

John Calvin



Selections from His Writings

Edited and with an Introduction
by JOHN DILLENBERGER



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JOHN CALVIN

Selections
from His Writings

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edited by
Gerald J. Larson

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A NOTE TO THE READER

This volume, like its companion one on Martin Luther, is meant for the general reader. A variety of texts has been chosen to show the range of John Calvin's life and writings—commentaries, sermons, letters, catechisms, tracts, broad-based theological works. The materials cover his major ideas; but the particular text in which an issue is developed may not always be the fullest or the classical expression it has received by Calvin. It seemed more important to show the diversity of his writings. This can be safely done because Calvin's ideas did not change to an extent which would make the present process of selection distorting of his views. Moreover, it has the advantage of showing that Calvin should not be exclusively identified with the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. While recognizing the importance of the *Institutes*, it is equally necessary to see that this theological work represents a fraction of Calvin's life and work and that, as the introduction shows, the *Institutes* needs to have the halo removed which history has put around it.

The materials are arranged in groupings of allied content, but the style of writing in any grouping may vary considerably. The Table of Contents provides a clue to the context for each section. For the general reader, the order of the present selections is recommended, but no difficulty should be experienced in choosing another order.

The selections are frequently chosen from within larger documents, not only among documents. But whatever sections are included have been taken intact, that is, within the selected material, no omissions have been made. These selections are all taken from existing texts and hence the work of the whole is entirely dependent upon the translation and editorial work of others. Obviously, a definite view of Calvin is evident in what has been selected, as well as in the Introduction.

Brief introductory notes have been provided for each selection. The footnotes and Biblical references which remain are largely those of the translators and editors of the respec-

tive volumes from which the materials are taken. But the footnotes have been mainly eliminated because of considerations of space. Those wishing to use the notes are referred to the document sources from which they have been taken. Biblical references have been standardized in the texts. Brackets, i.e., square brackets—indicate editorial comments and additions throughout. Although both brackets and parentheses are used within the texts from which this volume is selected, brackets have been changed to parentheses in all such instances. Hence, brackets refer to my work; parentheses to previous work.

For the reader who wishes an account of the activities of John Calvin, either as an introduction to the selections or as a sequel, an introduction to the man, his life and thought follows. Because his life and thought forms such a unity and each aspect is necessary to understand the other, the introduction may serve a purpose for the general reader beyond what would ordinarily be the case.

J.D.

AN INTRODUCTION TO JOHN CALVIN

I. The Man and His Life

The year in which Calvin was born, 1509, Luther took a baccalaureate degree in Bible and was already giving lectures. Before Calvin reached his teens, the Reformation in Germany had already reached a zenith in Luther's ideas and actions. When Calvin published his first edition of the *Institutes* in 1536, at the age of twenty-seven, Luther was already fifty-three and within a decade of his death. In 1541, five years before Luther's death, Calvin was to settle in Geneva for the second time for a twenty-three-year ministry, until the day of his death. Thus Calvin is definitely among the second generation reformers, though second to none.

The first fourteen years of Calvin's life were spent in Noyon, approximately 65 miles to the northeast of Paris, where his father was a staff official in the second oldest Gothic Cathedral.¹ Reared in a circle of students and associations beyond his own social heritage, Calvin early acquired an upper-class demeanor of aloof involvement, of being above the fray while being in it, punctuated on occasion by a loss of temper followed by remorse. But thoroughness and determination marked his life throughout, and even the unplanned intervals were used to full advantage.

At fourteen, Calvin applied himself to study at the staid Arts and Theological Colleges of the University of Paris. He excelled in Latin under the aegis of Cordier and received his Master of Arts in 1528. In the same year, Calvin's father, estranged from the Cathedral chapter over his staff responsibilities and accepting the promising place of the legal profession in society, directed Calvin to study law, which he did at Orléans and Bourges. But when his father died in 1531, Calvin felt himself freed from this responsibility. After finish-

¹ Charles Seymour, Jr., *Notre-Dame of Noyon in the Twelfth Century* (New Haven, 1939).

ing his law course,² he returned to Paris, enamored with the thought of becoming a classical scholar. While Calvin had done well enough at law, he had become interested in classical languages and writings in his associations with Wolmar and Alciati at Bourges. In the excitement of this interest, Calvin published his first book, *A Commentary on Seneca*, in 1532 in Paris. It did not have a wide circulation.

While Calvin undoubtedly had knowledge of Luther during this period, either directly or through friends, there is no evidence that it occupied or preoccupied him in the least. The theological-student-turned-lawyer now was interested in being a classical scholar. But somewhere between 1532-34, Calvin was led from general humanist interests to what he himself in the preface to the *Commentary on the Psalms*³ describes as a sudden conversion. But like most conversions, it was prepared, the result being the dramatic recastings of elements which now re-form themselves. Knowledge of individuals whose dissent was suppressed, an association in common danger and alliance with Nicholas Cop and his rectoral address calling for a more spiritual church, conversations and associations with du Tillet, a meeting with Lefèvre—all may have played their part. In the spring of 1534, Calvin surrendered the clerical benefices from whose income he had carried on his studies, surely a sign that the conversion had happened. Like other conversions to the Protestant cause, it signified the conviction that reform was no longer possible in the Catholic Church as then constituted. The logic of that position is retrospectively given in words ascribed to someone else, but the statement is probably Calvin writing about himself. The material is in his *Reply to Cardinal Sadolet*, written in 1539.⁴

It is interesting that the two great reformers, Luther and Calvin, have left such uncertain clues about the circumstances and dates of the conversions which established their historic roles. Their life thrusts were so directed to involvements and the issues about them that self-involvement was only retrospectively registered.⁵

² Here following: McNeill, J. T., *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 104.

³ Included in this volume, pp. 21 ff.

⁴ This text is included in this volume, pp. 81 ff. The particular statement recurs on pp. 108 ff.

⁵ In both instances, it is my judgment that the dramatic changes must be placed later than most scholars assume.

The convert Calvin was interested in changing badges from classical to theological scholar, but not in the least in changing his style of life as student and writer. But the history of his life is his inability to do just that. After wandering associations with the religiously awakened and concerned in Paris, Poitiers, Angoulême, and Orléans, Calvin found his way to Basel, probably both to escape the danger of persecution and to settle down to study. It was in Basel that Calvin extensively read the Church Fathers, mastered Hebrew, and published the first edition of the *Institutes* in 1536,⁶ with a preface to the French King Francis I. Apparently, Calvin had some hope that Francis I would grant freedom of religious expression to views shared in France similar to his own, perhaps even total reform.

The first edition is a plea for the new views as well as their elaboration in the form of what is believed, and what is to be believed. It is the scholar Calvin believing in the power of the Gospel to have its way, hopefully with the support of the King, but if not, in spite of him. Calvin was French to the core and it was a lifelong disappointment to him that the reform was culturally and politically so unsuccessful in spite of his own efforts and the sacrifice of life and limb of many in its behalf. But the book itself, judged by publishing standards, was a success, as were the successively enlarged editions.

The book was no more than published when Calvin went to Italy where he conferred with the Duchess of Ferrara, whose sympathy and association with those interested in reform was well known. If Calvin went to Italy partly because every educated man was supposed to, one can only report that it did not take, for as he said, he entered Italy only to leave it. Perhaps the fact that the Duchess could successfully influence the reform neither in Italy nor among her friends and relatives in France conditioned Calvin negatively.

After two short months, Calvin was back in Paris and Noyon, settling the estate in the latter, and planning to travel to Strassbourg, to settle down as a scholar who influenced the life of the reform movement. But the war between Francis I and Charles V was responsible for the road being blocked, and Calvin, via a detour, found himself in Geneva overnight, only to have a friend disclose his presence. It was the fateful

⁶ Sections of the 1536 edition and of the 1559 edition are included in this volume, pp. 267 ff.

night in which Farel, the passionate leader of reform in Geneva, knocked on Calvin's door and verbally bludgeoned Calvin into accepting a position in Geneva by threatening God's condemnation on one who would retreat to a study when the reform needed his active services. Shortly thereafter, in September 1536, Calvin returned to Geneva, was given the title of "Professor of Sacred Scripture," and several months thereafter became one of the pastors, apparently through some ceremony which qualified him as ordained.

Geneva had just come through two developments, a growing self-government freed of outside domination except for pressure from Bern, and the beginning stages of the Reformation. Farel had been given the assurance of support by the political powers of Geneva for the total reform of the religious and moral life of the community, Geneva having been known in its own time as a free-swinging city.

Thus Farel and Calvin set about to reorient the life of the city. But while the Little Council (comprised of four syndics and a treasurer elected by the citizens and an additional sixteen elected by the Council of Two Hundred) and the Council of Two Hundred (elected by the Little Council) had authorized the plans of Calvin and Farel, they hardly expected them to be as serious and adamant as they were. Calvin prepared a Confession of Faith, to be accepted by all who wished to be citizens, planned an educational program for all, and invoked the discipline of excommunication, particularly exclusion from the Sacrament, for those whose life and thought did not correspond to the rule of life and faith delineated in the Scripture. It was not that men's lives were to be beyond all traces of sin, but rather that their life was only worthy if they believed in and exhibited in their behavior signs of relying on the continuing mercies manifest in the Holy Supper. Hence, the Communion was to be frequent, indeed available each week in one of the parishes, but with the appropriate expectations, lest the Sacrament be profaned. Hence, the right of excommunication residing in the church, not among the magistrates, was to be the rule.

After over a year of struggle the issue finally came to a head, partly under pressure upon the Geneva magistrates from Bern. In January of 1538 the Council of Two Hundred forbade the ministers to preach and to keep anyone from the Supper. Farel and Calvin preached anyway and refused to administer the Sacraments under the circumstances. In April of that year Farel and Calvin were ordered to leave the city

within three days. Calvin, glad to be rid of Geneva, attempted again to settle down to a life of scholarship in Basel. But this time Bucer threatened the divine wrath and Calvin accepted a call to the French refugee church in Strassbourg.

In Strassbourg, too, Calvin had a teaching and pastoral position, and he was able to have implemented the patterns of church life and discipline rejected in Geneva. But Geneva did not forget Calvin. When the moderate Catholic reformer Cardinal Sadolet of Modena in North Italy wrote to the governing authorities in Geneva, subsequent to Calvin's departure, in the hope that they would return to the Roman fold, Calvin was asked to reply, which he did in a document that sets forth Calvin's views on reform and indicates that the reformed churches belong to the ancient traditions. But Calvin's *Reply to Sadolet*, written in six days in the early fall of 1539, was obviously only a part of his literary activity. The first of his Biblical commentaries, the *Commentary on Romans*, was also published in 1539 and in 1540 appeared his *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of Our Lord*,⁷ a clear statement of his views as well as the Zwinglian and Lutheran positions. A greatly enlarged Latin edition of the *Institutes* appeared in 1539 and a French translation of the same in 1541. During these years, Calvin also attended various meetings—Frankfurt, Hagenau, Worms, Regensburg—and at one of these had an extensive conversation with Melancthon, whom he found too willing, as the letters to him included in this volume also show, to make concessions to opponents where matters of truth were at stake. Moreover, in August of 1540 Calvin, then thirty-one, married a widow with two children, Idelette de Bure.

The relatively idyllic years at Strassbourg gave way as Calvin reluctantly bowed again to increasing pressure from Geneva to the effect that his God-given responsibilities lay in return to the city. In September 1541 Calvin took up residence in Geneva, where he was to serve until his death in 1564.

