Society for Ecumenical Studies

Calvinus Catholicus et Ecumenicus

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John Calvin: Catholic and Ecumenical?
Reformed, Catholic & Orthodox Perspectives

A view from the Reformed tradition

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Introduction:Theological context

Labels like Catholic or Protestant can be very misleading. They place us where we don't belong: Christ was not a Christian, Luther was not a Lutheran, Wesley was not a Methodist and Calvin was not a Calvinist. But Calvin, in contrast to Wesley and Luther, should not be credited or blamed for founding any particular Church. There are no, or if there are, there should not be, any Calvinist Churches. Reformed Churches world wide, currently numbering 80m and possibly the largest of Protestant and Anglican communions, may acknowledge their debt to Calvin, but need not regard him as their founder. Calvin was not a Presbyterian. Though he advocated elders or presbyters he also supported episcopacy. Karl Barth conceded that in 16th century Protestantism, Calvin acted like the successors of Peter in Rome, a pope.[1] Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ etc should acknowledge his influence but at their wisest have never felt under an obligation to agree with everything he said or did. Calvin's writings do not have the same dominating influence as Luther's writings on Lutherans and the Wesley's sermons and even more the Wesley hymns on Methodists.

[1] Karl Barth *Ad Limina Apostolorum, An Appraisal of Vatican II* et Richmond, John Knox, 1968, 49

[If any wish to pursue this argument, a good place to begin is with the lectures a Reformed theologian dared to give in the Lutheran University of Gȍttingen in 1923, Karl Barth *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*[2]] John Cotton set the tone for us when he advised that we follow Calvin no further than he followed Christ. The distinction is fundamental. Is it my task as a Christian preacher to proclaim Christ or to defend a confessional stance, eg Calvinism? Calvin was a Catholic. Like all the 16th century Reformers he was baptised and brought up and destined for office in what we now specify as the Roman Catholic Church, to distinguish her from 'the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church' of the Ecumenical Creed of 381, the Church we hope we all belong to. He died a Catholic in so far as he was never excommunicated, though Benedict[3], not the Pope, or Selderhuis, try to argue that he was denied a 'Catholic burial' when he died in 1564. No one knows where he is buried. [Certainly not beneath the Reformation monument in Geneva. This would have horrified him]. Calvin belongs to us all! I ask my Roman Catholic friends to treat him like Hans Küng, but more graciously! Calvin, like Küng may have 'Protestant tendencies', but after Pope John XXIII and Vatican II he would wish to write and tell us, as Küng has, 'Why I am Still a [Catholic] Christian' [Küng 1987,2005] - or compare Barth's last ecumenical address to 'Dear Catholic and Reformed Fellow-Christians', written the night before he died[4].

Historical Context.

Long before Calvin was born in 1509, some Christians had been deeply concerned about Church Reform. Possibly they had always done so. Reform is a perennial challenge unless you believe, as many do, that the Church is in essence a perfect society, 'all glorious, with no stain or wrinkle'- a reading or mis-reading of Ephesians 5.27. But for the past 200 years before Calvin, there had been demands for reform of the Church 'in head and members'. A note in a volume

[2] Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions* ET Darrell L Guder, Judith J Guder, Louiseville, Westminster John Knox 2002

[3] Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed, A Social History of Calvinism* New Haven, Yale University Press 2002; Herman J Selderhuis, *John Calvin, A Pilgrim's Life*, ET Albert Gootjes, Nottingham IVP, 2009, 10

[4] Karl Barth, *Final Testimonies* Grand Rapids Eerdmans 1977, 53

commemorating the Council of Florence 1438/9 said the word 'reform' had never been more frequently in use than between 1378 and 1449[5]. Results had been disappointing and in one case disastrous. The Council of Constance in 1415 had executed the Czech Reformer Jan Hus after promising him safe conduct and a fair hearing. Could Councils dominated by the Pope and his allies be trusted? The Fifth Lateran Council 1512-17, held shortly before Luther's protest, advocated various reforms but one might say deliberately failed to carry them out. Such failures prompted Luther's dramatic appeal to the German Nobility: if the whole town is on fire and the mayor refuses to act, it is the task of every citizen to put out the blaze.[6] They also inspired appeals made by both Luther and Calvin for a genuinely free and ecumenical council. They had to wait 25 years and all they got was Trent and a host of anathema. The Council they longed for was not held until Vatican II in 1962.

Reforming Bishop?

There was not much hope in 16th century Geneva of either the local bishop or the popes promoting reform. Bishop Pierre de la Baume is well described by the Roman Catholic theologian, Alexandre Ganoczy, as 'a pawn of the Duke of Savoy'[7]. He had once laid siege to the city, not the best way for a bishop to win friends, and had effectively been banished in 1533. He was later made a cardinal and archbishop![8] 'The city had substituted its own sovereignty for that of the bishop'[9], says Naphy. But who was going to give leadership in the Church? Farel realised he was not up to the job. He put the fear of God into Calvin and persuaded him to stay and help 'the consolidation of the Genevan Reformation'. This he did for the rest of his life, with the exception of a few years exile in Strasbourg 1538-

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[5] Giuseppe Alberigo ed, *Christian Unity The Council of Ferrara- Florence 1438/9 1989,* Leuven Peeters 1991, 76 [Reference to *Luther Works is to* Fortress, Phiadelphia edition 1966

[6] Martin Luther *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* 1520 in *Luther Works* 44, 137

[7] Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin* [1966] ET Philadelphia, Westminster Press 1988, 106

[8] T H L Parker, *John Calvin* London J M Dent 1975, 55

[9] William G Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* [1994] Louiseville, Westminster John Knox 2003, 25

1541, during which the Genevans rediscovered they could not manage without him.

Reforming Pope?

It is impossible to be impartial about the Popes, then or now. But there is an ecumenical consensus with John McNeill, Reformed, Eamon Duffy[10], Roman Catholic, J N D Kelly[11], Anglican, and Richard McBrien[12], RC, that there were no good, reforming Popes during Calvin's lifetime. McBrien goes in for Papal ratings: Outstanding; Good or Above Average; and Worst Popes. Calvin lived through three of the worst. Julius II, 1503-1513. He bribed his way into office and is described by McBrien as the antithesis of the Apostle Peter. Leo X 1513-21 failed to appreciate clamours for Reform and instead provoked Luther's revolt by authorising the sale of Indulgences to build St Peter's. Paul IV is described as 'triumphalist to the core' and anti-Semitic. He forced Jews into a ghetto in Rome and insisted they wear distinctive headgear. Hitler, some sort of Catholic[13]followed his example. Clement VII 1523-1534 was illegitimate. Paul III 1534-49 fathered four illegitimate children. We might then have had a good ecumenical Pope in the great Englishman, Reginald Pole, but he missed election by one vote and instead we got Julius III 1550-1555 who enjoyed hunting, banqueting and other sensual pleasures. It is hard to agree with Eamon Duffy, who must have turned a blind eye to all these, when he comments that the Popes are 'a crucial dimension of the story of the providential care of God', easier to agree with Barth who, according to his Roman Catholic friend Hans Kὺng[14], saw merits in the Papacy but was accustomed to say that he could not hear the voice of the Good Shepherd speaking from the Chair of Peter. Even if you take an Augustinian view that bad priests do not invalidate a sacrament, it

[10] Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners* New Haven, Yale University Press 2006
[11] J N D Kelly, *Oxford Dictionary of the Popes* Oxford, Oxford University Press 1986
[12] Richard McBrien, *Lives of the Popes* San Francisco, Harper 1997
[13] Klaus Scholder, *A Requiem for Hitler* ET John Bowden London SCM 1989, 166. Cardinal Bertram, on hearing of Hitler's death, instructed his priests to hold a Requiem for Hitler.
[14] Hans Kὺng, *My Struggle for Freedom* ET John Bowden, London Continuum 2003, 131 'And by that he means Pius XII in particular'

must surely be the case that an unreformed and unrepentant Pope is unlikely to support a reforming movement. One glimmer of hope emerges when Adrian VI instructed his Legate at the Diet of Nuremberg, 1522 that blame for disorders in the Church lay primarily with the Curia. Now we are talking! And dare I add. that Calvin was more 'catholic' than the Popes!

