



Some history and histories of Calvin in the context of the Reformation

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This essay consists essentially of an Identikit of Calvin and his mentality. Presented will be something of himself, how others have viewed him, and select areas of controversy in his work and thought. The intention is to illustrate chiefly that in approaching 'Calvin', one needs to be both circumspect and ready for surprises.



Calvin's vision of the interim cosmos

'All the world's a stage', says Jaques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. It is an axiom that Calvin could assent to – 'God has set us on a stage', he once remarked.¹ For although he had little time for theatre as box-office entertainment, Calvin did compare his concept of the divine-human relationship to 'theatre'. He took his cue both from biblical literature and Renaissance notions of cosmic drama played out in human lives. On another occasion Calvin remarked that 'we are spectators in the beautiful theatre of the world'.² Note that he uses the word 'beautiful' – but was not Calvin supposed to have detested the world, also alleged against Augustine, as a kind of Manichee reluctant to accept the intrinsic goodness of the created order? Not at all. There are no indications of any such dualist tendencies in Calvin, implying some kind of world- or life-denying stance. The problem did not lie in the objective terrestrial context, environment, or in nature, to all of which he had a completely appreciative attitude, like the author of Psalm 104.

However, the beautiful theatre of the world was also the stage setting for a cosmic struggle between God and Satan, the kingdoms of righteousness and darkness, order and chaos, good and evil, with

the allegiance of humanity being the prize.³ Human beings play their allocated parts in this. The Deity plays a major role, by means of the Word and the Spirit, be it through the ‘divine oracles’ and prophets in Scripture, the incarnation, and other lieutenants and ministers of his Word. The brief prologue to the entire, post-Fall drama is the second question that is asked in the Bible and the first by God. The ominous sound of God walking in the garden at dusk had caused Adam and Eve to go for cover, but then God calls out to Adam: “‘Where are you?’” Accordingly, the human cast in this drama of life, at risk of being lost due to its preference for the ‘shadows’, and being ‘puffed up with a false opinion of life’, as Calvin expressed it, is called ultimately – after suspended judgement – to friendship with God as the means of rescue from self-annihilation.⁴

Humans react variously to this, for whatever reasons, so that the plot thickens and the suspense increases. Such a spiritual drama of redemption and abandonment (damnation) is played out wherever the Word is made clearly known. At the individual and societal levels, this engenders conflicts and tensions of a white-knuckle kind. While there are signs of some people living in obedience and grace, there is wide imperviousness to the concerned voice and will of God. According to Calvin, symptoms are wilful ignorance, false doctrines, blasphemies, slothfulness, lovelessness, bad behaviour, idolatrous addictions, arrogance, contempt, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and so on – all derived from the toxic impact of sin on the human condition, resulting in the pollution of the human heart. In short, Calvin is primarily a broadcaster of, and commentator on the *ecclesia militans*, visible and invisible, whose struggles with the Devil are partly external, partly internal, and partly within individuals including himself. As might be expected, such themes appear in Calvin’s sermons on Job, who is a mirror of how God and the Devil operate.⁵

For Calvin, Geneva was a microcosm of this scenario, with, as Shakespeare’s Jaques says, ‘men’ and ‘women’ as ‘players’ having ‘their exits and their entrances’. Dramas, tragic or absurd, are constantly re-enacted. Certainly, when one looks at the records of the Genevan City Council, the Consistory of Church Discipline, the Venerable Company of Pastors, or letters of Calvin and others, more often than not it does very much look like this. If Calvin had any serenity in this

cockpit, he concealed it, even if his faith pointed to God's ultimate victory and the future life of blessedness as the only way to relieve the despair of the interim mayhem. He was constantly in the thick of the action, highly dramatic and histrionic as it often was. Calvin obviously had supporters, but he was just as often opposed, denounced, scorned and harassed by others in the reputedly model Reformation city. In his death-bed address, he recalled that people would sometimes set their dogs at him on the street, and that others had fired gunshots outside his house at night.⁶ Previously, he had protested that some Genevans maliciously abbreviated his name and so nicknamed him 'Cain', and that others named their dogs after him.⁷ Another time he complained about the provocation of people loudly playing tennis outside St Peter's during services.⁸ And he once remarked that there are people around who, when he might say: 'It is 12 noon, and so daytime', would even contradict that.⁹ Such things could hardly have happened if Calvin had been the awesome, tyrannical, theocratic dictator of legend, and 'Pope' of Geneva.¹⁰

And Geneva? – 'the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the Apostles', whose 'manners and religion to be so sincerely reformed, I have not seen in any other place'.¹¹ So reckoned John Knox famously. My own view of this is that Calvin would be quick to challenge such an analysis – while acknowledging his devotion to the advancement of ecclesial society, locally and internationally, by means of a 'network of exchanges' to foster a fellowship and unity.¹² This involved visits, correspondence, consultations, colloquies, synods, counselling, intelligence gathering, colleges, consensus memoranda, pursuing a common life and so on.



The veiled Calvin

This general and particular picture has been sketched because it is essentially Calvin's own. Moreover, the aim here is to recall Calvin, both the person and the religious thinker, with some semblance of authenticity and reality. This is not easy. The conventional Calvin, the one of high and immutable dogma, is well catalogued and all-pervasive. That is how (among epigones, general sympathizers, and some neutrals) he has been predominantly portrayed: a disembodied

mind of great coherence, power and influence, a Titan of the faith, the architect of a great ‘system’ of theology, although Calvin was not a writer of Calvinist, systematic dogmatics.¹³ Up to our own times, the bulk of Calvin-friendly studies has been concerned with him as a teacher of doctrine, in the quest of a ‘usable Calvin’. As a guide to truth he can participate as a ‘familiar contemporary’ shorn of all distracting historical or personal apparel.¹⁴

There is, however, the other Calvin. This is the self-effacing human, private one, but also (like St Paul) not always able to exercise self-control, and so troubled with spiritual anxieties, theological doubts, and secular commotions. This Calvin is less familiar – in great contrast to some like Luther or Augustine, whose egos and self-presentation skills were much more developed.

There are several reasons for the hidden Calvin. One is that a corollary of the tendency to make a doctrinal icon out of Calvin is to view his historicity as almost inconsequential. Another is that Calvin’s own personality and character is not so much forbidding as self-veiling and so difficult to access directly. ‘I do not speak about myself willingly’, he said.¹⁵ The words that he does use occasionally of himself do not correspond to his perceived image. Rather, he describes himself as ‘modest’, ‘soft’, ‘mild’, or ‘naturally bashful’, ‘timorous’ and so reclusive, preferring to live a life of ‘tranquillity, avoiding celebrity’ devoted to ‘scholarly work’.¹⁶ That is about all he deliberately discloses of his predisposition, although much else can be inferred from remarks of others and from his oblique style of self-communication throughout his writings. He clearly has no heroic self-delusions: ‘I am nothing [...] and all I have done is worthless’, he says at the end of his life, even if more of theological than a personal statement.¹⁷

A third reason is grounded in his spiritual self-understanding. Here the keynotes are self-denial and effacement. Often recalling Paul’s ‘You are not your own’ (1 Cor 6:19), as the legitimizing surrender of self, he remarks that ‘Since I know that I am not my own master, I will offer myself as a true sacrifice to the Lord’.¹⁸ This is a way of adopting a new identity, a new persona as it were, as monks and nuns did on taking vows. And as for the word ‘Calvinism’ – the first

recorded repudiation of it was by Calvin himself: ‘Our detractors find no greater insult to attach to us than this word “Calvinism”’.¹⁹

