

“The Most Perfect School of Christ”: The Genevan Reformation

Geneva is the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in this earth since the days of the Apostles. In other places I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion to be so sincerely reformed, I have not seen in any other place.

John Knox (1513–72)

In 1556, at the time of uttering the above praise, the fiery Scottish Reformer John Knox was a refugee in Geneva due to Mary Tudor’s campaign against Protestants. Knox was neither the only refugee nor the only admirer in Calvin’s Geneva. About the same time, another Marian refugee in Geneva wrote: “Geneva seems to me to be the wonderful miracle of the whole world . . . Is it not wonderful that Spaniards, Italians, Scots, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, disagreeing in manners, speech, and apparel . . . being coupled with only the yoke of Christ, should live so lovingly . . . like a spiritual and Christian congregation” (McNeill 1967: 178).

The extravagant praise of Geneva as a “holy city” guarded by “legions of angels” indicates that this “new Rome” of the Reformation was not only a refuge for Protestants expelled from other lands for their faith, but was also a mecca for adherents to the new faith. As we shall see, Geneva as the model of a Christian commonwealth was not “built in a day,” but was the result of a long and often bitter struggle. Furthermore, in this process, Geneva not only welcomed refugees, it created them. At the center of all the praise and blame that swirled through and around Geneva stood John Calvin, himself a displaced person from France.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

John Calvin (Jean Cauvin), 26 years younger than Luther, was a second-generation Reformer. As the most important Reformer outside

Germany (some would argue *the* most important Reformer of all), Calvin's work and personality place him in that "elect" group of leading figures in the church about whom there are few if any nonpartisan judgments. He has been portrayed as both a narrow dogmatist and an ecumenical churchperson; a ruthless inquisitor and a sensitive, caring pastor; an ascetic, cold authoritarian and a compassionate humanist; a rigorous individualist and a social thinker; a plodding systematizer and the theologians' theologian who finally completed the doctrine of the trinity; a man dominated by logic and a man of contradictory traits and inconsistencies; a theoretician of capitalism and of socialism; the tyrant of Geneva and a defender of freedom; a dictator and a revolutionary. With regard to his theology, some hold that its center is predestination; others claim its center is the forgiveness of sin; and still others argue it has no center at all! In short, few have been neutral about Calvin. The history of the interpretation of Calvin has yet to reach the exhaustive scope of that of Luther, but there is no doubt it will be as colorful. Calvin even had his own "Cochlaeus" in Jerome Bolsec, whose 1577 biography of Calvin was a major achievement in the art of defamation.

Calvin was born in Noyon, a cathedral city about 60 miles northeast of Paris. His mother died when Calvin was about five or six. His father, an attorney for the cathedral chapter and a secretary to the bishop, obtained a modest church benefice for John which subsidized his education. At fourteen, Calvin set out for Paris where he engaged in general studies at the Collège de la Marche and then theological studies at the Collège de Montaigu where Erasmus and Rabelais had preceded him and Loyola was to follow. In 1528, at eighteen, Calvin received his Master of Arts degree. Calvin's mastery and skill in the prevalent forms of Latin argumentation as well as his religious and ethical seriousness may be behind the legend that his classmates nicknamed him "the accusative case." A somewhat more humane description of Calvin's student days comes from his friend and biographer, Theodore Beza (1519-1605), who explained Calvin's penchant for lying in bed in the mornings as time for reflecting on his diligent late-night studies.

In 1528 Calvin moved from Paris to the famous law schools in Orleans and then Bourges, where he completed a degree in law in 1532. This shift from preparatory theological studies to law was at the insistence of his father who had become involved in a controversy with the clergy of Noyon, and who may well have believed that law would provide a better career. At Bourges, Calvin had the opportunity to pursue his lively interest in the classics, including the study of Greek. That Calvin's pursuit of law was largely a matter of filial obedience is

evident in the fact that upon the death of his father Calvin returned to Paris to study humanism. In 1532 he published his first work, a learned commentary on Seneca's *On Clemency*. Although apparently a publishing failure, it shows Calvin's early linguistic ability and deep knowledge of the classics. This commentary, contrary to some suggestions, is not a source for Calvin's move toward the Reformation or a plea for religious toleration but rather an expression of his response to the volatile political context of the early Reformation in France confronted by royal absolutism. As a young lawyer Calvin is proposing the "golden mean" of clemency between tyranny and revolt. As such, this commentary is a clue both to his later address to Francis I that prefaces the *Institutes* and to his perennial concern for order in the course of reform.

In fact, Calvin himself provided scant autobiographical information regarding his conversion to "Protestantism." He was, as he said in his reply to Cardinal Sadoletto's appeal to the Genevans to return to the Roman faith, "unwilling to speak of myself" (Olin 1966: 54). This personal reticence is striking when compared to Luther who, it often seems, rarely had a thought or emotion he did not write down. "Whereas Luther's persona looms large on every page of his work, Calvin inclined to be so 'private' that it is difficult to discern the person behind the pen and to discover the emotional heartbeat behind his intellectual drive to grasp the mysteries of God and the world" (Oberman 1994: 114). He certainly shared the humanists' desire to return *ad fontes*, to the sources of culture, including the Scriptures. But recent Calvin scholarship has become sensitive to the many ways sixteenth-century humanism may be defined. Hence some would limit Calvin's humanism to his use of its methodology, while others would include his acceptance of some of its substantive views of human nature and history. What Calvin did share with the French evangelical humanists in the decade prior to his conversion was the existential fear and spiritual anxiety in the face of both the near-annihilation of the French "Lutherans" and the break from Roman Catholicism. Bouwsma (1988) and Oberman (1994) both point to Calvin's use of "labyrinth" and "abyss" as central expressions of the confusion and anxiety of the time. In this context the young Calvin was assisted in developing his own biblical theology by Luther's writings in Latin and in French translation. A master of French, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, Calvin did not understand German, a fact some Zwinglian theologians suggested accounted for his admiration of Luther. "The young Calvin is theologically not an Erasmian, but – in view of his different understanding of the *iustitia Dei* – to a remarkable extent in experience

and at times even in expression a disciple of Luther" (Oberman 1994: 134).

Late in life, Calvin did speak of his "unexpected conversion" that scholars posit took place sometime in 1533-4. In the preface to his 1557 Psalms commentary Calvin referred to God's providence in changing the direction of his life. "What happened first was that by an unexpected conversion he tamed to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years - for I was so strongly devoted to the superstitions of the papacy that nothing less could draw me from the depths of mire. . . . Before a year slipped by anybody who longed for a purer doctrine kept on coming to learn from me, still a beginner, a raw recruit" (Bouwisma 1988: 10). In his reply to Sadoletto, Calvin further described his conversion in terms similar to Luther's experience of liberation by the mercy of God from the burdens of the confessional and a piety of achievement. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Calvin accused the Roman church of enslaving consciences by many laws that cause extreme anguish and terror and uncertainty of salvation. Here the person "will always doubt whether he has a merciful God; he will always be troubled, and always tremble." "On the contrary, justified by faith is he who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God's sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man. . . . Therefore, 'to justify' means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence were confirmed" (McNeill and Battles 1960: 1180, 653-4, 726-8).

