

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

MEET

CALVIN

the man, the minister,
the husband, the
persevering follower
of a
sovereign God



An entire issue devoted to

John Calvin

(1509-1564)

in commemoration of The
450th Anniversary of his first
going to Geneva and the first
edition of his monumental
Institutes of The Christian Religion



"...he (Calvin) was the most Christian man of his age."

Ernst Renan,
French Historian

"CALVIN WAS ONE OF THOSE STRONG AND CONSISTENT MEN OF HISTORY WHO PEOPLE EITHER LIKED OR DISLIKED, ADORED OR ABHORRED."

Lewis W. Spitz,
Lutheran Historian

"To omit Calvin from the forces of Western evolution, is to read history with one eye shut."

Lord John Morley,
English Scholar

"The sixteenth century was a great century. It was the century of Raphael and Michelangelo, of Spenser and Shakespeare, of Erasmus and Rabelais, of Copernicus and Galileo, of Luther and Calvin. Of all the figures that gave greatness to this century, none left a more lasting heritage than Calvin."

Georgia Harkness, Theologian

"Few great Christian leaders have suffered quite so much misunderstanding as John Calvin. He has often been dismissed as a theologian without humanity. In fact, the very reverse is much nearer the truth. . . . He was a man of deep and lasting affection, passionately concerned for the cause of Christ in the world; a man who burned himself out for the gospel."

Banner of Truth Trust

"... Calvin made such a mark upon his age and, even beyond it, exercised an influence which does not yet seem likely to decline. Even more than a thinker, . . . he was a leader of men."

Francois Wendel,
Historian

"The Genevese should bless the birthday of Calvin."

Montesquieu, Eighteenth century
Philosopher and Political Theorist



ADORED

"The longer I live the clearer does it appear that John Calvin's system is the nearest to perfection."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon,
English Preacher

"The strength of that heretic [Calvin] consisted in this, that money never had the slightest charm for him. If I had such servants my dominion would extend from sea to sea."

Pope Pius IV,
Roman Pontiff at time of Calvin's death

"Taking into account all his failings, he [Calvin] must be reckoned as one of the greatest and best of men whom God raised up in the history of Christianity."

Philip Schaff,
Historian

"Calvin is the man who, next to St. Paul, has done most good to mankind."

William Cunningham,
Scottish Theologian

"I have been a witness of him for sixteen years and I think that I am fully entitled to say that in this man [Calvin] there was exhibited to all an example of the life and death of the Christian, such as it will not be easy to depreciate, and it will be difficult to imitate."

Theodore Beza,
Calvin's Successor

"If Calvin ever wrote anything in favor of religious liberty, it was a typographical error."

Roland Bainton,
Yale Church Historian

[Calvin] "belonged to the ranks of the greatest haters in history."

Erich Fromm,
Author

"Calvin has, I believe, caused untold millions of souls to be damned..."

Jimmy Swaggart, Preacher

"Better with Beza in hell than with Calvin in heaven!"

A saying coined by
Calvin's enemies in Geneva

"It was the fact that Calvin's own character was compulsive-neurotic which transformed the God of Love as experienced and taught by Jesus, into a compulsive character, bearing absolutely diabolical traits in his reprobatory practice."

Oskar Pfister,
Freudian Psychologist

ABHORRED

[Calvin was] the "cruel" and "the unopposed dictator of Geneva."

"But we shall always find it hard to love the man [Calvin] who darkened the human soul with the most absurd and blasphemous conception of God in all the long and honored history of nonsense."

Will Durant,
Historian

[Calvin was] "one of the terribly pure men who pitilessly enforce principles."

H. Daniel-Rops,
Roman Catholic Theologian

"The famous Calvin, whom we regard as the Apostle of Geneva, raised himself up to the rank of Pope of the Protestants."

Voltaire, French Enlightenment Philosopher





The Calvin grotto as it appears today near Poitiers, France. Here Calvin secretly organized his first Lord's Supper as depicted below.



Calvin preaching in Geneva at St. Peter's Cathedral, above, as the pulpit is today.



From the Publisher

The three "big names" for which we have received the most requests from readers to present in a full issue are Augustine, Luther and Calvin.

Augustine we are now at work on for a future issue and it should be out sometime in the next year. Regarding Luther, so much was written about him in connection with the 500th anniversary of his birth that we have decided to take some time before devoting an issue to him...but, someday.

We considered this to be the time to do an issue on Calvin as this year marks the 450th anniversary of his first going to Geneva and the same anniversary for the publication of the first edition of his *Institutes*.

We were confirmed in our inclination to do this Calvin issue now when the E.O. Television Company of Holland invited us to prepare a documentary film script for a television special on the life of Calvin. The resulting program was transmitted in Holland in the Dutch language this fall and is now being made into an English language film by Gateway Films.

This was one of the more difficult issues to plan and prepare. The mere mention of Calvin's name still elicits strong reactions and emotions both pro and con. Our attempt has been to get beyond both the Calvinists and the caricatures and let Calvin be Calvin.

Calvin's historical influence on the development of Protestantism and the modern church is both deep and diverse, reaching far beyond the Reformed and Presbyterian bodies. The early Baptists known as the "Particular Baptists" were Calvinists as were the early Congregationalists. The Anglicans were influenced by those who shared Calvin's theology such as Martin Bucer and Peter Matyr Vermigli, and the Methodists look with gratitude to the Calvinist George Whitefield. Jonathan Edwards, C.H. Spurgeon and a formidable list including a notable company of Christian leaders ministering today gladly acknowledge a special indebtedness to John Calvin.

In closing, consider present day Geneva and its significant role in international political and ecclesiastical affairs. Do you see Calvin smiling, frowning, or just perplexed?

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COVER

Huguenot church at Lyons painted the year of Calvin's death. The building was formerly an ordinary house, but converted for Reformed worship about the middle of the 16th century. Picture courtesy of Bibliotheque Publique et Universitaire, Geneva. Portrait is Calvin as a young man from the painting by Holbein at Castle Aschbach.



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Did You Know?...

To signify his willingness to sacrifice all to the service of the Lord, Calvin's seal pictured a burning heart in a hand and was accompanied by this motto: "Promptly and Sincerely in the work of God."



Calvin's early training was as a lawyer and his first published book was an academic commentary on the ancient philosopher Seneca.

Although neither were Protestants, both Calvin's father and his brother Charles were excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church.

Calvin was not granted citizenship in Geneva until five years before his death in 1564. He had been the city's most famous person for over twenty years.

Calvin's association with the Swiss city of Geneva was not part of his plans. He visited the city only because of a detour to avoid the hostilities of a war raging between the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V and the King of France, Francis I. Calvin had intended to remain in Geneva a single night before resuming his travel to Strasbourg.

John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, visited Calvin's Geneva. He wrote to an English friend saying of the city, it "is the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles."

Although he never met the great German Reformer, Martin Luther, Calvin esteemed him very highly. To his friend Heinrich Bullinger, Calvin wrote: "even if he [Luther] were to call me a devil I should still regard him as an outstanding servant of God."

Calvin married a widow with two children. After her death in 1549, he raised her two children as his own.

Calvin encouraged congregational psalm-singing in the church at Geneva. Calvin viewed music as a gift of God, and even put to music a number of the psalms himself.

Nearing his journey's end, Calvin gave strict instructions that he be buried in the common cemetery with no tombstone. He wished to give no encouragement to those who might make it a Protestant shrine. Today, his grave site is unknown.

Calvin did not like to waste a minute of his time. Even on his death-bed, his friends pleaded with him to refrain from his labors. He replied: "What! Would you have the Lord find me idle when he comes?"

Once when Calvin was sending a letter to his close friend Pierre Viret by one of a pair of students, he noticed that the other was a little jealous at not being the messenger. Calvin quickly dashed off another letter to Viret. The letter contained only the request that Viret pretend it was a valuable letter.

During the course of his ministry in Geneva, lasting nearly twenty five years, Calvin lectured to theological students and preached an average of five sermons a week. This was in addition to writing a commentary on nearly every book of the Bible as well as numerous treatises on theological topics. His correspondence fills eleven volumes.

Drawing by a student made during one of John Calvin's lectures.



As Shakespeare wrote, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." John Calvin was certainly not born great.

The Life and Times of John Calvin

BY T.H.L. PARKER

Calvin came from lowly stock. His paternal grandfather was a barrel-maker and boatman, his mother's father an innkeeper. His own father, Gerard, however, had improved his lot to become a successful lawyer, with a practice which brought him into the society of the local gentry and cathedral clergy. A side benefit from these connections fell to John, in that he was to be educated privately with the sons of the aristocratic De Montmors and was also to be given one or two chaplaincies in the cathedral, which serve as university grants.

Gerard planned a career in the church for his son. The path to this



View of Geneva from the lake

career lay through the University of Paris. There he would take the arts course and then go on to the nine years of study for the theological doctorate. After that, he would trust the De Montmors' patronage and his own talents to reach the higher levels of preferment.

The arts course was accomplished, or nearly so, by the mid-1520s. Calvin was now an excellent scholar, a good Latinist, proficient in the philosophy taught in those days, and qualified to take up the intensive study of theology.

A CHANGE IN PLANS

But suddenly all the plans fell through. Gerard changed his mind and decided that John should achieve greatness in law and not in the church. John, dutiful son that he was, acquiesced, and the next five or six years saw him at the University of Orleans, attaining some distinction in a study for which he had no love. These were years which brought him into the ideals of the Renaissance and probably into the evangelical faith as well.

The effects of the new approach to the arts and scholarship were by this time apparent all over Europe. Greek was steadily making its way as a necessity and not a mere ornament in the scholar's equipment. Printing presses were supplying cheap editions of the Greek and Latin classics. There were already half-a-dozen editions of the Greek New Testament and as many of the Hebrew Old Testament. It was a revolution in thinking and taste, almost as great as that which has occurred in our own day, with "the divine art of printing," as Bullinger called it, corresponding to the computer and word processor.

Calvin, too, came under this influence. He learned Greek now and, a little later, Hebrew. He developed a taste for good writing, read widely in the classics, added Plato to the Aristotle he already knew, and made his close friends from like-minded young men. Moreover, he set to work, editing and commenting on a Latin treatise by Seneca. This first book was published in 1532, when he was 22 years old.

But, during the years of studying



Young Calvin expounds the Bible to a family at Bourges

law, a more profound influence than that of the Renaissance had overtaken him. By the mid-1520s, the most momentous period in the history of the modern church, Luther's position was clear. In many countries Luther had a strong following and his friends were making use of the easy dissemination of ideas by printing to reach a wider audience. Most importantly for Calvin, there were also "Lutherans" in Paris and in Orleans.

CONVERSION

We do not know the time or the circumstances of Calvin's conversion to the evangelical faith. His own account in the preface to his commentary on the Psalms is reticent and vague. He writes:

God drew me from obscure and lowly beginnings and conferred on me that most honorable office of herald and minister of the Gospel. . . . What happened first was that by an unexpected conversion he tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years—for I was strongly devoted to the superstitions of the Papacy that nothing less could draw

me from such depths of mire. And so this mere taste of true godliness that I received set me on fire with such a desire to progress that I pursued the rest of my studies more coolly, although I did not give them up altogether. Before a year had slipped by anybody who longed for a purer doctrine kept on coming to learn from me, still a beginner and a raw recruit.

Plainly, for Calvin himself, the important thing was not when it happened or how it happened, but the change itself and the results of the change.

He became marked out as a "Lutheran," and, when persecution arose in Paris where he had returned to teach in one of the colleges, he was forced into hiding now here, now there, in France. At last, he had to leave the country altogether. He sought refuge in Basel.

In that city, 450 years ago, he published the book with which his name was always to be associated—"Calvin's Institutes." The word "Institutes," however, does not convey much to us. It would be better to translate the title as "Principles of the Christian Faith"

Dr. T.H.L. Parker is former professor at the University of Durham in England and author of the biographical work John Calvin published by Lion.



Pastor of Geneva

BY DR. OLIVIER FATIO

One is accustomed to speaking of Calvin as the Reformer of Geneva. It would be more precise, perhaps, to call him the pastor of Geneva, because Calvin was above all a pastor, and his work as a reformer was simply the extension of his pastoral ministry.

In fact, Calvin was not really prepared for pastoral ministry. Everyone knows how he was pushed into it one fine day in July, 1536, by Guillaume Farel. Why did Farel take an interest in this 27-year-old, a lawyer, humanist, and self-taught theologian? Because for some months, the cultured public with its avid taste for Protestant theology could speak of nothing else than his book *Christianae religionis institutio*, published in March, 1536. In this pocket-size book, the young man presented Reformation doctrine in a systematic way with great clarity and strength of conviction. Calvin was an intellectual and was going to Strasbourg to continue his studies; pastoral ministry was not his forte. Yet Farel got him to stay.

That first stay in Geneva seems to have been an unfortunate episode. The population was not prepared to submit to the demands of foreign pastors. As a result, the government drove Calvin and Farel out at Easter, 1538.

One might expect Calvin to go back to scholarly pursuits, admitting failure as a pastor. And Calvin did go on to Strasbourg. But there Martin Bucer asked him to take care of a community of French-speaking Protestant refugees and to teach at the academy. This stay in Strasbourg would turn out to be of primary importance for Calvin. Working with Bucer, he acquired what he had lacked in Geneva: experience in the pastoral ministry, the catechism, and the liturgy.

During his exile, the situation in Geneva bordered on anarchy. In 1540, an official delegation came to beg Calvin to come back. Reluctantly, he returned to Geneva in September, 1541, intending to spend a few weeks, a few months at the most, just enough time to put the affairs of the church back in order. He was to die there 23 years later.

How is it that during these 23 years Calvin became "the Reformer of Geneva" and Geneva became "the city of Calvin"? Did he exercise extensive political powers, those of a dictator as his detractors have claimed? Certainly not. Rather it was by preaching, organizing, admonishing, writing—in short, fulfilling his ministry as a pastor.

By November, 1541, the government had adopted Calvin's *Ecclesiastical Calvin's interchange with Farel*



or "Instruction in the Christian Faith."

The book was intended as an elementary manual for general readers who wanted to know something about the evangelical faith. The first part of the title expressed this aim: "The Principles of the Christian Faith, containing almost the whole sum of godliness and whatever it is necessary to know about saving doctrine." Calvin later wrote that, when he undertook the work, "all I had in mind was to hand on some elementary teaching by which anyone who had been touched by an interest in religion might be formed to true godliness. I labored at the task especially for our own Frenchmen, for I saw that many were hungering and thirsting after Christ and yet that only a very few had any real knowledge of him."

The first three chapters take up 81 pages, in the edition of 1536. They form the heart of the book. But the situation in Western Christendom demanded that more should be said. Between the Roman Catholics and the Reformers, there were three major disagreements—on the Church, the

Ordinances, which gave a new aspect to the Geneva reformation. In it, significantly, the preaching of the Word played a central role. In the city's three churches, it sounded forth every day of the week; and twice on Sunday, with sermons that lasted for more than an hour. Eighteen pastors from Geneva and the surrounding county parishes formed a high-caliber "Pastors Company" that wielded considerable influence, since the church pulpits were more or less the "media" of the day.