With little enthusiasm, considerable determination, and the conviction that his return was a form of "sacrifice to the Lord," he used his personal and pastoral influence to the utmost for the religious and moral transformation of the city. For the next decade and a half that task was to demand all his resources of spirit and body. The secure though uneven

⁷ Included in this volume, pp. 507 ff.

victory of the following years was marred—though Calvin would not have had delight in victory—by his failing health. Indeed, Calvin, under the tutelage of the Word, had learned to live in trouble to the discomfort of those who could not.

In the attempt to secure a church consonant with its ancient period and with the Word, Calvin involved the Geneva Councils in a process which resulted in the Ecclesiastical Ordinances of the Church of Geneva.⁸ Four offices were said to belong to the church: (1) pastors who preached, taught, administered the sacraments, admonished and, with the elders, corrected the erring; (2) teachers who had theological expertise and who were responsible for correct theological views and for an educational task, ranging from regular schools to the theological equipping of prospective pastors; (3) elders, appointed by and from the magistrates, whose responsibility was the oversight of the moral and religious life of the community; and (4) deacons who had responsibility for the poor and the ill and for the financial affairs of the church. The twelve elders in Geneva together with the ministers formed the Consistory, responsible for offences referred to them. These ranged from non-attendance at services, attempts to reestablish medieval religious practices, disruption of services, to drinking, adultery, gambling, dancing.

To understand Geneva at this time, as most places in Europe of the period, it is necessary to assume the interrelated responsibilities shared by governing bodies and the church. Religion was assumed to be the business of governments with the church concerned that it be supported and protected by the magistrates but left free to delineate religious truth within the church and, if necessary, against the government. The notion of religious freedom from both government and church was only inchoately and sporadically evident in the Reformation period. Hence, in Calvin's Geneva the moral issues involved both government and church, sometimes in alliance, sometimes in opposition. Indeed, what Calvin so seriously pursued was largely an ethical code already on the books but certainly not enforced.

Calvin encountered a series of episodes on the religious and moral level, some of which threatened the Reformation and his role in Geneva. Castellio, a humanist who joined the Protestant fold and was appointed head of the school in Geneva, was discovered to have unacceptable notions on Bib-

⁸ Included in this volume, pp. 229 ff.

lical books, having declared the Song of Solomon to consist of love stories, and subsequently having attacked Calvin and his associates in an uncharitable way. So he was exiled from Geneva. Several years later, Jerome Bolsec attacked Calvin's views on predestination, and the Council also banished him. But the most remembered historic incident in which Castellio figures again is the case of Servetus. Physician and theologian, competent in his time in both, Servetus vigorously rejected the Trinity and was universally considered a heretic in both Catholic and Protestant circles. He had the habit of getting his views known, yet of eluding persecution and inevitable death by his secret maneuvers. But he made a daring, open appearance in the church in Geneva. Only the hunch that he would win sufficient support in Geneva makes such a sudden switch intelligible.

In the decade preceding the appearance of Servetus in Geneva in 1553, Calvin had frequent encounters with a series of fairly prominent individuals in Geneva on moral issues. There was the wife of Pierre Ameux, who apparently proposed, and set about practicing, free love. There was François Favre, his son Gaspard and his daughter Franchequine, who was married to Ami Perrin—all of whom affronted Calvin in what certainly was considered immoral conduct by both church and state alike. They belonged to an increasing number known as the Libertines, who in 1537 challenged the Council of Two Hundred, and who in a threatening episode, were quieted by Calvin as he rushed headlong into the armed crowd. Berthelier organized a political party from among the opponents to Calvin, and he also supported Servetus.

For the most part, the opposition to Calvin was less interested in repudiating him as such or in supporting Servetus than it was in establishing its own freedom of life and morals. Servetus was a convenient pawn and one, in turn, who felt that the Libertines could be used to his advantage. Apparently, the Libertines, Servetus, and Calvin alike recognized the situation as a crisis of power and control.

But in spite of the stakes, Calvin was given the best hand. No person had made himself less acceptable, personally and theologically, throughout Europe than Servetus, and no one had a greater price on his head. Hence, in spite of the power of the Libertines, the verdict outside and in Geneva would have the support of those who in other circumstances might be inclined to be more lenient or to exonerate him.

Although Calvin had counseled decapitation as a form of mercy, Servetus was nevertheless burned at the stake and died with great dignity. Calvin then too vigorously defended putting Servetus to death, and Castellio rejected Calvin's position in his volume *Whether Heretics Ought to be Persecuted*. Indeed, it was his liberal defense of the freedom of religious convictions in this tract which became the basis for the historic negative consciousness about Calvin and the Servetus affair.

However, for the period, Calvin's attitude toward divergent religious opinion showed considerable latitude. He had given a letter of recommendation to Castellio when he was first banished from Geneva, and he had friendly conversations with Blandrata and Lelio Sozzini, both doubting Trinitarians from North Italy. But like other Protestants and Catholics of the time, Calvin was responsible for death penalties for divergencies less acute than those represented by Servetus. Calvin and his time are infinitely more guilty than the facts of the Servetus case would indicate. But Servetus came to symbolize the victims of the intolerance of that age; and Calvin became the symbol of the persecutors of that age.

Throughout this period Calvin also lived through personal tragedy in his own household. In 1542, a son died in infancy, and Calvin's wife never regained her health. After eight and a half years of marriage, she died, and Calvin, though never romantic, grieved deeply as his letters indicate. Throughout the Genevan period Calvin's household was not without inhabitants and problems. Calvin's youngest brother, Antoine, had lived in the household since the original flight to Geneva. Antoine's wife was found guilty of adultery with Calvin's manservant. Divorced as a result, Antoine again married and Calvin's house was filled with children from both marriages. Calvin's step-daughter, who had lived with Calvin and his wife in Geneva prior to her marriage, was also found guilty of adultery.

Beyond the problems within his own household, Calvin was occupied in finding a place for the refugees who came to Geneva in increasing numbers. Most came from France, but also a considerable number from England and northern Italy. Indeed, approximately one-third of Geneva's inhabitants at one time were refugees, and while the greatest number came after Calvin's victory, the refugees who became citizens tipped the voting balance, assuring Calvin's role at the time of, and in the light of, the Servetus affair. It is in-

teresting that Calvin himself did not become a citizen until 1559, that is, until five years before his death, and that John Knox, the Scottish reformer, was one of the refugees who became a citizen and referred to Geneva as "the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the apostles."

Calvin considered these involvements as the arena of his ministry. But it also involved him in counseling, visitation of the sick, marriage and baptisms, preaching, writing of tracts and letters, the revisions of the *Institutes*. During the plague, the Council, against Calvin's wishes, forbade him to visit the sick. T. H. L. Parker records that for the period between 1550 and 1559 approximately 270 weddings and 50 baptisms were recorded as performed by Calvin.⁹ Calvin, too, took his regular stint at preaching, which usually meant twice each Sunday and every day of alternate weeks. Preaching meant the exposition of Biblical books, taking phrases, clauses, sentences as they give themselves to be elaborated in their own right and as their meaning for faith broke in on the contemporary believer. Calvin believed that God's lively encounter with people came through the nexus of such Biblical exposition, vivified by the Spirit. But the form of preaching was essentially an instructional mode, in faith, and in faith's meaning and form for life.

The regularity of this concern with Scripture left in its wake a stupendous array of sermons, taken down by a writer designated by the community for the purpose (many still unpublished), inasmuch as Calvin spoke deliberately out of a context of preparation that had neither text nor note. The written commentaries were more background material for preaching, the clarification of the text and its meaning in ways which show considerable independence on Calvin's part over against authorities of the stature of Erasmus. Calvin wrote commentaries on every New Testament book except the Book of Revelation, which he confessed he did not understand, and on all but eleven of the books of the Old Testament.

He also found time to write tracts on the controversial issues of the time—predestination, Trinity, the Lord's Supper. Once an extensive traveler, Calvin, upon his return to Geneva in 1542, relied more on correspondence and occasional tracts

⁹ T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (London, S.C.M. Press), p. 81.

for his contact with the wider world than upon visits. His written contact is extensive, covering the major countries of Europe.

Reference has already been made to the 1536 and 1539 Latin editions and to the 1541 French edition of the *Institutes*. In 1543 another Latin edition with new material appeared. In 1545 the same edition was re-issued and also appeared in French. The Latin edition of 1550 has only minor changes, but the Latin edition of 1559 is the one Calvin himself felt best about, particularly because the form of ordering of the material was finally the one he wanted. A French translation of this edition, in which Calvin had a major hand, appeared in 1560.

It is obvious that Calvin had little leisure, and even his diversions were planned. He enjoyed companionship, games if not gaming, and had no scruples about a glass of wine, having declared that it was used in the Lord's Supper as an analog to the Holy Spirit because of the lively quality it imparted. Calvin had intense discipline in the midst of forces and powers that bore in on him from every side. But Puritan he was not; Puritanism was a subsequent development.

Toward the end of his life, Calvin's health increasingly deteriorated. For a time, he was carried to the Cathedral to preach, which he did until the sixth of February 1564. With death near at hand, he asked to speak both to the magistrates and to the pastors, and did so respectively on April 27 and April 28. Both of these documents are included in this volume. On the 27th of May he died, and Beza, his colleague, successor, and biographer said that on Calvin's death bed "nothing seemed left but his spirit."¹⁰ At his own instructions, Calvin was buried in an unmarked grave.

II. The Man and His Thought

If ever the thought and the life of a man are of one piece, they are so in the case of Calvin. Yet the man seems to stand apart from both as if one had a portrait of him unmoved in all his involvement. Perhaps that is what vexes one so—his appearing so unmoved. It is as if he were never in need or want, nor were ever unfulfilled. He has friends but no friendships. He gives praise but not with generosity, and he is inclined to be moved more by negative things around him than by positive ones.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

In the portraits of Calvin, the eyes look out with a fixed but unfocused stare as if anything in his way would be ignored. He is a man who is set in a direction from which he will not be deflected. He is, to use the phrase Jean Cadier used, "a man God mastered," but at the price of such human foibles as incongruity. He delineates his sufferings without anxiety and hardly a complaint. He is almost too God-like in the traditional sense of that term for us to be comfortable with him. That is why he seems so self-righteous, though self-righteousness is indeed foreign to his being. He wrestles with the world, but never with God.

Wherever Calvin set his direction, he pushed ahead. More than most people, he stood on principle and never wavered not because compromise was unintelligible, but because he saw truth so clearly that any compromise was error to him. That is why Melancthon vexed him so, and why Calvin would not leave their differences alone. This doggedness made Calvin a difficult adversary for his followers.

Such singlemindedness ignores aspects of humanity and limits sensibilities. For Calvin, the artistic world is so circumscribed that only God is the great artist, and the arts as a result lose much of the vibrancy that makes them appealing. There is no evidence that poetry or art were media which stirred his sensibilities. Even his letters are like mannerist paintings, suffering a certain lack of warmth and compassion. They pile reason upon reason, and have an overbearing insistence upon off-centered issues. Calvin's artistic imagination is confined to his prose writing. He saw the whole world through a creative prose style. Born of the classical and scriptural tradition, he was a master of the word with all the strength and limitation that implies.

Calvin was a man carried along by the work before him. He would have chosen a different role, but having accepted Strassbourg and Geneva as the pastoral role God had assigned him, he pushed along doing everything with consistency and singleness of purpose. This does not mean that he always got everything straightened out. He exhibits a dogged persistence at every point and is not upset when plans do not work out. He simply tries again as is evident in the case of the *Institutes*, which he finally succeeded in putting in a form that was acceptable to him.

