

Ross William Collins, *Calvin and the Libertines of Geneva*, edited by F. D. Blackley (Toronto/Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1968). Pp 210 (including an extensive bibliography of French sources). Reviewed by Judith Collins

It was a long time ago when I met the author of the book under review. I was seventeen years old and newly saved. The brother of my father was set to visit us, and I knew he was a liberal in theology. It was the only time our paths crossed. I did not know he wrote history texts. I only knew he did not believe the Bible literally. Yet the only way I had gained my faith was by fervid and long reading of the Bible as the very Word of God. How was I to meet my Uncle Ross? John, the Apostle of love in the New Testament said not to bid Godspeed to anyone who did not bring with him the doctrine of Christ as the Son of God. John even said not to receive such a one into one's house! This troubled me, but it was not my house but my parents'. I felt I must bear witness to my faith. Of course, I had never met a theological liberal before. I knew them only by reading of them. I cannot recall how I took the discussion where I wanted it. But I do remember vividly bringing up the topic of forgiveness of sin—"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." I was not prepared for the reaction. The old man slammed the palm of his hand down on the broad wood arm of the chair, "Don't ever mention the blood to me again!"

In my modern church history classes at the Bible College of East Africa in Nairobi, Africa, our IVF text talks a lot about theological liberalism. When I want to present a vivid illustration of that, I give them that personal eyewitness account. Uncle Ross had studied at Pine Hill Divinity Hall in Halifax, Nova Scotia before he went to Union Theological Seminary in New York. I wonder if he lost his faith in those schools. Because he did not pursue a career in theology but gained his Ph.D. in history at Columbia University, and after teaching several years at University of Syracuse, he joined the history department at the University of Alberta, eventually becoming head of that department. Perhaps it was a remnant of theological interest which led him to specialize in Renaissance and Reformation history.

His books interest me, especially the book under review. What did Uncle Ross think of the reformers he lectured on? How did he treat the gospel they preached, *justification by faith alone in Christ the Son of God, who died for our sins and rose again, presented in Scripture as historic facts*. He was a historian and a theological liberal. How did he balance history and the facts of the historic gospel with his personal theological stance? Will this book gave me an answer? It was his last book.

The first four chapters of this book, *Calvin and the Libertines of Geneva*, deal with the background of the Cauvin family as the boatmen of the rivers in Picardy in northern France, and their transition into the city life along the shores, in particular Noyon where Gerard Cauvin launched himself into the life of the bourgeoisie. His clerical and sollicitorial services to the city, the episcopal court and the county earned him such strong ties that his son John grew up in that milieu, enjoying the best education along with boys of the local nobility, which could not help but "(make) him aristocratic both in his politics and theology." Financial security from the ecclesiastical benefices his father obtained for him provided him with an ease and dignity for moving in such circles. Perhaps God was preparing him for the theological and political contests

awaiting him in future years in the turbulent City of Geneva. His five years study at the University of Paris in Latin, in scholastic philosophy, *The Sentences*, and in logic, gained him the doctorate in theology, while at the same time sharpened and disciplined his mental acumen. He became adept “to punch holes in the logic of his opponents in debate, to point out their inconsistencies, their evasions of the issue, their shifts and artifices, ...for the scholastic training did develop the mind and made students masters of argumentation.” The three years in which he excelled at Orleans in the Faculty of Law might have been necessary to polish the skilled advocate in argument, for it was alien to his character to love legal conflicts and strife. Yet such awaited him in future.

