
CALVIN'S TEACHINGS

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN CALVIN AND TURRETIN: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

TIM PRUSSIC¹

Before I even thought about matriculating at Western Reformed Seminary, I had great interest in the art and science of the interpretation of Scripture, or hermeneutics. One's hermeneutics, I came to find, to a great degree depends on one's view of Scripture: its inspiration, integrity, inerrancy, unity, etc. Thus, fresh out of college, I began to search for books on the inspiration of Scripture. I happened upon a then twenty-year-old book which appeared to be of great promise and seemed right up my alley: *The Authority and Inspiration of Scripture: An Historical Approach* by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim.² The major thrust of this book (which has since been called the "Rogers/McKim Proposal") is that, throughout history theologians have viewed inspiration with a tendency either toward what they call "formal" inspiration or "functional" inspiration. By formal inspiration, they mean that *the text* of the Bible itself is inspired by God, and by functional inspiration, they mean that the Holy Spirit *uses* the authoritative text of the Bible to work in the lives of people.³ In other words, Rogers and McKim locate formal inspiration in the text itself, while functional inspiration is the Spirit's application of that text to people. They offer these two views of inspiration as very close to mutually exclusive; they group theologians on either one or the

other side of their formal/functional dichotomy. In the course of the book, they included Calvin in the group promoting a functional inspiration and the Reformed Orthodox (and Turretin specifically) in the group espousing a formal inspiration. Having read Rogers and McKim thoroughly, and trusting that their historical research was correct, I struggled deeply with the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy for a handful of years – even into seminary.⁴

The Rogers/McKim Proposal was one more book in a long line of scholarship pitting Calvin against his later followers. Further, the Proposal did it on the sacred ground of the inspiration of Scripture. A distorted view of Scripture has devastating effects on one's theology, as Scripture is the fountainhead of theology.

Intrigued with the Rogers/McKim Proposal, I decided to put it to the test by comparing the doctrine of Scripture in John Calvin and Francis Turretin.⁵ What follows in this article is a bit of the fruit of my research into the doctrine of Scripture in two of the greatest theologians in the Reformed tradition, John Calvin and Francis Turretin. I'll examine first the form of their writing and then the content of their doctrine.

A mere comparison of the respective tables of contents of Calvin's and Turretin's *Institutes* immediately reveals the fact that these two great theologians arranged their work in substantially different ways. Calvin organized his *Institutes* after a soteriological model

beginning with human knowledge of God as Creator, moving into the knowledge of God as Redeemer, the means and benefits of Christ's grace, and finally into the external means of grace. Turretin, however, ordered his work after a more focused, analytical model. He separated out discussion into fairly self-contained sections (called *loci*, or places), similar to the way the Westminster divines ordered the chapters of the Confession. The major source of this organizational difference was rooted in historical context. Calvin was a second-generation Reformer and the first great systematizer of Reformed Protestantism. In Calvin's day, the Reformation was moving across much of Europe like a raging fire, but it was not yet a mature theological movement. Calvin's *Institutes* reflect both the power and organizational immaturity of his age. Turretin, by contrast, was a Reformed scholastic, or schoolman. Reformed scholasticism (sometimes called Reformed orthodoxy) developed as the Reformation advanced and took ground. Once Reformed schools were established, teachers began to ponder how best to teach theology in an academic or scholastic context. They drew heavily on the medieval scholastics (Duns Scotus, Bonaventure, Aquinas, etc.) to aid them in the form of presentation, while they drew heavily on the Bible through the Reformers, medieval scholastics, and church fathers for the content of that teaching.⁶ The difference in organization, therefore, does not necessarily reflect a difference in the content of teaching.

As one moves past the differing modes of organization to the content of their teaching, one is deeply impressed, not with the differences in teaching, but with the similarities. Broadly, both theo-

logians understood revelation as falling into two distinct but related categories: natural and special. They both affirmed that God is clearly revealed through nature as Creator and Sustainer of the world (this is sometimes called "general" revelation). There is no lack of clarity in the revelation, but sinners confuse God's clearly-revealed truth. Thus, sinners hold distorted notions of God—not because natural revelation is faulty, but because of their own sin and rebellion. Further, Turretin agreed with Calvin that the revelation of salvation from sin was revealed only through special revelation.⁷

Neither Calvin nor Turretin limited special revelation to Scripture alone. They affirmed that God had, throughout history, revealed himself in various ways throughout the ages of the church. The fullest revelation made to the church is God's written word. Regarding the Scripture in this present age of the church, both men stressed that, while God certainly had the power to reveal himself in other ways, the written word of Scripture is given to the church, beyond which we ought not seek revelation. In the pithy words of Turretin, "God is not bound to the Scripture, but has bound us to it" (Turr. *Inst.* II. ii. 2). Calvin, in obvious agreement, railed against the Anabaptists for separating the work of the Spirit from the written word of God, in which, alone, we recognize the Spirit.

For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God's face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in

his own image, namely, in the Word.
(Calv. *Inst.* I. ix. 3)

God's word, the Bible, is the last word for the church and is tied closely to the Spirit of God. According to Calvin and Turretin, God has bound us by his Spirit to the Scripture.

The authority of Scripture can be considered both objectively and subjectively (i.e., what the Scripture is of itself and what it is to a particular person). In the objective consideration, we detect no difference between Calvin and Turretin. Simply, if God spoke the Scripture, it bears his authority, which is infinite. Turretin, for example, reasoned thus: "The question of the authority of Scripture depends upon its origin... since it is from God, it cannot be other than genuine (*authenticus*) and divine" (Turr. *Inst.* II. iv. 1).

Under the consideration of the subjective authority of Scripture, we come to a significant discontinuity between Calvin and Turretin. This discontinuity

For Calvin, the words of Scripture have more authority than the historical conjectures of scholars, even when those conjectures are plausible and weighty. More succinctly, for Calvin, if it is written in the Book, it is true. The Bible, being God's own word, from his very mouth, cannot err.

is centered in the question of *how* the text of Scripture comes to be understood as divine and authoritative by a person. Calvin taught that when the Holy Spirit convinces a person of the divinity of the Scripture, he does so through the Scripture itself apart from the external *indicia* (indications or marks) of its divinity. The Westminster Confession offers a helpful list of these marks:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.⁸

The *indicia* are helpful in preparation for belief in the Scripture, as they brush aside unnecessary obstacles, and they can strengthen and buttress faith, but they are preparatory and ancillary. Turretin, by contrast, saw the Spirit convincing the person of the authority of Scripture *through* the marks themselves.⁹ He made it clear that faith is "formed" on the rational basis of the "sure marks":

Although faith rests on the authority of [divine] testimony, and not on sci-

entific demonstration, it does not follow that it cannot be supported by intellectual arguments at times, especially when faith is first formed, because faith, before it believes, should (*debere*) have the clearly perceived divine quality of the witness whom it should believe, [known] from the sure marks found in [the witness]; otherwise it cannot believe him. For where such grounds for believing anyone are lacking, the testimony of such a witness is not worthy of belief. (Turr. *Inst.* II. iv. 13)

Turretin stressed that faith has a rational grounding. One comes to believe in the divinity of Scripture on a rational basis. Consequently, he conceived of the Spirit using the marks of the Scripture to create a rational case on the strength of which the Spirit convinced the person of the divine nature of the Scriptures. Calvin, however, considered the process of coming to faith no less rationally, but with a less rationalistic flavor. Calvin simply argued that, external rational grounds (marks) aside, nothing could be more rational than what God the Spirit says. For Calvin, the same Spirit speaking in the Word is working inside the person under the ministry of the Word convincing them of the divinity of that Word. This, I think, constitutes the greatest discontinuity between Calvin and Turretin and reveals the incipient rationalism of Turretin's day, which came to full blossom in the Enlightenment and, in Geneva, in the person of Turretin's son, Jean-Alphonse Turretin.¹⁰

As regards the inspiration of Scripture, both Calvin and Turretin offer us essentially the same doctrine, but Turretin's teaching is, as should be ex-

At the end of the day, the Rogers/McKim Proposal is found wanting. That fact, however, did not stop it from influencing thousands of aspiring and established historians and theologians. Let us be diligent in the defense of our theological heritage, in the first place, simply by becoming familiar with it.

pected, more refined with increased clarity and precision. Both men saw the Scripture as a divine-human document, the very words of God through the ministry of men. Calvin, for example, often spoke of the Scriptures as being *os dei*, or from the mouth of God. He taught that "the Scripture is from God. . . . It has flowed to us from the very mouth of God" (Calv. *Inst.* I. vii. 5). The Bible is a divine document but is also conditioned by human and historical influences. "That the sacred writers responded," notes Turretin, "to circumstances of time and place is unquestioned" (Turr. *Inst.* II. iii. 2). Divine inspiration, according to these two theologians, does not circumvent human agency, but makes use of human writers, time, and place. Neither doubts that divine inspiration extends to the very words of the Scripture. Calvin asserts that "the word of God is not distinguished from the *words* of the Prophet."¹¹ Again: "Every word which may have issued forth from God is to be received with implicit authority."¹² While humans wrote the

Bible, divine inspiration extends right down to the very words themselves.

Similar to verbal inspiration, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is one that is hotly contested with regard to Calvin, but none dare misconstrue Turretin's view, as he states his position with customary force and precision. "The question is whether in writing they [the human authors of Scripture] were so led and inspired by the Holy Spirit that, with regard to both substance and the words, their writings were authoritative and divine. The adversaries deny this; we affirm it" (Turr. *Inst.* II. iv. 5). Did Calvin, however, understand the Bible to have errors or to be error free? Two examples will suffice to show that Calvin did not doubt the factual and historical data contained in the Scriptures. Even in Calvin's day, some scholars questioned the historicity of the person of Job. Did a man named Job *really* exist? In his sermon on Job 1:1, Calvin argued that, based on what the text says, he surely did.

Yet we ought not to doubt that this man, whose country is here noted, whose name is expressed, really was, that he lived, and that the things which are here written have happened to him.... For we have already the testimony of Ezekiel, and that of Saint James, who well show that Job truly was, and also when [the sacred] history declares it, we cannot erase what the Holy Spirit so notably wished to say.¹³

Secondly, since Jerome some Christian scholars had doubted that Peter authored the second epistle bearing his name. Like other scholars, Calvin noted the difference in literary style between First and Second Peter and had sufficient external

reason to question the authorship of Second Peter. Calvin, even in light of those reasons, still appealed to the text to find the answer to the question of authorship. He reasoned, "If it be received as canonical, we must allow Peter to be the author, since it has his name inscribed."¹⁴ For Calvin, the words of Scripture have more authority than the historical conjectures of scholars, even when those conjectures are plausible and weighty. More succinctly, for Calvin, if it is written in the Book, it is true. The Bible, being God's own word, from his very mouth, cannot err.

The notion of divine accommodation in Scripture is an interesting and clear example of how Calvin-Versus-Calvinism scholarship, like that of Rogers and McKim, has distorted the teaching of Reformed orthodoxy. Calvin's notion of accommodation was that God's speech to humanity in the Bible was accommodated to the capacity of the recipient, that is, finite humans. Calvin famously referred to the Scripture as God "lispering" and making "baby talk" or "prattle."¹⁵ The point of this is not that God has a speech impediment, but that humanity has a hearing impediment. Calvin's wonderful image is as if God, in speaking to his people in the Scripture, is holding a tiny infant in his arms. So great is God's care to communicate, that he articulates his love, as it were, through cooing to his infant, simply so that the infant can understand.

From the Reformation and from Calvin's time, the Reformed orthodox tightened up their theological articulations and reworked the form by which they expressed their theological ideas. In so doing, did they lose track of Calvin's

notion of accommodation? Rogers and McKim answer in the affirmative. They assert that Turretin entirely abandoned Calvin's notion of accommodation.

The concept of accommodation utilized by the early church fathers and by Calvin was *entirely absent* from Turretin. Calvin viewed the language and thought forms of the biblical writers as human products that God had graciously condescended to use. Turretin, by contrast, treated the language and thought forms of the Bible as supernatural entities dictated directly by God.¹⁶

Rogers and McKim would have us believe that, to Turretin, divine revelation was not adapted to human capacity, but was somehow divinely inspired to the point where it is a direct product of God's mind that bypasses human language and thought forms. A simple reading of the first two chapters of Turretin's *Institutes* would have saved them from their error in judgment.

Turretin's view of accommodation is not as beautiful and metaphorical as is Calvin's, but one really would not expect that from Turretin. There are three ways in which Turretin clearly articulates his notion of accommodation. The first is Turretin's most basic distinction in his concept of theology. He distinguished between what he called archetypal theology (God's knowledge of himself) and ectypal theology (the knowledge of God available to a created being). Simply stated, the knowledge of God a creature can have is quite distinct from God's self-knowledge. The object of the knowledge (God) is the same in both, but these two types of knowledge differ both in type and degree. Secondly, Turretin found

divine accommodation in the progressive revelation and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Divine revelation was tailored to the time and place it was given; God revealed himself not all at once, but in stages or progressively. Finally, divine revelation, even in its fullest written form, the Scripture, is still suited by God to the recipients and in a form that is most conducive to the ends for which he gave it. Richard Muller, quoting Turretin himself, notes that in Scripture, "God speaks 'not to himself' but 'to us,' which is to say – clearly echoing Calvin – '*accommodate ad captum nostrum, qui finites est,*' 'accommodated to our capacity, which is finite.'"¹⁷ Divine revelation not accommodated to finite creatures, for Turretin, is asinine, and strikes at the very heart of his theological concept.

One expects to find some variations and divergences in any particular doctrine held by two different theologians, even theologians within the same theological tradition. We should expect them to differ more and more as the theologians were separated by time. In the case of our two theologians, Turretin flourished about 120 years after Calvin, and lived in an intellectual climate quite different from the great Reformer. All the contextual and historical differences notwithstanding, we find a remarkable resemblance between the teaching regarding Scripture in Calvin and Turretin. There are differences, no doubt, but Turretin offers a fairly accurate scholastic repackaging of Calvin's doctrine.

