

*A glimpse*  
*of the*  
**LIFE & WORKS**



*of*  
**JOHN CALVIN**  
*by*  
Timothy Tow

*A glimpse*  
*of the*  
**LIFE & WORKS**  
*of*  
**JOHN CALVIN**

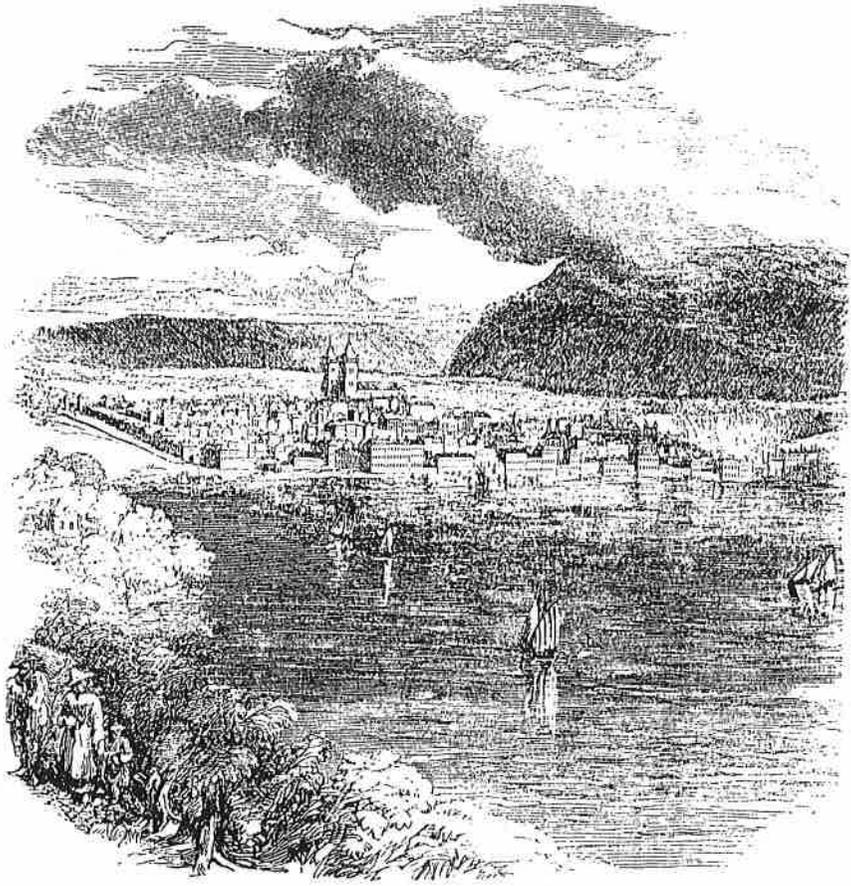
*by*  
Timothy Tow

*A Glimpse of the*  
**LIFE & WORKS of JOHN CALVIN**

© 1993 Rev (Dr) Timothy Tow  
9A GILSTEAD ROAD  
SINGAPORE 1130

ISBN No. 9971-991-29-2

*Published by*  
**CHRISTIAN LIFE PUBLISHERS PTE LTD**  
Tampines South P O Box 54  
Singapore 9152  
Republic of Singapore



*View of Geneva from the lake*

## Calvin's Emblem



*Promptly and Sincerely  
in the work of the Lord*

To  
*Drs Carl McIntire & J C Maris*  
*comrades-at-arms*  
*for a*  
*20th century Reformation*  
*1948 - 1993*  
*this booklet*  
*is*  
*affectionately dedicated*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*I am deeply indebted to Miss Low Sock Eng for typing this booklet, to Mr & Mrs Paul Wong for the cover art-work and arrangement of illustrative drawings and photos, and to Mr Roger Kok for many services kindly rendered.*

*I am all the more indebted to William Wileman, author of John Calvin, His Life, His Teaching and His Influence, published by Gospel Mission Press, 402 South Main St., Choteau, Montana, 59422 for the chapter "The Doctrines of Grace" (Five Points of Calvinism) reproduced in the Appendix. It is his desire warmly to invite young people "to read what God did in days of old."*

## PREFACE

When I received from Dr McIntire a request to speak on John Calvin at the 14th World Congress of the International Council of Christian Churches, it was required that the message be printed beforehand that delegates might have a more permanent record, as our custom is through the years.

In view of the fact that "*Calvinism is often misrepresented, not only by its opponents but also by those who are counted among its adherents,*" I thought it would be a double advantage if the printed notes were bound more elegantly, with vignettes of his life added, and made available to the Christian public.

If through this glimpse of the life and works of John Calvin the reader will be drawn to a deeper study of the man and his writings, this extra effort taken will be worth its while.

*Timothy Tow*

## Calvin by the Prince of Preachers

"Among all those who have been born of women, there has not risen a greater than John Calvin. No age before him ever produced his equal, and no age afterwards has seen his rival. In theology, he stands alone, shining like a bright fixed star, while other leaders and teachers can only circle round him, at a great distance, with nothing like his glory or his permanence. Calvin's fame is eternal because of the truth he proclaimed; and even in heaven, although we shall lose the name of the system of doctrine which he taught, it shall be that truth which shall make us strike our golden harps, and sing: *'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory for ever and ever.'* For the essence of Calvinism is that we are born again, 'not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'"

— C H Spurgeon

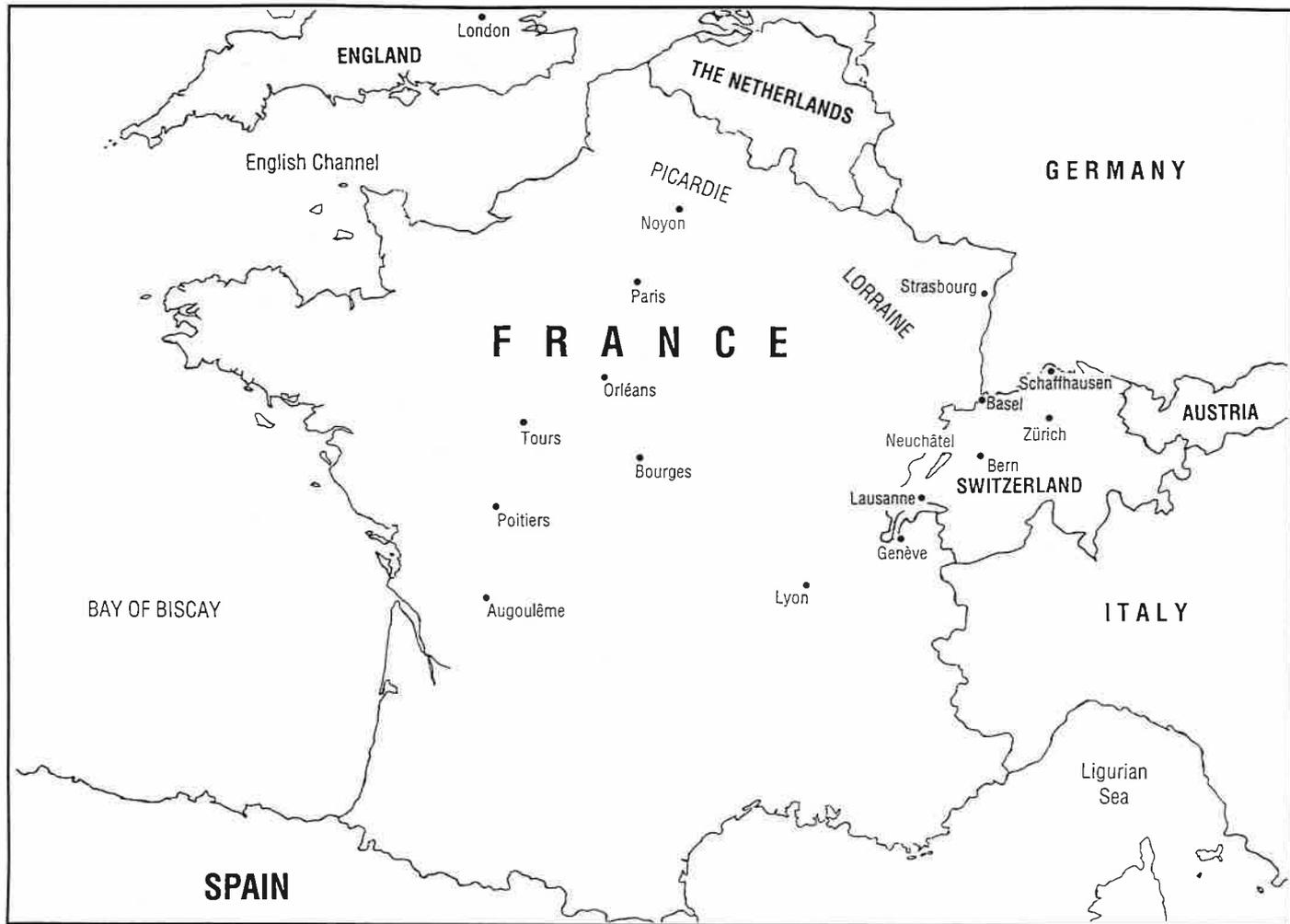
"What labors, what long walking hours, what worries he bore; . . . with what faithfulness and intelligence he took an interest in everyone; with what kindness and good will he received those who turned to him; with what rapidity and openness he answered those who questioned him on the most serious of questions; with what wisdom he received, both privately and publicly, the difficulties and problems brought to him; with what gentleness he comforted the afflicted, raised those who were laid low and discouraged; with what firmness he resisted the enemy; with what zeal he brought low the proud and stubborn; with what greatness of soul he endured misfortune; with what moderation he behaved in prosperity; with what skill and enthusiasm, finally, he acquitted himself of all the duties of a true and faithful servant of God, words of mine could never express."

— Nicolas des Gallars,  
a member of Calvin's pastoral team

## HIGHLIGHTS OF CALVIN'S *Life...*

**1509** Calvin was born in Noyon, France on July 10. **1523** Fourteen year-old Calvin goes to Paris to study. **1528-29** Calvin goes to Orleans and then Bourges to study law. **1531** Calvin's Father dies. **1532** He publishes his first work—a commentary on Seneca's De Clementia. **1533** Calvin and Nicolas Cop flee Paris. At about this time Calvin undergoes a "sudden conversion." **1534** Calvin visits Lefevre D'Etapes and resigns his two benefices. **1536** In March, first edition of his Institutes of the Christian Religion is published. **1536** In August, Calvin is persuaded by Farel to remain in Geneva. **1538** Calvin and Farel are banished from Geneva. Calvin goes to Strasbourg as pastor to the French-speaking congregation. **1539** Cardinal Sadeleto writes letter to Geneva. Calvin is asked to respond on behalf of Geneva. **1540** Calvin's Commentary on Romans is published. In August, Calvin marries the widow of an Anabaptist, Idelette de Bure. **1541** Calvin is welcomed back to Geneva September 13. **1542** Calvin writes a treatise on free will against the Roman Catholic theologian Albert Pighius. **1549** Calvin's wife, Idelette, dies. Consensus Tigurinus is signed with Zurich. **1552** Jerome Bolsec banished from Geneva. **1553** Servetus is burned at the stake for heresy. **1559** Calvin is made a citizen of Geneva. Final edition of Institutes is published. Academy is established. **1564** Calvin dies on May 27.