The traditional, stereotypical Calvin is still vigorously purveyed, in relation chiefly to dogmatic theology and history of doctrine. In the last fifty years or so, many scholars have approached this as a kind of pedigree pursuit or quest for roots – Calvin’s sources – classical, legal, philosophical, theological, whether contemporary or historical. This is very much wrapped up in the ‘ism’ sign-language of the cognoscenti – Erasmian Humanism, Neoplatonism, Augustinianism, Thomism, Scotism, Stoicism, nominalism, scholasticism, Aristotelianism, Paulinism, Lutheranism, Conciliarism, etc. This has been interesting, if baffling. Yet if truth be told, it has had little impact on either the wider non-theological academic world, or even the ecclesiastical world – with the exception perhaps of several Roman Catholic writers after Vatican II.²⁰ The downside of this sort of DNA approach is that it tends to yield a sort of predetermined Calvin that makes any distinctiveness harder to account for. It does not answer the question of: How come he was greater than the sum of the parts? Or, why was the impact of his thought, if it was so conservative and derivative, so inspirational?



Some new directions in modern Calvin studies

Sectors of Calvin research in the last forty years or so have been trying to escape the iron cage of the traditional presentations of a rather static, lithographic Calvin that one sees in much of the iconography. Such portraiture resembles the image expressed by Winston Churchill of Kevin O’Higgins, the Irish Free State leader in the 1920s and of glacial demeanour, namely: ‘A figure from the antique, cast in bronze’. Just think of the Reformation monument in Geneva, where Calvin and the other Reformers are depicted in terms of a Nietzschean *Übermensch* or Superman. Accordingly, such modern Calvin research is demythologizing, but not in a devaluing sense, or in the spirit of various, influential forms of anti-Calvin propaganda grounded in religious, academic and cultural prejudice or folklore. Rather, it is a quest for the fully historical Calvin, for the Calvin incarnate, releasing him from the boilerplate representations of convention as well as

his own self-imposed, semi-Sabellian persona. This has generated interesting studies on the ‘humanity’ of Calvin,²¹ and others on Calvin in terms of the realities of himself and his work.

The Reformer’s literary output in his own lifetime was about 150 items.²² He obviously did not suffer from writer’s block – there were his several thousand sermons and letters as well. The publications list includes nine different versions, controlled by Calvin, of the *Institutes*. He also states there, quoting Augustine: ‘I am one of those who write as they learn, and learn as they write.’²³ To be borne in mind that in theology, Calvin, uniquely among the Reformers, was an autodidactic, not university-schooled. In the British Library there are about 5000 items with the words Calvin or Calvinism in the title. This does not include journal articles on Calvin, or books with chapters on him. I believe that in the Calvin Studies Centre in Grand Rapids, there is collection of about 14,000 journal articles on Calvin. All this effectively means that it is unlikely that will ever be a definitive book by a single author on Calvin and the interpretation of him, so that the whole truth about him will remain elusive.

Some names of note in respect of new directions in modern Calvin research are first: Fred Graham.²⁴ Following in earlier pioneer work by André Biéler, he focussed on Calvin’s personal involvement in socio-economic, legal and political issues in Geneva. Graham stresses Calvin’s ‘Christian secularity’, not as something that was incidental to his work, but which belonged to the essence of it.

Next, William Bouwsma.²⁵ His ground-breaking biography placed Calvin within a general identity-crisis in European culture and religion at the time. Unresolved tensions there are found within Calvin too. He has a double mindset. First, religio-philosophical, making him analytical and dispassionate – conservative. Secondly, rhetorical, which inspires him to action and reorientation – progressive. These co-exist uneasily, hence Bouwsma’s subtitle: *A Sixteenth-Century Portrait*. That is, Calvin embodies (creatively) the paradoxes of that century. Rediscovered and prominent in this book are Calvin’s repeated caveats about the ‘labyrinth’ and the ‘abyss’,²⁶ losing one’s way – a pathological state that the Reformer likens to wild horses, running hither and thither, not knowing whether they are in or out, and so the experience of Hell and living death here and now.

Then, Bernard Cottret.²⁷ He is concerned to make Calvin more accessible and intelligible to a broad readership. He concentrates on how the Reformer developed his vocation, and on how he coped with his work, the environment, and a succession of difficult people or groups. Analysing how Calvin became Calvin, this is a history of faith in the face of the real, often faithless and hostile world. Echoing Bouwsma, he speaks of ‘an unfinished portrait’.

Lastly, Denis Crouzet.²⁸ Like Bouwsma, he strives to release Calvin from the history of dogma on the one hand, and on the other, from evolving cultural Calvinism as the unwitting harbinger of secularizing modernity. Crouzet’s orientation is psychohistory of a meditative kind. In this, the theatrical format of Calvin’s essential vision is constitutive. Further, echoing Bouwsma, he speaks of Calvin’s ‘parallel lives’, which are somewhat disjunctive.

None of these four authors are professional theologians or ordained. Interesting is that on the split mind and dual personality of Calvin as projected by Bouwsma and Crouzet, it is a Dutch Roman Catholic writer on Calvin, Marijn de Kroon, who points out that this is more of a problem for non-theological and non-religious observers. These underestimate the integrating and reconciling power of faith, which cannot be empirically demonstrated. Anyway, God does not make or make use of perfectly integrated people, even if they are designated as ‘saints’. Be that as it may, these four writers and others represent the growing laicisation of Calvin studies (as distinct from secularized, cultural Calvinism studies). There is no reason to be apprehensive about this. Who knows the ways of providence? The development might ultimately help, for example, modern Scottish ‘culture’ better come to terms with its sense of embarrassment at, and neurotic relationship with ‘Calvin and Calvinism’. This is perceived by many as having defaced the virtuous essence of Scottishness and turned the nation into manic depressives, alcohol addicts, and cultural philistines – so that either excoriating or airbrushing out the Calvin-Knox scapegoats is in order. National salvation, civility, and progress now lie in denial of imagined history.



Keynotes in Calvin's evolution

Calvin came from Picardy. In French tradition, the Picards were noted for their contentious nature. The Calvins seem to have been affected by this too. His people were a petit-bourgeois, upwardly-mobile family in Noyon, where his father, Gerald, worked as a notary or solicitor for the cathedral chapter. His grandfather had been a boatman on the Oise. It is interesting, by the way, that most of Calvin's life was spent in the shadow of cathedrals – at Noyon, Notre Dame in Paris, the great minster of Strasbourg, and St Peter's in Geneva. A dispute broke out between Calvin's father and the cathedral chapter that resulted in his excommunication in 1528. Apparently Gerald Calvin had been too speculative in investing clients' or diocesan funds. There were further quarrels with the church over the burial of Calvin's father when he died in 1531. Further, in 1537, an elder brother of Calvin, a priest, was excommunicated in 1537 – reason not known. Therefore, locally the Calvins had a reputation. Calvin himself says nothing about these family troubles.