As for my personal journey, I learned to approach scholarship, even erudite scholarship, with a healthy grain of salt. At the end of the day, the Rogers/McKim

Proposal is found wanting. That fact, however, did not stop it from influencing thousands of aspiring and established historians and theologians. Let us be diligent in the defense of our theological heritage, in the first place, simply by becoming familiar with it. For, were we to rely on the scholarship of Rogers and McKim, we would have mistakenly written off Turretin as a rationalist, and rejected his doctrine of Scripture as a significant departure from Calvin's doctrine.



¹ Tim Prussic is a graduate of Western Reformed Seminary and is licensed to preach by the Northwest Presbytery of the Bible Presbyterian Church.

² Jack Bartlett Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

³ I found, after I read their book and did my own research, that their formal/functional distinction, while useful, can be turned into a false dichotomy and used to attack the inspiration of the written word of God, the Bible. In my view, both Rogers and McKim are more influenced by Karl Barth's view of inspiration than John Calvin's.

⁴ It is quite important *which* books we read, especially when we lack discernment. Let this be a lesson to catechize our children well, for falsities, once latched onto mentally, are very difficult to supplant. Happily, the truth operates the same way.

⁵ Not only was Turretin specifically singled out by Rogers and McKim, but he's also the most logical choice for my comparison to Calvin as 1) he is highly regarded among the Reformed orthodox, 2) he was both pastor and profes-

sor in Geneva, just like Calvin, and 3) he was massively influential upon later Reformed thinkers, including Jonathan Edwards and Charles Hodge. Hodge actually used Turretin's *Institutes* as the systematic theology at Princeton Seminary until he published his own great *Systematic Theology*.

⁶ Some historians have called this the "double continuity" of Reformed orthodoxy, see Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:28-29.

⁷ For a detailed account of what's called the *duplex cognitio Dei*, or the double knowledge of God, see Barbara Pitkin, *What Pure Eyes Could See: Calvin's Doctrine of Faith in its Exegetical Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸ WCF 1:5, emphasis mine.

⁹ The current author is in disagreement with the great B. B. Warfield on this point. Warfield sees Calvin's doctrine of the Spirit's use of the *indicia* much along the same lines as Turretin's teaching. In that case, there would be no discontinuity, but the present author thinks that Warfield's view of Calvin was influenced by Turretin.

¹⁰ See James T. Dennison, "The Twilight of Scholasticism: Francis Turretin at the Dawn of the Enlightenment" in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. by Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster, 1999), 242-255; also, see Martin I. Klauber and Glenn S.

Sunshine, "Jean-Alphonse Turretini on Biblical Accommodation: Calvinist or Socinian?" in *Calvin Theological Journal* 25/1 (1990): 7-27.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (22 vols.; Repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 15:341 (Haggai 1:12), emphasis mine. Also, see his commentary on Gal. 3:16 (21:94-96), and Matt. 5:18 (16:278).

¹² *Ibid.*, 5:429 (Psalm 62:12). I quote Calvin and not Turretin on this topic, as Turretin's doctrine of verbal inspiration is uncontested, while numerous scholars argue that Turretin diverged from Calvin on this issue. For further evidence and the views of various scholars, see Roger Nicole, "John Calvin and Inerrancy" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/4 (1982): 425-442.

¹³ John Calvin, *Sermons from Job* (Repr., Ed. and trans. Leroy Nixon; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 8.

¹⁴ Calvin, *Commentaries*, 22:363 (The Argument of the Second Epistle of Peter).

¹⁵ See, for example, Calvin's *Institutes*, I. xiii. 1.

¹⁶ Rogers and McKim, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 177; emphasis mine. All three assertions in this quotation are highly suspect, and the first palpably false. Again, Rogers and McKim boldly assert, "No trace of Calvin's concept of accommodation was to be found in Turretin's work," *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 188.

¹⁷ Muller, *PRRD*, 2:305. Also, see Martin I. Klauber, "Francis Turretin on Biblical Accommodation: Loyal Calvinist or Reformed Scholastic?" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 55/1 (1993): 73-86.

CALVIN'S DISCIPLES, THEN AND NOW

JASON ANSPACH¹

JOHN CALVIN'S DISCIPLE-MAKING THROUGH
THE CENTURIES

Jesus Christ commissioned his eleven disciples in to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20a). Followers of the Lord Jesus have sought to do so ever since, be it in the form of evangelism, apologetic writings, or personal discipleship.

Sermons are preached, books are read, personal exhortations are heard, but one can only guess at how many people are reached and turned into disciples of King Jesus through our personal labors. Some Christians work the fields and see little in the way of visible fruit. John Calvin was blessed not only in his seeing the fruits of his labors before his death, but by having been used by God in winning disciples for Christ long after the man had been called into the presence of the Lord.

CALVIN THE DISCIPLE

Some might have the impression that John Calvin's life didn't truly begin until he wrote *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. While the *Institutes* was published early in his life (he was twenty-six when the first edition appeared in 1536), God in his providence was placing men in Calvin's life that would help guide and mold the man into the brilliant theologian we now know.

Calvin was a brilliant student. Initially, his father sent him to school with

the desire to see his son a priest. However a change of heart led his father to believe that practicing law would be more profitable. Calvin studied law at the University of Orléans. Robert Reymond notes that “within a year Calvin so distinguished himself in the knowledge of law that he was no longer looked upon as a student and was employed to teach classes in the absence of the professor for illness.”²

Calvin studied Greek under Melchior Wolmar,³ a man with Lutheran tendencies who supplied Calvin with several of Luther’s works, including *The Liberty of a Christian Man*, in which Luther laid out his case for justification to Pope Leo X.

Calvin’s conversion likely took place in 1532. He left little accounting of the people, events, and circumstances that led to his second birth. In the preface of his *Commentary on the Psalms* Calvin states that he set his mind to law and that his course was altered by God’s providence despite an initial desire to adhere to “superstitions of Popery.”

It has been suggested that more light on Calvin’s conversion is revealed in his *Reply to Sadoletto*, where he answers Jacopo Sadoletto’s letter to Geneva urging them to rejoin Roman Catholicism. In that writing Calvin portrays a Catholic and Protestant layman standing before God as they are examined as to who practices the “right faith”:

When, however, I had performed all [the works of satisfaction I was told to perform],... I was still far-off from true peace of conscience; for, whenever I descended into myself, or raised my mind to you, extreme terror seized me—terror which no expiations or satisfactions could cure.... Still, as

nothing better offered, I continued the course which I had begun, when, lo, a very different form of doctrine started up, not one which led us away from the Christian profession, but one which brought it back to its fountain-head, and, as it were, clearing away the dross, restored it to its original purity. Offended by novelty, I lent an unwilling ear, and at first, I confess, strenuously and passionately resisted; for . . . one thing in particular made me averse to those new teachers, viz., reverence for the Church. But when I opened my ears, and allowed myself to be taught, I perceived that this fear of derogating the majesty of the Church was groundless.

Aside from Wolmar, we have little in the way of identifying who those teachers were who guided a brilliant student into becoming a brilliant theologian and follower of Christ—but we can certainly be thankful that they did!

CALVIN’S ROLE IN THE LIVES OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Ritschlian church historian Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) described John Calvin as “the man who never smiled.” A superficial look at Calvin seems to suggest a withdrawn scholastic, sitting in an ivory tower writing feverishly, pausing only to pass condemnation on those below him. A recent article written in the *New York Times* by Molly Worthen gave the following one-sentence description of Calvin:

John Calvin had heretics burned at the stake and made a man who casually criticized him at a dinner party march through the streets of Geneva, kneeling at every intersection to beg forgiveness.⁴

Contrary to a popular opinion of Calvin as a sad, dour, man who executed discipline at the drop of a hat—the man was a joyful man. Benjamin B. Warfield wrote of Calvin’s teachings:

[Calvin taught that] laughter is the gift of God; and he held it [to be] the right, or rather the duty of the Christian man to practice it in its due season. He is constantly joking with friends in his letters, and he eagerly joins with them in all the joys of life. “I wish I were with you for half a day,” he writes to one of them, “to laugh with you.” ... He enjoyed a joke hugely, with that open-mouthed laugh, which as one of his biographers phrases it, belonged to the men of the sixteenth century.⁵

Calvin’s jovial demeanor when combined with his gifted ability to clearly portray the doctrines of the Holy Bible resulted in his being influential to those who studied beneath him.

In 1559 Calvin founded the Geneva Academy, which would become the first Protestant “university” in the world. The Geneva Academy was an integral part of education within the Reformed church—a University of Wittenberg for the Reformed church. Calvin was the Academy’s leading theology professor and, along with Theodore Beza, taught thousands of students from all over Europe. The list of men who studied under Calvin in Geneva is notable for many contributions to the church. Guido de Bres, who wrote the Belgic Confession, studied under Calvin at the Academy. Caspar Olevianus also studied under Calvin; he, along with Zacharius Ursinus, wrote the Heidelberg Catechism.

The persecution of Protestants in England during the reign of “Bloody” Mary Tudor (1553-1558) caused many to flee to Geneva and learn with and from Calvin. Standouts in this group include Miles Coverdale, who carried on William Tyndale’s work by producing the first complete printed translation of the Holy Bible in the English language, John Foxe who authored *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, and John Knox, who brought reform to the churches and culture in Scotland upon his return from Calvin’s Geneva. The Geneva Bible,⁶ translated from Greek and Hebrew, was completed in Geneva by Anthony Gilby and William Wittingham with Calvin’s support and encouragement.

Regardless of where the students at the Geneva Academy came from, they returned to their homes carrying with them the impressions and lessons learned while studying under Calvin. Robert Reynolds notes:

Calvin’s teachings on religious freedom, in particular, laid the foundation for Reformed Presbyterianism, and his views spread from the Geneva Academy throughout Europe, and from these European countries, especially from the British Isles, Presbyterianism spread to the New World where it became very influential in the original American colonies through the Geneva Bible and in both the “Great Awakening” through the efforts of such men as Gilbert Tennent in the North and Samuel Davies in the South and the American Revolution itself through the preaching of such men as John Witherspoon (the only minister to sign the Declaration of Independence), George Duffield and James Caldwell. Interestingly, when news of

the American Revolution reached England, Horace Walpole rose from his seat in the British House of Commons and wryly commented: “There is no crying about the matter. Cousin American has run off with a Presbyterian parson, and that is the end of it.”⁷

While Calvin’s *Institutes* did fill a need in the days it was written, it is John Calvin’s careful exposition of Scripture—his ability to leave us with a theology that is so intertwined and so reflective of the teachings found in Holy Scripture—that has taught and will continue to teach followers of Jesus Christ the doctrines of salvation as put forth in the entirety of the Bible.

In addition to his work with the Geneva Academy Calvin preached around 4,000 sermons and continually implored the people of Geneva to be followers of Christ and godly citizens. As Calvin’s life slowly passed away he gave a plea to his fellow ministers to continue in glorifying God in all aspects of life:

Let each one consider the obligation he has, not only to the Church, but to the city, which he has promised to serve in adversity as well as prosperity, and likewise each one should continue in his vocation and not try to leave it or not practice it. For when

one hides to escape duty, he will say that he has neither thought about it nor sought this or that. But one should consider the obligation he has here before God.⁸

THE ROLE OF CALVIN’S WORK AFTER HIS DEATH

In the centuries following Calvin’s death in 1564 the teaching of John Calvin, as clearly put forth in the *Institutes* has remained at the forefront of Christian learning. B. B. Warfield points to Calvin’s *Institutes* and its exposition of the Holy Scriptures as the very foundational theological treatise on which the Reformed faith rests:

[The *Institutes*] was the first serious attempt to cast into systematic form that body of truth to which the Reformed churches adhered as taught in the Holy Scriptures; and as such it met a crisis and created an epoch in the history of the Churches. In the immense upheaval of the Reformation movement, the foundations of the faith seemed to many to be broken up, and the most important questions to be set adrift; extravagances of all sorts sprang up on every side; and we can scarcely wonder that a feeling of uneasiness was abroad, and men were asking with concern for some firm standing-ground for their feet. It was Calvin’s ‘*Institutes*’ which, with its calm, clear, positive expositions of the evangelical faith on the irrefragable authority of the Holy Scriptures, gave stability to wavering minds, and confidence to skunking hearts, and placed upon the lips of all a brilliant apology, in the face of the calumnies of the enemies of the Reformation.

As the fundamental treatise in the development of a truly evangelical theology its mission has stretched, however, far beyond its own day. All subsequent attempts to state and defend that theology necessarily go back to it as their starting point, and its impress upon the history of evangelical thinking is ineffaceable. Even from the point of view of mere literature, it holds a position so supreme in its class that every one who would fain know the world's best books, must make himself familiar with it. What Thucydides is among Greeks, or Gibbon among eighteenth century English historians, what Plato is among philosophers, or the *Iliad* among epics, or Shakespeare among dramatists, that Calvin's 'Institutes' is among theological treatises.⁹

The original editors of Calvin's complete works said of Calvin:

Though Luther was supremely great as a man and Zwingli was second to none as a Christian citizen, and Melancthon well deserves the appellation of the most learned of teachers, Calvin may justly be called the leader and standard-bearer of theologians.

While Calvin's work has been lauded and appreciated by those who have followed the orthodox Christian teaching of Reformed theology, Calvinism itself has been looked upon unfavorably as a whole. During the Second Great Awakening, men such as Charles Grandison Finney openly rejected the doctrine of Calvinism, referring to it as "Old Divinity" and an unbiblical hindrance to evangelism. In his systematic theology Finney remarked, "I have felt greater hesitancy

in forming and expressing my views upon this Perseverance of the saints, than upon almost any other question in theology."

Finney and his revivalist repudiation of the five points of Calvinism eventually gave way to the error of theological liberalism. Today Calvinism finds itself at odds with Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches that deny, among other things, God's sovereign work in election, with mainline Protestant churches which have eliminated the biblical doctrines of those who founded and raised their (now crumbling) denominations, and with the churches descended from Finney who view Calvinism as something unbiblical.

In 1997 Southern Baptist historian William Estep wrote of Calvinism: "Calvinism's God resembles Allah, the god of Islam, more than the God of grace and redeeming love revealed in Jesus Christ."¹⁰ With such opposition surrounding Calvinism, combined with the constant trials brought against Christianity by the world, one might be led to think that this doctrine, which Jonathan Edwards called "horrible"¹¹ before submitting to it and finding joy in its truth, has run its course. However, Calvin continues to speak to those living today, and his theology is being freely and widely embraced by the youth of America today.