The failings of the Bishop and of the Papacy gives some credence to Calvin's argument with Cardinal Sadolet[15]. Sadolet was commissioned to urge the Genevans to return to the Catholic Church. Calvin's Response [1539] was that Rome should do likewise! In a less confrontational stance, Pope John Paul II concedes in *Ut Unum Sint* that for the current lack of unity, 'people of both sides were to blame', a point made thirty years earlier at Vatican II. Nonetheless says the Pope, the Church is preserved in the truth despite 'grave crises which have shaken her' and 'the infidelity of some of her ministers'[16]. And praise the Lord that this is so. But then give some of the thanks to John Calvin for what I call his 'Catholic Reforms' that have benefited us all. I list four: Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry and Conciliarism, including Vatican II.

Reform of Baptism

Calvin baptised but with two innovations: he expected parents, or particularly fathers, to be present at the baptism of their children and for baptism to take place during a normal service in church. Many of us, in most traditions, take such innovations for granted. We now know from local histories of Geneva such changes were strongly resisted. Changes in popular piety and practice require popular consent. Not all Genevan parents were happy with Calvin's reforms[17]. Some travelled to Catholic cities to have their children 'properly' baptised. Midwives continued to baptise the newborn in private homes out of respect of a popular fear, promoted by Augustine but rejected by Calvin, that unbaptised infants would not go to heaven.

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[15] John C Olin, ed *John Calvin, Jacopo Sadoleto, A Reformation Debate*, Grand Rapids, Baker House 1976; SCM *Library of Christian Classics, Calvin Theological Treatises* Vol XXII, 'Reply to Sadolet,219-256

[16] *Ut Unum Sint* 11; Unitatis Redintegratio 3.

[17] Karen Spierling *Infant Baptism in Geneva* Aldershot, Ashgate 2005

Calvin, unlike Barth, had no quarrel with infant Baptism but the requirement that a parent be present was so that baptism be seen as the first step in a life of discipleship and Church membership, not simply as a sacrament that might operate regardless of the faith and Christian nurture of the sponsors, including the congregation. Rome now respects his arguments.

The Roman rites authorised in 1969 after the Second Vatican Council clearly involve parents and godparents and expect them to bring up the child in the faith. The newly baptised is welcomed as a member of Christ's body, the Church. Calvin would be less happy about the invocation of the saints. But just as he accepted that Rome, despite many errors, remained a Church because of baptism, so he would surely welcome Rome's ecumenical acceptance of 'all the baptised' [Lumen Gentium 15]. In England we now have a Common Certificate of Baptism that is endorsed by most Churches including the Roman Catholic Church.

Reforming the Eucharist

Although Calvin like other Reformers rejected the Mass, as it was then being celebrated, his intention was to promote Communion and communicating in the Sacrament and institute a Full Service of Word and Sacrament every Sunday [*Inst* IV/17/43]. Even though he failed to convince the Swiss authorities and most Reformed congregations ever since, if parishioners communicate once a month or even once a quarter this is still a 12 or 4 fold increase on Medieval practice. The Mass had become a spectacle, albeit a sacrifice, not a communal meal. It looked to some like idolatry. There is no need here to go into all the painful details of arguments even among the Reformers about the nature of Christ's presence[18]. Sufficient to say that, if today John Calvin went to Mass in a Roman Catholic Church in Geneva, he would notice and welcome tremendous reform. The Service is simpler and in the language of the people. The Eucharist is clearly related to

[18] Recent studies include J Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation and the Gift* Oxford University Press 2007; Christopher Elwood, *The Body Broken*, New York, Oxford University Press 1999; Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude* Edinburgh T&T Clark 1993; Graham Ward, *Cities of God* London, Routledge 2000.Earlier, Kilian McDonnell, *John Calvin,, the Church and the Eucharist* ,Princeton 1967

the Last Supper and the feeding of the multitude in its four key actions of offering, giving thanks, breaking and sharing. Scripture is properly honoured and expounded. The Cup has been restored to the laity. Nothing is said about transubstantiation. At only two points might a Reformed Churchman hesitate. One is again the invocation of the saints and the other, the reference to sacrifice but the matters have now been so well rehearsed in dialogues as to no longer be a barrier to communion –I speak here from personal experience in Geneva whenever I have felt permitted to participate. The Liturgical Movement as part of the Ecumenical Movement has led to 'a remarkable convergence in celebration'[19]. In response to the WCC Faith and Order document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* 1982, drawn up by theologians from most churches including the Roman Catholic Church, even the Kirk of Scotland [Reformed] noted a consensus on the unique presence of Christ and the 'sacrificial character of the eucharist[20]'

Reform of the Ministry

Though this is a big subject and often crowds out the ecumenical agenda, it is possible to be briefer. Directly through the establishment of the Geneva Academy 1559 and indirectly by the challenge or threat posed by Reformed teachers and preachers, Calvin helped raise the standard of ministry in both Roman Catholic[21]and Protestant congregations. Catholic priests needed to be more of the calibre of Sadolet or Contarini if they were to respond convincingly to the arguments, usually based on Scripture but also on Tradition, of Calvin and his heirs. Even Geneva experienced a vast improvement in episcope when Francis de Sales became bishop of a diocese including Geneva in 1602. Someone described as 'a Calvinist' said he had

[19] Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright eds, *Baptism and Eucharist, Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration* WCC Faith and Order Paper 117, Geneva WCC 1983

[20] Max Thurian ed. *Churches Respond to BEM* Vol 1,91 Geneva WCC 1986. Roman Catholic response to BEM is in Vol VI 1988.'In the text on the eucharist we find much that we can agree with', p25

[21] Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith, Catholic England under Mary Tudor* New Haven, Yale UP 2009, 8,22- Thanks to an early alumnus of the Genevan Academy, Thomas Bodley, we have the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Was taught by Calvin and Beza. *Autobiography of Thomas Bodley* 1647, Oxford 2006, 38.

never met such a saint. He is indeed listed in *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints*.

Contrary to a widespread notion, Calvin did not object to episcopacy[22]. Nor did he insist on his own Genevan version of a fourfold ministry. Different patterns of ministry emerged in churches Calvin influenced, including the Church of England and the Reformed Church in Hungary which does have bishops. A feature of his reforms that other churches have appreciated is that of Elders. Elders assist pastors both at the Communion Table, in government and in pastoral care. You do not find in Calvin, as you do in Luther, much emphasis on the much misunderstood 'Priesthood of All Believers', better phrased and more Biblically precise as the common priesthood of the faithful, or, as in *Baptism, Eucharist and* Ministry, M 1-6, 'the Calling of the Whole People of God', but you do find an emphasis, strongly affirmed in The Churches of Christ that there should be more than one minister active in each congregation – a lesson the United Reformed Church still needs to re-learn from its newer partnership with the Churches of Christ. Sad to admit, a one man ministry is much more evident in Reformed congregations, not least in Geneva, than in Roman Catholic congregations. But then Calvin was and is a Catholic!

Complaints are sometimes voiced that Calvin was not ordained. Who could ordain him? The criticism if coming from Anglicans and Roman Catholics is a little disingenuous. They know that if ordained by fellow presbyters, his ministry would not be recognised by them. Calvin was called and called again by the local people and not imposed on them by Rome or some distant authority and he fiercely defended his election on the basis of Scripture and Tradition. Calvin himself noted Biblical precedents for 'exceptional ministries'-that of prophets in the Old Testament and Paul's apostleship in the New.