His childhood and youth was a mixture of emotional deprivation and privilege. When Calvin was born, his father was in his fifties. Thus he was subject to an elderly father, who was, like most fathers in those days, authoritarian and remote, possibly volatile. His mother died when he was six. His father, nearly sixty, remarried. How did all this affect Calvin the semi-orphan psychologically and in his character development? One wonders.

The privileged side of Calvin's youth has two aspects. First, his father destined him for the priesthood, and to that end was able to secure church benefices for him that would help pay for his higher education in Paris. Furthermore, due to his father's professional involvement with the local aristocracy, the Hangest family, from which the bishops of Noyon were usually appointed, part of Calvin's early education, academic and social, was spent at the Hangest family household. Here there were children of similar age, and with whom he went to university in Paris. The eldest of these, Claude, later helped Calvin get a further benefice as a preaching curate. To him, by then a monastic prior, Calvin dedicated his first book, a commentary on Seneca's *De clementia* (1532).

Pointed out routinely in much of the literature is that Calvin had aristocratic tendencies and reserve, and that this originates in these early connections. I am not sure about this, since a natural shyness does not make one aristocratic. Some of his writings do have a cool, elegant, detached style, others certainly not. The same mixture seems evident in his person. Depicted as having stoical attitudes, he actually denounced the Stoic suppression of feelings. ‘Apathia’, he said, is ‘an insane philosophy’,²⁹ which is another reason why he denounces asceticism. Contemporary reports indicate that Calvin could be moody and choleric, and so temperamental, though his migraines would not have helped. Indeed, in certain circumstances he justifies ‘vehemence’ as an oratorical and pedagogic virtue. Calvin, then, was no donnish cold fish. He did not conceal his ultimate plebeian origins – ‘merely an ordinary man from among the common people’, thus he described himself³⁰ – and was well aware of the passions and ferociousness of the mass of the people.

In Paris and elsewhere, Calvin was very fortunate in his education and teachers, including the famous Marthurin Cordier, Andrea Alciati, and Melchior Wolmar. Even so, the Collège de Montaigu, where he resided for five years, was a kind of Christian educational boot camp with a great stress on learning, piety, discipline, and mutual moral watchfulness. Reputedly, Calvin’s zeal as a kind of school prefect was such that he was nicknamed ‘*the Accusative Case*’.³¹ Again, one may wonder how the imprint of that experience on the obedient, adolescent Calvin affected his future views of what a properly disciplined church community should be like. Aged seventeen, Calvin graduated with an MA in 1526. An earlier view that the Scottish philosopher-theologian, John Mair or Major, was one of his teachers, is now regarded as dubious. During any overlap in Paris between Mair and Calvin, Mair taught in a different college, St Barbe.

In these years there was great intellectual, cultural and religious ferment and turmoil in Paris. Humanism, or classical studies, was challenging traditional philosophy, formal rhetoric was displacing metaphysics, biblical and patristic studies were sidelining scholastic theology. Notions of renovation, renewal, restoration, purgation and reform of traditional systems and institutions, as well as individual and social ethics, were also related to the church, especially by

influential writers like Erasmus. In addition, heresy was in the air, what with the furore in the Sorbonne over Luther's theology. Calvin was conscious of all this, and was affected. However, he says he drew the line at heresy due to his Catholic loyalism. Speaking later about his initial exposure to Lutheran writings, he stated: 'One thing above all restrained me from believing these people, namely my reverence for the Church'.³² So he was no youthful rebel in religion or easy convert jumping on a bandwagon.

After his father fell out with the church, he withdrew Calvin from the path of the priesthood and instructed him to take up law studies, partly on the grounds that this would enable him 'to become rich'.³³ At the universities of Bourges and Orléans, Calvin studied law, graduating with another degree in 1531. His father died in the same year. Calvin then gave up law and decided to do what really interested him, namely pursue the new classical studies that the king, Francis I, now underwrote when he established a Royal College devoted to Latin, Greek, and Hebrew studies. Calvin may have attended some courses there. He seems to have wanted to be a classical scholar, academic and teacher. His first book, the commentary on Seneca, which had no religious overtones, signalled that intent. The fact that he still had some benefices enabled him to finance further study. Apparently, when at Bourges, he occasionally preached as non-ordained curate. It was later recorded that a local seigneur or squire, who had heard him, said: 'It seems to me that Mr Calvin preaches better than the monks, for he goes straight to the point'.³⁴

It looks as if Calvin was converted to Lutheran thinking not long before November 1533, when the Rector of Paris University, Nicholas Cop, a friend of Calvin, gave an address that was deemed provocative and laced with Lutheran ideas. This led to a harassment of known Reformation sympathizers. Since Calvin seems to have either ghost-written or co-authored Cop's address, both he and Cop had to leave Paris quickly, but separately.

Calvin does not say much about his 'conversion', by which he seems to mean not so much a sudden spiritual experience as adopting a more positive and open attitude of mind ('teachable') to the critiques of the traditional religion – which he characterized as the 'superstitions of the Papacy'. All he says about this undated reorientation is not

necessarily that it was ‘sudden’ as ‘unexpected’ (also a meaning of *subito*), and that (with hindsight) it enabled his escape from the ‘abyss’.³⁵ By that he means the way of the Catholic church, to which he had been so devotedly attached. The church, he came to believe, had underestimated the magnitude of sin, treating it as finite rather than infinite, putting thereby everyone in danger of falling into a black whole of perdition. However, he may also have had in mind the even worse secularizing tendencies of Renaissance Humanism. The ‘Renaissance Church’ maybe?

For the next two years, Calvin, not endowed with the spirit of martyrdom, went on a walk-about as an internal exile, but abroad as well. He was in the south of France, Basel in Switzerland, the north of Italy, then back in Paris and Noyon occasionally. After the public attacks on the Mass at Paris in 1534 and 1535 that led to the execution of 25 people, one or two of whom Calvin knew, he decided to emigrate and head for Germany, to Reformation Strasbourg in particular, with some siblings. Thereby he became a virtually life-long refugee. The first hard evidence of his commitment to the Reformation faith does not appear till January 1536, with the appearance of the *Institutes* in Basel – structured on the Apostles Creed, written in Latin, and so only for the learned.

Thereafter, it is important to realize that Calvin had no internal vocation to the ministry or be a Reformer. We know what happened. Against his preference for peace and quiet to engage in private studies and writing, he was intimidated on a journey through Geneva by William Farel, the first Genevan reformer, to help out with the Reformation in the city, in 1536. The team ministry of Farel and Calvin was a flop. Although the city remained committed to the Reformation, both Farel and Calvin were expelled by the Erastian city government in 1538 for insubordination in church matters. As far as Calvin was concerned, he admitted mistakes, but concluded that this only proved the point that he had neither vocation nor talent for the ministry.

A few months afterwards, Calvin received a second external call to the church ministry, which he initially waved away. The Strasbourg Reformer, Martin Bucer, suggested he could minister to the considerable French Protestant refugee community in the German city. At the time Calvin said: ‘I am afraid of tempting God again if I

take up such a burden, which I have known myself unable to bear.’³⁶ Soon he confirmed that he had resolved ‘not to take up public office [...] until Martin Bucer cited the example of Jonah against me.’³⁷ A happy compromise arrangement was devised for Calvin in Strasbourg – he would not only minister unmolested to the French church, he would also work as a part-time lecturer in biblical studies at the new Academy there. Strasbourg was liberating and formative for Calvin in the years 1538–41. He did not have to deal with the civil government or political insecurities as had been the case in Geneva. In the areas of theology, biblical exegesis, liturgy, preaching, church discipline and so on, he benefitted enormously from the association with the Strasbourg Reformers. They also brought him as a delegate to the Catholic-Protestant reunion conferences in Germany, where he befriended other Lutheran Reformers, notably Philip Melancthon. All in all, Strasbourg was a providential apprenticeship for Calvin.

