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# Director's Desk

With several anniversaries and preparations for events happening on the world scene, the **Centro Pro Unione** desires to contribute to these events through its lecture series. Some of the texts of these events are printed in this issue of the *Bulletin*.

The first article is based on the lecture given by the Executive Secretary of the World Mennonite Conference, Dr. Larry Miller: "*Glory to God and on Earth Peace: Historic Peace Church Perspectives on the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation*." In his lecture he explained the attempts of the "peace churches" to be involved in the elimination of violence in society as their contribution to the WCC's decade to overcome violence. He traces for us the evolution of the project and the main statement for the Convocation to be held in Jamaica in 2011: "Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace." Dr. Miller concludes his lecture with an analysis of the reception of this document by the historic peace churches.

The next two texts were lectures given to conclude our anniversary celebration of the Genevan reformer Jean Calvin (10 July 1509 – 27 May 1564). The first was presented at the annual celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25). Each year the **Centro** and the Lay Centre at the Foyer Unitas sponsor an afternoon of prayer and reflection on the Thursday of the Week of Prayer. This includes a lecture on an ecumenical topic followed by an ecumenical prayer vigil. This year's lecture was given by William Henn, OFM Cap: *Echoes of John Calvin's Ecclesiology in the Reformed-Catholic International Dialogue*. After introducing Calvin's thinking about the Church he then presents the influence this thinking had on the various statements of the dialogue between the Catholic and Reformed churches. His conclusion reveals how much of Calvin's ecclesiology is echoed in the agreed statements already published and also the impact that Calvin's thinking may have for the future of the dialogue.

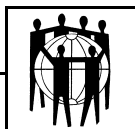
The third text takes a look at the dynamic of word and spirit in Calvin's theology. Dom Patrick Lyons, OSB spoke on: *Word and Spirit: Calvin's Theology and the Issues of Today*. After taking a look at the person of John Calvin, Dr. Lyons then proceeds to analyze the relationship of the pair 'word and spirit' in Calvin's theology but also in relation to other Reformers, especially Martin Luther. In the last part of his presentation, the authors speaks of the implication that the 'word-spirit' relationship has with ecclesiology and the sacraments in particular. His conclusion brings together these insights and then asks what contribution Calvin's theology may make after five hundred years?

The Centro's staff wishes to remember with fondness the passing of Mons. Eleuterio Francesco Fortino who died in September. He was a passionate ecumenist and an extraordinary person. May he rest in peace.

Check our web site for up to date information on the Centro's activities and realtime information on the theological dialogues. All of our staff wish you all a very pleasant Summer.

This *Bulletin* is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Drive, 16<sup>th</sup> Floor, Chicago, IL 60606 (<http://www.atla.com>).

James F. Puglisi, sa  
Director





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Centro Conferences

## **“Glory to God and on Earth Peace:” Historic Peace Church Perspectives On the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation**

Larry Miller  
General Secretary, World Mennonite Conference

(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Thursday, 15 April 2010)

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **World Council of Churches Initiatives**

In November 1998, delegates to the World Council of Church’s Eighth Assembly, gathered in Harare, Zimbabwe, voted to establish a “Decade to Overcome Violence.” This WCC initiative runs parallel to the United Nations “Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World” (2001-2010). Its aim is to move concerns for peace, justice and reconciliation from the periphery of the church to her centre. In the years since the Decade’s official launch in 2001, it has attempted to address a wide variety of violence at all levels — individual, interpersonal, and collective.

In February 2006, delegates to the World Council’s (WCC) Ninth Assembly, meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, voted to conclude the Decade to Overcome Violence with an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC). The IEPC, scheduled to take place May 17-25, 2011, in Jamaica, is intended to harvest the achievements of the Decade to Overcome Violence while planting the seeds for a more peaceful future. Its motto and guiding motif comes from the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem, as reported in the Gospel of Luke (2:14), “Glory to God and Earth Peace!”

According to the WCC, the convocation will bring together a wide spectrum of churches and Christian organizations “witnessing to the peace of God as a gift and responsibility of the entire human family.” It will seek to “strengthen the church’s position on peace, provide opportunities for networking and deepening our common commitment to the processes of reconciliation and just peace.”<sup>1</sup>

More specifically, convocation planners say<sup>2</sup> that the IEPC will be a place and time for:

- Celebrating God’s peace and the good will of God’s people;
- Working on a theology of peace and relinquishing any theological justification of violence;
- Telling stories of failure and success in overcoming violence, and listening to examples and good practices;
- Equipping participants with creative and effective tools for preventing and overcoming violence, and promoting peace and justice;
- Committing individuals and churches to a theology and practice of non-violence, peace, and justice; and
- Proclaiming an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace.

It is on this “Declaration of Just Peace” that we will focus our attention.

#### **Historic Peace Churches Responses**

Among the early and prominent participants in both of these WCC initiatives—the Decade to Overcome Violence and the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation process—are members of the “Historic Peace Churches.”

“Historic Peace Church” (HPC) is a term popularized first in 1935 in the United States to refer to the Church of the Brethren, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and the Mennonite churches which share a common witness against war. These three traditions of European origin, now spread around the world, date from different times: the Mennonites from the radical Reformation in the 16th century; the Friends from radical Puritanism in the 17th century; and the Brethren from radical pietism in the 18th century. Yet all have borne witness in their foundational texts and confessional writings that peace is an essential aspect of the gospel; all have rejected the use of violence and lethal force. Their common position on peace has brought these three Christian communions into many cooperative

<sup>1</sup> See [www.overcomingviolence.org/en/iepc/about-iepc/objectives-and-concepts.html](http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/iepc/about-iepc/objectives-and-concepts.html)

<sup>2</sup> The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation brochure “Glory to God and Peace on Earth.”

relationships, not only during times of war but also in worldwide peacemaking, service and relief projects.<sup>3</sup>

#### *A History of Responding to the World Council of Churches*

Though very few Historic Peace Churches are members of the World Council of Churches, there is a history of common HPC peace witness in the context of the WCC—and this from the very earliest days of the council.

At its founding assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, in the shadow of the Second World War, the WCC declared that “war is contrary to the will of God.” Following-up in 1949, General Secretary William Visser ‘t Hooft invited HPC representatives to present arguments for a pacifist position to the worldwide fellowship of churches. The representatives accepted the call. In their 1951 booklet, *War Is Contrary to the Will of God*, each Historic Peace Church group submitted its own statement, adding a fourth from the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Ecumenical leaders expressed appreciation for the statements but challenged the peace church leaders to do better. If the HPC could not formulate a common position on the Christian response to war, how could they expect the diverse WCC membership to come to agreement? So the HPC representatives renewed their efforts and, just prior to the WCC’s second assembly in 1954, presented a joint statement named “Peace Is the Will of God” (1953). This statement evoked a response from Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and Episcopalian bishop Angus Dun in defense of the “Just War” position, under the title “God Wills both Justice and Peace” (1955).<sup>4</sup> A few years later (1958), the HPC published another document, entitled “God Establishes both Peace and Justice” trying to take into account Niebuhr’s arguments in counter-defense of the pacifist position.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the HPC contributed to the WCC discussions on violence and nonviolence related not only to war, but also to the economic, social and political structures of injustice. The WCC’s fourth assembly (Uppsala, 1968) made an effort to deal with the issue of violence. HPC representatives participated but the results left them dissatisfied. At a subsequent consultation, one Mennonite presented a paper indicative of the disappointment; it was entitled “The Problem of Violence: Let’s Start All Over Again.”

At the fifth WCC assembly in Nairobi, in 1975, HPC delegates advocated for nonviolent alternatives to military engagement. Again they came away with the sentiment that their voice had not been fully heard or at least not as effective as hoped.

A few HPC representatives were involved in the sixth WCC assembly (Vancouver, 1983) and then in the new “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of the Creation” program which emerged from

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<sup>3</sup> See S. SPEICHER and D.F. DURNBAGH, “Historic Peace Churches,” in N. LOSSKY, et. ali., (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002) 521f.

<sup>4</sup> In *Christianity and Crisis*, 15, 10 (June 13, 1955).

it. By this time, however, HPC representatives were developing serious concern about the adequacy of the ecclesiological foundation and orientation of these WCC initiatives. The result was a new booklet-length HPC statement, shaped primarily by the leading Mennonite theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, John Howard Yoder, and published in 1990 under the title, *A Declaration on Peace: In God’s People the World’s Renewal has Begun*. The book was widely promoted at the WCC’s seventh assembly (Canberra, 1991), where HPC representatives collaborated with one another to bring peace churches perspectives into assembly processes.

This history of Historic Peace Church response to World Council of Churches initiatives prepared the way and opened the direction for HPC perspectives on and engagement in both the Decade to Overcome Violence and now the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation.

#### *Responding to the Decade to Overcome Violence and to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation*

In 1994, the WCC had established a “Program to Overcome Violence.” This initiative was designed “with the purpose of challenging and transforming the global culture of violence in the direction of a culture of just peace.”<sup>5</sup> HPC representatives worked vigorously to support and extend the vision of this new program. What resulted, in at least some part from these efforts, was the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV).

From the very beginning, Historic Peace Church representatives participated at the heart of the Decade initiative. Indeed, they were among the instigators of it. Throughout the week of the WCC’s 8<sup>th</sup> assembly in 1997, in Harare, the HPC caucus had appealed unsuccessfully to the WCC governing committees to place on the plenary table an action proposing what would become the Decade to Overcome Violence. Finally, at the very end of the assembly, after some participants had already left to catch their airplanes, Fernando Enns, the German Mennonite Church delegate, was finally given the floor to make the motion directly in plenary session. Delegates adopted the proposal; the DOV was formally launched several years later, in 2001.

Very early on, the WCC Central Committee asked the Historic Peace Churches to give special attention to the Decade. These groups quickly sensed a need to coordinate efforts, so an international HPC conference was organized in 2001 in Europe, issuing in the book *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation*. Additional Decade-related and HPC-convened consultations took place in Africa in 2004 and Asia in 2007.

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<sup>5</sup> H.L. GIBBLE, “Ecumenical Engagement for Peace and Nonviolence,” in T.D. PAXSON, Jr. (ed.), *Ecumenical Engagement or Peace and Nonviolence: Experiences and Initiatives of the Historic Peace Churches and the Fellowship of Reconciliation* (Elgin, IL: Global Mission Partnerships, Church of the Brethren General Board, 2006).

Other HPC and WCC co-sponsored books were published.<sup>6</sup>

In the meantime, Historic Peace Churches contributed leadership, staff and money to the WCC in support of the Decade to Overcome Violence. It may not be an exaggeration to say that the sustainability of the Programme to Overcome Violence and the Decade to Overcome Violence was due in significant degree to the Historic Peace Churches' engagement. And this HPC support for and participation in the Decade continues in relation to the IEPC. For example, in December of 2009 the Union of German Mennonite Congregations submitted as a contribution to the WCC process its own "Declaration on Just Peace," under the title "Guide our feet into the way of Peace." In the 125 years of the existence of this union of churches, there is no comparable document. In July of this year, the HPC in North America will host an ecumenical gathering in the USA, under the name, "Peace Among the Peoples," with the objective of "critically appropriating the agenda of the 2011 Convocation."