These chapters also portray another side of Calvin’s character by showing his attraction to the Renaissance studies in the new humanism, with its emphasis on the worth of man, of the individual, his contacts with those in Paris and elsewhere who were well sinned by the dangerous idea of church reform, and his openness to the Evangelicals who were teaching justification by faith alone. The author tries to pinpoint when, in these years and within these contacts, the young Calvin found the grace of the gospel. “*Many influences, combined over a long period, probably prepared Calvin for his conversion, ‘sudden’ though it may have seemed to him.*” Copious evidence is here given of his personal capacity for friendship, and that of those who found in him their best friend. Those of us who have long gazed on his stern and aloof mien in portraits of the time, and heard the scorn of his opponents to what they see as his strictures against the simple pleasures of life, are surprised to read not only in his letters but in those of others, the deep affection, trust and loyalty of friend to friend. Surely in his future life in Geneva, he would find friends of equal value as he had found in these years in France. It would not be all contest with those such as the Libertines. Did the humanistic love for the individual somehow rub off to affect him with some fairness for the cause of the Libertines? We shall see.

Chapters 5 through 7 cover the young Calvin’s flight from Paris to various places of refuge and study during the years 1534 and 1535. He had resigned the church benefices because he now knew the gospel was by grace and not by the works demanded by the Roman Catholic Church. He met with the aged LeFevre d’Etaples, much to the latter’s delight. He and his friend du Tillet stayed in Orleans for some time, then through to Strasbourg, and finally to Basel, where his first edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* was printed. Years later he told why he wrote the *Institutes* “while hiding unknown at Basel.” The French court was spreading lying rumors, identifying the godly French exiles and refugees in Germany as Anabaptists and seditious men. This was calculated to rouse the German Reformed against them, if not to deport them, for German Protestants had no time nor sympathy for radical Anabaptists. Calvin wrote of that time:

I could not be silent without treachery. This was why I published *The Institutes*—to defend against unjust slander my brothers whose death was precious in the Lord’s sight. A second reason was my desire to rouse the sympathy and concern of people outside, since the same punishment threatened many other poor people. And this volume was not a thick and laborious work.... It had no other purpose than to bear witness to the faith of those whom I saw criminally libelled by wicked and false courtiers.

Many were the Reformed whom Calvin met in these couple years, even in Italy, where a strong friendship took root with Renee the Duchess of Ferrara, “a daughter of Louis XII whose piety was greatly spoken of.”

Meanwhile the city of Geneva was rocked, during the years of the late 15th and early 16th centuries, by economic, religious, and political problems, totally unconnected with the Reformation. Power struggles between the Duke of Savoy, the Bishop of Geneva, the Count, the three City Councils and the townspeople striving for self-determination, the interference of the City of Berne—all created a turbulent Geneva. Thirty pages bursting with the details are sufficient for any student of Calvin’s history to understand why he so obstinately rejected William Farel’s emotional pleas to stay in Geneva and help him establish the Reform. That was July 1536, a couple months after the Genevan struggle for self-determination had reached a peak. No outsider in his right mind could have agreed to enter such a maelstrom. But as all history buffs know, it was only when Farel stooped actually to curse Calvin’s studies and writings if he stubbornly refused to stay and help the Church of Christ there, that Calvin in terror (to use his word) capitulated. With what results and fame the world knows! Through his work in Geneva Calvin blessed the whole world. In all the long description of the years of political travail in Geneva, Dr. Collins is setting the stage for Calvin to stride on as the lead actor. In fact, by that moment, he has his readers panting for the hero to appear!

Parenthetically, taking a breather from the tension of Geneva politics and contests, and giving this review a tinge of personal memorial to an uncle, I appreciate the beautifully sympathetic quotations the author, Ross Collins, chose, though personally, as a liberal, out of sympathy with the phrases. Speaking of Henry Cornelius Agrippa, rather a brilliant scholar amongst other attainments, he wrote, “Indeed he was greatly influenced by Lutheran teachings, for he declared Scripture the sole authority in the matter of faith, and said, paraphrasing Luther: *‘I think the Christian man the freest of all’*” (my italics). He quotes Bonnivard, “For Luther had already given heart at this time to several in Geneva and elsewhere so that they no longer feared so greatly the *sonnetes* of the pope.” He says of Thomas de Hofen, a disciple of Zwingli, “I believe that if one gave the people preachers, the papist faith would suffer much from it.” The Council of Berne wrote to the Council of Geneva, “objecting to the persecution of the partisans of the Gospel, and demanding liberty of worship for those who wished to live and speak according to the Gospel.” Farel feared lest he “compromise the cause of the Gospel with Marguerite, the sister of Francis I.” (*Uncle Ross, you can understand that phrase! Did you know the Gospel and how it could suffer if compromised?*)