Theologically, Calvin is most remembered for the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the first draft of which grew fivefold in a series of editions which extended well over two

decades. But this fixation on the *Institutes* distorts both the man and his theological work. Successive editions were revised and expanded in the midst of administrative, pastoral and other writing activities. It is hard to believe that Calvin ever had a sustained period of time in which the *Institutes* could have received the attention theological work requires. The fact that it is finally organized in four books, various chapters and subsections does not make it either theological or systematic. It simply means that it received Calvin's organizational push. Indeed, the organizational aspects of the *Institutes*, like the traditional three points of a sermon, pose the problem of inconsistencies and the incapacity to make adequate, coherent transitions.

The first edition of the *Institutes* is a beautiful book, organized along themes which flow in form and substance. Later organization, in terms of the two major theological motifs of God as Creator and God as Redeemer—under which rubrics everything else is subsumed—is an adequate theological conception. But, as executed, it does not always work. The inconsistencies, particularly in the sections on God the Creator, may be due as much to Calvin's own inability (largely because of pressures of time) to work matters out as to our inability to understand what he is doing. The overpraising of the *Institutes* as a systematic work has even robbed Calvin of his humanity in this failure of organization. It is nevertheless theologically superb.

But if there are problems about how various facets of what Calvin says relate to each other in any given work, particularly the *Institutes*, it must also be said that Calvin seldom changed his mind. That is why one can give a picture of Calvin's theological work by drawing themes from any documents—letters, commentaries, sermons,¹¹ catechisms,¹² *Institutes*—and find no difference in thought. There is considerable diversity in the prose medium which Calvin employed, a variety, depending upon the settings in which he exercised his pen. The thought changes only in slight variations or nuances, and occasionally in further elaboration.

No attempt will be made here to give a full picture of Calvin's thought. The texts included in this volume have

¹¹ A sample of both commentary and sermons is included as part of this volume, pp. 542 ff.

¹² A selection from the catechism of the Church of Geneva is included in this volume, pp. 245 ff.

been selected to be reasonably comprehensive, despite the variety of their form. The focus of both is to show aspects particularly central and unique to Calvin, with occasional reference to differences and likenesses with respect to individuals such as Luther, Melancthon, and Zwingli.

For Calvin, theological work is essentially the exposition and elaboration of Scripture through which one attains a lively knowledge of God. Scriptures provide the spectacles which give everything its true shape for the beholder. Therefore, to be true to Scripture is the task of the preacher and the theologian. Indeed, Calvin is so interested in being true to Scripture that he will accept Scriptural inconsistencies when he has no other alternative but will try to reconcile them wherever he can. Where Luther is willing to set James and Paul against each other, to the detriment of the former, Calvin gives "doing works" their due in the context of James without retreating one bit from the centrality of justification in Paul. If Luther is willing to think of a Bible within the Bible because of the centrality of justification by faith and of the way in which Gospel is set against law, Calvin without retreating from justification, nevertheless sees the totality of Scripture as a book which makes manifest the benefits of God for men. He even goes so far as to suggest that there must be a divine original of Scripture behind the received documents. But Calvin was not a fundamentalist, for the authority of Scripture did not rest upon the words being the word of God but upon the conjunction of word and spirit by which the knowledge of God through Scripture becomes self-authenticating. The superior wisdom of Scripture, its great antiquity, miracles, fulfillment in terms of prophetic prediction—, Calvin, contrary to his orthodox Calvinist successors, considers secondary matters subservient to the fundamental principle.

"Therefore, Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, these human testimonies which exist to confirm it will not be vain if, as secondary aids to our feebleness, they follow that chief and highest testimony. But those who wish to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith can this be known."¹³

¹³ *Institutes* I, viii, 13.

Calvin's sections on Scripture in Book I of the *Institutes*, essential as they are, are actually an intrusion at that point made necessary by the fact that he can no longer proceed to discuss the knowledge of God the Creator without having recourse to Scripture. Indeed, it would have been better had he put the section on Scripture first; but it is perhaps best that he did not, for Biblicist he was not. He assumed that his whole theological labor was the exposition of Scripture. Calvin had discussed the knowledge of God the Creator in the light of Scripture without having said so. From Scripture one knows that all men have a sense of God, that they feel an awesome response but fill it with manageable conceptions, that is, they make idols. There is enough of God manifest in creation for man to be "without excuse," but every attempt to do something about it exacerbates the problem. Calvin even has a section on man as if Adam had not sinned. He treats this apart from Scripture but certainly in the light of it. Indeed, because man needs the spectacles of Scripture to see God the Creator, Calvin accordingly inserts the section on Scripture. Indeed, from Scripture alone comes the knowledge of God the Creator on such issues as Trinity and Providence. In discussing God the Creator, Calvin already assumes the section on faith and the knowledge of God the Redeemer, which he does not actually discuss until Book III.

The organizational problem of the *Institutes* which Calvin never solved—though he felt better about the last edition than the previous ones—should not blind us to what he was doing. The essential structure of his thought is evident in a series of parallels which run throughout—God the Creator and God the Redeemer, law and Gospel, the Old Israel and the New Israel, Providence and election. Indeed, all the pairs can be put under God the Redeemer and God the Creator. Creation anticipates redemption and redemption assumes creation. Therefore, even law and Gospel are not different. The Gospel is a clearer manifestation of law, which for Calvin is identical with the religion of Israel. Essentially, the lively faith of Israel is already the faith of the New Testament community, though now faith takes on its true colors. The Old Covenant and the New Covenant are the same covenant, though under a different administration. The Old Covenant is built on mercy, not merit. Patriarchs and the prophets knew Christ in some sense, for they saw the promises fulfilled from afar. Both deal with the benefits of God.

This exceptionally positive role of Israel is already essen-

tially akin to what comes to fuller disclosure in the New Testament. The harmony between the old and the new is more pronounced than is the case in Luther, for whom the major accent sets the two against each other. While in Luther the law as a schoolmaster that drives one to Christ is considered to be the "alien work" of God, for Calvin it certainly belongs to his "proper work." Law as the schoolmaster that drives one to mercy and as the restraining force which makes community possible, is in both instances already in the service of the religion of Israel. But the law under the old dispensation is the guide to the believers in Israel and now, under the new dispensation, to the Christians. While the forms of the ceremonial law have been abandoned, the law is not abolished but finds its true setting in the context of believers. Indeed, for Calvin it is surprising but crucial to his thought that the law is not basically considered in its negative form. Hence, the Ten Commandments are interpreted not with respect to what they prohibit, but rather to what they enjoin upon the believer.

What has happened in the Gospel is that the benefits of God the Redeemer in Christ have flooded in upon us. What has been there all along has been made clear and its fullness is now manifest at one point—Jesus Christ.

The fullness of these benefits are evident in Calvin's conception of faith and justification in the Christian life. The ingredients in each instance should not be missed. Calvin defines faith as "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."¹⁴ The appellation that faith is a lively knowledge of God is certainly correct. For Calvin, Biblical history and logic make clear that God's beneficent dealing with the world has some standing as knowledge; that it is built upon a discerning apprehension; that its benefits, anchored in Christ, are not ephemeral because they are known to our minds; nor simply for assent, for they are known in our depths by the activity of the Spirit.

While faith is a comprehensive category, justification, the Reformation slogan, has to do with the precise situation of men before God. Hence, Calvin says, "we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into

¹⁴ *Institutes* III, ii, 7.

His favor as righteous men. And it consists of the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness."¹⁵ The news of being received in God's favor, of being forgiven, and of having righteousness ascribed to one as one finally stands before God includes all the elements which had been so central to Luther. But in Calvin's own thinking, justification now takes its appropriate place in the wider setting of the total dimensions of faith. That is because the role of justification has been won and now each aspect can take its appropriate place.

Nevertheless, the justification aspect remains more central than its place in the *Institutes* might suggest. Faith makes a difference, and Calvin tries to delineate the difference it makes. He can even suggest a compendium of Scriptural texts as a kind of guide to the believer's life. Works are a confirmation of faith. But while it is clear that one is justified not without works, it is not by works. Calvin never successfully solved the problem of how one can know that the works, which are meant to confirm faith, actually do so. He never understood the psychological tailspin this could engender and the frenzied activity of works that might result, in part because he came to the problem from another angle, mainly one of trying to encourage believers not to despair of their small progress:

"Let each one of us, then, proceed according to the measure of his puny capacity and set out upon the journey we have begun. No one shall set out so inauspiciously as not daily to make some headway, though it be slight. Therefore, let us not cease so to act that we may make some unceasing progress in the way of the Lord. Let us not despair at the slowness of our success; for even though attainment may not correspond to desire, when today outstrips yesterday the effort is not lost."¹⁶

Indeed, the security for Calvin lies not in works, which for him as for Luther would never be acceptable, but in the God-given, apprehended faith. Faith, too, has its comforts in the lively knowledge of what God is about, namely, that to the believer his benefits are sure. Calvin makes this point in the *Institutes* by placing the section on election in the setting of faith. It is the believer who knows the comforts of

¹⁵ *Institutes* III, ix, 2.

¹⁶ *Institutes* III, vii, 5.

election and its correlate, predestination. The notion that God controls all things, as Calvin delineated it in his concept of Providence under the knowledge of God the Creator and in predestination under the knowledge of God the Redeemer, was the positive rock of consolation to the believer. That it should be an oppressive idea had hardly entered the level of consciousness, certainly not for Luther or Calvin, believing as they did that powers, not man's freedom, controlled the world. He found emancipation and joy in the fact that the world was securely in the hands of God and that the believer who had received the gift of faith could believe that God had destined him for the present and for the future. To Calvin the notion of double predestination, which includes the rejection of those who are not among the elect, is the obverse side of election; it is an idea from which Calvin could not retreat because he found Scriptural bases for it. But he counseled every believer to accept that he was among the elect and to look upon others as the same. The completely deterministic mode in his analysis of Providence and predestination has a jarring effect for us, for we see it in the context of the dynamics of faith. But for him this is only inchoately the case. The logic of his argument leads him to make God the cause of evil, but he denies this conclusion, escaping only by a verbal declaration that this is not the case.

Surely it is obvious that such theological thinking is formed in the parish and in the church. Luther was a professor of theology, who from that base of operation changed the form of the church by everything that came in the wake of his major breakthrough. Calvin, the pastor-preacher-churchman, fashioned the church in a city which for generations was regarded as the beacon set on the hill, the model for all to follow. Calvin, the second generation reformer, needed to be less critical than Luther, though his positive statements are interlaced by still longer sections giving critiques of his own contemporaries. But Calvin can calmly and assuredly repeat with Cyprian and Augustine that "for those to whom he is father, the church may also be mother. . . . God, therefore, in his wonderful providence accommodating himself to our capacity has prescribed a way for us, though still far off, to draw near to him."¹⁷ The church is the community of faith, where God has accommodated himself to men, for grace runs through in all the imperfections that continue. A certain char-

¹⁷ *Institutes* IV, i, 1.

ity of judgment therefore is necessary among those who are recognized as members of the church, provided that "by confession of faith and example of life, by partaking of the Sacraments, (they) profess the same God and Christ with us."¹⁸ Hence, "where we see the word of God clearly preached and heard, and the Sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."¹⁹ Calvin's context suggests that his accent is that we are not to doubt that there is a genuine church where certain marks are evident. It was his successors who overzealously spelled out the content of the signs of the church.