Why did Calvin insist that the pastors main task was the preaching of the Word? Because, in his opinion, preaching was like a "visitation" from God, through which he reaches out his hands to draw us to himself.

Calvin and the other pastors occupied themselves with other matters besides preaching. According to the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, they also administered the sacraments, baptism and Holy Communion; they presided over marriages which took place during ordinary services; they watched over the proper functioning of public charity. They participated with the elders in the meetings of the renowned Consistory, which gathered every Thursday to censure, and even excommunicate, believers guilty of offenses against Reformed morality or doctrine. All this reflects the importance of the ministry which Calvin, as pastor, and his other colleagues exercised for the life of the Church and the city.

The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* were not enough. Calvin felt the need to provide pastors with two other texts: the catechism and the liturgy. The *Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, published in 1542, enabled the pastor to teach the basics of the Reformed faith by means of questions and answers spread over 55 Sundays. Memorized by children at school, repeated and explained before the whole community on Sunday, it became a key element in the formation of the faith of Genevans and other Reformed believers for nearly two centuries.

The same year, Calvin composed a liturgy, the *Form of Church Prayers and Hymns*, which has been the basis for the order of the Reformed service to our day, and he introduced the public singing of the Psalms. The Psalter became the heart of Reformed piety.

Under his direction, Geneva also became a receiving center for Protestant refugees persecuted in France by King Henry II. The rush of them was prodigious: the city, which numbered approximately 10,000 inhabitants in 1550, saw its population double in 10 years. In addition to the French, there were refugees from Italy, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, and elsewhere.

Exhausted by the illness which had almost made him an invalid since the winter of 1558-1559, Calvin passed away May 27, 1564. He died as poor as he had lived, without any other title than that of pastor.

Nicolas des Gallars, a member of his pastoral team, admirably summed up Calvin's pastoral ministry:

"What labors, what long waking hours, what worries he bore; . . . with what faithfulness and intelligence he took an interest in everyone; with what kindness and good will he received those who turned to him; with what rapidity and openness he answered those who questioned him on the most serious of questions; with what wisdom he received, both privately and publicly, the difficulties and problems brought to him; with what gentleness he comforted the afflicted, raised those who were laid low and discouraged; with what firmness he resisted the enemy; with what zeal he brought low the proud and stubborn; with what greatness of soul he endured misfortune; with what moderation he behaved in prosperity; with what skill and enthusiasm, finally, he acquitted himself of all the duties of a true and faithful servant of God, words of mine could never express."¹

¹*Opera Calvini* XXXVI, 15-16.

Dr. Olivier Fatio is a Professor at the University of Geneva in Switzerland.

Sacraments, and Justification. The last had already been fully explained, and the first was kept for the final chapter. Two chapters were given to discussion of the Sacraments of the Roman Church not recognized by the Reformers. These two chapters, with 106 pages, are longer because the subject was so important. In to the final chapter are packed three topics: Christian liberty, the authority of the Church, and political government.

The fact that the length of the last three chapters is double that of the first three indicates a second purpose of the book. This was to make clear to non-evangelicals, whether strong Roman Catholics or Renaissance "humanists," where the Reformation stood doctrinally. Ridiculous ideas were current, identifying the Reformers with various ancient heresies, with extreme and anarchistic Anabaptists, and with moral permissiveness. Calvin, therefore, wrote the *Institutio* as a confession of the faith of evangelicals, showing their orthodoxy to the great creeds, their loyalty to established political order, and their acceptance of the moral demands of God's law. There should have been no need after this for anyone who could understand Latin to plead ignorance of the Reformation faith.

WHAT IF?

History is full of "ifs." If there had not been troop movements and skirmishes blocking the route to Strasbourg, if they had reached Strasbourg in a day or two, and if Calvin had settled there for life, the history of Europe, England, and America would have been vastly different.

With his brother and sister and one or two friends, he directed his steps toward the free city of Strasbourg. As it was, the little company had to go round two sides of a triangle, into what we now call Switzerland, and then approach Strasbourg from the south. They got to Geneva, a safe town for them, since it had declared for the Reformation a month or two earlier. Here they put up at an inn for the night, intending to resume their journey in the morning.

Before the evening was out, it had come to the ears of the church leader, William Farel, that the author of the *Institutio* was in the city. Farel, poor man, was beside himself with work

and worry, as he strove to organize and establish a newly formed church. Organizing was not his strong point, and he had few helpers. Now there had been given him a man who would prove an ideal assistant.

Straight to the inn went Farel, not dreaming that his offer would be welcomed. Calvin, however, was obdurate. He was a scholar, a writer, not a pastor or administrator. Farel would have to find someone else. Calvin was headed for Strasbourg in the morning.

TERROR-STRICKEN TO STAY

At last Farel, baffled and frustrated, swore a great oath that God would curse all Calvin's studies unless he stayed in Geneva. Calvin had always had a tender conscience, and now, "I felt as if God from heaven had laid his mighty hand upon me to stop me in my course... and I was so terror-stricken that I did not continue my journey."

Through all that followed, this belief that God had called him to work here, and not somewhere else, never wavered. This belief was challenged only once, when he and Farel were banished from Geneva eighteen months later. He thought that God had mercifully released him. But, after three years of freedom, he submitted to renewed imprecations from Farel and returned to Geneva. In the long struggles which followed, his human desires were for freedom; but he was a soldier placed in a field of battle by

Calvin welcomed back to Geneva, September 1541.

his Captain. In that battle he must stay, until his Captain ordered otherwise. New orders finally arrived in May, 1564, with his death.

His return to Geneva from Strasbourg in 1541 was a different matter from his first entering the city. Then he had been a mere passer-by. Now he was an important and influential personage, close friend of leading Reformers like Martin Bucer and Philip Melancthon, and the author of three more books.

The *Institutio* was rewritten. Since 1536, Calvin had been doing some hard reading, especially in the Church fathers. He had also been doing some hard theological thinking and had the benefit of stimulating discussions with other theologians. He realized the *Institutio* needed more breadth.

He now put it out with the unashamed claim of presenting a comprehensive statement of "well-nigh the whole sum of our wisdom, worth calling true and solid wisdom." This was not so much a revision as a rewriting, though with much of the earlier material incorporated into it. The six chapters swelled to seventeen. The catechism form was abandoned, in favor of a broader treatment centering loosely round the concept of wisdom, with its two parts, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves.

It was, then, this established theologian who was invited back to Geneva. He could make his own terms and was obviously in a position of

great moral advantage. It is to his credit that he strove to curb his temper and his self-will (both too evident in his first period in Geneva) and to be patient with opposition.

REORGANIZING THE CHURCH

His commission was to reorganize the Church in Geneva. For him, the Church in any place must faithfully mirror the principles laid down in the Holy Scripture. In the New Testament, he found four permanent orders of ministry, and around these he constructed his organization. He prepared a draft document, "Ecclesiastical Ordinances," which was discussed in committee, somewhat modified, and passed for approval by the City Councils.

In this fourfold ministry, the whole life of the Church was covered, its worship, education, soundness and purity, and its works of love and mercy.

To the pastors was committed the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. They conducted the services, preached, administered the Sacraments, and generally cared for the spiritual welfare of the parishioners. In each of the three parish churches, two services were held on Sundays and the catechism class for children. During the week a service was held every other day—later on, every day. The Lord's Supper was to be celebrated quarterly, not once a week as Calvin wished.

The doctors, or teachers, had the responsibility for education, both for adults and for children. Lectures on the Old and New Testaments were usually held on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. These were more academic than the sermons and were conducted in Latin. The audience consisted of the older schoolboys, ministers, and anyone else who wished to attend. The education of children was also to be provided; but here great difficulties were encountered, owing to scarcity of suitable teachers and lack of money. The problem was gradually overcome, and the establishment of the Academy, in 1559, placed education in Geneva on a stable footing.

The third order was that of elders. In every district of the city, there were one or two elders who would keep an eye on spiritual affairs. If they saw, for example, that so-and-so was frequently the worse for drink, or that



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John Calvin's Search for the Right Wife

Idelette

BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

You don't look to the life of John Calvin for humor, but Calvin's quest for a wife would make grist for a twentieth-century situation comedy.

It is hard to say when the quest began. Until he turned 29 and took the pastorate of the French refugee church in Strasbourg, he hadn't much time to think about marriage. Besides that, he once wrote, "I shall not belong to those who are accused of attacking Rome, like the Greeks fought Troy, only to be able to take a wife." So he was in no hurry.

But Strasbourg was a bit of a refuge for Calvin. Shortly after he had arrived in the city, he moved in with Martin and Elizabeth Bucer. Martin was the warm-hearted pastor of the church of St. Thomas in the city. Elizabeth was as hospitable as he. Their home was known as "the inn of righteousness."

John Calvin had never seen such a happy marriage. Bucer was so pleased that he urged marriage for all his ministerial colleagues. "You ought to have a wife, Calvin," Martin had said more than once.

Philip Melancthon once noted that John Calvin seemed uncharacteristically silent and absent-minded at the end of a day-long conference. "Well, well," said Melancthon, "it seems to me our theologian is thinking about a future spouse."

By this time, Melancthon had been married for nineteen years, and his marriage was also a happy one. Mrs. Melancthon, who had a rollicking sense of humor, took good care of Philip in every way. His only complaint, which he undoubtedly relayed to John Calvin, was "She always thinks that I am dying of hunger unless I am stuffed like a sausage."

Calvin, too, realized that he needed



somebody to take care of him. When he moved out of the Bucer "inn," he rented a house for himself, his brother, his stepsister and some student boarders. He found it a strain, not only on his time but also on his sanctification, to manage a boarding house and serve as a pastor of a growing church. It was another reason for needing a wife. So he told his associates that he was now in the market for a wife and that he was open to any suggestions.

Of course, as usual, he knew what

he wanted. The job qualifications: "Always keep in mind what I seek to find in her, for I am none of those insane lovers who embrace also the vices of those with whom they are in love, where they are smitten at first sight with a fine figure. This only is the beauty that allures me: if she is chaste, if not too fussy or fastidious, if economical, if patient, if there is hope that she will be interested about my health."

Meanwhile, Calvin was having

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personal problems that he felt might be eased, if not solved, by having a wife. "I can't call a single penny my own. It is astonishing how money slips away in extraordinary expenses." As T.H.L. Parker writes, "His health was poor; he was not perhaps a good manager of his own affairs; his impatience and irritability might be softened by marriage."

In fact, Calvin seemed so convinced that the next step in his life during 1539 should be marriage that he reserved a date "a little after Easter" with his friend William Farel, whom he wanted to officiate at the ceremony. We don't know whether he had a particular bride in mind.

But a few months later the first candidate was brought forward. She was a wealthy German woman, who had a brother serving as her campaign manager. A strong supporter of Calvin, the brother argued that such a marriage would be most beneficial. Calvin had often said that he wished to live the life of a scholar. Since royalties from sales of theological books would not provide much of an income, it would be helpful for him to have a wealthy wife.

Calvin had two problems with the first candidate: first, she didn't know French and did not seem eager to learn it; secondly, as he explained to Farel, "You understand, William, that she would bring with her a large dowry, and this could be embarrassing to a poor minister like myself. I feel, too, that she might become dissatisfied with her humbler station in life."

Farel had his own candidate to suggest. She spoke French and was a devout Protestant, but was about fifteen years older than Calvin. Calvin never followed up on this one.

The next candidate spoke French and didn't have any money, but was highly recommended by friends. Calvin seemed interested, enough to invite her to Strasbourg for an interview.

Calvin again alerted Farel, "If it come to pass, as we may certainly hope will be the case, the marriage ceremony will not be delayed beyond the tenth of March." The year is now 1540; Calvin is now 31. "I wish you might be present, that you may bless our wedlock," but then Calvin added, "I make myself look very foolish if it shall so happen that my hope again fall through." But fall through it did.

John was now so embarrassed by the entanglements and by his off-and-on again letters to William Farel that he wrote, "I have not found a wife and frequently hesitate as to whether I ought any more to seek one."

But when he stopped seeking, he found. In his congregation of refugees was a young widow, Idelette de Bure Stordeur. She, her husband, and their two children had come to Strasbourg as Anabaptists. Listening to John Calvin's faithful exposition of Scripture, they were converted to his Reformed views.

Jean Stordeur, Idelette's husband, had been an Anabaptist leader, and

*... "for I am none
of those insane
lovers... where
they are smitten
at first sight
with a fine figure."*

undoubtedly John Calvin had discussed theological matters with the Stordeurs in their home. In 1537, when Calvin was still in Geneva, Stordeur had come to that city to debate with the Reformers there. Stordeur lost the debate, was ordered out of Geneva, and returned to Strasbourg. Undoubtedly, the discussions continued when Calvin arrived in Strasbourg two years later. Eventually, Calvin's use of Scripture convinced the Stordeurs in most of their areas of difference, but not all. In some, perhaps, Calvin tempered his own thinking. But soon the Stordeurs were in Calvin's church, partaking of the Lord's Supper; after further discussion, they had their son baptized by Calvin; eventually, the entire family became members of the church which now numbered nearly 500 refugees from France and the Low Countries.

Then, in the spring of 1540, Jean Stordeur, stricken with the plague, suddenly died. Idelette grieved for the loss of her husband; John sorrowed for the loss of a friend.

It was at this time, as John Calvin had almost given up thoughts of marriage because of the string of

fiascoes, that his pastor-friend Martin Bucer said to him "Why not consider Idelette?" John did.

Idelette was attractive and intelligent, a woman with culture, apparently from an upper middle-class background. She was also a woman of character and quiet strength.

It didn't take much time for the Reformer to pen another letter to William Farel, asking him to come and perform a wedding ceremony. This time it was no false alarm, and in August, John and Idelette were married.

Idelette was perhaps more concerned that her children have a good father, and John was relieved to have finally discovered a good wife.

Her first major adjustment was to move into Calvin's student boarding house and learn how to cope with a sharp-tongued housekeeper.

There were also health problems. Both of them became ill shortly after the wedding and were confined to bed. Calvin's thank-you note to Farel said, "As if it had been so ordered, that our wedlock might not be overjoyous, the Lord thus thwarted our joy by moderating it."

In his writings, John Calvin did not say much about his personal circumstances and even less about his wife—certainly not as Martin Luther did—but nevertheless you get from his letters a glimpse of Idelette as a wife who deeply cared for her husband as well as for her children. His biographers speak of her as "a woman of some force and individuality," and John himself described her as "the faithful helper of my ministry" and "the best companion of my life." He certainly was not disappointed in marriage.

Though he delighted in her company, during the first year of their marriage he didn't have much of it. After their stint in their sickbeds, John had to travel, leaving his bride to cope with the boarding house problems as well as her two children. He was not eager to leave, but Emperor Charles, the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire, had called the leading Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars together to discuss how they might stop their bickering and form a united front against the Turks, who were menacing his empire.