In 1929 J. Gresham Machen gave a Baccalaureate address at Hampden-Sydney College, where he asked:

How should it be if we should turn to the Bible for help? We have turned to everything else, to things ancient and modern. Why should we not turn at length to that? I am indeed aware that the demand that I am making is very great.... I am asking you to follow him

who came not to bring peace upon the earth but a sword; I am asking you to accept what the Bible itself presents as central.¹²

The evangelical church of today has been criticized for its preaching of therapeutic properties such as wealth, a positive self-image, or a better love-life—rather than the gospel of salvation. Couple this with youth groups seeking to entertain as the world rather than teach Christ and a mass of young people are left with a spiritual thirst for Truth that is being slaked by the Reformed theology of Calvin. Journalist Collin Hansen remarks:

Many churches geared toward so-called spiritual seekers focus on God's immanence, his nearness. They talk about a personal relationship with Christ, emphasizing his friendship and reminding audiences that God made us in his image. It all makes sense, because so many baby boomers left churches that felt personal and irrelevant. But the culture has shifted. Fewer Americans now claim any church background. Evangelical mega churches, once the upstart challengers, have become the new mainstream. Teenagers who grew up with buddy Jesus in youth group don't know as much about Father God.... Calvinism puts much stock in transcendence, which draws out biblical themes such as God's holiness, glory, and majesty. Think of the prophet Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6:1: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple."... Beholding God's transcendence helps us experience his immanence or nearness.¹³

In a world dominated by post-modern thought that denies any absolute truth in favor of relativism, Calvin's theology cuts through the dulled ears of those who have been told that nothing is absolutely important and shown a God who has created mankind to glorify him and enjoy him forever—because he alone is due eternal glory and he alone can provide eternal joy.

Just as John Knox carried the Reformation from Calvin in Geneva to Scotland and ultimately the New World, Calvin's modern day disciples proclaim the reality of Ephesians 2, that we were dead in sins and made alive through Christ by grace through faith, the gift of God.

Just as men from all over Europe came to Geneva to study under Calvin and subsequently returned to their home countries to spread the Gospel through Calvinism, today's disciples of Calvin are going to his writings and theology and returning to their cultural homeland proclaiming the gospel via Calvinism, whether it be from faithful pastors preaching God's sovereignty in salvation from the pulpit or from Reformed musicians such as Curtis Allen, whose lyrics ask:

On his own, man would never choose holiness. He's incapable, so Christ chose holes in his wrist. To demonstrate his grace to save any, though, some would argue that it's faith that saves many, apart from him, like he'll just sit back, watch, and hope some believe before their heart stops; does that sound consistent with the God of the Bible, all-powerful but in salvation he's idle? If God needs help and that's really true, does that mean salvation is up to me and you? If Christ can create the earth, moon, and stars,

does his work not work unless it works for us?

Calvin has remarkably made an impact on the believers of his day, and the centuries following his death up to this very day. Warfield said of Calvin and his publication of the *Institutes*,

The publication of [the *Institutes*] was like the setting up of the King's Standard in Mediaeval Europe—that the lieges might gather to it. It was raising the banner on high that all men might see it and rally around it. It provided at last a platform for the hard beset Protestants, everywhere spoken against, and far too easily confounded with the radicals of the day—radicals who scouted the very foundations of the Christian faith, overturned the whole fabric of the social order, outraged the commonest dictates of ordinary decency. Its publication met a crisis and created an epoch. It gave a new stability to Protestantism, and set it before the world as a coherent system of reasoned truth by which men might live and for which they might gladly die.¹⁴

While Calvin's *Institutes* did fill a need in the days it was written, it is John Calvin's careful exposition of Scripture—his ability to leave us with a theology that is so intertwined and so reflective of the teachings found in Holy Scripture—that has taught and will continue to teach followers of Jesus Christ the doctrines of salvation as put forth in the entirety of the Bible. 📖

¹ Jason Anspach is a student at Western Reformed Seminary and is serving as a

ministerial intern in the Tacoma Bible Presbyterian Church.

² Robert L. Reymond, *John Calvin: His Life and Influence*, 28.

³ Calvin dedicated his commentary on 2 Corinthians to Wolmar.

⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/1111punk-t.html>.

⁵ B. B. Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Creation," *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 5:297.

⁶ The Geneva Bible was tremendously popular due to its marginal notes written by Calvin, Knox, Coverdale, and others. On the advice of Calvin it adopted the style of chapters being divided into verses. This was the Bible that was taken on the voyage of the *Mayflower* to America in 1620.

⁷ Reynolds, *John Calvin: His Life and Influence*, 80-81.

⁸ David Hall, *The Legacy of John Calvin: His Influence on the Modern World*, 75.

⁹ B. B. Warfield, "On the Literary History of Calvin's 'Institutes,'" *Works*, 5:373-374.

¹⁰ William R. Estep, "Doctrines Lead to 'Dunghill,' Prof Warns," *The Founders Journal* (Summer 1997), <http://www.founders.org/journal/fj29/article1.html>.

¹¹ Quoted in George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 41.

¹² Quoted in Stephen J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen's The Gospel in the Modern World and Other Short Writings*, 23.

¹³ Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists*, 21-22.

¹⁴ Warfield, "Calvin and the Reformation" in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, edited by John E. Meeter, I, 403-4.

CALVIN AND CHURCH GOVERNMENT

JAMES HUFF¹

Alistair McGrath, in his book *A Life of John Calvin*, states that,

Whereas Luther regarded the organization of the church as a matter of historical contingency, not requiring theological prescription, Calvin held that a definite pattern of church government was prescribed by scripture. Curiously, the lists of ecclesiastical offices (IV, iii.3; IV, iii.4; IV, iv.1) which Calvin presents within the *Institutes [of the Christian Religion]* do not harmonize, and leave both the status of elders (or presbyters) and the number of ministries in some doubt.”²

In Book 4 of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin focuses on a number of issues regarding the church. McGrath speaks of Calvin’s “experience as an organizer.” Calvin focuses on exact particulars and does not deal in “general abstractions.”

In the *Institutes* Calvin writes about “The Condition of the Ancient Church and the Kind of Government in Use Before the Papacy.”³ There he traces the departure of the Papacy from the practice of the ancient church and from Scriptural teaching in regard to church government. In the *Institutes* Calvin writes,

We have stated that Scripture sets before us three kinds of ministers. Similarly, whatever ministers the ancient church had it divided into three orders. For from the order of presbyters (1) part were chosen pastors and teachers; (2) the remaining part were charged with the censure

and correction of morals; (3) the care of the poor and the distribution of alms were committed to the deacons.

“Readers” and “acolytes,” however, were not the names of definite offices; it was these whom they called “clerics,” and whom through definite exercises they trained from youth to serve the church in order that they might better understand the purpose for which they had been appointed and might, in time, be more ready to step into office. This I shall soon show more fully.

Calvin plainly writes that it is a man who is to be an elder or deacon based upon the qualifications given in Scripture. This is an area of unfortunate departure in several Presbyterian and other Reformed groups, including the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and the Christian Reformed Church.

Therefore, Jerome, on setting forth five church orders, lists bishops, presbyters, deacons, believers, and catechumens; he gives no special place to the remaining clergy and monks.⁴

Basically Calvin upholds the position that “bishop” and “presbyter” are the same office. “All those to whom the office of teaching was enjoined they [the ancient church] called ‘presbyters.’”⁵ Calvin agrees with this. He does recognize that in each city the presbyters chose one to be bishop

in order that dissensions might not arise (as commonly happens) from equality of rank. Still, the bishop was not so much higher in honor and dignity as to have lordship over his colleagues. But the same functions that the consul has in the senate—to report on business, to request opinions, to preside over others in counseling, admonishing, and exhorting, to govern the whole action by his authority, and to carry out what was decreed by common decision—the bishop carried out in the assembly of presbyters.

And the ancients themselves admit that this was introduced by human agreement to meet the need of the times.

Calvin does note, though, that the bishop, “while he surpassed the others in dignity, he was subject to the assembly of his brethren.”⁶ He also quoted Ignatius that in the ancient church:

Afterward, to remove seeds of dissensions, all oversight was committed to one person. Just as the presbyters, therefore, know that they are, according to the custom of the church, subject to him who presides, so the bishops recognize that they are superior to the presbyters more according to the custom of the church than by the Lord’s actual arrangement, and that they ought to govern the church in co-operation with them. Jerome, however, tells us in another place what an

ancient arrangement it was. For he says that at Alexandria from the time of the Evangelist Mark to that of Heraclas and Dionysius, the presbyters always elected one of their number and set him in a higher rank, calling him “bishop.”⁷

Higher ranks, e.g., “archbishops and patriarchs” were established in the ancient church primarily for matters of discipline. Calvin recognizes that these offices are not taught in the Scriptures, yet he graciously says “that the ancient bishops did not intend to fashion any other form of church rule than that which God has laid down in His word.”⁸

In his *Commentary on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* concerning 1 Tim 5:17-21, Calvin mentions that “elder” is not a “name of age, but of office,”⁹ and concerning Tit 1:5-6, he states

Presbyters or *elders*. It is well known, that it was not on account of age, that they received this appellation; for sometimes those who were still young—such as Timothy—were admitted to this rank. But in all languages it has been customary to apply this honorable designation to all rulers. Although we may conclude, from I Tim 5:17, that there were two classes of presbyters, the context will immediately show, that here none other than teachers are meant, that is, those who were ordained to teach; for immediately afterwards, he will call the same persons “bishops.”¹⁰

Calvin also recognizes the office of deacon as established in God’s word. In his *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, concerning Acts 6:1-6 (page 229) he states,

Luke declareth here upon what occasion, and to what end, and also with what rite, deacons were first made. He saith, When there arose a murmuring amongst the disciples, it was appeased by this remedy, as it is said in the common proverb, Good laws have taken their beginning of evil manners. And it may seem to be a strange thing, seeing that this is a function so excellent and so necessary in the Church, why it came not into the apostles' minds at the first (before there was any such occasion ministered) to appoint deacons, and why the Spirit of God did not give them such counsel which they take now, being, as it were, enforced thereunto. But that which happened was both better then, and is also more profitable for us at this day, to be unto us an example. If the apostles had spoken of choosing deacons before any necessity did require the same, they should not have had the people so ready; they should have seemed to avoid labor and trouble; many would not have offered so liberally into the hands of other men. Therefore, it was requisite that the faithful should be convinced by experience, that they might choose deacons willingly, whom they saw they could not want; and that through their own fault.¹¹

Calvin contrasts this office and how it was to be carried out with that which was done by the Roman Catholics.

The Popish bishops did suck up great riches under color of the ministration or deaconship; nevertheless, they entangled themselves in divers business, which they were scarce able to overcome, though everyone of them had had ten heads. Notwithstanding, such is their wickedness, that they say that

there can be no church unless it be drowned in this depth; neither do they cease to brag and boast that they are successors of the apostles, whereas there is nothing which appeareth to be more contrary.¹²

Furthermore, concerning deacons, as mentioned in 1 Tim 3:8-13, Calvin wrote,

Likewise the deacons. There is no reason why the diversity of interpretations should lead us to entertain any doubt. It is certain that the Apostle speaks of those who hold a public office in the Church; and this refutes the opinion of those who think that domestic servants are here meant. As to the view given by others, that it denotes presbyters who are inferior to the bishop, that is without foundation; for it is manifest from other passages, that the term bishop belongs alike to all presbyters. All are constrained to acknowledge this; and more especially a passage in the first chapter of the Epistle to Titus proves clearly that this is the meaning. (Tit 1:7). It remains to be stated that we understand "the deacons" to be those who are mentioned by Luke, (Acts 6:3) and who had the charge of the poor."¹³

In regard to the matter of whether one person should appoint a minister for a particular church or whether the church has the right of choosing, Calvin states that to take away this right from the church or from the College of Pastors the right of judging would almost wholly profane "the sacred administration of the Church."¹⁴

Calvin plainly writes that it is a man who is to be an elder or deacon based

upon the qualifications given in Scripture. This is an area of unfortunate departure in several Presbyterian and other Reformed groups, including the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and the Christian Reformed Church.

There are many other areas of church government with which Calvin deals—many of which are of a practical nature. This writer would certainly recommend further reading in the aforementioned references. 📖

¹ James Huff is the Pastor of the First Bible Presbyterian Church in Kalispell, Montana.

² P. 171.

³ 4.4.

⁴ 4.4.1, pp. 1068-1069.

⁵ *Institutes* 4.4.2 (p. 1069).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.4.2 (p. 1070).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.4.2 (pp. 1069-1070).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.4.4.

⁹ P. 137.

¹⁰ P. 290.

¹¹ *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, 229.

¹² *Ibid.*, 233.

¹³ *Commentary on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 85-86.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

JOHN CALVIN ON CIVIL GOVERNMENT

GARRY Z. COLE¹

INTRODUCTION

Americans have, for the most part, embraced the political and legal doctrine that has in essence constructed a wall of separation between church and state. Most of us acknowledge that the concept is necessary to protect the free exercise of religion. Likewise, we are uncomfortably aware that the secularity of government is equally indispensable because there is little evidence that a national religion, or established church, would be the one of our choosing. As a Reformed church, we believe that the differing spheres of authority have no impact on the fact that governments remain accountable to God.² This reality provided the foundation for John Calvin's conviction that the civil government and the church must be separate in some regards, but in other ways allied. Calvin acknowledged the need for separation of church and state, but never considered the separation of state and God. But because his hope was for a Christian administration, and because he lived in a very different time, the principle of separation of church and state he endorsed was less restrictive than would be practical for most secular governments today.³

Calvin's views regarding government stemmed from his belief in the necessity of civil authority because of the depravity of man, his belief in providence, and his uncompromising certainty that God is sovereign over all things, including governments.⁴ His views regarding the corrupt nature of mankind as a result of Adam's disobedience to God are well

documented. He believed that man's entire being was utterly sinful.⁵ Calvin wrote to the King of France that the wicked were so bold and their iniquity was so entrenched within them, that even the strictest of laws might not stop the evil doers from trying to harm God's people or disrupt God's plan. What then would those people do if there was no government to restrain them? Calvin concluded that civil government is necessary to protect the true church or "to uphold a public form of religion amongst Christians, and humanity amongst men."⁶ Calvin proposed that the purpose of the magistrate was to uphold God's glory, to preserve the divine truth, and to ensure the continuance of the Kingdom of Christ. When he was called upon to draft ordinances that would serve as a constitution for Geneva, he established an ideological movement that would have a lasting impact on both the sacred and the secular worlds.