One more contribution to the IEPC process must be named; after all it was created here, in this place. An international dialogue between Mennonite World Conference and the Catholic Church took place between 1998 and 2003, beginning with the theme "Towards a Healing of Memories," and concluding with a report entitled *Called Together to be Peacemakers*. In the hope that, on the basis of that dialogue, Catholics and Mennonites could together offer suggestions for the IEPC, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Mennonite World Conference sponsored a conference, October 23-25, 2007, in these "walls." The result was a common Catholic/Mennonite statement of theological reflections, which Mennonites and Catholics committed to overcoming violence may affirm together as a witness to peace in an ecumenical statement. The statement begins by identifying biblical and theological foundations of peace, under the headings "Creation, Christology, and Ecclesiology." Then follows a section on peace and discipleship. The statement closes with some challenges and recommendations for consideration by the IEPC.

To focus more narrowly the question of Historic Peace Church perspectives on the IEPC, we will now turn our attention to the IEPC "Initial Statement Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace" and Historic Peace Church responses to it.

#### **"Initial Statement:**

#### **Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace"**

#### **Producing the Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace**

Production of the "Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace"

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<sup>6</sup> J. ZIMMERMANN HERR & R. HERR, (eds.) *Transforming Violence: Linking Local and Global Peacemaking* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998); M. YODER HOLSOPPLE, R.E. KRALL & S. WEAVER PITTMAN, *Building Peace: Overcoming Violence in Communities*, Risk Book Series (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2004).

for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, is taking place through a multi-phased process.

The first step consisted of the work in 2008 of a "first drafting group" appointed by the WCC. For their task, the group took into consideration contributions from the "Living Letters" visits of ecumenical teams to various sensitive regions of the world,<sup>7</sup> from five "Expert Consultations," from theological faculties and seminaries, and from a number of other sources. One of these other "sources"—and the only one listed on the IEPC website under the heading of "confessional bodies/councils"—is the joint Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity / Mennonite World Conference statement to which I referred a moment ago.

This first drafting group wrote not a first draft of the Declaration on Just Peace but what they called an "initial statement towards an ecumenical declaration on just peace." They understood their statement to provide a "conceptual framework meant to facilitate a process of reflection in WCC member churches – and beyond – on the meaning and practice of just peace in today's violent world."<sup>8</sup> They hoped that their considerations would inspire and provoke readers to offer reactions and suggestions. In November 2008, the WCC General Secretary, Sam Kobia, sent this "Initial Statement" to WCC member churches, associate councils, Christian World Communions, regional ecumenical organizations, and other international ecumenical organizations, inviting written responses.

The elaboration of responses throughout the year 2009 constituted the second phase of the process. A number of groups did write responses to the "Initial Statement;" a dozen are posted on the IEPC website. Convocation organizers have received additional ones, including the Historic Peace Church statements that we will review shortly.

The third step in the process of producing the "Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace" has just begun with the first meeting of second drafting group, March 20-27, in Bogota, Colombia. Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, former WCC general secretary, serves as moderator of this ten-member group. Two Historic Peace Church representatives are members of the group; there were no HPC representatives on the first drafting group. It is the task of the second drafting group to write the "Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace."

Unofficial word indicates that we can expect a first version of the Declaration to begin circulating next month (May 2010), at least to the groups that wrote responses to the "Initial Statement." This will constitute the fourth phase of the process, culminating in the fifth phase, the writing of the Declaration, which will be presented to the Convocation.

In short, at this moment we stand somewhere between the third and fourth steps of the process. We have responses to the "Initial Statement" but not yet the first draft of the Declaration itself. We can already study perspectives on the "Initial

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<sup>7</sup> Israel and Palestine, Haiti, Pakistan...

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Sam Kobia, WCC general secretary, to WCC member churches and others, November 2008.

Statement,” including those of Historic Peace Churches. But we cannot yet see to what extent these points of view have influenced the second drafting committee and shaped the content of the first version of the Declaration itself. For this reason, we will now focus on the “Initial Statement” and the Historic Peace Church responses to it.

### Structure and Content of the “Initial Statement”

The “Initial Statement” with its 117 paragraphs begins with a “Meditative Introduction” entitled, “Glory to God and Peace on Earth” (§§ 1-7). These words from Luke 2 serve as the motto both for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation and for the “Initial Statement.” It is meant to remind us that God “is the foundation of everything we can say and do about overcoming violence and promoting peace in and with the earth” (§2). It is meant to remind us also of the biblical “emphasis on the earth as the location of peace...” (§6).

The statement’s “Preamble” (§§ 8-12) claims that “we find ourselves at special moment, a *kairos* of grace” (§8). In the events of global history since 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, God is “bidding us to repent of our sinfulness and seeking a deeper conversion to Christ (...) to renew our commitment to the *shalom* of God for which so many people in our time cry out” (§9). What does this mean for the churches? This initial statement is an attempt to consider how they “need to understand peace at this *kairos* of converging and contending forces, and where discipleship calls them to commit themselves in the coming years” (§12).

In line with the theological affirmation of the priority of God, chapter 1 speaks of “The God of Peace and the Peace of God” (§§ 13-45). A first section describes “Key Biblical Concepts” (§§ 14-18). Particularly important is *shalom* as a broad concept “inclusive of individual and communal peace. It encompasses the well being of human beings and the earth, the fullness of humanity’s social relations and humanity’s connectedness to the earth” (§15). In the New Testament, Jesus himself is the source of the peace which “makes it possible to overcome enmity and division” (§18). According to a second section in this chapter (§§ 19-21), peace is meant to unfold in the “*oikos* or Household of God” which includes both the *oikos* of the church and the *oikos* of the world. Further sections deal with “The God of Peace Revealed as the Holy Trinity” (§§ 22-27), “Human Beings – Earthlings in God’s Image” (§§ 27), “The Mystery of Evil and the Perversities of the Human Heart - Faces of Violence” (§§ 28), “Violence and the Reality of Trespassing” (§§ 29-33), “Abusing our Powers” (§§ 34-38) and, finally, “Forms and Structures of Enmity” (§§ 39-45).

Where does the Church stand in all of this, the drafters of the statement ask us near the conclusion of chapter one. “It cannot pretend not to be seriously affected; for indeed all the abuses to which we have referred are also to be found within Christian communities” (§44). And so it must recover faithfulness to the call to discipleship, that is “to take the side of the poor and the powerless, to witness to the truth, even when it puts our lives at

stake, and to be communities of healing and salvation” (§ 45).

Chapter 2 of the “Initial Statement” focuses on these communities of healing and salvation” under the title: “In the Name of Christ: The Churches as Communities and Agents of Peace building” (§§ 46-78). The first part (§§ 46-49) describes “The Nature and Mission of the Church” in the terms of the Faith and Order Commission paper published under the same title in 2005. This leads into a section on “The Vocation and Ministry of Peace-building in the Churches” (§§ 50-51) and another on “The Church as Sacrament of Peace” (§§ 52-55).” That “the Church is a sacrament of God’s peace,” we read (§55), “is the source of its being able to be a prophetic sign and instrument of God’s peace in the world.” Thereafter follows a section on “The Churches as Prophetic Sign in Peace-building” (§§ 56-57) and a long development on “The Churches as Instruments of Peace-building” (§§ 58-73). The chapter closes with comments on “The Spiritual Practices of Peace” (§§ 74-78).

In chapter three, “On the Way towards Just Peace — The Scope of the Churches’ Engagement” (§§ 79-117), the writers review recent developments in Christian peace thinking and peace practices” (*cf.* “Christian Peace Traditions,” §§ 88-104). “From the differing traditions of Christian peacemaking,” they assert, “just peacemaking has created a common pathway appropriate for our time. The older traditions of Christian pacifism and just war theory no longer control peace thinking” (§89). Moreover, we read a little further on, “both pacifism and just use traditions, including just war, share the same Christian norm for the use of force – nonviolence (...) Both dedicate themselves to the same goal – overcoming violence” (§90). Indeed, “in recent decades pacifists and just use advocates have found themselves to be working allies time and again” (§94) —working together to promote a “just peace” that reflects “a much broader scope.” Today all agree that “Christian peacemaking is far more than a firewall for containing conflict; it consists in practices that constitute a whole way of life for the People of the Way” (§100). It consists also in practices that build “Just Institutions in a Just Order” (§§ 105-113) and cares for creation. “In short,” the statement concludes, “both the world within —peace-building as soul-craft —and the world without—peace-building in and with just institutions—cry for peacemakers. Earth cries for Christians who will join others to make peace within creation in the same moment they make peace with creation” (§116).

### HISTORIC PEACE CHURCH PERSPECTIVES ON “THE INITIAL STATEMENT”

Unlike some previous moments in the history of Historic Peace Church responses to World Council of Churches statements, there has been no common HPC reply to the “Initial Statement.” But there have been at least six different answers from national Mennonite churches, Friends Yearly Meetings, and related groups. While this may not seem like many, it is a significant number when compared to the total number of

responses from all churches to the “Initial Statement.” Certainly it is enough, as we shall see, to give some sense of the reception of “Initial Statement” in Historic Peace Church circles, both in general and in relation to the specific chapters of the document.

### Reception in general: broad affirmation

To summarize in a word, Historic Peace Churches have welcomed warmly the “Initial Statement.” In their responses, compliments abound:

- “It is with great joy that we greet ‘Glory to God and Peace on Earth,’ both the planned convocation and the ‘Initial Statement Towards an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace,’” write the Christian and Interfaith Relations Committee of the American Friends General Conference (page 1). We appreciate the “Meditative Introduction,” with its confession that God is the foundation for everything we can say and do to promote peace. We appreciate the Statement’s spirit of repentance. We appreciate the fact that it lifts up the life and teachings of Christ. We appreciate the declaration that the peace of God embraces the whole of creation.
- “(...) We are grateful,” add the Dutch Friends Yearly Meeting, “that the World Council of Churches has placed the issue of the use of deadly force in conflict situations high on the agenda by its endeavor to develop a ‘declaration of just peace,’” (p. 1).
- The statement is excellent, profound, powerful and helpful, says Mennonite Church Canada. “The suggestions we make are designed to clarify and strengthen what is already a valuable document” (p. 1).
- The Theological Working Group of Church and Peace, a European network of Peace Churches, communities, peace organizations and individual Christians, introduced their response to the “Initial Statement” with a string of laudatory remarks. “We thank you for this text (...) and its wonderfully comprehensive vision for the peace of Christ among us. We applaud in particular the reflection on the Scriptures in this document, beginning with God’s own Peace Declaration in the announcement to the Shepherds in the Field, and then including biblical passages throughout the document. (...) We are thankful for the importance given to the concept of discipleship (...) We appreciate the concrete proposals for how the Church can act as peace-builder (...) we applaud the importance given to the distinctiveness of the Church as the Household of God (...) In all of these points, we have gained greatly by studying the Initial Statement. We thank you for your contribution to a general statement of the Churches that will help to strengthen our common witness to Christ’s overcoming the violence of our ripped and torn world.”

### Reception in particular: critical perspectives

Of course, there is more than “amen” and “hallelujah” in the Historic Peace Church responses to the “Initial Statement.” One

finds both strong consent for and serious objection to basic elements of each chapter.

### *The God of Peace and the Peace of God*

In the responses to the first chapter, “The God of Peace and the Peace of God,” there is indeed uniform affirmation of “the wonderfully comprehensive vision for the peace of Christ among us,” as the Theological Working Group of Church and Peace put it. Further, the Friends General Conference (USA) state that the Historic Peace Churches will find the sections on “Peace and the *oikos* or Household of God” and “God Revealed in the Trinity” (§§ 18-26) “very helpful in ecumenical dialogue (...) and (...) in broadening the understanding of the call to that divine peace that embraces the whole of creation. We regard (these paragraphs),”<sup>9</sup> they write, “as constituting a real and most welcome breakthrough in ecumenical dialogue concerning the centrality of peace witness to Christian faith and practice.”