Today's Roman Catholics can make a case for the local election of bishops. Their cry is resisted in Rome. . Somehow the people of Basle

[22] Jacques Pannier, *Calvin et l'Episcopat* Paris, Istra 1927; Alexandre Ganoczy, *Calvin Théologien de l'Eglise et du Ministère* Paris, Cerf 1964

retained this right but in 1967 the Vatican sought to abolish this and centralise all appointments. The Swiss theologian, Hans Küng [*Disputed Truth* 24] defended this tradition and was strongly supported by his good Reformed friend and citizen of Basle, Karl Barth. Popular election of Church leaders is a feature of Reformed Churches everywhere but it can claim to be as much Catholic as Reformed.[23] As Calvin noted in his *Institutes* IV/4/11

> The freedom of the people to choose their own bishops was long preserved: No one was to be thrust into office who was not acceptable to all. It was therefore forbidden at the Council of Antioch that anyone be introduced upon the people against their will.

He claims support from Luke in Acts and from later Tradition as found in Cyprian *Inst* IV/3/15, Augustine, Theodoret and Leo *Inst* IV/4/11-12. Antioch was in 341.

Councils, Collegiality, Consensus, Reception and Other Unresolved Issues

My argument so far has been that Calvin's reforms of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry are not dismissed in Rome as 'Protestant innovations' but have been accepted or 'received' by Vatican II, and in the case of the Ministry in part by the Council of Trent. At the risk of a sweeping generalisation, could we not all agree that after Calvin and Trent, the Roman Catholic Church was served by better popes, bishops and priests, both educationally and morally than it had been in his lifetime and the centuries before. Possibly? But a whole range of related issues remain unresolved and unresolved not only in Rome but also in Geneva and its Ecumenical Centre, the home of the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and various ecumenical agencies. Ecumenical Councils, Papal Primacy and Collegiality remain unresolved issues, not just for Roman Catholics but for the whole oikumene.[24] And though a Roman Catholic, Alexandre Ganoczy,

[23] Peter Norton, *Episcopal Elections 250-600*. Oxford, OUP 2007

[24] James F Puglisi, ed *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church* Collegeville,

sensed the influence of Calvin on Vatican II, it remains an open question as to whether that great Council has been or is being 'received' and in what sense. Was it a reforming Council, fulfilling many of the hopes of the 16th century Reformers or did it simply reaffirm Rome's self understanding? Pope Benedict himself seems undecided.[25]

The good news for Calvinus Catholicus is that these structural matters remain open questions. They were not resolved in his lifetime. Calvin, like Luther before him, longed for an ecumenical council that could resolve the points in dispute. All they got was Trent and its anathemas, a quarter of a century after Luther's first appeal for a free council and an open debate. Calvin was not the only one to be disappointed in Trent. Most of his Roman Catholic fellow countrymen in France were too. In Calvin's account, France sent only two bishops to Trent, 'both dull and unlearned'[26]. A century and a half later, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet 1627-1704, one time Bishop of Meaux, was still asking questions about the legitimacy of Trent.[27]

Bossuet is of special interest. He not only engaged in ecumenical dialogue, most notably with that great philosopher and Lutheran, Gottfried Leibniz 1646-1716, but was the leading spokesman of what became known as Gallican ecclesiology that was challenging notions of absolute papal infallibility right up to the debates on this issue at Vatican I in 1870. Bossuet was the author of a Declaration by French

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Liturgical Press1999, an ecumenical response to the Papal Encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* 1995

[25] Matthew Lam and Mathew Leverine, *Vatican II, Renewal within Tradition*, Oxford OUP 2008;
John W O Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, Cambridge Mass, Belknap Press 2008

[26] Calvin *Antidote to the Council of Trent*; Theodore Casteel, 'Calvin and Trent' *Harvard Theological Review* January 1970

[27] For most of the following I am indebted to Richard F Costigan SJ *The Consensus of the Church and Papal Infallibility*, Washington DC, Catholic Univ of America 2005; Margaret O'Gara, *Triumph in Defeat; Infallibility, Vatican I and the French Minority Bishops*, Washington DC, Cath Univ America 1988; Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman* Cambridge 1957; Louis B Pascoe SJ *Church and Reform, Bishops, Theologians and Canon Lawyers in the Thought of Pierre d'Ailly* Leiden Brill 2005

bishops in 1682 that the judgments of the Pope are only irreformable when they have the support of the 'consensus of the Church'. The minority at Vatican II, most of whom were not French, rejected the notion that of itself and without the consent of the Church, the decisions of the Pope are infallible.

I find it fascinating that that great 20th century ecumenist, Yves Congar, once described Bossuet and the views of his colleagues as 'Gallicanisme presbytérianiste'. Alas for my argument, Congar was thinking Biblically rather than of Reformed Presbyterians! Gallicanism reflected the views of French presbyters. But it might also reflect Calvin's influence or the fact that Calvin had, like Bossuet and company, learned much from Medieval conciliarists like the French Churchmen, Pierre d'Ailly 1351-1420 and Jean Gerson 1363-1429. Calvin believed in collegiality and conciliarity and his main and repeated objection to the Papacy would not have applied to Pope John XXIII who called for a Council but did apply, and does apply, to any form of papal tyranny or arbitrary rule.

The issue is not just ecclesiastical. Rome, from a Reformed perspective, had a bad record of supporting or condoning 20th century dictatorships, especially in Europe and Latin America[28]. Calvin's sympathies, by contrast, were opposed to any form of absolute one-person rule and in favour of a mixed polity of aristocracy tempered by democracy [*Inst* IV/20/8]. A few quotations and a few references must serve as illustrations of these claims.

Papal tyranny

> This is the very height of imperiousness for one man to set himself up as judge of all, and suffer himself to obey the judgment of none. But what if he exercise tyranny over God's people? *Inst* IV/7/19

Conciliarity

[28]For Chile and Pinochet see William T Cavanaugh, *Torture and the Eucharist*, Oxford Blackwell 1998; for Hitler see Klaus Scholder *A Requiem for Hitler* ET London SCM 1989

> Men's fault or failings causes it to be safer and more bearable for a number to exercise government, so that they may help one another, teach and admonish one another; and if one asserts himself unfairly, there may be a number of censors and masters to restrain his willfulness *Inst* IV/20/8

> We indeed willingly concede, if any discussion arises over doctrine, that the best and surest remedy is for a synod of true bishops to be convened, where the doctrine at issue may be examined. Such a definition, upon which the pastors of the church in common, invoking Christ's Spirit, agree, will have much more weight than if each one, having conceived it separately at home, should teach it to the people *Inst* IV/9/13

Calvin's Concern For Unity

Calvin took part in five or six Protestant–Catholic Colloquies and to his dying day longed for a more Ecumenical Council than that experienced at Trent[29]. His conviction about unity is movingly expressed in his letter to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer [1552] in England:

> 'the members of the Church being severed, the body lies bleeding. So much does this concern me, that, could I be of service, I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need be, could I be of any service.' [30]

Calvin is critical of Church leaders who prefer their own private peace and who are indifferent to the 'safety and piety of the [whole] Church'. In a later letter, he scolded Cranmer for being too half hearted in his reforms. Hence the emergence of more radical Reform

[29] Theodore Casteel, 'Calvin and Trent', *Harvard Theological Review* 63 1970; Basil Hall, 'The Colloquies between Catholics and Protestants 1539-41', *Humanists and Protestants* T&T Clark 1990; John T McNiell, *Unitive Protestantism, the Ecumenical Spirit*, London Epworth 1964

[30] John Calvin *Letters of John Calvin, Selected by Bonnet* Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1980, 132-,140

Movements in England with Thomas Cartwright, John Owen and Co, my ancestors in what Bernard Lord Manning called 'Orthodox Dissent'[31].