— CHRISTIAN HISTORY VOL 5, NO. 4



ENGLAND

London

English Channel

THE NETHERLANDS

GERMANY

PICARDIE

Noyon

Paris

FRANCE

LORRAINE

Strasbourg

Orléans

Schaffhausen

AUSTRIA

Tours

Basel

Zürich

Bourges

Neuchâtel

Bern

SWITZERLAND

Poitiers

Lausanne

Genève

BAY OF BISCAIY

Augoulême

Lyon

ITALY

Ligurian Sea

SPAIN

## A Glimpse of The Life and Works of John Calvin

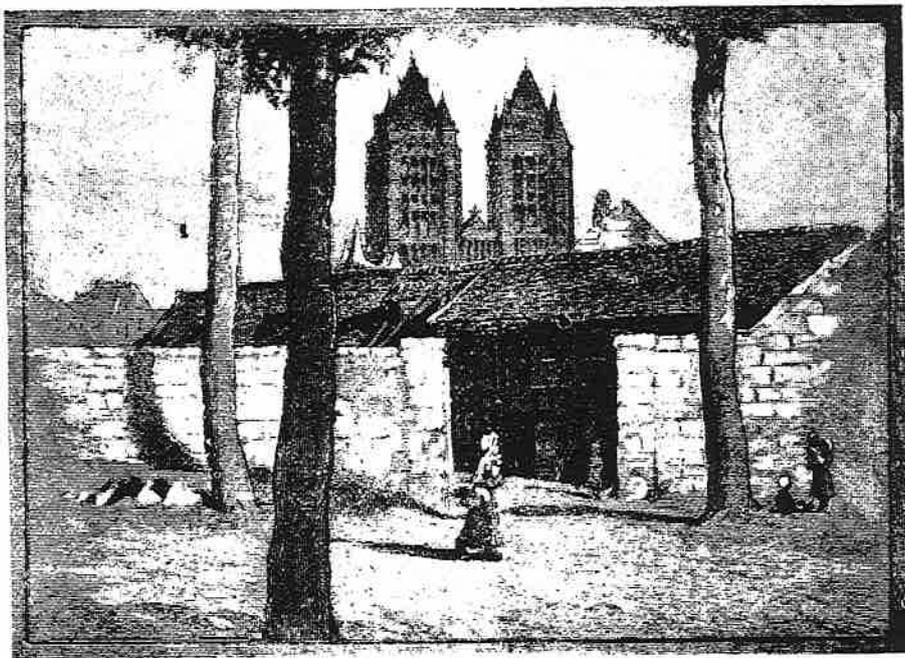
---

### His Birth and Education

John Calvin was born 25 years after Luther and Zwingli on July 10, 1509 at Noyon, Picardy, a province of Northern France. His father, Gerard Chauvin (Calvin is Latinised form) was secretary to the Bishop. As Gerard was of limited means to educate his son, whom he wished would serve in the Church, he sought from his Bishop the chaplaincy of a small church when John was twelve years of age. This became a source of income to pay for his education. In those days, it was common practice to bestow titles on mere children. For example, one was made a cardinal at eight years of age and another at eleven by Pope Clement VII (1523). Do we call this ecclesiastical nepotism?

The youth had been in possession of his chaplaincy for two years when a terrible plague broke out over his township. Many priests fled from their duties. Gerard Chauvin obtained permission for his son to leave the district "to go whither his mind should lead without loss of his emoluments". Young Calvin, now 14, headed south for Paris, where he studied Latin and the classics at the College de la Marche. In 1526, at 17, Calvin entered the College de Montaigu to train for the priesthood. He excelled all others in his studies by adhering to a strict discipline of keeping up with the lessons he learnt each day and committing them to memory.

During the days of Calvin's sojourn in Paris a "new" wind of doctrine was blowing — the Reformation set in motion by Luther. Preachers of the Protestant faith, Lefevre and Farel were an influence upon the young life. About this time Calvin's father changed his mind on his son's education from the study of theology to the study of law. And it was some years after this new turn at the crossroads of life that young Calvin was thoroughly converted from the old faith. Here is the testimony of his coming out of Roman darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel.



*THE CATHEDRAL TOWERS, NOYON, FRANCE*



*Calvin's house in Noyon*

## **Testimony of His Conversion -- When?**

When I was yet a very little boy my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterwards, when he considered that the legal profession 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 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 of guidance of His providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitious popery to be easily extricated from so profound a depth 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 me at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of the 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 a desire after purer doctrine were continually coming to me to learn, although I myself was yet but a mere novice and tyro.

### **From Theology to Law**

From Paris Calvin had gone south to Orleans to study law. He was so keen a law student that "at the end of one year he was no longer considered a scholar, but a teacher." He was more than once asked to supply his master's place. He received the Bachelor of Laws from the University in 1531. On leaving his alma mater he was conferred the Doctor of Laws without paying the usual fees as a mark of honour.

### **From Law to Greek**

From Orleans Calvin went on to Bourges to sit at the feet of Alciati, a jurist of repute at Milan now appointed to the University



*Young Calvin expounding the Bible  
to a family at Bourges.*



*The Calvin grotto as it appears today  
near Poitiers, France. Here Calvin secretly  
organized his first Lord's Supper as  
depicted below.*



by the French King. While studying in Bourges, Calvin met Melchior Wolmar, professor of Greek. On the Greek Testament his teacher remarked, "In this book is the answer to every problem, the remedy for every abuse, the rest of every heavy laden soul." Calvin learned his Greek, but more so the Word of Life.

It was under the influence of Wolmar while at Bourges that Calvin began to declare the Gospel. He preached in the surrounding villages, and from house to house. All were attracted by the young preacher of the "new" doctrine. While busily preaching this "new" doctrine at Bourges, he received word of the death of his father. This obliged him to return north via Paris. Passing through Paris, however, the young Reformer was to witness the martyrdom of one of the noblest sons of France at the hands of the Romanists — Louis de Berquin. It was a further lesson he learned in the school of truth.

As God had a job for him to do in the Metropolis, he soon left his native place to enter the arena where the winds of the "old" and "new" doctrines blew in daily conflict. He found his abode in the house of a merchant who was an ardent lover of the truth. He made this house his preaching station.

### Calvin's First Book

In 1532 Calvin published his first book, a commentary, in beautiful Latin, on Seneca's "De Clementia" which catapulted him into fame. Readers of his commentary on Seneca would surely be drawn to read his commentaries on Books of the Bible in days to come.

The spread of the "new" doctrine in the national capital did not last for long. A storm that had been brewing suddenly burst over Calvin's head. Nicholas Cop, the Rector of the University, had to deliver an inaugural address on All Saints Day, Nov 1, 1533. This oration, at the request of the Rector, was written by Calvin. It was a plea for the Reformation and an attack on the abuses of the old system. The Sorbonne regarded this to be directed at the Catholic Church. Action was immediately taken to arrest the culprits. Being



*Berquin was led forth to die for the faith of the Gospel*

forewarned, Cop had fled to his father's abode in Basel. Calvin the "ghost writer" escaped through a window, like the apostle Paul (II Cor 11:33). Disguising himself as a vinedresser he slipped out of Paris, while his rooms were being searched.

### A Fugitive for the Gospel

A fugitive for the Gospel's sake, the Reformer headed for Orleans. After wandering for weeks through Tours he finally arrived in Angouleme. He found refuge in the mansion of Louis Du Tillet, canon of the cathedral and a wealthy man. He had a library of four thousand volumes which became the daily enjoyment of the scholar.

It was at Angouleme in the library of Du Tillet that Calvin began the layout of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. According to Philip Schaff, he also aided Olivetan (his cousin) in the revision and completion of the French translation of the Bible, which appeared at Neuchatel in June 1535.

While at Angouleme Calvin ventured out to visit LeFevre at Nerac, the veteran preacher he had heard in Paris. The old man took his young brother by the hand and exclaimed, "Young man, you will one day be a powerful instrument in the Lord's hand. God will make use of you to restore the kingdom of heaven in France."

After six months of much needed rest at Angouleme, Calvin retraced his steps northwards to Poitiers. Here he gathered a congregation of willing hearers including the chief magistrate. They met at first in a garden, but afterwards in a cave in the rocks near a river for greater safety, like what underground churches in China are doing today. The cave became known as Calvin's Grotto to this day.

After a short stay of two months at Poitiers Calvin boldly returned to Paris via Orleans. It was his desire to witness for the Lord there, but God had a higher plan for him. Sensing the approach of another tempest of persecution Calvin changed course to go to Germany. Accompanied by Du Tillet, he left Paris. The two

comrades arrived safely in Strasburg. Had they remained for a few weeks longer they would have suffered martyrdom at the hands of the servants of Francis I, for the king was highly incensed against some radical Protestants who put up placards even on the door of his chamber to denounce him.

### Interview with Erasmus at Basel

Although Calvin and Du Tillet had arrived safely in Strasburg they found no warm welcome or opening. After a few months they moved on to Basel, gateway to Switzerland. It was at Basel that Calvin met with Erasmus. Erasmus had contributed immensely to the Reformation cause by publication of the New Testament, but he was a scholar, not a reformer. Calvin did not find common ground with him.

In Basel Calvin hoped to seek the seclusion he so much longed for. He found a room in the house of Catherine Klein, a lover of God who gave shelter to many a servant of the Lord on the run. It was in her house that Calvin produced the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

### *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536*

While it was earlier stated that in Du Tillet's library at Angouleme Calvin made a layout of the *Institutes*, it is safer to conclude that the great work had its birth in Basel. In his Preface to the Psalms this is what we learn of his state at that time:

Whilst I lay hidden in Basel, and known only to a few people, many faithful and holy persons were burned 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 erroneous and seditious persons, who, by their perverse ravings and false opinions, were overthrowing not only

# CHRISTIA

NAE RELIGIONIS INSTI-  
tutio, totam ferè pietatis summam, & quic-  
quid est in doctrina salutis cognitu ne-  
cessarium, complectens: omnibus pie-  
tatis studiosis lectu digniss-  
imum opus, ac re-  
cens editum.

