

Discipline, work and relief: the institutions of Reformed Geneva — overview and summary

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Calvin's Geneva was also a set of institutions that for generations shaped the conduct of its inhabitants, their relationship to work and money, the care of the poor, the education of the elites and the city's influence abroad. The Consistory supervised morals. The Hôpital général and the Bourse française organised poor relief. Printing spread the Reformation and sustained an industry. The Collège and the Académie trained pastors, magistrates and merchants. This chapter describes these institutions and shows what they bequeathed to the financial centre: a culture of discipline, a philanthropic tradition, an industry of the written word, human capital and an international network.

1 In five sentences

1. The Consistory, created in 1541, supervised morals, including economic conduct, and sought first of all correction and reconciliation.
2. Calvinist theology valued work as a vocation and conceived of wealth as a stewardship, which demanded sobriety, responsibility and concern for others.
3. The Hôpital général and the Bourse française organised centralised and community-based poor relief, which prefigured the Geneva philanthropic tradition.
4. Printing, a capital-intensive and export-oriented industry, and the Académie, founded in 1559, gave Geneva entrepreneurs, human capital and international influence.

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5. These institutions bequeathed to the financial centre a network founded on trust and a culture of discretion whose later use would prove ambivalent.

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