Calvin's conversion was publicly attested by his return to Noyon in May 1534 to surrender the ecclesiastical benefices he had held since he was twelve. Unlike many French reform-minded humanists who remained publicly in the Roman church, Calvin made a clean break. Throughout the rest of his ministry Calvin would sharply criticize these "Nicodemites" (so-called after Nicodemus in John 3: 1-17) who could not bring themselves to live publicly what they believed inwardly.

Although Calvin referred to being mired in papal superstitions, it is important to note that, unlike most of the first-generation Reformers, Calvin was neither a monk nor a priest. Indeed, it is not clear whether even during his pastoral career in Strasbourg and in Geneva he was ever ordained. Bouwisma (1988: 20) states that Calvin became a preacher and pastor not by ordination but by action of the Geneva town council. In his reply to Sadoletto Calvin refers to his holding the offices of teacher and pastor in Geneva, and his assurance that his ministry "is supported and sanctioned by a call from God" (Olin 1966: 50). Yet Calvin never

received the formal training in theology characteristic of the first generation; he was a self-taught theologian.

Calvin also markedly differed in context from the first-generation Reformers. He was neither German nor Swiss, but French. Unlike the Holy Roman Empire, France was progressing toward a centralized and absolute monarchy. It was not at all in the political, let alone religious, interest of the king, Francis I, to tolerate reform movements incompatible with his drive to create political and national unity. Reformers in France could find no cover, as in Germany, behind the magistrates of estates and cities or the protection of princes. Here each was exposed by public confession to the police power of the national state. This helps to explain the “Nicodemite” phenomenon Calvin opposed. **The Reformation in France created a church “in the wilderness” watered by the blood of its martyrs in opposition to the power of a central authority which the court lawyers formulated in terms of *un roi, une loi, une foi* – “one king, one law, one faith!”**

Journey to Geneva

Calvin left Paris because of the “Cop affair.” Calvin’s friend from their days together at the Collège de Montaigu, Nicholas Cop, professor of medicine, was elected rector of the Sorbonne. In his inaugural speech, delivered on 1 November 1533 (All Saints’ Day), Cop addressed the gathered professors of the Sorbonne on the Sermon on the Mount, and challenged them to obey God in spite of persecution and slander. His address cited not only the works of French humanists and Erasmus but also a sermon of Luther’s, and identified the biblical poor in spirit with persecuted evangelicals. Some theologians responded by charging that Cop was a Lutheran propagandist, and the king called for the arrest of the “Lutherans.” Calvin, suspected of being a co-author of the address because of his close association with Cop, fled. Cop managed to escape to Basle. Calvin found security at a friend’s home in Angoulême where he began to write what would soon become the most significant single statement of Protestantism, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Calvin completed and published the first edition of the *Institutes* in 1536 in Basle, where he had sought refuge in January 1535 from the intensifying French persecution of Protestants. Originally intended as an evangelical catechism for the education and reformation of the churches, this work quickly earned Calvin an international reputation. The catechetical form is no accident, for before Calvin began his first edition he knew Luther’s Small Catechism. Furthermore, at this time



institutio was a synonym for *catechismus*. "Luther had been a great influence on the *Institutes*, and Calvin both acknowledged him as the father of the movement with which he had now identified himself and admired his theological insight" (Bouwisma 1988: 18; see Watanabe 1994). Indeed, it has been claimed that Calvin was Luther's best and greatest disciple (Spijker 1993: I, 466; Gerrish 1968; Selinger 1984: 11–56). Analogous to Luther's catechisms, the first edition of the *Institutes* consisted of six chapters on the Law, the creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, arguments against the remaining Roman sacraments, and a discussion of Christian liberty. In great demand, the *Institutes* was repeatedly republished, expanded, and also translated into French. By the 1539 edition, Calvin conceived of the work as a text for the training of ministerial candidates. Calvin's final revision of 1559 extends to over 1,500 pages in modern English translation. The *Institutes* was prefaced with a letter to king Francis I of France, pleading for a fair hearing of the evangelical faith, and informing the king that a rule apart from service to God is nothing but banditry. This letter is a defense attorney's masterpiece of vindication for French Protestantism, and clearly exhibited Calvin's leadership qualities to Protestants everywhere. It is of interest that Calvin retained this dedicatory letter in all later editions after the death of Francis. His point is that whoever fills that office "is accountable before God for the well-being of the people, and whoever neglects or betrays his trust will not long remain king" (Willis-Watkins 1989: 117).

But this letter did not prompt a change of heart in Francis. His brief general amnesty for French religious exiles was prompted rather by his need for support on the eve of his third war with the emperor, Charles V. Taking advantage of this opportunity for a safe return, Calvin made his way back home to settle family affairs; it was his last visit to his homeland. Then, with his brother Antoine and his sister Marie, Calvin set out for the free imperial city of Strasbourg where he intended to settle down to a life of scholarship. On the way to Strasbourg they were forced by imperial troop movements to divert via Geneva. It turned out to be one of history's most remarkable detours.

Calvin arrived in Geneva in July 1536. He planned to stay only overnight before continuing his trip to Strasbourg. But someone recognized Calvin and tipped off an old acquaintance of his from Paris, William (Guillaume) Farel (1489–1565). Farel, a fiery preacher, had been laboring for some months to bring Geneva to the Protestantism already espoused by Bern, Basle, and Zurich. Farel saw Calvin as literally a Godsend to the cause, and exhorted him to stay and join in

the work of reforming Geneva. Calvin refused, explaining that he was a scholar not an administrator or preacher, and that he lacked the temperament for such a task because he generally did not get along well with people. As Calvin later wrote of himself: "Being of a rather unsociable and shy disposition, I have always loved retirement and peace. So I began to look for some hideout where I could escape from people. . . . My aim was always to live in private without being known" (Gerrish 1967a: 151).

Undeterred by Calvin's refusal, Farel thundered out an angry denunciation of Calvin's selfish plans, and proclaimed that God would curse Calvin's scholarly life if he did not stay in Geneva and carry out God's assignment. Calvin was overcome by this pronouncement. As he said of this event: "Farel kept me at Geneva not so much by advice and entreaty as by a dreadful adjuration, as if God had stretched forth his hand upon me from on high to arrest me" (Walker 1969: 158). Thus Calvin yielded to a responsibility he had neither sought nor wanted. "In spite of my disposition [God] has brought me into the light and made me get involved, as they say" (CO 31: 22). This "God-frustrated scholar," as Calvin has been called, devoted the rest of his life to Geneva, except for a short exile in Strasbourg.