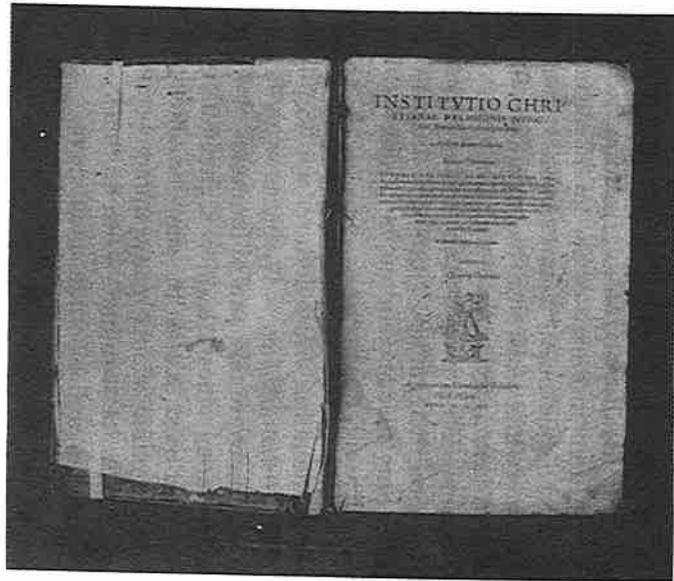
PRAEFATIO AD CHRI-  
stianissimum REGEM FRANCIAE, qua  
hic ei liber pro confessione fidei  
offeruit.

IOANNE CALVINO  
Noviodunensi auctore.

BASILEAE,  
M. D. XXXVI.

*D. Massise Limpasgio Pius  
amis Ioan. Opimus  
D. D.*

Title Page of the First Edition of Calvin's  
Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536)



Calvin's *Institutes* appeared in 1536 when Calvin was in his twenty-seventh year. The work was subsequently enlarged and revised. It is regarded as "the clearest and most comprehensive statement of the Reformed faith produced during the Reformation," and is still a standard Protestant book.

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 persons, 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 appears from this, that immediately after I left Basel; 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.

### Final Edition, 1559

The publication of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in Basel 1536 went through several editions. When it first saw light it consisted of only six chapters. Calvin kept on enlarging it until it grew to 80 chapters in four books in 1559.

Comments Philip Schaff in his History of the Christian Church, Vol VIII, pp 329-330:

The Evangelicals greeted the *Institutio* at once with enthusiastic praise as the clearest, strongest, most logical, and most convincing defence of Christian doctrines since the days of the apostles. A few weeks after its publication Bucer wrote to the author: "It is inevitable that the Lord has elected you as his organ for the bestowment of the richest fulness of blessing to his Church."

Nor is this admiration confined to orthodox Protestants. Dr Baur, the founder of the Tübingen school of historical critics, declares this book of Calvin to be "in every respect a truly classical work, distinguished in a high degree by originality and acuteness of conception, systematic consistency, and clear, luminous method." And Dr Hase pointedly calls it "the grandest scientific justification of Augustinianism, full of religious depth with inexorable consistency of thought."

The *Institutio* is not a book for the people, and has not the rousing power which Luther's Appeal to the German Nobility, and his tract on Christian Freedom exerted upon the Germans; but it is a book for scholars of all nations, and had a deeper and more lasting effect upon them than any work of the Reformers. Edition followed edition, and translations were made into nearly all the languages of Europe.

Calvin gives a systematic exposition of the Christian religion in general, and a vindication of the evangelical faith in particular, with the apologetic and practical aim of defending the Protestant believers against calumny and persecution to which they were then exposed, especially in France. He writes under the inspiration of a heroic faith that is ready for the stake, and with a glowing enthusiasm for the pure Gospel of Christ, which had been obscured and deprived of its effect by human traditions, but had now risen from this rubbish to new life and power. He combines dogmatics and ethics in organic unity.

He plants himself firmly on the immovable rock of the Word of God, as the only safe guide in matters of faith and duty. He exhibits on every page a thorough, well-digested

knowledge of Scripture which is truly astonishing. He does not simply quote from it as a body of proof texts, in a mechanical way, like the scholastic dogmaticians of the seventeenth century, but he views it as an organic whole, and weaves it into his system. He bases the authority of Scripture on its intrinsic excellency and the testimony of the Holy Spirit speaking through it to the believer....

Calvin's faith in Scripture as God's infallible and inerrant Word to man is absolute. He declares that when the Scriptures are read aloud they are as it were God speaking audibly from heaven to us on earth.

---

### Institutes Abridged in Singapore

*Author's note : Insofar as this speaker is concerned this is my testimony to the power of the truths expounded in the Institutes that gripped my soul when I first came to study it as a student at Faith Seminary (1948). Reading in Calvin's Institutes was an elective of two hours under the tutelage of Dr John Sanderson. The doctrine of God's sovereignty and the certainty of man's salvation by God's grace alone so thrilled my heart that during the summer vacation that followed, I read the whole of the Four Books of 80 chapters by myself with the help of Chambers Dictionary for the profound words he used that contained profounder meanings of the Truth. (Chambers Dictionary is the best for theological terms)*

*When I began to teach at Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore (1962) I had the first two books abridged for the sake of my students. Today I have completed the abridgement of the remaining two books which should lead to the publication of the four books in one volume in the nearest future.*

---

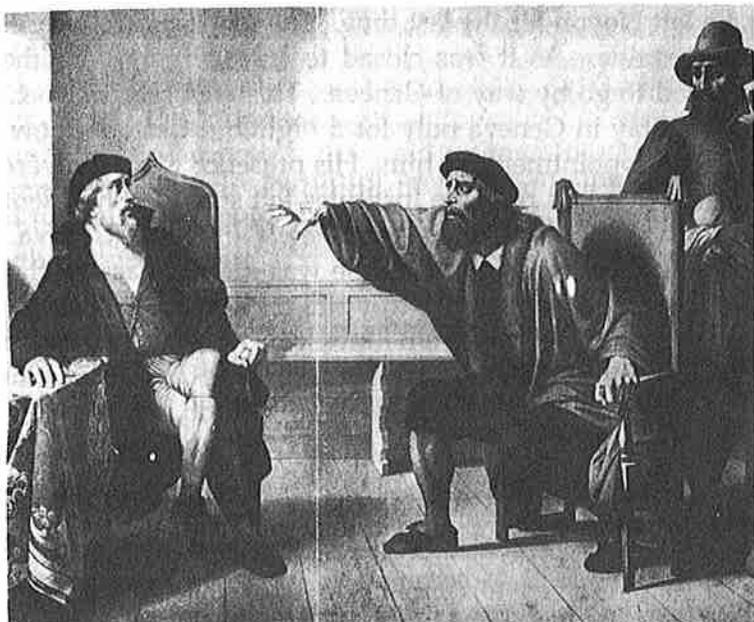
### The Greatest Turning Point in Calvin's Life

Shortly after the publication of the Institutes, in March 1536 Calvin crossed the Alps to Italy in the company of Du Tillet. He went as an evangelist. He spent a few months in Ferrara where persecuted Protestants could find refuge with the duchess Renee. From Italy he returned to Noyon at the news of the death of his

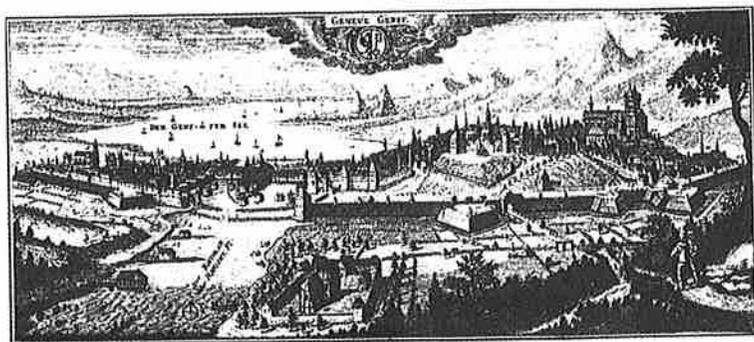
brother Charles. After settling his family matters, where was he to go now? Remembering Basel, with his brother Antoine and sister Maria, he left Noyon for the last time. The usual route to Basel was through Lorraine. As it was closed to travellers by war, the trio were obliged to go by way of Geneva. This was July 1536. Calvin intended to stay in Geneva only for a night, but did not know God had a higher appointment for him. His presence was discovered by Farel. Farel who had read the Institutes felt sure God had sent him to help in the Reformation Cause in newly liberated Geneva. But Calvin gave many an excuse, that he was merely passing through the city, that he wished rather to write than to preach, he needed rest, etc, etc. Farel could restrain himself no longer. Rising from his seat, and placing his hand on Calvin's head, he looked at him and said, "God curse your rest, your studies, if you do not help us in this hour of greatest need."

Calvin writes of this event in the Preface to the Psalms, which tells of this greatest turning point in his whole life:

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.... Then an individual who now basely apostatised and returned to the papists [Caroli is meant] 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 tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent.



*Calvin struck by imprecation of Farel*



*An Old View of Geneva*

Like the Apostle Paul desiring to proceed to Bithynia and Asia during his Second Missionary Journey but was turned to Troas and from thence, hearing the Macedonian call, entered Europe, so we see Calvin shunted to a lifetime's work in Switzerland by what we would call the "cooperative" will of God. A scholar is now to play the role of a reformer. "Man proposes, God disposes."

### Reformation Work with Farel in Geneva

Calvin settled down to the work God had appointed him by working together with Farel and other Reformed pastors. Though Protestantism had won the day against the corrupt system of Romanism there was plenty to do to reform the morals of the City. The people of Geneva were a light-hearted crowd where all sorts of vices abounded. Prostitution was sanctioned by the authority of the State. The priests never instructed the laity, themselves setting a bad example.

Calvin launched out against all these vices by preaching, teaching and pastoring. His eloquence attracted many hearers. To further remedy the evils a Confession of Faith and Discipline and a Catechism was prepared. These were sanctioned by the City Council in November 1536.

Besides the Confession and Catechism, the pastors presented to the Council a recommendation of holding the Lord's Supper once a month, the singing of Psalms, regular instruction of youth, abolition of papal marriage laws, maintenance of public order and the exclusion of unworthy communicants. In January 1537 the Great Council of Two Hundred issued orders against all these malpractices but the matter of excommunication was not mentioned.

In July 1537 the Council of Two Hundred required all citizens to assent to the Confession of Faith in the Church of St. Peter. In November the Council even declared that all who would not take the oath of abiding by the order be banished. Here was the Church governing the State, like the theocracy of Old Testament times.