Three months later he arrived back home for a month before going to another conference called by the

Emperor. "I am dragged most unwillingly," he wrote, but he went.

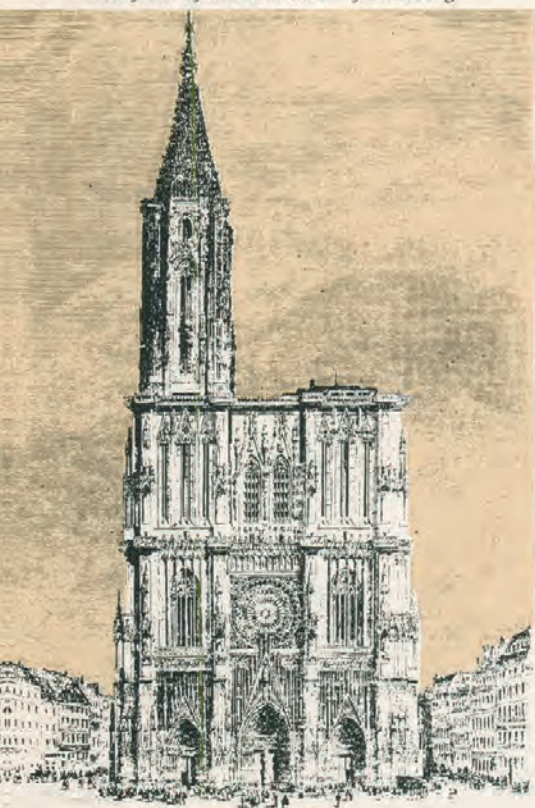
While attending the conference, he received news that a plague was ravaging Strasbourg. He was concerned. "Day and night my wife has been constantly in my thoughts," he wrote. He realized that just as the plague had taken her first husband only a year earlier, so it could now take Idelette, who was still weak from illness. He wrote, urging her to leave Strasbourg until the plague was over.

But Idelette had already taken action. She had taken her children and moved in with her brother Lambert. Lambert had been a wealthy landowner in Liege before he was forced to flee, leaving behind everything he had. But in only a few years in Strasbourg, he had once again become an honored citizen.

Later that year, John was called to another conference. He and Idelette were separated for 32 of the first 45 weeks of their marriage.

Then came an even greater challenge than separation—the call to return to Geneva. He did not want to go; "I would rather face death a hundred times" than return to Geneva, he said. "If I had a free choice, I would prefer doing anything else in the world."

West front of the Cathedral of Strasburg



But in September 1541, John headed toward Geneva to see if there was any reason why he should change his mind. "I offer my heart to the Lord in sacrifice," he wrote. Idelette stayed behind in Strasbourg until he determined whether Geneva would be safe for her.

Geneva showered gifts on him. "There was a new robe of black velvet, trimmed with fur. And a house on Rue de Chanoines, a short narrow street near the cathedral. At the back of the house was a garden which overlooked the blue lake." Then the Council sent

*The Lord has certainly
inflicted a bitter
wound in the death
of our infant son...
But He is Himself a
father and knows what
is good for His children.*

a herald and two-horse carriage to bring Idelette, the children and all the family furniture from Strasbourg to Geneva.

It was a traumatic move for Idelette as well as for John. Strasbourg had become home for her and her children. Her brother and his family were there as well. All she knew of Geneva was what John had previously experienced there, and it all sounded like more uncertainty and confusion, if not trial and tribulation.

But she went. And when she began settling down in the new house at Number 11 Rue de Chanoines, she was pleased. It was nothing like the crowded boarding house in Strasbourg.

The city council had loaned furniture to them, because they had very little of their own. Behind the house was a vegetable garden, which Idelette planted each year. She also planted herbs and flowers which scented the air. When guests came, John proudly took them out in the back yard to show off Idelette's vegetable garden.

During their first summer in Geneva, Idelette bore a son prematurely. Little Jacques died when he was only two weeks old. It was a

severe blow for both of them. "The Lord has certainly inflicted a bitter wound in the death of our infant son," John wrote a fellow minister. "But He is Himself a father and knows what is good for His children."

Three years later, a daughter died at birth, and two years after that, when both John and Idelette were 39, a third child was born prematurely and died. Then Idelette's physical problems worsened. Coughing spells dragged her down.

While life in Geneva was better for John Calvin the second time around, it still was difficult. He had as many enemies in the city as he had friends. Some of the citizens called their dogs "Calvin." What angered John more, however, was when the insults touched Idelette.

Idelette's first marriage to Jean Stordeur had never been solemnized by a civil ceremony, because Anabaptists felt marriage was a sacred ceremony, not a legal act. Hence, years later in Geneva, the gossips in Geneva spread the word that Idelette was a woman of ill repute and that her two children had been born out of wedlock. John Calvin and Idelette were now unable to have children, the gossips said, because God was punishing them for her previous immorality.

Despite her poor health, Idelette tried to keep John on an even keel. Friends remarked that John was in better control of his temper, in spite of various provocations. No doubt, Idelette defused numerous explosions.

She was still in her 30's when disease, probably tuberculosis, began wasting her. In August 1548 John wrote, "She is so overpowered with her sickness that she can scarcely support herself." And in 1549, when she had just turned 40, she lay dying. She had been married to John for only nine years.

On her sickbed she had two major concerns. One was that her illness should not be a major hindrance to John's ministry. The other was her children.

Later, in a letter, John recalled the time: "Since I feared that these personal worries might aggravate her illness, I took an opportunity, three days before her death, to tell her that I would not fail to fulfill my responsibilities to her children. She

immediately responded by saying, "I have already entrusted them to God." When I said that this did not relieve me of my responsibility to care for them, she answered, "I know that you would not neglect that which you know has been entrusted to God."

On the day of her death, John was impressed with her serenity. "She suddenly cried out in such a way that all could see that her spirit had risen far above this world. These were her words, 'O glorious resurrection! O God of Abraham and of all of our fathers, the believers of all the ages have trusted on Thee and none of them have hoped in vain. And now I fix my hope on Thee.' These short statements were cried out rather than distinctly spoken. These were not lines suggested by someone else but came from her own thoughts."

An hour later she could no longer speak and her mind seemed confused. "Yet her facial expressions revealed her mental alertness," John recalled later. "I said a few words to her about the grace of Christ, the hope of everlasting life, our marriage and her approaching departure. Then I turned aside to pray." Before long she quietly "slipped from life into death."

John was grief-stricken. He wrote to his friend Viret, "You know how tender, or rather, soft my heart is. If I did not have strong self-control I would not have been able to stand it this long. My grief is very heavy. My best life's companion has been taken from me. Whenever I faced serious difficulties she was ever ready to share with me, not only banishment and poverty, but even death itself."

To his friend Farel he wrote, "I do what I can to keep myself from being overwhelmed with grief. My friends also leave nothing undone that may bring relief to my mental suffering. . . . May the Lord Jesus. . . support me under this heavy affliction."

John Calvin was only 40 when Idelette died, but he never remarried. Later he spoke about her uniqueness and pledged that he intended henceforth "to lead a solitary life."

Idelette deBure Calvin's life was full of heartache, but, never a complainer, she brought joy and peace wherever she lived. John had known much about God the Father as Sovereign. Through her life and in her death Idelette taught him a little about the Holy Spirit as Comforter. *CH*

CALVIN'S Life...



During his lifetime, Calvin was already recognized as a major figure in Europe.

The illustration to the left is not untypical of the great volume of characterizations of Calvin that were generated.

It shows how Calvin's life, thought and work came to influence church structure and practice, international affairs, political realignments, and the definition of orthodoxy.

Below is a chronology of significant dates and events in Calvin's life.

1509 Calvin was born in Noyon, France on July 10. **1523** Fourteen year-old Calvin goes to Paris to study. **1528-29** Calvin goes to Orleans and then Bourges to study law. **1531** Calvin's Father dies. **1532** He publishes his first work—a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*. **1533** Calvin and Nicolas Cop flee Paris. At about this time Calvin undergoes a "sudden conversion." **1534** Calvin visits Lefevre D'Etaples and resigns his two benefices. **1536** In March, first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is published. **1536** In August, Calvin is persuaded by Farel to remain in Geneva. **1538** Calvin and Farel are banished from Geneva. Calvin goes to Strasbourg as pastor to the French-speaking congregation. **1539** Cardinal Sadeleto writes letter to Geneva. Calvin is asked to respond on behalf of Geneva. **1540** Calvin's *Commentary on Romans* is published. In August, Calvin marries the widow of an Anabaptist, Idelette de Bure. **1541** Calvin is welcomed back to Geneva September 13. **1542** Calvin writes a treatise on free will against the Roman Catholic theologian Albert Pighius. **1549** Calvin's wife, Idelette, dies. *Consensus Tigurinus* is signed with Zurich. **1552** Jerome Bolsec banished from Geneva. **1553** Servetus is burned at the stake for heresy. **1559** Calvin is made a citizen of Geneva. Final edition of *Institutes* is published. Academy is established. **1564** Calvin dies on May 27.

Gallery of Calvin's

SUPPORTERS & OPPONENTS

Olivetian [1503-1538]

Olivetian, which means "Midnight Oil," was a nickname acquired because of his habit of studying late into the night. His real name was Pierre Robert, and he was Calvin's cousin. According to Beza, Olivetan was the one who set the evangelical fires burning in Calvin's heart.

Although they knew each other in Calvin's hometown of Noyon, the cousins became more intimately acquainted while studying in Paris and Orleans. Already a Protestant, Olivetan aroused the suspicions of the authorities, and he was forced to flee to Bucer's Strasbourg in 1528.

In 1532, the Waldensian Christians of Italy's Piedmont area decided to join the Reformation. Olivetan visited the Waldensians and was commissioned to translate the Bible into French. When Calvin fled France and arrived in Basel in 1535, Olivetan was there placing the finishing touches on this pioneering work. Calvin may have assisted his cousin in the final phase of translating the New Testament. He did write a Latin and a French preface to the pioneering work, which clearly reflected, for the first time, his evangelical convictions.

From 1533 to 1535, Olivetan helped to win Geneva to the Reformation, that city where his younger cousin would spend the greater part of his life. Olivetan returned to Italy and the Waldensians where he died at the early age of 32. The cousins seem to have been rather close, for Olivetan left his library to Calvin.

Lefevre D'Etaples [ca. 1455-1536]

In his formative years, Calvin became aware of the native French reform movement, spearheaded by the great biblical scholar, Lefevre D'Etaples. Lefevre began an inten-



sive study of the Bible and came to the conclusion that the Scriptures must be the sole source of authority. He advocated what he called the "literal-spiritual" interpretation of Scripture. Lefevre argued that the only proper meaning of Scripture is that intended by the Holy Spirit. Luther was profoundly influenced by Lefevre's "literal-spiritual" interpretation of Scripture.

Drawing heavily on Paul's epistles, Lefevre also came to understand that man was saved only by God's mercy and grace, which are received by faith alone. Neither good works nor human merit contribute to salvation. He advocated a rigorous doctrine of predestination, and his view of justification by faith alone anticipated Luther's.

As he examined the Scriptures, he was amazed that he could find no mention of the pope, indulgences, purgatory, seven sacraments, priestly celibacy, or worship of Mary. Not surprisingly, he was charged with heresy by the Sorbonne in 1521. Lefevre then joined his pupil, Bishop Briconnet, to assist in reforming the diocese at Meux. Also at Meux was Guillaume Farel, who was later to become so important to Calvin and Geneva. In 1525, hostility to his reforms became so intense, that Lefevre was again forced to Strasbourg for a time. When he returned, he lived out the remainder of his life at Nerac,

under the protection of the King's sister, Marguerite d'Angouleme.

A fugitive from the Roman Catholic authorities, young Calvin proceeded to Nerac where he met the aging Lefevre in the Spring of 1534. It was reported that Lefevre said that Calvin would be "an instrument in the establishing of the Kingdom of God in France." Apparently, Calvin came away from his meeting with the elder Lefevre convinced that reform would not come about by remaining within the Roman Church. Shortly thereafter, Calvin resigned his benefices and thus broke decisively with Rome.



Francis I [1515-1547]

Francis I was the King of France during Calvin's early career as a Reformer. During most of his reign he was entangled in several wars with Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, and therefore could not devote his attention to religious matters. Initially, Francis was reasonably tolerant of the French Reformers, due primarily to the influence of his sister Marguerite d'Angouleme. He even maintained cordial relations with the pioneer of the reform movement in France, Lefevre D'Etaples. But all that changed in October, 1534.

It was to Francis I that Calvin wrote his famous letter which was prefaced to the first edition of the *Institutes*. The King had become incensed by the protest of French Protestants known as the "Affair of the Placards." In the early morning hours of October 18, 1534, Protes-

tants distributed throughout Paris leaflets denouncing the Roman mass. One was even placed on the King's bedroom door. Francis dramatized his anger by accompanying a solemn religious procession to the Cathedral of Notre Dame to symbolically purify Paris from the abomination. His anger did not stop with ceremonies. A policy of persecuting Protestants was inaugurated and would remain in effect until the Edict of Nantes in 1598. Hundreds of Protestants were imprisoned by Francis and 35 were burned at the stake, including several close friends of Calvin. The *Institutes* were written with the French martyrs on his mind. His book, as he writes to Francis in the prefatory letter, was to "vindicate... my brethren whose death was precious in the sight of the Lord."

Francis also played an interesting role in Calvin's arrival in Geneva. Because Francis was at war with the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V, Calvin was unable to take a direct route to Strasbourg as he intended, and was forced to take the momentous detour to Geneva.

Guillaume Farel [1489-1565]

It was Farel who persuaded a young, timid, and unwilling John Calvin to serve the cause of the Reformation in Geneva. Intending merely to pass through Geneva, spending a single night, Calvin was detained by Farel, "not so much by counsel and exhortation," he later wrote, "as by a dreadful curse, which I felt to be as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me."

A fiery redhead, Farel was involved in the native reform movement in France, led by Lefevre D'Etaples. When persecution forced him to flee in 1523, he became a leader of a band of evangelists, preaching mainly in French-speaking Switzerland. He was also at the center of evangelistic efforts which brought the cities of Bern and Geneva into the Protestant fold. After Farel persuaded Calvin to remain in Geneva, the two Frenchmen proceeded to institute many reforms in the city. Farel probably was Calvin's closest and dearest



friend through the years. They endured much together. They were both expelled from Geneva in 1538, and it was again the persuasions of Farel that prompted Calvin to return in 1541. Farel had since gone to Neuchatel, where he continued to work in close harmony with Calvin in Geneva.

A rift occurred between the two friends in 1558, when 69 year-old

Farel married a young girl. Calvin refused to attend the wedding. But their friendship survived. It was to Farel that Calvin wrote one of his last letters and, in a touching gesture, asked Farel to "remember our friendship." Though aged and infirm, Farel felt it his duty to attend his dear friend on his death-bed in 1564. The following year, Farel followed Calvin in death.