The Reformation in Geneva

The Reformation in Geneva was intimately allied with the political emancipation of the town. **Geneva more than many other Reformation areas exemplified the revolutionary potential of the Reformation.** This fact was not lost on the mind of the French crown, which later always suspected Protestants of political subversion.

In the early sixteenth century Geneva was struggling for independence from the House of Savoy, the dominant power south of Geneva between France and Italy. The traditional ruler of Geneva was a prince-bishop who by this time was little more than an extension of the House of Savoy. To the north of Geneva were the powerful Swiss cantons of Catholic Fribourg and Protestant Bern, both of whom for political reasons wanted to draw Geneva into a Swiss alliance. In 1525 Savoy lost its satellite Lausanne to an alliance with Bern and correctly surmised that Geneva might follow suit. Although Duke Charles III of Savoy coerced reaffirmation of Genevan allegiance to their bishop and the House of Savoy, Genevan exiles negotiated a treaty with Fribourg

and Bern which brought Geneva into the Swiss orbit in February 1526. The Genevan supporters of the Swiss Confederacy were called Eidgenotes (*Eid* = oath; *Genosse* = associate) and it has been suggested that this name was conflated with that of a Genevan exile leader, Besançon Hugues, to form the name "Huguenot" later applied to French Protestants and refugees. The origin of the term "Huguenot" has long been debated. Another explanation attributes it to early French Calvinist gatherings near the Hugon Gate in the city of Tours. The derisive diminutive "little Hughes" (Huguenot) was then accepted as a badge of honor (Ozment 1980: 359; Gray 1983).

In 1527 the Genevan Council of Two Hundred was instituted and formally assumed the legislative and judicial powers previously exercised by the duke of Savoy. Executive functions were exercised by the Little Council which consisted of 25 members, 16 of whom were appointed by the Council of Two Hundred and the others (four syndics, the city treasurer, and four from the previous year's Little Council) elected annually by the General Council of the citizenry.

Geneva was attacked by Savoy in 1530 but rescued by the intervention of Bern and Fribourg. But by now Bern and Fribourg were at religious odds. Bern had embraced the Reformation in 1528 but Fribourg remained rigorously Roman Catholic. In 1533 Bern energetically missionized Geneva for Protestantism, and the resultant religious riots, iconoclasm, and rise of "heresy" in the city collapsed its alliance with Catholic Fribourg. Through public disputations and fiery sermons, Farel led the vanguard of Protestants against the old church. He gained the pulpit of the cathedral, and persuaded the Council of Two Hundred to suppress the mass on 10 August 1535. By December 1535, the magistrates gave the Catholic clergy the choice of conversion or exile. In May 1536 a general assembly of citizens ratified reform measures and affirmed their will "to live according to the gospel and the Word of God." Bern had defended and liberated Geneva from Savoy, but Geneva resisted Bernese attempts to substitute itself for the ousted prince-bishop and the House of Savoy. Genevan sovereignty was formally recognized by Bern in August 1536, although Bern continued to be a power for Geneva to respect.

Thus when Calvin arrived in Geneva at the ripe old age of twenty-seven, Farel and his colleagues were just beginning to try to implement the recent mandate for the Reformation. The Roman clergy had been expelled, but a new Protestant structure was yet to be created. It was for this task of firmly establishing and consolidating Protestantism that Farel believed Calvin had been divinely sent to Geneva. Apparently not

everyone was privy to Farel's insight, for in formalizing Calvin's appointment as reader in Holy Scripture, the secretary of the Little Council missed his name and wrote down, "that Frenchman" (*ille Gallus*).

Calvin's first attempts to reform Geneva not only failed but led to his expulsion from the city. It was axiomatic to him that church worship and discipline belonged in the hands of the leaders of the church, not the hands of the politicians. This was a departure from the polity of other Swiss Protestant cities including that of Bern, Geneva's defender. The citizenry, which still included a large population of Catholics, was not pleased with the discipline and doctrinal uniformity that Calvin and Farel sought to impose. In November 1537 the General Council refused to enforce the confession of faith to which Calvin insisted the whole population must adhere. The council apparently feared that the church's oversight of the city's morals challenged its own authority, a fear which other cities shared and one which would continue to be a source of tension in Geneva. Thus the Council of Two Hundred denied Calvin and Farel the right to excommunicate. The town had not gotten rid of a Catholic prince-bishop in order to replace him with Protestant ones! In February 1538 the annual election put syndics in office who were hostile to Farel and Calvin. In mid-March the Council of Two Hundred warned Calvin and Farel not to meddle in politics but to stick to religion. The magistrates' understanding of religion included the liturgical practice sanctioned by Bern that unleavened bread must be used in the Lord's Supper.

On Easter Sunday 1538, Calvin and Farel preached in the two main Geneva churches but refused to administer communion, in defiance of the order of the magistrates. In short, they excommunicated their entire congregations! They were not against the use of unleavened bread *per se* but against the right of the civic authorities to dictate in ecclesiastical matters. Calvin saw the crisis in terms of pastoral freedom; the Genevan authorities saw it in terms of independence from Bernese interference. "It was in the interests of Geneva to appease and conform to Berne in as many ways as possible in order to guarantee Bernese military support and to remove or reduce possible points of conflict while maintaining a maximum amount of internal independence" (Naphy 1994: 26). There was an uproar and the Genevan Council immediately dismissed Farel and Calvin and gave them three days to leave Geneva. Informed of the decision, Calvin responded: "Well and good, if we had served men we would be ill rewarded, but we serve a great Master who will reward us" (Monter 1967: 66-7).



Sojourn in Strasbourg

Farel settled in Neuchâtel, and Calvin went to Strasbourg at the urging of the Farel-like threats of Martin Bucer (1491–1551), the leading Reformer there: “Don’t think that you can leave the ministry even for a short time without offending God, if another ministry is offered you” Bouwsma 1988: 21–2). Having finally arrived at his original destination, Calvin spent three of his happiest years (1538–41) as a university lecturer and pastor to a French refugee congregation. While in Strasbourg, Calvin learned a great deal about church organization from Martin Bucer (Spijker 1994), a former Dominican, who himself had received his initiation into the evangelical movement from Luther at the Heidelberg disputation in 1518.