The author has thus far laid before us the personal preparation of *the man*, and set the stage ready in *the city*, now for the titanic struggle for the Gospel of Christ to prevail, through that man, and for that city, and thence, the world. Although the grand convergence of City Council and citizens in St. Peter’s in May 1536 showed unanimous intention to follow the Reformation, yet when

the Government of Geneva took in hand the religious reorganization of the city, it was a heavy task..... There were still many staunch Catholics in the city who heard mass in secret (and followed the priests)..... The problem was how to bring these people into conformity with the law and the Gospel.

Chapter 8 describes the first bout with the Libertines. The city government began to regulate the morals and manners of the citizens, much farther than the usual medieval regulations against “indecent dances,” gaming, cards or dice. Now Sunday observance, particularly, compulsory church attendance, was on the books. Calvin and Farel formulated *The Articles*, which went much further in ordering people’s lives, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, discipline even to excommunication, watching and reporting the life and conduct of each person, psalms in church service, instruction of children, ordinances for marriage and matrimonial cases, many of these measures to be conducted by the city councils. The *Catechism* and the *Confession of Faith* were intended to be subscribed to by all citizens. The Councils and district officers were in charge of enforcement. At this point came rebellion. To us in this day, we cannot imagine forcing citizens to attend church, to subscribe by oath to a Confession of Faith upon threat of banishment for non-compliance.

Here in northern Kenya, the reviewer is involved in a pioneer outreach to a section of the illiterate, pastoralist Rendille people who never had a church nor known of Christ. This is a different situation from Geneva where Christianity had existed for long. Even so, we could never think of forcing church attendance, or change of traditions before faith in Christ, and before they themselves see the need of it. Yet we provide them with a school for their children, and famine relief in drought, and regular church services, but the sacraments only for those who profess faith in Christ with a credible life. From the Geneva procedure could come big trouble down the road, when such fake church members could vote the whole church over to Rome or worse. Nowhere in the New Testament does it seem such a course was encouraged. But in the case of Geneva when everyone had been Catholic, it was difficult to separate citizens from church members, and so arose the conflict between state and church. The solution lay in the power of discipline and the sacraments, and Calvin and Farel came to see that this was the better option than enforced professions.

Under either procedure, there were

those who, having shaken off the restraints of the old regime, did not want to submit to the yoke of the new. While these ultimately became known as *Libertines*, they were not necessarily people of vicious or evil lives; indeed they were usually people who had felt the Renaissance call to shake off all medieval shackles and restraints.

Then there were those, not so much *Libertines*, but who looked at the contest from their particular political viewpoint. To them the interests of the city must prevail, and the church should not be an independent entity but subordinate to the State according to the Bernese concept. Dr. Collins calls them Patriots or nationalists.

The whole situation was complicated by the affair of Caroli and the Trinitarian dispute over the use of the words Trinity and Person. Calvin suffered such misunderstanding in this contest, that it doubtless led him later on in the affair of Servetus to be severely dogmatic in the matter of the Trinity. As one reads further into these heated forays, one is ready to sympathize with Calvin, when, a few years hence, he hated the very thought of Geneva as his place of daily crucifixion.

