiss, “L’origine et les étapes historiques des droits de l’homme et des peuples”, *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, 66, 1917, p. 7-125.

² Émile Doumergue, “Discours sur l’origine des principes de 1789”, *Séance publique de rentrée de la Faculté de théologie protestante de Montauban*, 1905, p. 19-43.

³ Joseph Marc Hornung, *Idées sur l’évolution juridique des nations chrétiennes et en particulier sur celle du peuple français*, F. Ramboz: Genève, 180.

⁴ Amos-B. Vienney, “L’article de la Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen proclamant la liberté de conscience”, *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, 88, 1939, p. 127-133.

⁵ Charles Gide, “À propos d’un Jubilé à Genève”, *Foi et vie*, 12, 1909, p. 655-657.

lution¹. In recent years, the Geneva-based theologian Éric Fuchs, author of the article “Rights of Man” in *l’Encyclopédie du protestantisme* states that “There was a real historical and systematic complicity between The Rights of Man and Protestantism”². According to Fuchs, the Reformation established the theoretical bases of freedom of conscience and Calvin, as a sound jurist, paved the way for the “ethical monitoring of political power”. The idea of men being equal, proclaimed in this way by the very will of the Creator, had flourished at the time of the English Revolutions and crystallised in the works of Locke, from which the American *Bills of rights* were derived. Without really setting out his ideas in detail, Fuchs refuses to allow any linear relationship between the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen with this Reformation-based and then Anglo-Saxon philosophy. Recent historians of Protestantism are moreover divided over this issue of the religious and Protestant foundations of the Rights of Man. Daniel Ligou thus concedes a historical lineage but will not accept any doctrinal lineage between the Reformation and the Revolution³.

However, a yet more recent historiography, essentially Anglo-Saxon in origin, took up the question of the Protestant contribution to the history of the modern age. Dale Van Kley’s *The religious origins of the French Revolution* indeed marked a turning point⁴. In the English version, the work’s subtitle was quite explicit: “From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791”. In the French translation, it was wisely reduced to a mere mention of the chronological boundaries⁵. The major work by the American Law historian Harold J. Berman⁶ makes for its part a fairly explicit link with Jellinek’s theories. Indeed, he believes that it was always for religious (or ideological, but functioning as a religious system)

¹ Eric Fuchs, Pierre-André Stücki, *Au nom de l’Autre. Essai sur le fondement des droits de l’homme*, Labor et Fides: Genève, 1985; Jean-François Collange, *Théologie des droits de l’homme*, Cerf: Paris, 1989.

² Éric Fuchs, “Droits de l’Homme”, in *Encyclopédie du protestantisme*, ed. Pierre Gisel, PUF: Paris, 2006, p. 378.

³ Daniel Ligou, “Sur le protestantisme révolutionnaire. A propos d’un ouvrage récent”, *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, 104, 1958, p. 25-49.

⁴ Dale K. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution: From Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791*, Yale University Press: New Heaven, 1996.

⁵ Dale K. Van Kley, *Les origines religieuses de la Révolution française (1560-1791)*, Seuil: Paris, 2002.

⁶ Harold J. Berman, *Droit et Révolution. L’impact des Réformes protestantes sur la tradition juridique occidentale*, Fayard: Paris, 2011.

reasons that the political upheavals in the west occurred through the Ages. By transferring spiritual authority to secular legislators, Protestantism, he believes, contributed to the spiritualisation of secular law at the very time that the latter had been nationalised. By splitting Christianity into two irreconcilable parts, the Protestant Revolution thus forced the law of each country to be set out in detail and to evolve in a more directly national form, though still influenced by its religious inspiration.



4. A theological and Protestant reappropriation of human rights after WWII

The theory of the Calvinist Reformation's contribution to the modern world in any case marked the historical culture and history of the Protestant Huguenots durably enough for the Protestant theologian Roger Mehl to pay renewed attention to it¹. However, he draws a distinction between two historical levels, the discourse level and the event level. In his view, as discourse alone, the texts that resulted from the Reformation did not show any awareness of the existence of any possible rights of man. On the other hand, seen as a political-religious event, the Reformation, by allowing the emergence of a demand for the right to be different and thus of a demand for religious pluralism, allowed the emergence of all the other rights of man. This was therefore a social and politically particularly paradoxical effect of the influence of the Reformation, the initial aim of which was only to restore the full and complete sovereignty of God. And this demand emerged fairly soon after the period of the Reformation. Mehl notes the evident "collusion" between Protestant discourse and

¹ Roger Mehl, "La tradition protestante et les droits de l'homme", *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, n°58/4, 1978, p. 367-378.

philosophical discourse (Rousseau and Kant), which made it possible in the 18th century for these theories to be expanded on by the writings of the “philosophers”. Even if we can observe a still greater pertinence of this discourse of freedom, Mehl notes in turn that it is only in the Anglo-Saxon countries that this discourse truly became a “political act”.