The influence of Bucer and Strasbourg on Calvin and the French Reformation was expressed in 1605 by the Catholic judge and friend of Montaigne, Florimond de Raemond:

Strassburg, they called it the New Jerusalem, . . . was where the Hydra-Headed Heresy drew up its Arsenal . . . Here was the retreat and rendezvous for Lutherans and Zwinglians under the leadership of Martin Bucer, the great enemy to Catholics. This was the receptacle for those banished from France and the host to him who has given his name to Calvinism. It was here that he constructed the Talmud of the new heresy, that instrument of our ruin. In short, this was where the first French church, as they call it, was drawn up to serve as a model and patron for those we have since seen everywhere in France. (Greengrass 1987: 21)

From Bucer, Calvin learned and experienced how to integrate civic and religious life through the church offices of doctor or teacher, pastor, lay elder, and lay deacon. By this time Strasbourg had become signatory not only to the semi-Zwinglian Tetrapolitan confession but also to the Lutheran Augsburg confession. Bucer’s irenic and ecumenical leadership included Calvin in international Protestant–Catholic ecumenical efforts to avoid the division of Christendom that finally happened with the council of Trent.



As a Strasbourg delegate to the Frankfurt conference (1539), Calvin met representatives from Catholic and Protestant countries, including Melancthon with whom he remained a life-long friend and shared the desire to overcome the Lutheran–Swiss division over the Lord’s Supper. Calvin also participated in the religious colloquies at Worms (1540–1) and Regensburg (1541). At the latter meetings he subscribed

to the altered Augsburg confession (the *Variata*). Melancthon had altered the article on the Lord's Supper (article 10) to facilitate agreement with the south Germans and the Swiss. The original reads: "Our churches teach that the body and blood of Christ are *truly present and are distributed* [*vere adsint et distribuuntur*] to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord. They disapprove of those who teach otherwise." The emphasized phrase was changed to "truly exhibited" [*vere exhibeantur*], and the condemnation of divergent opinions was dropped (Bekennnisschriften 1963: 64–5). This new formulation approached Calvin's point of view, but of course in the process further diverged from the old faith. The original states that everyone who partakes receives Christ's body and blood, whereas the altered article concedes the possibility that unbelievers receive only bread and wine, not Christ's body and blood. Although this was more amenable to Calvin, it should be noted that as pastor of the French congregation in Strasbourg he had already recognized the unaltered Augsburg confession to which the city had subscribed when joining the Schmalkaldic League. Furthermore, already in 1536 there was an agreement on the Lord's Supper negotiated with Luther by Bucer, the Wittenberg concord, to which Calvin was subject. Calvin recognized that in intention and substance the Augsburg confession was not a "Lutheran" document but a witness to the catholicity of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church based on the creeds and Scripture.

Calvin also learned from the humanist Jean Sturm (1507–89), whose educational labors made Strasbourg one of the foremost educational centers in Europe, and whose *Gymnasium* (a secondary school to prepare students for advanced studies) continues to this day under his name. Sturm's humanist ideals, which included acquiring Greek, Latin, and the classics as well as religious and moral education, informed Calvin's own later educational efforts in Geneva.

But not least of Calvin's joys in this marvelous reformed city was his marriage to Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist he had been instrumental in converting. In response to the efforts of Farel and Bucer to push him toward marriage, Calvin made it clear that his model of womanhood focused on modesty, thrift, and patience with his ill-health rather than on a "fine figure." But Farel, whose priorities in such matters did not exactly coincide with Calvin's, mentions that she was also beautiful. Farel himself married a young refugee widow when he was sixty-nine, much to Calvin's disapproval. In any case, Idelette remained Calvin's faithful companion until her death in 1549. She gave Calvin an instant family, for she brought into the marriage her two children. Together they had at least three children, all of whom died in

infancy. Idelette's son lived with them in Geneva for only a short time; her daughter, Judith, lived in Geneva and married in 1554. But there was no lack of small children around the Calvins because his brother's family – eight children! – shared the household. In that context it is hard to imagine Calvin was as dour as detractors suggest. We know little, however, about Calvin's marriage and family life. Unlike Luther, who spoke often in glowing terms about his Katie whom he would not trade for the whole world, Calvin gives few clues to his feelings about Idelette until his poignant lament after her death that he had lost "the best companion of my life."

During his stay in Strasbourg, Calvin reworked his *Institutes* and expanded the original six chapters to seventeen. He also compiled a book of French Psalms and a liturgy for his congregation, and wrote an exposition of Paul's letter to the Romans as well as a treatise on the Lord's Supper. Most important of all, he responded to Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto's appeal to the people of Geneva to return to the Roman church.

The expulsion of Farel and Calvin from Geneva had created disarray in the evangelical community of Geneva. Factions arose among the evangelicals, and the numerous Catholics still in the city had hope that the reform could be overthrown. Sadoletto was a humanist and a distinguished cardinal who had participated in the drafting of a famous Catholic report calling for thorough moral reform of the church in preparation for a reform council. He took advantage of the unstable situation in Geneva to affirm Roman authority and tradition against Reformation innovations. Sadoletto's long entreaty was addressed to the Little Council. The magistrates could find no one capable of making a suitable reply to this dangerous challenge to Geneva, and thus appealed to Calvin. Calvin responded to Sadoletto with one of the most noteworthy defenses of the evangelical faith. On the two major issues of the Reformation, Calvin fully sided with Luther in arguing that the ultimate authority in the Christian life and community is Scripture not the church, and that justification is by faith and trust in a merciful God alone apart from human achievements.

Calvin's eloquent defense of the evangelical faith won him new respect in the city. This, plus internal political developments concerning concessions to Bern, the ouster of the anti-Calvin party among the magistrates, and the departures of the ministers Morand and Marcourt who had replaced Calvin and Farel, prompted Geneva to recall Calvin. In mid-1540 the new magistrates pleaded with Calvin to return to Geneva and resume his work of Reformation there. Calvin's response was that he would rather die a hundred times than go back to Geneva.

Once again, Farel, who was not invited back, threatened God's wrath on Calvin if he did not accept this call. Bucer also said he should return. Calvin yielded and was back in Geneva in September 1541. This time the secretary noted not only his name but that he was "to be forever the servant of Geneva." He was appointed the pastor of the ancient cathedral of St Peter, provided with a decent salary, a large house, and annual portions of 12 measures of wheat and 250 gallons of wine. On the Sunday after his return Calvin mounted the pulpit in St Peter's and began with the very chapter and verse of the Bible where he had left off preaching three years earlier. "Nothing could have been less dramatic or more effective. . . . In this way Calvin signaled that he intended his life and his theology to be, not a device of his own making, but a responsible witness to the Word of God" (George 1988: 185).

Geneva under Calvin, 1541–1564

In spite of the fact that it was the Geneva government that implored Calvin to return, Calvin's progress in winning the town to his vision of the church rightly constituted and truly reformed was neither smooth nor rapid. His eventual triumph by 1555 over numerous opponents and his creation of a model of Protestantism that continues to influence churches the world over is remarkable because he worked solely by moral suasion. In fact, he did not become a citizen until 1559. Calvin never enjoyed the political power and material resources of the deposed Catholic bishop of Geneva. Nor did Calvin have at his side the hundreds of priests, monks, and canons available to the old church; by Calvin's death there were only 19 pastors in Geneva, all employees of the municipal government. To an astute observer of Geneva in 1541, it would have appeared highly unlikely that Calvin could carry out a thorough reform of the city. Yet Calvin's reform of this recalcitrant city was so thorough it may legitimately be called a revolution (Kingdon 1974: 97–103). How did he accomplish this reform?