Mennonite Church USA appreciates that the “Initial Statement” tries to take account of violence at many levels and in many forms. “We urge you to continue to hold together the macro and the micro, violence at the private/personal level and the violence of war, the *oikos* of planet Earth and the *oikos* of each individual and family.”

Yet, all is not perfect. If the “Initial Statement’s” vision for peace” elicits Historic Peace Church praise, its conceptualization of “violence” (cf. §§ 29-33) is thought to be problematic. For the Friends General Conference, the word normally has moral import. That is, if an act is an act of violence, then it is morally wrong. To define violence as “a trespassing into the space each living thing rightfully requires,” as is done in the Initial Statement, and then to extend it to the whole of creation is difficult and confusing. For Mennonite Church Canada, the word and concept of “violence” is inadequate as a term to designate the opposite of *shalom*. To describe the negation of “peace” a bigger concept and word than violence are needed—a concept and word like “evil” or “sin.”

Subject also to Historic Peace Church critique in this chapter are its Christological perspectives. While Mennonite Church USA commends the statement’s authors for grounding their declaration in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, they urge more consistent development of this Christology as the basis for the decisions and actions proposed in the statement. “Our peacemaking involves putting on the mind of Christ and being led by the Spirit,” they write, “apart from this, it is impossible.”

The Netherlands Yearly Meeting of Friends appreciate the biblical grounding of the statement but has “some difficulty with those parts of chapter 1 that are very theological and Trinitarian in nature (...) In our tradition we would rather ground a statement on Just Peace on the message of peace that Jesus preached, and his own non-violent way of life (...). The Friends General Conference levels a similar critique more strongly. We are

<sup>9</sup> Paragraphs §§ 19-26.

troubled by the “conspicuous absence of the sort of Biblical hermeneutic that focuses on the life and teachings of Jesus” (ref. §§ 19-26). “We are troubled that there is no hint in the Initial Statement of the Gospel account, particularly in Mark, of Jesus Christ’s non-violent confrontation of injustice, hypocrisy...”

The theological working group of Church and Peace echo and extend these sentiments. Given the drafting groups stated desire to avoid specialized theological language, these theologians are surprised by the specialized Trinitarian terminology (§§ 22-25). They advocate instead for founding peace theology on the calling to following Jesus Christ—as was done in the preamble of the Initial Statement (§ 12). Furthermore, they think that the Initial Statement fails to reflect on the implications of Jesus’ word to ‘love enemies’.

#### *In the Name of Christ:*

##### *The Churches as Communities and Agents of Peace Building*

You will remember that Chapter 2, “In the Name of Christ: The Churches as Communities and Agents of Peace Building,” opens with a development on “The Nature and the Mission of the Church.” This title and much of the content of the section come the Faith and Order Commission’s 2005 document by the same name.

The Friends General Conference says simply, “we can unite with these sections.” Their approval of the paragraphs on the “Churches as Prophetic Sign in Peace-Building” is worded more strongly: “We are delighted to unite with this section (...) which is powerful and, once approved, a section that we would want to bring to the attention of our own meetings” (p. 6).” They regard the paragraphs in this chapter on “The Churches as Instruments of Peace-building” as “a crucial element of the Initial Statement, as it articulates the practical import of the Church’s peace witness.” They hope that the peace actions called for in this chapter “will characterize the churches in the years to come...” (p. 6).

Problematic for these Friends, however, is the statement’s section on “The Church as a Sacrament of Peace” (§§ 52-55). “What gives us pause,” they write, “is the language that seems to restrict the in-breaking power of God to draw people towards God’s peace. We do not think God is limited by God’s own sacraments (...) We do not believe that liturgy is the only window on the eschatological hope of bringing together all things in Christ” (p. 6).

For Mennonite Church Canada, the Initial Statement’s ecclesiological dimension is seriously deficient. “There is need,” they write, “to strengthen a compelling, persistent, consistent, and pervasive ecclesiology throughout the document.” It is true that the opening paragraphs of chapter two provide “a very strong ecclesial foundation.” But this foundation quickly disappears. The church is no longer presented primarily as “a sacrament of the presence of peace,” or as “a key locus of peace,” but as a “strategic actor (activist) for peace. (...) While the strategies of mediation, education, healing, restorative justice, advocacy, and such are critically important, the option of inviting persons into

full participation in a community that is founded on and grounded in the peace of Jesus Christ is not identified as an important strategic option. (...)” In other words, the Church is not presented as an “inviting space for the peace it is proclaiming”—which is, after all, the vocation of the Church. In the end, the Church is reduced from “being sacrament” to “acting for peace.”

#### *On the Way Towards Peace: The Scope of the Churches’ Engagement*

The third chapter of the Initial Statement, “On the Way Towards Peace, The Scope of the Churches Engagement” is based on the claim that “from the differing traditions of Christian peace making, just peacemaking has created a common pathway for our time. The older traditions of Christian pacifism and just war theory no longer control peace thinking” (§89) (...) In recent decades pacifists and just use advocates have found themselves to be working allies time and time again” (§94). Do Historic Peace Churches respondents agree? Yes and no!

The Friends General Conference say that they welcome “recognition of the converging evolutions of the pacifist and just war traditions. (...) Nonetheless, pacifist and ‘just use’ positions remain distinct” (p. 8). The Netherlands Yearly Meeting of Friends state the same perspective more strongly: “The concept of Just Peace is being introduced as a synthesis of the former antithesis between those churches that embraced the Just War doctrine and those churches that opted for a radical pacifist position. Although we applaud that the churches of the former category, which are in the majority in the WCC, have become much more cautious in condoning the use of violence, the antithesis mentioned cannot yet be said to be overcome. In our view this antithesis is incorrectly being presented as a gradual rather than a principal difference...”

The Church and Peace Theological Working Group articulate similar sentiments. Previously in their response, this group had already confessed some stronger feelings: “We find it very troubling that pacifism and ‘justified use’ are grouped together with the claim that they ‘share the same Christian norm for the use of force – nonviolence. This is simply not true.” In their response to chapter three, they add: “We agree that there is now a common pathway between the different traditions of Christian peacemaking that is appropriate for our time (§89) but feel strongly that the pathway should be extended to working together to transcend the ‘just use’ theory.”

All Historic Peace Church respondents would certainly agree. Mennonite Church USA wishes more attention would be paid in the declaration to saying “no” to the violence of war. “The Declaration on Just Peace,” they say, “must plead with the church of the just war tradition to make the theory of just war operative.” It should also include a strong call to the churches to dramatically increase commitment in support of “unarmed Christian soldiers for peace.” For Mennonite Church Canada, the concept of the “exceptional use of ‘killing violence’ contradicts the broad definitions” in the statement, both of the

“faces of violence” and the “spirituality of peace.” They find a contradiction also between the presentation of nonviolence as the faithful expression of *shalom*, and the developments on the just use of violence by Christians exercising the “responsibility to protect” vulnerable populations.

Church and Peace says it this way: “We invite all churches to resist with us the temptation of justifying the use of deadly weapons even as a last resort. (...) What is needed is a commitment of the churches to lay down our lives rather than to take the lives of others as a last resort.”

### **CONCLUSION: FURTHER ALONG THE WAY**

I would like to conclude this lecture and review of Historic Peace Churches perspectives on the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation with three observations or questions.

The first is that when we compare the experience of interaction between the Historic Peace Church community and the WCC community in the DOV and the IEPC, there seems to be greater proximity and greater convergence of views than in the previous periods of interaction around matters of war, peace and nonviolence. At the same time, fundamental divergence remains—and remains in regard to the most problematic issue historically, that is, the issue of lethal violence as a last resort. What is the normative Christian response of last resort, to lay down one’s life or to take another’s life?

The second observation is rooted in one of the suggestions in the joint Catholic Church / Mennonite World Conference statement formulated in this place. “We recommend,” they/we said, “that the Convocation in 2011 work toward the goal of achieving an *ecumenical consensus* on ways Christians might advocate, together, to replace violence as a means to resolve serious conflicts in society.” Has the “Initial Statement” adequately carried forward this recommendation? I believe that is an open question and the conclusions still debatable.

Finally, it is still a little too early to know what impact, if any, the Historic Peace Churches responses to the “Initial Statement” is having in the shaping of the Ecumenical Declaration of Just Peace. We must wait a few more months to have a first glimpse of the work of the second drafting group. In the meantime, I will leave you with a few off-the- record words I received on this question last week, from a Colombian Mennonite member of the group: “The second statement is completely new,” he writes, “about six pages or so, and is meant to be much more accessible to a wider non-theological audience, and even to a non-Christian one. Nevertheless, I think it takes a strong nonviolent, anti-war, Jesus-centered stance, touching on an ecclesiology of peace. But undoubtedly with so many erudite people looking at it around the globe, it’s enough to give me the willies...!”

That last sentence describes how exactly I feel about giving you this lecture this evening! Still, I am assuming that you are a friendly group and that in the period of discussion we are about to enter, there will be no need for protection or for me to lay down my life as a last resort.

Thank you for commitment to all things that give “glory to God and peace on earth.”



# CC

Centro Conferences

## Echoes of John Calvin's Ecclesiology In the Reformed-Catholic International Dialogue

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The theme of this presentation has been chosen to honor the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth John Calvin (1509-1564), which occurred on July 10, 1509. He is without doubt one of those Christian leaders and writers who has had a tremendous influence upon the life of the Church. The website of the newly formed World Communion of Reformed Churches, which is comprised of Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Uniting and United Churches, all of which identify themselves as stemming from the tradition initiated by Calvin, lists its membership as including 227 churches with more than 80 million believers in 108 countries.<sup>1</sup> Those figures do not tell the whole story, however, since not all churches within the Calvinist tradition have joined the World Communion, nor can John Calvin's influence be limited only to communities that explicitly trace their roots to him. His theology has had an impact upon believers from traditions such as the Baptist, the Pentecostal and even the Methodist. Thus, when one considers the many generations which have been schooled in Calvin's thought during the five centuries since his birth, one realizes something of how important he is in the history of the Church.

Having had the privilege of participating in the third phase of international dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, I have been asked by the *Centro pro unione* to present some reflections upon how Calvin's view of the Church has appeared over the course of its three phases. I will begin with some thoughts about John Calvin himself and his view of the Church before exploring how his

ecclesiology is echoed in the reports of the Reformed-Catholic international dialogue.

### John Calvin and his Thinking about the Church

Calvin's ecclesiological outlook was deeply influenced by his experience of becoming an ardent promoter of the Protestant Reformation. When Luther posted his 95 theses in 1517, Calvin was only eight years old. He thus was baptized and raised a Catholic. Because his father, Gérard, was a lawyer who worked for the cathedral chapter of the local diocese, Calvin was even granted several benefices, or ecclesiastical salaries, during his youth. He renounced these on May 4, 1534, before his twenty-fifth birthday,<sup>2</sup> but at least some commentators do not identify that renunciation with his conversion to protestant thought. When did that happen?