Pierre Viret [1511-1571]

With Farel and Calvin, Pierre Viret formed the triumvirate which founded the Reformed Church in French Switzerland. From Protestant Bern, Viret and Farel made a missionary journey to Geneva. In June, 1535, Viret and Farel routed the Catholic defenders in a marathon debate. Shortly thereafter the mass was suspended and the Catholic clergy abandoned Geneva to the Protestants. Enemies tried to poison the reformers. Only Viret ate the poisoned meal. Although he recovered, his health was permanently damaged. Geneva officially declared itself in the Protestant camp in May, 1536. Just a short time later, Farel prevailed upon a young John Calvin to remain in Geneva to assist in the reform of the city.

After Farel, Viret was one of Calvin's closest friends. Their paths had crossed earlier in Basel, after Francis I initiated persecution of



Francis I initiated persecution of Protestants in the wake of the placard affair. Viret was at Calvin's side at the Lausanne disputation in 1536, he smoothed the way for Calvin before his return to Geneva after his banishment in 1542, and labored side by side with Calvin in Geneva from 1559 to 1561. It was said that his sermons were more popular than Calvin's.

Viret is chiefly known as the Reformer of Lausanne. Not long after Geneva was won to the Protestant cause, he and Farel introduced Protestantism to the city of Lausanne. Viret remained in that city for 22 years, maintaining a close association with Calvin's Geneva. In the face of the strong opposition of the city of Bern, Viret was deposed in 1559, after which he went to Geneva.

Under the auspices of the Genevan church, Viret served as an active evangelist in France and presided over the Reformed Synod of Lyon in 1563.



Martin Bucer [1491-1551]

In many ways, Bucer was Calvin's teacher and mentor. During his exile from Geneva, Calvin came under the influence of Bucer in Strasbourg. Calvin accepted a call from the French-speaking congregation in Strasbourg, and the two reformers developed a keen friendship. In three formative years [1538-1541], Calvin sat at Bucer's feet, absorbing Bucer's views of predestination, church organization, and ecumenism.

Bucer had been converted to Protestantism when he heard Martin Luther's defense at the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518. Shortly thereafter, he, along with Matthew Zell, Wolfgang Capito, and Casper Hedio, assumed the leadership in the reformation of Strasbourg. Bucer is best known for his efforts to reconcile Ulrich Zwingli and Martin Luther on the matter of the Lord's Supper. Although Bucer failed, he continued in his efforts to unite the Lutheran and Reformed branches of Protestantism.

He was exiled from Strasbourg during the Augsburg Interim of

1548 and sailed for England to assist Archbishop Cranmer with the English Reformation. Bucer was appointed Regius professor at Cambridge and influenced the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. His influence was cut short when he died in England in 1551.



Jacopo Sadeleto [1477-1547]

Sadeleto, Archbishop of Carpentras and Bishop, was one of the ablest of the Roman Catholic theologians during Calvin's life. His encounter with Calvin was the first notable challenge of the Counter-Reformation to recover lost territory.

Calvin and Farel had been banished from Geneva in 1538. Calvin had accepted the invitation of Bucer to come to Strasbourg. Farel ended up in Neuchatel. Calvin would have remained contented with his ministry in Strasbourg had it not been for Cardinal Sadeleto. Having observed the banishment of the Protestants in Geneva, Sadeleto seized the opportunity to try to lure the city back into the Roman fold. He addressed an enticing letter to the city's leadership.

However, Geneva was not about to return to the shackles of Rome. Calvin was asked to answer Sadeleto on their behalf. Calvin's reply to Sadeleto was written in six days. With devastating eloquence,

Sebastian Castellio [1515-1563]

Once a friend and colleague, Sebastian Castellio became one of Calvin's severest critics. They met during Calvin's exile in Strasbourg. When Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541, he invited Castellio to return with him as the rector of the Latin



Calvin effectively countered Sadeleto's argument. It was a religious and literary masterpiece.

Calvin skillfully defended the Evangelicals against charges of heresy and schism. Calvin even challenged Cardinal Sadeleto himself to return to the true faith of the church Fathers. As he made clear in his reply, Calvin did not believe that he or the other Protestant leaders were innovators in religion. Indeed, the reason that the religious movement of the sixteenth century was called the "reformation," rather than the "revolution," was because Protestants were seeking to "re-establish" and "re-form" the true church, which had declined under the ever increasing political aspirations of the Renaissance Popes.

The Genevans were profoundly affected by his impassioned reply to Sadeleto. Soon after, an invitation was sent to Calvin requesting him to return to his pastoral duties in Geneva.



school. After Geneva was ravaged by the plague, both Castellio and Calvin offered to serve as pastor to the hospital treating the plague victims. But when church officials asked Castellio to go, he refused. Calvin offered to take his place but the Genevan Senate prevented it. The friendship was never the same again.

Castellio took offense at some of Calvin's theological positions. In particular, he felt the Song of Songs was obscene and should be expunged from the canon of Scripture. When he sought ordination in Geneva, Calvin opposed him. Castellio decided to leave Geneva for greener pastures and Calvin graciously consented to write a letter of recommendation on his behalf. After a brief sojourn in Lausanne with Pierre Virat, Castellio returned to Geneva. A short time later, he publicly denounced the ministers of Geneva, charging them with drunkenness, impurity, and intolerance. The outburst resulted in banishment from Geneva.

Castellio went to Basel, a city known for its tolerance. There he translated some of Bernard Ochino's writings, which favored Unitarianism and polygamy. After several years of poverty, he was finally made a professor of Greek at the university. Anonymous tracts against Calvin appeared and Castellio was strongly suspected of being the author. When he died in December, 1563, Theodore Beza saw it as the judgment of God.

Castellio was nowhere more eloquent in his opposition to Calvin than during the Servetus affair. His famous book, *Concerning Heretics*, was a plea for religious toleration, directed mainly at Calvin. Castellio

wrote: "To burn a heretic is not to defend a doctrine, but to kill a man."

Castellio was the greatest liberal of his age and one of the few advocates of religious toleration in a time when the penalty for heresy was death. As one of the most vocal opponents of Calvinism, he exerted considerable influence on the development of Arminianism and Socinianism.



Theodore Beza [1519-1605]

A Frenchman and a lawyer like Calvin, he was Calvin's successor at Geneva. Beza became a Protestant after a severe illness in 1548. He visited Geneva and then was appointed professor of Greek at the Academy in Lausanne, where he remained for a decade. During this time at Lausanne, Beza proved to be an ardent supporter of Calvin. He sided with Calvin against Bolsec in the controversy over predestination and came to Calvin's defense after the execution of Servetus.

One of Calvin's crowning achievements in Geneva was the founding of the Academy. Although not well known at the time, Beza was chosen as professor of Greek and rector of the Genevan Academy in 1559. A deep and abiding friendship grew between Calvin and Beza. After arriving in Geneva, Beza ably represented the cause of Protestantism at the famous Colloquy of Poissy with Catherine d'Medici and advised the French Huguenots in the wars of Religion in France.

Upon Calvin's death, he assumed Calvin's mantle, taking full leadership of the Academy, while also serving as moderator of the Venerable Company of Pastors. Of Calvin, he said: "I have been a

witness of him for sixteen years and I think that I am fully entitled to say that in this man there was exhibited to all an example of the life and death of the Christian, such as it will not be easy to depreciate, and it will be difficult to imitate."

In 1565, he published a Greek Text of the New Testament, which came to exert enormous influence on Protestant biblical studies. After the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572, Beza took a bold step and argued that an inferior magistrate could revolt against the government.

Beza's ardent and logical defense of double predestination, biblical literalism, church discipline, and other Calvinistic ideas has led many modern scholars to consider him one of the formative influences of seventeenth-century Reformed scholasticism.



Heinrich Bullinger [1504-1575]

Bullinger was a fellow Reformer in Switzerland and close friend to Calvin. After the disastrous Second War of Kappel in 1531, in which Zwingli was killed on the battlefield, Bullinger, the illegitimate son of a priest, was chosen as Zwingli's successor. With Zwingli gone, a man was needed in Zurich who would preserve and consolidate the accomplishments of the Reformation. In Bullinger, such a man was found.

The Protestant Reformation had long been divided on the matter of the Lord's Supper, even since Zwingli and Luther could not reach an agreement at the Colloquy of Marburg in 1529. With the emergence of Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper, there were now three main branches: the Lutheran, Zwinglian,

continued on page 35

How Prayer Was Calvin's Key to Living Well

The Principal Practice of Faith

BY RAYMOND K. ANDERSON

The treatment and value given to prayer stand so dominantly at the center of Calvin's complete life work that here the systematic theologian, the biblical scholar, the church teacher and the pastoral counselor all are speaking to us with equal force.
(Udo Smidt, *Das Gebet bei Calvin*)

A Reshaped Life-View

One of the most remarkable renewals brought by the Reformation was a shift in the whole idea of what it meant to be worthy and do good. The very purpose of life was redirected. Preoccupation with acquired virtue and earned status was displaced by confidence in friendship freely received and permanently guaranteed by God's unearned love.

Scriptures Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone

The revolution in Christian ethics, like so much else in the Reformation, may be seen as an indirect result of the return to the Scriptures. Even before the Reformers, many common people had the intuitive feeling that the



medieval Church had set up its own system of hoops, which you had to jump through to merit eternal reward. The traditional approach to life, spelled out in the official canons, was removed from the joyful spontaneity that one could recover through renewed focus on the spirit of Jesus in the Gospels.

The Reformers found it tragically unchristian that the Roman Church should have contrived to manipulate people's conscience using a kind of balance sheet of earned "merits." The religious establishment had been less than honest in leaving lay people with the superstition that God keeps score on your pious activities: as you light a votive candle, venture forth to vener-

ate the relics of some saint, subsidize a mass, or contribute to a building fund. One could even receive papers in connection with certain special donations ("indulgences," they were called), which went so far as to list the amount of remission your gift would merit towards early parole from purgatory. Luther's indignation, as a loyal churchman, over such huckstering of grace was what had sparked the Reformation in the first place. In the Scriptures there was no basis for this focus on externals.

The Reformation movement rapidly became more than a revolt against a church which had become too high and mighty. People began to rediscover how the Scriptures themselves

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focused on God's living grace in Christ. Where "Scriptures alone" were taken as the final authority, Paul's ardent trust in God's "grace alone" began to flood back into their minds as the sole basis for a truly human life.

When the Reformers began again to take Christ as their key, they regained a sense of the sovereignty of God's grace not only as the sole basis for salvation, but also as what makes life worth living. They also began to appreciate faith in a new way. For faith, dependent trust on God himself, was the only channel through which we are touched by God's grace. All renewal depends on this confidence that only God can give: "faith alone."

So Relax

We find John Calvin, the greatest among the second generation of reformers, saying surprising things about the Christian life—surprising especially, if we have been thinking in terms of the later "Puritan work ethic."

If men by their virtue could accomplish the Law, it would be said to them, get to work. But on the contrary, it is said, relax, rest, in order that God might do the job. Law then could well be impossible, indeed, so far as we are concerned; but it is possible for God to print it in our hearts and govern us by his Holy Spirit—so that it will be an easy and light yoke for us and there will be no harshness in it to trouble us.

Calvin was trained as a lawyer, not a monk or clergyman, and this, together with his rather French genius for cutting through to essentials, equipped him to discern the far-reaching implications of these theological insights for the practical business of living.

Such a shift in the grasp of God's purpose for life required that many medieval assumptions be put to rest: all pretensions to laying siege on heaven and scaling its walls, all claims to special spirituality, all posturing on precarious ladders of personal achievement and virtue; all thought of God as a reluctant scout-master who sees our worth in a chest full of merit badges. The whole penitential system, through which the Church had managed to pull the strings of power, had to go.

We can see the Church's paganized

approach allegorized in medieval woodcuts or paintings. There is poor Everyman struggling painfully up a ladder of acquired virtues and earned merit, hanging on precariously above the yawning jaws of a fiery Hell. The Church may spur him onwards by fanning the flames, as it were, with its warnings, by arranging an occasional boost from the Saints, who have made it already, or by passing along encouragement and merit on loan from Jesus' own winnings. But all the while, way up where the ladder reaches heaven, an impassive God the Father sits by with baleful eye and folded arms.

By contrast, the Reformers rediscovered the New Testament's graciously active God, who showed himself eager to seek out, heal and restore even his enemies. If it is God's

"The principal work of the Spirit is faith. . . the principal exercise of faith is prayer."

very nature to contribute to need, and if he wants us to freely depend on him for everything good in our lives, then Christians must abandon all pagan conceits regarding their own shining virtues, spiritual superiority or earned merit. Goodness must be redefined as a quality of relationship, in which everything we have is a gift from God. The Calvin-influenced Heidelberg Catechism represented this insight well by simply organizing everything it had to say about Christian life under one caption: "About Thankfulness."

For he knew the dangers: If you forget that "faith alone" means faith in someone definite, then you may deceive yourself into treating your own whims or passions as if they were the inspiration received through "faith alone." This was the "libertine" or "frenetic" trait Calvin decried among some Anabaptists. He knew it would give a black eye to the whole Reformation. Indeed, at the very beginning of his career he had been driven into exile by allegations of looseness in practical

life. He fled Paris for the freer cities of Navarre and Switzerland, accused of sedition against the established order.

No one knew better than an ex-lawyer the need to clarify how the new grasp of faith would bring real order to life. This is why Calvin prefaced his great lifework, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, with an open letter to the French king. He wanted to reassure the powers-that-be that a return to the early Christian sources and grace-responsive life would motivate a more orderly, loyal, and socially constructive life.

Faith and Prayer

Calvin repeatedly has been misunderstood as one who sought after a new legalism, more bitter and humorless than any canon law. But Calvin saw very clearly that it was a state of personal relationship, and not the outer form of action that was the heart of the matter for human goodness.

Two of Calvin's favorite slogans carried particular revolutionary force for the Christian life. First, Calvin claimed that "the principal work of the Spirit" is faith. A second, closely related slogan is similar in form: "the principal exercise of faith is prayer." Grasp all that is intended under these two statements, and we have the Reformer's key to the entire Christian life.

If bonding free persons into his community is God's very goal for all creation, then the trust relationship we call faith is his principal work. This is a point where the Calvinist tradition and later Anabaptist and Pietist churches could have found themselves much closer together than they actually have been in the push and shove of later history. At the very center of Calvin's thought, piety is tied intimately to Christian behavior and social action. These two dimensions of Christian life made one seamless garment.

"Of prayer: which is the principal exercise of faith, and by which we daily receive God's benefits"—is the heading of the longest and perhaps the most important chapter regarding Christians' behavior in Calvin's main work (Book 3, Chapter 20 of the *Institutes*). "Prayer, [the] principal exercise of faith"—the words may pass us by as all too glib. Like a pat on the head: "Be good little children, now, and say your prayers." But this was no pious chant for Calvin. Faith for him was a life and death matter, not only spiritually and psychologically, but in the political arena as

well. Fighting words, they resulted from long struggle for the essentials of biblically reformed life.