The clue to Calvin's success in Geneva is that he wrote the rules for the city's political and ecclesiastical games. He had not been trained as a lawyer for nothing! As one of the conditions for his return from exile he had bargained the right to draft the institutional and legal form of the church. Within six weeks of his return he submitted to the magistrates his Ecclesiastical Ordinances. With a few minor amendments, the government enacted these ordinances into law. Within the next two years, two further sets of laws regarding justice and political offices were enacted that further formed the constitution of the Geneva city-

state. Whether or not Calvin was the author of these later laws as some scholars believe, there is no doubt that the magistrates looked to Calvin as a legal and moral resource for the drafting of these laws. **In short, Calvin's success in Geneva was related to his firsthand and intimate knowledge of who made decisions and how these decisions were made.**

The Ecclesiastical Ordinances organized the Genevan church by setting forth **four categories of ministry** – **doctors, pastors, deacons, and elders** – and creating institutions for the work of each. The doctors were to study Scripture and to teach. Their theological scholarship was to serve the maintenance of doctrinal purity and the preparation of ministers. Pastors were to preach the Word of God, administer the sacraments, and instruct and admonish. Candidates for the office of pastor were examined in doctrine and conduct, and had to be approved by the ministers and the Little Council. The pastors of Geneva and its dependent villages met weekly for discussion of theology and doctrine. The deacons were responsible for the supervision of charity, including relief of the poor and overseeing the hospitals. They were elected once a year in the same manner as the elders. There is some controversy in recent scholarship over whether Calvin's idea for this double diaconate (“administering the affairs of the poor” and “caring for the poor themselves”) derived from his knowledge of already existing welfare institutions in Geneva or from his biblical theology. Whatever the source, it was clear to Calvin that appeal to Scripture was paramount for the development of that society which so impressed John Knox.

The doctors and the pastors together constituted the Geneva Company of Pastors, also known as the “Venerable Company.” The Company of Pastors met quarterly for purposes of administration and mutual discipline. Although of limited legal authority, the Venerable Company held a notable place in the moral structure of Geneva.

The elders were laymen whose function was to maintain discipline within the community. Against Calvin's wishes, the elders were political appointees chosen from and by the magistrates. In all, there were 12 elders. Two were chosen from the Little Council, four were chosen from the Council of Sixty, and six were chosen from the Council of Two Hundred. Selected for their wisdom and piety, they represented different parts of the city. They were to watch over the lives of the people, to admonish the disorderly, and when necessary report erring people to the Consistory.

The Consistory, a kind of ecclesiastical court, was the principal organ of church discipline; it included the 12 elders and the pastors. Its presiding officer was ordinarily one of the syndics. The main concern of the Consistory was the systematic supervision of the morals of the

people of Geneva, including the enforcement of the moral laws. This was the source of Geneva's reputation for austerity and "puritanism." The Consistory had the power to excommunicate those who in its eyes had committed serious offenses. Such offenses included adultery, illicit marriages, cursing, unauthorized luxury, disrespect in church, and comportment bearing traces of the old faith such as regarding the Virgin Mary as a patroness. Scholars have so far only sampled the many cases handled by the Consistory (see Kingdon 1994: 23). Therefore the following list should be viewed as suggestive of about 5 percent of the total cases: relapses to Catholicism (39 instances); blasphemy (28); general disrespect and complaining about Calvin and his rule (62); games of chance (36); immorality (13); insulting French immigrants (9); dancing and unseemly singing (12); absence from worship and catechetical instruction (10); issues of faith (7); suicide attempt (1). It is this effort at the control of morals normed by Scripture that has led some to call Geneva a "bibliocracy" (*TRE* 7: 573; Kingdon 1972; Baker 1988). "No other institution deserves more credit for shaping in Geneva that particularly austere style of life we have come to label Puritan" (Kingdon 1993a: 531).

It is not surprising that the Consistory was the most controversial institution of the Reformation in Geneva. It soon became the focal point for the opposition to Calvin, but it was also for Calvin a crucial vehicle for expressing his authority. This latter point warrants emphasis because those living in contemporary pluralistic and secular societies easily forget how threatening the charge of unauthorized innovation was to the Reformers. In fact, from the early church to the early modern period, innovation was equivalent to heresy. The very reason Calvin had been implored to return to Geneva was Sadolet's accusation of innovation and his appeal to traditional authority which threatened the Genevans. The Consistory thus was Calvin's means for instilling respect for his authority, even if at times this approximated a moral reign of terror. So, for example, included along with punishable offences relating to infractions of theology and worship are games and dances. "Anyone who sings indecent, dissolute, or outrageous songs or dances the fling or some other similar dance shall be imprisoned for three days and shall then be sent before the consistory" (Hughes 1966: 58). It is, of course, easy to focus on such cases in order to argue that the Consistory's primary role was social and political control of human behavior. Without gainsaying that important task, an effort should also be directed to understand discipline as an expression of social concern. As intrusive and oppressive as the Consistory was, it "was also designed to display social concern, to see to it that every resident of

Geneva was integrated into a caring community.” In Geneva, contrary to our contemporary urban anonymity and anomie, “there were real networks of caring” (Kingdon 1993b: 666, 679). Calvin strove to construct a Consistory that would provide education in the Christian faith and a counseling service designed for reconciliation. “Discipline to these early Genevans meant more than social control. It also meant social help. . . . [The Consistory] really tried to assist everyone in its city-state to live the kind of life it thought God intended people to live” (Kingdon 1994: 34).

Calvin’s Consolidation of his Authority

Opposition to the not-so-secret ecclesiastical police in Geneva crossed class and economic lines to include magistrates as well as common citizens. In turn, the Consistory did not shrink from judging prominent citizens, including deposing a pastor for alleged sexual harassment. In January of 1546 Pierre Ameaux, a member of the Little Council, publicly criticized Calvin. His motives were both political and personal. Politically, Ameaux was concerned that Calvin’s apparent refusal to open the ministry to native Genevans would create undue French influence through the Company of Pastors. Personally, Ameaux, whose family playing-cards business lost out to the new discipline, had also had a drawn-out process with the Consistory over his divorce case against his adulterous wife. **When Ameaux asserted Calvin was teaching false doctrine, Calvin perceived this not as a personal attack but as an attack upon his authority as a minister. He persuaded the Council of Two Hundred to impose on Ameaux the punishment of a public penance that included a walk around the town dressed only in a penitential shirt, begging for mercy on his knees at three public squares. Calvin’s prescription was “rough halters for rough donkeys”** (Monter 1967: 74; Naphy 1994: 66–7, 94–6). The effect was a public proclamation of Calvin’s authority. Public outcry against the humiliation of Ameaux was quelled by erecting a gibbet in Ameaux’s neighborhood.