George Tavard, who gave the *Centro pro unione* lecture during the Octave of prayer for unity in 2005,<sup>3</sup> wrote a fine little book a few years earlier entitled *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology*, in which he analyzed Calvin's earliest theological writings discovering what he thought were several clues which shed light on his conversion. We don't have the time here to dwell on the fascinating details of Tavard's hypothesis, but the sudden appearance of a strongly anti-Roman tone only in the second half of Chapter Four of the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* of 1536 led Tavard to conclude that, while yet a student, Calvin had a profound religious experience which he later described as quite sudden and which brought his heart into a state of docility to God. Describing this experience later, Calvin noted: "Having therefore received some taste and knowledge of true piety, I immediately was burning with such a great desire to profit from it that, though I did not at all give up

<sup>1</sup> See the website <http://www.reformedchurches.org/aboutus.html> [accessed on July 4, 2010]. The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) came into being during the Uniting General Council held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, from June 18-28, 2010. The WCRC is the result of the merger of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (founded in 1970 by the union of the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed churches [1875] and the International Congregational Council [1891]) with The Reformed Ecumenical Council (Founded in 1946 of Reformed churches, mainly in Africa and Asia). Waldensian churches are also part of this new communion.

<sup>2</sup> W. WALKER, *John Calvin: The Organiser of Reformed Protestantism (1509-1564)* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969 [orig. 1906]) 29.

<sup>3</sup> G. H. TAVARD, "Hospitality as Ecumenical Paradigm," *Centro Pro Unione semi-annual Bulletin*, N. 69 (Spring 2006) 9-19.

my other studies, I treated them more loosely.”<sup>4</sup> To this positive conversion was added a second change, occurring after a particular persecution of Reformed Christians by Francis I of France in late 1534, which involved a sharply critical evaluation of the Catholic Church as it existed under the guidance of the pope. Tavad’s point is to demonstrate that the very earliest of Calvin’s theological writings were quite “catholic” in the sense of not having noticeably anti-Roman sentiments. These came in a second moment, with the effect that Calvin’s theology, influenced by such a double conversion, integrates two interrelated by distinguishable dimensions, one more serenely positive and one more critical or even polemical. This would apply also to his ecclesiological thought. If so, one could expect to find a basic difference in intention between Calvin’s ecclesiology and at least some of the affirmations of Reformed-Catholic dialogue texts. The dialogue texts would presumably be less governed by the intention of objecting to certain doctrines or practices in the Catholic community of the sixteenth century. For his part, Calvin shared the conviction of many other reformers “that a true Christian believer cannot follow the Roman pontiff with a good conscience.”<sup>5</sup>

What are the principal elements of Calvin’s ecclesiology? The definitive edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, of 1559, is divided into four books, the fourth of which is entitled “The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites Us Into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein.”<sup>6</sup> This is where we find his ecclesiology, which I will now summarize in seven points.

1) First of all, Calvin begins his discussion of the Church with the fundamental Reformation principle that it is by faith in the Gospel and not by works of the law that one comes to be in communion with Christ and is saved. Because of their weakness, human beings need help to come to such faith. In his sovereign providence, God offers such help. To insure that they hear the effective preaching of the good news, He has deposited the precious treasure of the Gospel within the Church and appointed pastors and teachers to proclaim it with authority. In addition, God has instituted the sacraments which are “highly useful aids

to foster and strengthen faith” (*Institutes* IV 1,1).<sup>7</sup> God’s children are entrusted to the maternal care of the Church, so that they may grow to the perfection of faith. The role of the Church as teacher is underlined. Commenting on Eph. 4,10-13, on God’s providing the Church with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to help the Church grow, Calvin adds: “We see how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into maturity<sup>8</sup> solely under the education of the church” (*Institutes* IV,1,5). This teaching role is part of the maternal nature of the Church. Calvin applies the saying of Jesus about the indissolubility of marriage to the Church; I quote: “For what God has joined together, it is not lawful to put asunder’ [Mark 10:9], so that, for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother” (*Institutes* IV,1,1), a phrase echoing St. Cyprian of Carthage. The theme of the Church as mother who brings up children in the faith is one of the central aspects of Calvin’s ecclesiology and the reason for affirming the traditional principle concerning the necessity of the Church for salvation: “God’s fatherly favor and the especial witness of spiritual life are limited to his flock, so that it is always disastrous to leave the church” (*Institutes* IV,1,4).<sup>9</sup>

2) Secondly, Calvin places his doctrine of the Church within the overall framework of the creed. As such, it is not surprising that his ecclesiology may be called Trinitarian. He writes: “For here we are not bidden to distinguish between reprobate and elect – that is for God alone, not for us, to do – but to establish with certainty in our hearts that all those who, by the kindness of God the Father, through the working of the Holy Spirit, have entered into fellowship with Christ, are set apart as God’s property and personal possession; and that when we are of that number, we share that great grace” (*Institutes*, IV,1,3). Calvin sees the phrases from the Apostles’ creed “holy, catholic church” and “communion of saints” to be equivalent. Thus he gives prominence to the idea that the Church is a communion, in which the various members are to assist one another by mutual help and encouragement.<sup>10</sup> Such a partnership in grace is for Calvin a source of tremendous consolation (cf. *Institutes* IV, 1, 3; this whole third section is entitled “The communion of saints”).

<sup>4</sup> From J. ANDERSON, ed., *John Calvin’s Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) xlvii; as quoted in G.H. TAVARD, *The Starting Point of Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 114.

<sup>5</sup> G.H. TAVARD, *The Starting Point...*, op. cit., 37.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1 & 2, John T. McNeill, ed., (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), “The Library of Christian classics, Volumes XX and XXI,” xvi, which contains part of the “Table of Contents” of the work; later where Book IV actually begins in the text on page 1011, the word “aids” is mistakenly rendered “aims.” These two volumes have a continuous pagination, volume 1 including pages i-lxxi and 1-849 while volume 2 includes pages 850-1734.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1012. Hereafter, all quotations and references to Calvin’s *Institutes* will appear within parentheses in the text, the roman numeral referring to the book, the first arabic number referring to the chapter and the second arabic number referring to the section of the chapter. In this way the reader can refer to the text in any standard edition and in various languages, either in printed form or digitally on the internet.

<sup>8</sup> The original is correctly translated by McNeill as “manhood,” which I have rendered more inclusively. Whenever I think it is warranted, I will make similar slight modifications in the McNeill translation.

<sup>9</sup> Paragraph 4 of the first chapter of Part IV is entitled “The visible church as mother of believers” in the McNeill edition.

<sup>10</sup> See R.C. PETRY, “Calvin’s Conception of the ‘Communio Sanctorum,’” *Church History* 5 (1936) 227-238.

3) While all Protestant visions of the Church take into account the belief that people are saved by faith alone, Calvin brings his distinctive emphasis upon the “sovereignty of God” to bear upon his ecclesiology by means of the special role given to the doctrine of predestination.<sup>11</sup> In the first edition of the *Institutes* (1536), the Church is not only the *communio sanctorum*, but also *numerus electorum* or *praedestinatorum*.<sup>12</sup> God Himself provides the Church with her members through predestination, a reason for optimism and hope even when the Christian community is a small or persecuted minority. Resting on the power of almighty God, the Church will endure and survive whatever challenges or trials come her way. The doctrine of predestination also implies that the true members of the Church are known only to God, since only God knows who has been elected to salvation. As a consequence, the true Church cannot simply be equated with the visible Church. It is broader than the visible Church since it includes those who have already died or who have yet to be born. At the same time, it will always be smaller than the visible community of those who profess to be Christian at any given moment in history, since, as Augustine taught against the Donatists, the Church on earth always remains a *corpus permixtum*. Some who outwardly claim to be Christian are not so in fact. This being the case, the sin of those who ostensibly are her members is not a valid excuse for leaving the Church. Calvin vigorously rejects the view of ecclesial purists who would abandon the Church because of corruption or immorality or other failures (see *Institutes* IV,1,12-29).

4) What then is the relation between the invisible Church of the elect and the visible Church that one encounters in history? The distinction between the two does not render the visible church dispensable or unimportant. The invisible, perfect Church of the elect penetrates the visible, imperfect Church of history. God instituted the visible Church and our faith in God is the reason for acknowledging its great value. Calvin writes:

For the Lord esteems the communion of his church so highly that he counts as a traitor and apostate from Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of Word and sacraments. He so esteems the authority of the church that when it is violated he believes his own diminished. It is of no small importance that it is called “the pillar and ground of truth” and “the house of God” [1 Tim. 3:15, KJV]. By these words Paul means that the church is the faithful keeper of God’s truth in order that it may not perish in the world. For by its ministry and labor God willed to have the preaching of his Word kept pure and to show himself the Father of a family, while he feeds us

<sup>11</sup> See U. KÜHN, “Church,” in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, Jean-Yves Lacorte, ed., Vol. I (A-F), (New York: Routledge, 2005) 304.

<sup>12</sup> See J.T. McNEILL, “The Church in Sixteenth-Century Reformed Theology,” *The Journal of Religion* 22 (1942) 259.

with spiritual food and provides everything that makes for our salvation. It is also no common praise to say that Christ has chosen and set apart the church as his bride, “without spot or wrinkle” [Eph. 5:27], “his body and . . . fullness” [Eph. 1:23]. From this it follows that separation from the church is the denial of God and Christ. Hence, we must even more avoid so wicked a separation. For when with all our might we are attempting the overthrow of God’s truth, we deserve to have him hurl the whole thunderbolt of his wrath to crush us. Nor can any more atrocious crime be conceived than for us by sacrilegious disloyalty to violate the marriage that the only-begotten Son of God deigned to contract with us [cf. Eph. 5:23-32]” (*Institutes* IV,1,10).

5) In light of such high praise for the Church and such a strong warning about separation from it, Calvin’s attitude toward the Roman Catholic Church calls for some explanation. His “Letter to Francis I,” king of France, with which he introduced the first edition of the *Institutes*, states that the heart of the controversy raging among Christians at that time could be located in the contrast between the Roman conviction that the Church is always visible and to be identified with the those communities in communion with the pope and the reformed conviction that the Church is not always visible but is identifiable wherever one can verify the preaching of the Word of God in its purity and the administration of the sacraments as they were instituted by Christ. The identification of the true Church as distinct from the false Church is a recurring theme in Reformed ecclesiology (cf. *Institutes* IV,1,11). To Word and Sacrament, many Reformed writings add ecclesial discipline for the ongoing correction of the members of each congregation as a third mark of the true Church. Applying these criteria to the Roman Catholic Church of its day, the Geneva Confession of 1536 did not hesitate to affirm: “. . .where the gospel is not declared, heard, and received, there we do not acknowledge any form of the Church. Hence the churches governed by the ordinances of the pope are rather synagogues of the devil than Christian churches” (*Geneva Confession* of 1536, article 18).<sup>13</sup>

6) Regarding ecclesial structure, Calvin indicated four offices as rooted in the New Testament – pastor, teacher, elder and deacon.<sup>14</sup> While this fourfold order was never fully embraced by his followers, most Reformed churches adopted a structure which included a group of pastors and elders exercising a ministry of oversight over the community at local, regional and national levels. Synods and councils were of great importance in this view, as is clear from Calvin’s *Institutes* IV,9. In general, he did not see a hierarchical difference between the biblical

<sup>13</sup> Text taken from the following website: <http://www.creeds.net/reformed/gnvconf.htm> [accessed July 9, 2010].

<sup>14</sup> See KÜHN, “Church”, *op. cit.*, 304, and A. GANOCZY, “Calvin, John,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, Vol. I, (NY/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 236.

ministries of *episkopos*, presbyter/elder and deacon, placing instead the accent upon the headship of Christ over the Church.

