

XVI. John Calvin: Progress and Refinements in the Reformation

A. Calvin's relation to Luther

1. Calvin a 2nd generation Reformer; built on Luther's rubble
2. Calvin a systematizer and executive
X: Luther more issue oriented and a polemicist
3. Intellectually, Calvin a scholar driven to practicalities
X: Luther a practical man who saw the need of scholarship
4. Doctrinally, both were very close on the broad theological outlines; note emphasis of both on sovereignty of God and predestination, but note disparity on Consubstantiation.
5. In terms of Leadership, both were natural leaders. Luther's bombast was matched by Calvin's penetrating logic and force of argument; Luther's emotional reaction (convictions?) to the issue of the Lord's Supper was equaled by Calvin's calculating, rational, and exegetical approach to issues.

B. Beginnings of the Reformation in France

1. Humanism out of the Sorbonne (theological college at U. of Paris)
 - a. Francis I (1515-47) invited humanist/Renaissance scholars to Paris
 - b. Sorbonne (Theological School) favors Gallican rights and some outward ecclesiastical reforms, but no doctrinal changes or innovations.
2. Early Reformation leaders
 - a. Jacques Lefevre (1450-1536) = [Jacobus Faber]
 - 1) influenced by Pico della Mirandola on importance of the language in the study of the Scriptures
 - 2) Professor at Univ. of Paris till 1525
 - 3) Christian humanist influence
 - a) taught Farel and Briconnet
 - b) influenced Luther and perhaps Calvin
 - 4) 1512: translated some Pauline epistles with commentary
 - 1) proto-reformation position on justification by faith and the authority of the Scriptures
 - b) branded a heretic
 - 5) 1525: fled to Strasbourg and later to Navarre
 - a) translated NT & OT from the Vulgate
 - b) regretted that he had fled martyrdom:
"Thousands have suffered and died in defense of the doctrine in which I instructed them; and I, unfaithful shepherd that I am, after reaching so advanced an age, when I ought to love nothing less than life, or rather to desire death, have basely avoided the martyr's crown, and betrayed the cause of my God!"
 - b. William Briconnet (1470-1534)
 - 1) background
 - a) son of the finance minister, a powerful cardinal
 - b) protector and student of Lefevre
 - 2) as Bishop of Meaux (1523-24)
 - a) attempted reforms
 - Franciscan preaching banned in his bishopric
 - Lefevre and Farel invited to preach w/ open Bible

- b) coerced later into persecuting evangelicals
 - c. Margaret of Navarre (1492-1549)
 - 1) sister of Francis I; probably effective in restraining him
 - 2) patron of reformers and protector of refugees
 - 3) = a mystic with evangelical and Reformed doctrine, yet a practicing Roman Catholic
 - * d. William Farel (1489-1565)
 - 1) student of Lefevre who had told him, “God will yet reform the church and you shall witness it!”
 - 2) Elijah of the French Reformation
- 1520: read Luther’s theses and writings --sermons resulted in fistfights
 1523: fled France to proselytize in Switzerland
 1528: wins over German speaking Berne to Refm.
 1532: run out of Geneva by monks

C. Beginning of the Reformation in Geneva

1. Independence

a. 1533 - Duke of Savoy thrown out with the help of Berne

b. Republicanism

1) civil and military power to the people

2) Syndics = 4 city executives elected by the Great Council of 200, who were elected by the 640, who were elected annually by the city

2. Reformation seeds

a. 1532 - Farel stakes his life for the Gospel

1) entered Geneva on the earlier advice of Zwingli

2) Schaff VIII:243,44

b. 1534 - Farel returns under credentials from Berne

1) R.C. polemicist from Sorbonne can argue only from Aquinas

2) monks and nuns begin to evacuate

c. 1535 - mass and R.C. trappings banned

3. Calvin’s visit in 1536

a. on his way to Strasbourg

b. accosted by Farel

1) just after Farel had read Calvin’s *Institutes*...

2) threatened young Calvin with a curse: “You are only following your own wishes! If you do not help us in the work of the Lord, the Lord will punish you for seeking your own interest rather than His.”