COMPONENTS OF GOVERNMENT

Calvin, writing on the subject of civil law in Chapter 20 of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, identified three components of governmental authority: (1) the Magistrate, who is the protector or guardian of the laws; (2) the Laws, by which the magistrate governs; and (3) the People, who are governed. He started with the contention that no authority or government exists unless it is ordained by God.⁷ Governments are granted power by the consent of those governed, but their original authority is a gift from God and is subject to God.⁸ Calvin often referred to the magistrate as the minister or servant of God.

In his "Prefatory Address to His Most Christian Majesty, Francis, King of the French," Calvin respectfully but

firmly reminded the king that a true sovereign is the minister of God. Any ruler who does not make his reign subservient to God is not a king, but a robber. Rulers are ministers of God to punish those who do evil. Calvin instructed that magistrates must constantly remind themselves that they are the ministers of God, and in so doing, they will be forced to exhibit a "kind of image of the Divine Providence, guardianship, goodness, benevolence, and justice."⁹

But this responsibility did not and does not establish the king or any other authority as the head of a state-sponsored religion. The Westminster Confession of Faith states, "The civil magistrate may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and Sacraments; or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven."¹⁰ Civil authorities must not dictate a specific understanding of what the Scriptures teach so that one particular denomination would be given preference, nor may they usurp the authority given to elders by Scripture. The state has powers relating to the church, but no powers within the church.

Government, by definition, is an entity with legal force and authoritative control.¹¹ The second aspect of any civil government is the set of laws by which the magistrate rules and by which the people are governed. Calvin believed that there is a natural law, available and applicable to all men, but that nations have the liberty to enact laws it deems beneficial and that address the special needs or circumstances of the people. He taught that all laws so established must be tested by the perpetual concept of love and must be equally applied to all. But Calvin also noted the distinction between civil and religious jurisdictions, stating that

“Christ’s spiritual Kingdom and the civil jurisdiction are things completely distinct.”¹² Calvin’s reforms in Geneva, where a type of Protestant state was established, still reflected his belief that man must be subject to two different but compatible governments: that which is found in the soul of man and relates to eternal life; and a second government that regulates the civic or material aspects of man. This view of “two kingdoms” is similar to the position established earlier by Martin Luther, and both reformers acknowledged that natural law alone would never be sufficient because of the foolishness of men.¹³

The third aspect of civil authority is the people that are governed. Calvin believed that every citizen had a duty to obey the government, even when the government was unjust.¹⁴ He understood that it is the duty of citizens to respect what God has ordained, leaving vengeance to him. The second duty of citizens is submission. We are to submit to the laws of the government, pay taxes that are levied, and perform required civic duties such as the bearing of arms in defense of the nation. There are certainly exceptions, but unless the government requires a Christian to do what God forbids or forbids them to do what God commands,¹⁵ we are called to be model citizens.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Calvin believed that these three components make up a system of civil government that is necessary and that will benefit the governed. He used the biblical example from the book of Judges to challenge those who would argue against the establishment of civil government. When there was no king, the people did

what was right in their own heart. Most would agree that even a corrupt government is better than no government at all. Anarchy is absolute lawlessness, and no state can long survive in that condition. Civil authorities are given the responsibility of protecting the lives and property of its citizens, and the depravity of the human heart makes that protection indispensable.

There are other benefits as well. Calvin saw civil government as an opportunity for good. Schools and roads could be provided to benefit both the rich and the poor. New hospitals and prisons were also a part of the social reforms he encouraged.¹⁶ He believed there was great potential for any government that established a state that would be an entity truly “under God.” He actually went so far as to question whether there could ever be lasting prosperity in any kingdom that is not ruled by God’s divine word.¹⁷ Calvin wrote that man derives as much benefit from civil government as he does from bread and water, light and air.¹⁸ Quite simply, civil government allows for the possibility that men can live together in harmony.

If we stop there, Calvin’s views on government do not generate a lot of controversy. Most today would agree that government is charged with the protection of life and property,¹⁹ and that position fits easily within Calvin’s view of government. More difficult is the question of whether civil authorities should be involved in any matter regarding enforcement of the first four of the Ten Commandments. Many would take issue with the rest of Calvin’s statement concerning civil government: “This is not its [civil government] only object, but it is, that no idolatry, no blasphemy against the

name of God, no calumnies against his truth, nor other offenses to religion break out and be disseminated among the people.”²⁰ Most Presbyterians would be reluctant to allow the state to enforce any duties toward God, particularly if physical coercion was employed to force conformity. In fact, the more integrated role seemingly championed by Calvin was a concern to early American Presbyterians who elected to revise Chapter 23 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The original wording could be interpreted as too Erastian, and it was deemed necessary to clarify the position of the church to protect it from interference.²¹ But John Calvin lived in a time when the Protestant church looked to the state for protection from Rome, and it was natural to give the state more prerogatives than seem reasonable today.²² Ecclesiastical discipline was generally under the control of civil magistrates, and it was the subject of specifically ecclesiastical courts that was a source of controversy.²³ Calvin’s statement must also be considered in light of the fact that he was a very religious man whose primary focus was advancement of the Reformation.²⁴ Calvin thought of the State as a Christian nation, and there is no evidence he would have wanted such involvement from a secular government without Christian leadership. And even in the early 1550s, he argued against the right of the state in the matter of excommunication, believing that to be the purview of the Consistory.²⁵

FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

So did Calvin promote one form of government over another? He is at times called an advocate of theocracy, usually by those citing the government of Geneva after Calvin returned in 1541. Geneva was governed by a City Council, but the

Consistory (made up of preachers and lay elders) ruled on all matters relating to the church, and could refer citizens to the City Council for discipline.²⁶ The Consistory was seldom opposed by the City Council, but the fact that both authorities existed indicates that it was not a true theocracy. But it is certainly true that Calvin believed the state should be “theocratic” in the sense that it was and is subject to God’s law.

In his writings Calvin discussed three forms of government: the monarchy (rule by one individual), democracy (the power rests with the people), and the aristocracy (a few selected individuals rule over many). Calvin has been characterized as a reformer of secular society in part because he championed liberation from the rule of tyrants, and he clearly rejected monarchy as a preferred form of government.²⁷ He thought it safer for government to be in the hands of many than in the hands of one, maintaining that monarchies are generally unable or unwilling to regulate themselves. Calvin vehemently opposed the theory that the Pope, or any king, should be able to claim absolute power.

Democracy is a system of government that fits well with Calvin’s thinking in some regards, but the fit is not perfect. Calvin stressed the importance of education and practical training in the rights and duties of citizens. He promoted the dignity and equality of man, understanding that even in our fallen condition we are granted a remnant of grace because we are created in God’s image. But while Calvin championed liberty, he also emphasized the principle of submission. Much has been made of the Calvinistic influences that impacted American history and its revolution from England.²⁸

The ideological origins of the American Revolution may have been rooted in Calvinism, and a love of liberty may well have been planted in the hearts of American patriots as the result of Calvin's reforms, but it is doubtful that John Calvin would have actually supported such a revolution. He declared that men should be content with whatever form of government exists, maintaining that governments are established according to the providence and particular dispensation of God.

The form of government apparently preferred by Calvin was aristocracy, or a blend of aristocracy and democracy.²⁹ Aristocracies have generally been associated with states where power was in the hands of the wealthy, the landowners, or some other class of the social elite. Rather than the state being ruled by those most able, a hereditary oligarchy generally existed that kept power in the hands of wealthy families regardless of achievement or intelligence. But in its true form, aristocracy is a form of government that advances "rule by the best."³⁰ Calvin endorsed the concept of an aristocracy, believing that it was sanctioned by scripture: "This has ...already been confirmed also by the Lord himself when he established an aristocracy... among the Israelites...."³¹ Calvin was acutely aware of man's fallen condition, and knew that a democracy could put government into the hands of the worst as easily as the hands of the best. This understanding, combined with his opposition to totalitarianism and absolutism, became components of the ideology that served as a precursor to the development of constitutional governments where the people collectively decide who the "best" are that will govern them. For this reason, Calvin is often credited with being with

the forefather of the republican form of government, and the virtual founder of America.³²

CONCLUSION

By applying the principle of the sovereignty of God to the establishment of governments, be they secular or sacred, Calvin offered liberation from the tyranny that thrived under Arminianism and Roman Catholicism.³³ But for people and societies both, he stressed the need for moral righteousness and warned that no society could prosper long without a government in submission to God. He proposed a Christian government that would control the people for their own good, and the results of his social and institutional reforms in Geneva were so successful that even his critics praised his political thought.³⁴ He believed there should be mutual support and cooperation between the civil and the ecclesiastical jurisdictions, but he knew the sinful nature of man meant there would be no perfect kingdom on this earth. So as we do today, Calvin ultimately looked forward to the time when Christ will reign on earth,³⁵ stating, "for it is not of us, but of the Living God and His Christ" who will "rule from sea to sea and from the river even to the ends of the earth."³⁶ 

¹ Garry Z. Cole is Pastor of the Ryder Memorial Presbyterian Church in Bluff City, Tennessee.

² G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Second Edition; Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing Co., 1964), 311.

³ Clark, Gordon H. *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Unicoi, Tenn.: The Trinity Foundation, 2001), 212.

⁴ McNeill, John T., Editor, *Calvin: On God and Political Duty* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1950).

- ⁵ Barlow, Jonathan. *Calvinism*, 10 Jan 2009, The Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics <<http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/index.html>>.
- ⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Chapter 20, "Of Civil Government," trans. by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).
- ⁷ Harro Hopfl, *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- ⁸ "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth" (Prov 8:16-17).
- ⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ch. 20.
- ¹⁰ WCF 23:3.
- ¹¹ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster Online. 10 January 2009; <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/government>>.
- ¹² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ch. 20.
- ¹³ David M. Whitford, "Cura Religionis or Two Kingdoms: The Late Luther on Religion and the State in the Lectures on Genesis," *Church History* 73:1 (Mar 1, 2004).
- ¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ch. 20; see also Rom 13:2.
- ¹⁵ Acts 5:29.
- ¹⁶ William C. Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1983).
- ¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ch. 20.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Rom 13:4.
- ²⁰ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ch. 20.
- ²¹ Gordon H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?*
- ²² *Ibid.*, 212.
- ²³ Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1990).
- ²⁴ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932), 399-400.
- ²⁵ Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, 114.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111-112.
- ²⁷ Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, transl. by M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).
- ²⁸ David W. Hall and David J. Vaughan, *A Heart Promptly Offered: The Revolutionary Leadership of John Calvin* (Nashville: Cumberland House Publishing, 2006).
- ²⁹ John T. McNeill, editor, *Calvin: On God and Political Duty* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1950), 53.
- ³⁰ Based on the Greek word, *aristos*, which means "best."
- ³¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ch. 20.
- ³² D. James Kennedy, *What if Jesus had Never been Born?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994), 60; Kennedy quotes the German historian Von Ranke, saying, "John Calvin was the virtual founder of America."
- ³³ Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*.
- ³⁴ J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract, Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume, and Rousseau*, ed. by Sir Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 206.
- ³⁵ Dan 2:32-35; Isa 11:4; Ps 2:9.
- ³⁶ Ps 72:8.

JOHN CALVIN, THE WORK ETHIC, AND VOCATION

ALLISTER STONE¹

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

John Calvin was a French reformer of church and culture. Protestants look back to him, and note the impact of his great mind in applying the doctrines of predestination. He was one whom God used as a catalyst to assimilate and manipulate the works of the past to change the future. Many may not be familiar with the lasting influences that “predestination” had on vocation and society. His “new” understanding of work and vocation brought freedom, assurance, and joy to all those being sanctified by it.

Work is the first thing that God revealed about himself. “In the beginning God created” (Gen 1:1; cf. Ps 8:3). Confirming this idea is Gen 2:2, “And on the seventh day God ended his work, . . . and He rested.” The penultimate of God’s creation, mankind, was given an occupation at the time of his creation.

In the beginning the work was pleasant and even enjoyable² with a mist coming up from the ground to water the earth. Adam and his wife sinned in the garden by eating the forbidden fruit. Soon after, God cursed the ground on account of man’s disobedience. Some have incorrectly applied the curse to ‘work’ and not the ‘ground.’³

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, . . . Cursed [is] the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat [of] it all the days of your life. Both thorns and

thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you [are,] and to dust you shall return.”⁴ (Gen 2:17-19)

It seems like work has remained an uphill battle for mankind since the curse. Work in the Bible continued to be necessary, to prevent poverty, hunger, stealing, and as a means of judging character (Prov 6:6; 18:9; 20:11; Eph 4:28). Solomon gave numerous encouragements to avoid sloth, and taught that the accumulation of possessions is futile. The Jewish understanding of work can be further seen in the teachings of the Talmud.

Calvin vocational idea was that “there would be no employment so mean and sordid (provided we follow our vocation) as not to appear truly respectable, and be deemed highly important in the sight of God.”³³ Calvin remarked that we are like a “useless block of wood” if we feel “called to laziness,” as that is not what God intended. Contrary to Luther, Calvin felt that striving culturally was appropriate as long as your motivation was correct.

Then along came the Greeks. To them work was the curse⁵ and was intended only for the lowest class of people, slaves.⁶ It was the free men who engaged in art, philosophy, politics, large agriculture endeavors, or war.⁷ In classical Greek the word⁸ was the word for 'work' as well as their 'god of sorrow.'⁹ Aristotle thought to be out of work or unemployed was good fortune,¹⁰ as it freed you up for better things. He also believed that money was unproductive in society.¹¹ There was a pervasive

belief that a person's prudence, morality, and wisdom was directly proportional to the amount of leisure time that a person had. A person who worked, when there was no need to do so, would run the risk of obliterating the distinction between slave and master.... Leadership, in the Greek state and culture, was based on the work a person have to do, and any person who broke this cultural norm was acting to subvert the state itself.¹²

Ancient Rome built itself on the back of the Greek ideas, with an even larger slave labor component. In Rome land was king, while free craftsman and small farmers were the source of workers and overseers for the large building projects carried out by the slaves.¹³ It was noted, that "the prevalent view among the aristocracy was that wage earnings were sordid, that workshops were low place, and that trades were despised."¹⁴ "Pagan Rome was for the elite. From it the "masses were excluded, and the vulgar populace was hated."¹⁵ And work was still a curse.