More serious threats to Calvin’s authority came from the patrician families of the Perrins and Favres. These respected Genevan families had been among the strongest advocates for bringing Calvin back to Geneva; but neither Ami Perrin nor François Favre, his father-in-law, was in favor of the Consistory’s inquisitorial practices. When Calvin

censured François' wife for lewd dancing at a wedding and excluded François himself from the sacrament for immoral behavior, Ami Perrin publicly questioned the competence of the Consistory. The Favres fled town, and Ami left on a diplomatic mission to France. Upon their respective returns to Geneva both François and Ami were imprisoned, the latter because he was also suspected of being in collusion with France to invade Geneva. Bernese intervention obtained the release of Favre, and Perrin was acquitted. Calvin now labeled Perrin and his followers "libertines," alleging that they did not want discipline because it would expose their loose living and faithless lives.

One of these "libertines," Jacques Gruet, who was also from an old Genevan family, not only criticized Calvin but was found to have appealed to the French king to intervene in Geneva. He was also suspected of posting a placard on the pulpit of St Peter's that declared, "When too much has been endured revenge is taken." Believing Gruet to be part of an international plot against Geneva, the magistrates tortured and then beheaded him, with the consent of Calvin. In December a "libertine" mob gathered to intimidate the Council of Two Hundred. Calvin himself ran into their midst, proclaiming: "If you must shed blood, let mine be first." Unnerved, the mob subsided. Less dangerous opposition was expressed by citizens who named their dogs for Calvin and composed ditties that ridiculed him (Walker 1969: 295-312).

One source of hope and comfort came from outside. The continuing influx of religious refugees into Geneva provided a source of political support for Calvin, for they were generally of high social and intellectual status and were obviously grateful for the haven Calvin provided them. Between 1550 and 1562 Geneva received approximately 7,000 immigrants - this in a city whose total population at the time of Calvin's arrival was about 10,000. The vast majority of these refugees were from France, although there were also substantial English and Italian colonies in Geneva. And of course not all refugees remained in Geneva. Thus, for example, when Elizabeth succeeded Mary Tudor on the English throne, many English refugees returned home. The impact of all these newcomers is hard to measure beyond their obvious strain on local resources and their support for Calvin with its frequent lyrical descriptions of Geneva as a holy city. To them Geneva was not just a shelter, it was as close to the city of God as earthly pilgrims could get.

On the other hand, not all of these newcomers agreed with Calvin's theology. A famous example of doctrinal opposition was Jerome Bolsec, who although generally sympathetic to Reformed theology

sharply criticized Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Bolsec was an ex-Carmelite friar who embraced the Reformed faith in Paris, left his order, married, and settled near Geneva where he served as a physician. He frequently visited Geneva and often argued theology with the pastors. In October 1551 he publicly attacked Calvin's understanding of predestination as unbiblical (1 Timothy 2: 4 states that God desires all to be saved) and pagan (portraying God as an unjust tyrant and the ultimate source of evil). He was immediately imprisoned, tried, publicly condemned, and banished for life; he later returned to the old faith. Bolsec's revenge was to publish in 1577 a scurrilous biography of Calvin, accusing him among other things of sodomy, which continued to be an arsenal for anti-Calvinist polemics for the next two centuries.

The significance of Bolsec's challenge, not just to Calvin but to the entire Geneva Company of Pastors, was that he criticized their doctrine by reference to Scripture, and that he did so in a way that aroused more interest in the general populace than any other theological debate. This stimulated Calvin to give his doctrine of predestination a far more elaborate and prominent place in succeeding editions of his *Institutes*. Calvin also correctly perceived that popular interest in Bolsec's argument was far more of a danger than more rarefied theological controversies over the Lord's Supper or the Trinity. "For Calvin's Reformation was fundamentally dependent upon popular support. If that support was eroded, he feared that all his life's work for the advancement of God's kingdom would fade away. And so he hammered out an extreme position that has been identified with his name and his followers ever since" (Kingdon 1991: 145).

Explication of Calvin's doctrine of predestination and its historical impact is too large an endeavor to take on here. But in light of the popular identification of Calvin and Calvinism with the dogma of predestination, it is important to provide some guidance to Calvin's intention. Predestination is not the major doctrine from which other doctrines flow but rather the outcome of the central Reformation conviction of salvation by grace alone. It is Calvin's emphasis on "Christ's statement to his disciples, 'You did not choose me, but I chose you' [John 15: 16]" (McNeill and Battles 1960: 935). Every theology which focuses on salvation as the sole work of God brings some form of election and predestination in its wake. "It [the doctrine of predestination] is the negation of all merit and places salvation solely in the mercy of God. It means that salvation is rescue and not achievement" (Leith 1989: 122; Dowey 1994: 218-20).

The doctrine of predestination therefore is not an effort to probe and map the mind of God, but an expression of pastoral care. On the

personal level it is the proclamation that salvation is God's gift and choice of the person in spite of his or her doubts, unbelief, and external circumstances. On the communal ecclesiastical level it is the proclamation that in spite of conditions and events, God's church will prevail. This was crucially important to the early Reformation churches suffering persecution; and it was precisely to them that Calvin addressed the comfort of predestination. What Bolsec – and too many later Calvinists! – missed was that in doctrinal terms “unconditional election is another way of saying unconditional grace” (Torrance 1994: 19). The practical sense in the preaching of election in these years was in strengthening the persecuted Reformed communities in France. The importance of this is illustrated by the concern of the martyrs of Lyon who, upon learning in prison of the predestination debate in Geneva, feared they would lose the doctrine that enabled them to endure their persecution: **God's elect cannot be lost** (Wiley 1990: 109).

It is also important to note that for Calvin God's choice of his people is not a matter of speculation but of confession and adoration: **“God's hidden decree is not to be searched out but obediently marveled at”** (McNeill and Battles 1960: 952–3). Furthermore, this is the affirmation that the universe is not ruled by fate or by chance but rather by God, the God who reveals himself in Christ. First and last for Calvin, God is not a celestial tyrant but a loving parent whom Calvin describes in images of a nurse, a mother who cannot forget her nursing child, and a father who gives good things to his children. “Free adoption is the citadel of Calvin's faith; double predestination is a defensive outwork, and it has not proved a very effective one. He does not seem to have realized how the proof might place in question what he wanted to prove. Predestination, he supposed, would be the final guarantee of both humility and security. But it has guaranteed neither one, as the history of later Calvinism makes painfully clear” (Gerrish 1993: 170).