*Interior of St. Peter's Cathedral*  
In the foreground is Calvin's chair.



*St. Peter's Cathedral as It Appears Today*

The submission of the Genevese to such a severe system of moral discipline did not last long. There was another source of dissatisfaction that brought the crisis to a head. Before Calvin came, Farel had abolished all holidays except Sunday, the baptismal fonts and the unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper all of which were retained and practised in Berne.

Worldly men who desired to live as they pleased, called Libertines, challenged the authorities. This put the pastors into a tight spot, but they stood firm. They continued to denounce the sins of the people and censured the Council for not punishing the unruly. Calvin even denounced the Council as the Devil's Council.

On Easter Sunday he ascended the pulpit of St. Peter's but declared he could not administer the Lord's Supper to the rebellious city lest the sacrament be desecrated. Many who came with swords were ready to strike and shouted down the preaching. This obliged Calvin to leave the Church under the escort of his supporters.

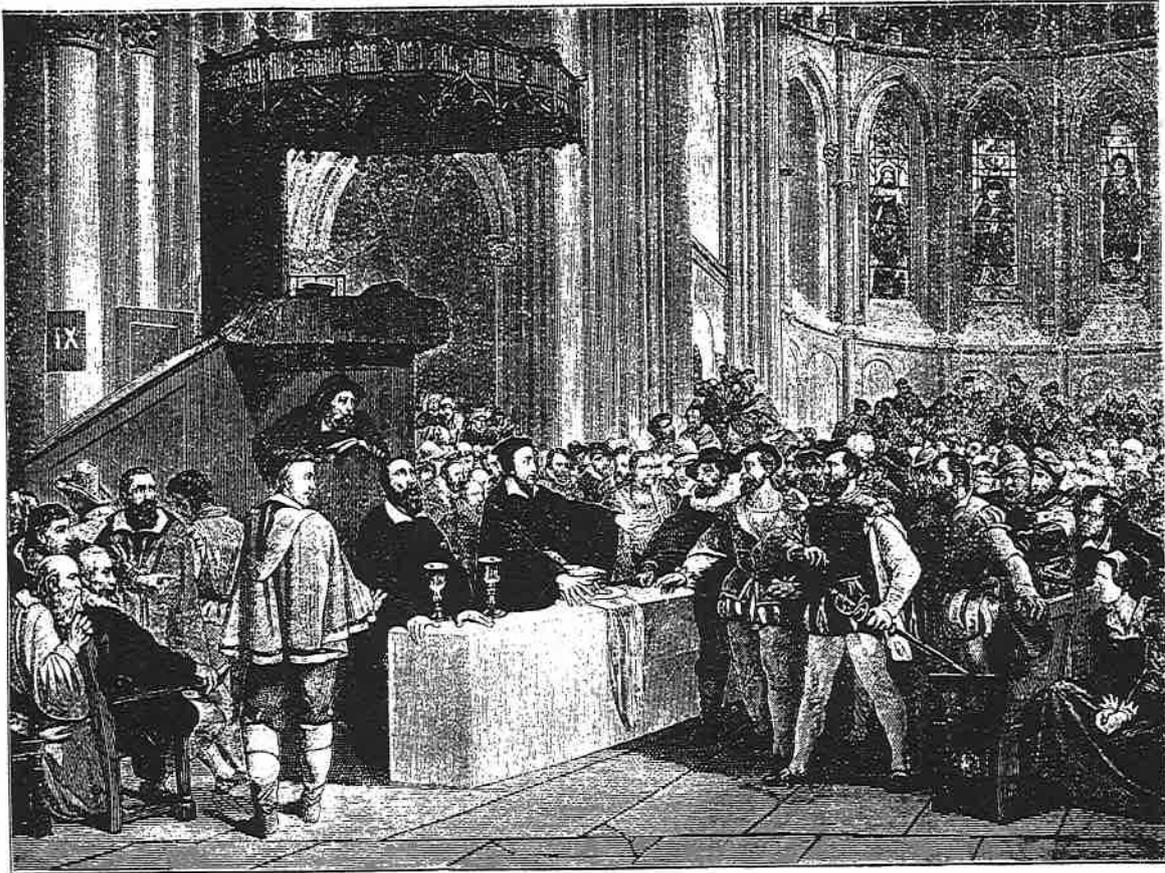
### **Reformers Became Refugees**

The Council of Two Hundred met the next two days and deposed both Calvin and Farel without a trial, ordering them to depart the City in three days' time. Replied Calvin to their oppression, "Very well, it is better to serve God than man. If we sought to please men, we should have been badly rewarded, but we serve a higher Master, who will not withhold from us reward."

The exiled ministers left on horseback in stormy weather to Basel. In the torrential rains they were almost swept by the current while crossing a stream. But the warm reception in Basel lifted their hearts. Farel received a call from Neuchatel his former pastorate. Calvin went on to Strasburg.

In a letter to Farel hereafter, Calvin testified to his bosom friend the resoluteness of his consecration in the Lord's service:

Although Geneva was a troublesome province to me, the thought of deserting it never entered my mind. For I considered myself placed in the position of God, like a sentry



*Calvin refusing the Lord's Supper to the Libertines*

at his post from which it would be impiety on my part were I to move a single step. Yet I think you would hardly believe me were I to relate for you even a small part of those annoyances, nay miseries, which we had to endure for a whole year. This I can truly testify that not a day passed in which I did not long for death ten times over. But as for leaving that Church to remove elsewhere such a thought never came into my mind.

Truly, Calvin was a devout minister whom God had raised for Himself, like Paul the apostle, and he could sing, *"Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us"* (Romans 8:37).

### Three Happiest Years in Strasburg

*"For His anger endureth but a moment: in His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning"* (Ps. 30:5). Geneva was the night of weeping, but Strasburg the joy in the morning. The next period in Strasburg was one of the happiest in Calvin's life.

Now Strasburg was a free imperial city of Germany since the 13th century. It is situated a few miles west of the Upper Rhine, forming a connecting link between Germany, France and Switzerland, and on the spiritual plane, between Lutheranism and Zwinglianism. It became a City of Refuge for thousands of persecuted Protestants, particularly from France, who called it the New Jerusalem. The citizens had received the Reformation in 1523. Called also the Wittenburg of South-western Germany where the Reformers of the two leading types of Protestantism laboured together in harmony, it was allied to Geneva and Zurich.

Calvin received an earnest invitation from Bucer and Capito, Protestant pastors of Strasburg, to labour among them. According to the Lord's injunction that when they persecute you in one city you should flee to another, Calvin decided to go. He arrived in Strasburg in September 1538 and stayed there exactly three years.

He was appointed professor of theology by the Town Council. Here he lectured daily to the students from Romans and the Gospel of John as the basis of his teaching. He preached in the Dominican Church four times a week on top of his pastoral ministry. He preached twice on Sunday. He was contented to receive a small salary from the Senate, but remained "two sleeves of empty breezes" as the Chinese saying goes. Settling in, he bought his citizenship the next year. By coming to Strasburg his views were extended as he gained new experience. He rubbed shoulders now with the Lutheran Church leaders, and learned to appreciate them, though he was unimpressed by their lack of discipline and too much dependence on the princes.

Calvin's "little French Church" numbered between four and five hundred. He made it a disciplined Church and had greater success here than in Geneva. "No house," he says, "no society, can exist without order and discipline, much less the Church." He trained deacons to assist him in his pastoral ministry that they might care for the poor, according to the apostolic injunction (Gal. 2:10). He converted many Anabaptists who yielded to having their infants baptised. His "little" Church prospered and gained the respect of the Strasburg citizens.

No sooner was Calvin departed from Geneva than there entered in the flock a grievous wolf (Acts 20:29) in the form of Cardinal Sadolet. "Sadolet was a man of great eloquence, but he perverted it chiefly in suppressing the light of truth. He had been appointed a cardinal for no other reason than in order that his moral respectability might serve as a gloss on false religion. Observing his opportunity in the circumstances which had occurred, and thinking he would easily ensnare the flock when deprived of its distinguished pastors, he sent...a letter to his so-styled 'most Beloved Senate, Council, and people of Geneva', omitting nothing which might tend to bring them both into the lap of the Romish Harlot. (Says one commentator, "This letter was as craftily worded as if it had been penned by a fox.) There was nobody at that time in Geneva capable of writing an answer.... But Calvin having read it at Strasburg, forgot all his injuries, and forthwith answered with so

much eloquence that Sadolet immediately gave up the whole affair as desperate." (Philip Schaff).

Sadolet's tactic of winning Geneva back to the Roman fold was first to praise their noble city, the order and form of their republic, the hospitality of their citizens to foreigners and strangers, but he cast suspicion on the character and motives of the Reformers. He admitted that man is saved by faith alone but reasoned the need of good works to back up that faith. He then asked the Genevese whether it be more expedient for their salvation to remain in the Catholic Church that had a continuous history of fifteen hundred years or be led astray by splintered Protestant leaders that had arisen the last twenty-five years?

Calvin answered Sadolet not with subtle arguments, but with the Word of God point after point. The testimony of his being kept in the dark labyrinths of Romish upbringing that thwarted for years his search for the light and freedom of the Gospel is given in full in Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VIII, p. 409. It demolishes all arguments for anyone who is released by the Gospel light to return to the dark labyrinths of the Roman fold. Interestingly, this is the only instance where the reticent scholar lifts the veil on his struggling soul before conversion. It is a happy connection from Strasburg that this personal testimony of his is revealed. He testifies:

I, O Lord, always professed the same Christian faith in which I had been brought up as a boy. But at first I had no other reason for my faith than that which was then everywhere prevalent. Thy Word, which ought to have shone on all Thy people like a lamp, was taken away, or at least was hidden from us. And in case anyone should long for greater light an idea had been instilled in everyone's mind that the investigation of that hidden heavenly philosophy was better in the hands of a few whom the others might consult as oracles, and that the highest knowledge fit for plebeian minds was to subdue themselves to obedience to the Church. Again, the elements in which I had been instructed were such as could neither properly train me to the right and true worship of Thy divine majesty, nor pave the way for me to a sure hope of

salvation nor train me aright for the duties of the Christian life. I had indeed learned to worship Thee alone as my God; but since the true reason of worshipping was altogether unknown to me, I stumbled at the very threshold. I believed, as I had been taught, that I was redeemed by the death of Thy Son from condemnation to eternal death, but the redemption I envisaged was one whose efficacy could never reach to me. I looked for a future resurrection, but hated to think of it, as being an event most terrible. And this was not simply my own personal feeling, but was genuinely derived from the doctrine which was then uniformly preached to the people by their Christian teachers. They certainly preached of Thy mercy towards men, but confined it to those who could show that they deserved it. What is more, they placed this deserving in the righteousness of works, so that he alone was received into Thy favour who reconciled himself to Thee by works. Yet they did not disguise the fact that we are miserable sinners, that we often fall through the weakness of the flesh, and that to all, therefore, Thy mercy must be a haven of salvation. But the way to obtain it, according to them, was by making satisfaction to Thee for our offences. Then, again, the satisfaction they enjoined was, first, after confessing all our sins to a priest, humbly to ask for pardon and absolution; and secondly, to wipe out our bad actions from Thy remembrance by doing good deeds. Lastly, to supply what was still wanting, we were to add sacrifices and solemn expiations. Moreover, because Thou art a stern judge and a severe avenger of iniquity, they showed us how dreadful Thy presence must be. Therefore they bid us flee first of all to the saints, that by their intercession Thou mightest be won over and made friendly towards us.