Growing opposition led to failure for Calvin and Farel to maintain ecclesiastical discipline. In the elections of February 1538, Libertines and Patriots were elected. Then, with new intrigues from Roman Catholic France on the political scene, the two preachers were told “not to meddle with politics, but to preach the Gospel as God had commanded it.” This limit on the freedom of the pulpit the Reformers could not accept, so the General Council demanded that all Frenchmen living in Geneva be expelled. At this threat, Berne, ever eager to impose sovereignty over Geneva, sought to impose its church rites and usages upon the Genevan church. The Geneva Government agreed. The Reformers “were furious over the attempt by the Genevan Government to foist the usages upon the Church in Geneva without any discussion; such an action violated the principles of liberty and autonomy of the Church for which Calvin stood.” A showdown ensued, with neither side ready to give way. The magistrates took the opportunity to oppose the Reformers while throwing the blame for their opposition upon Berne, and they forbade the Reformers to preach.

As Easter approached, people wandered about the streets at night shooting their guns in front of the houses of ministers. They made loud fun of the “Word of God,” calling it the “Pistol of God,” threatening to throw all the ministers into the Rhone River. “The terror of these nights made an indelible impression upon Calvin. On his deathbed he recalled them. ‘I was saluted, mockingly, with fifty or sixty (gun)shots in front of my door,’ enough “to frighten a poor timid scholar as I am and I confess always have been.” Nonetheless, on Easter Sunday, April 21, in defiance of the Council’s prohibition, Calvin and Farel preached as usual in their churches, but refused to serve the Lord’s Supper amidst “the disorders and abominations that reign in the city today;” they would wait until the people were better disposed. Such flagrant disobedience on the part of the preachers could not be overlooked by the city government. On Tuesday the preachers were given three days to leave the city, and on Wednesday they departed. “The Libertines and their allies had triumphed. Calvin’s work in Geneva seemed to be at an end.”

There follows a chapter on Calvin’s year or two of refuge in Basel and Strasbourg, safe from the Genevan tensions, but full of event. Sometimes he was blamed for the debacle at Geneva; ... When the Caroli affair broke out again, he had to deal with it once more; ... but worst of all was the defection back to the Catholic Church of his friend as close as a brother, du Tillet. It had been the old friendship of fellow students, and of shared Reformed faith back to the early days in France.... After several marriage negotiations had failed, Calvin and the widow Idelette de Bure married in a union happy as long as it lasted until the death of their infant son, and its mother.... His *Answer* to Cardinal Sadolet’s clever blandishments to Geneva to return to Mother Church “is a masterpiece of lucid, vigorous and convincing argument. He had little trouble in demolishing the flimsy arguments of his opponent.”

When suggestions were made to Calvin to return to Geneva, he flatly refused. He did, however, confess that the overthrow in Geneva was “partly due to our lack of experience, negligence, folly and error,” but maintained his innocence and purity of intentions in the matter which was not at all due to “fraud, impurity, malignity or idleness.” And again, “I fear above all things to return to the charge from which I have been delivered.” As he ministered as Pastor to the church of French refugees in Strasbourg, he prepared for their use, a liturgy based on Bucer’s, and a system of discipline such as he had wished to use in Geneva. He did away with the Confession which had been the bone of contention at Geneva, and replaced it with a personal

examination. “I announced that I would admit no one (to the Lord’s table) unless he first submitted to an examination. This was so that the ignorant, the badly instructed religiously be better prepared; that those who have need of special admonition receive it; finally so that those who are tormented by some uneasiness of conscience may be consoled.”

He persisted in rejecting all idea of a return to Geneva. To Farel’s suggestion he wrote that he preferred “A hundred deaths of another kind rather than that Cross on which I had to die a thousand times daily.” He was actually frightened by the idea, and begged Farel to condemn the idea of recall with energy. In May 1540 he wrote of seeing ever more clearly from “what a whirlpool the Lord had delivered me.” And later to another, “I have not read without laughing that part of your letter in which you preoccupy yourself with my health. Shall I go to Geneva to enjoy better health? Why not immediately at the Cross? It will be better to perish all at once than to be tortured once again in that torture chamber.” It seems that all his learned ability, his long years of training in the universities could prepare him to issue unanswerable arguments in oral debates, and in closely argued letters, but could never overcome his natural timidity and distaste for controversy.