7) Regarding the relation between the Church and the State, Calvin notes that civil government is necessary for human life and must be respected and obeyed except when it commands a violation of the law of God. Among the principal purposes of government are included the following: “[it] prevents idolatry, sacrilege against God’s name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offences against religion from arising and spreading among the people; it prevents the public peace from being disturbed; it provides that each man may keep his property safe and sound; that men may carry on blameless intercourse among themselves; that honesty and modesty may be preserved among men. in short, it provides that a public manifestation of religion may exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men” (*Institutes* IV,20,3). Calvin sees the Church as having an obligation to fashion a human society that is transformed by the values of the gospel, as was attempted in Geneva during Calvin’s own lifetime.

To recapitulate, Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* present us with an ecclesiology which may be summarized in the following points: 1) the reason for the church is to help weak human beings come to saving faith; 2) the church is a communion brought about by the sovereign, free action of the Triune God; 3) it is comprised of those predestined by God’s free plan to be saved; 4) the invisible one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of the elect is visible to God alone but penetrates the visible church here on earth, with the consequence that it is never permissible to separate oneself from the church which God has established as necessary for salvation; 5) the true church can be distinguished from false pretenders by its preaching of the word in its purity and celebration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, to which the administration of discipline for good order may also be added as a third sign; 6) ministers are of equal rank and the church is governed in a synodal way which includes the participation of the laity and always seeks to follow the guidance of its sole head, Jesus Christ; and 7) the state should create the circumstances needed to allow the Church to pursue her mission within society and should ban whatever is offensive to the will of God.

### **Echoes of This Ecclesiology in the Reformed-Catholic International Dialogue**

Notwithstanding the ecumenical euphoria which characterized the late 1960’s, bilateral dialogue between Reformed and Catholics was not something, to be taken for granted. Some voiced questions about the compatibility of bilateral relations, on the one hand, and what had to that time appeared to be the multi-

lateral nature of the ecumenical movement.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, by 1969 it was agreed that the three themes of Christology, ecclesiology and the attitude of a Christian believer before the world could provide fruitful topics for discussion between the two communities, without duplicating the work being done by other bilateral or multilateral conversations.<sup>16</sup> They provided the agenda for the phases of Reformed-Catholic international bilateral dialogue ever since.

The first phase, from 1970-1977, concluded with a text entitled “The Presence of Christ in the Church and the World” and basically explored Christology in relation to five sub-themes: the Church, teaching authority, the world, eucharist and ministry.<sup>17</sup>

The second phase concluded in 1990 with the text entitled “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church.”<sup>18</sup> It begins with a very helpful re-reading of history whose aim is a reconciliation of memories, proceeds to a common confession of faith about Christ and the Church and takes up traditional differences in the way in which the two communities have understood the nature and mission of the Church.

The third and most recent phase of dialogue (1998-2005) focused on the way in which the churches need to be agents promoting the values Jesus enunciated in his proclamation of the Kingdom of God.<sup>19</sup> This text is quite different from its predecessors, in that it accepted the call by many dialogue participants in recent years, especially those coming from the global South, to employ a more contextual methodology, treating theological themes by beginning with the experience of Christian believers – in this case, their experience in carrying out their responsibility for promoting a more just and peaceful world. This method resulted in a significantly longer text which included narratives about how Catholics and Reformed Christians faced the chal-

<sup>15</sup> An excellent account of this ambivalence is given by O.P. MATEUS, “Not Without the World Council of Churches: A Contribution to the History of the Catholic-Reformed International Bilateral Dialogue,” *The Ecumenical Review* 61 (2009) 328-342.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 334 and, especially, 338.

<sup>17</sup> The text is printed in H. MEYER and L. VISCHER, eds., *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, Faith & Order Paper, 108 (New York/Geneva: Paulist Press/WCC, 1984) 434-463. It, as well as the other two dialogue reports referred to in the present study, are also available at the internet sight for the Centro Pro Unione: <http://www.prounione.urbe.it/>

<sup>18</sup> Published in J. GROS, H. MEYER and W.G. RUSCH, eds., *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level 1992-1998*, Faith and Order Paper, 187 (Grand Rapids/Geneva: Eerdmans/WCC, 2000) 780-818, and available at <http://www.prounione.urbe.it/>.

<sup>19</sup> Published as “The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God” in The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Information Service*, 125 (2007/III) 110-156, with a commentary by J. VERCRUYSSSE, SJ, at *Ibid.*, 157-168; also available at: <http://www.prounione.urbe.it/>.

lenges of apartheid in South Africa, the “troubles” in Northern Ireland and the abuse of the First Nations (or native Americans) in Canada. Because of this methodology, however, there was less looking to the past than had occurred in the prior two phases of dialogue and consequently less direct or indirect reference to Calvin.

In light of this general description of the three dialogue results, it is obvious that the way they include “echoes” of Calvin’s ecclesiology will be different in each case. Here are a few reflections about each of them in that regard.

### **1977: The Presence of Christ in the Church and the World**

This dialogue report states its intention to “produce a survey of the degree of agreement, disagreement and unresolved issues” on the five separate themes which were the focus of dialogue in five successive week-long meetings of the two teams (12).<sup>20</sup> The hope is expressed that, by “bring[ing] to light the differences between the two communions,” “an honest appraisal . . . could help the two traditions to overcome them and discover together what they must do in order to become more credible in the eyes of the world” (5). The opening chapter, on “Christ’s Relation to the Church” registers no disagreement. Some affirmations clearly echo the ecclesiological vision of Calvin, such as the fact that “the mission and task of Jesus [...] are authoritative for the Church in every age and culture” (14), that the Church is to be seen in light of the divine purpose for Israel as expressed in the Old Testament (15), that the New Testament must be carefully interpreted in order to discern what is to be considered as normative for the life and doctrine of the Church from what is relative (19-20) and that the Church is active in the world to serve God’s plan and so “believing acceptance of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God” can “extend also to the realm of politics” (21-23). All of these statements are all able to be affirmed by Catholics as well.

The second chapter, on teaching authority in the Church addresses the question of differences inherited from the past, first of all, by noting the inherited contrast or even opposition between Scripture and Tradition “is no longer to be presented in terms of the battle lines of post-Tridentine polemic” (25). Moreover, the related debate concerning whether the discernment of the canon of the New Testament was “the decision of a ‘possessing’ Church or the receiving recognition of an ‘obeying’ Church is out of date” (32). Both sides agree that the Church is a *creatura Verbi* (26) and that the community advances in comprehension of the Word of God in time. Different emphases in what counts as the process by which the Word is correctly interpreted are noted. The reformed, for example, emphasize the importance of the life of faith of the whole community (28), carefully maintaining a “relationship between the theologically

trained servant of the Word and the theologically informed, responsible, total community” (29) while “the Catholic Church stresses within the community the special service of those who with the aid of the Holy Spirit accept pastoral responsibility” (30). Perhaps the most striking contrast here is brought out when the topic of infallibility is taken up. Here I believe that we can see a very strong echo of Calvin’s view of the Church; I quote:

The Reform rejection of any infallibility which is accorded to men derives from a repugnance to bind God and the Church in this way. In view of the sovereignty of Christ over the Church and of the liberty of the Spirit, a repugnance strengthened by the experience of frequent errors and resistances to the Word on the part of the Church. . . . The misgivings concerning the idea of ecclesiastical infallibility do not detract from the decisive though subordinate weight given in the Reformed tradition to the ancient Ecumenical Councils in the transmission and interpretation of the Gospel. For the Reformed, however, what alone is infallible, properly speaking, is God’s fidelity to his covenant, whereby he corrects and preserves his Church by the Spirit until the consummation of his reign (42).

Here, I would propose, we hear the strongest echo of Calvin’s view of the Church in the 1977 document. The emphasis upon the sovereignty of Christ, the liberty of the Spirit, the historic failures of members of the Church, including – and perhaps Calvin would even say especially – the hierarchy and the need for ongoing correction are all important themes in his *Institutes*.

There are a few other ecclesiological echoes in this first document. For example, addressing the presence of Christ in the World, Chapter Three calls that presence “ecclesiological” in the sense that “Christ is present in the Church and through his Lordship over the Church he exercises his Lordship over the world” (43). Further, “Christ who is Lord of all and active in creation points to God the Father who, in the Spirit, leads and guides history where there is no unplanned development” (45). Authentic renewal of congregations should have an influence on “the wider social and political context” (56). While these affirmations about God’s rule over history and the role of the Church as instrument in this rule have a strikingly Calvinistic ring to them, the Catholic team takes no issue with them, suggesting that this approach to envisioning the Church-World relation is fully acceptable to Catholic faith.

The final two sections of this text are on the Eucharist and the Ministry, topics eminently relevant to ecclesiology but which would be perhaps too specialized for the limits of the present paper. It should be noted, however, that the section on the Eucharist contains the only paragraph (84) which explicitly mentions John Calvin by name, indicating that his view of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist must be seen in light of his Christology, which he believed was an accurate reflection of that of two great champions of Christological orthodoxy – St.

<sup>20</sup> Instead of using additional footnotes, I will identify all of the texts quoted from the dialogue reports by placing within parentheses after the quotation the paragraph number in which the cited words appear.

Athanasius and St. Cyril of Alexandria. The Ministry chapter seeks to demonstrate convergence between Reformed and Catholics that apostolicity is an essential feature of the Church and that succession in ministry is considered as part of the Church's apostolicity, also for the Reformed. At the same time many differences in emphasis are registered in this section. Perhaps most reflective of Calvin's ecclesiology here is the reformed emphasis on synodality:

Both Roman Catholic and Reformed theology are particularly aware of the importance of the structure of the Church for the fulfillment of its commission. The Roman Catholic Church, in this regard, has derived a predominantly hierarchical ordering from the Lordship of Christ, whereas, from the same Lordship of Christ, the Reformed church has decided for a predominantly presbyteral-synodal organization. Today both sides are taking a fresh look at the sense of the Church as it appears in images of the early Church (106).

Both the chapter on the Eucharist and the final chapter dedicated to Ministry include many questions, suggesting that the dialogue team was convinced that much further discussion of these themes was needed.

### **1990: Towards a Common Understanding of the Church**

This second dialogue report concentrates "more directly on the doctrine of Church" (3), as noted in its Introduction, adding that "the new openness of ecumenical relationships has helped us to see our respective histories in new perspectives, and to clarify our relationships today. A new assessment of our common ground and of our disagreements is now possible; we are moving closer to being able to write our histories together" (7). The Introduction goes on to specify that "a complete ecclesiology was beyond our scope in this phase of dialogue. But it seemed especially important to reconsider the relation between the Gospel and the Church in its ministerial and instrumental roles" (9).

In fact, the text does begin with a history, which, in light of the polemical tone of reflections about the Church at the time of the Reformation, is particularly helpful. And yet this portion of the text was not entirely "written together." Each side produced its own account, then reviewed and modified it in light of the reactions of the other side (15). The result provides a very useful Reformed formulation of the ecclesiological concerns of John Calvin. He shared with Luther the following fundamental concerns:

... to affirm the sole headship of Jesus Christ over the Church; to hear and proclaim the message of the Gospel as the one Word of God which alone brings authentic faith into being; to re-order the life, practice and institutions of the Church in conformity with the Word of God revealed in Scripture. In all this there was no intention of

setting up a "new" Church; the aim was to re-form the Church in obedience to God's will revealed in his Word, to restore "the true face of the Church" and, as a necessary part of this process, to depart from ecclesiastical teachings, institutions, and practices which were held to have distorted the message of the Gospel and obscured the proper nature and calling of the Church (18).