But even when I had done all these things, though I had some periods of quiet, I was still a long way from true peace of conscience; for whenever I descended into my soul or raised my mind up to Thee, extreme terror seized me, such terror as no expiations or satisfactions could cure. And the more closely I examined myself, the sharper the stings with which my conscience was pricked, so that the only solace left to me was to delude myself by trying to forget it all. However, as

nothing better offered, I continued on the path I had already begun.

But then a very different form of teaching arose; not one that led us away from the Christian profession, but one which brought us back to its fountainhead, and by, as it were, clearing away the dross, restored it to its original purity. Offended by the novelty, I lent an unwilling ear, and at first, I confess, strenuously and passionately resisted it; for — such is the firmness or wilfulness with which men naturally persist in the course they have once undertaken — it was with the greatest difficulty that I was brought to confess that I had all my life been in error. One thing in particular made me averse to those new teachers; and that was reverence for the Church.... At last, my mind being prepared to give the matter serious attention, I saw — just as if light had broken in upon me — in what a pigsty of error I had wallowed, and how polluted and impure I had become. With great fear and trembling at the misery into which I had fallen, and far more at that which threatened me in the prospect of eternal death, I could do no other than at once betake myself to Thy way, condemning my past life, not without groans and tears.

Dear Reader, are you also seeking to be saved by trying to please an angry God with your good works? Romanists are like Buddhists trying to earn merits in order to enter heaven. This is where the rediscovery of Martin Luther comes in, *"The just shall live by faith"* (Rom. 1:17) and Calvin's greater assurance, *"Salvation is of the Lord"* (Jonah 2:9). *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercies He saved us...."* (Titus 3:5). Amen.

Calvin's reply spread far and wide, a copy of which reached Luther in Wittenburg. Said Luther to his friends, "Here is a writing which has hands and feet. I rejoice that God raises such men. They will continue what I have begun against Antichrist, and by the help of God they will complete it."

It is a pity that Calvin and Luther never met face to face. Nevertheless, in one of his letters to the Senior Reformer, Calvin pined, "O, if I could fly towards thee and enjoy thy society, if only for a few hours!" There had been a controversy about the meaning

of the Lord's Supper between Luther and Zwingli. Had Calvin been there could he have brought them closer together?

Nevertheless, Melancthon the Lutheran theologian and Luther's successor and Calvin, leader of the Reformed Faith, were on good terms. How genuine and moving Calvin's love for Melancthon was is reflected in what the former wrote upon the latter's death: "O Philip Melancthon — for it is thou whom I address — thou who livest at the hand of God with Christ, awaiting us on high till we are gathered with thee into blessed repose, a hundred times hast thou said to me when, wearied with toil and vexation, thou didst lean thy head upon my bosom. Would to God, would to God, that I might die upon that bosom! As for me, later, a hundred times have I wished that it had been granted us to be together. Certainly thou wouldst have been bolder to face struggles, more courageous to despise envy and calumny. Then also would have been suppressed the malignity of many whose audacity increased in proportion to what they called thy weak-minded fear."

Why was Melancthon so much missed by Calvin in his death? Because Calvin was his strong supporter and confidant in many a battle for the faith of the Gospel — debating on the side of Protestantism in many "Colloquies."

During Calvin's days in Strasburg, the emperor Charles V was anxious from political motives to bring together the Protestant princes to the Roman Church in order to muster their support against the Turks. Strasburg was called to the Conference which sent Calvin, Bucer, Capito and Sturm as her commissioners. The leader on the side of the Protestants was Melancthon. The aim of these Colloquies was to secure the reunion of the Church by mutual concessions on certain differences of doctrine and discipline.

Calvin, being a Frenchman and ignorant of the German language, played a subsidiary role. Nevertheless he could see more clearly than others, and soon earned the respect of either party. He was in fact quite tired of going to conference after conference which ended in futility. He went with Melancthon to Frankfurt, Worms and Regensburg. At Worms he wrote an epic poem of sixty-one

distichs (one hundred and twenty lines) which celebrates the triumph of Christ over His enemies (the Roman Party) just to kill time!

### Calvin Takes a Wife

A recluse of a scholar like Calvin was charged to be a cold-blooded lizard! Was he so insensitive to the affairs of the heart? Merle d'Aubigne, church historian, speaks more kindly of him, "There was in Calvin a lofty intellect, a sublime genius, but also that love of mankind, those affections of the heart, which complete the great man."

Says William J. Peterson in the "Christian History" magazine, Vol. V, No.4, "You don't look to the life of Calvin for humour, but Calvin's quest for a wife would make grist for a twentieth century situation comedy." We are sure his moving to Strasburg was the beginning of this quest, when he saw the light of marital bliss while visiting with his friends, Bucer and Melancthon. Moreover in his commentary on Ephesians 5:28-33 he observed, "It is a thing against nature that anyone should not love his wife, for God has ordained marriage in order that two may be made one person — a result which, certainly, no other alliance can bring about. When Moses says that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, he shows that a man ought to prefer marriage to every other union, as being the holiest of all. It reflects our union with Christ, who infuses his very life unto us, for we are flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bones. This is a great mystery, the dignity of which cannot be expressed in words."

Marriage is a mystery of mysteries. I have experienced and observed how it can come so easily as in love at first sight. The Biblical example is Boaz and Ruth. On the other hand, it can come with great difficulty or after much exertion of energy is made, as in the finding of a bride for Isaac (he was not married until forty years of age. Gen. 25:20).

When Calvin went looking for a wife, he did not like the first one offered to him, nor was he very pleased with the second. In a



IDELETTE  
*wife of John Calvin*



*Cardinal Sadoletto visits Calvin*

letter to Farel his bosom friend and senior colleague, he wrote, "Always keep in mind what I seek to find in her; for I am not one of those insane lovers who embrace even the vices of those they are in love with, when they are smitten at first sight with a fine figure. The only beauty which allures me is this — that she is chaste, not too nice or fastidious, economical, patient, and likely to take care of my health."

Now, when he stopped looking, he found her! "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing" (Eccles. 3:1,5). The lady of his choice, according to the ideals he disclosed to Farel, was Idelette de Bure, widow of Jean Stordeur (or Storder) a prominent Anabaptist whom he had converted. She had two children by her former husband. In one of his pastoral visits to the young widow, Calvin's heart was set aflame by the passivity of her modest, gentle character. She was the answer to his prayer for a life-partner of a firm faith, devout love and domestic helpfulness. He found in her "the excellent companion of my life, the ever-faithful assistant of my ministry and a rare woman." She was observed by Beza, Calvin's successor, to be "a grave and honourable lady."

*"For love is as strong as death... many waters cannot quench love"*  
(Song of Solomon 8:6,7)

Calvin lived happily with her, but not too long. During their nine years of marriage she gave birth to a son (1542) who lived but a fortnight. Although this struck them very hard, Calvin was yielded to His sovereign will. He said, "The Lord has dealt us a severe blow in taking from us our infant son; but it is our Father who knows what is best for his children." He found compensation rather in his spiritual children, "God has given me a little son, and taken him away; but I have myriads of children in the whole Christian world." May I echo to this bitter-sweet sentiment of Calvin, "Count me one of your sons — from Singapore!"

Soon death caught up with his wife. She was still in her thirties when sickness, probably tuberculosis, began wasting her

away. In August 1548 Calvin wrote of her inability to support herself. In 1549 when she had just turned forty she lay dying. In a letter to Viret his colleague in Geneva his love and esteem for Idelle, now departed, flourishes anew:

I have been bereaved of the best companion of my life of one who, had it been so ordered, would not only have been the willing sharer of my indigence, but even of my death. During her life she was the faithful helper of my ministry. From her I never experienced the slightest hindrance. She was never troublesome to me throughout the entire course of her illness; she was more anxious of her children than about herself. As I feared these private cares might annoy her to no purpose, I took occasion, on the third day before her death, to mention that I would not fail in discharging my duty to her children. Taking up the matter immediately, she said, 'I have already committed them to God.' When I said that that was not to prevent me from caring for them, she replied, 'I know you will not neglect what you know has been committed to God.' Lately, also, when a certain woman insisted that she should talk to me regarding these matters, I, for the first time, heard her give the following brief answer: 'Assuredly the principal thing is that they live a pious and holy life. My husband is not to be urged to instruct them in religious knowledge and in the fear of God. If they be pious, I am sure he will gladly be a father to them; but if not, they do not deserve that I should ask for aught in their behalf.' This nobleness of mind will weigh more with me than a hundred recommendations.

Calvin never looked again. He remained a widower to the rest of his life.

### Recall to Geneva

Since the expulsion of Farel and Calvin from Geneva things began to get from bad to worse. There was the Roman counter-attack through Cardinal Sadolet in a subtle pincer-movement to retake Geneva and there was no one to repel him. Fortunately, it was Calvin who came to their rescue, answering Sadolet from

Strasburg. He completely demolished all the arguments Sadolet had advanced to bring Geneva back into the Roman fold.

Realising Calvin was the one who could deliver Geneva from her moral chaos and civil disorders, the elders of the city pleaded with him to return. Three attempts were made to induce Calvin back but failed. Writing to his former colleague Viret, he said, "There is no place in the world I fear more: not because I hate it, but because I feel unequal to the difficulties which await me there." Geneva to him was an abyss, and much more now than 1536. Meanwhile, many private letters were written from Geneva pleading with him to return.

In a sincere reply to the City Council dated October 23, 1540, he wrote "I am in a singular perplexity; having the desire to meet your wish, and to wrestle with all the grace that God has given me to get her brought back into a better condition. On the other hand, I cannot slightly quit or lay down lightly the charge to which the Lord has called me, without being relieved of it by regular and lawful means. For so have I always believed and taught, and to the present movement cannot persuade myself to the contrary, that when our Lord appoints a man as pastor in a church to teach His Word, he ought to consider himself as engaged to take the government of it, so that he may not lightly withdraw from it, or without the settled testimony in his own heart, and the testimony of the faithful, that the Lord has discharged him."

