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A FORGOTTEN GIANT
OF THE REFORMATION

*The Apologetics, Ethics, and
Economics of the Bible*

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Viret's *Instruction Chrétienne* a detailed application of God's Word to the practical problems of Christian living in every aspect of personal and social life, but this is done with an admirable sense of theological balance and the delicate relation of dogmatics to ethics, together with the constant implicit purpose of favoring the preaching of the Gospel, of extending God's kingdom, and of bringing all honor and praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. In the *Preface* Viret sets forth his central purpose with the utmost clarity:

My aim in this volume has been to produce an exposition of the Law of God, a Law which must be regarded as the rule for every other law through which men are to be directed and governed.²

He adds,

Every science, human prudence and all wisdom of men must be put into relation to God as a gift which proceeds from Him.³

Then Viret goes on to define his purpose more precisely:

Thus God has included in this Law every aspect of that moral doctrine by which men may live well. For in these Laws He has done infinitely better than the Philosophers and all their books, whether they deal with Ethics, Economics, or Politics. This Law stands far above all human legislation, whether past, present, or future, and is above all laws and statutes edicted by men. It follows that whatever good men may put forward has previously been included in this law, and whatever is contrary to it is of

2. Pierre Viret, *Instruction chrestienne en la doctrine de la Loy et de l'Évangile*, Vol. 1 (Geneva, 1564), p. 249.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 274.

necessity evil.... This law, if it is rightly understood, will furnish us with true Ethics, Economics, and Politics. It is incomparably superior to what we find in the teachings of Aristotle, Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, and like thinkers who have taken such pains to fashion the customs of men.⁴

And Viret concludes his *Preface* with these words:

For as it can only be God Himself who is able to give us such a perfect Law by which we are truly enabled to govern ourselves, likewise it is only He who can provide us with Princes and Magistrates, Pastors and Ministers gifted with the capacity of applying this Law. Further, He is fully able to shape such men into adequate instruments for His service and to grant them the authority necessary for the accomplishment of the duties of their office. Thus armed, they are enabled by God to maintain those over whom they rule (and of whose welfare they are accountable to God) in a spirit of due subjection. For, just as He has granted us this Law in order that we might clearly know what we lack, so He likewise grants us, through Jesus Christ His Son, the Holy Ghost, by whom our hearts are renewed, and through whom we receive those gifts and graces so necessary for the accomplishment of our vocation.⁵

Such a view of the overarching authority and supreme wisdom of God's law led Pierre Viret to an examination of the particular duties of men within the bounds of their specific vocations. To this task he more particularly addressed himself in a masterly treatise entitled: *Métamorphose chrétienne, faite par dialogue*.⁶

4. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.

6. Pierre Viret, *La métamorphose chrétienne* [Christian Metamorpho-