What was more specific to Calvin?

- The unity and universality of the one true Church, to which those belong whom God has called or will call in Jesus Christ;
- The authority of Jesus Christ governing the Church through the Word in the power of his Spirit;
- The identification of an authentic "visible church" by reference to the true preaching of the Word and the right administration of the two dominical sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper;
- The importance of a proper Church order central to which was the office of the ministry of Word and Sacrament and, alongside it, the oversight exercised by elders sharing with the ministers of the Word in governing the affairs of the Church (19).

The reaction to these proposals seemed to emphasize the authority of the Church and its hierarchy, which led the Reformers to reject the following:

- The appeal to the Church's tradition as an authority equal to Scripture or belonging together with it;
- The universal authority of the Pope;
- The claim that church councils constitute an infallible teaching authority;
- The canonical distinction between the office of a bishop and that of any other minister of Word and Sacraments (20).

Since it seemed clear that "the established leadership of the Western Church was not generally prepared to agree to the amendments of doctrine, Church order and practice which the Reformers sought," they, "for their part, ... convinced that nothing less than obedience to God and the truth of the Gospel was at stake ... interpreted resistance as unwillingness to undergo conversion and renewal" (21). Coming up to the present, the report notes that many Reformed "appreciate the seriousness with which the Roman Catholic Church has placed the Word of God at the centre of its life" since Vatican II (29). In the current reassessment, while caricatures and misunderstandings are being overcome, some still wonder whether Catholics have "really addressed the issues of the Reformation" (30). That being said, there is, on the Reformed side

... an increasing sense that while the Reformation was at the time theologically and historically necessary, the division of the Western Church should not be accepted as the last word; that it is at best one-sided to read that

history as if all the truth lay on the side of the Reformers and none at all on the side of their opponents and critics within the Roman Catholic camp; that there have been both in the more remote and more recent past many positive developments in the Roman Catholic Church itself; that the situation today presents new challenges for Christian witness and service which ought so far as possible to be answered together rather than in separation; and – perhaps most important of all – that Reformed Christians are called to search together with their Roman Catholic separated brothers and sisters for the unity which Christ wills for his Church. ... (31)

For its part, the Catholic historical overview, acknowledges the truth of the charges of abuse. “Judgment on the Church just before the Reformation has, therefore, been severe – and justly so” (34), they admit. However, insofar as Luther and Calvin called for a reform of doctrine and not merely discipline or behavior, official reaction scrutinized their thought for doctrinal errors and thus the faulty practice which was the reason for their criticism in the first place was slow in being addressed. Subsequently, various reforms have been taken within the Catholic community, especially those fostered by Vatican II. This Catholic reading concludes by stating that today its theologians “generally acknowledge that many of the issues raised by the Reformers urgently needed to be faced and resolved” and that Catholic historians “have become more sympathetic to Zwingli and Calvin ... seeing them ... as reformers who felt obliged by their understanding of the Gospel to continue their efforts to reform the Church at all costs” (61). John Paul II is quoted as saying that, while “the work of their reform remains a permanent challenge among us and makes our ecclesiastical division always present ... “no one can deny that elements of the theology and spirituality of each of them maintain deep ties between us” (61).

This effort at moving toward a healing of memories is followed by a common confession of faith. “What unites us as Christians” the dialogue partners write, “is more important, more essential, than that which separates us as Roman Catholics and Reformed” (65). The confession of faith includes several statements about the Church, the most important of which being an attempt to give a compatible formulation to different emphases from the Reformed and Catholic traditions. They write:

Justification by grace through faith is given us in the Church. This is not to say that the Church exercises a mediation complementary to that of Christ, or that it is clothed with a power independent of the gift of grace. The Church is at once the place, the instrument, and, the minister chosen by God to make heard Christ’s word and to celebrate the sacraments in God’s name throughout the centuries. When the Church faithfully preaches the word of salvation and celebrates the sacraments, obeying the command of the Lord and invoking the power of the Spirit, it is sure of being heard, for it carries out in its

ministry the action of Christ himself (86).

To these are added the words: “The ministerial and instrumental role of the Church in the proclamation of the Gospel and in the celebration of the sacraments in no way infringes on the sovereign liberty of God” (87). God’s saving action is not restricted to the means placed in the hands of the Church; but still “God’s call is always related to the Church, in that God’s call always has as its purpose the building up of the Church which is the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12,27-28; Eph 1,22-23)” (87). Here we have a strong echo of Calvin’s emphasis on justification, on the sovereignty and freedom of God and on the importance of Word and Sacrament, read in a way that also embraces Catholic sentiments about the instrumental, sacramental and, if you will, mediatory role of the Church. I think that the achievement of this formulation is quite impressive and holds promise for further potential convergence.

The third chapter of this ecclesiological report takes up what are presented as three traditional differences in the two communities’ approaches to understanding the Church. The first contrast is between the Reformed emphasis upon the Church as *creatura Verbi* and the Catholic view of the Church as “sacrament of grace.” Calvin’s ecclesiology is clearly echoed when the report claims that the first approach insists “emphatically that the preaching, teaching and witness of the Church through the centuries – the Church’s dogma and tradition – are always to be subordinated to the testimony of the Bible, that Scripture rather than Tradition is ‘the word of God written’ and ‘the only infallible rule of faith and practice’ (96).” But also in the more Catholic description of the Church as sacrament of grace, echoes of Calvin’s convictions can be heard, such as: “All language concerning the sacramentality of the Church, then, must respect the absolute Lordship of Christ over the Church and the sacraments” (104); or again: “The instrumental ministry of the Church is confided to sinful human beings. It can therefore be disfigured or atrophied, mishandled and exaggerated. But the reality of God’s gift always transfigures human failure...” (109). At the end of the day, there seems to be enough openness to both Word and Sacrament by both traditions that the report suggests that they may be understood as “complementary to each other or as two sides of the same coin” (113).

The second difference concerns how the two sides view the continuity of the Church in history, stemming from “the sending of the apostles on mission by Christ” (116). Here too, something of Calvin’s view of the Church is seen in a passage such as the following: “The Church is not worthy of its name if it is not a living and resourceful witness, concretely addressing people’s needs. This is also why the Church’s continuity demands that it recognizes itself as *semper reformanda*” (117). While both sides agree on the need for continual reform – indeed, the report quotes Vatican II’s *Unitatis redintegratio* 6 at this point precisely in support of such reform – nevertheless, this issue raises a number of questions that still divide the two communities or, at least, require further discussion: 1) what makes for continuity

and, in particular, need the ministry of bishops in apostolic succession be part of such continuity? 2) What authority can be assigned to Tradition in relation to Scripture? 3) Can the presence of sin within the Church obscure beyond recognition the true identity of the Church, as the Reformed might say? And 4) were the events of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and the resulting division a substantial rupture in the continuity of the Church, as Catholics might say? Calvin's ecclesiology is echoed in this agreement that continuity requires continual reform and renewal because of human failure; the four open questions, however, while also reflecting his viewpoint, show where Catholics still cannot agree with it.

The third and final ecclesiological difference concerns the Church's visibility and ministerial order. Calvin's own view that the visible and invisible Church are indissolubly linked is affirmed in contrast to the sometimes common misinterpretation that he and those influenced by his thought intended to separate them. "There exists but one Church of God" (126), the report unambiguously affirms, and "the invisible church is the hidden side of the visible, earthly church" (127). In a perhaps surprising reversal of the situation at the time of the Reformation, when Calvin's *Institutes* did not recognize more than elements of the true Church in the community united under the guidance of the bishop of Rome, today the chief difficulty of the Reformed is Vatican II's teaching that the Church of Christ "subsists in" the Catholic Church (cf. *Lumen gentium* 8), that it thus has a special relation to Christ's Church which it does not extend to the Reformed churches. Though it does not say so explicitly, the report would seem to imply here that the Catholic doctrine of "subsistit in" is more "Calvinist" than the view of contemporary Reformed Christians.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding ministerial order, the report seems to echo Calvin nicely when it views ministry in relation to the fundamental activities of proclaiming the Word, celebrating the sacraments and guiding the ordered life of the community through the ministry of oversight (*episcopé*) (131-135). It also follows Calvin in looking to the New Testament and the early patristic literature as sources for understanding how ministry is to be structured and that it should be "presbyterially organized" (136-137). The Reformed in this text seem to find the three-fold ministry of *episcopoi*, presbyters and deacons more congenial

<sup>21</sup> What I mean here is that Calvin recognized the presence of "remains of the Church" in the Catholic Church – *vestigia ecclesiae* – but not the "true church," characterized by the preaching of the pure Word of God and celebration of the sacraments according to the Lord's command. Y. CONGAR, "Le développement de l'évaluation ecclésiologique des Églises non catholiques: Un bilan," in *Essais œcuméniques: le mouvement, les hommes et les problèmes* ([Paris]: Centurion, [1984]) 206-241, on page 210, states that the theme of *vestigia ecclesiae* was especially strong in the theology of Calvin. Vatican II's teaching about *subsistit in* is based on recognition of the presence of "elements of the Church" in other Christian communities, without seeing in them the fullness of what it means to be Church, a position that strikes me as analogous to the way in which Calvin viewed the Catholic Church.

than one might have expected, given the four-fold pattern that a number of authoritative commentators ascribe to Calvin. Differences between Reformed and Catholics appear concerning doctrinal authority within the Church and its relation to ministry and concerning whether ordination may be considered a sacrament. Surprisingly, the report states that "Calvin himself did not object to calling ordination a Sacrament, but he did not count it on a level with Baptism and the Eucharist because it was not intended for all Christians (*Institutes* IV: 19,28)" (140). Further dialogue is called for on the questions of the rite of ordination and who may be ordained – specific mention of the ordination of women being noted – and on the collegial exercise of *episcopé* (141-142). A ministerial theme not yet considered is signaled in the following words: "we have begun to come to terms with the particularly difficult issue of the structure of ministry required for communion in the universal Church. . . . Our discussion of the matter has shown how complex the issues involved are and how different the perspectives in which they are seen on both sides" (143). Thus on the issues of visibility and ministry, Calvin's ecclesiology is certainly echoed, but the Reformed participants did not feel compelled to follow him in all points.

#### **2005: The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God**

The most recent text from 2005 is much less pertinent to the theme under consideration in the present study, in so far as it focused on the contemporary activity of Reformed and Catholics in carrying out their social responsibilities in view of the demands of the Kingdom of God. Much less than in the earlier two phases did it focus on questions which have divided the two communities since the time of the Reformation and, consequently, much less did it echo in any explicit way Calvin's understanding of the Church. In a paragraph intending to retrieve his view of the Kingdom of God, the report noted:

Calvin's keen awareness and repeated teaching about the sovereignty of God shapes how the Reformed churches understand the kingdom. All of creation stands under the authority and providence of God. . . . Ethical formation in harmony with the values proclaimed by Christ in the Scriptures should lead the members of the church to act in a way which brings about a society ordered along the lines of God's plan and purpose for creation. The church has a vital role to play in this task, but this role is carried out humbly and realistically and in the attempt to be obedient to the sovereignty of God (52).