Provisional Churches

Calvin, like Luther before him and Wesley after him, sought to reform the Church he knew, not create a new church. In the apt description by Basil Hall, he sought to restore an old painting which over the years had become disfigured by grime and varnish. If faithful to his legacy, Reformed Churches today see themselves as 'provisional Churches', a point readily conceded in the Anglican-Reformed International Dialogue 1984, and by the great Reformed theologian Karl Barth. But if really faithful to Calvin's concerns, we should go on pushing for the reform of Rome.

Half the world's Christians are Roman Catholics. The other half might appear like branches splintered into a myriad of competing sects. Rome has a structure of unity that not even the Orthodox can match and which the World Council of Churches makes no claim to express. But if Rome holds together half the world's Christians, she alienates the other half. Hence my argument that reform of Rome is essential for unity. Indeed, I am attracted by a quotation I can not locate: 'the goal of the Ecumenical Movement is reunion with Rome, but not with Rome as she now is'.

People of the calibre of Calvin are God's gift to the whole Church. Had he lived 400 years later, he would have been a *peritus*, not just an Observer at Vatican II. The whole Church needs him so please, if you will, accept him as a Catholic. Any lesser title is just an excuse for ignoring him on this, his 500th Birthday. There is also a good case for saying with Barth[32] that there is no past in the Church, Calvin is still with us:

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[31] Bernard Lord Manning, *Essays in Orthodox Dissent* London, Independent Press 1939

[32] Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* [1952], ET New Edition, London SCM 2001, p3; *Theology of John Calvin* [1922] ET Grand Rapids Eerdmans 1995, p4 'the historical Calvin is the living Calvin' who still wants to speak to us.

> As regards theology, we cannot be in the Church without taking as much responsibility for the theology of the past as for the theology of our present. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Schleiermacher and all the rest are not dead but living. They still speak and demand a hearing as living voices, as surely as we know that they and we belong together in the Church.

Bibliographical Notes

As often with great thinkers, you are better off reading their works than books about them. You cannot read everything, but the *Institutes* have a good index. *Calvin's Letter to Sadolet* gives you the flavour of wholesome debate, especially if you read Sadolet's *Letter* first: John C Olin, Lester Koster, *John Calvin, Jacopo Sadoleto, A Reformation Debate*, Grand Rapids, Baker House 1979; *Calvin Theological Treatises*, SCM Library of Christian Classics XXII London SCM 1954. Then select some of Calvin's numerous *Commentaries*, still in print. Some of the best books on Calvin are the oldest. They include:

T H L PARKER, *John Calvin*, London, J M Dent 1975
Hans SCHOLL, *Calvinus Catholicus*, Basel Herder 1974
Francois WENDEL, 1950, *Calvin* ET London, Collins Fontana 1965
John WHALE, *The Protestant Tradition* Cambridge 1960

For sympathetic Roman Catholic understanding see works by:

Alexandre GANOCZY, *The Young Calvin*, ET Edinburgh T&T Clark 1987; *Calvin Théologien de l'Ēglise et du Ministère*, Paris Cerf 1964; *Calvin und Vaticanum II, Das Problem der Kollegialität*, Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner 1965
George TAVARD, *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 2000

Among recent works:
Philip BENEDICT, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed, A Social History of Calvinism* New Haven, Yale University Press 2002
Machiel van den BERG, *Friends of Calvin*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans

2009
Bruce GORDO, *Calvin*, New Haven, Yale University Press 2009
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Lukas VISCHER, Jean-Jaques BAUSWEIN, *Reformed Family World-Wide*, Eerdmans 1999
Lukas VISCHER, *Pia Conspiratio Calvin on the Unity of Christ's Church*, Geneva, John Knox 2000
Lukas VISCHER, Setri NYOMI, *The Legacy of John Calvin*, Geneva WARC 2008
Randall ZACHMAN, ed, *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2008

A Roman Catholic Perspective

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Calvin was long seen as a purely negative figure by Roman Catholics, even more than Luther – because of Calvinism's near victory over Catholicism in XVI/XVII, when even Poland and the Ukraine came under strong Calvinist influence.

Donald Norwood says: Calvin anticipated Vatican II over baptism (presence of the parents), eucharist (weekly communion, use of the vernacular), ecumenism (concern for the unity of the Church).

Such a claim is plausible. See John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700*, on where the real divide lies – not between Catholicism

and Protestantism, but between medieval Christianity and early modern Christianity, of whatever denomination. Yet the Roman Church was inhibited from root and branch reform by the need it felt to defend its tradition. Development became problematic and self-conscious. Developments in religious devotions and pastoral work gave Catholicism the edge in the inter-confessional competition of XVI/XVII, but some obvious reforms, particularly of the liturgy, were delayed for centuries.

But Vatican II doesn't need precursors: it can look after itself. And the differences are just as interesting as the common features. Randall Zachman in his collection *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism* (2009) argues that Calvin's sacramental theology became more Catholic as years passed – with a shift from viewing the sacraments as mere symbols of divine grace to recognizing them as channels of divine grace. But even in his account it is clear that Calvin continued to deny that the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the eucharist were themselves the channels of grace. He was particularly concerned to stress that Christ's humanity is in heaven, and that the purpose of the eucharist is to help us raise our hearts and minds to heaven, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of the Father. This is very different from the Catholic emphasis on a return to Calvary. This has been somewhat modified, however, by the new eschatological emphasis in the revised form of the Roman mass.

For me the most interesting part of Calvin's legacy lies in his teaching on justification and predestination. Here he claimed simply to follow St Augustine. The main points of Augustine's doctrine are as follows:

- The depravity of fallen mankind (not total viciousness, but a lack of a pure love of God), and the inability of 'free will' to rescue us.
- We need divine grace to teach us to know and love God, and further divine grace to enable us to begin to live our lives accordingly, and yet more divine grace if we are to reach the haven without shipwreak. God's love and grace achieve what they intend. God can force conversion, as in

> the case of St Paul. More often, he works on his elect – through the influences they encounter, and the awakening of the spirit within us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. – We genuinely respond, we are not merely passive, but God does all the real work. 'For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do according to his goodwill' (Phil 2:13). 'It depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy' (Rom 9:16).

Calvin put this pithily: 'Certainly, we obey God willingly, but with a will which he has formed in us' (*Opera* 7, 474).

The Council of Trent, Decree on Justification (1547), ch. 16: 'To those who work well right till the end and hope in God eternal life should be held out, both as a grace promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus in his mercy and as a reward to be faithfully bestowed on their good works and merits according to God's own promise… Christ Jesus continuously infuses strength into the justified, which also precedes, accompanies and follows their good works…Therefore, we must believe that nothing further is needed by the justified for them to be regarded as having entirely fulfilled the divine law in their present state of life by the works they have done in God, and for them to be regarded as having truly deserved to receive eternal life.' – Note how this combines *congruent* with *condign* reward ('congruent' meaning that is appropriate for God to reward the just, in view of his promise to do so, while 'condign' means that he is obliged to do so by the requirements of justice, quite apart from his promise). It is clear from the debates, however, that the notion of condign reward was in fact insisted upon.