He would have been happy to stay there, but another external call, this time from the Genevans, disturbed his comfort zone. It took him nearly a year to make up his mind. For Calvin, Geneva was no plum charge. ‘That place of torture’³⁸ he called it. ‘I would rather die 100 times in some other way than on the cross of being in Geneva, on which I died 1000 times a day.’³⁹ When he did decide to return to Geneva in 1541, however, the understanding was that it would be on a six-month secondment. Things did not turn out like that, and the rest is well-known history: Calvin remained there till his death in 1564. Geneva was to act as feeder for the Reformation in France and to nourish Reformation movements elsewhere in Europe, in the west: the Netherlands, the Rhineland Palatinate, England, and Scotland, and in the east: Hungary and Poland. And by the 1550s, Calvin’s writings were also influential among Reformation sympathizers in Spain (partly due to the link via the Spanish Netherlands).

However, as Calvin rightly anticipated, the second Genevan ministry, despite positive and influential achievements, was indeed largely a way of the Cross. This time, however, he was more equipped for it, especially internally. He had, as he said, sacrificed himself to the ministry of the Lord, annihilating personal predisposition, preferences and identity.⁴⁰ His insistence on having no funeral and his grave unmarked is to be seen in this light. In Denis Crouzet’s

memorable phase, the enigma of the mature Calvin is explicable by his quasi-mystical self-understanding as being ‘*absent à soi*’ (absent to himself).⁴¹ Calvin’s odyssey, therefore, was away from himself to God and towards his neighbours. Contrary to anti-Reformation propaganda, Reformers like Calvin despised subjective individualism and the primacy of self-concern, which he saw as the antithesis of the Gospel, ‘the pestilence that without fail leads to our destruction’.⁴² Rather, he was zealous in encouraging relationships, wide networks, cooperative endeavours with civil authority and society, domestic and international fraternity, community life, public gestures of discipline and repentance, reconciliation banquets, and ecclesial society. In these respects, he tried to be an ambassador of Christ in the world. Religion is not private, it is public. This was another reason, apart from theological ones, why he considered Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and other perfectionist and secessionist movements as posing a sectarian threat equal to that of the Papacy.⁴³ Calvin is assuredly not the father of private or individualized Christianity, or modern multi-denominationalism, even if he was quite relaxed about diversity of forms and secondary practices.



Select controversies and misconceptions

1. *Predestination*, in the form of God’s eternal decree of double predestination, that is, the prelapsarian double judgement of election and rejection. This can be the werewolf of Reformed theology, and is the source of the perception that ‘Calvinism’ equals ‘predestination’ – as reinforced in recent times by Nicolas Tyacke.⁴⁴ Calvin stated: ‘I am assured in my conscience that what I have taught and written on predestination did not grow in my brain, rather that I hold it from God.’⁴⁵ This is in response to the criticism that he is indulging in unreformed curiosity and speculation. He means that he finds it is corroborated in Scripture – hence in 1562, he preached thirteen sermons on the election of Jacob and the damnation of Esau. Before denouncing Calvin for this doctrine, people should also try to read those sermons, as that is how he tried to explain the notion to the people. Published in 1579, they were also published in English translation in the same year.⁴⁶ His bottom line on the matter is that

such a doctrine underlines the sheer gratuitousness of God's love and mercy, and that there is no involvement of meritorious exercise of free will. All are worthy of damnation, but God relents and decides to rescue some from the labyrinth. In reply to the argument that this is capricious and pastorally destabilizing, Calvin argued that better our certainty that some will be saved, compared to the situation in the Old Church, where no one is certain that anyone will be saved.

We cannot explore this further. But some brief observations can be made. First: Some modern Calvin-friendly writers tend to play down the importance of his doctrine on the matter by pointing out that in the *Institutes*, there are only four chapters out of eighty-two devoted to the matter, so that it cannot be a major item in his theology. Yet apart from the sermons mentioned already, he also published two books on the matter, and cites the doctrine in his commentaries. So playing down the doctrine in Calvin will not work. Secondly: Despite this, he refrained from making the doctrine a stipulation of fellowship and unity of faith with other Reformation churches, some of whose representatives, like Melancthon and the Swiss Zwinglian churches, counselled reticence. The church in Berne, the Genevan church's overseer, told the Genevan City Council in 1555 that for the sake of religious peace and the avoidance of scandal 'the secrets of God' should remain secret.⁴⁷ Thirdly: At first sight, it looks as if Calvin imposed the doctrine relentlessly on the Genevan ministers and church – especially as the City Council, to which he appealed, appeared to provide back-up. However, if one looks carefully at the wording of the Council's resolution, all which is prohibited in Geneva is public opposition to the doctrine.⁴⁸ And then: The doctrine was not inserted in the Genevan confession of faith or catechisms – or Reformed confessions anywhere else until the seventeenth century.

Lastly: There is one revealing piece of evidence that double predestination was not imposed in Geneva with Procrustean rigour. In 1553, an ordinary working man, a French refugee, was called to the Consistory, the joint church-state disciplinary body. This was Robert Lemoine, who liked to sound off in taverns with provocative religious ideas of a radical kind. The Consistory questioned him and asked him if it were also true that he had said, quote: 'this fucking predestination doctrine'.⁴⁹ On being reprimanded for using such crude

language, he replied that where he came from in France, people spoke like that. The point is: the matter went no further. In reality, therefore, even in Calvin's Geneva, double predestination was not a doctrine by which faith or the church stood or fell. The doctrine lacked catholicity, historical or contemporary, even if intimations of it are found in Augustine, the obscure Gottschalk, and Scripture.⁵⁰

2. *The Servetus affair*. From a modern perspective, of course, this *cause célèbre* is appalling and shameful. Thereby, Genevan Christian society displayed its medieval side. However, at the time it was encouraged and lauded internationally and ecumenically almost without exception. The benefit for the Genevan Reformation was that it gained the much needed credentials for universality and catholicity. One has to say that although much has been written about it, the whole affair and Calvin's role in it is still awaiting a comprehensive, dispassionate study.⁵¹ There is the riddle of why Servetus, whose ideas, not just on the Trinity and infant baptism, were genuinely bizarre and subversive, came to Geneva at all. There is the unresolved mystery of Calvin's apparent cooperation with the French Inquisition before the fleeing Servetus arrived in Geneva. Some papers sent by Servetus to Calvin over the years and with Calvin's annotations, were presented at the French trial in Vienne. Did Calvin send them, allow them to be sent, or were they sent without his knowledge? Calvin later denied cooperation, saying he could not possibly have lent a helping hand to 'Belial'.⁵² The evidence that Calvin at least allowed material to be sent is in an oft-quoted letter from a go-between in Geneva – but the original is no longer extant. The author, Guillaume de Trie, says that he had no end of difficulty getting this material from Calvin – 'it seems to him that his duty is to convict heresies by doctrine rather than pursue them by [penal] means, since he does not hold the sword of justice.'⁵³