The double character of proclamation and Sacrament should not be overlooked, for to Calvin the benefits of Christ are to be received in both forms. For Calvin, baptism is the initiation or the ingrafting into Christ, the mark and sign of our total involvement as believers—mortification, renewal, union. It is our entrance into the New Covenant, just as circumcision was the entrance into the old. Calvin is, of course, acutely aware that infants cannot comprehend the sign which they carry. Thus, he argues that while hearing in a comprehending sense is the ordinary arrangement by which God calls people, he has called many, "giving them true knowledge of Himself by inward means, that is, by the illumination of the Spirit apart from the medium of preaching."²⁰ Moreover, he adds, "this objection can be solved without difficulty: infants are baptized into future repentance and faith, and even though these have not yet been formed in them, the seed of both lies hidden within them by the secret working of the Spirit."²¹

Indeed, here Calvin calls upon the Spirit to rescue him in this dilemma. In one sense his conception of Spirit is his escape hatch, but from another standpoint it is the pivot upon which everything turns. For Calvin, every apprehension of God depends upon the activity of the Spirit, upon the way in which God becomes alive and lively to the depths of man. At the edges and limits of Calvin's thought, the Spirit takes over. The Spirit is so self-evidently the pivot of his apprehensions that it frequently operates as a *deus ex machina* in his thinking.

¹⁸ *Institutes* IV, i, 8.

¹⁹ *Institutes* IV, i, 9.

²⁰ *Institutes* IV, xvi, 19.

²¹ *Institutes* IV, xvi, 20.

Baptism is administered once. But its reality lives on. In turmoil and tribulation of spirit, its promises are to be remembered and banked upon. The Lord's Supper is to be understood as the sheer liberality of God, who like a provident householder wishes continually to sustain us, this time in figures and images adapted to our capacity, making Christ's presence as certain as if we had seen it with our own eyes. While the union of Christ with us remains a mystery, here in the Lord's Supper we receive it in more tangible form in ways that refresh, strengthen and gladden us."²² While the tangible presence is a marvelous accommodation for us, it is not to be overstressed. It is not the seeing, but the eating and drinking *in faith* which enjoins the signs and the mysteries.

For Calvin there is a presence in the Lord's Supper, though he cannot accept the Lutheran view of the ubiquity of Christ's body in the elements nor in the traditional views of transubstantiation. The meal as a memorial is not adequate, Calvin insisting that our "souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ in the same way that bread and wine keep and sustain physical life."²³ Hence, Calvin again calls upon the Spirit to solve his problems. Christ sits at the right hand of God; He is present in the Sacraments:

"Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the sacred power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space."²⁴

In a subsequent passage Calvin suggested that the Spirit may lift us to Christ as well as Christ descending to us.²⁵

Precisely because proclamation is the way in which Christ is present to us verbally and the Lord's Supper is the way under which he is present to us through other sensibilities, Calvin theologically insists upon the frequency of the Supper, suggesting that it should be observed at least once a week. He had considered the agreement with the magistrates of

²² *Institutes* IV, xvii, 1.

²³ *Institutes* IV, xvii, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Institutes* IV, xvii, 31.

Geneva to the effect that the Lord's Supper was to be offered four times a year as a temporary expedient so that proper discipline could be exercised for worthy participation. But what was to be a temporary expedient has had, and continues to have, an incredibly long history in the Reformed tradition!

It often has been said of Calvin's thought that it illumines the benefits of God in Christ for the believer. It would not be too much to call it a religious functionalism, for his religious exposition serves the life and understanding of the believer. Only the sections on Trinity and Christology seem less vibrant and real, though Calvin there, too, takes on his opponents. That is because here Calvin, like Luther, follows a traditional path, for no critical faith issues were being reborn or reformed, only defended. Perhaps that is why he was personally offended when he was accused of heresy on the trinitarian issue.

His statements on political theory were less traditional. While he shared the traditional assumption of the times, to the effect that government existed for the sake of maintaining true religion as well as genuine civil order, he had enunciated these in such a way that the constituted authority could be subverted under specific circumstances. In commenting on the Fifth Commandment, he suggests that if our parents lead us to transgress the law, we have a right not to regard them as parents; and he then goes on to add that the same obtains with respect to princes, lords and every kind of superior.²⁶ In elaborating on civil government, he suggests that the role of resistance to tyranny is lodged in the lesser magistrates who have a definite responsibility to oppose the unjust ruler, and he proceeds to cite several ancient precedents.²⁷ He, too, comments on the forms of government, stating that government is best which checks the vices of men, and therefore has power distributed and checked.²⁸ It is conceivable that the Constitution of the United States, drafted by Madison, who studied under John Witherspoon, a Calvinist divine at Princeton, owes as much to John Calvin as it does to the artificial checks and balances of Montesquieu.

²⁶ *Institutes* II, viii, 38.

²⁷ *Institutes* IV, xx, 31.

²⁸ *Institutes* IV, xx, 8.

I

The Man and His Life

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF PSALMS¹

[Calvin's preface to the Commentary on the Book of Psalms, written in 1557, bears a role similar to Luther's Preface to the Complete Edition of his Latin writings in that it provides a retrospective look at his own life and work. Moreover, it is one of the few places in which Calvin speaks about himself. He feels a particular kinship to David and his tribulations.]

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE

JOHN CALVIN

TO THE GODLY AND INGENUOUS READERS,
GREETING

If the reading of these my *Commentaries* confer as much benefit on the Church of God as I myself have reaped advantage from the composition of them, I shall have no reason to regret that I have undertaken this work. Having expounded here, in our small school, the Book of Psalms, about three years ago, I thought I had by this means sufficiently discharged my duty, and had resolved not to publish to the

¹ [The text here reprinted is taken from the *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. I, translated from the original Latin and collated with the author's French version by the Rev. James Anderson. (Edinburgh: Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1845), pp. xxxv-xlix.]

world what I had familiarly taught those of my own household. And, in fact, before I had undertaken to expound this book in my lectures, at the request of my brethren, I said what was true, that I had kept away from this subject, because that most faithful teacher of the Church of God, Martin Bucer, had laboured in this field with such singular learning, diligence, fidelity, and success, that at least there was not so great need that I should put my hand to the work. And had the Commentaries of Wolphangus Musculus at that time been published, I would not have omitted to do them justice, by mentioning them in the same way, since he too, in the judgment of good men, has earned no small praise by his diligence and industry in this walk. I had not yet come to the end of the book, when, lo! I am urged by renewed solicitations not to suffer my lectures, which certain persons had carefully, faithfully, and not without great labour, taken down, to be lost to the world. My purpose still remained unaltered; only I promised what for a long time I had been thinking of, to write something on the subject in the French language, that my countrymen might not be without the means of being enabled to understand so useful a book when perusing it. Whilst I am thinking of making this attempt, suddenly, and contrary to my first design, it occurred to me, by what impulse I know not, to compose in Latin, only as it were in the way of trial, an exposition of one Psalm. When I found that my success corresponded to my desire far beyond what I had ventured to anticipate, I was encouraged, and accordingly began to make the same attempt in a few other Psalms. On perceiving this, my intimate friends, as if in this way they held me bound, urged me with the greater confidence not to desist from my course. One reason which made me comply with their solicitations, and which also had from the commencement induced me to make this first attempt, was an apprehension that at some future period what had been taken down from my lectures, might be published to the world contrary to my wishes, or at least without my knowledge. I can truly say, that I was drawn to execute this work rather from such an apprehension, than led to it from my own free will. At the same time, as I continued to prosecute the work, I began to perceive more distinctly that this was by no means a superfluous undertaking, and I have also felt from my own individual experience, that to readers who are not so exercised, I would furnish important assistance in understanding The Psalms.

The varied and resplendid riches which are contained in this treasury it is no easy matter to express in words; so much so, that I well know that whatever I shall be able to say will be far from approaching the excellence of the subject. But as it is better to give to my readers some taste, however small, of the wonderful advantages they will derive from the study of this book, than to be entirely silent on the point, I may be permitted briefly to advert to a matter, the greatness of which does not admit of being fully unfolded. I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;" for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated. The other parts of Scripture contain the commandments which God enjoined his servants to announce to us. But here the prophets themselves, seeing they are exhibited to us as speaking to God, and laying open all their inmost thoughts and affections, call, or rather draw, each of us to the examination of himself in particular, in order that none of the many infirmities to which we are subject, and of the many vices with which we abound, may remain concealed. It is certainly a rare and singular advantage, when all lurking places are discovered, and the heart is brought into the light, purged from that most baneful infection, hypocrisy. In short, as calling upon God is one of the principal means of securing our safety, and as a better and more unerring rule for guiding us in this exercise cannot be found elsewhere than in The Psalms, it follows, that in proportion to the proficiency which a man shall have attained in understanding them, will be his knowledge of the most important part of celestial doctrine. Genuine and earnest prayer proceeds first from a sense of our need, and next, from faith in the promises of God. It is by perusing these inspired compositions, that men will be most effectually awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure. In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book. And not only are the promises of God presented to us in it, but oftentimes there is exhibited to us one standing, as it were, amidst the invitations of God on the one hand, and the impediments of the flesh on the other, girding and preparing himself for prayer: thus

teaching us, if at any time we are agitated with a variety of doubts, to resist and fight against them, until the soul, freed and disentangled from all these impediments, rise up to God; and not only so, but even when in the midst of doubts, fears, and apprehensions, let us put forth our efforts in prayer, until we experience some consolation which may calm and bring contentment to our minds. Although distrust may shut the gate against our prayers, yet we must not allow ourselves to give way, whenever our hearts waver or are agitated with inquietude, but must persevere until faith finally come forth victorious from these conflicts. In many places we may perceive the exercise of the servants of God in prayer so fluctuating, that they are almost overwhelmed by the alternate hope of success and apprehension of failure, and gain the prize only by strenuous exertions. We see on the one hand, the flesh manifesting its infirmity; and on the other, faith putting forth its power; and if it is not so valiant and courageous as might be desired, it is at least prepared to fight until by degrees it acquire perfect strength. But as those things which serve to teach us the true method of praying aright will be found scattered through the whole of this Commentary, I will not now stop to treat of topics which it will be necessary afterwards to repeat, nor detain my readers from proceeding to the work itself. Only it appeared to me to be requisite to show in passing, that this book makes known to us this privilege, which is desirable above all others—that not only is there opened up to us familiar access to God, but also that we have permission and freedom granted us to lay open before him our infirmities, which we would be ashamed to confess before men. Besides, there is also here prescribed to us an infallible rule for directing us with respect to the right manner of offering to God the sacrifice of praise, which he declares to be most precious in his sight, and of the sweetest odour. There is no other book in which there is to be found more express and magnificent commendations, both of the unparalleled liberality of God towards his Church, and of all his works; there is no other book in which there is recorded so many deliverances, nor one in which the evidences and experiences of the fatherly providence and solicitude which God exercises towards us, are celebrated with such splendour of diction, and yet with the strictest adherence to truth; in short, there is no other book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God, or in which we are more powerfully stirred up to the performance

of this religious exercise. Moreover, although The Psalms are replete with all the precepts which serve to frame our life to every part of holiness, piety, and righteousness, yet they will principally teach and train us to bear the cross; and the bearing of the cross is a genuine proof of our obedience, since by doing this, we renounce the guidance of our own affections, and submit ourselves entirely to God, leaving him to govern us, and to dispose of our life according to his will, so that the afflictions which are the bitterest and most severe to our nature, become sweet to us, because they proceed from him. In one word, not only will we here find general commendations of the goodness of God, which may teach men to repose themselves in him alone, and to seek all their happiness solely in him; and which are intended to teach true believers with their whole hearts confidently to look to him for help in all their necessities; but we will also find that the free remission of sins, which alone reconciles God towards us, and procures for us settled peace with him, is so set forth and magnified, as that here there is nothing wanting which relates to the knowledge of eternal salvation.