The phrase contains a double meaning. Prayer first provides, as it were, a workout for faith. Prayer is the action whereby faith is strengthened and reinforced, as muscles are toned by exercise. But the other meaning of "principal exercise" or "principal practice" may surprise us. With the gusto of a revolutionary, Calvin is declaring that the whole pious enterprise of the medieval penitential system dwindles behind this simple communion. Prayer, our first line of spontaneous personal responsiveness to God, is the principal action as Christian believers. Prayer is the very substance of good action.

The sum total comes back to this: Since the Scripture teaches us that it's a principal part of the service to God to invoke him . . . he values this homage we do him more than all sacrifices. . .

Calvin could scarcely have put it more strongly. But why this stress on prayer at the center as the "principal practice of piety"? Grasp the movement of his thought here, and we have the Reformer's whole ethic in a nutshell.

No goodness can be accomplished by a person in isolation from God's living community. No action, however dutiful, no virtue, however shining, can even approach actual goodness before God, unless it expresses conscious relationship with him and is imbued with a sense of gratitude for everything as his gift.

God's whole purpose in creating us, in adorning the world with such a magnificent variety of beautiful and good things, in watching over us with such careful providence is that we might be moved continually to render praise to him.

This kind of sweeping claim has not received its full force in Calvinist history. Taken seriously, this "return of grace" is not merely one duty among others. It is the very essence of human existence and itself the prime Christian activity.

Here we can begin to grasp the true sense of "glorifying" or "honoring God" as "man's chief end" which is at the very beginning of Calvinist catechisms. "We are born and placed

in life in order that we practice God's honor," says Calvin. And thanksgiving, a free response to God's own gracious giving, is the very essence of what is meant by God's honor. We honor God if we "put all our confidence in him," and acknowledge that all good comes from him alone," as Calvin's Geneva Catechism has it. For this, and this alone, is the hallmark of a Christian: prayer in the context of thankful expectation.

When Life and Liturgy Meld

The whole of ethics, then, is comprised under the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. There quite simply is no ethic, no value or good to be had in life outside of the faith-relationship. Calvin took Paul at his word, where he said, "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). This means that for Christians any good deed is recognized as God's own action—an expression of lively conversation with him.

In this perspective the call to "pray without ceasing" in I Thessalonians 5:17 had a very literal meaning for the Reformer. The entire active life melds into a liturgy of prayer. One thinks here of the little prayer caps worn by Mennonite women, which are meant to signify something similar. Day-long, one prays in everything.

Calvin sees the function of even the *Calvin insulted by Libertines*

most demanding Old Testament laws to conduct us beyond their own formal prescriptions and throw us back into conversation with God. God's Law has a double force. It stands not just as outer command; but, more fundamentally, it acts as sovereign promise of the inner renewal his community receives from him. In a dual way, then, the law has always pointed past itself to grace-dependent relationship and funneled into new prayer response.

Calvin had a way of showing how the Lord's Prayer follows the same outline as the Ten Commandments. Why? Simply this, God's commands are also his promises. In telling us our need, they teach us what to ask from him, who is the source of all that we have or are. His laws point us both directly and indirectly towards the prayer relationship.

Fulfillment Through Failure

But Calvin was also fond of pointing out how "God commands that which we cannot do, in order that we know what we should ask of him." Our failures are turned, through prayer, into a deepening fulfillment. "The law commands in order that we, being pressed to keep its commandments and succumbing through our frailty, might train ourselves to implore God's



aid." Law acts like the flywheel on a steam engine: its weight drags us through cycles of failure to return to our energy source. So God trumps our failure, as we are drawn back into the grace-dependent relationship which is the Law's fulfillment.

Everything in life, then, is given to reinforce the grace-dependent relationship: our natural joys, through prayers of thanksgiving; our adversities, weakness, and needs, through prayers of petition; our failures and rebellions, through prayers of confession and repentance.

A Threefold Guidance System

As we live our lives in the grace-dependent relationship, Calvin envisioned us as always being able to get our bearings for every new situation by looking at the dimensions of God's action in and for his community: past, present, and future.

Looking back at what God has promised us in Christ, we are relieved from paralyzing compulsions to do everything for ourselves. "Self denial," he called it (using a Latin legal term which referred to transfer of the burden of ownership). We are not our own; no need to worry. Self-dispossession, then, did not mean we should repress our own feelings or deny our own worth, but quite the opposite: it meant we may feel our infinite worth as experienced in Christ's love, as opposed to our own accomplishments. It meant we could let our limited view of self fall away, in favor of an unspeakably higher status: the full, permanent friendship of God.

Cross-Bearing

Consideration of the second aspect of God's relation to his community, here and now, is a question of empowerment. We should be prepared for anything in the present moment. "Cross-bearing," as Calvin calls it, is no call to long-faced "inner-worldly asceticism." Rather, one is to live in the reassuring company of the One who has been there before us. Christ's presence and the resurrection promise can lighten all our crosses—both the burden of sharing his love for an unlovely world, and that of our own shortcomings.

CALVIN AND MISSIONS

Geneva was not only a refuge to Protestant fugitives, but, under Calvin's influence and direction, it became the hub of a vast missionary enterprise. The Venerable Company of Pastors was established as Geneva's missionary agency, sending an army of missionaries to Italy, Germany, Scotland, England, and especially to Calvin's homeland, France.

The Genevan missionaries traveled by night, hid in attics and false rooms behind chimneys, and used obscure roads. Once they arrived at their intended destination, they would join together with other Protestants to form an underground church. The churches gathered secretly in barns, open fields or secluded caves. But with Geneva's guidance, these churches underwent remarkable growth in France.

Sending missionaries in that day was a very delicate matter. Knowing that an indiscretion could mean the death of a missionary, the Venerable Company of Pastors often omitted the names and destinations of their missionaries. Even with the many precautions, not all of the missionaries reached their destinations. When missionaries were arrested and sentenced to death, as they often were, Calvin wrote tender and compassionate letters encouraging them to stand

firm in the Lord.

The missionary enterprise of Calvin's Geneva was not confined to Europe. One missionary venture undertaken by Geneva still stirs the imagination. In 1556, Geneva's Venerable Company of Pastors sent Pierre Richier and Guillaume Charretier to accompany a Protestant expedition to Brazil. Richier and Charretier were to serve in the dual capacity of chaplains to the French Protestants and missionaries to the Indians of South America.

Regrettably, the leader of the expedition betrayed the missionaries and the Protestant settlers. Four of the settlers were murdered. Richier and Charretier were forced to return to France. Although abortive, the project was a striking testimony to the far-reaching missionary vision of Calvin and his Genevan colleagues. Calvin's interest in missions did not wane throughout his ministry in Geneva.

Calvin's missionary vitality led to the tremendous spread of Calvinism throughout Europe, eventually superseding Lutheranism as the most vibrant representative of Protestantism. Historically, one of the most telling characteristics of Calvinism was that it thrived in those countries where opposition was the greatest.

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Meditation of the Future Life

The future aspect, "meditation of the future life" is no world rejection, as it has sometimes been misconstrued. Rather, it is living in the promise of world renewal. So everyone and everything we experience may be regarded in anticipation of their perfect re-creation in the Father. With such reflection, the most dismal present scene becomes luminous with hope—hope based on sovereign promise, and not just our human potential.

This three-directional tuning in on the God known through Christ gives a kind of navigational orientation for direction-taking in every new situation life brings—however uncharted the waters. Calvin found it summarized in Jesus' words, "If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." For the Reformer this meant constant

reflection on our fellowship with the one who accompanies us into every decision: as incarnate Word, giving shape for life; as Spirit, sharing, empowering, and preserving our present existence; and as eternal Father, drawing all things, finally, into coherence with his grace.

Prayer, for Calvin, is what makes a Christian. It is not just the first act of a Christian in time—though it is that—it is also the foremost thing in Christian existence.

How is it possible to have an encounter with God? . . . I stand before God with my desires, my thoughts, my misery; I must live with him, for to live means nothing other than to live with God. Here I am, caught between the exigencies of life, both small and great, and the necessity of prayer. The Reformers tell us the first thing is to pray." (Karl Barth, *Prayer*)

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IT WAS BOTH **"A HORRIBLE DECREE"** and **"VERY SWEET FRUIT"**

Calvin on Predestination...By Frank A. James III

What was running through John Calvin's mind as he contemplated the doctrine of predestination? Was he locked in a trance, eyes rolled back, imagining a somber God lurking in the mists of eternity, arbitrarily picking and choosing who would be saved and who would be damned?

No, Calvin's thoughts about predestination did not originate with morbid and abstract speculations, as some might suppose, but with a pastor's concern for the people who filled the pews of his church every Sunday.

As a pastor, Calvin noticed that people responded differently to the preaching of the gospel. "If the same sermon is preached, say, to a hundred people," he observed, "twenty receive it with the ready obedience of faith, while the rest hold it valueless, or laugh, or hiss, or loathe it."

What Calvin saw troubled him. Why did some men fervently embrace Christ, while others firmly rejected him? He searched the Scriptures and there he found the doctrine of predestination.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Calvin was not the first to treat the doctrine of predestination, but it is the name of John Calvin with which this doctrine has become inseparably linked. This is due in part to Calvin's detailed exposition of predestination and partly because he, more than anyone else since Augustine, was called upon to defend it.

Past interpreters of Calvin often fell victim to the misconception that predestination resided at the center of his theology. However, today most acknowledge that he never discussed predestination as his most basic presupposition.

Admittedly, he did accord a growing importance to predestination in succeeding editions of the *Institutes*. In the first edition of 1536, it did not warrant special discussion. But later, when Augustine's doctrine came under assault, Calvin felt obliged to meet the challenge. "Even a dog barks," he wrote to a friend, "when his



Calvin threatened at the church of Rive

master is attacked: how could I be silent when the honor of my Lord is assailed?"

Attacks on predestination came from two directions. The Roman Catholic Archdeacon of Utrecht, Albert Pighius, mounted the first assault. In his book *On the Freedom of the Will*, he challenged both predestination and Calvin's concept of free will. Pighius portrayed Calvin's doctrine as destroying the basis for morality and making God the author of sin.

Calvin first responded to the question of free will with his own book in 1543. He planned to address the matter of predestination in another work. But Pighius died suddenly, and Calvin turned to more pressing matters.

Controversy about predestination broke out again in 1550, after Jerome Bolsec arrived as a refugee in Geneva. A former Carmelite monk, Bolsec had left the Roman church and become a Protestant. He took up the medical profession, but his interest in theological questions remained intact.

Shortly after his arrival in Geneva, Bolsec began to publicly denounce the doctrine of predestination. Such a doctrine, he said, made God a patron of criminals, and worse than Satan. At first he was dealt with rather gently. He was admonished by the Church authorities and told to cease from such activities. Calvin even met privately with Bolsec in an effort to resolve differences. Bolsec, however, remained unconvinced.

After other reprimands, Bolsec

finally let fly his most blatant attack. During a church meeting in October, 1551, he suddenly erupted in a vigorous renunciation of predestination and the Genevan clergy. Just about that time, Calvin happened to enter the church. Verbal sparks flew. Afterwards, Bolsec was arrested and put in prison.

Not all in Geneva shared Calvin's view of predestination. The city government and the ministers of the Genevan church decided to consult with the other Swiss churches about Bolsec. They generally sided with Calvin, but the replies were less than Calvin had hoped. While affirming election, the other Swiss churches were more reticent about reprobation. The result was a milder judgment on Bolsec. He was banished from Geneva and eventually returned to the Roman church.

It was under such convulsive circumstances that Calvin was provoked to defend and clarify his views. Had it not been for Pighius and Bolsec, one wonders if Calvin's name would have been so closely associated with predestination.

CALVIN'S PERSPECTIVE ON PREDESTINATION

To Calvin, predestination was like a tightrope—fearful and wonderful at the same time. He proceeded with caution and prudence, keeping his balance only by holding firmly to the teachings of Scripture. "The moment we exceed the bounds of the Word," he

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wrote, "...there we must repeatedly wander, slip, and stumble."

When one reads Calvin's own writings on predestination, a different picture emerges than most would expect. Rather than an arid scholastic discourse, Calvin speaks of predestination as immensely practical and beneficial to the Christian. He confidently affirms, "...in the very darkness that frightens them not only is the usefulness of this doctrine made known but also its very sweet fruit."

THE GOD OF PREDESTINATION

With pastoral experience and Scripture as his guide, Calvin reached this profound conclusion: God "does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others." He defined predestination as "God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others." Predestination, like a coin, has two sides, election and reprobation. Predestination, for Calvin, especially draws attention to two attributes of God. Election displays God's gracious mercy. Reprobation manifests God's righteous justice.

The Mercy of God

From Calvin's pastoral perspective, predestination is "the Lord's clear declaration that he finds in men themselves no reason to bless them but takes it from his mercy alone."

Nothing else displays God's mercy like the doctrine of predestination. It is the story of sinful, undeserving men receiving the gift of salvation for no other reason except that God wished to extend his kindness to them. Calvin was less dismayed over God's just reprobation. That he could understand. But he was completely awe-struck by the realization that God extended mercy to the undeserving.

The best expression of God's mercy is Christ. Great stress is laid on the fact that election is "in Christ." For Calvin, that not only means Christ is the supreme object of the Father's election, but also that Christ is the instrument of election. Calvin even takes the further step of describing Christ as "the Author of election." In Calvin's view, Christ actively participated in

T.U.L.I.P.

The familiar caricature of Calvin's theology is symbolized by the mnemonic device TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. These so called "five points of Calvinism" arose in the seventeenth century, amid great political and theological turmoil in the Netherlands.

In the early seventeenth century, Jacob Arminius, professor of theology at the University of Leiden, came under suspicion by the more orthodox Dutch Calvinists. Arminius was viewed to have seriously deviated



Jacobus Arminius

from the orthodox doctrines of justification and election. Charges of Pelagianism were made, and the matter quickly escalated.

In retrospect, Arminius' views were not, strictly speaking, Pelagian. He did, however, differ from Calvinist orthodoxy on a number of issues. He denied the doctrine of perseverance and questioned whether grace was necessary for one to come to faith. He also challenged the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The desire of Arminius was to uphold the goodness and mercy of God. He was concerned that Calvinist doctrines made God the author of sin and wanted to stress the importance of faith and holiness in the Christian life.

His untimely death provided only a temporary reprieve. The fires were soon rekindled by his followers. Under the leadership of John Uytenbogaert, the Arminians met in 1610 to draw up what was called a remonstrance. It was simply a petition for toleration and a summation of their views in five points. They modified the doctrine of

unconditional election, asserting that God did not elect individuals. They argued that God's election was more general and had reference to that group of men who exercised faith. Like Arminius, they also denied perseverance of the saints, saying God's gift of faith could be resisted by man. Finally, the Arminians affirmed that Christ died for the sins of every man.