So, hesitation in Calvin? There have been suggestions by some that on the issue of capital punishment of heretics, Calvin had evolved from a liberal to a hard-line position. There is no evidence for this, even if in the *Institutes* he remarks in passing that dealing with the excommunicated should not degenerate from 'discipline to butchery'.⁵⁴

On the other hand, there is firm evidence showing that during and after the Servetus trial, which was a civil one, not a church one, Calvin took a rigorous line and justified Servetus' execution, if not by burning. His book of the following year, 1554, *Defence of the Orthodox Faith*, includes the defence of capital punishment for blasphemous heresy of this order. Yet, in reality, was he uncertain, in conflict with himself and maybe in the end pressurized by others? It is easy to say that 'If Calvin ever wrote anything in favour of religious liberty, it was a typographical error'.⁵⁵ To be borne in mind is that he had been plagued with letters and books from Servetus for fifteen years, and had never responded. To that extent he was no heresy hunter to the death. It is not so well known that Calvin remarked afterwards that Servetus could have saved his life if during his trial he had shown some 'modesty'.⁵⁶ In the end, however, a *force majeure* compelled everyone in Geneva to show that the city was no refuge for unmitigated blasphemy or atheism, as denial of the Trinity was assessed. It would have been the same anywhere else. Incidentally, evidence for Calvin's sense of proportion was shown two years earlier, in 1551. Jerome Bolsec had caused a rumpus in Geneva by publicly denouncing double predestination on the basis that it made God into a tyrannical Jupiter and the author of sin and evil. Militant ministers wanted to press capital charges for blasphemy, but Calvin did not support that. Instead, Bolsec was expelled.

Furthermore, five years after the Servetus affair, in 1558, a tantalizing piece of circumstantial evidence suggests a Calvin of two minds. In a less sensational case, an Italian preacher in Geneva, Valentino Gentile, was tried and sentenced to death for denying the Trinity. Inexplicably, the sentence was later commuted to banishment. Bearing in mind that in 1558, Calvin had a power with the authorities that he did not have in 1553, the query is – did he intervene? This is not yet known. Incidentally, poor Gentile was executed in more liberal Berne eight years later on the same charge – something that has escaped the historiographical headlines.⁵⁷

3. *The early anti-Calvin tradition.* Anti-Calvin sentiment has had wide currency. The chief sources of it are twofold. First, older Roman Catholic polemic, which was also borrowed by the Anglo-Catholic wing

of Anglicanism. Secondly, Enlightenment perceptions of Calvin as a symbol of religious intolerance and persecution as well as of a horrible theology. These perceptions were inherited by liberal and modernist theologians as well as secular writers. One influential Enlightenment source was the eminent Dutch thinker on jurisprudence and ethics, Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), himself of Dutch Reformed but Arminian persuasion. Calvin, said Grotius, was no friend of natural rights and liberty of opinion. Grotius' views on Geneva were somewhat out of context. He only cited the Servetus case as the example that became iconic and normative for all reasonable and progressive people in the future, giving rise to the shibboleth: 'Calvin burned Servetus'. The influential church historian Roland Bainton appealed to Grotius in his standard study of Servetus: Calvin violated human rights and freedom of thought. There is, of course, a semi-truth in such a view – but the judgemental inference is another form of violation: since 'Calvin' is tainted by this; therefore, as a repressive theocrat, he is to be shunned on everything.

Traditional Roman Catholic, anti-Calvin projections have a longer lineage. The image of Calvin as either a sex maniac (astonishingly) or ruthless dictator originates chiefly in French Catholic reception of him in the sixteenth century. After Calvin's death, the Genevans published two accounts of Calvin, and a third ten years later.⁵⁸ This was with hesitation, since they were aware of Calvin's contempt of celebrity status. Compared to other Reformation centres, Geneva was always very low key about the heritage of the Reformation and of Calvin. One of these accounts presents mainly 'Calvin the mind', or spiritual exemplar, an approach still influential in our times. The other includes this, but adds more 'personal details', to humanize Calvin. The Genevans presented Calvin as a Christian Hercules, but not a saint, nor, like in Luther accounts, a special instrument of divine providence. While partisan, there was then some effort to avoid hagiography, but these accounts were mocked in Catholic circles for just that.

The riposte came from Jerome Bolsec in 1577, expelled from Geneva twenty-five years before, he had returned to France and to the Catholic church. His anti-Calvin life⁵⁹ was very successful, supplying an arsenal for subsequent Catholic polemics, very much *ad personam*.⁶⁰ This was that Calvin was an impostor, a rebel, a sodomite, a heretic,

a lecher, a tyrant, Simon Magus reborn, that is, the embodiment of all heresy, and the cause of religious chaos in France. If part of the context of this is the propaganda warfare connected with the Wars of Religion, such views on Calvin were not accepted uncritically by all subsequent Catholic writers, even in the seventeenth century. And the early encyclopaedist Pierre Bayle (1647–1702) exposed the myths. Yet the popular impact of the demon-image was indelible. Up to the late nineteenth century, the Bolsec biography, even if discredited, was still being published. Its French Catholic editor affirmed that ‘Calvin’s memory has been the object of fetishism and idolatry greatly in excess of the alleged adoration of the saints and images attributed to Catholics.’⁶¹ That can only refer to Calvin’s theology, since Reformed writers, aware of Genevan inhibition, had produced no notable biography of Calvin for two-and-a-half centuries, from about 1660 to 1900.

Incidentally, between 1581 and 1585, a Scottish Catholic theologian in Paris, James Laing (*ca.* 1530–94),⁶² produced and dedicated collective Latin editions of lives of Reformation heretics to the young James VI.⁶³ Bolsec’s life of Calvin was among them, along with hostile lives of others, namely Luther, Carlstadt, and Peter Martyr. Included also was Laing’s original creation, a life of Knox – the first ‘biography’ of him. In this bumper edition of heretical lives, Laing also inveighed wickedly against David Fergusson, one of the leaders of the Kirk presbyterian party associated with Andrew Melville. The enterprise was part of a contemporary strategy to encourage James to convert to Catholicism, especially after his fall out with George Buchanan, by denigrating the Reformation, the reputations of Calvin and Knox, and Presbyterianism.

4. *Calvin’s roles in England and Scotland.*⁶⁴ This is not so much an area of polarized controversy as of debate. When one talks of the influence of the other thing, ‘Calvinism’, over the longer term, then that is more contentious. However, remarks here will be confined to Calvin’s direct and personal impact in his own lifetime, and to the dissemination of his writings. The essential thing to recognize is that in relation to England and Scotland or any other country including France, Geneva did not play at being ‘Rome’, and Calvin did not play at being a

‘Pope’. There is not a shred of evidence to support such a scenario. Rather, Calvin sometimes offered opinions, not dictates, and usually on request. His general stance was that of a benevolent exhorter and an amicably critical outsider with no desire for involvement beyond a non-executive consultancy role. If many English and Scots tended to invoke him as a higher authority and arbiter, the reality was that for most of the time, Calvin kept a discreet distance. He acknowledged that England was more the sphere of influence of other Reformers like Bucer, Melancthon, and especially Bullinger, and that in respect of their activity, he was happy to lend a hand. An example was in 1549, for example, when at the prompting of Bucer,⁶⁵ now at Cambridge, Calvin wrote to the Lord Protector, Somerset, outlining the core of Reformation belief and particular priority areas in a reform programme. This needs to go beyond government legislation – and so into re-education and evangelisation of the people.