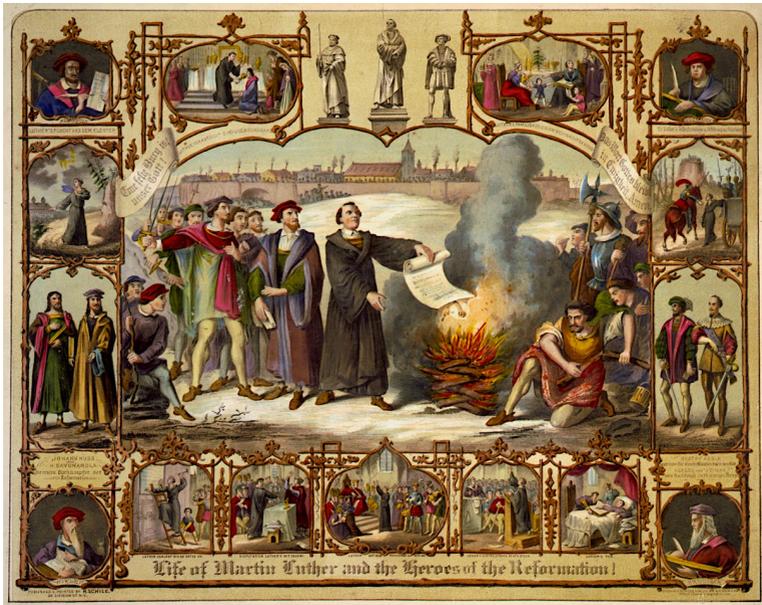
Some years later, the pastor Jacques Galtier tried to make a point about the paradoxical links maintained by Protestantism and the rights of man in a theological thesis that he defended in 1988¹. Refining, yet not refuting, the theories of the Calvinist historians of the early 20th century, he reminds us of the role of the French Protestants in the Revolution over the rights of man because “they were ready to share ideas of tolerance and to fight for themselves and others, in view of the emergence of the rights of man”. He thus clearly reaffirms, after the Protestant political thinkers such as Guizot or Quinet and in light of Jellinek’s theory, that there is an obvious link between Reformation, Revolution and the Rights of Man. But, in France, such a rapid proclamation of the rights of man as principles left the question of their political application completely unanswered and Galtier attributes the delayed implementation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen to the weakness of the properly divine basis thereof. He concludes from this that in France, the elimination of any influence accorded to religion left the field open for all forms of political abuse.

At the end of the 1970s, the Calvinist theologian Jürgen Moltmann² tried to revisit the issue of the theological basis of human rights and of the modern era. Giving due weight to the role of history and of anthropology in the universal recognition of human rights, he, however, extensively relativized the properly Protestant contribution in order to reaffirm the intrinsic universality of this contemporary Utopia derived, he believed, from multiple sources, both religious and political. Identifying all the same the role of forerunner played by the Calvinist churches, he concludes his essay with a veritable declaration of faith, which in his mind connects a religious and a political-legal struggle for the truly universal promotion of the rights of man.

¹ Jacques Galtier, *Théologies calvinistes. Déclarations et avènement des droits de l’homme*, Thèse de doctorat en théologie, Institut protestant de théologie, 1988, repris partiellement dans *Protestants en Révolution*, Labor et Fides: Genève, 1989.

² Jürgen Moltmann, “Le fondement théologique des droits de l’homme”, *Colloque théologique de l’Alliance Réformée Mondiale à Londres*, Genève, brochure, s.d. (1976).

As we will see at the end of this study, Protestant thinking on the rights of man has evolved considerably since the aftermath of the French Revolution. The seminal role of the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformations and the catalytic effects thereof are admittedly still acknowledged but their direct influence on the global success of contemporary liberal thinking has been very much played down. Authors never forget to stress that it is in this dual response—both religious and political—that the modern freedoms were able to become established sustainably in the political agenda of the modern era. The religious opposition to the dogmatic intolerance of the Calvinists, combined with the political struggle against absolute monarchies, allowed liberalism to flourish in the aftermath of the revolutions of the 18th century. By going beyond its religious origins, this liberal agenda has become universal whilst becoming solidly established in the secular legal and political world system of human rights. By recognising the major contribution of philosophical thought to the emancipation of the individual, and by playing down slightly the contribution of Christian doctrines to the historic flourishing of liberal doctrines, Protestant thinkers of today are making an act of humility, but also nurturing hope. They are thus calling for the latter to be re-enrooted in the divine plan that obliges Christians to implement them resolutely here and now. The humanistic and religious agenda of human rights therefore remains a Utopia, with diverse roots and influences, but one which sincere believers must continue to promote in their own way, that is, as a completely human illustration of an eternal and infallible divine plan.



H. Breul, Life of Martin Luther and the Heroes of the Reformation! Original by H. Brückner; printed by H. Schile, ca. 1874 (Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94504464/>).