Contrast Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III.12.1: '[Those who bluster about the righteousness of works] do not reflect on the righteousness of Christ, which, if they had the slightest perception of it, they would never treat with so much insult. It is certainly undervalued, if not recognized to be so perfect that nothing can be accepted that is not in every respect entire and absolute, and tainted by no impurity; such indeed as never has been, and never will be,

found in man. It is easy for any man, within the precincts of the schools, to talk of the sufficiency of works for justification; but when we come into the presence of God there must be a truce to such talk. Let us contemplate that Judge, not as our own unaided intellect conceives of him, but as he is portrayed to us in Scripture, with a brightness which obscures the stars, a strength which melts the mountains, an anger which shakes the earth, a wisdom which takes the wise in their own craftiness, a purity before which all things become impure, a righteousness to which not even angels are equal… Even if a man could satisfy the Law, he could not stand the scrutiny of that righteousness which transcends all our thoughts.'

The New Catechism follows Trent, but concludes (§2011) with quoting St Therèse of Lisieux: 'In the evening of my life I shall appear before you with empty hands…. All our good works are tainted in your eyes.' – It has been said that good Catholics live according to Trent, and die as Calvinists.

The question we need to ask is not what deserves 'damnation': damnation is a rhetorical notion, intended to scare sinners, but not to reveal the exact nature of an eternal life in separation from God. The key question is rather, what enables the beatific vision, and participation in the life of the Trinity. How could we claim that even the 'righteous' deserve this as a matter of justice?

Predestination

Can God save all those he wishes to save? Or is the best he can do to make salvation an option for those who so choose? Rom 8:30, 'Those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.' It is really intolerable to think that God created a world outside his control.

It is an observed fact that not all come to faith or are regenerated in baptism. Even among baptized Christians, there are many in whom there are no visible signs of spiritual growth. To Calvin, as to Augustine, it is manifest that not all are saved. This follows St Paul's insistence on faith as a precondition for salvation: salvation, he

insisted, is for all who *believe*.

Why does God not convert everyone? He does not *owe* everyone, or indeed anyone, entry into heaven. His mercy consists of the fact that he saved *some*, when he could with perfect justice have chosen not to save *any*. Again thought of hell as a place of everlasting torment confuses the issue.

Augustine says: not all are saved, because God does not wish to save all. He has chosen a holy remnant.

Compare Aquinas, who is thoroughly Augustinian:

> STh 1a. 23.3, *Is anyone reprobated by God?* 'It must be asserted that God reprobates some… Since by divine providence men are ordained to eternal life, it also pertains to providence to let some fall short of this goal. This is called reprobation… For as predestination involves the will to confer grace and glory, so reprobation involves the will to let someone fall into guilt, and to inflict the penalty of damnation accordingly. It is true that God loves all human beings and indeed all his creatures, inasmuch as he wills some good to all, but he does not will every kind of good to each. In that he does not will to some the blessing of eternal life, he is said to hate and reprobate them… Reprobation is not the cause of what exists here and now, namely guilt, but it is the cause of abandonment by God… But guilt comes from the free will of the one who is reprobated and deserted by grace… Although anyone who is reprobated by God cannot acquire grace, nevertheless the fact that he flounders in this sin or that happens as a result of free choice, and therefore he is deservedly accounted guilty.' [RP: we sin freely, but predictably, if God does not give us efficient grace, as contrasted to merely 'sufficient' grace.]
>
> 23.5 ad 3. 'The reason for predestination of some and the reprobation of others must lie in the divine goodness… God has willed to manifest his goodness in men, in those whom he

> predestines in the mode of mercy by sparing them, and also in those whom he reprobates in the mode of justice by punishing them. This is why God chooses some and reprobates others… If God prepares unequal lots for those who are not unequal, this does imply injustice in God. This would only be contrary to justice if the effects of predestination were a due to be paid and not a gift of grace. As regards the gifts of grace, anyone is free to give to whom he wills and as he wills, be it more be it less, provided that he does not deprive anyone of what is his due.'

See STh 1a. 19.6 for Aquinas' explanations of 1 Tim 2:4, 'God wills all men to be saved.' (1) God wills all those who are saved to be saved – in other words, no one can saved contrary to God's will. (2) God saves some from every class of human being. (3) God's 'antecedent' or preliminary will is that all should be saved, since this is good in itself, but his 'consequent' will, that takes everything into account including the requirements of justice, is that some should be damned.

Applying this reasoning to reprobation, we could say that the desirability *in se* that all be predestined for salvation is overriden by the need to manifest God's justice as well as his love.

Calvin followed this traditional and established orthodoxy. There is nothing new in Calvin that he himself thought to be of prime importance. He did, however, introduce supralapsarian predestinationism – not only is the ultimate destiny of all men and women since the Fall predestined, but the Fall itself was predestined.

> *Divine Institutes* III.23.7, 'They eloquently deny that it was by divine decree that Adam should fall away and perish – as if God, who (according to Scripture) does whatever he wishes, had created the most noble of his creatures for an ambiguous end. They say that Adam had the free will to determine his own fortune and that God decreed nothing, save to treat him according to his deserts. If this frigid fiction is accepted, where

will be the omnipotence of God, by which, according to his secret plan, which is itself dependent on nothing, he controls everything? … The decree, I admit, is, fearful; and yet it is impossible to deny that God foreknew what the end of man would be before he made him, and foreknew it because he had so ordained by his decree… God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendents, but also ordained it by his own decree.'

II.4.3 *How God acts on the hearts of men.* 'This comes about in two ways. When God's light is withdrawn, nothing remains but blindness and darkness; when his Spirit is taken away, our hearts become as hard as stone; and when his guidance ceases, they immediately wander off in the wrong direction.'

III.23.8 [*Does this make God the author of sin?*] 'Although the perdition of the wicked depends on the predestination of God, the cause and matter of it is in themselves… Man therefore falls according to the decree of divine providence, but he falls by his own fault. The Lord had declared only just before that everything he made was very good (Gen 1:31). From where then comes the depravity of man, which led him to fall away from God? To exclude the supposition that creation was the cause, God had expressly approved what proceeded from himself. Therefore it was man's own malice that corrupted the pure nature God had given him, and his ruin brought with it the death of his whole posterity. Let us then perceive the evident cause of condemnation in the corruption of human nature (a cause which comes more closely home to us), rather than inquire into the hidden and almost incomprehensible cause in the predestination of God.'

In all, according to Calvin the Fall was 'free', yet according to the divine plan and intention. The opposite view, called 'infralapsarianism' (that predestination only came into effect *after* the Fall), makes the whole history of salvation a second thought, after 'Plan A' (the history of man without a fall) had failed. It also

implies that we do not know what sort of God it is with whom we have to do in creation. But God's plan of salvation was pre-eternal. The '*felix culpa*' was eternally pre-ordained.

The Synod of Dort (1618-9), confirming Calvinism against its Arminian critics, insisted on: (1) total depravity of man, (2) unconditional election, (3) limited atonement [Christ died only for the elect], (4) irresistibility of grace, (5) the certainty of the perseverance of the elect and the reliability of the gift of assurance.

Assurance depends not on confidence in our own powers and free perseverance, but in trust that God will protect us from ourselves. – Though Trent criticized the notion of 'assurance' as presumptuous, yet in a slightly weakened form (stopping short of declaring 'I am saved') it is standard in Catholic spirituality.

Limited atonement: does God owe everyone entry into heaven? He manifestly does not bestow on all his creatures all possible benefits. It is *plausible* to say that in his infinite love he intends that all his rational creatures enter into heaven, and we can *hope* that this is the case; but it would surely be presumptuous to *expect* it.

Molinism (Catholic)
Molina published in 1588 *De concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione*. God offers sufficient grace to all. God foreknows our response (by *scientia media*) but does not determine it; his 'predestination' respects our anticipated response. 'Efficacious' grace (which saves) is no different in kind from 'sufficient' grace (in effect, ineffective grace): the difference is simply that God foreknows by *scientia media* that it will actually be accepted. This is quite different from Augustine's belief that God sends the elect the graces that he knows will be efficacious.