Cf. Fisher, *History of the Reformation*, p. 211.

Calvin years later: “Being by nature a bit anti-social and shy, I always loved retirement and peace.... but in spite of my natural inclination, He has thrust me into the limelight and made me ‘get into the game,’ as they say.” =Author’s Preface to Calvin’s *Commentary on the Psalms*

4. July 1516 - Geneva hires “Farel and a young Frenchman” as his assistant

D. Early Life of John Calvin

1. Parentage

- a. Born July 10, 1509, in Noyons, France
- b. father worked way out of poverty
=notary and ecclesiastical asst. attached to local Bishop

2. education

- a. good elementary education with children of the Nobles
- b. University of Paris, 1523ff.
 - 1) Latin, philosophy and theology at two colleges -his father had secured him 2 benefices by age 18
 - 2) "The Accusative"
- c. University of Orleans
 - 1) father changed John's course
 - 2) law study till death of father in 1531
 - a) Greek and Hebrew
 - b) Doctor of Laws degree at no charge
 - 3) all night studies: later headaches and insomnia
- d. University of Paris
 - studies in classics and theology

3. Conversion, 1532

- a. possible influence of Lefevre or cousin Olivetan
- b. experience:

"At first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardor." *Preface to Commentary on the Psalms*

After my heart had long been prepared for the most earnest self-examination, on a sudden the full knowledge of the truth, like a bright light, disclosed to me the abyss of errors in which I was weltering, the sin and shame with which I was defiled. A horror seized on my soul, when I became conscious of my wretchedness and of the more terrible misery that was before me. And what was left, O Lord, for me, miserable and abject, but, with tears and cries of supplication to abjure the old life which Thou condemned, and to flee into Thy path?"

- a. Nicolas Kop = new Rector of University of Paris
 - 1) revolutionary inaugural address on All Saints' Day
-probably written by Calvin
 - 2) Schaff VIII:313
- b. injudicious Placard Affair, 1524
 - 1) clandestine anti-Mass protests
 - 2) persecution of Protestants

5. Early Writings

- a. Commentary on Seneca's "Clemency" - 1532
- b. *Psychopannychia*, 1534
 - =first religious publication; against Anabaptist idea that the soul sleeps between death and the resurrection
- c. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536
 - 1) first edition --> slim 7 chapters
 - 2) written in sanctuary of Basel
 - 3) dedicated to King Francis I
 - a) Protestant apology

- b) written more for literate upper classes
 - quality Latin text
 - his polished French version impacted the Fr. language
- 4) logical and systematic presentation of biblical doctrine
 - 1) “Without Luther’s antecedent labors his work could not have been done.” -Walker, p. 392.
 - ...Calvin more formulative than creative
 - b) two theses: the knowledge of God
the knowledge of man
- 5) 1559 revision swelled to 79 chapters

E. Calvin and Farel in Geneva, July 1536-April 1538

1. Honeymoon in Geneva
 - a. Calvin lectures in St. Peter’s Cathedral as “Professor of Sacred Scriptures” and prepares a Children’s catechism
 - b. Farel composes a strict Protestant Confession of Faith
 - subscription essential for maintaining citizenship
 3. strict discipline: civil examiners oversee behavior of citizens; breeches lead to the Church withholding monthly communion from those walking disorderly
2. Divorce from Geneva
 - a. R.C.s accuse Calvin of Arianism
 - b. Libertines chafing
 - minimum measures demanded: unleavened bread and holidays of Protestant Berne
 - c. City arrogates discipline to itself and forbids Reformer’ preaching
 - d. Reformers preach anyway and withhold communion from all on Easter
 - e. Banishment from the city
 - Calvin and Farel part ways after Berne; Farel to Neuchatel