The orthodox Calvinists responded with a seven-point statement called the counter-remonstrance. The government tried to settle the controversy with a series of ecclesiastical conferences. But matters only grew worse. Riots actually broke out in some areas of the Netherlands. Finally, amid a battle between political rivals, Prince Maurice and Oldenbarnveldt, a national synod was called to settle the controversy.

The synod convened in 1618 in the Dutch city of Dordrecht [Dort]. To insure fairness, the Dutch Calvinists invited delegations from Reformed churches throughout Europe. Simon Episcopius, represented the Arminian position at Dort. The rejection of Arminian theology was unanimous. Five theological points were formulated to answer the Remonstrants. The Canons of Dort declared that fallen man was totally unable to save himself [*Total Depravity*]; God's electing purpose was not conditioned by anything in man [*Unconditional Election*]; Christ's atoning death was sufficient to save all men, but efficient only for the elect [*Limited Atonement*]; the gift of faith, sovereignly given by God's Holy Spirit, cannot be resisted by the elect [*Irresistible Grace*]; and that those who are regenerated and justified will persevere in the faith [*Perseverance of the Saints*].

These doctrines have been called the five points of Calvinism and are often symbolized by the well-known "TULIP." However, they are not a full exposition of Calvin's theology. To be sure, these doctrines do reflect Calvin's viewpoint in the area of soteriology. For example, the synod of Dort does not address Calvin's devout commitment to Scripture, nor does it say anything about the Trinity or Christ. The doctrines of Dort are more properly viewed in their historical context as a theological response to the challenges of seventeenth-century Arminianism.

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the choosing of the elect. At every point across the spectrum of election, from its inception through its execution to its realization, Christ is the focal point of God's mercy.

In the final analysis, to diminish predestination was, for Calvin, to denigrate the role of Christ in accomplishing salvation. Is it any wonder that he was so insistent that predestination "ought to be preached openly and fully?"

The Justice of God

It was the dark side of predestination that aroused so much scorn toward Calvin. But he saw in reprobation more than fire and brimstone. No other doctrine so powerfully reveals the righteousness of God.

To acknowledge reprobation is to acknowledge that the God of Christianity hates and punishes sin. Even the sins of the elect are punished in their substitute, Christ.

Opponents accused Calvin of making God the author of sin. He rejected such a notion as insidious, asserting that, by definition, God's inscrutable will is righteous. "For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous." No one can lay a charge against God.

Just as God is the ultimate cause of election, so also God is the ultimate cause of reprobation. Calvin would not sidestep this conclusion. Indeed, it is the frank acknowledgment of God's reprobation that prompts Calvin's piercing confession: "It is a horrible decree."

Calvin did not pretend to understand why God ordains some to reprobation any more than he understood why God elects some to salvation. He could only declare: "the reason of divine righteousness is higher than man's. . . slender wit can comprehend."

Calvin's conception of reprobation is incomplete without an important corollary. Although God is viewed as the ultimate cause of reprobation, still Calvin insists that "none undeservedly perish." Condemnation of the reprobate occurs "because men deserved it on account of impiety, wickedness, and ungratefulness." None suffer punishment apart from a consideration of personal guilt. Calvin does not attempt to explain how these two aspects of reprobation fit; he simply embraces the tension.

MAN AND PREDESTINATION

"They who shut the gates that no one may dare seek a taste of this doctrine," warned Calvin, "wrong men no less than God." The unavoidable result of a clearer view of God is a truer picture of man.

True Humility

The wicked receive precisely what they deserve. The elect receive what they do *not* deserve. This recognition of the immense goodness of God stirs the pious soul to "true humility." Without a proper understanding of predestination, Calvin cautioned, "humility is torn up by the roots."

Calvin advocated what he called a "learned ignorance," which is to say that the Christian must humbly trust God's righteous judgment even though he does not really comprehend God's ways. This he contrasted with a "brutish ignorance." The "brutish" are those who bury their head in the sand when faced with something they do not understand, such as predestination. By its very nature, the perspective of predestination obliges the godly man to rely upon God rather than his own limited understanding.

Assurance

As a pastor, Calvin had no doubt seen many parishioners troubled about their salvation. His years of ministry to the saints persuaded him that "Satan has no more grievous or dangerous temptation to dishearten believers than when he unsettles them with doubt about their election." To counter Satan's attack, he took courage from the doctrine of predestination. Rightly understood, predestination is a bulwark against doubt, an "impregnable security." It "brings no shaking of faith, but rather its best confirmation."

Ask Calvin how he knew that he was numbered among the elect, and he would reply, "Christ is more than a thousand testimonies to me." If Christ is the cause, the instrument, and the object of election, as Calvin fervently believed, then Christ was also the "mirror of election," in whom the Christian finds the basis for his assurance.

Stimulus to Christian Activity

Francis Hotman, one of Calvin's devoted friends, wrote in 1556 that Geneva had been imbued with a new and vigorous spirit which had given birth to a race of "martyrs." Predesti-

ation, rightly viewed, is a stimulus to bold Christian activity. Those upon whom God has set his mercy press on against all odds because their assured election has rendered them "invulnerable to all storms of the world, all assaults of Satan and all vacillation of the flesh." The man chosen by God ought to confidently assert himself in the cause of Christianity.

Calvin vehemently rejected the charge that election leads to idleness. From his perspective, idleness and God's election are mutually exclusive. When God extends his mercy, it must make a difference in the sinner's life. God elects men to be holy.

One of the natural results of Calvin's perspective of predestination was an intensified zeal for evangelism. "For as we do not know who belongs to the number of the predestined or who does not belong, we ought to be so minded as to wish that all men be saved. So shall it come about that we try to make everyone we meet a sharer in our peace."

Historically, the outworking of an aggressive predestinarian theology can be seen in the vitality of the English Puritans and the French Huguenots. It provided the stimulus to George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards in the Great Awakening, provoked William Carey to initiate the modern missions movement, and inspired the dynamic preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

CONCLUSION

The essential truth of predestination was not that some are justly condemned, but that many who deserve condemnation are pardoned. Calvin came to grips with the one indisputable fact; it is only when punishment is real that the mercy of God is real.

The doctrine of predestination was for Calvin a "horrible decree" but, even more, it was "very sweet fruit." He did not pretend to understand it fully, for that would require that he comprehend God. Yet he could confidently pronounce, "even though. . . predestination is likened to a dangerous sea, still in traversing it, one finds safe and calm—I add also pleasant—sailing."

"Let this be our conclusion," Calvin writes at the close of his discussion of predestination in the *Institutes*, "to tremble with Paul at so deep a mystery; but, if froward tongues clamor, not to be ashamed of this exclamation of his: 'Who are you, O man, to argue with God?'" CH



John Calvin: One of the Fathers of Modern Democracy

BY W. STANFORD REID



Over the years, various theories have arisen concerning John Calvin's political views. Some have viewed him as a virtual dictator, "the pope of Geneva." Others have felt he was a master of dissimulation who always got his own dictatorial views across by subtle means. Yet others have suggested that he was one of the founders of modern democracy. Which view, if any, is correct?

To understand Calvin's views on political government, one must understand the political context of his day. Democratic forms of government were on the decline. Even those countries which had tended towards more democratic forms of government (e.g., the Estates General in France, Parliament in England and Scotland, and the Imperial Diet in the Holy Roman Empire) were reversing that trend. Democratic institutions still existed, but any power which they possessed had been largely taken away by the absolute monarchs. These rulers sought to imitate and practice the ideas set forth in Niccolò Machiavelli's (1469-1527) famous book, *The Prince*. Machiavelli advised princes on how to achieve absolute power.

The claims of the worldly princes were challenged by the popes, who viewed themselves as the spiritual rulers of the world. As the representatives of Christ, the popes asserted their right, not only to persecute those who

Calvinist uprising in Holland against Phillip II

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disagreed with the Roman Catholic Church, but even to depose monarchs who refused to obey their orders. (Pius V asserted this right when he decreed that Elizabeth be deposed from the throne of England.) Democracy had few supporters in places of power in the early sixteenth century.

One must also take into account Calvin's own background and training. The son of a Picard lawyer, he was at first destined for the priesthood. But his father, after a conflict with the local bishop, ordered Calvin to leave Paris, where he had been studying, and go to Orleans to study law. It was not long before he heard that one of the innovative humanist lawyers, André Alciat from Italy, was teaching at Bourges. While Calvin apparently did not like him personally, he learned much from him, particularly the new ways of studying and analyzing historical legal sources. This fit well with the training which he had already received in Paris, so that Calvin's training prepared him to be both a humanist scholar and a lawyer.

Probably even more important was the fact that, during his studies at Bourges, he seems to have accepted the teachings of the new religious movement which we know as the Reformation. By this time, Luther's teachings had spread widely, even in France. There was also the reforming activity of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich and the Anabaptists in Switzerland and Germany. Calvin undoubtedly had some knowledge of their beliefs early in his Christian experience. His acquaintance with their views certainly increased as the years passed.

All these various influences entered into Calvin's political thinking, whether he agreed with them or not. Luther thought of the ruler as being supreme over the church in all such worldly matters as property and even organization, but he insisted that this authority stopped at the foot of the pulpit. Zwingli, on the other hand, allowed the civil ruler nearly total control over the church. In contrast to all, the Anabaptists would have nothing to do with the civil authorities. The responsibilities of the civil government, the Anabaptist said, were limited to non-Christians. True Christians did not require civil supervision, since they already obeyed God's law.

By the time the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* appeared

in 1536, Calvin had considerable knowledge of these varying views, as well as those of classical writers such as Seneca and Cicero. He also probably knew the works of Jean de Terre Rouge (c. 1418) and Claude de Seyssel (c. 1519), who had written works stressing the limitations of royal absolutism.

Ultimate Authority

Yet, with all these various influences upon him and the social context of his own day, there was one ultimate authority to which he adhered above all others: the Bible, the Word of God. From the time of his conversion, this was basic to Calvin's thinking. The oracles of God possessed ultimate authority over man, because God is sovereign over all creation. This theme of the sovereignty of God appears repeatedly in Calvin's whole system of thought. True, man might not understand everything in the Scriptures or in God's purpose, for "the secret things belong to God" (Deut. 29:29), but what God has revealed must form the basis and the structure of the Christian's thinking.

To Calvin, this meant that there was very clearly a Christian-biblical world-and-life view which encompassed all phases of life—not just religion, but science, economics, and politics. In treating the subject of politics, he was prepared to look to the classical writers and the humanists of his own day, since he believed that even the non-Christian had implanted within him, by the grace of God, a sense of justice and equity. However, the ultimate authority for his political ideology was the Bible. There God had declared what the political state was to be like and how it was to function.

According to Calvin, the church has a role to play with regard to the state. The church is responsible, Calvin believed, to set forth the biblical teaching concerning the state and its function. Yet, and this is basic to Calvin's thought, the church is not to rule the state. Calvin believed in a *theocracy*, not an *ecclesiocracy*. Both the rulers of the church and the civil magistrates are directly responsible to God for their actions, but they do not rule over each other. The church may admonish the magistrate as to what God's law says, but cannot determine how that law is to be applied in matters of civil jurisdiction. The magis-

trate may advise the church concerning matters relating to civil affairs, but cannot force the church to conform to civil rules in its teachings, worship, or government. In this, Calvin laid down very clearly the principle of the separation of the functions of church and state. They are related and mutually supportive, but also independent of each other. This means, if the state attempts to interfere in the operation of the church or seeks to restrict its spiritual work, the church has the right and duty to disobey, although it will have to suffer the consequences of such disobedience.

At the same time, Calvin believed that the church's form of government was to be fundamentally democratic. In this way it served as a pattern for the state to imitate. He did not believe that ministers and other church officials should be imposed on the church by the civil government or by a small group of wealthy or aristocratic individuals. Instead, he believed that ministers, elders, and deacons should be appointed by the people of the church as a whole.

Those who wanted to become ministers were first examined by the consistory, made up of ministers and elders of the churches, as to their morals and knowledge of the biblical teachings and their ability to serve as pastors. When approved, they were then presented to the city council, who would be responsible for their financial support. Finally, they were presented to the people, who had the right either to accept or reject them. The congregation as a whole thus had the final say as to who would be the minister. These procedures, as set forth in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, undoubtedly influenced the civil government in Geneva.

The Magistrate and the Law

Calvin held the magistrate in high honor. In fact, he insisted that being a magistrate was the most important calling anyone could receive. The state was created by God to maintain peace and equity in a sinful world. The state, however, does not have the freedom to do as it pleases, for it is under the rule of God's law.

Divine law is the basis of the church's administration, but this law is also the foundation of the state. This is true even of a state which has no Christian instruction. Even the un-

regenerate have implanted in their hearts and minds a knowledge of justice and equity by which society is governed. To Calvin, this natural law is the foundation for all political government.

This immediately raises the question of who is to govern. To Calvin, a ruler, whether an individual or a body made up of a number of individuals, is a necessity. Without someone to guide and direct the enacting and enforcing of laws, a society simply falls into anarchy. However, that ruler is ultimately appointed in and by the providence of God. Calvin did not favor the idea of succession by right of birth. Rather, he believed free election was the best method of establishing a ruler. He did not, however, declare that all non-elected rulers were illegitimate. But he did hold that election by the citizenry was the means whereby God would choose the individuals most suitable for the exalted position of magistrate.

What then is the proper relation of the magistrate to the law? Is the ruler above or under the law? Calvin held that the ruler is under divine law in his relation to the sovereign God. But in relation to the citizens, his subjects, the magistrate is the personification of law. This does not, however, free the ruler to rule as he pleases. The laws which are enacted must be equitable and enforced equitably. This means the ruler is to rule for God and for the people. The ruler, whether an individual or a parliament, must seek to benefit, protect, and sustain the people. The establishment of poor relief, hospitals, and similar social agencies in Geneva had its source in this concept.

At the same time, the people are to obey the ruler, not merely because of social benefits, but because they are obeying the authority which God has established over them. Only if they are commanded to do that which is contrary to God's revealed will are they obliged to disobey the law.

Covenant and Rebellion

At the base of this concept of the relation of ruler and ruled was Calvin's covenant idea. He held that there was in reality a covenant between the people and the ruler (even if the latter succeeded to the position of ruler by the right of birth). Therefore, there was mutual responsibility.

THE SERVETUS AFFAIR

Michael Servetus (1511-1553)



Servetus and Calvin before the council of Geneva

There was one tragic event during Calvin's tenure in Geneva which brought him not only heartache, but also condemnation. If Calvin is remembered for anything beyond his doctrine of predestination, it was his part in the trial of Michael Servetus. No one should excuse Calvin for consenting to the execution of this confessed heretic, but one should understand that men of the sixteenth century viewed blasphemy as a capital offense. This was no less true of Catholics than of Protestants.