Now, if my readers derive any fruit and advantage from the labour which I have bestowed in writing these Commentaries, I would have them to understand that the small measure of experience which I have had by the conflicts with which the Lord has exercised me, has in no ordinary degree assisted me, not only in applying to present use whatever instruction could be gathered from these divine compositions, but also in more easily comprehending the design of each of the writers. And as David holds the principal place among them, it has greatly aided me in understanding more fully the complaints made by him of the internal afflictions which the Church had to sustain through those who gave themselves out to be her members, that I had suffered the same or similar things from the domestic enemies of the Church. For although I follow David at a great distance, and come far short of equalling him; or rather, although in aspiring slowly and with great difficulty to attain to the many virtues in which he excelled, I still feel myself tarnished with the contrary vices; yet if I have any things in common with him, I have no hesitation in comparing myself with him. In reading the instances of his faith, patience, fervour, zeal, and integrity, it has, as it ought, drawn from me unnumbered groans and sighs, that I am so far from approaching them; but it has, notwithstanding, been of very great advantage to me to be-

hold in him as in a mirror, both the commencement of my calling, and the continued course of my function; so that I know the more assuredly, that whatever that most illustrious king and prophet suffered, was exhibited to me by God as an example for imitation. My condition, no doubt, is much inferior to his, and it is unnecessary for me to stay to show this. But as he was taken from the sheepfold, and elevated to the rank of supreme authority; so God having taken me from my originally obscure and humble condition, has reckoned me worthy of being invested with the honourable office of a preacher and minister of the gospel. When I was as yet a very little boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterwards, when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who followed it to wealth, this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose. Thus it came to pass, that I was withdrawn from the study of philosophy, and was put to the study of law. To this pursuit I endeavoured faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.

I was quite surprised to find that before a year had elapsed, all who had any desire after purer doctrine were continually coming to me to learn, although I myself was as yet but a mere novice and tyro. Being of a disposition somewhat unpolished and bashful, which led me always to love the shade and retirement, I then began to seek some secluded corner where I might be withdrawn from the public view; but so far from being able to accomplish the object of my desire, all my retreats were like public schools. In short, whilst my one great object was to live in seclusion without being known, God so led me about through different turnings and changes, that he never permitted me to rest in any place, until, in spite of my natural disposition, he brought me forth to public notice. Leaving my native country, France, I in

fact retired into Germany, expressly for the purpose of being able there to enjoy in some obscure corner the repose which I had always desired, and which had been so long denied me. But lol whilst I lay hidden at Basle, and known only to a few people, many faithful and holy persons were burnt alive in France; and the report of these burnings having reached foreign nations, they excited the strongest disapprobation among a great part of the Germans, whose indignation was kindled against the authors of such tyranny. In order to allay this indignation, certain wicked and lying pamphlets were circulated, stating, that none were treated with such cruelty but Anabaptists and seditious persons, who, by their perverse ravings and false opinions, were overthrowing not only religion but also all civil order. Observing that the object which these instruments of the court aimed at by their disguises, was not only that the disgrace of shedding so much innocent blood might remain buried under the false charges and calumnies which they brought against the holy martyrs after their death, but also, that afterwards they might be able to proceed to the utmost extremity in murdering the poor saints without exciting compassion towards them in the breasts of any, it appeared to me, that unless I opposed them to the utmost of my ability, my silence could not be vindicated from the charge of cowardice and treachery. This was the consideration which induced me to publish my *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. My objects were, first, to prove that these reports were false and calumnious, and thus to vindicate my brethren, whose death was precious in the sight of the Lord; and next, that as the same cruelties might very soon after be exercised against many unhappy individuals, foreign nations might be touched with at least some compassion towards them and solicitude about them. When it was then published, it was not that copious and laboured work which it now is, but only a small treatise containing a summary of the principal truths of the Christian religion; and it was published with no other design than that men might know what was the faith held by those whom I saw basely and wickedly defamed by those flagitious and perfidious flatterers. That my object was not to acquire fame, appeared from this, that immediately after I left Basle, and particularly from the fact that nobody there knew that I was the author.

Wherever else I have gone, I have taken care to conceal that I was the author of that performance; and I had resolved to continue in the same privacy and obscurity, until at length

William Farel detained me at Geneva, not so much by counsel and exhortation, as by a dreadful imprecation, which I felt to be as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me. As the most-direct road to Strasburg, to which I then intended to retire, was shut up by the wars, I had resolved to pass quickly by Geneva, without staying longer than a single night in that city. A little before this, Popery had been driven from it by the exertions of the excellent person whom I have named, and Peter Viret; but matters were not yet brought to a settled state, and the city was divided into unholy and dangerous factions. Then an individual who now basely apostatised and returned to the Papists, discovered me and made me known to others. Upon this, Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after having learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquillity of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken; but sensible of my natural bashfulness and timidity, I would not bring myself under obligation to discharge any particular office. After that, four months had scarcely elapsed, when, on the one hand, the Anabaptists began to assail us, and, on the other, a certain wicked apostate, who being secretly supported by the influence of some of the magistrates of the city, was thus enabled to give us a great deal of trouble. At the same time, a succession of dissensions fell out in the city which strangely afflicted us. Being, as I acknowledge, naturally of a timid, soft, and pusillanimous disposition, I was compelled to encounter these violent tempests as part of my early training; and although I did not sink under them, yet I was not sustained by such greatness of mind, as not to rejoice more than it became me, when, in consequence of certain commotions, I was banished from Geneva.

By this means set at liberty and loosed from the tie of my vocation, I resolved to live in a private station, free from the burden and cares of any public charge, when that most excellent servant of Christ, Martin Bucer, employing a similar kind of remonstrance and protestation as that to which Farel

had recourse before, drew me back to a new station. Alarmed by the example of Jonas which he set before me, I still continued in the work of teaching. And although I always continued like myself, studiously avoiding celebrity; yet I was carried, I know not how, as it were by force to the Imperial assemblies, where, willing or unwilling, I was under the necessity of appearing before the eyes of many. Afterwards, when the Lord having compassion on this city, had allayed the hurtful agitations and broils which prevailed in it, and by his wonderful power had defeated both the wicked counsels and the sanguinary attempts of the disturbers of the Republic, necessity was imposed upon me of returning to my former charge, contrary to my desire and inclination. The welfare of this church, it is true, lay so near my heart, that for its sake I would not have hesitated to lay down my life; but my timidity nevertheless suggested to me many reasons for excusing myself from again willingly taking upon my shoulders so heavy a burden. At length, however, a solemn and conscientious regard to my duty, prevailed with me to consent to return to the flock from which I had been torn; but with what grief, tears, great anxiety and distress I did this, the Lord is my best witness, and many godly persons who would have wished to see me delivered from this painful state, had it not been that that which I feared, and which made me give my consent, prevented them and shut their mouths.

Were I to narrate the various conflicts by which the Lord has exercised me since that time, and by what trials he has proved me, it would make a long history. But that I may not become tedious to my readers by a waste of words, I shall content myself with repeating briefly what I have touched upon a little before, that in considering the whole course of the life of David, it seemed to me that by his own footsteps he showed me the way, and from this I have experienced no small consolation. As that holy king was harassed by the Philistines and other foreign enemies with continual wars, while he was much more grievously afflicted by the malice and wickedness of some perfidious men amongst his own people, so I can say as to myself, that I have been assailed on all sides, and have scarcely been able to enjoy repose for a single moment, but have always had to sustain some conflict either from enemies without or within the Church. Satan has made many attempts to overthrow the fabric of this Church; and once it came to this, that I, altogether feeble and

timorous as I am, was compelled to break and put a stop to his deadly assaults by putting my life in danger, and opposing my person to his blows. Afterwards, for the space of five years, when some wicked libertines were furnished with undue influence, and also some of the common people, corrupted by the allurements and perverse discourse of such persons, desired to obtain the liberty of doing whatever they pleased, without control, I was under the necessity of fighting without ceasing to defend and maintain the discipline of the Church. To these irreligious characters and despisers of the heavenly doctrine, it was a matter of entire indifference, although the Church should sink into ruin, provided they obtained what they sought,—the power of acting just as they pleased. Many, too, harassed by poverty and hunger, and others impelled by insatiable ambition or avarice and a desire of dishonest gain, were become so frantic, that they chose rather, by throwing all things into confusion, to involve themselves and us in one common ruin, than to remain quiet by living peaceably and honestly. During the whole of this lengthened period, I think that there is scarcely any of the weapons which are forged in the workshop of Satan, which has not been employed by them in order to obtain their object. And at length matters had come to such a state, that an end could be put to their machinations in no other way than cutting them off by an ignominious death; which was indeed a painful and pitiable spectacle to me. They no doubt deserved the severest punishment, but I always rather desired that they might live in prosperity, and continue safe and untouched; which would have been the case had they not been altogether incorrigible, and obstinately refused to listen to wholesome admonition.

The trial of these five years was grievous and hard to bear; but I experienced not less excruciating pain from the malignity of those who ceased not to assail myself and my ministry with their envenomed calumnies. A great proportion of them, it is true, are so blinded by a passion for slander and detraction, that to their great disgrace, they betray at once their impudence, while others, however crafty and cunning, cannot so cover or disguise themselves as to escape being shamefully convicted and disgraced; yet when a man has been a hundred times found innocent of a charge brought against him, and when the charge is again repeated without any cause or occasion, it is an indignity hard to bear. Because I affirm and maintain that the world is managed and governed by the se-

cret providence of God, a multitude of presumptuous men rise up against me, and allege that I represent God as the author of sin. This is so foolish a calumny, that it would of itself quickly come to nothing, did it not meet with persons who have tickled ears, and who take pleasure in feeding upon such discourse. But there are many whose minds are so filled with envy and spleen, or ingratitude, or malignity, that there is no falsehood, however preposterous, yea, even monstrous, which they do not receive, if it is spoken to them. Others endeavour to overthrow God's eternal purpose of predestination, by which he distinguishes between the reprobate and the elect; others take upon them to defend free will; and forthwith many throw themselves into their ranks, not so much through ignorance as by a perversity of zeal which I know not how to characterise. If they were open and avowed enemies, who brought these troubles upon me, the thing might in some way be borne. But that those who shroud themselves under the name of brethren, and not only eat Christ's sacred bread, but also administer it to others, that those, in short, who loudly boast of being preachers of the gospel, should wage such nefarious war against me, how detestable is it? In this matter I may very justly complain with David, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me," (Ps. 41:9.) "For it was not an enemy that reproached me; but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company," (Ps. 55:12, 13, 14.) Others circulated ridiculous reports concerning my treasures; others, of the extravagant authority and enormous influence which they say I possess; others speak of my delicacies and magnificence. But when a man is content with scanty food and common clothing, and does not require from the humblest more frugality than he shows and practises himself, shall it be said that such an one is too sumptuous, and lives in too high a style? As to the power and influence of which they envy me, I wish I could discharge this burden upon them; for they estimate my power by the multitude of affairs, and the vast weight of labours with which I am overwhelmed. And if there are some whom I cannot persuade whilst I am alive that I am not rich, my death at length will prove it. I confess, indeed, that I am not poor; for I desire nothing more than what I have. All these are invented stories, and there is no colour whatever for any one of them; but many nevertheless are

very easily persuaded of their truth, and applaud them; and the reason is, because the greatest part judge that the only means of cloaking their enormities is to throw all things into disorder, and to confound black and white; and they think that the best and shortest way by which they can obtain full liberty to live with impunity just as they please, is to destroy the authority of Christ's servants.