The nature of Calvin’s personal engagement with England was almost exclusively literary. The form was chiefly dedications of biblical commentaries to a string of pro-Reformation leaders, like Somerset, Edward VI, and Elizabeth, as well as correspondence with eminent figures like Archbishops Cranmer and Parker, Bishop Grindal and William Cecil. His letters consistently encouraged the English church to progress further in the direction of the pure religion and the true worship of God, and develop the means to those ends – preaching, catechism, education for the ministry, and so on. Wider church unity and concord was also one of his themes. Of note is that while Calvin had personal preference on matters like the liturgy, vestments and ceremonies, he granted the need for transitional accommodation and toleration on matters which are just ‘external’. Striking is that not only on these issues, but also on forms of church government, church-state relations, and church discipline, Calvin is not prescriptive. All that is mandatory, he reiterates, is that the church be guided by the Bible if it is to achieve full Reformation.

The outcome of Calvin’s diplomatic, circumspect and pragmatic approach was that in the developing Church of England, as earlier in the embarrassingly divided English Church in Frankfurt, the various contending parties and tendencies had recourse to him as probably sympathetic to their side – or that he would be if he were better

informed. However, after the damaging episode whereby Calvin became wrongly associated with John Knox's writing against female rulers, he simply, if tacitly, refused to be drawn into English church questions. The humiliation of Queen Elizabeth returning his gift to her of a new commentary on Isaiah, thereby making him a *persona non grata*, must have affected him greatly.

The irony was that after his death in 1564, Calvin's star rose dramatically in England. This was by means of the popularity of his writings, and not just the English version of the *Institutes*, translated by Cranmer's son-in-law, Thomas Norton. By 1580, top of the demand for theological books in England was Calvin. And a remarkable statistic is that between 1559 and 1603, there were three times more translations (ninety-three) of Calvin works into English than in any other language.⁶⁶

As regards *Scotland*:⁶⁷ by the time the Scottish Reformation was legalized (1567), Calvin had been dead for three years. Though acquainted with Scots since his Paris days in various contexts, he knew little about Scotland despite its ancient alliance with France where there were similar underground, prototype Reformed churches. A letter in August 1558 to James Hamilton, Duke of Châtellherault, Earl of Arran, living in France and a Reformation convert, is a homily with good wishes for the Gospel 'in your nation'.⁶⁸ He hopes that the desirable services of Knox will be enlisted. While supportive, Calvin hardly imagined that the Reformation adopted by Parliament in 1560 had great prospects under a firmly Catholic Sovereign, Mary Stewart, subject to French influence, in particular her uncles, the detested Guises. And after the affair of the *First Blast*, his relationship with Knox was now a bit strained – as with England, the chief guarantor of Reformation Scotland. Accordingly Calvin's involvement was reactive rather than proactive. He dedicated no writings to sympathizers or leaders there. Ironically, Scotland eventually came to be perceived as a Mecca of 'Calvinism' and paragon of Reformed 'purity'.

The sudden Reformation victory surprised Calvin, who told Knox he was 'astonished at such incredible progress.'⁶⁹ Yet until the abdication of Mary Stewart in 1567, the victory was uncertain, since the parliamentary legislation lacked the necessary royal assent till

then. Though hamstrung legally and financially, the small General Assembly had drafted a Reformation programme in 1560. Parliament accepted the *Confession of Faith* and abolished Catholicism (though not bishoprics). There was no regulative legislation beyond that.

Some Calvin-Knox correspondence of 1559–64 is not extant, perhaps not just accidentally. Knox sometimes consulted Geneva, but Calvin's replies were not always favourable. For example, Knox asked him if he agreed that children of priests and excommunicated persons should not be baptized – Calvin replied that he did not agree. Knox also asked if he thought that redundant ex-priests and monks should be deprived of their church livings and evicted. Calvin again said 'no [...] act towards them with humanity'.⁷⁰ In 1561, on the subject of purity of worship Calvin replied: 'moderate your rigour [...] certain things should be tolerated, even if you do not quite approve of them'.⁷¹ The missing Calvin replies about deposing the Catholic monarch and terminating her private Mass suggest that he counseled restraint, since Protestant political leaders loyal to Mary played the conservative Calvin against Knox and the militants.

The foundational documents of the Reformed Kirk: the *Scots Confession*, the *First Book of Discipline*, and the liturgical *Book of Common Order* bear Calvin's clear genetic imprint on many essentials. On church polity, Knox, like Calvin, was not a doctrinaire 'Presbyterian', though both subscribed to ministerial parity and effective discipline. The *Book of Discipline* envisaged 'superintendents' on the Lutheran model. Dogmatic Presbyterianism *de iure divino* only developed later in Scotland with Andrew Melville, in line with Beza in Geneva, Cartwright in England and Travers in Ireland. That episcopacy was not actually outlawed in Reformation Scotland accounts for the long struggle between bishop and presbytery until the eventual victory of the latter in 1690. Ironically, it was episcopal Calvinists in Scotland who had articles on double predestination adopted by the Kirk in 1616 – the 'Aberdeen' or 'New' Confession – following similar trends in the episcopal Churches of England and Ireland.

Lastly, if Calvin had an apparent cult status in Scotland as elsewhere, the theological diet was not exclusively 'Calvinist' or Genevan. The

Church of Scotland shared in the wide Reformed consensus. In 1566, its General Assembly adopted the *Second Helvetic Confession* as a further subordinate standard. And in 1593, James VI had an English translation of the *Heidelberg Catechism* authorized in Scotland, which became a text book in the universities.

5. *Calvin the kill-joy?* Searching questions have been asked about Genevan pastoral care, seen by some as oppressively disciplinarian based on the premise of enforceable sanctification and compulsory righteousness of an unremitting kind. Theologically, Calvin affirms the full humanity of Christ, and is certain that God accommodates himself to human nature and weakness. However, alleged is a dividing Nestorian tendency in Calvin's christology – whereby God incarnate may be only partly involved in the human condition – might mean that Calvin is unsympathetic to people unresponsive to the Word.⁷² This would be on the grounds that God does not enter into their particular darkness. Does this account for the tendency of the Consistory to exercise spiritual correction and discipline in stubborn cases by means of haranguing, personal humiliation, corporal punishment, and exile? Or, coercion rather than commendation? This is a good question, although to be noted is that Calvin did not invent such a pastoral approach – it was already embedded in the Christian monastic and educational traditions as well as the abiding Augustinian legacy. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean Piaget had not yet arrived in Geneva.

Irrespective of this – the idea that Calvin was ineluctably anti-human, anti-world, anti-beauty, anti-pleasure, and so the father of puritanical oppression, is not supported by the evidence. It is true, for example, that in Reformation Geneva dancing was banned. That was not unusual, and anyway, the legislation on that there had been passed in the Catholic era, and simply retained. There was no sabbatarianism as we understand it. Sports and games were permitted on Sundays except sacramental Sundays: four times year. There were, it is true, the 'Sumptuary Laws' against excessive consumerism and ostentatious affluence, even in dress and make-up – but these were hopelessly ineffective. Anyway, Calvin had written: 'I do not so strictly demand evangelical perfection that I would not acknowledge as a Christian anyone who has not yet attained it. Otherwise everyone

would be excluded from the Church.⁷³ The Church is a mixed body, not a Donatist coterie of saints or a monastic community of realized holiness. Even so, Calvin insisted that people must be driven on, acknowledging that progress for most is feeble.