At any rate Calvin was determined to obey God's will, so he wrote to Farel, "When I remember that in this matter I am not my own master, I present my heart as a sacrifice and offer it up to the Lord." Indeed there is that famous emblem of Calvin depicting a hand holding a heart as an offering to God, "*prompte et sincere in opere domini*," "promptly and sincerely in the work of the Lord." That is the characteristic of every true servant of God — not so much ability as availability.

Seventeen years later when he looked back to this critical period of his life, he said the same, "Although the welfare of that Church was so dear to me, that I could without difficulty sacrifice



*Calvin re-enters Geneva*

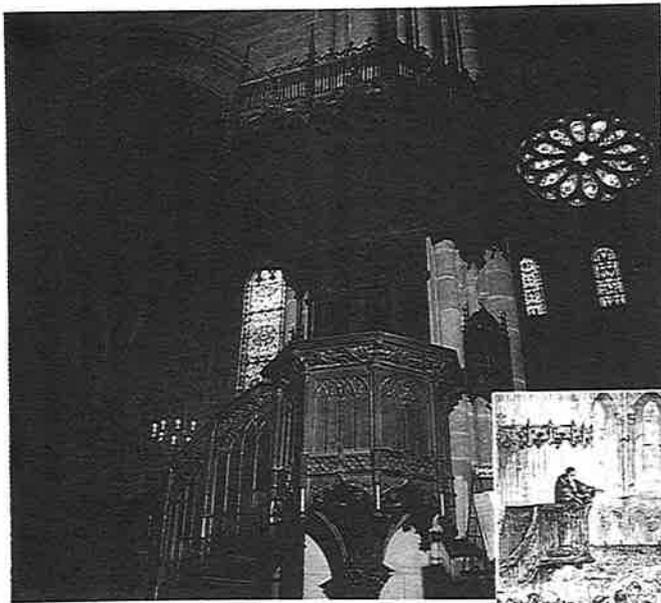
my life for it, yet my timidity presented to me many reasons of excuse for declining to take such a heavy burden on my shoulders. But the sense of duty prevailed, and led me to return to the flock from which I had been snatched away. I did this with sadness, tears and great anxiety and distress of mind, the Lord being my witness, and many pious persons who would gladly have spared me that pain, if not the same fear had shut their mouth."

The strong language Martin Bucer his friend in Strasburg had used comparing him to Jonah who must face the consequences of running from God finally induced him to return. On September 13, 1541 Calvin arrived back in Geneva. The first thing the Reformer did was to call the people to a service at the Cathedral to confess their sins.

### Second Reformation in Geneva

To bring Reformation to Geneva his formula was to make it a sort of Biblical Republic, combining church and state, as in Old Testament times, into one unit. Writing to Farel a few days after returning to Geneva he said, "Immediately I offered my services to the Senate, I declared that a church could not hold together unless a settled government should be agreed on, such as is prescribed to us in the Word of God, and such as was in use in the ancient church. I requested that they would appoint certain of their number who might confer with us on the subject. Six were then appointed." Calvin's proposals were adopted.

The church was to be governed by four orders: pastors, doctors, elders, deacons. This was the beginning of the Presbyterian system. The powers were vested in a "consistory" or "Session" comprising six ministers and twelve elders. The elders were elected year by year. The leaders were required to take the oath of allegiance to the state and fidelity to the Church. Geneva was to become a Church-State. Every citizen came under the rule not only of the State but also of the Church. Such a theocracy brought much confusion and resistance. The principles of government were not all of Calvin's. They were the principles adopted by all the pastors, not



*Calvin preaching in Geneva at St. Peter's Cathedral, above, as the pulpit is today.*



*John Calvin in his study*

only in Geneva but in Zurich, Berne and Basel. And these were voted by all the citizens.

These principles were sweet to the devout and law-abiding but bitter to the unconverted and unruly. The latter formed themselves into a party called 'Libertines'. These gave Calvin and the Church-State much trouble from time to time. Did not Calvin and Farel get banished from the same struggles for trying to maintain a pure Church many years back?

### Calvin and Servetus

The matter came to a head when a Spanish physician named Michael Servetus escaped from a death sentence passed upon him at Vienne for blasphemy to appear suddenly in Geneva. He had the backing of the Libertines out of spite. But Servetus did not realise he had got out of the frying pan of Vienne to land in the Geneva fire. He was arrested and imprisoned. He was tried and found guilty of blasphemy and denial of the Holy Trinity, and the eternal sonship of Christ. He was condemned to the stake to be burned.

There are many who put the blame of Servetus solely on Calvin. William Wileman having consulted forty writers on the death of Servetus by burning cannot put the sole blame on Calvin. Whether Calvin is to be solely blamed for Servetus' burning let the reader judge from Wileman's findings in his book *John Calvin, His Life, His Teaching and His Influence* as follows:

All these circumstances prove that his trial was lengthy, deliberate, and careful; and quite in harmony with the requirements of the age. All the Reformers who were consulted approved of the sentence that was pronounced.

At the last stage of the trial, the discussion lasted for three days. The "lesser Council" were unanimous; and the majority of the Great Council were in favour of capital punishment, and so decided on the last day. Sentence of death by fire was given on October 26th, to be carried into effect on the following day.



*Servetus and Calvin before the council of Geneva*



*Calvin insulted by Libertines*

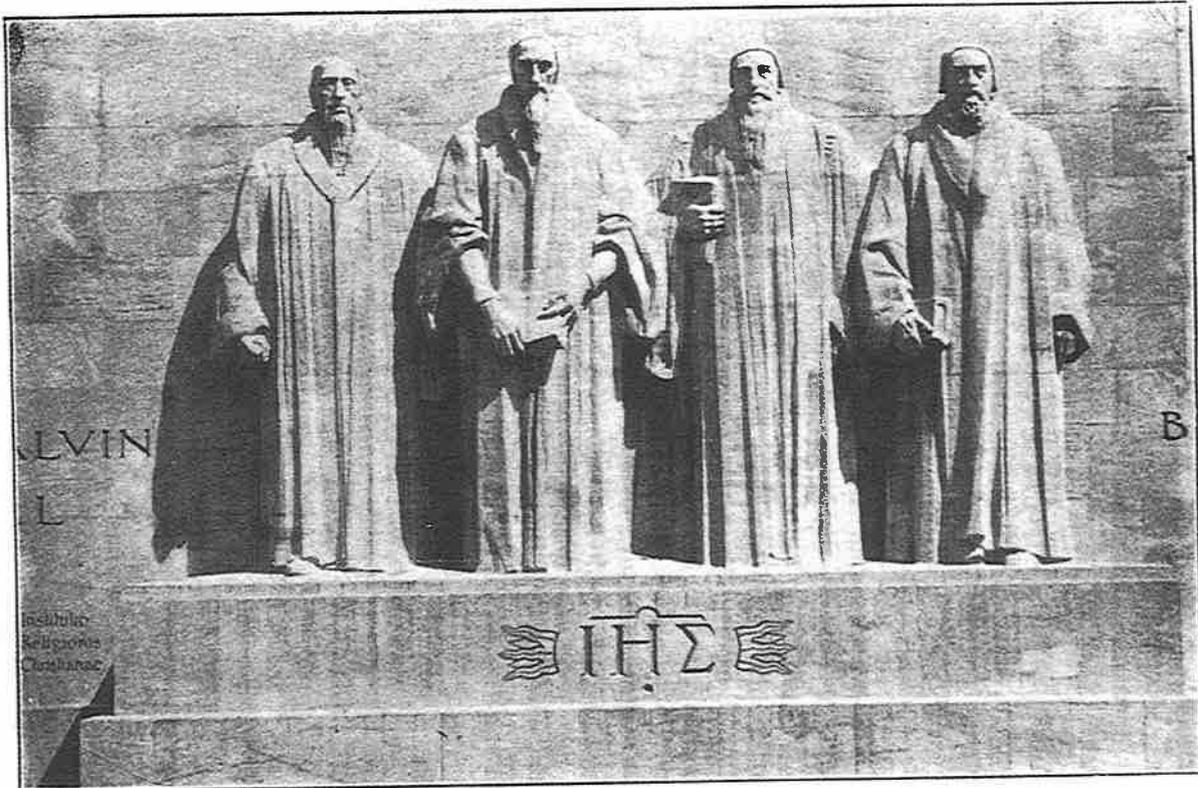
And now one man alone stands forth to plead for a mitigation of the sentence, namely, that another form of death be substituted for the stake. That one man was John Calvin. He interceded most earnestly with the judges for this, but in vain.

Both Farel, who came to Geneva for the purpose, and Calvin, prayed with the unhappy man, and expressed themselves tenderly towards him. Both of them pleaded with the Council for the substitution of a milder mode of death; but the syndics were inflexible.

The historian Paul Henry writes of this matter: "Calvin here appears in his real character; and a nearer consideration of the proceeding, examined from the point of view furnished by the age in which he lived, will completely exonerate him from all blame. His conduct was not determined by personal feeling; it was the consequence of a struggle which this great man had carried on for years against tendencies to a corruption of doctrine which threatened the church with ruin. Every age must be judged according to its prevailing laws; and Calvin cannot be fairly accused of any greater offence than that which we may be charged for punishing certain crimes with death."

The main facts therefore may now be summarised thus:

1. That Servetus was guilty of blasphemy, of a kind and degree which is still punishable here in England by imprisonment.
2. That his sentence was in accordance with the spirit of the age.
3. That he had been sentenced to the same punishment by the Inquisition at Vienne.
4. That the sentence was pronounced by the Councils of Geneva, Calvin having no power either to condemn or to save him.
5. That Calvin and others visited the unhappy man in his last hours, treated him with much kindness, and did all they could to have the sentence mitigated.



*The Central Panel of the Monument to the Reformation at Geneva*  
Left to right: Farel, Calvin, Beza, Knox.

Three hundred and fifty years after the death of Servetus, a "monument of expiation" was erected on the spot where he suffered death at Champel, near Geneva. It bears the date of October 27th, 1903; but the unveiling ceremony was postponed until November 1st.

On one side of this monument are recorded the birth and death of Servetus. On the front is this inscription: "Dutiful and grateful followers of Calvin our great Reformer, yet condemning an error which was that of his age, and strongly attached to liberty of conscience, according to the true principles of the Reformation and of the Gospel, we have erected this expiatory monument. October 27th, 1903."