In addition to these, there are "the hypocritical mockers in feasts," of whom David complains, (Ps. 35:16;) and I mean by these not only lick-dish characters, who seek a meal to fill their belly, but all those who by false reports seek to obtain the favour of the great. Having been long accustomed to swallow such wrongs as these, I have become almost hardened; yet when the insolence of such characters increases, I cannot but sometimes feel my heart wounded with bitter pangs. Nor was it enough that I should be so inhumanly treated by my neighbours. In addition to this, in a distant country towards the frozen ocean, there was raised, I know not how, by the frenzy of a few, a storm which afterwards stirred up against me a vast number of persons, who are too much at leisure, and have nothing to do but by their bickering to hinder those who are labouring for the edification of the Church. I am still speaking of the internal enemies of the Church—of those who, boasting mightily of the gospel of Christ, nevertheless rush against me with greater impetuosity than against the open adversaries of the Church, because I do not embrace their gross and fictitious notion concerning a carnal way of eating Christ in the sacrament; and of whom I may protest, after the example of David, "I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war," (Ps. 120:7.) Moreover, the cruel ingratitude of all of them is manifest in this, that they scruple not to assail both in flank and rear a man who strenuously exerts himself to maintain a cause which they have in common with him, and whom therefore they ought to aid and succour. Certainly, if such persons were possessed of even a small portion of humanity, the fury of the Papists which is directed against me with such unbridled violence, would appease the most implacable animosity which they may bear towards me. But since the condition of David was such, that though he had deserved well of his own people, he was nevertheless bitterly hated by many without a cause, as he complains in Ps. 69:4, "I restored that which I took not away," it afforded me no small consolation when I was groundlessly assailed by the hatred of those who ought to

have assisted and solaced me, to conform myself to the example of so great and so excellent a person. This knowledge and experience have been of much service in enabling me to understand The Psalms, so that in my meditations upon them, I did not wander, as it were, in an unknown region.

My readers, too, if I mistake not, will observe, that in unfolding the internal affections both of David and of others, I discourse upon them as matters of which I have familiar experience. Moreover, since I have laboured faithfully to open up this treasure for the use of all the people of God, although what I have done has not been equal to my wishes, yet the attempt which I have made deserves to be received with some measure of favour. Still I only ask that each may judge of my labours with justice and candour, according to the advantage and fruit which he shall derive from them. Certainly, as I have said before, in reading these Commentaries, it will be clearly seen that I have not sought to please, unless in so far as I might at the same time be profitable to others. And, therefore, I have not only observed throughout a simple style of teaching, but in order to be removed the farther from all ostentation, I have also generally abstained from refuting the opinions of others, although this presented a more favourable opportunity for plausible display, and of acquiring the applause of those who shall favour my book with a perusal. I have never touched upon opposite opinions, unless where there was reason to fear, that by being silent respecting them, I might leave my readers in doubt and perplexity. At the same time, I am sensible that it would have been much more agreeable to the taste of many, had I heaped together a great mass of materials which has great show, and acquires fame for the writer; but I have felt nothing to be of more importance than to have a regard to the edification of the Church. May God, who has implanted this desire in my heart, grant by his grace that the success may correspond thereto!

GENEVA, *July 22, 1557.*

CALVIN'S WILL AND ADDRESSES TO THE MAGISTRATES AND MINISTERS¹

[Calvin's will, as well as his parting addresses to the magistrates and ministers on April 27 and 28, 1564, respectively provide additional information on how Calvin saw his life work. The will and address to the magistrates are taken from Beza's *Life of Calvin*, with Beza's comments given in parentheses. An abbreviated address to the ministers is also included by Beza, Calvin's colleague and successor. A fuller text of this address was prepared by one of the pastors, Jean Pinault, from his own notes. The latter text is included in this volume and Pinault's own comments are given in parentheses.]

(On the 25th of April, he made his will in the following terms:—)

THE TESTAMENT OF JOHN CALVIN

In the name of God, Amen. On the 25th day of April, in the year of our Lord 1564, I, Peter Chenalat, citizen and notary of Geneva, witness and declare that I was called upon by that admirable man, John Calvin, minister of the Word of God in this church at Geneva, and a citizen of the same

¹ [The text of the will and the addresses for the magistrates is reprinted from *Tracts Relating to the Reformation*, Vol. I, translated from the original Latin by Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1844), pp. xix-c. The text of the address to the ministers is reprinted from the *Letters of John Calvin*, Vol. IV, compiled from the original manuscripts and edited with historical notes by Dr. Jules Bonnet (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1858), pp. 372-77. The translation is by Marcus Robert Gilchrist.]

State, who, being sick in body, but of sound mind, told me that it was his intention to execute his testament, and explain the nature of his last will, and begged me to receive it, and to write it down as he should rehearse and dictate it with his tongue. This I declare that I immediately did, writing down word for word as he was pleased to dictate and rehearse; and that I have in no respect added to or subtracted from his words, but have followed the form dictated by himself.

In the name of the Lord, Amen. I, John Calvin, minister of the Word of God in this church of Geneva, being afflicted and oppressed with various diseases, which easily induce me to believe that the Lord God has determined shortly to call me away out of this world, have resolved to make my testament, and commit my last will to writing in the manner following:—First of all, I give thanks to God, that taking mercy on me, whom he had created and placed in this world, he not only delivered me out of the deep darkness of idolatry in which I was plunged, that he might bring me into the light of his Gospel, and make me a partaker in the doctrine of salvation, of which I was most unworthy; and not only, with the same mercy and benignity, kindly and graciously bore with my faults and my sins, for which, however, I deserved to be rejected by him and exterminated, but also vouchsafed me such clemency and kindness that he has deigned to use my assistance in preaching and promulgating the truth of his Gospel. And I testify and declare, that it is my intention to spend what yet remains of my life in the same faith and religion which he has delivered to me by his Gospel; and that I have no other defence or refuge for salvation than his gratuitous adoption, on which alone my salvation depends. With my whole soul I embrace the mercy which he has exercised towards me through Jesus Christ, atoning for my sins with the merits of his death and passion, that in this way he might satisfy for all my crimes and faults, and blot them from his remembrance. I testify also and declare, that I suppliantly beg of Him that he may be pleased so to wash and purify me in the blood which my Sovereign Redeemer has shed for the sins of the human race, that under his shadow I may be able to stand at the judgment-seat. I likewise declare, that, according to the measure of grace and goodness which the Lord hath employed towards me, I have endeavoured, both in my sermons and also in my writings and commentaries, to preach His Word purely and chastely, and

faithfully to interpret His sacred Scriptures. I also testify and declare, that, in all the contentions and disputations in which I have been engaged with the enemies of the Gospel, I have used no impostures, no wicked and sophistical devices, but have acted candidly and sincerely in defending the truth. But, woe is me! my ardour and zeal (if indeed worthy of the name) have been so careless and languid, that I confess I have failed innumerable times to execute my office properly, and had not He, of His boundless goodness, assisted me, all that zeal had been fleeting and vain. Nay, I even acknowledge, that if the same goodness had not assisted me, those mental endowments which the Lord bestowed upon me would, at his judgment-seat, prove me more and more guilty of sin and sloth. For all these reasons, I testify and declare that I trust to no other security for my salvation than this, and this only, viz., that as God is the Father of mercy, he will show himself such a Father to me, who acknowledge myself to be a miserable sinner. As to what remains, I wish that, after my departure out of this life, my body be committed to the earth, (after the form and manner which is used in this church and city,) till the day of a happy resurrection arrive. As to the slender patrimony which God has bestowed upon me, and of which I have determined to dispose in this will and testament, I appoint Anthony Calvin, my very dear brother, my heir, but in the way of honour only, giving to him for his own the silver cup which I received as a present from Varanius, and with which I desire he will be contented. Every thing else belonging to my succession I give him in trust, begging he will at his death leave it to his children. To the Boys' School I bequeath out of my succession ten gold pieces; as many to poor strangers; and as many to Joanna, the daughter of Charles Constans, and myself by affinity. To Samuel and John, the sons of my brother, I bequeath, to be paid by him at his death, each 400 gold pieces; and to Anna, and Susanna, and Dorothy, his daughters, each 300 gold pieces; to David, their brother, in reprehension of his juvenile levity and petulance, I leave only 25 gold pieces. This is the amount of the whole patrimony and goods which the Lord has bestowed on me, as far as I can estimate, setting a value both on my library and moveables, and all my domestic utensils, and, generally, my whole means and effects; but should they produce a larger sum, I wish the surplus to be divided proportionally among all the sons and daughters of my brother, not excluding David, if, through

the goodness of God, he shall have returned to good behaviour. But should the whole exceed the above mentioned sum, I believe it will be no great matter, especially after my debts are paid, the doing of which I have carefully committed to my said brother, having confidence in his faith and good-will; for which reason I will and appoint him executor of this my testament, and along with him my distinguished friend, Lawrence Normand, giving power to them to make out an inventory of my effects, without being obliged to comply with the strict forms of law. I empower them also to sell my moveables, that they may turn them into money, and execute my will above written, and explained and dictated by me, John Calvin, on this 25th day of April, in the year 1564.

After I, the foresaid notary, had written the above testament, the aforesaid John Calvin immediately confirmed it with his usual subscription and handwriting. On the following day, which was the 26th day of April of same year, the same distinguished man, Calvin, ordered me to be sent for, and along with me, Theodore Beza, Raymund Chauvet, Michael Cop, Lewis Enoch, Nicholas Colladon, and James Bordese, ministers and preachers of the Word of God in this church of Geneva, and likewise the distinguished Henry Scrimger, Professor of Arts, all citizens of Geneva, and in presence of them all, testified and declared that he had dictated to me this his testament in the form above written; and, at the same time, he ordered me to read it in their hearing, as having been called for that purpose. This I declare I did articulately, and with clear voice. And after it was so read, he testified and declared that it was his last will, which he desired to be ratified. In testimony and confirmation whereof, he requested them all to subscribe said testament with their own hands. This was immediately done by them, month and year above written, at Geneva, in the street commonly called Canon Street, and at the dwelling-place of said testator. In faith and testimony of which I have written the foresaid testament, and subscribed it with my own hand, and sealed it with the common seal of our supreme magistracy.

PETER CHENALAT.

(This testament being executed, he sent an intimation to the four syndics, and all the senators; that, before his departure out of life, he was desirous once more to address them all in the senate-house, to which he hoped he might

be carried on the following day. The senators replied, that they would rather come to him, and begged that he would consider the state of his health. On the following day, when the whole senate had come to him in a body, after mutual salutations, and he had begged pardon for their having come to him, when he ought rather to have gone to them; first premising that he had long desired this interview with them, but had put it off until he should have a surer presentiment of his decease, he proceeded thus:—)

Honoured Lords,—I thank you exceedingly for having conferred so many honours on one who plainly deserved nothing of the kind, and for having so often borne patiently with my very numerous infirmities. This I have always regarded as the strongest proof of your singular good-will toward me. And though in the discharge of my duty I have had various battles to fight, and various insults to endure, because to these every man, even the most excellent, must be subjected, I know and acknowledge, that none of these things happened through your fault; and I earnestly entreat you, that if, in anything, I have not done as I ought, you will attribute it to the want of ability rather than of will; for I can truly declare that I have sincerely studied the interest of your republic. Though I have not discharged my duty fully, I have always, to the best of my ability, consulted for the public good; and did I not acknowledge that the Lord, on his part, hath sometimes made my labours profitable, I should lay myself open to a charge of dissimulation. But this I beg of you, again and again, that you will be pleased to excuse me for having performed so little in public and in private, compared with what I ought to have done. I also certainly acknowledge, that on another account also I am highly indebted to you, viz., your having borne patiently with my vehemence, which was sometimes carried to excess; my sins, in this respect, I trust, have been pardoned by God also. But in regard to the doctrine which I have delivered in your hearing, I declare that the Word of God, entrusted to me, I have taught, not rashly or uncertainly, but purely and sincerely; as well knowing that His wrath was otherwise impending on my head, as I am certain that my labours in teaching were not displeasing to Him. And this I testify the more willingly before God, and before you all, because I have no doubt whatever that Satan, according to his wont, will stir up wicked, fickle, and giddy men, to corrupt the pure doctrine which you have heard of me.