The Servetus Case

The growing opposition to Calvin was the context for the infamous Servetus case. **Michael Servetus (ca. 1511–53)** was born in Aragon and became a public figure with the publication of his ***Seven Books on the Errors of the Trinity*** in Strasbourg in 1531. Protestant and Catholic theologians alike joined in condemning Servetus's attack on the fundamental doctrine of the trinity. In the lapidary phrasing of Roland Bainton (1960: 3), **“Michael Servetus has the singular distinction of having been burned by the Catholics in effigy and by the Protestants in**

actuality.” In 1532 Servetus published his *Two Dialogues on the Trinity*, which maintained that in its doctrinal development the church had fallen away from Jesus. Although Servetus was not renowned for his discretion, he did at this time realize that the better part of valor included anonymity and a different profession. Thus he went to Paris where he studied medicine and anatomy. In the annals of medicine he has a certain fame for being one of the first to discover the pulmonary circulation of the blood, a discovery perhaps prompted by his concern to show that the Holy Spirit entered the blood system through the nostrils. Respiration is inspiration; the soul is in the blood (Genesis 9: 4; Leviticus 17: 11).

But Servetus could not abstain from theological publication and controversy. He began a pseudonymous correspondence with Calvin, who recognized him from his writings. When Servetus sent Calvin his newest endeavor, *The Restitution of Christianity* (*restitutio* is the counterpoint to Calvin's *institutio*), Calvin sent back his own *Institutes*, which Servetus promptly returned filled with insulting marginal comments. Calvin then sent all this correspondence to a friend in Vienne who passed it on to the Inquisition in Lyon to assist the capture of Servetus. In August 1553 Servetus managed to escape from his imprisonment by the Catholic Inquisition and fled toward Italy. On the way to seeking asylum in Naples, he stopped in Geneva, apparently drawn there like a moth to a flame.

In his writings and in his correspondence with Calvin, Servetus had presented infant baptism as diabolical, denied original sin, and likened the trinity to a three-headed Cerberus. Jesus was not the eternal son of God but a human become divine. Servetus presented himself as another archangel Michael, leading an angelic host against the Antichrist. To Calvin, this was the “impious ravings of all the ages,” and he wrote that should Servetus ever appear in Geneva he would not leave alive. Servetus arrived in Geneva on a Saturday and attended Calvin's church on Sunday! Lest this be interpreted as a death wish, it should be noted that absence from church would have attracted attention. Unfortunately for Servetus his disguise was not sufficient; he was recognized in church by refugees from Lyon, and immediately arrested. In accord with the law, his accuser, Calvin, was also to be held in custody until the conclusion of the trial. Calvin's secretary stood surety for him.

The claim that the “libertines” used the heresy trial of Servetus to embarrass Calvin, who was the expert witness for the prosecution, probably “springs solely from sources supportive of Calvin and desirous of discrediting Calvin's opponents” (Naphy 1994: 184). But Servetus's fate was sealed by the Genevan magistracy even before the

unanimous denunciations of him poured in from Basle, Bern, Schaffhausen, and Zurich. Melancthon also concurred in the judgment; and Bucer had demanded the death penalty already in 1531 after the appearance of Servetus's first tract on the trinity. Servetus was found guilty of spreading heresy and sentenced to death by burning. The penalty accorded with the law against blasphemers in article 106 of Charles V's criminal code, *Constitutio criminalis Carolina*. On the morning of 27 October 1553, Servetus was burned to death. He died uttering the prayer, "Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have mercy on me." To the end, Servetus would not pray in trinitarian language to "the eternal Son of God." In that time a misplaced adjective could be fatal.

Calvin had sought, in an unsuccessful humanitarian gesture, to commute the punishment from burning to beheading; Farel rebuked Calvin for such undue leniency. Following the execution of Servetus, Calvin wrote his *Defense of the Orthodox Faith*, in which he declared that in cases of heresy the glory of God must be maintained regardless of all feelings of humanity. Calvin made plain his view in his commentary on Deuteronomy 13 which demands the stoning of false prophets: "God makes plain that the false prophet is to be stoned without mercy. We are to crush beneath our heel all affections of nature when his honor is involved" (Bainton 1951: 70).

But Sebastian Castellio, the Genevan schoolmaster forced out of town in 1544 by Calvin after continuous disputes with the magistracy, published in response a plea for religious toleration and opposition to capital punishment for heretics: *Concerning Heretics, Whether They Are to be Persecuted* (1554). The book does not mention the Servetus affair, but consists of a compilation of citations from ancient and contemporary authors against persecution. One of Castellio's main sources was Sebastian Franck's *Chronicle*. In his later response to Calvin's defense, Castellio wrote the famous line: "To burn a heretic is not to defend a doctrine, but to kill a man" (Bainton 1965: 271). In this Castellio was far ahead of his time, for Calvin and Geneva received congratulations and applause from all quarters for execution of the arch-heretic. On the other hand, Castellio also shared the common concept of the *corpus Christianum*, for after admitting he had not read Servetus's writings he said if he were indeed a blasphemer he deserved to die (Nijenhuis 1972: 128). In our modern world of religious and ethical relativism, the sixteenth-century concern for truth appears strange even as we persecute others for political deviance. Well before the infamous words "We destroyed the city to save it" were uttered by an American military leader in the Vietnam War, Bainton (1951: 94; 1960: 215) commented:

"We are today horrified that Geneva should have burned a man for the glory of God, yet we incinerate whole cities for the saving of democracy."

Castellio, by the way, after leaving Geneva moved to Basle where he served as professor of Greek. His continuing concern for peace and toleration found eloquent expression in his pleas against forcing consciences occasioned by the French Wars of Religion: *Advice to a Desolate France*. To his dying day Castellio was attacked for various heresies. Ironically, the last attack came from a physician living in Strasbourg, Adam Bodenstein von Karlstadt, who with his father Andreas had had his own share of hounding! Castellio died in Basle on 29 December 1563 and, to the indignation of the Genevans, was buried with honors in the cloister of the Basle cathedral.

In 1903 Calvin's heirs erected a monument of atonement at the place of Servetus's execution which reads: "We, devout and grateful sons of Calvin, our great reformer, yet condemning an error which was the error of his century, and firmly devoted to the freedom of conscience according to the true principles of the Reformation and the Gospel, have erected this monument of atonement on October 27th 1903" (Nijenhuis 1972: 122). In a certain sense this is curious because Zurich had been drowning Anabaptists since the 1520s and at the very time Servetus was executed so were Calvin's followers in France. And in the decades after Servetus, the streets and fields of France would be soaked with Calvinist blood. The modern toleration of religious pluralism is anachronistic for the sixteenth century. Thanks to Castellio the Servetus case has remained a notorious case of religious persecution. Interestingly, it seems Servetus had contemplated America as a refuge for religious exiles.