Servetus had been condemned to death in absentia throughout Catholic and Protestant Europe for his vehement denial of the Trinity. In an extraordinarily foolish move, Servetus, having just escaped from a Roman Catholic prison, decided to go to Geneva. He knew full well that Geneva was not likely to be hospitable. With some uncontrollable urge pushing him forward, Servetus boldly took a seat in the Cathedral of St. Pierre while Calvin was preaching. He was recognized immediately and arrested.

There was a certain inevitability that Servetus would one day find himself surrounded by burning fagots. The only uncertainty was by whose hands would it come—Protestants or Catholics? Despite his angry denunciations of Calvin at his trial, Calvin visited Servetus in jail and earnestly sought to persuade him of his errors. Servetus dismissed Calvin with a laugh.

The confrontation at Servetus's trial was not the first time the two men had encountered each other. Nearly twenty years earlier, Calvin jeopardized his life by returning to a hostile Paris in order to share the gospel with a young heretic named Michael Servetus. Years later Calvin wrote, "I was even willing to risk my life to win him to our Lord, if possible." But Servetus's erratic behavior was evident even then. After arranging this meeting with Calvin, Servetus did not appear.

When the sentence was passed upon Servetus, Calvin requested that the Genevan city government grant Servetus a more humane death. The judges remained adamant, and Calvin's request was denied. Servetus was burned at the stake in Geneva on October 27, 1553.

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Servetus being led to execution



In a truly Christian government, there is also a covenant between God and his subjects. This, of course, was based upon the Old Testament concept of government in which Israel was the covenant people under such rulers as David and Solomon. To Calvin, this covenant relation in the New Testament dispensation was no longer limited to Israel, but should characterize all states claiming to be Christian.

Here we come upon one of the ideas which seems to have undergone development in Calvin's thought. Many of the rulers of his day were tyrannically exercising their authority over their people. This was particularly noticeable in the matter of religion. Persecution of Protestants was usually instigated by the clergy, but carried out by the civil authorities. In his Epistle Dedicatory to the first edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin called upon Francis I of France to stop attacks on and executions of Protestants. As a result of such royal oppression, the Genevan reformer increasingly felt that hereditary monarchy could only lead to tyranny. So he opposed it. Yet, bad as tyranny might be, Calvin considered it better than anarchy, where total lack of order could only lead to the collapse of society. Christians, therefore, must submit to tyrants and obey them, for they were sent by God as punishment for sins or as a providential means of training. Only when the tyrants commanded that which was contrary to God's revealed will could Christians disobey.

What about the possibility of rebellion? At first, Calvin was absolutely opposed to any such action. But it seems that he gradually became more reconciled to the idea of anti-tyrannical action. However, he felt such action could never be taken by an ordinary citizen. Only those who hold public office have the right to resist the ruler. This view was expressed in his first edition of the *Institutes* and repeated in all the later editions.

However, in some of his commentaries, he seems to have gone further, even accepting the idea of the right of the inferior magistrates to remove a tyrannical, persecuting monarch. In taking this position, he was clearly laying the groundwork for possible revolutionary action, not only by Protestants who were under persecution, but by all those who were

oppressed by a tyrannical, dictatorial government.

Thus, in summary, as we look at Calvin's political ideas, we see the enunciation of the basis for democratic government. In his thinking, all society is subject to the sovereign God and therefore to his law, whether expressed in the Old Testament and set forth by the church or in the sense of justice and equity given to all men. To achieve this end, God establishes states ruled by magistrates who have the duty of enforcing the divine laws in order to maintain justice and equity. Calvin believed, however, that magistrates who are elected are more likely to rule justly than those who take control by

*Only when tyrants
commanded that which
was contrary to God's
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Christians disobey.*

inheritance or force. Furthermore, the tyrannical hereditary ruler, as well as the one who illegally seized power, could be resisted even to the point of removal by the duly constituted magistrates of the realm. Here was a political philosophy which was to have a major impact on the western world over the next few centuries.

Geneva and Beyond

To get a glimpse of Calvin's influence on political thinking in his own day, we must turn first of all to the city of Geneva, in which he lived. He undoubtedly wielded considerable influence on the codification of Geneva's laws, as he was the secretary of the committee appointed to put the laws into a proper form. During the years following 1542, when the laws were codified, he also exerted no little personal influence on the governing bodies of the city.

From Geneva, his influence spread far and wide. His writings, including his biblical commentaries, pamphlets, and above all the various editions of his *Institutes*, were read and studied widely, even by those who did not agree with him. Then, too, Geneva offered shelter to a great number of religious refugees from many countries: France, England, Scotland, the

Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain. Many of these refugees eventually returned to their own countries, carrying with them Calvin's theological and political ideas. Once the university was established in 1559 in Geneva, others came to study there, usually returning home having drunk at the Calvinistic fountain.

The outcome of this was that Calvin's political ideas became the standard view among those who accepted his theological teachings. It is not surprising, therefore, to find his French followers setting forth a political concept which would undermine the absolutism of the French monarchy. Francois Hotman, Hubert Languet, and Philip du Plessis-Mornay propagated his views vigorously and effectively. In Holland, Calvin's teaching seems to have been at the root of the Dutch resistance to Spanish dominion, which resulted in the establishment of an independent kingdom of the Netherlands. And, if one looks across the English Channel, one finds Calvin's influence equally strong. While still refugees in Geneva, John Ponet and Christopher Goodman produced works setting forth radical democratic ideas which fit with Calvin's political teachings.

Perhaps the most thoroughgoing Calvinist, who took the teacher's ideas to their logical conclusions, was the Scot, John Knox. Knox set forth his views in a number of pamphlets, the best known being *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, published in Geneva in 1557. Calvin disapproved of it, although it was approved by others. Knox's views were adopted by George Buchanan, another Scot, who was the tutor of James VI (Later James I) of England. Out of Calvin's influence on the British Isles rose the English Puritans and the Scottish Covenanters of the following century.

As we look back, then, at Calvin's political thought, we can see that he not only set forth ideas which exercised a powerful influence for democracy in his own day, but also that his ideas had a broad influence on subsequent political thinking in the western world. Although the theological connection which he made between politics and Christianity has largely disappeared, he can still be regarded as one of the fathers of modern democracy. CF

FROM THE ARCHIVES

CALVIN THE RELUCTANT RECRUIT

Calvin did not seek out the leadership role in Geneva; indeed, it appears he would have much preferred to avoid it. The first selection below is taken from his preface to the commentary on the Psalms. The second selection refers to his return to Geneva for the second period and is found in a letter to Farel.

Whenever I call to mind the wretchedness of my life there, how can it not be but that my very soul must shudder at any proposal for my return? I will not mention the anxiety by which we were continually tossed up and down and driven to and fro from the time I was appointed your colleague. . . . When I remember by what torture my conscience was racked at that time, and with how much anxiety it was continually boiling over, forgive me if I dread the place as having about it something of a fatality in my case. You yourself, with God, are my best witness that no lesser tie could have held me there so long, save that I dared not throw off the yoke of my calling, which I was convinced had been laid on me by the Lord. Therefore, so long as I was bound hand and foot, I preferred to suffer to that extreme rather than for a moment to listen to the thoughts that were apt to come into my mind of moving elsewhere, thoughts which often stole in upon me unawares. But now that by the favour of God I am delivered, who will not excuse me if I am unwilling to plunge again into the gulf and whirlpool which I know to be so dangerous and destructive?

Wherever else I had gone, I had taken care to conceal that I was the author of [the *Institutes*]; and I had resolved to continue in the same privacy and obscurity, until at length Guillaume Farel detained me at Geneva, not so much by counsel and exhortation, as by a dreadful curse, which I felt to be as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me. As the most direct road to Strasbourg, to which I then intended to return, was shut up by the wars, I had resolved to pass quickly by Geneva, without staying longer than a single night in that city. A little before this, popery had been driven from it by the exertions of the excellent man whom I have named and Pierre Viret; but matters were not yet brought to a settled state, and the city was divided into ungodly and dangerous factions. Then a person who has now basely apostatized and returned to the papists, discovered me and made me known to others. Upon this,

Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after learning that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter the imprecation that God would curse my retirement and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to help, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation, I was so terror-struck, that I gave up the journey I had undertaken; but sensible of my natural shyness and timidity, I would not tie myself to any particular office.

"Offered to him in Sacrifice" TO THE FIVE PRISONERS OF LYONS

The following letter was addressed by Calvin to five of his colleagues facing execution after Calvin's efforts to intercede proved fruitless. The five were burned at the stake facing the end with composure, singing psalms, repeating passages of scripture and exhorting each other to courage.

From Geneva, 15 May 1553
My very dear Brothers:

We have at length heard why the herald of Berne did not return that way. It was because he had not such an answer as we much desired. For the King has peremptorily refused all the requests made by Messieurs of Berne, as you will see by the copies of the letters, so that nothing further is to be looked for from that quarter. Nay, wherever we look here below, God has stopped the way. This is well, however, that we cannot be frustrated of the hope which we have in Him, and in His holy promises. You have always been settled on that sure foundation, even when it seemed as though you might be helped by men, and that we too thought so; but whatever prospect of escape you may have had by human means, yet your eyes have never been dazzled so as to divert your heart and trust, either on this side or that. Now, at this present hour, necessity itself exhorts you more than ever to turn your whole mind heavenward. As yet, we know not what will be the event. But since it appears as though God would use your blood to sign His truth, there is nothing better than for you to prepare yourselves to that end, beseeching Him so to subdue you to His good pleasure, that nothing may hinder you from following whithersoever he shall call. For you know, my brothers, that it

behoves us to be thus mortified in order to be offered to Him in sacrifice. It cannot be but that you sustain hard conflicts, in order that what was declared to Peter may be accomplished to you, namely, that they shall carry whither ye would not. You know, however, in what strength you have to fight—a strength on which all those who trust, shall never be daunted, much less confounded. Even so, my brothers, be confident that you shall be strengthened, according to your need, by the Spirit of our Lord Jesus, so that you shall not faint under the load of temptations, however heavy it be, any more than he did who won so glorious a victory, that in the midst of our miseries it is an unfailing pledge of our triumph. Since it pleases Him to employ you to the death in maintaining His quarrel, He will strengthen your hands in the fight, and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain. And though the fruit may not all at once appear, yet in time it shall spring up more abundantly than we can express. But as He hath vouchsafed you this privilege, that your bonds have been renowned, and that the noise of them has been everywhere spread abroad, it must needs be, in despite of Satan, that your death should resound far more powerfully, so that the name of our Lord be magnified thereby. For my part, I have no doubt, if it please this kind Father to take you unto Himself, that he has preserved you hitherto, in order that your long-continued imprisonments might serve as a preparation for the better awakening of those whom He has determined to edify by your end. For let enemies do their utmost, they never shall be able to bury out of sight that light which God has made to shine in you, in order to be contemplated from afar.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

TO LUTHER

Calvin was a prolific letter-writer. Reprinted below is the entire text of a letter sent to Martin Luther, by way of Philip Melancthon, along with some of Calvin's writings. Melancthon never showed the letter to Luther.

January 21, 1545

To the very excellent pastor of the Christian Church, Dr. M. Luther, my much respected father.

When I saw that my French fellow-countrymen, as many of them as had been brought out from the darkness of the Papacy to soundness of the faith, had altered nothing as to their public profession, and that they continued to defile themselves with the sacrilegious worship of the Papists, as if they had never tasted the savour of true doctrine, I was altogether unable to restrain myself from reproving so great sloth and negligence, in the way that I thought it deserved. How, indeed, can this faith, which lies buried in the heart within, do otherwise than break forth in the confession of the faith? What kind of religion can that be, which lies submerged under seeming idolatry? I do not undertake, however, to handle the argument here, because I have done so at large already in two little treatises, wherein, if it shall not be troublesome to you to glance over them, you will more clearly perceive both what I think, and the reasons which have compelled me to form that opinion. By the reading of them, indeed, some of our people, while hitherto they were fast asleep in a false security, having been awakened, have begun to consider what they ought to do. But because it is difficult either casting aside all considerations of self to expose their lives to danger, or having roused the displeasure of mankind to encounter the hatred of the world, or having abandoned their prospects at home in their native land, to enter upon a life of voluntary exile, they are withheld or kept back by these difficulties from coming to a settled determination. They put forth other reasons, however, and those somewhat specious, whereby one may perceive that they only seek to find some sort of pretext or other. In these circumstances, because they hang somehow in suspense, they are desirous to hear your opinion, which as they do deservedly hold in reverence, so it shall serve greatly to confirm them. They have therefore requested me, that I would undertake to send a trusty messenger to you, who might report your answer to us upon this question. And because I thought it was of very great consequence for them to have the benefit of your authority, that they might not fluctuate thus continually, and I myself stood besides in need of it, I was unwilling to refuse what they required. Now, therefore, much respected father in the Lord, I beseech you by Christ, that you will not grudge to take the trouble for their sake and mine, first, that you would peruse the epistle written in their name, and my little books, cursorily and at leisure hours, or



Philip Melancthon [1497-1560]
Despite the animosity that later existed between Lutherans and Calvinists, Melancthon and Calvin were dear friends.

that you would request some one to take the trouble of reading, and report the substance of them to you. Lastly, that you would write back your opinion in a few words. Indeed, I am unwilling to give you this trouble in the midst of so many weighty and various employments; but such is your sense of justice, that you cannot suppose me to have done this unless compelled by the necessity of the case: I therefore trust that you will pardon me. Would that I could fly to you, that I might even for a few hours enjoy the happiness of your society; for I would prefer, and it would be far better, not only upon this question, but also about others, to converse personally with yourself; but seeing that it is not granted to us on earth, I hope that shortly it will come to pass in the kingdom of God. Adieu, most renowned sir, most distinguished minister of Christ, and my ever-honoured father. The Lord himself rule and direct you by his own Spirit, that you may persevere even unto the end, for the common benefit and good of his own Church.

LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

In his master work, *The Institutes*, Calvin set forth his theology of grace and sanctification. After attacking the notion of people earning divine favor with good deeds, Calvin addresses the question of how we are to live as Christians saved by grace—and why.

"I do not so strictly demand evangelical perfection that I would not acknowledge as a Christian one who has not yet attained it."

CHAPTER VI

The life of the Christian Man; and First, by What Arguments Scripture Urges Us to It

Motives for the Christian life...

Now this Scriptural instruction of which we speak has two main aspects. The first is that the love of righteousness, to which we are otherwise not at all inclined by nature, may be instilled and established in our hearts; the second, that a rule be set forth for us that does not let us wander about in our zeal for righteousness.