Calvin's view that the good things of this world should be not only used, but also relished, is evident. While urging moderation and, when necessary, frugality, he was opposed to asceticism and Stoic indifference – 'that insane and inhuman philosophy.'⁷⁴ He rejects Augustine's maxim: '*utor non frui*', that is, 'I use the goods of this world, but not to have pleasure in them.'⁷⁵ Hence, even in the *Institutes*, while advising against excess, Calvin can write: 'We have never been forbidden to laugh, or to be filled with food, or add to our possessions, or to be delighted with music, or to drink wine.'⁷⁶ He holds that a virtue of wine is to make people merry and enhance gratitude to God. He is against making the danger of drunkenness 'a pretext for a new cult based on abstinence'.⁷⁷

While sharing the ancient strand of Christian tradition rejecting religious art that involves human or divine representation, Calvin was otherwise affirmative of art and fine things in a secular context. 'Gold, silver, ivory, marble – these are lovely things, which God has made attractive to us apart from their utility.'⁷⁸ Painting (especially landscapes) and sculpture are 'gifts of God'⁷⁹ as is music, one of the chief means of 'giving pleasure', appropriate in church services too.⁸⁰ Therefore, 'Calvin' and 'aesthetics' are not antonyms.

Lastly, sex and marriage. Calvin here does not subscribe to the traditional Christian view of marital sex as a regrettable, concessive practice to enable procreation. Rather, within marriage, sex is 'a holy and pure thing of delight, even if uncontrolled excesses can occur'.⁸¹ Paul's remarks on marriage as 'a remedy for lust' are improper, he says – rather, it is an honourable thing in itself.⁸² He acknowledges erotic attractiveness, when he says: 'it need not be sin if a man chooses a wife because of her shapely figure'.⁸³ Calvin does share the standard view of the subordination of women to males, although he denies that this implies intrinsic female inferiority. Yet he stresses that in two respects, males and females are equal: 'in the sight of God', and 'in bed'⁸⁴ – an equality that the Genevan church extended to divorce cases occasioned by adultery.⁸⁵ He also departs from male

chauvinist tradition by tending to blame Adam rather than Eve for the Fall, which he does not consider as primarily sexual anyway.⁸⁶ All in all then, these are hardly the observations of a life-denying merchant of doom and gloom.

In conclusion: it may surprise some to learn that Calvin believed in miracles apart from those in the Bible. For in 1552 he testifies to one. On hearing that the Hapsburg forces had sacked his native town of Noyon, and that apart from the Cathedral the only building left standing was the Calvin family home, he remarked that that indeed was a miracle.⁸⁷

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Notes

- ¹ 31st Sermon on Job, in *Sermons of Master Iohn Calvin, Upon the Booke of Job (translated out of French by Arthur Golding; London, 1574)*, 158, lines 20–21.
- ² *Commentary on the Book of Psalms by John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–1849), vol. 4, to Ps. 104, 31. Cf. *Institutes* I.6.2.
- ³ Cf. Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham, N. C.: Labyrinth Press, 1991). William J. Bouwsma, *Calvin: A Sixteenth-*

- Century Portrait* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 177–88.
- ⁴ See *Commentary on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847–1850), vol. 1, on Genesis 3:8–9.
- ⁵ Cf. *Supplementa Calviniana* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), vol. 1, 726. Extract translated in Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography* (trans. [from the French, 1995] M. Wallace McDonald; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 307.
- ⁶ English extracts in G. R. Potter and M. Greengrass, *John Calvin* (Documents of Modern History; London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 172.
- ⁷ Letter to Pierre Viret, October 1548, in *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia* [hereafter abbreviated as *CO*] (eds. Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Cunitz and Eduard Reuss; 59 vols.; Brunswick; Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke & Son [M. Bruhn], 1863–1900), 13:92–93.
- ⁸ Cf. Cottret, *Calvin*, 184.
- ⁹ Letter to Henry Bullinger, 1553, in *CO* 14:611.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life* (trans. A. Gootjes; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic; Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 127–29.
- ¹¹ Letter to Anne Locke, November 1556, in David Laing, ed., *The Works of John Knox* (6 vols.; Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1846–64), IV:239–41.
- ¹² Denis Crouzet, *Jean Calvin. Vies parallèles* (Paris: Fayard, 2000) – citing Alexandre Ganoczy.
- ¹³ Convincing presentations and critiques of Calvin's thought devoid of architectonic constructions beyond the shape and substances of the *Institutes*, and which also assess the history of Calvin's doctrinal interpretation are François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought* (trans. P. Mairet; London: Collins; New York: Harper & Row, 1963) and Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville, Ky.; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

- ¹⁴ David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 211.
- ¹⁵ See *Reply to Sadoleto* (1540), in J. K. S. Reid, ed., *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (Library of Christian Classics XXII; London: SCM Press, 1954), 225. Cf. Heiko Oberman, “*Initia Calvini*: The Matrix of Calvin’s Reformation”, in W. H. Neuser, ed., *Calvinus sacrae scripturae professor / Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), esp. pp. 113–17.
- ¹⁶ Preface to his Psalms commentary (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–49), vol. 1.
- ¹⁷ Farewell address, in Potter & Greengrass, *John Calvin*, 172–73.
- ¹⁸ Letter to Farel, October 1540, in *CO* 11, 99–100. Also see especially *Institutes* III.7.1–4 on denial of self – not as a goal in itself, but to love others better.
- ¹⁹ Preface to his Jeremiah commentary (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1850–55), vol. 1.
- ²⁰ After early tentative steps to consider positive aspects of Calvin’s theology by Yves Congar, serious, polemic-free engagement with Calvin was undertaken by a variety of Roman Catholic writers such as Louis Bouyer, Alexandre Ganoczy, Helmut Feld, Marijn de Kroon, Kilian McDonnell, Luchsius Smits, Heribert Schützeichel, George Tavard, etc. Interestingly, in 1996 Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy of the Pontifical Commission for Promoting Christian Unity pointed out that self-styled ‘evangelical’ churches which keep aloof from ecumenical movements and organisations like the World Alliance of Reformed Churches often do so on the basis of an appeal to Calvinist theology. See Jane Dempsey Douglass, “Calvin in Ecumenical Context”, in Donald McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 315.
- ²¹ For example: Richard Stauffer, *The Humanity of Calvin* (trans. [from the French, 1964] G. A. Shriver; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1971); Alain Perrot, *Le visage humain de Jean Calvin* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1986).
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- ²³ *Institutes*, “John Calvin to the Reader”. There he cites “Augustine, Epistle 7”. In modern Augustine editions this is Letter 143, 2.
- ²⁴ W. Fred Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary: John Calvin and His Socio-Economic Impact* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1971; repr., Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1987).
- ²⁵ See n. 3 above.
- ²⁶ Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 45–48.
- ²⁷ See n. 5 above.
- ²⁸ See n. 12 above.
- ²⁹ David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, eds., *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, Volume 6: Acts 1–13* (trans. W. J. G. McDonald; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1965), on Acts 8:2.
- ³⁰ ‘*Unus de plebe homuncio*’. See F. L. Battles and A. L. Hugo, eds., *Calvin’s Commentary on Seneca’s ‘De clementia’* (Renaissance Texts Series, III; Leiden: Brill, 1969), 9 [10].
- ³¹ Cf. Theodore Beza, *Vita Calvini*, in *CO* 21, 121.
- ³² “Reply to Sadoletto” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (trans. J. K. S. Reid; Library of Christian Classics XXII; London: SCM Press, 1954), 252.
- ³³ Preface to the Psalms commentary.
- ³⁴ Theodore de Bèze, *Life of Calvin*, 1565 (revised by Nicolas Colladon), in *CO* 21:56.
- ³⁵ Preface to the Psalms commentary. See also T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (London: J. M. Dent, 1975), 162–65, and Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 10–11, 45–48, 163–66.
- ³⁶ Letter to Louis du Tillet, July 1528, in *CO* 10b:221.
- ³⁷ Preface to the Psalms commentary.
- ³⁸ Letter to Viret, May 1540, in *CO* 11:36.
- ³⁹ Letter to Farel, March 1540, in *CO* 11:30–31.
- ⁴⁰ See n. 18 above.
- ⁴¹ Crouzet, *Jean Calvin*, 9 ff.
- ⁴² *Institutes*, III.7.1.