(Then referring to the great blessings with which the Lord had favoured them,) [he says] "I am the best witness from how many and how great dangers the hand of Almighty God hath delivered you. You see, moreover, what your present situation is. Therefore, whether in prosperity or adversity, have this, I pray you, always present before your eyes, that it is He alone who establishes kings and states, and on that account wishes men to worship him. Remember how David declared, that he had fallen when he was in the enjoyment of profound peace, and assuredly would never have risen again, had not God, in his singular goodness, stretched out his hand to help him. What then will be the case with such diminutive mortals as we are, if it was so with him who was so strong and powerful? You have need of great humbleness of mind, that you may walk carefully, setting God always before you, and leaning only on his protection; assured, as you have often already experienced, that, by his assistance, you will stand strong, although your safety and security hang, as it were, by a slender thread. Therefore, if prosperity is given you, beware, I pray you, of being puffed up as the wicked are, and rather humbly give thanks to God. But if adversity befalls you, and death surrounds you on every side, still hope in Him who even raises the dead. Nay, consider that you are then especially tried by God, that you may learn more and more to have respect to Him only. But if you are desirous that this republic may be preserved in its strength, be particularly on your guard against allowing the sacred throne on which he hath placed you to be polluted. For He alone is the supreme God, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who will give honour to those by whom He is honoured, but will cast down the despisers. Worship Him, therefore, according to his precepts; and study this more and more, for we are always very far from doing what it is our duty to do. I know the disposition and character of each of you, and I know that you need exhortation. Even among those who excel, there is not one who is not deficient in many things. Let every one examine himself, and wherein he sees himself to be defective, let him ask of the Lord. We see how much iniquity prevails in the counsels of this world. Some are cold; others, negligent of the public good, give their whole attention to their own affairs; others indulge their own private affections; others use not the excellent gifts of God as is meet; others ostentatiously display themselves, and, from overween-

ing confidence, insist that all their opinions shall be approved of by others. I admonish the old not to envy their younger brethren, whom they may see adorned, by God's goodness, with some superior gifts. The younger, again, I admonish to conduct themselves with modesty, keeping far aloof from all haughtiness of mind. Let no one give disturbance to his neighbour, but let every one shun deceit, and all that bitterness of feeling which, in the administration of the Republic, has led many away from the right path. These things you will avoid, if each keeps within his own sphere, and all conduct themselves with good faith in the department which has been entrusted to them. In the decision of civil causes let there be no place for partiality or hatred; let no one pervert justice by oblique artifices; let no one, by his recommendations, prevent the laws from having full effect; let no one depart from what is just and good. Should any one feel tempted by some sinister affection, let him firmly resist it, having respect to Him from whom he received his station, and supplicating the assistance of his Holy Spirit. Finally, I again entreat you to pardon my infirmities, which I acknowledge and confess before God and his angels, and also before you, my much respected Lords." (Having thus spoken, and prayed to Almighty God, that he would crown them more and more with his gifts, and guide them by his Holy Spirit, for the safety of the whole Republic, giving his right hand to each, he left them in sorrow and in tears, all feeling as if they were taking a last farewell of their common parent.)²

(On the 28th of April, when all of us in the ministry of Geneva had gone to him at his request, he says,) Brethren, inasmuch as I have had something to say to you, which concerns not only this church, but also several others, which in a certain manner depend on it, it will be good to begin with prayer, in order that God may give me grace to say every thing without ambition, always having a respect to his glory, and also that every one may retain and profit by what shall be said.

It may be thought that I am too precipitate in concluding my end to be drawing near, and that I am not so ill as I persuade myself; but I assure you, that though I have often felt myself very ill, yet I have never found myself in such a state,

² The preceding is from the text supplied by Beza; what follows is from the text prepared by Pinault.

nor so weak as I am. When they take me to put me in bed, my head fails me and I swoon away forthwith. There is also this shortness of breathing, which oppresses me more and more. I am altogether different from other sick persons, for when their end is approaching their senses fail them and they become delirious. With respect to myself, true it is that I feel stupefied, but it seems to me that God wills to concentrate all my senses within me, and I believe indeed that I shall have much difficulty and that it will cost me a great effort to die. I may perhaps lose the faculty of speech, and yet preserve my sound sense; but I have also advertised my friends of that and told them what I wished them to do for me, and it is for this very reason I have desired to speak with you before God call me away; not that God may not indeed do otherwise than I think; it would be temerity on my part to wish to enter into his counsel.

When I first came to this church, I found almost nothing in it. There was preaching and that was all. They would look out for idols it is true, and they burned them. But there was no reformation. Everything was in disorder. There was no doubt the good man Master William [Farel], and then blind Courant (not born blind, but he became so at Bâle). There was besides Master Antony Saulnier, and that fine preacher Froment, who having laid aside his apron got up into the pulpit, then went back to his shop where he prated, and thus gave a double sermon.

I have lived here amid continual bickerings. I have been from derision saluted of an evening before my door with forty or fifty shots of an arquebuse. How think you must that have astonished a poor scholar timid as I am, and as I have always been, I confess?

Then afterwards I was expelled from this town and went away to Strasbourg, and when I had lived there some time I was called back hither, but I had no less trouble when I wished to discharge my duty than heretofore. They set the dogs at my heels, crying, Here! here! and these snapped at my gown and my legs. I went my way to the council of the two hundred when they were fighting, and I kept back the others who wanted to go, and who had nothing to do there; and though they boast that it was they who did everything, like M. de Saulx, yet I was there, and as I entered, people said to me, "Withdraw, sir, we have nothing to say to you." I replied, "I will do no such thing—come, come, wicked men

that you are; kill me, and my blood will rise up against you, and these very benches will require it." Thus I have been amid combats, and you will experience that there will be others not less but greater. For you are a perverse and unhappy nation, and though there are good men in it the nation is perverse and wicked, and you will have troubles when God shall have called me away; for though I am nothing, yet know I well that I have prevented three thousand tumults that would have broken out in Geneva. But take courage and fortify yourselves, for God will make use of this church and will maintain it, and assures you that he will protect it.

I have had many infirmities which you have been obliged to bear with, and what is more, all I have done has been worth nothing. The ungodly will greedily seize upon this word, but I say it again that all I have done has been worth nothing, and that I am a miserable creature. But certainly I can say this that I have willed what is good, that my vices have always displeased me, and that the root of the fear of God has been in my heart; and you may say that the disposition was good; and I pray you, that the evil be forgiven me, and if there was any good, that you conform yourselves to it and make it an example.

As to my doctrine, I have taught faithfully, and God has given me grace to write what I have written as faithfully as it was in my power. I have not falsified a single passage of the Scriptures, nor given it a wrong interpretation to the best of my knowledge; and though I might have introduced subtle senses, had I studied subtilty, I cast that temptation under my feet and always aimed at simplicity.

I have written nothing out of hatred to any one, but I have always faithfully propounded what I esteemed to be for the glory of God.

As to our internal state, you have elected M. Beza to hold my place. Advise how to relieve him, for the charge is great, and so weighty that he might well sink under the load. But advise how to support him. Of him I know that he has a good will and will do what he can.

Let every one consider the obligation which he has not only to this church but also to the city, which you have promised to serve in adversity as well as in prosperity; thus let each keep by his vocation and not endeavour to retire from it nor enter into cabals. For when people go under ground to seek for shifts, they may say indeed that they did not reflect, and

that they did aim at this or that. But let them consider the obligation that they have here contracted before God.

And study too that there be no bickerings or sharp words among you, as sometimes biting gibes will be bandied about. This will take place, it is true, in laughing, but there will be bitterness in the heart. All that is good for nothing, and is even contrary to a Christian disposition. You should then guard against it, and live in good accord and all friendship and sincerity.

I had forgotten this point: I pray you make no change, no innovation. People often ask for novelties. Not that I desire for my own sake out of ambition that what I have established should remain, and that people should retain it without wishing for something better, but because all changes are dangerous and sometimes hurtful.

On my return from Strasbourg, I composed the catechism and in haste, for I would never accept the ministry till they had taken an oath respecting these two points: namely, to preserve the catechism and discipline; and while I was writing it, they came to fetch bits of paper as big as my hand and carry them to the printing office. Though Master Peter Viret was then in this town, do you think I ever showed him a word of it? I never had leisure; I have sometimes indeed thought of putting a finishing hand to it if I had had leisure.

As to the prayers for the Sabbath I adopted the form of Strasbourg, and borrowed the greater part of it. Of the other prayers, I could not take any part from that formulary, for it contained nothing of the kind; but I took the whole from the Holy Scriptures.

I was also obliged to compose a formulary of baptism when I was at Strasbourg, where people brought me the children of Anabaptists from five or six leagues off to have them baptized. I then composed this unpolished formulary, which I would not advise you, notwithstanding, to change.

The Church of (Berne) has betrayed this one, and they have always feared me more than they loved me. I am desirous they should know that I died in the opinion that they feared rather than loved me, and even now they fear me more than they love me, and have always been afraid lest I should disturb them about their [*eucharist*].

(This remark ought to have been introduced before in some place of which I have not a distinct recollection.)

(He made use of the aforesaid words. I have not set them

down in doubt or uncertainty. I doubt not but he himself would have set them down better, and would have said more. But what I did not recollect with the most perfect distinctness I have left out. He took a courteous leave of all the brethren who shook him by the hand, one after the other, all melting into tears.)

(Written the 1st day of May, 1564, on the 27th day of which month he died.)

LETTERS OF JOHN CALVIN¹

[Since Calvin disclosed so little of himself in his theological writings, the letters reveal clues about the man Calvin not otherwise available. The letters reprinted here provide glimpses of Calvin's view of other Reformation figures, particularly Luther and Melancthon, and they show him writing about his failing health.]

TO BUCER

(Unsuccessful results of the Colloquy of Berne—Sacramentarian discord—Remarkable judgment concerning Luther)

GENEVA, 12th January, 1538.

I have a good many things to write to you about, things too by no means agreeable, had I a little more leisure; write however I must, as much as my very limited time will permit, since to me it will be no slight consolation, to confide to your friendly bosom, the evils which oppress us. In the letter which I wrote to Capito from Berne, I exulted as if matters had been terminated to our satisfaction; and who would have entertained any doubts about the success of so good a cause? For our confession, which was then the point in question, was judged by the ministers to be a devout production, and an oath in confirmation of it was with the highest propriety exacted by the people; what remained but that a deputation should be named to cure the wound which had been inflicted by the former deputies of Berne? That was not obtained without the greatest difficulty, but when even those who were

¹ [The letters here reprinted are taken from the *Letters of John Calvin*, Vols. III and IV, compiled from the original manuscripts and edited with historical notes by Dr. Jules Bonnet (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1858). The translation is by Marcus Robert Gilchrist. Vol. IV, pp. 382-86; 400-4; Vol. III, pp. 57-58; 59-60; 61-63; 157-58; 159-60; 219-20; 293-94; 335-38; 399-400; 410-12; 461-63; 481-84; Vol. IV, pp. 31-33; 148-50; 300-23; 358-60; 362-63; 364.]

actuated by the most iniquitous sentiments could not oppose our demand, deputies were appointed to settle this question, who it was very sure would never undertake the task for which they had been selected. As soon as they refused, the duty was entrusted to those among whom the evil had arisen; but that you may understand how little seriousness there was in this measure, the moment that the feeblest rumor of public report indicated to what issue things so well prepared were tending, these new deputies were immediately recalled.