F. Calvin at Strasbourg, “the Antioch of the Reformation, 1538-41

1. invited by Reformer Martin Bucer (1491-1551)
 - a. Aquinas scholastic Dominican -> Erasmian humanist -> Martinian -> independent Reformer of Strasbourg
 - b. influenced Calvin (& subsequent Reformed Church) in church polity
 - c. fled to England after resisting Augsburg Interim (1548-51)
 - 1) invited by Archbsp Cranmer
 - 2) served as Prof. of Divinity at Cambridge
 - 3) body exhumed and desecrated by Bloody Mary
2. “The Little Church” / “Church of Strangers”
 - a. 400+ French refugees; -not as worldly as Genevans
 - b. used Bucer’s liturgy
3. austerity
4. marriage to Idelette de Bure, 1540

- a. widow of former Anabaptist preacher with 2 children
- b. one son of their own dying after birth
- c. nine years till her death
 - note Calvin's letters on her passing: pp. Schaff, 418,19

5. meeting with Melanchthon

- 6. re-invitation to Geneva
 - a. response to Cardinal Sadolet
 - b. reticence of Calvin

G. Reorganization of Geneva (1541-47)

- 1. return on his own terms as chief pastor with 3 assistants
- 2. new "Ordinances" of religion
 - a. church government independent of total state control
 - 1) yet church elders chosen from city councils
 - 2) church has sole power of excommunication
 - 3) "proper" conduct of citizens to be enforced by civil law -- 6 districts for pastoral visitation
 - b. Four church offices: pastor, teacher, deacon, elder
 - 1) weekly meeting of the Venerable Company (=Classis)
=pastors to whom Calvin preached
 - 2) Consistory: 12 elders and 5 pastors meeting to conduct the affairs of the church and discipline; every Thur.
 - c. Lord's Supper monthly instead of quarterly
- 3. re-codification of city laws
 - asserted independence from Berne & rest of Switzerland
- 4. Psalter (and liturgy)
 - a. introduced from Calvin's work in Strasbourg
 - b. additions from Beza and Clement Marot
 - the latter was the ablest contemporary French poet
 - c. 62 editions in 3 years; popular even with R.C.s
- 5. Commentaries
 - a. greatest exegete of the times
 - "Next to the study of the Scriptures which I earnestly inculcate, I exhort my pupils to peruse Calvin's *Commentaries*, which extol in loftier terms than [contemporary Dutch divine]; for I affirm that he excels beyond comparison in the interpretation of Scripture, and that his commentaries ought to be more highly valued than all that is handed down to us by the library of the fathers; so that I acknowledge his to have possessed above most others, or rather above all other men, what may be called an eminent spirit of prophecy."
 - "His *Institutes* ought to be studied after the [Heidelberg] Catechism, as containing a fuller explanation, but with discrimination, like the writings of all men." -- Jacob Arminius
 - b. scope
 - 1) Synoptics, Romans, major prophets are the best
 - 2) 23 OT books; all NT books, except Revelation

6. Correspondence: 1000s of issue-oriented letters

7. Refugees

- a. open door policy
- b. Bernardino Ochino of Italy
 - 1) vicar-general of Capuchians in Italy
 - 2) orator who could “make the stones weep”
- c. John Knox

H. 8 Years of Difficulty (1547-55)

1. Sources of difficulty

- a. Patriots = Patriarchal families
- b. Libertines & antinomians
- c. poor health

* 2. Miguel Servetus (1511-53)

- a. Spanish physician
 - his political opponents
 - moral opponents
 - discovered circulation of blood in the body
- b. “The Errors of the Trinity” -1531
 - 1) =Arian (viz., Sabellian) view of Godhead
 - 2) condemned by RCs as heretic
 - 3) Calvin risked his life to meet with Servetus in Paris
- c. “The Restitution of Christianity” -1553
 - 1) = rebuttal to Calvin’s *Institutes*
 - 2) asserted Nicene doctrine of the Trinity, Chalcedonian Christology, and infant baptism were the sources of the church’s corruption
- d. capture in Vienna
 - condemned to slow roasting, but escaped and was burned in effigy
- e. trial in Geneva
 - 1) appeared in disguise against Calvin’s personal warning not to come
 - 2) Servetus attempts to exploit increasing strength of Libertines: calls for banishment of Calvin
 - 3) tried for heresy and blasphemy
 - a) Calvin the prosecutor; city council the judge & jury & executioner
 - Servetus denied more that Protestantism, but Christianity itself
 - spirit of Antichrist = dangerous murderer of souls
 - b) trial transcript sent to 4 other Swiss cities before verdict. Unanimous decision: guilty of death
- f. burning of Servetus
 - 1) visited in dungeon by Calvin
 - 2) Calvin sought method of decapitation
 - 3) historical context
 - a) blasphemy a capital crime in Europe
 - b) Melancthon and Bucer concurred in the execution
 - c) Servetus believed in capital punishment for “incorrigible obstinacy and malice”