Arminianism (in the Reformed tradition)
Developed by Arminius (d. 1609), his teaching set out in the five articles of the *Remonstrance* (against strict Calvinism) of 1610.

The following is a summary of them:

1. God's eternal decree is to save those who believe and obey and to condemn the incorrigible and unbelieving.
2. Christ died to win forgiveness of sins for every human being, this forgiveness being received by every believer.
3. Man is dependent on divine grace to achieve anything that is 'truly good'
4. All good thoughts or deeds require grace, but grace is not irresistible.
5. Those incorporated into Christ by true faith are assured of the assisting grace of the Spirit. Whether those with true faith can fall away and be lost 'must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our mind.'

So the divide is not between Roman Catholics on the one side and Reformed Christians on the other, but exists within both traditions – with Augustinians (and Thomists) lined up against Molinists in just the same way that Calvinists are against Arminians. This continued right down into living memory. Contrast the *Catholic Encylopedia* (Molinist) to Garrigou-Lagrange in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Augustinian) – both early twentieth-century texts. I suspect that since Vatican II Molinism has become almost universal. Likewise, I was once told by a teacher at the then London Bible College (now the London College of Theology) that when he started teaching there 30 years ago most of his students were Calvinists, but now most of them are Arminian.

For the drawbacks in Arminianism consider this passage from an Arminian poet:

JOHN MILTON, *PARADISE LOST* (1667), III. 93-128

[The Father in heaven is addressing the Son]

> For man will hearken to his [Satan's] glozing lies,
> And easily transgress the sole command,
> Sole pledge of his obedience: so will fall,

He and his faithless progeny: whose fault?
Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.
Such I created all the ethereal powers
And spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have given sincere
Of true allegiance, constant faith or love?
Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
Not what they would, what praise could they receive?
What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When will and reason (reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoiled,
Made passive both, had served necessity,
Not me. They therefore as to right belonged,
So were created, nor can justly accuse
Their Maker, or their making, or their fate,
As if predestination overruled
Their will, disposed by absolute decree
Of high foreknowledge. They themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I; if I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.
So without least impulse or shadow of fate,
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,
They trespass, authors to themselves in all
Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
I formed them free, and free they must remain
Till they enthral themselves. I else must change
Their nature, and revoke the high decree
Unchangeable, eternal, which ordained
Their freedom; they themselves ordained their fall.

Repellent in this passage is the egoism of a God whose prime concern is self-justification, accompanied by a shoulder-shrugging indifference to the fate of man. Does God desire our well-being or

not? It is wholly inadequate for Milton to present him as an impartial umpire, presiding over human destinies after subjecting them to a test of their obedience.

Note how akin Milton's position is to the so-called 'freewill defence' so popular nowadays with philosophers of religion – that there cannot be human virtue without a real possibility, and therefore in practice the actuality, of sin and sinners, even to the extent of alienation from God. Against it I would argue:

1. A world in which creatures invariably but freely choose the good is a possible world, and therefore God could have created it. God as creator is not like an agent in the world (who, if omnipotent, would have the greatest difficulty in respecting human freedom) but more like the author of a novel, who has to decide what his characters are freely going to do.
2. The free will defence attributes to freedom an unqualified value in a way that no sane person would do in a real situation. Parents have to teach their children to develop their freedom and use it responsibly: but they would themselves be utterly irresponsible if they allowed a child a freedom that could lead to self-harm.
3. In any case, freedom has plenty of scope outside morality. The valuable choices in life are choices between different goals, all of real but varying value, and the adoption of particular means, leading to the creation of a wide range of distinctive lifestyles. That we sometimes find ourselves in situations where we are faced with a choice between good and evil, and a choice where evil is genuinely tempting, is an unfortunate accident. To imagine that God created the world to be a moral obstacle course is to fall into the sort of crude moralism that could be plausibly attributed only to a vindictive governess.
4. If moral goodness requires resistance to temptations that the agent is capable of yielding to, then the saints reach a state where they are incapable of moral goodness, and moral goodness cannot be attributed to Christ, as he is presented in Scripture and Tradition. Here again it is surely clear that the situation where one is faced with a genuine choice between the

simply good and the simply bad, with both possible choices being psychologically credible, is not a desirable one. If this is what 'human freedom' means, human freedom is not a great endowment, but a debility.

5. But in fact choices that are morally significant and truly free, involving a real and genuinely moral choice between good and evil, are surely rare. Most morally wrong choices involve moral blindness – a failure to perceive clearly that a tempting course of action is wrong. Such a failure may well be partly voluntary, resulting from self-interest or the indulgence of an irrational drive, but it remains the case that, more often than not, human misbehaviour resists analysis in straightforward terms of culpable sin arising from a conscious misuse of freedom. Likewise, most good behaviour involves no real choice. If the whole purpose of human freedom is that we should consciously choose to follow God, despite a real allurement to do the opposite, we would need to possess a real freedom over against habit, inhibition, social control, and mere caution. But most decent people have been so shaped by strict upbringing and other early influences that they have no inclination to murder, to defraud, or to commit adultery. They are never, or only rarely, put to the test; and even when they are put to the test and pass with flying colours, it will only sometimes be the case that this is due to real moral goodness or the love of God: it will more often be due to a fortunate lack of the indeterminacy of will and psychological freedom that are required for wrong-doing.

Why, then, is there evil? The answer of Augustine and Aquinas, powerfully restated by Calvin, is that God wishes to display both his justice and his mercy.

Christopher Ness, *An Antidote against Arminianism* (1700), 48: 'The Arminians may be called sub-mortuarians, for their holding no full election till men die; and post-destinarians, for placing the eternal election beyond the course of man's life… And may they not also be styled re-lapsarians, for saying that the elect may totally and finally fall away?'

Spurgeon: ‘Arminianism marries Christ to a bride he did not choose.’

In contrast, Calvinism preserves the sovereignty of God, and offers a real possibility of assurance. Augustinian Catholics, like myself, look on Calvin as an ally.

Note
Predestination does not necessarily mean that God dooms some to hell, for it can be combined with universalism: in fact universalism requires universal predestination – to salvation, of course. Note the subtle position of the great Reformed theologian Karl Barth, who argues that Christ himself is simultaneously elect and reprobate:

> ‘What did God elect in the election of Jesus Christ? By the one decree of self-giving he decreed his own abandonment to rejection and also the wonderful exaltation of endowment of man to existence in covenant with himself, that man should be enriched and saved and glorified in the living fellowship of that covenant… The only knowledge that we have of man’s preordination to evil and death is in the form in which God of his great mercy accepted it as his own portion and burden, removing it from us and refusing to let it be our preordination in any form… We know nothing above or beyond the will of God as it is thus realized in time. And for this reason we do not find a proportion but a disproportion between the positive will of God which purposes the life and blessedness of man and the permissive will of God which ordains him to seduction by Satan and guilt before God... God willed that the object of this election should be himself and not man. God removed from man and took upon himself the burden of the evil that unavoidably threatened and actually exercised dominion in the world that he had ordained as the theatre of his glory.’ (*Church Dogmatics* II. 2, pp. 168, 172)

The meaning appears to be that Christ exhausts in himself the decree of reprobation, and that everyone else will be saved. This combines,

brilliantly, an implication of universalism with taking the notion of human guilt and reprobation seriously.