Augustine Bishop of Hippo influenced many, including Calvin,¹⁶ yet did little to change the perception of work.

Augustine was of the persuasion that the monastics and clergy should labor only as it was useful to prevent sin, but that work was a punishment.¹⁷ He continued to struggle with pagan philosophy; "it took a long time to see the full implications of his faith in the grace of God."¹⁸ Monastic life, martyrdom, and the priesthood were things that he and the early church considered heavenly, and all other tasks were lower and worldly. The church's response to work became "so heavenly minded that they did no earthly good."¹⁹ It was during this time that the church gained power.

Augustine had perceived the church and secular state to be in a symbiotic relationship for mutual benefit, support, and preservation.²⁰ As a consequence of the union, the mindset and productivity of the state's masses would be guided by the oversight of the church. As time progressed the state was no longer independent, but subservient to the church's supreme ruler, the Pope. Other early church thinkers did not make significant change to the view of vocation either.

A "hierarchy of professions and trades was developed by St. Thomas Aquinas as part of his encyclopedic consideration of all things human and divine."²¹ His ranking had a farmer as supreme, and a merchant as lowest. All these were, however, lower than the works of the church. Luther's work ethic was a continuation of the status quo and position, with humbleness and patience. He combined this with the feeling that it is not the fruit of labor, but the labor itself that would set you free.²² So imagine the changes when reformation came to Geneva with Calvin!

It is at this point that I digress a moment to reflect on the man Calvin, on this his 500th anniversary. I would like to draw your attention to some 'current' perceptions of him, influences on him, and his ideal plan.

It has been said of Calvin that he was "God-intoxicated" as he lived his life unreservedly before the face of God.²³ Froude noted the unique skill set that God had given Calvin when he said "no eye could have detected more keenly the unsound spots in the creed of the church, nor was there a Reformer...so resolute to exercise, tear out and destroy what was distinctly seen as false...and make truth...the rule of practical life."²⁴ And Stickelberger noted "like his thinking, so is his style: not ambiguous, but crystal clear, despising unnecessary flowering language, a mirror of his purity."²⁵ Though not perfect, he was a product of and reaction to earlier influences.

Augustine and Bucer can be seen as an amalgam in Calvin's thoughts on predestination and work ethic.²⁶ Calvin's belief in the priesthood of all believers was similar to Luther's, although they differed on sacramental views. His views of the state and vocation were different than any before. Also, he had a new vision for the city of Geneva.

Originally just passing through, he was persuaded to stay and help in the church. This initial overnight stay extended into three years. Noting a need for revival and reformation from the Catholic church, he attempted to make Geneva so earthly good that it would be heavenly minded.²⁷ With Calvin in the pulpit

The church could warn and admonish those guilty.... The council of

Geneva would punish those guilty of such offences as being absent from church, dancing or playing cards,...swearing,... giving one's daughter to a Catholic in marriage, arranging a marriage between an elderly woman and a young man,... denying the reality of the devil and hell.²⁸

Setting up a theocratic kingdom on earth was not well received when the commitment to it became personal. This theocratic kingdom brought with it many social innovations, such as this: doctors and surgeons would be called back to the hospital to take care of the poor in addition to their other duties (not something done in those days). Hostels were founded for strangers, prisoners were gathered together on Saturdays to listen to sermons, and an infirmary for the local and traveling ill was started.²⁹ For persistent adultery Calvin favored the death penalty, which was carried out a couple of times. Despite this, there was a reluctance to enact laws against prostitution and blasphemy.³⁰ "Calvin's aim in this section...was to show what is God's will in the orders that exist...and on the divine will! There can be no Christian freedom without submission to the divine will."³¹ This holistic view of predestination prepared the way for his vocational viewpoint.³²

Calvin vocational idea was that "there would be no employment so mean and sordid (provided we follow our vocation) as not to appear truly respectable, and be deemed highly important in the sight of God."³³ Calvin remarked that we are like a "useless block of wood" if we feel "called to laziness," as that is not what God intended. Contrary to Luther, Calvin felt that striving culturally was appropriate as long as your motivation was cor-

rect, as Paul writes, “whatever is not done out of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).

Van Til notes, “Calvin discusses duty and beauty, vocation and avocation (he allows room for such recreations as golf and sport in general.”³⁴ In the *Institutes*, Calvin notes that we are not forbidden to drink wine, enjoy music, laugh, or to have a great meal, but all things are to be done to the glory of God.³⁵ This seems well and good, but if I am an unregenerate person what do I do?

Many still dread, fight, and avoid work, and count down the days until retirement from their current vocation. Instead, let us look at things the way Calvin did. Do not forget the process that has given us the freedom to pursue any vocation our heart desires. Often, the history that led up to the emancipation of the workers is under-appreciated. Many are negligent in acknowledging God or thanking God for allowing them the opportunity to participate in his plan, which includes our working.

The good news is that God has a plan for you as well. Wendel notes, “nevertheless, the reprobate sometimes show

The WRS Journal 16:2, August 2009

signs analogous to those of vocation.... The reprobate are occasionally touched almost by a like sentiment as the elect.” His impression of Calvin’s thought was that even the non-believers have a vocation to carry out God’s will. The non-regenerate may “feel” that they are doing the “right thing,” and could not fathom doing anything else, but this false sense of assurance should not be interpreted as a sign of salvation. Calvin’s perception of vocation and his thoughts on predestination have made many lasting changes seen even today.

Although Calvin was not popular with many in his day, his vocational views can be seen impacting culture in Holland, England, Scotland, and even America, where “our Pilgrim and Puritan fathers were inspired with a sense of mission and vocation.”³⁶ This work ethic has been influential in forming what employers are looking for today.

According to Maywood, employers’ rankings of the attributes most desired in employees consistently confirm that the most desirable employee is one who demonstrates the traditionally valued characteristics of reliability, dependability, pride of craftsmanship, and willingness to learn and who derives personal gratification from a job well done.³⁷

Not only did Calvin free people to pursue upward mobility to the glory of God, but he also freed people to enjoy the fruit of their labor. To Calvin riches were not the “evil” the monastics had thought. Matter and material things are made by God and are to be enjoyed, with temperance, and to forbid such was tantamount to blasphemy. “The poor you have always” is all part of the predeter-

mined plan of God. He even encouraged people to dress up to make good first impressions for the glory of God.³⁸ So while Luther tolerated the world, Calvin mastered it.³⁹

As in all things, Calvin did believe that there was some flexibility to the social ethic. Paul's admonition in Rom 14:4, "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls," seems to be in Calvin's mind when he states, "do not put pressure on others to follow our example, as if it were a rule.... Avoid rashly dictating what others should do."⁴⁰ We should, like Peter, learn John 21:22, "If I will that he remain till I come, what [is that] to you? You follow me." And we should do our task to the glory of God and try and not to micromanage what everyone else does.⁴¹ This principle then gives backbone to creativity and independence.

As Christians we are then encouraged to express ourselves in legitimate means and in a prudent manner when being imposed upon. Calvin encouraged prudent discrimination of character by adding, "It would be imprudent and foolish to overlook" traits, that our God-given mind would warn us about.⁴² Nor "does [a Christian] knowingly and intentionally allow himself to be imposed on; he does not relinquish his prudence and judgment so that he can be more easily cheated, nor does he forget the difference between black and white."⁴³ One must also acknowledge, "God sometimes imposes... new and unusual roles"⁴⁴ for each vocation. This great freedom does not come without responsibility.

It seems in history that equality and democracy have been found on the side

that was Calvinistic. Aristocratic and unequal society tended to be Arminian and Catholic. Bancroft notes that predestination of life and vocation "inspires a resolute, almost defiant, freedom"⁴⁵ that is unparalleled by any other method by which man tries to teach equality.

Like a pejorative, "work" is not something many revel in. Many still dread, fight, and avoid work, and count down the days until retirement from their current vocation. Instead, let us look at things the way Calvin did. Do not forget the process that has given us the freedom to pursue any vocation our heart desires. Often, the history that led up to the emancipation of the workers is under-appreciated. Many are negligent in acknowledging God or thanking God for allowing them the opportunity to participate in his plan, which includes our working. We must remind ourselves that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, it should be done to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). 

¹ Alister Stone, M.D., is a graduate of Western Reformed Seminary and is licensed to preach by the Northwest Presbytery of the Bible Presbyterian Church. He is a physician in emergency medicine at St. Joseph Hospital in Tacoma, Washington, and an elder in the Tacoma Bible Presbyterian Church.

² "... but what before his fall he did with ease and pleasure, was not to be accomplished after it without painful and persevering exertion." Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (1871), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.i.html>.

³ “*In opere tuo*“ — Vulgate. The Septuagint makes the same mistake: Ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις σου, “in your works,” Charles Christiansen, Carolyn Manville Baum, Julie Bass-Haugen, *Occupational Therapy: Performance, Participation, and Well-being* (3rd ed.), 3, 26.

⁴ NKJV.

⁵ Maywood, A. G. (1982). “Vocational Education and the Work Ethic,” *Canadian Vocational Journal*, 18:3, 7-12. as quoted in <http://www.coe.uga.edu/workethic/historypdf.pdf>.

⁶ The ancient Greeks regarded the most desirable and the only “good” life as one of leisure. Work, in the sense of supplying the basic necessities of life, was a degrading activity which was to be allocated to the lowest groups within the social order, especially to slaves. Slavery was the social device which enabled the Greeks to maintain their view of work as something to be avoided by a full human being: what human beings “shared with all other forms of animal life was not considered to be human” (Arendt 1959; as quoted in Tony Watson, *Sociology, Work and Industry* (Routledge, 2003), 173-174; see http://www2.ciando.com/shop/book/readex/index.cfm/fuseaction/readex/bok_id/4038/cat_id/194/cat_nav/168/bookshow/Sociology-Work-and-Industry/isbnshow/0203103041,9780203103043/usessl/1/CFID/24228460/CFTOKEN/18971789).

⁷ *Homo faber: Work through the Ages*, trans. by D. C. Fisher (New York: Harcourt Brace); quoted in Roger P. Hill, “History of work Ethic,” <http://www.coe.uga.edu/workethic/hpro.html>.

⁸ Walter Scheidel, Sitta Von Reden, and Francis Taylor, *The Ancient Economy* *The WRS Journal* 16:2, August 2009

(2002), 23, as noted in <http://books.google.com/books?id=31NpStyNegC>.

⁹ His mother was the goddess Eris (“discord”), who was the daughter of Nyx (“night”), <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ponos>.

¹⁰ Aristotle as quoted in R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 110.

¹¹ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Baker Academic, 2001), 102.

¹² L. Braude, *Work and Workers* (New York: Praeger, 1975), as noted in Roger B. Hill, *Historical Context of the Work Ethic*.

¹³ Herbert A. Applebaum, *The Concept of Work: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (SUNY Press, 1992), 120.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123; Treggiari, citing Cicero.

¹⁵ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 68.

¹⁶ C. Gregg Singer, *John Calvin: His roots and Fruits* (The Prebyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), vii.

¹⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, trans. by Marcus Dods (T. & T. Clark, 1871), 517.

¹⁸ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 103, “Calvin ... saw monasticism as an evil that led to pride, envy, strife,... laziness,... and unhealthy dualism.”

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

²¹ David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 188; A Tilgher, *Homo faber: Work through the Ages*, as quoted in <http://www.coe.uga.edu/workethic/hreferences.html>.

- ²² Ernst Troeltsch, as noted in George Lundskow, *The Sociology of Religion: A Substantive and Transdisciplinary Approach* (Pine Forge Press, 2008), 101; Howard Kohn, *The Last Farmer: An American Memoir* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 102.
- ²³ Henry R Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 93.
- ²⁴ As quoted in N. S. McFetridge, *Calvinism in History: Calvin Classics* (Vol. 1; Still Waters Revival Books; Reprint, 1989), 17.
- ²⁵ Emanuel Stickelberger, *Calvin: A Life*, trans. by David G. Gelzer (John Knox Press, 1954), 31.
- ²⁶ Francois Wendel, *Calvin: Origins, and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. by Philip Mairet (Baker Books, 1997), 141.
- ²⁷ Emanuel Stickelberger, *Calvin: A Life*, 93.
- ²⁸ C. Gregg Singer, *John Calvin: His Roots and Fruits* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), 64.
- ²⁹ Emanuel Stickelberger, *Calvin: A Life*, 92.
- ³⁰ John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford University Press, 1973), 189.
- ³¹ Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. by Geoffery W. Bromiley (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 207.
- ³² "Calvin thus tied his understanding of vocation to his clear doctrine of predestination," William C. Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 232.
- ³³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by John Allen, (6th ed.; Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-school work, 1921), 3:10:650.
- ³⁴ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 104.
- ³⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:19.
- ³⁶ Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, 94.
- ³⁷ "Vocational Education and the Work Ethic in a Changing Workplace," ERIC Digest No. 78; ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education Columbus OH; <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-929/ethic.htm>.
- ³⁸ Bouwsma, 196.
- ³⁹ A. Dakin, *Calvinism* (The Westminster Press, 1965), 199.
- ⁴⁰ Bouwsma, 192.
- ⁴¹ Dakin, 202.
- ⁴² Bouwsma, 192.
- ⁴³ Ibid.; Bouwsma does a good job with Calvin's work discussing the Sermon on the Mount; cf. John Calvin's commentary on Matt 5:39f. This, as argued by Calvin, should also apply on a national level, pp. 193, 35.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 194.
- ⁴⁵ As quoted in N. S. McFetridge, *Calvinism in History: Vol. 1 of Calvin Classics*, (reprinted; Still Waters Revival Books, 1989), 13.