- d) Torquemada burned 8,800+, not for blasphemy or immorality, but for their desired freedom of conscience
- e) tolerance was eschewed as much in the old world as much as intolerance is in the modern west

J. Calvin's Last years (1555-64)

1. Servetus affair the turning point; Calvin's power solidified
 - a. rebellious opponents banished
 - b. more French refugees get the franchise
2. Academy expanded to Univ. of Geneva, 1559
 - a. lectured every other day
 - b. Reformation seeds cast to the four winds (refugees)
 - c. Theodore Beza catches Calvin's mantle; next came Turretin in 1700
3. Death, May 27, 1564: fifty-five years old; worn out but still very active; day before death, council visited and reassured him; Theodore Beza confirmed as successor to various offices

Calvin had two men promise to bury him secretly in unmarked grave; possible point now has a memorial stone with "J.C."

K. Survey of Calvin's Work

1. Accomplishments

- a. refined biblical church government
 - 1) republicanism: constitutional/representative
 - a) rule by lay elders
 - b) graded courts of fellowship and appeal
 - 2) divorced from state control (at least initial steps)

"Men who were accustomed to rule themselves in the Church, would claim the same privilege in the commonwealth." --Fisher

"The sense of the exaltation of the Almighty Ruler, and of his intimate connection with the minutest incidents and obligations of human life, which is fostered by (Calvin's) theology, dwarfs all earthly potentates." --Fisher
- b. set biblical exegesis on an even keel
 - 1) use of original languages and textual criticism
 - 2) Analogy of Faith vs. deduced doctrines of scholasticism
- c. original theology

-- biblical doctrines developed from Protestant viewpoint
- d. Geneva claimed for Reformation center
- e. leaders trained for other lands!

2. Criticisms?

a. "Calvin was a cold, logical thinker"

X-Logical, but note the application of his Logo

b. "Calvin had a harsh, fatalistic theology"

X-Note balanced emphasis on whole counsel of God; doctrines of Grace

X-Theological systems are to be judged by Scripture, not by human presuppositions colored by a modern perspective of egalitarianism. An eternal hell, also, is a difficult doctrine.

X-Who ever attacked Luther's parallel doctrine of predestination?

X-Note the historical results of Calvinism; anything but fatalism.

c. "Calvin meddled in private lives"

X-Calvin was not the ruler or legislator of Geneva, but rather the city representatives elected by the people

X-every city had laws of personal conduct; Calvin helped simplify and get enforcement of these

X-generally, only overt and flagrant rebellion was punished

&- it may be granted that Calvin's amillennial eschatology colored his understanding of theonomy/realized theocracy, thus allowing the civil authority the power of coercion in areas today considered to be realms of civil and religious liberty.

d. Servetus Affair -- see discussion above (H.2.e.1f.)

L. Effects of Calvin's Work in France

1. refugees return as missionaries to France

a. perhaps 1/3 seal their faith with their lives

b. toehold of Protestantism

-- 10% of France (mainly in the South); 40%-50% of nobility

2. kings during the early part of the Reformation

a. Francis I (1515-47)

1) would have been happy with Erasmian reform -- early on protected some Protestants -- Margaret connection

2) 1534 - open persecution when he is persuaded that the Placard Affair was part of a large-scale Anabaptist plot

3) Calvin kept in touch, exhorting the French preachers

4) 37 printing offices cranked out small, concealable French Bible and Marot's Psalmody

- b. Henry II (1547-59)
 - 1) married Pope Clement's niece, Catharine de Medici -- she will act as regent for the next kings, her 3 sons
 - 2) secret alliance with Schmalcald League vs. HREmperor
 - a) progress of Protestant doctrine in his reign
 - b) later violent outbreak vs. "heretics" in year of his untimely death