The Geneva Council on 13 October 1540 wrote Calvin a letter begging him to come to their assistance, saying “We are like the doors of France and Italy through which can pass an admirable edification or else ruin.” Calvin’s reply to one and all his friends, “I dread this place as fatal for me.” All the pastors at Strasbourg felt he should remain with them, but they changed and no longer opposed his return to Geneva, even Bucer offered to go with him. The Zurichers wrote him, “You know that Geneva lies on the borders of France, Italy and Germany, so that the hope is great to see the Gospel spread from thence into the neighboring cities and enlarge the boundaries of the kingdom of Christ.” Those people knew what arguments he could not resist. Farel, true to form, wrote him “a thundering letter.” Finally, on 24 October 1540, he wrote to Farel: “As to the state of my mind, here it is. If I had the choice, I would do anything rather than yield to your desire; but since I remember that I am not my master, I offer my heart a slain victim in sacrifice to the Lord... for the glory of God and the good of the Church.” He and his family left Strasbourg on 1 September 1541.

Back in Geneva, Calvin requested a committee to discuss a constitution for the church, and six persons were appointed from the city councils. Calvin and the ministers wrote the draft; the councils did the amending. The document which emerged was called *The Ecclesiastical Ordinances of the Church of Geneva*; it became the church constitution and much of the Presbyterian system elsewhere in the world. A Kenyan perspective on this would be amazement that a government could have such input and control over a church constitution. Kenyan churches have to register with the government, submit among other things, their constitutions, but none is subject to such control as that exerted by Geneva. Four orders were established within the Church: pastors, doctors/teachers, elders, and deacons. The sermon would replace the mass as the central event of the worship service. Attendance at church was still to be enforced except with adequate excuse. Clearly, this would ensure continued opposition from the Libertines. The Eldership (Consistory) was the only church court allowed, and it was presided over normally by a city syndic. The Consistory had no authority to inflict corporal punishment and excommunication was usually contested by one of the City Councils. The councils wanted to appoint fellow pastors with Calvin, who found it hard to get the men he felt were worthy.

The fact that the ministers in Geneva were appointed by the Council and took an oath before it and the syndics, in which they promised to uphold the ordinances and polity of the city, and the fact that they received their stipend from the city, led the Government to think that they could control them.

This laid the way for free rein to the Libertines to interfere. We churches today don't realize how blessed we are to have churches independent of the government.

During the decade following 1545, the opposition from the Libertines crystallized within the great Favre family. Charges of immorality led nowhere, as the accused person merely replied he had nothing to do with ministers for they were from France, and that the Consistory was merely designed to restrain the liberty of the people. Even when condemned by a civil magistrate to several days in jail, it was to the Libertines neither dishonoring nor difficult; in fact, they rather enjoyed the experience. What they did resent was a forced appearance before the Consistory. Calvin refused to budge as he upheld the rights of the Consistory. City elections in 1547 put into office three of the four syndics from the Libertine faction.

Many were the cases brought which blew up because the Consistory was dealing with unconverted sinners outside what we would think was their jurisdiction. One man wanted a divorce from his immoral wife, a "spiritual Libertine"; another railed against Calvin to his friends privately in his own home, another played at skittles on Easter Sunday and Council sent him to prison; the wife of the Captain-General was a thorn in Calvin's side with her delight in dancing and enjoyment of the opposition she created. The affair of "the slashed trousers" "took on almost the proportions of a conspiracy of the Libertines against the Calvinists." The current fad in men's fashions, trousers slashed where they fitted most closely, and fitted with pieces of another kind of cloth so that they stuck out to form puffs, had come to be regarded as indecent, and were forbidden in Augsburg (1530), Zurich (1532), Berne (1536), and Geneva (1543). The Libertines of Geneva, true to their nature in their love of opposition to law, flaunted such trousers. Ami Perrin, the Libertine Captain-General, wanted to deck out the city Archers in such breeches for one day of celebration only. Council agreed but Calvin was upset because they were illegal. His protest led Council to withdraw the permission. And so it went, from one crisis to another, one here political, one there manners or morals, another, the wearing of doublets bearing a cross, another, publicizing a private letter of Calvin's.