CALVIN'S INFLUENCE

THE STORY OF CALVINISM IN THE NEW WORLD: A SYNOPSIS

LEONARD W. PINE*

INTRODUCTION

As I pondered on the enormity of my suggested topic, it occurred to me that it would be somewhat pathetic for me to attempt to add to the world's knowledge of John Calvin. I expect that hundreds of thousands of pages have been written on the subject. When it comes to a contemporary view of how he has impacted our English-speaking world, and the New World in particular, I realized that the research alone could take years. But I do feel quite capable of introducing the readers of this *Journal* to an excellent source of which they may not have previously aware. So, I decided to turn to one of the most respected authorities on Calvin extant today, John T. McNeill. McNeill's *The History and Character of Calvinism*, first published in 1954, thoroughly examines Calvin's thought and impact around the world in a scholarly and yet accessible way. My thought here is not to review the book, but to offer a synopsis of the work in the pertinent passages that have to do with Calvin's impact in the New World, and through it, in the modern era. The edition I worked with was published as a paperback in New York by Oxford University Press, Inc., in 1967. The page numbers you see sprinkled through this article are from that edition.

BEGINNINGS

The first Calvinists in the Americas arrived in Rio de Janeiro in 1555. Gaspard de Coligny brought a French Huguenot expedition there, but its leader abandoned his Protestantism and shipped the refugees back to France as heretics. Another Huguenot refugee expedition arrived in Canada's Bay of Fundy in 1602. After a winter on the island of St. Croix the settlers moved to the mainland and established Port Royal (now Annapolis, Nova Scotia). Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec for the French in 1608. Once it was well established, the government of New France gave the Huguenots no liberty to worship or organize after about 1647 or so, and French Calvinism in the Americas dwindled away to nothing.

In 1562 another expedition went to the Florida coast, where three years later they were murdered by the Spaniards. Some Calvinists did manage to come and stay, though, establishing small churches in New Netherlands, Massachusetts, and South Carolina. From these beginnings the Protestant Reformation took root in America.

THE ENGLISH IN AMERICA

Unlike the French, who wanted their heretics back so they could put them to death, the English were quite glad to be rid of the Puritans and for the most part let them go whither they would. Many went to the Virginia colony, where the Anglican Church was established in the charter of 1606. Pilgrims (the separatists of their day) and Puritans made their way to what would become the Plymouth and

the Massachusetts Bay Colonies. The Pilgrims at Plymouth listened to the preaching of John Robinson, whose ideas of a totally autonomous local church were a strange brand of Calvinism for the time, but a natural outgrowth of Calvinistic principles. The Plymouth Plantation members adhered to devout obedience to the Scripture interpreted according to Calvinistic hermeneutical principles and courageous living trusting in the sovereign providence of God.

The larger colony of Massachusetts Bay was founded in 1628-30, and by 1640 more than 20,000 Puritans had arrived. These were the flower of the Puritan movement, and they were led by such men as John Cotton, Thomas Mather, and John Davenport, all from Cambridge. Their Calvinism was not a rigid and static system, and they weren't happy with either episcopacy or Presbyterianism. Slowly congregationalism spread throughout the Puritan colonies, though retaining elements of Presbyterianism. Thomas Hooker promoted political suffrage to all free men, even if they weren't communicants in the church. In 1636 Roger Williams, who for his ideas of separation of church and state had been ousted from Massachusetts, founded at Providence the colony of Rhode Island, where he allowed just about anyone to come. 1636 also saw the founding of Harvard College. Some of the Puritans stressed the responsibility of men, others of the goodness of God; still others the entire Calvinist pattern of theology. Various synods were held to decide major issues facing the Church. The Westminster Confession was adopted bodily, except for the sections dealing with polity and discipline. Cotton Mather's writings, among others, indicate the acceptance of essen-

tially Presbyterian views of the ministry. But the moral character of people started to slide, and revival would not come fully until Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening.

THE DUTCH IN AMERICA

In 1609 a tiny Dutch colony was begun on Manhattan Island. Fourteen years afterwards groups of Walloon Calvinists settled on Manhattan and Staten Island, and also near Albany. In 1653 New Amsterdam was incorporated as a city on Manhattan Island.

"In 1640, it was formally declared that only the Reformed Church was to be permitted in New Netherlands" (p. 342). But by 1663 Peter Stuyvesant, the director of the colony, had granted liberty of conscience in the colony. The next year the English navy threatened New Amsterdam, and Stuyvesant had to surrender. In 1673 the Dutch recovered the city, but it became English again by treaty in 1674 and was renamed New York. In 1696 the Dutch Church of the City of New York was incorporated. The Dutch Reformed Church in America was to have a prominent role both in the formation of a nation and in the Great Awakening.

THE SCOTS IN AMERICA

In 1651 Cromwell sent some of his Scottish prisoners to New England; six years later they established the Scots Charitable Society of Boston to aid one another or any other Scot that might happen by. About 1710 large numbers of Scots from Ulster, who had suffered under Queen Anne's government, began to arrive in New England and Pennsylvania. They became the backbone of the early pioneers, founding settlements and churches all over the wilderness. Some

of the eminent Scots-Irish leaders of this period were Francis Makemie, an able and fearless Presbyterian preacher; William Tennent, who founded the first Presbyterian educational institution in America in 1727; and the Scot John Witherspoon, who was to be the only clergyman among the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

THE GERMANS IN AMERICA

The decades that brought the Scots-Irish migration saw also the arrival of thousands of Germans, many of them Palatinate Calvinists. A congregation of both Dutch and German Reformed in Philadelphia (1710) soon became Presbyterian. Through the efforts of travelling ministers John Philip Boehm, George Michael Weiss, and Michael Schlatter, the German Reformed Church spread through much of Pennsylvania and New York and came to “vigorous life” (p. 349).

POLITICAL INFLUENCES

John Witherspoon was not the only Presbyterian who favored freedom. In Calvinism itself there was a desire for church autonomy from the state, and there was a “distinctly congenial” (p. 347) attitude to republicanism, which was brought to fruition in the Revolution. On the whole, Presbyterians vigorously opposed the monarchy. Gradually they developed a greater toleration of other religious groups. In 1776 Virginia’s Bill of Rights guaranteed all men the free exercise of religious beliefs. After many years of dissent, “Presbyterianism had ceased to demand a position of establishment and, without losing its religious character, had become committed to the principle of religious freedom” (p. 348).

WEDGES

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries most of the Calvinistic churches were rent through a series of controversies. Primarily four elements characterized this period of Calvinism: Erastianism (the philosophy of the supremacy of the state in ecclesiastical matters), rationalism (which encouraged acquiescence to Erastianism for ecclesiastical “safety”), new evangelical forces, and the ensuing tensions and secessions.

Dissension Among the Scots

Scottish Presbyterians were the hardest hit by this pattern of events, but every place where Reformed Churches had been politically established suffered similarly. Even in America revivals brought with them the tormented breath of rationalism and strife. The Enlightenment threatened Christianity on all fronts.

Though the Scottish church was reunited in the 1690s, the reign of Queen Anne saw it split again over the issue of patronage, which took the call of the ministers out of the hands of the congregation, and placed it in the hands of patrons who had donated the land for the church. The seceders went to Ireland, Canada, and the United States. A movement was begun early in the nineteenth century to reunite the fragments of the church, and in 1820 the United Secession Church gathered together most of the seceders.

The majority of the Church remained intact in Scotland, and it was during this period that the ministers of the Scottish Kirk led the world in the sciences, literature, and history—but not in theology. Some of the Evangelicals did not secede, however, and they remained behind to

give the General Assembly grief. This was also a period of great Evangelical revivals, the beginning of the Great Awakening. The Evangelicals had their effect. The Church of Scotland in 1829 was the first national church to authorize and maintain foreign missions. Scotland's theology was little affected by evangelical Arminianism, even though Wesley was well-received. The Scottish Baptists were on their feet in the early 1800s, as Calvinistic in theology as the Presbyterians.

The patronage issue would not stay down, and in 1843 about half of the General Assembly walked out when the government tried to force patronage on them. They began the Free Church of Scotland which embraced "the majority of the most zealous and active among both clergy and laity" (p. 361).

America's Great Awakening and the "Fallout"

"The stages of Evangelical revival were ... attended by strife" (p. 361). The Evangelicals' aggressive pietism stirred up opposition, which fortunately was overcome. The Great Awakening was led by Jonathan Edwards, who must be regarded as the most eminent of American Calvinists. In the eighteenth century Presbyterians still had a numerical advantage over the Congregationalists, as well as the ecclesiastical control of the American colonies. The Presbyterians had much to do with the formation and support of the American republic, and the expansion of it also. They had a large part in missions to the American Indians, and were joined by other churches in reaching out to the frontiers of the new nation. "The life of all churches of Calvinist origin in America at that period present two

notable pluses, revivalism and concern for education" (p. 365). Camp meetings began to be held in 1800, and from 1782 to 1850 twenty-eight colleges were founded in frontier states alone, joined by others in the original colonies.

But the nineteenth century saw also many divisions. Many of the colleges founded were begun by seceders from the established Presbyterian Church, and the Congregationalists had their problems as well. The cause of the divisions was rooted in pietism and the revivals—disagreement over methods or theology or both caused a lot of controversy in all branches of the Reformed churches, some of which has never been settled.

REUNION EFFORTS IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

Through the nineteenth century Scottish cries for Christian unity were incessant. No instant changes were to take place, however; the restoration of unity in the Church of Scotland was a cumulative process. The first stage began in 1820, and was not brought to completion until 2 October 1929, when the United Free Church and the Church of Scotland were reunited in a church "as one established and free" (p. 376).

In England, the English Presbyteries, shaking off Unitarian influences and affirming the Westminster Standards, joined with Scottish Presbyterians in England to form the Presbyterian Church of England in June 1876.

In America, the Civil War caused Northern Presbyterians to unite into the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and the Southern Presbyterians to join in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. This breach was not healed until 1983.

In Canada, the four Presbyterian churches there united to form the Presbyterian Church of Canada in 1875. Discussion of union with the Anglicans was begun about 1889, and in the next decade union with the Methodists was considered as well. As the negotiations went on, the Anglicans and Baptists declined to participate, with the minority of Presbyterian groups joined in the United Church of Canada on June 10, 1925. Affirming the Westminster Standards, its polity is basically Reformed, and it maintains "a strong ecumenical consciousness."

Australia saw the final union of Presbyterian elements in 1901 in the Presbyterian Church of Australia. There are hopes for union with the Methodists and Congregationalists. New Zealand's Presbyterianism of the Southern and Northern Island joined in 1901. Negotiations for union with Methodists and Congregationalists "have reached an advanced stage" (p. 381).

Finally, in South Africa the Reformed Free Church of South Africa (growing out of Dutch Reformed influences) was formed in 1859. "The four territorially separated branches of the Dutch Reformed... were associated in a Federal Council in 1906" (p. 382).

EXPANSION THROUGH MISSIONS

With the rise of British and Dutch sea power, missions became a compelling vision of Protestant hearts. The Baptist Missionary Society was founded in 1792, and was soon followed by other missionary societies in England, and also in Scotland, America, Switzerland, France, Holland, and Germany. The leadership in almost all of these was Calvinist, under whatever denominational flag they la-

The WRS Journal 16:2, August 2009

bored. Denominationalism on the whole "shrank out of sight in the foundation and support of the missionary societies" (p. 385). The first world missions conference was held in New York in May 1854. Thirty-one years later in London, the "Century Conference" adopted the principles of comity, or, not proselytizing another group's converts while working together for common edification. The Far East and Africa saw the working of this system primarily, and the most conspicuous result of the system was the founding of the United Church of South India in 1947.

ECUMENICITY

The modern Ecumenical Movement had its beginnings around 1846, with the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in London. "The Alliance was concerned with spiritual and not organic unity; but where the former is enjoyed, the obstacles to the latter disappear" (p. 387). The year 1875 saw the founding of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, which organization has been more consistently favorable to ecumenical co-operation and unity than perhaps any other denominational family. A further step was made at Edinburgh in 1910 with the World Missionary Conference, sometimes thought of as originating the present Ecumenical movement. "Calvin's words to Cranmer that he would not hesitate to cross ten seas if he might help in uniting the severed members of the Church's body express an attitude that has been revived in the churches of the Calvinist family" (p. 388).

CALVINISM IN A CHANGING WORLD OF THOUGHT

Calvinism and Philosophy

“Calvinism and Puritanism never said an emphatic *NO* to the current forces of secular culture” (p. 390). Peter Ramas, a sixteenth century philosopher, whose anti-Aristotelian logic held syllogisms in contempt, proposed dealing with evidence by argumentative rhetoric instead. The seventeenth century saw Descartes with his method of doubt. These appeals to logic did not fail to lure Calvinistic minds, and though decried by some, they were championed by many of influence—John Cocceius, for example. The teaching of mathematics and the sciences grew more popular—1614 was the year that logarithms were invented by Calvinist John Napier of Scotland; and this period saw, also, the development of algebra by Descartes. The sciences were mostly the natural sciences, with a fair sprinkling of chemistry. At this time science was not considered to be the enemy of religion, but rather religion’s handmaiden.

The eighteenth century saw theology of all types, and Calvinism especially, assailed from many sides. Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant, while claiming to further science and better religion, secularized the first and shook the second.

In America of the nineteenth century some of the leading theologians included John Williamson Nevin, who stressed the centrality of the person of Christ in salvation, using the new German thought to do it; Philip Schaff, who hoped for reunion with the Roman Catholic Church; Charles Hodge, whose *Systematic Theology* is a reaffirmation of Calvin’s own teachings; Benjamin B. Warfield, who championed classical Calvinism from the halls of Princeton; and Horace Bushnell, a Con-

gregationalist preacher and author, who was severely critical of Calvinism’s contemporary expression.

Calvinism and Criticism

The nineteenth century was a period of innovation in outward forms of worship in Reformed churches. The singing of hymns, the use of an organ, fresh architectural styles, and new liturgies all came into being gradually, in the face of sometimes rather stiff opposition.

But something deeper was afoot. Higher criticism, that “science” that calls into doubt the inerrancy, authority, and accuracy of the Scriptures, was beginning to make itself felt in pulpits everywhere. Union Theological Seminary in New York, until 1892 tied to the Presbyterian Church, was the center of the new thought. Along with doubting Scriptural authority came the doubt of the Westminster Confession of Faith; whereas in previous years the Confession had never been viewed as perfect, there had always been a reluctance to alter it. The twentieth century, especially, has seen it altered many times, and finally replaced by a liberal Confession that is more in line with new theological thought.