- c. Francis II (1559-60) -- 16 years old
 - 1) henpecked: dominated by megalomaniac mother and aggressive wife, Mary of Guise (Queen of Scots)
 - 2) Guise family were fanatical R.C.s who sought the throne for Mary's uncle Francis (Guise) and the papacy for her uncle Charles
 - 3) protestant opponents to the Guise
 - a) Bourbons: 3 royal sons of Margaret of Navarre
 - b) Chatillons
 - most notable was Admiral Coligny, an intimate of the Guise family as a child -- became Protestant while held prisoner in Holland for 2 years
 - 4) Edict of Romorantin (1560), forbade Protestant assemblies but stopped proceedings against individuals

- d. Charles IX (1560-1574) -- began at age 9
 - 1) 1561 - French Council in Paris calls for colloquy, Council of Poissy, to work out a compromise RC and Reformed confession
 - a) Theodore Beza (1519-1605) =Protestant representative at Poissy
 - impressed Catharine =Paris lawyer of 9 years with humanist training =Calvin's successor in Geneva
 - translated NT into Latin using Codex Beza (D)
 - b) no success of conference

 - 2) Edict of St. Germain, 1562
 - =limited toleration of Protestants: able to assemble in daylight outside of city limits

 - 3) "Huguenots"
 - suggested definitions: ..."army of Hugh Capet" ..."Eidgenots" = freedom party of Geneva; =German word for "Confederates."

 - 4) Huguenot Wars, 1562ff.
 - a) precipitated by massacre at Vassy, March 1562
 - b) Catholic League organized at the instigation of the Jesuits, with the Guise family at the head
 - c) Catharine, seeking balance of power between the two major factions, suggests a political marriage

 - * d) St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, August 24, 1572
 - Admiral Coligny brutalized
 - 2,000 Huguenots cut down in Paris; 20,000 throughout Fr
 - Henry of Navarre escapes
 - Pope orders thanksgivings and commissioned painting of the slaughter

5) Charles IX dies 2 years later in a delirium; phps a guilt complex

e. Henry III (1574-89)

1) Incompetent king; had to borrow \$ from the Guise clan

2) War of the Three Henries

King Henry = moderate RCs

Henry of Guise = radical RCs

Henry of Navarre = Huguenots

a) Guises held Paris out of distrust of compromising monarchy

b) King Henry assassinates Henry Guise and his Cardinal brother and flees to protection of Henry of Navarre to help resist powerful Catholic League

3) King Henry assassinated in the Protestant camp by a Dominican assassin

3. Henry IV [of Navarre] (1589-1610)

a. next legitimate successor to the throne

b. swept thru France and surrounded Paris

1) became RC to avoid excessive bloodshed, 1593

“Paris is worth a mass”

2) concessions to the Huguenots

-- he refused to sign specific articles of faith

X-Yet his example blunted the ardor of many other Huguenot nobles

3) concessions to the RCs

a) he vowed to defend the RCism and die in it

b) Jesuits will train the royal children (!) and will be involved in picking the royal bureaucrats

c. assassinated by Jesuits

4. Edict of Nantes, 1598

1. Henry IV's guarantees to the Huguenots to protect their civil liberties and religious freedoms in Southern France

2. Revoked by Louis XIV in 1685 after years of erosion of liberty

5. 50 years of relative toleration

a. Cardinals Mazarin and Richelieu oversee decay of gains under the Edict of Nantes

1) after the first 20 years, no new Hug. churches to be built

2) all protestant garrisons later outlawed

-- resisting cities were sacked as examples

b. Huguenots fight back with own educational system

6. King Louis XIV (1643-1715), the Sun King

a. "The Sun King" --> "L'etat est moi"

b. Jesuit leverage

*

c. 1685 - Revocation of Edict of Nantes

1) Huguenot marriages declared illegal

2) children to be trained in RC schools

3) oppression

a) quartering troops

b) many galley slaves and hangings

4) 400,000 Huguenots flee France in next 100 years