The Servetus affair was a turning point for Calvin. His opponents were unable to use the Servetus case against him. Soon Geneva was firmly in Calvin's control. As a consequence, restrictive and disciplinary elements in the city were enhanced; the Consistory became more of an ecclesiastical court; and the ministers were now consulted on the choice of elders. The later years were not without personal trials for Calvin. In 1557 his sister-in-law was discovered in adultery with his own servant and banished from Geneva (see Kingdon 1994: 32-3); and in the same year his step-daughter Judith was also found guilty of adultery. Nevertheless, Calvin's influence continued to grow with the combined circumstances of the defeat of his enemies and the continuing influx of religious refugees. In 1559 Calvin founded the Geneva Academy, now the University of Geneva, which attracted students from all areas of Europe, and became the training ground for Protestant

leadership influential throughout Europe. In the same year, Calvin was made a citizen of Geneva.

It is a mistake to conclude that Calvin turned Geneva into a theocratic police state. For most of Calvin's career he had to struggle to maintain authority. His edge in this struggle was his control of the public media through constant preaching and teaching, but there were times when Calvin's authority remained very fragile. Calvin, in common with other Reformers, recognized that the success of his reform movement rested in no small part upon respect for his leadership and authority. What is remarkable is not his efforts to consolidate authority but that in this process he did not succumb to favoritism to win support. Neither prominent citizens nor his own family were allowed to be above the law. In this, Calvin provided a model of democratic equality under the law that modern states would do well to emulate.

Calvin died on 27 May 1564 at the age of fifty-five. Beza reported on Calvin's death at sundown: "Thus in the same moment, that day, the sun set and the greatest light which was in this world, for the direction of the Church of God, was withdrawn to Heaven. We can well say that with this single man it has pleased God in our time, to teach us the way both to live well and to die well" (Kingdon 1967: 13). Like Luther, Calvin had long suffered a variety of ailments that caused severe pain and breathing difficulties, including arthritis, kidney stones, pulmonary tuberculosis, intestinal parasites, hemorrhoids, bowel problems, and migraine headaches. Bouwsma (1988: 30) suggests that "even more erosive" than these physical ailments was Calvin's internal tension between his trust in God and his own need to control and to achieve. At the end he confessed his deficiency in everything: "Truly, even the grace of forgiveness he [God] has given me only renders me all the more guilty, so that my only recourse can be this, that being the father of mercy, he will show himself the father of so miserable a sinner." Whether Calvin was a neurotic overachiever is for psychiatrists to evaluate; but both Calvin and Luther were convinced that only divine therapy can provide more than amelioration of symptoms and begin a cure. Just before his death Luther scribbled the lines, "No one can think he has tasted the Holy Scriptures thoroughly until he has ruled over the churches with the prophets for a hundred years. . . . We are beggars. That is true" (*LW* 54: 476). Both Calvin and Luther "suffered through the conflict – unavoidable for medieval and modern alike – between the conscience and Evangelical reliance on God. . . . This is the sickness unto death which Luther uncovered: we cling to our achievements and cannot shake the need to prove ourselves before God and man, in life and death. Luther's 'neurosis' proves to be part and parcel of the

Reformation discovery: we are beggars ~ that is true!" (Oberman 1989b: 324). At his own request Calvin was buried in an unmarked grave.

Protestant Mission and Evangelism: The "International Conspiracy"

Nearly 7,000 religious refugees had flocked to Geneva, attracted by the stature of Calvin and driven by persecutions of Protestantism in their homelands. These refugees came from nearly every province in France as well as from England, Scotland, Holland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Poland, and Bohemia. When they returned home, they took Calvinism with them.

The Academy in Geneva trained missionaries for work in other countries. The French crown viewed this activity as subversive and punished those caught by death. Hence these pastors traveled in disguise, frequently as merchants, into countries where Calvinism was outlawed, and established churches patterned after the church in Geneva. As indicated by the figures from 1555 to 1562 (see Monter 1967: 135; Kingdon 1956: 145), their numbers were impressive:

1555	5 (4 to Piedmont)	1559	32 (all to France)
1556	5 (2 to Piedmont, 2 to Brazil)	1560	13 (1 to London)
1557	16 (4 to Piedmont, 1 to Antwerp)	1561	12 (all to France)
1558	23 (1 to Turin)	1562	12 (all to France)

The Geneva church functioned as the international headquarters for this missionary movement, a kind of Protestant Vatican. Foreign theological disputes and questions were sent to Geneva for resolution and clarification. The missionary churches were also served by an extensive news bureau and communications network centered on Geneva. Calvinism ultimately prevailed in England and Scotland, whereas it survived only in a minority status in France. In all this, Calvin "regarded himself as a soldier stationed in Geneva, but at the same time as an officer directing a European army. . . . His parish was as wide as Europe and his vision was directed to France at its center" (Oberman 1992: 102, 109).

It is this vision of the reform of the whole of Europe that contributes to Calvin's reputation as an ecumenical churchman. His active involvement in the major religious colloquies during his years in Strasbourg

has been mentioned. He continued to promote his relationship with the Lutherans through his friendship and correspondence with Melancthon and by publishing some of Melancthon's major writings in French translation. Calvin's goal of unifying Swiss Protestants and then the Swiss and German Protestants involved him in the ongoing controversies over the Lord's Supper. He realized that union of the Reformed and Lutheran churches was unrealizable unless the stumbling block of the Marburg colloquy (1529) could be overcome. To that end he strove with Zwingli's successor, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), to reach a consensus. The Zurich consensus, known as the *Consensus Tigurinus*, was achieved in 1549. The story of Calvin's energetic effort to overcome Bullinger's self-conscious defense of Zwingli's memory and the Zurich suspicion that he, Calvin, was too "Lutheran" is ably told and analysed in recent studies by Paul Rorem (1988; 1994). The key issue for Calvin, as for Luther, was to safeguard the gift character of the sacrament. Unfortunately and ironically, Calvin's ecumenical advance in Switzerland was read with suspicion by second-generation Lutherans as a move more toward Zwingli than toward Luther (Steinmetz 1990).

Thus the Reformed and Lutheran churches entered a long period of controversy in Germany. Elsewhere in Europe Calvin's work received warm responses – in some cases, such as France, too warm! Since Calvin had left France to evangelize it from without, it is to these efforts that we now turn.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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- Edward A. Dowey, Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, 3rd expanded edn, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994
- B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993
- Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993
- Robert M. Kingdon, "Was the Protestant Reformation a Revolution? The Case of Geneva," in Robert M. Kingdon, ed., *Transition and Revolution: Problems and Issues of European Renaissance and Reformation History*, 53–107, Minneapolis: Burgess, 1974
- Robert M. Kingdon, "Social Control and Political Control in Calvin's Geneva," and "Calvinist Discipline in the Old World and the New," in Hans R. Guggisberg and Gottfried G. Kroedel, eds, *The Reformation in Germany and Europe: Interpretations and Issues* (ARG special volume), 521–32, 665–79, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993