In 1548 the success of the Emperor's armies against the Protestants in Germany caused alarm in Geneva, which the Libertines utilized by demanding the restoration of Perrin to the post of Captain-General, so that, as Calvin commented, Perrin "has been unexpectedly elevated to the stage from which he had been driven by hisses." Two of his supporters were elected to judicial posts. Christians, who suffer personally when bad politicians are restored to power, can sympathize with poor Calvin: "I have no hope that the obstinate spirits of the wicked will improve." He thought that "they would leave us in peace if we wished to give up our admonitions." But that he could not do. "How can we keep silent while we are obliged to see some things which, even at Rome, would be censured?" Each week brought a new conflict, and Calvin could only hope that the Lord would assist him. "I am ready to tolerate all, to forget all, provided that they do not interrupt the March of the Kingdom of Christ." The Libertines called

their dogs by his name, Calvin, and for this he complained to the Council. The Libertines triumphed in the next elections of 1549. Perrin, already Captain-General was elected as first syndic, thus holding the two most important posts in the city. He was known to encourage sexual vice, and other Libertines again and again resisted discipline.

Worse to Calvin was Libertine interference in church affairs. Council claimed there were too many ministers, their number should be reduced. Council ordered them to preach every day and in a certain manner. Calvin refused as no consultation had been done, and said he would rather die than obey. Council then ordered the use of the Lord's Prayer more often in the services and that the Commandments be recited as in the past. Calvin said he would rather die than submit to practices that smacked of sorcery and enchantment. The Council gave in.

The Servetus affair broke the back of the resistance in Geneva. The author of the book goes into great detail of the background of Servetus, his denial of the deity of Christ, his approach to several prominent reformers before any of them realized his true aims, and his scurrilous attacks on Calvin. After having been tried and condemned in several other cities, one wonders why he ever went to Geneva where a stricter regime was in place. Some modern authorities think he was plotting with the Libertines for the overthrow of Calvin. That would seem to fit. During his public discussions in Geneva he sought again and again to play up the enmity between the Libertines and Calvin. And indeed many Libertines did espouse his cause.

In the midst of the two phases of his trial, the theological and the moral, the Council passed a decree intended to embarrass Calvin, namely, permission for the prominent Libertine supporter of Servetus, Berthelier, to receive the Lord's Supper on the following Sunday. Because of his unsatisfactory life and his support of Servetus, the Consistory had ruled he could not be admitted to the Supper on that date. A special meeting of the Council was called for Saturday morning to deal with Berthelier's appeal and the Council's support. There Calvin declared, "I have sworn that I had decided to die rather than profane so shamefully the Holy Supper of the Lord... that I would die a hundred times rather than subject Christ to such a shameful derision." On Sunday morning Calvin preached the pre-communion sermon and criticized the councilors seated before him. In conclusion he said, "If someone to whom the Consistory has forbidden it should want to take his place at this holy table, it is certain that I will prove myself, for my life, in a fitting way." He descended from the pulpit and took his place at the communion table. It was a tense moment; Berthelier did not present himself. He had been tipped, probably by the Council, not to appear. It was a striking moral victory for Calvin.

Meanwhile Servetus denounced Calvin and his theology, demanded his deposition from the ministry, reimbursement for his troubles from Calvin, and even his death. None of this helped his cause. He and the Libertines finally agreed that his matter be referred to the other Swiss churches rather than that of Geneva. But all the Swiss churches sent back their replies condemning Servetus. The Council was divided; several punishments were put forward, but most voted for the stake. Calvin did his best for a less cruel form of execution but failed. Servetus died at the stake, crying out, "O Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me!"