Should the Roman Catholic Church desire to follow this example, and erect "monuments of expiation," let her first build one in Paris, and unveil it on August 24th. And doubtless sites would gladly be given for the same purpose in Oxford, Coventry, Maidstone, Lewes, and other places in England. And should Romanists desire the alteration or abrogation of any oath, instead of tampering with the Coronation Oath of Great Britain, let them first annul the oath taken by every bishop at his consecration that he will pursue heretics to the death. All persecution on account of religion and conscience is a violation of the spirit of the gospel, and repugnant to the principles of true liberty.

### **Academy of Geneva**

The judgment upon Servetus took place in 1553. It was a painful event, but it should be seen also in the light of the Law of Moses which prescribes death to the false prophet (Deut. 13, 18). It is of the Lord's grace that blasphemers are not so punished today.

The debate on Calvin's past may never end. The Church-State theocracy of Calvin's generation is a thing of the past. But the Academy founded by Calvin has borne sweet fruit for centuries.

Originally Calvin had hoped to establish a Christian University. As the little Republic could not sustain it, he confined himself to an Academy. For the founding of the Academy Calvin



*Calvin addressing the Council for the Last Time*

himself went from house to house to collect donations.

The Academy was dedicated on June 5, 1559 in the Church of St. Peter in the presence of the whole Council, the ministers and six hundred students. Dedicated to science and religion, ten able professors were assembled together with him, who taught grammar, logic, mathematics, physics, music and the ancient languages. Calvin, with his successor Beza concentrated on theology.

The Academy was an instant success. No less than nine hundred young men from almost all the nations of Europe were matriculated as regular scholars, and almost as many, mostly refugees from France and England sat at Calvin's feet. Among them was John Knox, later to become the Reformer of Scotland. Not only Knox, a stream of outstanding men in many fields of endeavour were to follow from Geneva into all parts of the European continent. What was the strength of the Academy Calvin founded? It lay in this motto engraved on that portico that supports the great staircase, on the keystone: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." This reflects Calvin's heart that he holds up to the Lord. Head knowledge without heart knowledge is a poisonous fruit.

### Calvin's Last Days

The incessant toils that kept Calvin going in teaching, preaching, writing, pastoring, governing, to no end slowly wore him down. He preached his last sermon on February 6, 1564. On this memorable occasion he did his best for his Lord even spitting blood. On April 25, 1564 Calvin made his will. All he had to dispose of amounted to 225 crowns. He ended his will thus:

I thank God that He has not only had mercy on His poor creature, having delivered me from the abyss of idolatry, but that He has brought me into the clear light of His gospel, and made me a partaker of the doctrine of salvation, of which I was altogether unworthy; yea, that His mercy and goodness have borne so tenderly with my numerous sins and offences, for which I deserve to be cast from Him and destroyed.

On Saturday evening, when twilight faded into night, May 27, 1564, Calvin gently slipped away with the last words, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be...." He left this world of sorrows forever as he was ushered into glory. Calvin was buried the next day which was the Lord's Day in an ordinary grave in the Plain-Palais Cemetery on the outskirts of the City. A stone about a foot square engraved with the letters J.C. identifies him from the rest. He had lived 54 years, 10 months and 17 days.

In 1950 when the International Council of Christian Churches was convened in Geneva at its Second World Congress, under the leadership of Dr McIntire we went to the cemetery where Calvin's body was buried to lay a wreath. I saw with my own eyes that stone with the initials, J.C., which reminded me of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whose name the Reformer of Geneva was surnamed. Which reminded me of our Saviour's word to the disciples, "But rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." After all this study of such a great life, we say hallelujah rather there's a name written in heaven called John Calvin. Is your name also written there?

---

## APPENDIX I

### KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

(Calvin's Introduction to the Highest knowledge  
in the first three chapters of his INSTITUTES - Abridged)

#### The Connection Between the Knowledge of God and Knowledge of Ourselves

1. True wisdom principally consists of two parts — the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves. Which of these two branches of knowledge comes first, it is hard to determine. They are intimately bound together. For, our very existence is nothing but a subsistence in God.

We begin to discover God when we are plunged into misery. Our poverty and woes, caused by Adam's sin, compel us to seek God's help. This is the first step towards knowing God. Our poverty, infirmity and depravity lead us to perceive and acknowledge that God is all strength, wisdom, goodness. Through our imperfections we are made to realise His perfections.

A self-complacent man, content with his own endowment but blind to his wretched conditions, does not aspire to God.

2. When we are self-satisfied in our own goodness by a natural proneness to hypocrisy, and compare ourselves with our neighbours, we tend to think ourselves holy and righteous. We judge ourselves by our own standards. Such judgment is as erroneous as by those who, being accustomed to seeing nothing but black, would call brown white. Such judgment is like the false confidence one has in one's eyes who is accustomed merely to an earthward vision until dazzled by the noonday sun. Thus, being satisfied with our own goodness, we flatter ourselves. We fancy we are demigods. A true vision of God and His perfections, however, casts us flat to the ground. We begin then to see our hypocritical righteousness and loathe it as the greatest iniquity.

The Bible consistently records the awe that overwhelms the souls of saints upon every discovery of God's presence. *"We shall die, because we have seen God"* (Judg. 13:22), *"I am but dust and ashes"* (Gen. 18:27), are some of the expressions of the patriarchs who saw God. Elijah *"wrapped his face in his mantle"* as he came into the presence of the Almighty.

In showing up man's pollution and impotence Job brings him to the presence of the Divine purity, power and wisdom.

Thus, we perceive man knows not his own meanness until he comes into God's majesty.

Not only man becomes humbled before God, the cherubim in holy awe veil their faces too. Isaiah, indeed puts down the whole universe under His feet — *"the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign."* (Isa. 6:2, 24:23).

In conclusion, we see that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are intimately connected. The proper order of instruction requires, however, to treat the subject of the knowledge of God first.

## **The Nature and Tendency of the Knowledge of God**

1. By the knowledge of God is not meant merely a notion that there is such a Being. The knowledge of God should tend to bring us into pious and religious communication with God. We perceive in such a relationship a two-fold knowledge — 1) of Him as Author of Salvation and Redeemer through the person of Jesus Christ; 2) of Him as Creator.

In this preliminary study we shall see what our knowledge of God as Creator results. As we discover Him to be not only Creator of the universe, but also its Provider and Governor with infinite power, wisdom and goodness, and that He rules over the affairs of men with righteousness and judgment, we should give Him our worship. This knowledge should tend to lead us into a life entirely dependent on Him — the fountain of all goodness. This knowledge

should tend to produce a life of constant communion with Him in supplication and thanksgiving. In short, we should have a reverential love of God arising from such a knowledge. For, till men come to such enlightened senses that they owe everything to God, in life and death, in great and small, they will not voluntarily serve Him.

2. Cold speculations merely on the essence of God without warm understanding of God's benign character, whatever they may be, are therefore refuted. For example, there is the doctrine of Epicurus of a God not concerned about the world who remains in a state of perpetual inactivity, as if He went to sleep. What benefit to mankind does such doctrine bring? Our knowledge of God should rather inspire fear and reverence, reliance upon His loving care with rendering of thanks and praise. Our knowledge of God should inspire a personal devotion and submission to His rule and authority. Our knowledge of God should lead us to revere Him as Judge, rewarding the pious and punishing the wicked. We should therefore restrain ourselves from sin, not merely from a dread of vengeance but rather from loving consecration. Because we love Him as our Father and Lord, even though there were no hell, we would shudder at the thought of offending Him. We fear not so much His hurting us as our hurting Him. We give Him, as a result of such enlightened knowledge, heart-worship which is that pure religion so hard to find. For, what we see mostly in worship is formality and great ostentation in ceremonies.

### **The Human Mind Naturally Endued with the Knowledge of God**

1. Without controversy, the human mind is naturally endued with the knowledge of God. According to Rom. 1:20 God the Creator has given to all some knowledge of His existence through the things He has made. Cicero observes there is no nation so barbarous, no race so savage, as not to be firmly persuaded of the being of God. Such knowledge should induce men to worship God and consecrate their lives to His service. Thus those who are

endued with such knowledge but do not serve Him are condemned by their own testimony!

That man is naturally endued with the knowledge of God is amply proved by the retention of some religious sense in the most barbarous who in other respects appear to differ little from brutes. That man is naturally endued with the knowledge of God is also amply proved by idolatry. Though a corrupted form of worship of the Deity, it nevertheless evinces a strong impression of the knowledge of God upon the human mind.

2. It is therefore a most absurd assertion that religion was the invention of a few cunning men, a political machine to confine the common people to their duty, while these inventors of religion disbelieved the existence of God. It is true that cunning men have introduced many inventions into religion to overawe the simple that they might control their minds. But such craftiness could not have been practised if the minds of men had not previously been possessed with a firm persuasion of the existence of God.

Under such circumstances it is incredible to say that the cunning minds who have used religion for their own ends are themselves devoid of any knowledge of God. The case of Caligula should prove our diagnosis. The Roman Emperor was notorious for his audacious contempt of the Deity. Yet, no man trembled with greater distress at any occasion of Divine judgment, for he became ultimately fearful of the Divine Power whom he earlier despised. This phenomenon of fear of the Almighty by the ungodly must be traced to God's vengeance, smiting their consciences the more as they seek to fly away from Him. These hauntings from God upon the harassed consciences of the impious is further proof that the idea of God is never lost in the human mind.

3. By way of recapitulation, the idea of God impressed on the human mind is indelible. This, it has been observed, is evidenced by the futile struggle of the wicked mind to rid itself of it. Thus, Dionysius' scoff at the judgment of Heaven is but forced laughter while the worm of a guilty conscience gnaws within. I therefore cannot agree with Cicero that religion is getting better and better,

for the world, as we shall soon discover, uses every method to corrupt this worship.

The knowledge of God, far from being learnt in the schools, is self-taught from birth. Nature permits no one to forget it. Now, the knowledge of God that we should have is: We are born to know Him, and live for Him. Unless our understanding has reached this point, it is uncertain and useless. This truth is reflected in Plato's teaching that the chief good of the soul consists in similitude to God, when the soul, having a clear knowledge of Him, is wholly transformed into His likeness.

The knowledge of God that induces men to worship the Creator is what renders men superior to beasts. It makes them aspire to immortality.

## APPENDIX II

### THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

(Five Points of Calvinism by William Wileman)

The design of this work has included from the beginning of a brief yet prominent place for a view of those holy and glorious truths which are commonly known as the "doctrines of grace."