This ecclesiological statement very explicitly draws upon Calvin's thought about the nature and mission of the Church in society as an agent for promoting the sovereign will of God. Other echoes are much more implicit. Thus, in describing the process of discerning what particular initiatives are called for in a given situation, the Reformed note that the final authority resides in a communal discernment in which the current situation

is evaluated in light of the authority of Jesus Christ as expressed in Scripture; in comparison all subsequent authorities should be regarded only as “subordinate standards” (135). These affirmations echo the idea of the reformability of all decisions in light of the Scripture and the signs of the times and that the discernment feeding into such reform be carried out in a synodal, even local, way, themes congenial to Calvin’s overall approach to authority in the Church.

This third dialogue report also made a very intentional effort to deepen one dimension of the ecclesial reflection of the second, that is, the relation between Word and Sacrament. The 2005 document claims that an ecclesiology which would limit itself to seeing the Church as either *creatura Verbi* or sacrament of grace, rather than both, would be necessarily incomplete and inadequate. The Church is an instrument in service to the Kingdom both by proclaiming the Word and by celebrating the sacraments, a conclusion drawn from the common reflection based both upon the Scripture and the tradition and upon the current experience of Reformed and Catholics in various situations from the recent past. This unity of Word and Sacrament does seem to echo Calvin, though perhaps going a bit farther than he in insisting on the necessary interdependence of the two. The dialogue team concludes that the Church could appropriately be called, by both communities, not only a prophetic herald but also “a kind of sacrament of the Kingdom of God” (197).

### Conclusion

I hope that the fore-going exposition has demonstrated that there are powerful echoes of John Calvin’s ecclesiology in the international Reformed-Catholic dialogue. Those echoes of the insights of this great thinker have helped to clarify the extent to which the two churches already share many convictions about the nature and mission of the Church within God’s design for the salvation of humankind. At the same time, especially in the report of the second phase, as one might expect given its title “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” the dialogue has sharpened the questions which need more exploration if greater convergence or even, hopefully, full consensus is to be achieved.

I believe that Calvin’s insistence upon the need for continual reform can be a precious resource in this ongoing task. Catholics can fully embrace that conviction. In light of it, greater agreement in evaluating our common and separate histories is to be hoped for. Furthermore, Calvin’s mining of not only Scripture but also of the early patristic tradition can be a source for progress toward convergence, especially in the crucial question of ministry at various levels in the Church. The most recent phase of Reformed-Catholic dialogue plumbed the patristic literature in a relatively cursory way regarding the theme of the Kingdom of God. I believe that careful common work on the patristic contribution to understanding what God’s Word implies for ministry and Church order could provide a most fruitful source for further convergence, even on the difficult question of

a ministry in service to the universal unity of the Church, what Catholics understand as the Petrine ministry.

One of my fonder memories of participating in the third phase of this dialogue with brothers and sisters of the Reformed tradition occurred at one of their theological faculties in South Africa. We had finished a grueling week of listening to talks and of discussing their relevance for our dialogue and were resting before beginning the long journeys back to our respective homes. Several of us were leisurely exploring the library when we came across a section containing the works of Calvin. One of the members of the Catholic team, Fr. Harry O’Brien, a priest from Scotland who had earned a doctorate in the theology of John Calvin at the Gregorian University, began to draw off of the shelves volumes of Calvin’s commentaries on the Scriptures with which he was very familiar, and shared with the group of us who were listening in admiration, some beautiful passages written by this great Christian reformer. To me, that scene will remain a symbol of the way forward and of what we could be for one another.

On that note, I would like to conclude with words written by the Reformed team concerning the reconciliation of memories that we long for:

Can we not look upon each other as partners in a search for full communion? In that search we may be led to discover complementary aspects in our two traditions, to combine appreciation for the questions and insights of the Reformers with recognition that the Reformed can also learn from the Roman Catholic Church, and to realize that Reformed and Roman Catholics need each other in their attempt to be more faithful to the Gospel (“Toward a Common Understanding of the Church,” 32).

Such an approach, they add, would “hold out hope of further increase in mutual understanding in the future” (*Ibid.*, 31). So may it be.



## Word and Spirit: Calvin's Theology and the Issues of Today

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We are coming to the end of a year marking the fifth centenary of the birth of John Calvin on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1509, and I am glad of the opportunity to present some observations on his life and work. Calvin's destiny – in this context a rather loaded word – was that he would be known in subsequent centuries mainly through a form of religious thought and practice called Calvinism, which is said with some but not complete justification to be derived from him. The man himself, again with some but not complete justification, has over the centuries been represented as austere to the extent of being joyless, harsh and even cruel. This centenary offers an opportunity to present a more nuanced view both of Calvin and of his theological legacy.

Attempts to assess his character had already begun before his death in 1564, in the form of polemical theological tracts, but the first biography was the work of a Jerome Bolsec, a Carmelite friar who had accepted the reform but subsequently returned to the Catholic Church. In 1577 he wrote in French a tract that has remained notorious for the extreme nature of the charges made against its subject and has been discredited because of factual inaccuracies.<sup>1</sup> All possible invective was hurled at Calvin and, not surprisingly, the more lurid charges have become part of the widely received perception of the man. Accusations of being ambitious, presumptuous, arrogant, might in later times be regarded simply as predictable aspects of the polemic against an adversary which was characteristic of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but that he was an impostor who claimed to be able to raise the dead, a lover of rich fare, a gadabout and a sodomite would not easily be forgotten.

Other critical biographies were to follow, including accounts by Cardinal Richelieu and Bishop Bossuet.

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Histoire de la vie, mœurs, actes, doctrines, constance et mort de Jean Calvin, jadis ministre de Geneve*. Text in 'Archives curieuses de l'histoire de France depuis Louis XI jusqu'à Louis XVIII,' ed. L. Cimber, F Danjou (Paris, 1835) V, 305.

Bossuet accused him of being ambitious, an autocrat, a morose and bitter spirit, and described his literary style as *triste*.<sup>2</sup> A French Catholic biographer, J. M. Audin, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century put things succinctly: 'Calvin never loved, and no one loved him either. One dreaded him, feared him. No one felt drawn to him because of personal appeal.'<sup>3</sup> Calvin was no better served by some Protestant writers, especially nineteenth century liberals. His approach to theology differs so much from their concern with 'the essence of Christianity' that for them a sectarian and despotic personality must lie behind it. This is an example of how assessments of his theology were linked both by way of cause and effect to perceptions of his personality and character.

Clearly, to achieve a balanced image of him there is need to know the facts of his career, to assess carefully what he said of himself and to take account of what is revealed through his relationships with others.

### CALVIN'S LIFE AND PERSONALITY

Born on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1509, at Noyon in Picardy, France, he was the son of a notary engaged by the ecclesiastical authorities - both by the Chapter of the cathedral and the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. STAUFFER, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, trans. George Shriver (Birmingham AL: Solid Ground, 1971) 22. Q. BREEN, "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition," *Church History* 26, 1 (1957) 7.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in R. STAUFFER, *op. cit.*, 23. Cf. also R.L. REYMOND, *John Calvin. His Life & Influence* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2004) 135-140: Appendix A. Opposing Calvin Biographers.

bishop himself.<sup>4</sup> It was this connection that enabled the father, Gerard, to secure a sinecure for his son at the age of twelve, a portion of the revenues of a local church. This required that he receive the tonsure and become a cleric. That was not an unusual way of sponsoring a student but his father did want him to become a priest and sent him to study in Paris. But after the preliminary Latin and philosophy studies there, Gerard changed his mind and sent him to Orleans to study law. From there Calvin himself chose to go to Bourges where the teaching was said to be superior. Having completed his licentiate he returned to Paris with the intention of pursuing humanist studies. It appears that he had by now espoused the Lutheran reform at a time when the hostility of the king, Francis I, made it dangerous to do so.

Like others of this new persuasion he went into hiding in 1534 after the affair of the 'Placards' – a set of posters attacking the Mass had appeared in Paris (one was found on the door of King Francis's bedchamber) and the government reacted swiftly, imprisoning and executing those who were found to be 'Lutherans.' Little is known of the time he spent as a fugitive apart from a short period in Basel where he wrote a theological tract that would in later editions become famous as *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In 1536 he was passing through Geneva and was recognised by Guillaume Farel, the newly appointed Church leader there. Geneva had through public debate adopted the Lutheran reform, but from mixed motives - partly to further its desire to free itself from the overlordship of the Catholic House of Savoy and partly to placate its dominant and reformed neighbour, Berne. Farel has been described as one capable of bearding a complete stranger to tell him his duty and Calvin himself recorded years later that Farel informed him God would curse his retirement and the tranquillity of the studies to which he aspired, if he withdrew and refused to help in the re-organisation of the Church at Geneva.

He was at that stage committed to the reform but, as the author already of a theological work, his ambition was to continue to make a theological contribution. He agreed to stay, terror-struck, he was to say later, by Farel's imprecation, and that fact is, I believe, of great

significance in understanding Calvin. A life-changing decision was made under conditions of fear and foreboding about the future, about whether to continue as a refugee or remain in the fractious community that was Geneva. Reflecting on those early days at the end of his life, he recalled the sometimes violent opposition he and Farel met in a city divided by factions more concerned with social and economic advantage than with religion: 'Just imagine how that frightened a poor scholar, timid as I am, and confess I have always been.'<sup>5</sup>

Deep inner sentiments come to the surface in this address to his fellow ministers shortly before his death. A self-questioning as well as a self-justification mostly absent from his writings and letters during his life is now evident in this farewell, as in a similar address from his sick-bed to the city's governing Council. The received image of Calvin is certainly not that he was timid and retiring, nor was he perceived in that way by his contemporaries, but behind the façade of a determined, confident, at times ruthless, reforming figure there seems to have been an insecure personality who over the years did not allow himself the luxury of introspection and concern for his own psychological well-being. Part of the problem may have been that too much responsibility was thrust upon him at too young an age – twenty-six. In any case, having accepted a role he had not sought, he was in my view psychologically constrained to continue in it despite feeling unsuited to it.

Initially his task was simply to teach Scripture and he was able to keep a low profile, but by a series of accidents and because of his superior theological knowledge he found himself, with Farel, spearheading a programme of reform that required more dedication to religious practice than the Genevans found acceptable. Opposition grew and both men were expelled from the city in 1538. The religious situation deteriorated however and the city Council decided that Calvin was its best hope for the creation of a lasting form of church organisation. Having spent three contented years in Strasbourg as pastor to the French speaking congregation he agreed to return. The agreement between the ministers in Strasbourg and the civil authorities in Geneva was that it was to be only a six-month stay.

That he agreed to return at all may however represent less a personal desire for the task he had originally undertaken than an anxiety based belief that this was where his duty lay. It would accord with the theory that a person acting in a less than free manner is likely to expend more energy than is appropriate in the duties thus undertaken, seeking reassurance rather than realisation of innate potential. Calvin seems to have been such a driven personality. One of the ministers in Berne,

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<sup>4</sup> Among well known modern biographies are: W.J. BOUWSMA, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1988); B. COTTRET, *Calvin: Biographie* (Paris: Editions Jean-Claude Lattès, 1995); E. DOUMERGUE, *Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps*, 7 Vols. (Lausanne: G. Bridel, 1899-1917); A.E. McGRATH, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford/Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990); O. MILLET, *Calvin. Un Homme, une Œuvre, un Auteur* (CH-Gollion: infolio éditions, 2008); T.H.L. PARKER, *John Calvin: A Biography* (London: J.M. Dent, 1975).