Calvinism and Liberalism

While Higher Criticism questions the physical Scriptures, liberalism encompasses and reaches beyond the higher critics to question the doctrines of Scripture. The eighteenth century was the seedbed of deism, rationalism, and naturalism. Theology was hard hit, and being a theologian came to mean that what one did was to reconcile logic with Scripture. The “founder of modern theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher, was the theologian of the Romantic Movement” (p.

406). To him, Scripture yielded authority to religious emotion, and theology relied on psychology. His teachings had a very moderating influence on Calvinistic minds, and others followed his example of emphasis on emotion and psychology. Anthropology became the guideline of theology.

Nineteenth century America also witnessed the rise of the Social Gospel, nurtured and spread through Union Theological Seminary. “Only some of the smaller members of the Reformed family of churches remained immune to the liberal heaven” (p. 409). Within the Fundamentalist movement, begun in 1909, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1936) and the Bible Presbyterian Church (1937) became prominent among the small number of Presbyterian groups that seek to uphold the Word of God and classical or Dortian, Calvinism.

CALVINISM AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Calvinism and Politics

Calvinists have always been active in political affairs. As a group they have favored and fought for representative government and rejected tyranny in any form. Oliver Cromwell was a notable exception; benevolent dictator that he was, he was still a dictator. A younger contemporary of Cromwell, John de Witt, “was a staunch advocate of a free republic” (p. 412). During the Revolution in America, Calvinism asserted principles of the authority of the people, divinely bestowed. And one of the primary advocates of religious liberty in the early years of the colonies was Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island.

In the Netherlands also both Calvinists and Arminians made their contribu-

tions to political thought. Calvinist Johannes Althusius (pub. 1603), emphasized the co-operation of all citizens under two contracts, social and governmental, in a society where the rulers are “delegates of the people” (p. 416) and where both “rulers and people acknowledge that they hold their power from God” (p. 416). Arminian Hugo Grotius, though outside the Calvinist tradition, was the chief exponent of international law, which he put forth in his book *The Rights of War and Peace*, published in 1625.

Calvinism and Economics

“Ideas that have been brought to expression by late Calvinists have been read back into Calvin to the confusion of history” (p. 418). One example is the idea that Calvin affirmed that wealth is a sign of the favor of God, when actually Calvin condemned this manner of thinking. It is not that this idea is never true, only that it is not *necessarily* true, and to say that it is, is beyond the pale of Scripture.

Concerning usury, or interest, Calvin was not totally opposed to it, as later Calvinists have come to hold in some areas. Rather there was given “cautious permission of moderate interest, under the strict rule of love and for the good of the borrower” (p. 418).

Calvinism and Humanitarianism

The Industrial Revolution brought much poverty with its prosperity. One of the first to realize the Church’s obligation to the poor was Thomas Chalmers, a leader of Scottish Evangelicalism. He adopted Adam Smith’s *laissez-faire* theories, which led him to the belief that relief for the poor should not come from government, but from the Church and other

private institutions. His work was quite successful as far as it extended.

The 1850's also saw the rise of the Social Gospel movement, which was a polite way of hiding socialism in a religious cloak. It gained formal recognition by the Federal Council of Churches (later, the National Council) in 1912 by the Social Creed of the Churches, with a revision in 1932. Presbyterian and Reformed churches had a large part in this creed. The movement has paid a minimum of attention to theology and doctrine.

Concerning racial issues, Calvinists have largely opposed slavery, but during the American Civil War, most churches of whatever denomination supported the position of the states where they were located. Calvinists were prominent, however, in the small group of anti-slavery men in the South.

In conclusion, "most Calvinists have always associated with their faith in the sovereignty of God a feeling for the cause of human liberty and public justice and a strong preference for representative and responsible government" (p. 425).

THE SPIRIT OF CALVINISM IN THE WORLD TODAY

The "body" of Calvinism, obviously, is the physical make-up of the Church, with its sessions, presbyteries, synods, confessions, officers, building, congregations, and so on. Reformed polity as a whole has not changed much; though there are as many liturgies almost as there are churches, the basic form and goals in worship remain the same. But "the body without the spirit is dead" (p. 427), and the spirit of Calvinism is not easy to define and catalogue.

Post-War Development

When World War I became a reality in 1914, it became obvious that the widely hailed liberalism did not have the answers needed to subdue the evils of the world. Into the theological arena stepped Karl Barth, one of the most influential philosophers and theologians of the twentieth century. He declared his own war "against the presuppositions of the old complacent liberalism and every element of natural theology" (p. 428). Though he refused to submit himself to absolute truth, his deferential treatment of both Luther and Calvin had "the effect of leading friend and foe to their company" (p. 429). The crisis of the war led many to a spiritual quest and a desire to restore a Calvinistic awareness of God as well as its "moral tonic" (p. 430). Conservative exponents of a return to Calvinism included Abraham Kuyper, whose work influenced theology on both sides of the Atlantic; L. Berkhof, who reflected the views of Kuyper and Bavinck in refuting the views of Barth; Cornelius van Til, who gave a "cautious reinterpretation" (p. 430) of the doctrine of grace; Auguste Lecerf, a French theologian whose works reflect the belief that Calvinism is the remedy for the twentieth century; Paul T. Fuhrmann, the title of whose book *God Centered Religion* (1942) speaks for itself; and many others.

Revival of Calvinism

The Calvinism being "restored" today is not a replica of any brand of Calvinism that has preceded it. For one thing, it would be necessary to restore the society and manner of thinking of the sixteenth century to accurately rebuild original Calvinism. But to recover the spirit of Calvinism, this is not necessary. The spirit of Calvinism is to respond to God appro-

priately as He has revealed himself in Scripture.

Some shudder at the thought of returning to Calvinism. They would rather stay in a place of intellectual neutrality and detachment than to commit themselves to the mission Calvinism demands. Calvinism, it is supposed, breeds personality disorders, guilt, unhappiness, sobriety, pride, pretention, and a sour disposition, among other things. And perhaps there is some substance to these charges among those that pervert it to one degree or another. But the true spirit of Calvinism, rightly understood, does nothing of the sort. "A sense of security in God may be accompanied by a disturbing compassion for men: there is always a Jerusalem to weep over. *Happiness is little related to decibels of laughter*" (p. 436, emphasis added).

THE EXTENT OF THE CALVINISTIC SPIRIT

The spirit of Calvinism is making itself known to all of Christianity, and it "characterized by a combination of God-consciousness with an urgent sense of mission" (p. 436). It is not a rich man's religion primarily; its most faithful adherents, historically, have been among the less prosperous. Capitalists who really reflect Calvinistic ethics are concerned chiefly not with amassing wealth, but with using it to benefit others. The spirit can no longer be claimed by only Reformed churches; it has gone beyond ecclesiastical bounds seeking union and intercommunion. Calvin's message is to all. And that message is, in every circumstance, every man has to do with God (*Institutes* 3.7.2).

CONCLUSION

Since McNeill's book was first published, much has occurred in the American West. *The WRS Journal* 16:2, August 2009

cas from the viewpoint of a vital Calvinism continuing to impact culture, theology, missiology, and the Church at large. Calvin's teachings continue to satisfy the thirst of hungry souls and drive an evangelism that goes far deeper than outward response. To conclude, I present the testimony of an acquaintance who had this to say:

I want to comment on Calvin's teaching on Western civilization and the church and me in particular. I was raised in a church that did not stress most of the doctrines of Calvinism. I made a profession of faith at an early age since I felt and was told I was able to understand the gospel and make a decision to follow Christ. I thought I was OK and accepted by God since I said the sinner's prayer and believed the right stuff. Then something amazing happened to my family. My older sister became born again in her late teens and said I was given a wrong theology and a false sense of security and challenged me to repent of my sins and really believe in Jesus so much that it would change my life. My sister started teaching me the doctrines of grace. Seven years later, when I was 16 years old, I became convicted of my sin and believed in Jesus as my only hope of his selective grace. His sovereign selection of me in particular strangely warmed my heart and I was born again.

This is the power of the biblical doctrines that Calvin taught, and why they continue to impact our world today. 📖

*Leonard Pine is Field Director of the Presbyterian Missionary Union, and Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology at Western Reformed Seminary.

CALVIN AND THE AMERICAN QUEST FOR LIBERTY

HANS A. ZEIGER¹

“And as I willingly admit that there is no kind of government happier than where liberty is framed with becoming moderation, and duly constituted so as to be durable, so I deem those very happy who are permitted to enjoy that form, and that I admit that they do nothing at variance with their duty when they strenuously and constantly labor to preserve and maintain it.”

– John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV:20²

“I can never join Calvin in addressing his god,” Thomas Jefferson wrote to John Adams in 1823. “If ever man worshipped a false god, he did. The being described in his 5 points is not the God whom you and I acknowledge and adore, the Creator and benevolent governor of the world; but a daemon of malignant spirit. It would be more pardonable to believe in no god at all, than to blaspheme him by the atrocious attributes of Calvin.”³

Jefferson had his strange reasons for rejecting the God of John Calvin. What the author of the Declaration of Independence could not have disputed is the profound impact of Calvinism in the making of America. For all of Jefferson’s outrage about the inequity of Calvinistic “Daemonism,” he wasn’t about to question the Calvinist contribution to human liberty. As the nineteenth-century historian George Bancroft wrote in his *History of the United States of America*, “The fanatic for Calvinism was a fanatic for liberty.”⁴

There is some irony in the fact that Calvinism turned out to be revolutionary. Calvin was a man of law and order, a lawyer and a scholar of the Roman Stoics before his conversion, later a defender of public discipline in Geneva. He did challenge the authority of the Catholic church, but only because he first taught submission to the authority of Scripture. In the last chapter of the *Institutes*, entitled “On Civil Government,” Calvin rebutted the anarchism of the radical Anabaptists who supposed that the state was “unworthy of a Christian man,” worthless to the citizen of heaven.⁵ Calvin argued that the office of the magistrate was “a most sacred office,” a noble profession worthy of any Christian’s respect. Magistrates were “the viceregents of God,” said Calvin, established by his authority and accountable to him for their actions. Even tyranny was preferable to anarchy, and only where the tyrant contradicted the commands of God was peaceful resistance warranted.⁶

According to Calvin, government had a divinely-instituted purpose: to protect the public order and defend God’s moral law.⁷ When it came to the question of how best to order the state, Calvin offered an opinion: a mix of republicanism and aristocracy. But Calvin rejected the notion that a regime could change its form. Types of government arose organically by the will of God; revolution could never be just. “Whatever be the form [of government] which [God] has appointed in the places in which we live, our duty is to obey and submit.”⁸

But the anarchic Anabaptists weren’t the only extremists Calvin responded to in his final chapter. There were also the “flatterers of princes” who exalted the state in the place of the Divine.⁹

To them, Calvin pointed out the limits of government. Taxation was a legitimate power of government, but tax revenues were not “private chests” for princes. Taxes “are almost the blood of the people” and “are merely subsidies of the public necessity, and . . . it is tyrannical rapacity to harass the poor people without cause.”¹⁰ Rulers who abused their powers and oppressed the people would answer to God.

Since governments were just as much corrupted by the fall as any human institution, Calvin suggested the importance of a mixed government that checked and balanced itself, for “it is safer and more tolerable when several bear rule, that they may thus mutually assist, instruct, and admonish each other, and should any one be disposed to go too far, the others are censors and masters to curb his excess.”¹¹ And though he taught that the state was the protector of the church, he also taught the separation of those institutions. “But he who knows to distinguish between the body and the soul, between the present heeling life and that which is future and eternal, will have no difficulty in understanding that the spiritual kingdom of Christ and civil government are things very widely separated.”¹²

Calvin did not rule out entirely the possibility that individuals might resist the state in defense of their organic constitution. Those who already lived in a free society would fail in their duties to sit by as a tyrant attempted to uproot their ancient liberties. “And as I willingly admit that there is no kind of government happier than where liberty is framed with becoming moderation, and duly constituted so as to be durable, so I deem those very happy who are permitted to enjoy that form, and that I admit that they do

nothing at variance with their duty when they strenuously and constantly labor to preserve and maintain it.”¹³ Magistrates who did not labor to preserve liberty were “traitors to their office and their country.”¹⁴ So Calvin was a partisan for liberty, but he was an opponent of revolution to achieve it.

Calvinism—a set of ideas and experiences much larger than one man—never was revolutionary in the sense that Calvin’s native France became in the wake of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. With Calvinism the idea of liberty was always ordered—ordered first by God and second by his appointed rulers. Unfettered freedom of choice was not really freedom at all. It was anarchy or license, not liberty. It was the height of fallen man’s slavery to sin, and it would be no wonder to Calvin that France’s Revolution turned quickly into despotism, spreading its legacy on to the Gulags and killing fields of later generations.

Neither was Calvinism revolutionary in the sense that it offered something original or novel to the world. Indeed, Calvin was an echo of Augustine and many of the Church Fathers.¹⁵ He was, more significantly, a teacher of the Holy Scripture. Calvin was a conservative—a conservator of eternal truths, a believer in the divine ordering of this life and the life to come.

But Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was rocked by the impact of biblical faith renewed. The old orders, bound to Rome, allowed too little space for Protestantism to flourish. For the Presbyterians in Scotland and the Huguenots in France, the practice of faith created a political problem. How can Christians obey their magistrates when

those magistrates restrict the freedom to worship? In 1561, the Reformer John Knox stood before Mary Queen of Scots to answer for his Protestantism. The queen asked if subjects may rebel against their government. Knox replied, "If princes exceed their bounds, madam, no doubt they may be resisted even by power."¹⁶ The English historian James Froude wrote of that incident, "Thus spoke Calvinism the creed of republics."¹⁷

The English Puritans were just as concerned about politics, but their focus was less on the right of rebellion than the possibility of a decent political order. The Puritans settled in New England nearly a century after the first publication of Calvin's *Institutes*. They were devoted above all to the Word of God and the life to come. Yet, like Calvin in Geneva, the Puritans in America were not careless about the affairs of this life. They reflected on the lessons of nature and sought, through reason, to make their way amid the ruins of the fall. They attempted, with mixed results, to balance the demands of Scripture and the requirements of a just community. They were an intensely political people.