These views of divine truth are often so connected with the Reformer's name as to be termed "Calvinistic." Not that Calvin was the first to teach them. They are the doctrines, that is, the *teachings*, of the Bible, of the Lord Jesus, of Paul. They are the truths that have ennobled kingdoms, animated martyrs, broken the chains of sin, and opened the gate to life. They are the truths that have produced rich fruit in life, and given comfort in death to uncounted thousands of believers.

Yet, partly because Calvin was used of God to revive much truth that had been obscured by error, and partly because he taught these doctrines as a system of truth, they have received the designation of Calvinism.

The difference between what is called the Arminian view and that which is known as the Calvinistic may be briefly stated thus. The former teaches that man by nature has both will and power to turn to God, to repent, believe, obey, and do all that the gospel requires. The latter teaches that man by nature has neither will nor power to produce any spiritual desire or act; and that therefore the work of grace is begun, continued, and completed entirely and alone by the sovereign grace of God.

I can never forget being as a child entranced by reading in a book of astronomy how the older astronomers placed the earth in the centre, and taught that the sun and the whole universe of stars revolved around this globe. And how the astronomers of a later century placed the sun in the centre of our system; and thus brought order out of confusion.

Something like this occurred on an after day when by divine teaching the sweet "doctrines of grace" were revealed in their

majesty, and applied in their power.

Let it be realised here that this is not a theological work, either of doctrine or of experience. This brief outline of doctrine is only intended to illustrate the life of Calvin; and this fact must limit both thought and expression.

The doctrines known as Calvinistic are usually stated as *five*, though a larger number might be given. But the usual classification will answer the present purpose; and for the sake of conciseness they will be given in their proper sequence.

1. The *first* of these great truths is "*Original Sin.*" By this is meant that, as a result of the Fall of the first Adam, all his descendants are born in a fallen condition, and destitute of spiritual life. That every person, at his first birth, is "dead in trespasses and sins," without will to what is good, and without power to repent and believe.

Original sin consists in apostacy from God, alienation of the will, a darkened condition of the understanding, and a complete infection of the whole being, body and soul. This is abundantly plain from the Word of God, and is made feelingly plain to those who by the Spirit of God are "convinced of sin." We are thus "by nature children of wrath; that is, subject to the wrath of God.

All practical sin is the result of original sin, as the fruit grows upon the tree, as the stream issues from the fountain.

This foundation truth is of vital importance. To miss its import is to be liable to every error, and the prey of every "wind of doctrine." *Therefore, "marvel not that I said unto thee, ye MUST be born again"* (John 3:7).

2. The *second* great truth is the doctrine of *Election*. This word simply means *choice*. By the doctrine is meant the sovereign, free, eternal, unmerited, and unalterable choice on the part of God of persons to everlasting life and salvation. With this doctrine is usually joined that of *Predestination*, which is the eternal decree of God, determining that certain events shall take place. The word "predestination," as a noun, does not occur in the New Testament;

but the verb translated "predestinated" occurs six times (Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29,30; I Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:5,11). The English word does not appear at all in the Revised Version.

With this doctrine it is also usual to attach that *Reprobation*, which is indeed a necessary consequence. By this is meant, when properly understood, the decree of God which justly leaves some persons where their sin has placed them. The Westminster Confession says of this: "The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath, *for their sin*, to the praise of His glorious justice."

These twin truths can be abundantly proved from Scripture; and our wisdom is to bow to whatever is taught in the holy treasury of truth.

The word translated "election" occurs seven times in the New Testament (Acts 9:15: "a vessel of election unto Me"; Romans 9:11; 11:5,7,28; I Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Peter 1:10).

The adjective translated "elect" or "chosen" occurs twenty-three times in the New Testament. The verb "to elect" or "to choose," that is, on God's part, occurs twenty times. We have therefore *fifty* occurrences of this doctrine in the New Testament.

This truth is hated by the carnal mind of man, and many are the objections raised against it. All of these are very familiar, both by experience and by argument; but every objection vanished and melts away in the sweet light of God's Word when applied with power. Were this the place for a controversial view of this holy truth, the ground could be taken from under the feet of any objector by one simple argument: If God *can* save all men, and all men are not saved, it follows that the exercise of His power is withheld; and this must logically amount to sovereign choice of those who are saved.

I have sometimes in ministry asked a question, leaving the answer to the court of the conscience of the hearer: Two dying

robbers were crucified with the Lord of life; why was one saved, and not the other? There can ultimately be only one answer to this question.

3. The *third* great truth is known by the expression "*Particular Redemption*." By this is meant that the atonement of Christ is not universal, either in its intention or its application. This naturally follows upon a divine choice of persons; redemption being effected for those who were ordained to eternal life and chosen to salvation.

The objection urged against this truth based upon the word "all" and the word "world" falls at once to the ground upon an examination of the words.

The objection raised that this doctrine excludes any from salvation is a very weak one in the mouth of an Arminian, who professes to believe that a redeemed person may be finally lost. Were this the intended place, it could be proved that the Arminian system is illogical and absurd as well as unscriptural.

Redemption is described in Scripture as "precious" (Psalm 49:8), "plenteous" (Psalm 130:7), and "eternal" (Hebrews 9:12). Redemption is the payment of a price for the object bought. The price was the blood of Christ. The object purchased was the "church of God." From redemption flow all new covenant blessings, life, godly sorrow, faith, forgiveness of sin, adoption, life, peace.

4. The *fourth* great truth known as "Calvinistic" is that of "*Effectual Calling*." By this is meant that all who are chosen to life and redeemed by blood shall, at an appointed time, be quickened into life by the Holy Spirit, and be called by grace into the knowledge of the truth.

The word "effectual" is used to distinguish this call from the open, or outward, call of the gospel as it is preached, which is universal wherever it comes. "Unto you, O men, I call; and My voice is to the sons of man" (Proverbs 8:4). "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). This outward call in preaching may be *refused* (Proverbs 1:24; Hebrews 12:25), *rejected* (John 12:48), *put away* (Acts 13:46), *neglected* (Hebrews 2:3), and *disobeyed* (1 Peter 4:17).

But the "effectual call" is *holy* (2 Timothy 1:9), *almighty* (Romans 1:16), *attracting* (John 12:32), *quickenning* (John 5:25), *effective* (1 Thessalonians 1:5), and *irresistible* (Romans 8:27).

5. The *fifth* great "doctrine of grace" is that of the *Final Preservation* of all those who are chosen to salvation by God the Father, redeemed by God the Son, and quickened by God the Holy Spirit, they will receive grace so to endure to the end as that they must infallibly be saved.

To reason against this is to question the wisdom, will, love, grace, and even the power of God. It is to charge Him with fickleness of purpose and inability to accomplish that which He intended and began.

Three scriptures occur to the mind in penning the last sentence; and with them this chapter must close.

*"And this is the Father's will which sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39).*

*"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (John 10:28).*

*"Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).*

The objections to these high and holy truths are best met by appeal to the unerring Word. No argument can stand against what is written there. Yet, remembering the haughty malice of one heart in days long gone by, what remains but tender compassion for those who now oppose, and a desire for their salvation? Others there are who find these doctrines stones of stumbling in their path, yet sincere, tender, willing to learn: these we love to take by the hand to the Great Infallible Teacher, and leave them with Him in the sweet light of His Written Word.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CONSULTED

- Buswell, James Oliver. *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by John Allen. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, n.d.
- Christian History*. Volume 5, Number 4. An entire issue devoted to John Calvin (1509-1564) in commemoration of the 450th Anniversary of his first going to Geneva and the first edition of his monumental *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
- Davies, Alfted T. *John Calvin: Many-Sided Genius*. New York: American Tract Society, 1947.
- Douglas, J.D. Editor. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Revised edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974, 1978. S.v. "Calvin," and "Calvinism," by W.S. Reid.
- Ferguson, Sinclair, and David R. Wright. Editors. *New Dictionary of Theology*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988. S.v. "Calvin," by R.S. Wallace; and "Reformed Theology," by R.W.A. Letham.
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*. Abridged. Edited by Edward N. Gross. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988.
- Letters of John Calvin*. Selected from the Bonnet Edition. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980.
- Miller, Andrew. *Miller's Church History*. London: Pickering and Inglis, 1963.
- Parker, T.H.L. *Portrait of Calvin*. London: SCM Press Limited, n.d.
- Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church*. Volume 8, *The Swiss Reformation*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910.
- Tow, Timothy. *Calvin's Institutes Abridged*. Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God*. Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1991.
- Wileman, William. *John Calvin: His Life, His Teaching, and His Influence*. Montana: Gospel Mission Press, 1981.

## BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

- Pioneering in Dyak Borneo  
*by Jason Linn, translated by Timothy Tow*
- In John Sung's Steps (*The Story of Lim Puay Hian*)
- Calvin's Institutes Abridged, *Vol. 1, Bk 1 & II*
  - Forty John Sung's Sermons,  
*translated by T. Tow, in two volumes*
    - The Gospel of Life,  
*An Applied Commentary on John's Gospel*
    - The Gospel Prophets
  - The Law of Moses And Of Jesus
    - John Sung My Teacher
      - Asian Awakening
  - Wang Ming Tao & Charismatism
    - Chronicles of Conquest
- The Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God
  - Prophets of Fire and Water
    - Propescope on Israel



*Life Bible-Presbyterian Church (1950)  
and Far Eastern Bible College (1962),  
9 & 9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 1130,  
where the Institutes of the Christian Religion is taught  
and the cause of Missions and a 20th Century Reformation  
diligently promoted.*

## Why You Should Read *Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*

---

Says Dr B B Warfield:

*"Even from the point of view of mere literature; it holds a position so supreme in its class that everyone who would fain know the world's best books, must make himself familiar with it . . . What Plato is among philosophers, or the Iliad among epics, or Shakespeare among dramatists, that Calvin's Institutes is among theological treatises . . ."*

---

Says the author of this booklet:

*"Reading Calvin's Institutes, however, is like going through a ten-course Chinese dinner. The feast he spreads is so sumptuous that it takes no little time to imbibe. (There are four books totalling 80 chapters, 1644 pages). In order to make the Institutes more assimilable to students of Far Eastern Bible College. I have made an Abridgment for their guidance, chapter by chapter . . ."*

---

Says Dr J C Maris:

*Gen.-Sec. of International Council of Christian Churches*

*"It has been a great undertaking. With painstaking accuracy Dr Tow has summarised the Reformer's teaching . . . It should be in the hands of the old and young. Pastors and youth leaders could use it as a textbook for religious instruction. It may serve as a Compendium for theologians who want to brush up their knowledge of Reformed doctrine."*

---

Have you got a copy of  
*Calvin's Institutes Abridged (Book I & II)*  
by Timothy Tow?