I dare not give way to too malignant suspicions, but all declare that those who take such delight in disturbances and seditions are watching for an opportunity of making innovations. A short time after that, it was announced that Megander had left the country by a sentence of banishment. This news was as great a blow to us as if we had heard that the Church of Berne had for the most part fallen off. I begin to fear, my dear Bucer, that we are aiming at an agreement which will have to be sanctioned by the sacrifice and blood of many pious men, nor is this the phrase of a man who wishes to draw back, but of one who desires such an agreement as all good men could join us in. And if we have this at heart, all those perplexing difficulties which it seems might restrain the more timid, will be swept away. But these, which we ourselves thought were to be opposed, are that Luther should not give scope to his wild fancy, about our flesh being as it were a graft into that of Christ's, or that of Christ's into ours, nor feign that Christ's body is of infinite extension, nor impose upon us a local presence: for there is hardly any one of those who have hitherto protested who does not suspect something of this kind. If Luther can cordially accept of us along with our confession, there is nothing which I could more willingly desire; but in the mean time he is not the only one in the church of God to be looked up to. For we should be cruel and barbarous if we made no account of the many thousands who are cruelly domineered over under pretext of that agreement.

What to think of Luther I know not, though I am thoroughly convinced of his piety; but I wish it were false, what is commonly said by most people, who in other respects would be very unwilling to be unjust to him, that with his firmness there is mixed up a good deal of obstinacy. His conduct affords us no slight grounds for entertaining this suspicion. If that is true which I understood to be rumored about

lately in the churches of Wurtemberg, that they had compelled nearly all the churches to recognize error, how much vainglory, pray, is there in such conduct? If we were not afflicted with the malady of ambition, would it not have been enough for us that Christ should be deemed veracious, and that his truth should shine forth in the hearts of men? I see indeed what will come of all this. Nothing can be safe as long as that rage for contention shall agitate us. All recollections of past times must then be buried in oblivion, if we look for a solid peace. For the contest was so keen and so much embittered, that it is not possible to bring it to mind without kindling at least some sparks of strife; and if Luther has so great a lust of victory, he will never be able to join along with us in a sincere agreement respecting the pure truth of God. For he has sinned against it not only from vainglory and abusive language, but also from ignorance and the grossest extravagance. For what absurdities he pawned upon us in the beginning, when he said the bread is the very body! And if now he imagines that the body of Christ is enveloped by the bread, I judge that he is chargeable with a very foul error. What can I say of the partisans of that cause? Do they not romance more wildly than Marcion respecting the body of Christ? If the Swiss should take upon them to inveigh against such mistakes, how would this pave the way for an agreement?

Wherefore if you have any influence or authority over Martin, use it to dispose him to prefer subduing to Christ, rather than to himself, those with whom he has hitherto wrangled in the most inauspicious of strifes; nay, that he himself submit to the truth which he is now manifestly attacking. Here what should have been done was that every one should ingenuously confess of his own accord his own error, and I could not help protesting to you as I think you yourself recollect, that those wily insinuations by which you attempted to excuse yourself and Zwingli displeased me. It is not in the mean time by any means becoming to insult one another. Would that all these reproaches might fall upon my head, and yet I am fully convinced in my own mind that I have never been so abandoned by God since I began to taste of his word, as not to preserve a pious sense of the use of the sacraments and of our participation of the body of Christ. There is nothing certainly in my introduction to contradict this; and even should we grant that there was an absurd shame in one party of confessing their fault, who would not

after all excuse this feeling compared with what is said of the insolent fury of Martin?

Wherefore, my dear Bucer, you must strive that all things be properly adjusted on both sides. A difficult task, you will say; I admit it, certainly; but since you have taken it upon you, you must labour seriously, I do not say to fulfil it, but to endeavour to do so. How intolerable do you think it appears that so many, and by no means contemptible churches of the whole of Saxony, when they have shown their readiness to come to an equitable agreement, should be kept so long in suspensel If then you ask of the Swiss to lay aside their obstinacy, contrive that Luther in his turn cease to bear himself so imperiously. . . .

TO ZEBEDEE

(Pressing invitations to concord—Apology for Bucer—Judgment respecting Zwingli, Luther, Carlostadt—Necessity of union.)

STRASBOURG, 19th May, 1539.

Your letter gave me uneasiness for other reasons, but greatly agitated my mind, because I see that you still entertain so great an aversion to the agreement which I imagined had been duly established in your parts. As you do not seem, however, to have taken up your views of the subject without some reasons, I shall first endeavour to satisfy you as well as I can respecting the things which you object to, then I shall slightly touch on the cause itself. You say that those men whose talents and hearts I so highly commend, have diminished their own authority among most persons whom you know, both men of small and of great importance. I confess it indeed. But whose fault is it? "I wish it were not their own," you say.

Take care, lest you do injustice to the servants of Christ, whom you suspect so maliciously when they themselves have given you no grounds for doing so. Bucer conducted himself in such a manner in the affair of the agreement, that while many exclaim that his actions displease them, no one can point out the slightest point in which he did wrong. I know what complaints are everywhere heard about him among those who cry out against the agreement. But if you examine a little more closely, it will be clear to you that they are mere invectives. If we condemn, with so much facility, a man

endowed with so many excellent gifts, and whose services the Lord has made use of for such excellent things, what, pray, shall we say of those who have hitherto approved themselves by no notable action? But should you persist in flattering yourself by depreciating men who do not deserve it, you shall never, for all that, persuade me not to feel and declare those to be sincere men whose sincerity I see with my eyes. It is to no purpose you recur to that commonplace remark, we should not from admiration of men let ourselves be led away from the certain truth of religion. For I am not enslaved by so preposterous and blind an admiration of any man, as to be detached by it from a sound judgment, much less from the authority of the faith; and I know that Farel has too much firmness to leave me any room for fearing that he could in this manner be turned aside from the word of God. But as I know that all who stand up for the opinions of Luther are suspected of too much wiliness by the men of our party, I was unwilling to allow Farel to be tormented by a needless mistrust. But to what purpose dread the astuteness of that man of whose candour you can be assured? I shall not cease then loudly to proclaim that virtue which I think I perceive in Melancthon. Meanwhile there are certain things in which I myself confess him to be deficient, so far am I from wishing to subject any one to his opinions. For this is my purpose, that banishing all suspicions which are an obstacle to us, we should confidingly on the one side and the other listen to each other's reasons, reserving for our own judgment the question itself intact till the truth be discovered. I know that there is an immense fear of the Gorgon as far as Bucer is concerned. But it vexes you, that he has overthrown a doctrine, which lately (1537, Sept.), was so well established there, and you think it to be the more dishonourable, that he himself should bring into doubt a doctrine, which formerly he defended with the greatest firmness against most obstinate opponents. What kind of a truth it is we are wavering in, I do not perceive; but I venture to say, that we perfectly and firmly agree with Bucer, so that no part of sound doctrine is abandoned by us. What is there repugnant to the plain meaning of the Scripture in the formula I drew up some time ago? What is there in my articles, which could in any way give you offence? Nevertheless nothing prevents an agreement, but that those men, who wish to appear very conservative, entirely reject this doctrine. If we think that Martin dissembles, why do we not thoroughly draw him out?

Let us simply assent to the teaching of the Scripture, and we shall either win him over, with or against his will, to the light; or he certainly will not be able to use evasion, but will disclose whatever poison may be in his heart. But since we have not fully found out his opinion, we even shrink from confessing the truth, lest we may seem to assent to his views. What harm could result from drawing up a clear confession of the participation of the body and blood of the Lord, which is the privilege of the faithful in the holy supper? Surely Martin would be compelled to accept it, or we would justly bid him farewell. You have no cause to take so great offence at the retractations of Bucer. Since his teaching concerning the use of the sacraments was erroneous, he justly retracted it. I would that Zwingli had made up his mind to do the same. For his opinion on this subject was both wrong and pernicious. When I saw that our friends eagerly accepted it with great applause, I did not hesitate to oppose it, while I was still working in France. I confess, he (Bucer) commits a mistake by endeavouring to soften the sentiments of *Cecolampadius* and Zwingli, because he makes them almost agree with Luther. But those men, who most spitefully censure him in every other respect, do not blame him for this. For they have nothing more at heart, but that Zwingli should remain untouched. But I wish, that they would cease to defend him so urgently, and would with singleness of mind give glory to God by a bare confession of the truth. I am very far from conceding to you that there was no rigidity in the doctrine of Zwingli. Indeed one can see at a glance that, too much absorbed with overturning the superstition of a carnal presence, he at the same time set aside the true efficacy of our participation, or at least threw an obscurity over it. So that what we required was that greater light should have been thrown on that point. You have reason to be offended that Luther retracts nothing, palliates nothing, but stubbornly maintains all his opinions.

But what could Bucer do? He might have waited, you will say. But it was better by his example to incite Luther and others to their duty. To what end that holy obtestation? For after he had retracted his own errors, he also adjures them in God's name to correct in their turn whatever mistakes they have committed. What Luther's book against the Arians contains, I know not, except that from the title I guess the main points of the subject. If in handling it he has given *Carlostadt* a good drubbing, it is not without reason. Wherefore they

cannot feel wroth with him, except that it is matter of sorrow that by the unnecessary ripping up of old quarrels, minds should be exasperated. It is more certain than certainty itself, that the Church of Wittemberg has been pestered with that foolish dogma by Carlostadt. We have not Bucer's Latin book. If such are their acts of conciliation it is with reason they displease you, and I should not consider them in a more favourable light if I saw them. But it does not follow that every difference of opinion should immediately break out into an open rupture. Wherefore, though your conscience compel you to oppose in some respects his opinion, it is your duty to do your endeavour that the fraternal union between you and him be maintained. For it behoves us not rashly to break up our connection with those whom the Lord has joined with us in the fellowship of his work. And this alone I ask of you, that you constantly retain that faith in which you have hitherto stood, but in such a manner as that you may not appear of your own free will to seek for a rupture with those to whom you cannot refuse the right of being esteemed both by you and all pious men as among the leading servants of Christ. Good God, to what a point have we come. We ought to consider a separation from the ministers of Christ, with the same disposition as if our own bowels were torn out. Now it is almost a sort of sport not only to cut off certain members, but to retrench the most vital parts from their connection with us. These things, as I have thrown them together at random and without any arrangement, you will reflect on, and endure patiently the just liberty I have taken. Moreover you have no occasion to be under any apprehensions from me. The things you have written I will keep by me as religiously as I should wish them to be kept, if it were my own life that was at stake.

TO JOHN SLEIDAN

(Marks of fraternal confidence—blame pronounced on Melancthon—persecutions in France and Italy.)

GENEVA, 27th August 1554.

When I learned lately from a letter of our brother N., that of the three whom the senate had set at the head of the French Church you are one, I was, as you may well suppose, greatly delighted, and this joy, I hope, will be lasting. For