There are in Scripture very many and excellent reasons for commending righteousness, not a few of which we have already noted in various places. And we shall briefly touch upon still others here. From what foundation may righteousness better arise than from the Scriptural warning that we must be made holy because our God is holy? [Lev. 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15-16]. Indeed, though we had been dispersed like stray sheep and scattered through the labyrinth of the world, he has gathered us together again to join us with himself. When we hear mention of our union with God, let us remember that holiness must be its bond; not because we come into communion with him by virtue of our holiness! Rather, we ought first to cleave unto him so that, infused with his holiness, we may follow whither he calls. But since it is especially characteristic of his glory that he have no fellowship with wickedness and uncleanness, Scripture accordingly teaches that this is the goal of our calling to which we must ever look if we would answer God when he calls [Isa. 35:8, etc.]. For to what purpose are we rescued from the wickedness and pollution of the world in which we were submerged if we allow ourselves throughout life to wallow in these? ...

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Christian life receives its strongest motive to God's work through the person and redemptive act of Christ.

And to wake us more effectively, Scripture shows that God the Father, as he has reconciled us to himself in his Christ [cf. II Cor. 5:18], has in him stamped for us the likeness [cf. Heb. 1:3] to which he would have us conform. Now, let these persons who think that moral philosophy is duly and systematically set forth solely among philosophers find me among the philosophers a more excellent dispensation. They, while they wish particularly to exhort us to virtue, announce merely that we should live in accordance with nature. But Scripture draws its exhortation from the true fountain. It not only enjoins us to refer our life to God, its author, to whom it is bound; but after it has taught that we have degenerated from the true origin and condition of our creation, it also adds that Christ, through whom we return into favor with God, has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life. What more effective thing can you require than this one thing? Nay, what can you require beyond this one thing? For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption.

Imperfection and endeavor of the Christian life

I do not insist that the moral life of a Christian man breathe nothing but the very gospel, yet this ought to be desired, and we must strive toward it. But I do not so strictly demand evangelical perfection that I would not acknowledge as a Christian one who has not yet attained it. For thus all would be excluded from the church, since no one is found who is not far removed from it, while many have advanced a little toward it whom it would nevertheless be unjust to cast away. . . .

What then? Let that target be set before our eyes at which we are earnestly to aim. Let that goal be appointed toward which we should strive and struggle. For it is not lawful for you to divide things with God in such a manner that you undertake part of those things which are enjoined upon you by his Word but omit part, according to your own judgment. For the first place, he everywhere commends integrity as the chief part of worshipping him [Gen. 17:1, Ps. 41:12; etc.]. By this word he means a sincere simplicity of mind, free from guile and feigning, the opposite of a double heart. It is as if it were said that the beginning of right living is spiritual, where the inner feeling of the mind is unfeignedly dedicated to God for the cultivation of holiness and righteousness.

But no one in this earthly prison of the body has sufficient strength to press on with due eagerness, and weakness so weighs down the greater number that, with wavering and limping and even creeping along the ground, they move at a feeble rate. Let each one of us, then, proceed according to the measure of his puny capacity and set out upon the journey we have begun. No one shall set out so inauspiciously as not daily to make some headway, though it be slight. Therefore, let us not cease so to act that we may make some way of the Lord. And let us not despair at the slightness of our success; for even though attainment may not correspond to desire, when today outstrips yesterday the effort is not lost. Only let us look toward our mark with sincere simplicity and aspire to our goal; not fondly flattering ourselves, nor excusing our own evil deeds, but with continuous effort striving toward this end: that we may surpass ourselves in goodness until we attain to goodness itself. It is this, indeed, which through the whole course of life we seek and follow. But we shall attain it only when we have cast off the weakness of the body, and are received into full fellowship with him.

**SELECTIONS FROM
Confession of Faith which
all the citizens and
inhabitants of Geneva
and the subjects of the
country must promise
to keep and hold.
(1536)**

The Word of God

First we affirm that we desire to follow Scripture alone as rule of faith and religion, without mixing with it any other thing which might be devised by the opinion of men apart from the Word of God, and without wishing to accept for our spiritual government any other doctrine than what is conveyed to us by the same Word without addition or diminution, according to the command of our Lord.

One Only God

Following, then, the lines laid down in the Holy Scriptures, we acknowledge that there is one only God, whom we are both to worship and serve, and in whom we are to put all our confidence and hope: having this assurance, that in him alone is contained all wisdom, power, justice, goodness and pity. And since he is spirit, he is

to be served in spirit and in truth. Therefore we think it an abomination to put our confidence or hope in any created thing, to worship anything else than him, whether angels or any other creatures, and to recognize any other Saviour of our souls than him alone, whether saints or men living upon earth; and likewise to offer the service, which ought to be rendered to him, in external ceremonies or carnal observances, as if he took pleasure in such things, or to make an image to represent his divinity or any other image for adoration.

The Law of God Alike for All

Because there is one only Lord and Master who has dominion over our consciences, and because his will is the only principle of all justice, we confess all our life ought to be ruled in accordance with the commandments of his holy law in which is contained all perfection of justice, and that we ought to have no other rule of good and just living, nor invent other good works to supplement it than those which are there contained, as follows: Exodus 20: "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee," and so on.

Natural Man

We acknowledge man by nature to be blind, darkened in understanding, and full of corruption and perversity of heart, so that of himself he has no power to be able to comprehend the true knowledge of God as is proper, nor to apply himself to good works. But on the contrary, if he is left by God to what he is by nature, he is only able to live in ignorance and to be abandoned to all iniquity. Hence he has need to be illumined by God, so that he come to the right knowledge of his salvation, and thus to be redirected in his affections and reformed to the obedience of the righteousness of God.

Salvation in Jesus

We confess then that it is Jesus Christ who is given to us by the Father, in order that in him we should recover all of which in ourselves we are deficient. Now all that Jesus Christ has done and suffered for our redemption, we veritably hold without any doubt, as it is contained in the Creed.

Righteousness in Jesus

Therefore we acknowledge the things which are consequently given to us by God in Jesus Christ: first, that being in our own nature enemies of God and subjects of his wrath and judgement, we are reconciled with him and received again in grace

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Christian life receives its strongest motive to God's work through the person and redemptive act of Christ.

And to wake us more effectively, Scripture shows that God the Father, as he has reconciled us to himself in his Christ [cf. II Cor. 5:18], has in him stamped for us the likeness [cf. Heb. 1:3] to which he would have us conform. Now, let these persons who think that moral philosophy is duly and systematically set forth solely among philosophers find me among the philosophers a more excellent dispensation. They, while they wish particularly to exhort us to virtue, announce merely that we should live in accordance with nature. But Scripture draws its exhortation from the true fountain. It not only enjoins us to refer our life to God, its author, to whom it is bound; but after it has taught that we have degenerated from the true origin and condition of our creation, it also adds that Christ, through whom we return into favor with God, has been set before us as an example, whose pattern we ought to express in our life. What more effective thing can you require than this one thing? Nay, what can you require beyond this one thing? For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption.

Imperfection and endeavor of the Christian life

I do not insist that the moral life of a Christian man breathe nothing but the very gospel, yet this ought to be desired, and we must strive toward it. But I do not so strictly demand evangelical perfection that I would not acknowledge as a Christian one who has not yet attained it. For thus all would be excluded from the church, since no one is found who is not far removed from it, while many have advanced a little toward it whom it would nevertheless be unjust to cast away.

What then? Let that target be set before our eyes at which we are earnestly to aim. Let that goal be appointed toward which we should strive and struggle. For it is not lawful for you to divide things with God in such a manner that you undertake part of those things which are enjoined upon you by his Word but omit part, according to your own judgment. For the first place, he everywhere commends integrity as the chief part of worshipping him [Gen. 17:1, Ps. 41:12; etc.]. By this word he means a sincere simplicity of mind, free from guile and feigning, the opposite of a double heart. It is as if it were said that the beginning of right living is spiritual, where the inner feeling of the mind is unfeignedly dedicated to God for the cultivation of holiness and righteousness.

But no one in this earthly prison of the body has sufficient strength to press on with due eagerness, and weakness so weighs down the greater number that, with wavering and limping and even creeping along the ground, they move at a feeble rate. Let each one of us, then, proceed according to the measure of his puny capacity and set out upon the journey we have begun. No one shall set out so inauspiciously as not daily to make some headway, though it be slight. Therefore, let us not cease so to act that we may make some way of the Lord. And let us not despair at the slightness of our success; for even though attainment may not correspond to desire, when today outstrips yesterday the effort is not lost. Only let us look toward our mark with sincere simplicity and aspire to our goal; not fondly flattering ourselves, nor excusing our own evil deeds, but with continuous effort striving toward this end: that we may surpass ourselves in goodness until we attain to goodness itself. It is this, indeed, which through the whole course of life we seek and follow. But we shall attain it only when we have cast off the weakness of the body, and are received into full fellowship with him.

**SELECTIONS FROM
Confession of Faith which
all the citizens and
inhabitants of Geneva
and the subjects of the
country must promise
to keep and hold.
(1536)**

The Word of God

First we affirm that we desire to follow Scripture alone as rule of faith and religion, without mixing with it any other thing which might be devised by the opinion of men apart from the Word of God, and without wishing to accept for our spiritual government any other doctrine than what is conveyed to us by the same Word without addition or diminution, according to the command of our Lord.

One Only God

Following, then, the lines laid down in the Holy Scriptures, we acknowledge that there is one only God, whom we are both to worship and serve, and in whom we are to put all our confidence and hope: having this assurance, that in him alone is contained all wisdom, power, justice, goodness and pity. And since he is spirit, he is

to be served in spirit and in truth. Therefore we think it an abomination to put our confidence or hope in any created thing, to worship anything else than him, whether angels or any other creatures, and to recognize any other Saviour of our souls than him alone, whether saints or men living upon earth; and likewise to offer the service, which ought to be rendered to him, in external ceremonies or carnal observances, as if he took pleasure in such things, or to make an image to represent his divinity or any other image for adoration.

The Law of God Alike for All

Because there is one only Lord and Master who has dominion over our consciences, and because his will is the only principle of all justice, we confess all our life ought to be ruled in accordance with the commandments of his holy law in which is contained all perfection of justice, and that we ought to have no other rule of good and just living, nor invent other good works to supplement it than those which are there contained, as follows: Exodus 20: "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee," and so on.

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Mr. X beat up his wife, or that Mr. Y and Mrs. Z were seeing rather a lot of each other, they were to admonish them in a brotherly manner. If the response was unsatisfactory, they were to report the matter to the Consistory, who would summon the offender, remonstrate with him or her. If this failed, they would, as a last resort, pronounce excommunication, which would remain in force until he repented.

Finally, the social welfare work was the charge of the deacons. They were the hospital management board, the social security executives, and the alms-house supervisors. It was a proud boast that there were no beggars in Geneva.

A HEAVY WORK LOAD

Calvin not only organized the form of the church, he also played his full part in the day-to-day work. He preached twice every Sunday and every day of alternate weeks. In the weeks when he was not preaching, he lectured three times (he was the Old Testament professor). He took his place regularly on the Consistory, which met every Thursday. And he was either on committees or incessantly being asked for advice about matters relating to the deacons.

It should not be thought that he was in any way the ruler or dictator of Geneva. He was appointed by the City Council and paid by them. He could at any time have been dismissed by them (as he had been in 1538). He was a foreigner in Geneva, not even a naturalized citizen, until near the end of his life. His great authority was a moral authority, stemming from his belief that, because he proclaimed the message of the Bible, he was God's ambassador, with the divine authority and power behind him. That he was involved in so much that went on in Geneva, from the City constitution down to drains and heating appliances, was simply due to his outstanding abilities and sense of duty. He made good his offer of himself in 1541 as "the servant of Geneva."

POOR HEALTH

The burden of work and responsibilities was turned into crushing labor by his continual poor health. Overwork in his law-student days had impaired his digestion. This in turn, increased by his excitable and nervous disposition, brought on migraines. Later his lungs became affected,

perhaps through too much preaching and talking, and he was incapacitated by lung hemorrhages. As if all this were not enough, he was tortured by bladder stones and the gout.

And yet he drove his body beyond its limits. When he could not walk the couple of hundred yards to church, he was carried in a chair to preach. When the doctor forbade him to go out in the winter air to the lecture room, he crowded the audience into his bedroom and gave the remaining lectures on Malachi there. To those who would urge him to rest, he had the wondering question, "What! Would you have the Lord find me idle when he comes?"

The afflictions and pressures he endured were intensified by the opposition he faced. It was not reasoned opposition raised in the course of debate. This opposition took the form of actual physical intimidation, of men setting their dogs on him, of the firing of guns outside the church during the service, of people trying to drown his voice or put him off by loud coughing while he preached, even of anonymous threats against his life.

Disaffection grew. Calvin, for his part, stuck to his guns admirably. At first he was patient, but gradually his patience was worn away. Even in his patience, he was too unsympathetic. He may have remained always morally superior to his opponents, but he showed little understanding, little kindness, and certainly little sense of humor.

On the other hand, we have to ask ourselves how much Calvin would have achieved in Geneva and in the world, if he had been an amenable sort of man. His sympathy was for the needs of the Gospel; his kindness was for the Kingdom of God; in the situation he saw no comedy, only tragedy.

We must remember that during all this turmoil, Calvin had not relinquished his many other responsibilities. He continued preaching and lecturing, commentaries and other books were written, many hundreds of letters were dispatched to every part of the civilized world, and he had worked away at the *Institutio*.

Never satisfied, Calvin made his greatest and final revision in the winter of 1558, when severe illness gave him leisure from ordinary tasks. The work was greatly increased in bulk, the 21 chapters of 1550 now became 80. These 80 were completely recast into four "books," correspond-

ing to the four parts of the Apostles' Creed on God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and the Church.

What happened to the *Institutio* in its course from the six chapters based on the catechism to the four books on the creed? Did it lose its contact with those who are "hungering and thirsting for Christ"? Did it cease to be evangelistic and become purely theoretical theology? Above all, did it drift away from the teaching of Holy Scripture? Not at all.

The 1559 edition begins with the same sentence as it did in 1539, which was nearly the same as in 1536: "Our true and genuine wisdom can be summed up as the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves." By "God," Calvin means the God who has revealed himself through Holy Scripture, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. By "the knowledge of God," Calvin means the relationship of child and Father created by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The *Institutio* remains what it always was, an evangelistic and pastoral work, a continual exposition of Holy Scripture.

Only five years remained to him after 1559. They were years of increasing sickness and weakness—years, nevertheless, of unremitting toil. He again translated the *Institutio* into French. He wrote the large commentary on the Pentateuch and translated that also. He continued to preach, lecture, and perform his ordinary duties until February of 1564. After this he quickly declined and died three months later. CH

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and Calvinist. The Zwinglian and Calvinist branches finally reached an agreement, only because of the willingness of two men, Bullinger and Calvin. As early as 1547, Calvin and Bullinger began discussing the matter and finally reached an agreement in 1549, when Calvin and Farel went to Geneva and met personally with Bullinger. The result was known as the *Consensus Tigurinus* or the Zurich Consensus.

Bullinger engaged in a multifaceted ministry of preaching and teaching, as well as carrying on an enormous amount of correspondence with many of the great men of Europe, including Calvin. He was especially influential in the English Reformation. CH

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