Dr. Collins treats all these things objectively; he does not take sides, but for the comment that Servetus would have been quite at home with 19th century liberals. Even, it might be added,

with 20th century liberals. I think maybe the author was moved to write this book, not so much by interest in the cause of the Gospel as taught by John Calvin, but by an interest in the place and problem of discipline in the Church. One might speculate if he had ever himself been questioned as to the orthodoxy of his belief. He does not at all deride the place of church discipline; he merely deals with it as an historical issue, and he does so as the brilliantly objective historian he obviously was. I would say that he comes down on the side of church discipline.

The church, said Calvin, “has no power of the sword to punish or coerce, no authority to compel, no prisons, fines or other punishments like those inflicted by the civil magistrate. Besides, the object of this power (of admonition) is, not that he who has transgressed may be punished against his will, but that he may profess his repentance by a voluntary submission to chastisement.” The sole means of coercion which the Church possessed was excommunication. On this Calvin was quite firm. He could see no other way to discipline society except by the exclusion of the unworthy from the benefits of church membership.

All that remains is the final *denouement* for the Libertines of Geneva. The real test came in 1554 when Berthelier made a supreme effort to take away from the Consistory the power of excommunication. He did not succeed, and in the elections, the Libertines lost much ground. Three of the four syndics elected were for Calvin. Throughout that year, Berthelier heightened his campaign, and for months the Council wavered, but in the end declared that they would adhere to the edicts, that the Consistory would retain the power of excommunication. The Libertines had actually overreached themselves and become increasingly unpopular. The younger generation in Geneva, who had known little but the tuition of Calvin, deeply resented the Libertine treatment of Calvin. It was they, rather than the French refugees so feared by the Libertines, who compassed what was little short of a revolution, that is, the overthrow of Perrin and his colleagues. The widespread disgust over the violent and unjust attacks of the Libertines upon Calvin, the head of the Church in Geneva, and upon his teachings became more and more evident.

Another contentious issue was that of French refugees who at times poured into Geneva. The Libertines naturally opposed their being granted entrance into the bourgeoisie. But the power and the influence of the Libertines were waning. In the elections of 1555, all four syndics elected were supporters of Calvin. The councils were purged of many Libertine sympathizers, and their overthrow meant a strengthening of the disciplinary regime in Geneva. The Consistory consolidated its right to excommunication; it was able to pass judgments and hand over offenders to the Council for punishment. To us today, however, some of the offences did not merit such judgments.

This review of John Calvin will be more complete with a testimony or two to his normal humanity. Calvin has been depicted as reserved, cold, vindictive, the foe of all recreation, too stern to give way to laughter. We remember his host of friends in his youth and student days. Beza says he was a most entertaining companion at dinner. Indeed, Calvin was said to have frequently asserted, “We are not forbidden to laugh or to drink wine.” In 1547, in a letter to a friend, he said, “I am sorry that I am unable to have at least half a day with you in order that we might have a good laugh together.” He was fond of witticisms, and Castello, who had been a

guest at Calvin's home in Strasbourg, was shocked at the extent to which joking played a role in the Reformer's household.

We close with Dr. Collins's final assessment of his subject:

One of the most damaging accusations made against Calvin is that he was a political tyrant. It must not be forgotten that Calvin was no more than a pastor at Geneva. He did not always get his way nor was there any method by which he could achieve his ends at any time other than through his learning and prestige. He possessed expert legal knowledge and was often consulted by the authorities of Geneva in legal matters for that very reason. His learning was so much greater than any of his contemporaries in Geneva that his views could not be rejected without a very careful consideration. He was not, as the Perrinists asserted, a bishop or the Protestant pope of Geneva. One cannot deny that his authority in religious matters was very great, but he had a profound knowledge of the Bible, the Fathers and the history of the Church. His reputation was an international one and his views were difficult to disregard.... No interpretation can minimize the importance of what he said, what he wrote and what he did. Calvin, who was buried in an unmarked grave, minimized his own personal importance. He did not and we cannot minimize the importance of what he accomplished.