A Reflection from Orthodoxy

*Father **Maximus Lavriotes**, is an independent theologian and writer. The following is a summary of his talk on The Roots of Christian Mysticism, " The Theology of the later Byzantine Fathers from the 7th -14th century", given at the London Christian Meditation Centre, St Mark's, Clerkenwell, 26 April 2005.*

The occasion for the West's divide – whether it is over Augustine and Calvin, or between Catholic and Protestant, or between Medieval and Modern - is not something that registers greatly within Orthodoxy. In the Orthodox Church, Augustine is honoured as one of the Fathers, but his teaching is not seen as a defining achievement in the same way as it is in the Latin tradition, to which both Catholics and Protestants belong. As one of the Fathers, his writings have a standing proper to one of the Church's saints; his feast is kept on June 15th. But, as with many of the other Fathers, his teaching is seen and weighed in the context of the whole tradition, not just in terms of his significance and contribution within the tradition. So tradition has a tendency to provide a balance or a counterweight where it is found that something in one instance is overstated, or inadequate or needs to be developed. In some cases, this may even amount to correction.

In the case of St Augustine, the Orthodox Church believes that what become the great questions for the West - of works, grace, faith and justification, anthropology, human nature, the fall, salvation – were already settled at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680-1, which condemned the heresy of Monothelitism, and answered the question of what will was at work in Christ. Behind the controversy lay different views in East and West on what a human will is and the role humanity thus has in salvation, especially the will of Christ himself, human and divine. In effect the Council, which forms part of the doctrine of both East and West, adopted a position different from

Augustine's and actually went further than Pelagius. As such, the Council vindicated the standpoint of St Maximus the Confessor, and it is the development and expression of his teaching – and how it was furthered by St Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century – that we explore now, by way of reflection on where the West would arrive in the sixteenth and the teaching of John Calvin.

Maximus the Confessor

Maximus was born about 590. He came to prominence in the seventh century. Regarded as one of the most important Church Fathers of the Eastern Christian - Byzantine tradition.

Background-influences

The beginnings of the Eastern theological tradition can be traced back to Alexandria in the very first centuries after Christ. By the latter part of 5th century Proclus' pupil Ammonius, the son of Hermeias, transformed under duress the pagan "Neoplatonic" School of Science (focused on the study of Aristotle) into a "Christian" School of Science. His most distinguished pupil became John the Grammarian. (Ammonius' Philosophical School had nothing to do with what western scholars have dubbed "the great Christian Catechetical School" founded by Pantaenus, the teacher of Clement). The Byzantine Emperor Justinian had shown respect for Ammonius' School and unlike the Athenian spared the Alexandrian School from closure in 529-though yet not fully christianized.

The greatest figure in Alexandria just before Maximus was John the Grammarian (known as John Philoponus). He published a treatise *"Against Proclus on the eternity of the world"* and shortly after that another*" Against Aristotle"* in both of which he showed a serious error in Aristotle. Aristotle up to then had been regarded as infallible especially in physics. Aristotle denied the possibility of infinitude regarding the Cosmos but at the same time accepted the eternity of time and consequently of the world. How could something eternal be not infinite? John Philoponus became a Christian (Monophysite) and got embroiled in the theological debates of his time.

Gap between East and West

Already in the 2nd century Irenaeus who came from Asia Minor to the West to become Bishop of Lyons, has proven himself the real founder of Eastern theological tradition, which became under Athanasius a School of theological Realism – by adopting a typically Alexandrian interpretation of Aristotle. Irenaeus tried to bridge the gap between the East and West with regard to the date of calculating Easter. (It became custom since the 4th century the date of Easter to be announced each year from Alexandria, the astronomical centre of the empire, using astronomical tables). Irenaeus also attempted to defeat the many dualistic forms of Christianity (Docetism, Gnostics, Marcionism) mostly influenced by the Platonic distinctions between matter and Spirit, (or body and soul and the derogatory attitude adopted towards the former); but dualism survived and flourished after Irenaeus' death (202) in other forms such as the Manicheans (Augustine had been a Manichean before becoming a Catholic). The tendency to dualism had very serious repercussions for the fate and destiny of Western Christianity.

Maximus became head of the christianized School of Science but fled Alexandria when the city was invaded by Islamic hordes in 642 becoming a monk in Rome. Being the most eminent scientist of his time he produced the first permanent tables for finding the Easter Day and the Yom Kippur Day (still then fervently observed according to the Jewish calendar by Christians until its transformation into the Exaltation of the Cross Day on September 14 in 629AD) basing his calculations on observations on the circles of the moon. He then established the Alexandrian interpretation of Aristotle's *Physics* as the theological instrument *par excellence* for understanding the Cosmos and human nature in particular. His all-essential axiom that *necessity* is incompatible with *nature* and thus freedom is a *natural property* of every nature (of the Divine and human natures in particular), became the backbone of Eastern Theology and opened up a gap between the

Eastern and Western Empires both doctrinally and in practical matters.

Maximus was also influenced by the Cappadocians (Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzus). They adhered to the very same realistic principles established by the Alexandrian tradition through Irenaeus and Athanasius but also, at least in Basil's case, made use of the scientific revisions which were then taking place.

Maximus, a man ahead of his time

Maximus was the greatest scientist within seven Christian centuries! He perceived the general relativity theory as well as the evolution of species through natural selection *"from the most general genera down to the most specific species"*. He established that there was no eternal matter which pre-existed (as the Platonists and Origenists believed). He became very accurate in asseverating that God's infinitude together with **all** properties of the Divine Nature is communicable to man. He also introduced the principle of ceaseless evolution in the study of the universe by suggesting that all created nature has the ability to expand and contract on end. He urged that all species evolve and eventually become extinct though we don't gather how the latter occurs precisely from his writings. He also contended there were no constants in physics: *Nothing that is created can be immutable*. (This means that Einstein was wrong to assume that the speed of light is a constant and contemporary astrophysicists have demonstrated his error). He also contributed to the unification theory,[That is, how can the fundamental forces in nature become one (gravity, electromagnetism, weak and strong interactions)] by accepting the Stoic axiom (already adopted by the Alexandrian School) that human will, expressed as desire and motion, is a fundamental force in the universe!

Maximus' understanding of Christology

Aristotle' s understanding of good and evil as equal forces prevailed in Alexandrian thought up until the time of John Philoponus.

According to Aristotle evil and good eternally existed with equal force. Humans were equally inclined to good or evil…

Christian theologians tended to examine the humanity of Christ; in order to establish that he was fully human he had to be in possession of all inclinations that humans display throughout their lives and if so, theologians had to accept that Christ was equally inclined to good and evil. Maximus overturned this theory. He suggested that goodness was granted to us by nature and that evil was non-being - having never been created by God and thus by no means integral element of any nature. We therefore have to abuse our own will to make evil happen (which Christ was unable to do since both of his natural wills were of their own accord in natural harmony with both of his natures), yet in our very nature we still remain virtuous even while abusing it – no abuse whatsoever can distort God's creation! We don't have to import virtue in from outside as Aristotle said. We just have to get rid of lust and all other unnatural by-products of willfully abused natural energy in order to allow our inalienable natural goodness to shine properly. The purification of our own nature became the ideal of the monastic life. This is of paramount significance because Christ's human nature is the embodiment of original goodness. This had serious implications for understanding human life and reality.

Maximus' Anthropology

Maximus' Anthropology is purely Pelagian which proves that Pelagius himself borrowed his views from the School of Alexandria. But St. Maximus went much further than Pelagius by declaring that God has created man self-sufficient to cause his own salvation through Christ's humanity by simply enacting his natural and innate salvific capacity!

There are three human states of being:

1) Life contrary to nature (fallen beings, human life as the majority of us know it)
2) Life According to nature (the Christian life attained by purification of all abuses of the will)

3) Life beyond nature (to which we can only be elevated by God's uncreated activity)

So we fallen human beings can only activate our inner natural splendour but God must intervene to raise us above created nature and make us uncreated by grace.