The Puritans shared much of Calvin's understanding of politics. They also were the beneficiaries of decades of scholarship and conversations about Calvin's theology that constituted Calvinism. They carried on the Calvinist school of thought in their sermons, their home devotions, their books and pamphlets, and their discussions about politics and culture. According to the eminent historian Perry Miller, "Calvinism could no longer remain the relatively simply dogmatism of its prophet. It needed amplification, it required concise explication, syllogistic proof, intellectual as well as spiritual fo-

cus."¹⁸ For young New England Puritans who studied at Harvard College and for pastors who reasoned with their congregations and each other, books on logic and systematic theology by Samuel Willard, William Ames, Petro van Mastricht, Zacharias Ursinus, and John Wollebius helped to form the Calvinist intellectual canon.¹⁹

The Puritans, as their label suggests, wrestled intensely with the problem of purity: how could they promote it in individuals, families, and society? How could they emphasize God's sovereign grace while encouraging obedience among His people? The answer that English Puritans like John Preston, Richard Baxter, Richard Sibbes, and William Perkins found in Scripture was the idea of the covenant.²⁰ Defending intently the sovereignty of God, the covenant theologians sought out a deeper understanding of man's part in the divine plan. Their work was a fuller affirmation of Calvin's beautiful declaration, citing Augustine, in the *Institutes*, that "human will does not obtain grace by freedom, but obtains freedom by grace."²¹

So when the first Englishmen reached New England, "The one thing that these largely Calvinist settlers brought with them was their familiarity with religious covenants as the basis for forming communities," writes Donald Lutz.²² If spiritual freedom came only as a grace of God to the regenerate soul, certainly God was the giver of other graces too, even sometimes to those outside of faith. The covenant theologians were covenant political philosophers too. They spoke of society as a contract, a binding agreement with the Lord and each other to which people endowed with the gift of reason freely consented. "No common weale can

be founded but by free consent,” said Massachusetts governor John Winthrop, “...for no man hath lawful power over another, but by birth or consent.”²³

Among early American covenants were the Mayflower Compact of 1620; the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut, which created a common government for three villages in 1639; the Organization of the Government of Rhode Island in 1642; and the partnership of the Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven colonies into the New England Confederation in 1643.²⁴ The Pilgrims who signed the Mayflower Compact did “in the Presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation.”²⁵

Covenants and compacts were clearly the established basis of governance in the American colonies.²⁶ And, as Lutz notes, the establishment of compact government in the colonies occurred quite apart from the theories of Locke, Montesquieu, and Blackstone, who in the middle of the seventeenth century had yet to add their contributions to political philosophy.²⁷ It is the prevalence of covenant theology in the colonies that explains “the surprising similarity in the Americans’ state constitutions and colonial documents.”²⁸

Along with their belief in the necessity of public authority and government by consent, the Puritans developed a belief in limited government. The purpose of government was to maximize liberty for individuals and families to govern themselves according to the Law of God. “[L]iberty,” wrote Winthrop, “is the proper end and object of authority, and cannot subsist without it; and it is a lib-

erty to that only which is good, just and honest.”²⁹ Freedom was to be constrained within moral limits, but it was best if the people could do this privately rather than submitting to a tyrant. In order for government to exercise its power for the public good, wrote John Cotton, it was necessary “that all power that is on earth be limited.”³⁰ Contained within Calvinism were both the need for government to rule over sinful men, and the need for limited government to avoid usurping the realm of the church, the family, and the individual.

Over time, the relationship between the New England church and the social compact of the growing colonial community changed form. Membership in the town was no longer synonymous with membership in the church. After a period of spiritual declension in the late seventeenth century, the churches of New England experienced a tremendous revival by God’s spirit, known to history as “The Great Awakening.” The Awakening reminded the settlers of their covenants and of their part in the plan of God. No one did more in this effort than Jonathan Edwards of Northampton, Massachusetts. He was the greatest theologian and the greatest Calvinist in American history.

The Puritans were not the only settlers to convey Calvinism across the Atlantic. The Scottish Reformation was transmitted to America when droves of Scots-Irish Presbyterians fled persecution by the established church. If the Puritans had come to their belief in government by consent through careful deliberation, the Scots-Irish had reached the same conclusion through rough experience. Many settled in Virginia and the Carolinas and eventually in the backwoods of Kentucky and Tennessee. As Lord Thomas

Babington Macauley later said of their preachers, "They inherited the republican opinions of Knox."³¹

John Witherspoon was one such Scottish preacher descended both intellectually and biologically from Knox.³² Witherspoon came to America from Scotland in 1768 to become president of the College of New Jersey at Princeton. A decade prior, Jonathan Edwards had been president of the college. In Witherspoon were combined the two movements that gave revolutionary energy to American Presbyterians: Scots-Irish Presbyterianism and the Great Awakening. Among the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Witherspoon affirmed the principles of the Founding in his 1776 sermon entitled "The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Man." Witherspoon asserted God's providence as the superintending principle in the defeat of sin and the triumph of liberty. Revolution, he said, was "not only lawful but necessary."³³ The sermon was distributed in over 500 colonial churches.³⁴

The republican philosophy, as it culminated in 1776 and 1787, was deeply grounded in 150 years of local self-government informed by biblical and Calvinist principles. Enlightenment ideas about the social contract served simply to lend breadth to an organic movement that had its institutional foundations in the Puritan community, and its intellectual foundations long before that. According to religious historian Sydney Ahlstrom, "Puritanism provided the moral and religious background of fully 75 percent of the people who declared their independence in 1776."³⁵ More than that, intellectual historian Paul Conkin observes that Calvin's "followers exerted by far the

greatest influence upon American political thought."³⁶

The Father of the Constitution, James Madison, studied the writings of Calvin under John Witherspoon at Princeton. The most famous lines of the *Federalist*, penned by Madison, reflect a Calvinist understanding of the soul and the state. They fall in *Federalist 51*: "But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary."³⁷ The American Constitution not only made a government that was sufficiently powerful to create order among sinful men and women, it checked and balanced the government itself.

Even with its towering influence on the development of the American order, Calvinism seemed to be a dying theology to some observers in the early republic. Ezra Stiles of Yale predicted in 1787 that the writings of Jonathan Edwards "in another generation will pass into as transient notice perhaps scarce above oblivion, and when posterity occasionally comes across them in the rubbish of libraries, the rare characters who may read and be pleased with them will be looked upon as singular and whimsical."³⁸ But according to Marsden, Stiles "underestimated the resilience and popular support of strict Calvinism. Even in the era of Revolutionary politics, Edwards had a following."³⁹

A grandson of Edwards, Timothy Dwight, held aloft the light of the Awakening in the first generation after the Founding. When Stiles died in 1795, Dwight rebutted Stiles' talk of Edwards' insignificance by taking his place as president of Yale. There he taught a new generation of reformed preachers. In their

discussions in the seminaries and presses, Calvinist scholars carried on a vigorous debate about piety, revivalism, and reason throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. As Calvinism was delivered by pioneers to new frontiers like Michigan and Indiana, it took root in the culture of the Midwest. Even while the country was becoming more pluralistic and extensive, the basic concepts of Calvinism remained influential over the American mind.⁴⁰

Just as it is impossible to understand the history of American politics without an appreciation for religion, it is impossible to understand the history of American religion without an appreciation for politics.⁴¹ Religious historian Nathan O. Hatch has described the major religious movement following the Revolution as “The Democratization of American Christianity.”⁴² The cultural tides of democracy posed two major challenges to Calvinism. The first was the ascendancy of Arminianism, beginning in the eighteenth century and intensifying with the Second Great Awakening. The Arminians emphasized free will instead of God’s sovereignty in the plan of salvation.

The second challenge to Calvinism was the turmoil of the nineteenth century: as it split the country, so it split the descendants of the Puritans from the descendants of the Scots-Irish. It divided whole denominations. At the center of the conflict was the old question of government by consent. It took a man of spiritual doubt, his mind shaped in the simple congregations of Kentucky and Indiana Calvinism, his words laced with Scripture, to call back the nation to its “ancient faith,” as he called it. By that, Abraham Lincoln meant “that ‘all men are created equal;’ and that there can be no moral

right in connection with one man’s making a slave of another.”⁴³

A third assault against Calvinism originated outside of democracy and threatened to topple consensual government. It had its roots in nineteenth century philosophy and science, propagating a new determinism and a new understanding of human nature. The English biologist Charles Darwin and his followers said that human beings were evolving creatures; nature was said to change over time, eliminating the political basis for human equality and the theological basis for sin and salvation. The German philosopher Georg William Friedrich Hegel taught the doctrine of historical inevitability that gave rise to the totalitarian states of the twentieth century.

With milder results in America, liberal preachers of Calvinist heritage accepted the new faith of Darwin and Hegel. Rejecting the doctrines of sin and grace, they promised heaven on earth. The old Puritan notions of Providence remained in the background, but often the heirs of the Puritans exalted the new god of Progress. It was Woodrow Wilson, a Presbyterian and successor of Edwards and Witherspoon as the head of Princeton, who believed that Americans had evolved beyond the Constitution of limited government into the age of the administrative state, and who, from his vision of a perfected world, promised a “war to end all wars.” Instead, according to the great Calvinist scholar J. Gresham Machen, “humanity is standing over an abyss.”⁴⁴

Against these developments there arose a protest by the true heirs of the Reformation in the twentieth century. This movement continues in churches throughout the land, in private schools

and in the home schooling movement, and in publications like this one. Religious conservatives—Calvinists among them—have continued to play a significant role in American politics.

Yet, today liberalism dominates most of the nation’s cultural institutions, and at this very moment Progressivism is making a grand resurgence in our public life. From such challenges Calvinists need not retreat. As Machen warned in 1936, it would be hopeless to solve the world’s political and social troubles “until we have come to be right with God.”⁴⁵ So it is today. If we are to preserve our nation’s “ancient faith,” we must renew the Ancient Faith of John Calvin. 📖

¹ Hans A. Zeiger is a senior fellow at the American Civil Rights Union and a 2008 Publius Fellow of the Claremont Institute. A graduate student in the Pepperdine University School of Public Policy, he holds a BA in American Studies from Hillsdale College. Hans is a member of the Tacoma Bible Presbyterian Church.

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Ch. XX, trans. Henry Beveridge, (BibleOne 4.0, 1999), 321.

³ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 11 April 1823, quoted in Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 191.

⁴ George Bancroft, *History of the United States of America* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), I, 319.

⁵ Calvin, 315.

⁶ Calvin, 324, 336.

⁷ Government was especially “to prevent the true religion, which is contained in the law of God, from being with impunity openly violated and polluted by public blasphemy” (Calvin, 318).

⁸ Calvin, 321.

⁹ Calvin, 316.

¹⁰ Calvin, 326.

¹¹ Calvin, 321.

¹² Calvin, 317.

¹³ Calvin, 321.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ John Cotton wrote that Augustine, Luther, and Calvin “were all of them thought new Doctrines in their time; and yet all of them the ancient truths of the everlasting Covenant of grace.” From *Gospel Conversion* (London, 1646), quoted in Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1982), 93.

¹⁶ W.P. Breed, *Presbyterians and the Revolution* (Decatur, MS: Issacharian Press, 1993), 60.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1982), 95.

¹⁹ Miller, 95-97.

²⁰ Miller, 374 .

²¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 3, 308.

²² Donald Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism* (Baton Rouge,

LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 24-25.

²³ Miller, 408. A moment before Winthrop uttered his famous passage about the “city on a hill” in his inaugural address for a new land in 1630, he declared: “We are entered into Covenant with Him for this worke. Wee haue taken out a commission ... Wee have hereupon besought Him of favour and blessing. Now if the Lord shall please to heare us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then hath hee ratified this covenant and sealed our Commission, and will expect a strict performance of the articles contained in it” (John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity,” 1630, Hanover Historical Texts Project, 1996, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>, accessed 21 Jan. 2009).

²⁴ Lutz, 31-32.

²⁵ John Carver, William Bradford, et al, “Agreement Between the Settlers at New Plymouth,” 1620, Avalon Project, Yale Law School, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mayflower.asp, accessed 22 Jan. 2009.

²⁶ Lutz, 28.

²⁷ Lutz, 31.

²⁸ Lutz, 24-25.

²⁹ Miller, 426.

³⁰ Miller, 409.

³¹ Breed, 9.

³² Breed, 42.

³³ Witherspoon, “The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men,” in Ellis Sandoz, ed. *The Political Sermons of the Founding Era: 1730-*

1805 (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 549.

³⁴ Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003), 15.

³⁵ Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, quoted in Barry Alan Shain, *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 195.

³⁶ Paul K. Conkin, *Self-Evident Truths* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974), 7.

³⁷ James Madison, “No. 51,” *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 319; John Adams of Puritan Massachusetts had made a similar explanation of government as a necessary evil in 1760: “all Magistrates and all civil officers, and all civil Government, is founded and maintained by the sins of the People.” John Adams, 18 Dec. 1760, *The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. L.H. Butterfield (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1961), I, 184, quoted in A.J. Beitzinger, *A History of American Political Thought* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1972), 189-190.

³⁸ Ezra Stiles, quoted in George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 499.

³⁹ Marsden, 499.

⁴⁰ Marsden, 499.

⁴¹ See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁴² Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁴³ Abraham Lincoln, "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act," 16 Oct. 1854,

AMDOCS, <http://www.vlib.us/amdocs/index.html>, accessed 22 Jan. 2009.

⁴⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* (reprinted; Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 4.

⁴⁵ Machen, 8.

BOOKS

Because of limitation of size for the printed *WRS Journal*, we were not able to include several book reviews that have been prepared for this issue. These are posted at the *Journal's* website, however: http://www.wrs.edu/journals/volume_16-2.htm. Here are the books that are reviewed there:

Reviews by Morris McDonald:

-Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures On Calvinism*

-John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*

-Steven J. Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*

-John Calvin, *The Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*

-Charles E. Edwards, *Devotions and Prayers of John Calvin*

Review by Ben Robinson:

-Burk Parsons, ed., *John Calvin: A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine, & Doxology*.

Review by John A. Battle:

-Davis A. Young, *John Calvin and the Natural World*

Review by Judith Collins:

-Ross William Collins, *Calvin and the Libertines of Geneva*, edited by F. D. Blackley. (In this review Judith Collins includes her own interaction with the author.)