- ⁴³ Calvin “Reply to Sadoleto”, 230.
- ⁴⁴ Nicholas Tyacke, *The Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).
- ⁴⁵ To the Genevan City Council, 1552, in *CO* 14:382.
- ⁴⁶ *Thirteene Sermons of Maister Iohn Calvine: Entreating of the Free Election of God in Iacob, and of Reprobation in Esau: A Treatise Wherin Every Christian May See the Excellent Benefites of God Towardes His Children, and His Marvelous Iudgements Towards the Reprobate* (trans. J. Fielde; London, 1579). The Genevan editors had aimed the original (in *CO* 58–59) at Sebastian Castellio, the religious liberal.
- ⁴⁷ *CO* 21:601.
- ⁴⁸ *CO* 21:525.
- ⁴⁹ “Annales Calviniani”, in *CO* 21:544–55. Cf. Cottret, *John Calvin*, 211–12.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. John 15:19; 17:6; Romans 9:22–23.
- ⁵¹ For judicious introductions, see, for example, Parker, *John Calvin*, 117–23; Wendel, *Calvin*, 93–98; Selderhuis, *John Calvin*, 203–06; Basil Hall, “The Calvin Legend”, in G. E. Duffield, ed., *John Calvin* (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966), 9–11. Among modern writers very hostile to Calvin on the issue were Roland Bainton and Stefan Zweig.
- ⁵² *CO* 8:479.
- ⁵³ Letter from De Trie to Antoine Arneys, March 1553, quoted in Jacques George de Chauffpié, *The Life of Servetus. Being an Article of His Historical Dictionary, vol. IV* (trans. J. Yair; London, 1771), 80.
- ⁵⁴ *Institutes*, IV.12.10.
- ⁵⁵ Alexander Gordon, “Miguel Serveto-y-Revés”, in *Theological Review* 15 (1878): 305.
- ⁵⁶ *CO* 8:480.
- ⁵⁷ See an old account by Benedict Aretius, *A Short History of Valentinus Gentilis the Tritheist, Tryed, Condemned, and Put to Death by the Protestant Reformed City and Church of Bern*, translation from the 1567 Latin original (London, 1696).
- ⁵⁸ 1564, 1565, and 1575. Authors were Theodore Beza initially, and then in collaboration with Nicolas Colladon.

- ⁵⁹ *Histoire de la vie, moeurs, actes, doctrine, constance et mort de Jean Calvin* (Lyon; Paris, 1577). There were later translations into Latin (1580) and German (1581).
- ⁶⁰ See Irena Backus, “Early Lives of Calvin and Beza by Friends and Foes”, in her *Life Writing in Reformation Europe* (Aldershot; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2008), esp. pp. 152–62.
- ⁶¹ F.-L. Chastel, ed., *Histoire de la vie ... par H. H. Bolsec* (Lyon, 1875), Introduction.
- ⁶² Cf. J. G. Fotheringham, “Laing, James (c.1530–1594)”, rev. John Durkan, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Laing did not make it into the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).
- ⁶³ *De vita et moribus atque rebus gestis haereticorum nostri temporis* (Paris, 1581). It was translated into German in 1582. See Backus, *Life Writing*, 33–46, 71–78, 167–79.
- ⁶⁴ See Ian Hazlett, “Calvin and the British Isles”, in Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *The Calvin Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 117–25; Francis Higman, “Calvin face à l’Anglicanisme”, in Olivier Millet, ed., *Calvin et ses contemporains* (Cahiers d’Humanisme et Renaissance, 53; Geneva: Droz, 1998), 57–68; James Kirk, “The Calvinist Contribution to the Scottish Reformation”, in id., ed., *Patterns of Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation Kirk* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 70–95.
- ⁶⁵ On the year of that letter, previously taken as 1548, see Higman, “Calvin”, 58.
- ⁶⁶ Cf. Andrew Pettegree, “The Reception of Calvinism in Britain” in W. H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong, eds., *Calvinus sincerioris religionis vindex / Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion* (Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, 36; Kirksville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), esp. pp. 274–83.
- ⁶⁷ Cf. W. Ian P. Hazlett, “Reformation in Scotland”, *The Reformation in Britain and Ireland: An Introduction* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 135–68.
- ⁶⁸ 1st August 1558, in *Letters of John Calvin: Selected from the Bonnet Edition* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), 198–201.

- ⁶⁹ See next note.
- ⁷⁰ Calvin to Knox, 8th November 1559, in Laing, *Works of John Knox*, 6:94–98. *CO* 17:665–68.
- ⁷¹ Calvin to Knox, 23rd April, 1561, in *CO* 18:434–35.
- ⁷² Cf. Graham, *The Constructive Revolutionary*, 178–83. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (trans. J. N. Thomas and T. Wieser; Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1960), 49.
- ⁷³ *Institutes*, III.6.5.
- ⁷⁴ See n. 29.
- ⁷⁵ *De doctrina christiana*, book I, 3. Cf. *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 1, to Matt 13:46.
- ⁷⁶ *Institutes*, III.19.9.
- ⁷⁷ See the Psalms commentary, to Ps 104:15; *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, to John 2:8 and Luke 1:15.
- ⁷⁸ *Institutes*, III.10.2.
- ⁷⁹ *Institutes*, I.11.12.
- ⁸⁰ Preface to the *Geneva Service Book* (1542), in *CO* 6:170.
- ⁸¹ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, to 1 Cor 7:6; *Harmony of the Law* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1852–55), to Deut 24:5.
- ⁸² *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, to Luke 1:23.
- ⁸³ *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis*, to Gen 29:18.
- ⁸⁴ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, to Matt 19:9
- ⁸⁵ See Jean-François Bergier and Robert Kingdon, *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève au temps de Calvin* (Geneva: Droz, 1962–64), vol. 1:35, 41.
- ⁸⁶ See Partee, *Theology of Calvin*, 133–36; Wendel, *Calvin*, 187–91.
- ⁸⁷ Cf. *CO* 14:412, 423, 476.