Life in the fallen state

Our fallen state is a state of self-division and confusion without any real damage, defect or distortion of what the Creator originally made in His Image and Likeness and therefore there is only one single image to which humanity amounts. The fall caused that this unique image seems as if smashed into smithereens; so mankind exists in a fragmentary state of being according to Maximus because the one image is split. Reunification at the natural level has to do with restoring what belongs to nature (and therefore what pertains only to the one natural will, active in all humans). As long as individuality (occurring as a multiplicity of **persons**) prevails over nature there is an unnatural situation allowing for selfish abuses of the one will we all share in common. It is a kind of feebleness, a digression from what the common will naturally intends. In this case the will follows the interests of each particular individual no matter how destructive to human nature or detrimental to the rest of the society these interests are. This abusive function of **personal** willfulness is defined by Maximus as Gnomic Will. Gnomic Will is a potential for strictly personal laxity in sticking to what nature dictates to rational creatures, but not a natural capacity of these creatures. Christ's true humanity was totally deprived of gnomic will as **He has never become a human person despite His incarnation. Hence His ultimately sinless humanity and incapacity to "choose" sin (no nature whatsoever has been created by God with a capacity to sin). Had the Creator ever granted to any nature the proneness to sin, He would have proven Himself the very author of evil…**

Life in the natural state

It is impossible for anyone to make a choice-unless their will acts in its gnomic or personal capacity-because every nature has been created choice-less. Any natural will expresses the spontaneity of nature itself

which knows at any time what to do. Thinking (imagination in particular) is set in motion in our fallen state only. Intellectual thinking is unnecessary for people restored in their natural state. The activity of the intellect is a negative factor in the spiritual life. At state 2, meditation or contemplation is pointless (at state 1 it is strictly prohibited!).The great ideal of Eastern monasticism is to cease the function of the intellect completely in order to arrive at real Union with God in this life - this is very close to Buddhist ideals - by invoking the uncreated power of God –the only One who can elevate us to a real and unmediated Union with Himself. Once we are in state 2, all human virtue is completely activated. Everyone here is extremely active in virtue. He loses his own "self" or personality and thinks only of others and of the common good.

Life in the supernatural - uncreated state

In state 3, there is absolute passivity- as human beings are being completely overwhelmed by God. This state will prevail in the life to come but here and now purified people we may get glimpses of it.

Maximus' understanding of Salvation

Maximus gives an extraordinary definition of Christ as *the One with whom **all** rational creatures shall inevitably unite*. Thus the divine motive for salvation of the world precedes its creation. God is therefore never risking anything! He is not going to lose a single human being. There are two possible images of ultimate and everlasting Union with Christ: either by grace (saints) or contrary to grace (sinners), but **all** will be equally united with Him for evermore. Christ will treat both sides equally. This is the plan God had in mind when he saved the world before creating it. Maximus' God never gets himself in a mess! (as if faced by a "sudden" fall or sin of man…)
It is very important to notice that human beings have no natural capacity whatsoever to do anything sinful or evil. They can though abuse their natural will and then act as **persons** through gnomic will in order to achieve wrongdoing. Conversely, all have natural capacity for their own salvation; for spontaneous acts of charity, gratitude and prayer. They are not in such a defective state that they can't help themselves without "spiritual" help from outside from the Church or

other human beings…In fact human beings do not really need such help at all, providing that they remain within the realm of their own nature and they never violate their natural will.

In state 3 God imparts all his divine attributes without exception to these people but not his own essence. This is what "deification" means- partaking of the divine attributes without losing any human attributes. *"Out of his ultimate goodness he turns everything human into himself."* This famous expression by Maximus describes state 3. According to the Western scholastic tradition it is not possible to attain this state of ultimate Union with God neither in this life nor in the life to come. The dualism that Irenaeus fought against was successfully overcome in the East but not in the West. *Humanity* or *Adam* (in Hebrew) literally means the one made of clay. God assumes humanity *thus making Adam so much God, as much Himself became clay*. You do not lose your created status in state 3 but everything is transformed.

Gregory Palamas

Gregory was a follower of Maximus in the fourteenth century. He was a compiler. He was not an original. He intended to be a monk living in solitude elevating himself to the natural state and expecting elevation from God, but an unusual thing happened.

He came from a very noble family. His father was a member of the royal council of the emperor. He was found praying during council and dismissed. Gregory was very distinguished at school. He wrote an essay on Aristotle. His professor said that Aristotle himself would have approved. The Scholastics associated necessity with nature so even God had to exist and act out of necessity. Gregory, like Maximus and the Cappadocians, associated nature with freedom. Gregory came to Mount Athos to become a monk.

Another Greek monk arrived from Calabria in Southern Italy well versed in scholasticism and an Augustinian. He began suggesting things that were prominent in the West but alien to Byzantine

tradition. For example monks in the East closed their eyes and placed their chin on their chest as they said the Jesus prayer. He wrote with irony that if they were naked they would be navel gazing! He said that whatever is inferior to intellect has to be dismissed as he believed that the cardinal sin of man was his ignorance of scientific truth and thus salvation could come only through research and intellectual activity. He however misunderstood the term “ignorance”. The Desert Fathers had said that the fall led to a state of ignorance of God, a confusion which doesn’t allow the eye of the soul be illumined by God. In the West ignorance was understood as lack of knowledge therefore quite early the western monks left the cloister and headed for the schoolroom. The only way to get rid of sin in their view was to learn.

The monk newly arrived from Calabria discovered that the monks on Mount Athos did not favour learning and began to question Gregory to try and entrap him into admitting that ignorance of science was an obstacle to salvation. In the dialogue between the two monks completely different understandings about divine revelation, salvation and human nature emerged. The western monk said everything material was contemptible. He was confident that the only way a human could get in touch with God was through ecstasy and intellect; to get out of the body and the passivity of sentiments to find God. The Hesychast movement in the East was based on ridding the intellect of all concepts. This is what the monks in the desert had been striving to do. Gregory said how can I get in touch with God without being in love with him? And how can I love him without allowing the passive faculty of the soul and the body become actively sensuous rather than mortified for the sake of the intellect? (The soul according to Aristotle had three parts of which the highest was the intellect.) Apparently all Western mystics attempted to mortify the lower parts whereas Eastern monks suggested that if God were to make contact with humanity it must be with the whole of man. According to the Scholastics God was pure essence therefore he was completely inaccessible to man. But in the East God has attributes as well as essence. For the West this poses the problem of how God can retain his simplicity and not be said to be composite. The Scholastics say that God is *Actus Purus:* pure actuality. The real problem in the West is the incommunicableness of

God. Tackling this problem made Gregory Palamas into a great theologian. He took his arguments from his predecessors especially Maximus and used it to challenge Scholasticism in an effective way. This was a difficult period in the history of the Byzantine Empire which was collapsing. Its fall was a matter of time. But at another level people were turning to God in droves. The kingdom of God was seen as something within humanity (Luk.17:21) rather than of the world. Most of the male population was turning to monastic life and in fact this was one of the reasons for the fall of the Empire, there were not enough men left to fight.

There followed three general councils at Constantinople at which the Emperor John Cantakouzenos presented a list of questions. The first was the question of whether there really was a distinction between God's essence and his attributes which might threaten the idea of God's simplicity. The West remained unable to accept that humans can move into the divine sphere and a Papal encyclical in 1943 still insisted that to assert that humans could take on divine attributes was blasphemous. Meister Eckhart is one of the few Western mystics who did declare it was possible for God and Man to become one and he is still regarded as a heretic.

Final points to note - it is interesting to note the despair on the face of Christ on the cross in the western art of the middle ages-a sign of complete separation between God and humanity; and with regard to the incarnation of God note the differences between the East and West: For the East the incarnation of God means he becomes even more hidden-not revealed! He manifests again himself in glory after his resurrection to all those who are pure in heart to see Him.

It should be regarded as a source of consolation that the common destiny of humanity has already been safeguarded: Christ is determined to claim all his baggage!