

Society for Ecumenical Studies

## **Calvinus Catholicus et Ecumenicus**

*Friday 10 July 2009 – The 500<sup>th</sup> Birthday*

*St Thomas More Room, St Mary's Catholic Church, London SW3*

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

## **A view from the Reformed tradition**

*The Revd Dr Donald Norwood, United Reformed Church, and recently research fellow at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey.*

### **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 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestantism, Calvin acted like the successors of Peter in Rome, a pope.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Göttingen in 1923, Karl Barth *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*<sup>2</sup>] 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>3</sup>, 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<sup>4</sup>.

### **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

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions* ET Darrell L Guder, Judith J Guder, Louisville, Westminster John Knox 2002

<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>4</sup> 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<sup>5</sup>. 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.<sup>6</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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'<sup>7</sup>. 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!<sup>8</sup> 'The city had substituted its own sovereignty for that of the bishop'<sup>9</sup>, 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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<sup>5</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo ed, *Christian Unity The Council of Ferrara- Florence 1438/9 1989*, Leuven Peeters 1991, 76 [Reference to *Luther Works* is to Fortress, Philadelphia edition 1966]

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* 1520 in *Luther Works* 44, 137

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

<sup>8</sup> T H L Parker, *John Calvin* London J M Dent 1975, 55

<sup>9</sup> William G Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* [1994] Louisville, 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<sup>10</sup>, Roman Catholic, J N D Kelly<sup>11</sup>, Anglican, and Richard McBrien<sup>12</sup>, 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<sup>13</sup> 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 Kùng<sup>14</sup>, 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

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<sup>10</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners* New Haven, Yale University Press 2006

<sup>11</sup> J N D Kelly, *Oxford Dictionary of the Popes* Oxford, Oxford University Press 1986

<sup>12</sup> Richard McBrien, *Lives of the Popes* San Francisco, Harper 1997

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Kùng, *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<sup>15</sup>. 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’<sup>16</sup>. 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<sup>17</sup>. 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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<sup>15</sup> John C Olin, ed *John Calvin, Jacopo Sadoletto, A Reformation Debate*, Grand Rapids, Baker House 1976; SCM *Library of Christian Classics, Calvin Theological Treatises* Vol XXII, ‘Reply to Sadolet, 219-256

<sup>16</sup> *Ut Unum Sint* 11; *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3.

<sup>17</sup> 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<sup>18</sup>. 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

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<sup>18</sup> 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’<sup>19</sup>. 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’<sup>20</sup>,

### **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<sup>21</sup> 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 episcopate when Francis de Sales became bishop of a diocese including Geneva in 1602. Someone described as ‘a Calvinist’ said he had

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<sup>19</sup> Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright eds, *Baptism and Eucharist, Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration* WCC Faith and Order Paper 117, Geneva WCC 1983

<sup>20</sup> 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

<sup>21</sup> 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<sup>22</sup>. 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

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<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> And though a Roman Catholic, Alexandre Ganoczy,

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Norton, *Episcopal Elections 250-600*. Oxford, OUP 2007

<sup>24</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformers or did it simply reaffirm Rome's self understanding? Pope Benedict himself seems undecided.<sup>25</sup>

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'<sup>26</sup>. 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.<sup>27</sup>

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 Press 1999, an ecumenical response to the Papal Encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* 1995

<sup>25</sup> 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

<sup>26</sup> Calvin *Antidote to the Council of Trent*; Theodore Casteel, 'Calvin and Trent' *Harvard Theological Review* January 1970

<sup>27</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> century ecumenist, Yves Congar, once described Bossuet and the views of his colleagues as ‘Gallicanisme presbytérieniste’. 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 20<sup>th</sup> century dictatorships, especially in Europe and Latin America<sup>28</sup>. 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

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<sup>28</sup>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

### *Conciliarity*

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<sup>29</sup>. 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.’<sup>30</sup>

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

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<sup>29</sup> 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

<sup>30</sup> John Calvin *Letters of John Calvin, Selected by Bonnet* Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1980, 132-,140

hearted in his reforms. Hence the emergence of more radical Reform Movements in England with Thomas Cartwright, John Owen and Co, my ancestors in what Bernard Lord Manning called ‘Orthodox Dissent’<sup>31</sup>.

### **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 500<sup>th</sup> Birthday. There is also a good case for saying with Barth<sup>32</sup> that there is no past in the Church, Calvin is still

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<sup>31</sup> Bernard Lord Manning, *Essays in Orthodox Dissent* London, Independent Press 1939

<sup>32</sup> 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.

with 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 Sadoletto, 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'Église 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

Martin HIRZEL, Martin, SALLMANN , eds, *John Calvin's Impact on Church And Society*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 2009 and published also in French and German

Richard MULLER, *The Unaccompanied Calvin, Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford University Press 2000

Herman J SELDERHUIS, *John Calvin, a Pilgrim's Life*, ET Nottingham, Intervarsity Press 2009

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