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<sup>5</sup> T.H.L. PARKER, *John Calvin, ..., op. cit.*, 182.

Wolfgang Musculus, described him as a bow always strung. Among his physical ailments in later years were migraine and irritable bowel syndrome, both of them typical symptoms of stress.

That is how I see his situation. As many will be aware, there are studies of Luther which focus on his psychological makeup, such as Erikson's *Young Man Luther. A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* and Oberman's less clinical but insightful *Luther – Man between God and the Devil*.<sup>6</sup> Historically, biographical studies of Calvin have, as I indicated, been rather partisan, hagiographical or demonising, and on the whole less analytical. One modern study, however, William Bouwsma's *John Calvin. A Sixteenth Century Portrait*, is in a category of its own. It is a portrait, the author says, rather than a biography, but not primarily a psychological study, and a sixteenth century portrait because he is less interested in Calvin's inner life for its own sake than in using it to illuminate the momentous cultural crisis central to the age. Thus Bouwsma presents what he calls a cultural portrait of Calvin in the form of a dialogue between antithetical impulses within him, one arising from the traditional intricately ordered Christian cosmos and the other from the uncertainty and freedom opened up by humanism. Calvin was heir to the first because of his scholastic training, and an avid student of the new learning developed by the other. According to Bouwsma, the philosophical Calvin craved desperately for intelligibility, order, certainty while the humanist in him was inclined to celebrate the paradoxes and mystery at the heart of existence.<sup>7</sup> He lived with this tension all his life and it showed itself in his temperament. 'Calvin was a singularly anxious man and as a reformer, fearful and troubled,'<sup>8</sup> says Bouwsma, but he concludes that he was more heroic than most in his struggle to come to terms with the tensions in himself.<sup>9</sup> Bouwsma's portrait has been criticised for simply presenting an alternative assessment of Calvin's thought under the rubric of anxiety,<sup>10</sup> but to me it has the advantage of showing how the conflictual elements of the contemporary culture could interact with, play upon, his psychological traits, to give rise to the devout yet

polemical, emotional yet intellectual man it is generally agreed he was.

Bouwsma's analysis has to do with the intellectual dimension of the culture. There was of course a political dimension to it also and in Geneva there were considerable political tensions affecting Calvin. The years after his return were the setting for a long battle to establish and consolidate the Church order he believed was in accordance with the Gospel. One of his difficulties was that the native Genevans resented newcomers from France who were being recruited to the ministry. Geneva too remained a city of factions based on family rivalries, attitudes towards standards of religious practice and moral behaviour, as well as prejudice against outsiders. As a result those years are divided into periods of conflict, of consolidation and of eventual triumph, and furnish helpful evidence in order to judge what kind of man Calvin was. Clearly, he was very determined to succeed.

In his writings, especially his letters, over that long period he revealed something of himself, but present day scholarship has shown that how he perceived himself must be balanced by more objective criteria, not only the comments of friends and foes alike, but also the facts of his reforming career, insofar as these can be ascertained by historical research.

As well as his writings, much of his voluminous correspondence has been preserved. Many of his letters were written on the occasion of illness or death touching his friends or himself and he revealed considerable emotion in them, often in what today seems an unduly rhetorical style but was not unusual for that age and for people like Calvin writing in French and well versed in rhetoric. It was a time when epidemics, infant mortality, fatal illnesses and chronic pain were commonplace. In 1541, while he was away from Strasbourg, plague struck the city and took two students who were boarders in his house. He wrote to Farel to say that those events brought him such sadness as to 'completely overwhelm my soul and break my spirit.' A letter to the parent of one of the boys is a classic example of the rhetorical style. The death of his only child at birth in 1541 and of his wife in 1549, a widow whom he had married in 1540, led him to write to his friends about his intense grief but also of his resignation to God's will.

He had married, like many of his contemporaries, for reasons of convenience rather than romance, but unlike many of those who had suffered the same tragedy Calvin did not re-marry after his wife's death. In a surprisingly unreserved passage in a sermon he told his congregation why: 'As for me, I do not want anyone to think it very virtuous of me that I am not married... I know my infirmity, that perhaps a woman might not be happy with

<sup>6</sup> E.H. ERIKSON, *Young Man Luther. A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York/London: W.W. Norton, 1958). H.O. OBERMAN, *Luther – Man between God and the Devil*, trans. E. Wallison-Schwarbart (New York: Image Books, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> W. BOUWSMA, *John Calvin ...*, *op. cit.*, 230-231.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 231.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. E.A. DOWEY, Review of Bouwsma's book in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 57, 4 (1989) 846.

me.<sup>11</sup> Commentators have speculated whether he was referring to his chronic and painful maladies, which were not however uncommon, or to his bad temper, an infirmity to which he admitted and which has been well chronicled by others, including his friends. In a letter written in 1539, while at Strasbourg, he told of a dispute with his fellow ministers there. 'There I sinned grievously through not keeping my temper. For my mind was so filled with bile that I poured out bitterness on all sides.'

It is acknowledged by biographers that he had close friends and that these friendships were for the most part life-long. His friendship with Farel, which was sometimes stormy because of the latter's often impetuous acts (as when at sixty-nine he suddenly married a young girl), was nevertheless deep and lasting and he wrote to express his great happiness when Farel recovered from a nearly fatal illness. He dedicated his *Commentary on II Corinthians* to Melchior Wolmar, who had taught him Greek: 'I remember how faithfully you have cultivated and strengthened the friendship between us, which had its first beginning so long ago....'<sup>12</sup>

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his friendships but there is also need to take account of his interaction with others in the course of his work. From his return to Geneva in 1541, when the city Council appointed him chief pastor, he was faced with the task of re-organising the ministry, of appointing new men and accepting or rejecting some who in 1538 had not sided with or had openly opposed the rigorous programme he and Farel had devised to create a 'well-ordered and regulated Church.' A careful study<sup>13</sup> of how Calvin dealt with Henri de la Mare, one of those original dissidents, has shown that in negotiating with the city Council, the paymasters of the ministers, Calvin consistently discriminated against this man. He was first of all transferred to a country church and then, despite repeated appeals for money to repair both church and his house, was left unaided while others received what they needed. The church was without doors and windows and one wall of the house fell down.

While there appears to have been a personal animus

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<sup>11</sup> *Sermon 21 on I Tim 3*. Text (modernised) in *John Calvin's Sermons on Timothy and Titus*. Facsimile of 1579 edition (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983) 258.

<sup>12</sup> *Comm. 2 Cor* Dedicatory Epistle, 1. References to the Commentaries are all taken from *Calvin's Commentaries*, D. Torrance, T. Torrance, eds, (Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press, 1972).

<sup>13</sup> W. G. NAPHY, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994) 59-67.

in Calvin's attitude to de la Mare, a doctrinal issue was also involved. De La Mare was a friend of a native Genevan named Ameaux who resented Calvin because he had lost his trade of card making when the new godly regime outlawed such games and he had also been refused a divorce from his wife through Calvin's insistence on reconciliation. At a private dinner party, Ameaux attacked Calvin's views on predestination, was arrested and sentenced to public humiliation. De La Mare, considered guilty by association, was jailed.

This incident is a reminder of how much theological issues mattered for the consolidation of the new civil and church order in places like Geneva and how conflicting claims of jurisdiction could arise between the two authorities. While the citizens were not in general theologically literate, doctrine had its own importance. The city Council established its legitimacy in the eyes of powerful neighbours like Berne by subscribing to the new doctrine and taking responsibility as far as it could for church affairs.

## WORD AND SPIRIT

Turning now to doctrine and the main theme of this paper, Calvin's theology of Word and Spirit and its relevance to today's theological issues, I note first that this pairing of Word and Spirit arises from Calvin's Trinitarian theology, specifically his theology of Revelation. God's self-disclosure in Christ involves a second movement, the mission of the Spirit. The saving knowledge of God, to be found fully only in Christ, is gained solely through his Word joined to his Spirit.<sup>14</sup> This has implications for his theology of Scripture but also for that of the sacraments.<sup>15</sup> In speaking of the invocation of the Trinity at baptism, he concludes 'that Word and Spirit are nothing else than the essence of God.'<sup>16</sup> Comparative studies of Reformation and Catholic theologies have often focused on the terms Word and Sacrament, but the theme Word and Spirit - Holy Spirit - is more fundamental and its origin in the theology of God's self-disclosure explains why Calvin's contribution to the theology of the Spirit is so significant.

Even though Regin Preter in his study, *Spiritus Creator. Luther's Concept of the Holy Spirit*, maintained that 'the concept of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>14</sup> E.D. WILLIS, *Calvin's Catholic Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966) 117.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. P.W. BUTIN, *Revelation, Redemption and Response. Calvin's Understanding of the Divine-Human Relationship* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 59-60.

<sup>16</sup> *Institutes* I.xiii.16. All quotations from the *Institutes* are taken from JOHN CALVIN, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, J.T. McNEILL ed., Ford Lewis Battles, trans., 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).

completely dominates Luther's theology,<sup>17</sup> this is true only if it is as an unnamed Spirit, as Luther's theology is fundamentally a theology of the Word, and to use an obvious instance, his treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian*, makes few references to the Spirit. For him the 'inestimable power and liberty of Christians'<sup>18</sup> comes simply from faith, and this faith acquires its power from the Word. Faith and the Word, Luther says, rule in the soul. 'Just as the heated iron glows like fire because of the union of fire with it, so the Word imparts its qualities to the soul.'<sup>19</sup> This is an evocative image, evocative even of the Spirit, perhaps, but it brings to mind at once the fact that Calvin's theology of the generation of faith by the Word in the soul is precisely where the role of the Spirit in this process is powerfully articulated.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, his exposition of the doctrine of the Spirit in the section dealing with the Trinity follows the traditional orthodox pattern.<sup>20</sup> The whole plan of the *Institutes* is based however on the opening statement of the work that true wisdom consists in the knowledge of God and of oneself,<sup>21</sup> so Calvin is concerned to draw attention as early as possible to the sure source of the knowledge of God, which is the Holy Scripture. Accordingly, he says conviction of the truth of Scripture is to be sought in a higher source than human wisdom and is to be found in the witness of the Holy Spirit, 'the secret testimony of the Spirit' to its truth.<sup>22</sup> His thinking on this inner witness of the Spirit will be expanded greatly in Book III, where he deals with the role of the Spirit in the generation of faith and the whole process of regeneration and justification in a theology that is a considerable advance on Luther's, as the reference to regeneration occurring prior to justification might indicate.

My main point here is that in his consideration of the two topics, Scripture and the way salvation is appropriated, Calvin developed his distinctive theology of the relationship between Word and Spirit, in effect between Christ and the Spirit. That is why I hold that his theology is of interest today – because of its

<sup>17</sup> R. PRENTER, *Spiritus Creator. Luther's Concept of the Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001) ix.

<sup>18</sup> MARTIN LUTHER, 'The Freedom of a Christian', *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 607.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 601.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of Calvin's approach to the doctrine of the Trinity, see T. GEORGE, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1988) 199-201.

<sup>21</sup> *Inst.* I.i.1.

<sup>22</sup> *Inst.* I.vii.4.

pneumatological contribution to Christology, an advance whose need has been felt in Catholic theology since Vatican II.

### The Work of the Spirit

In Book III he develops further the idea of the secret testimony of the Spirit. Without the illumination of the Spirit, the Word can do nothing, but by the Spirit the mind is not only illumined but the heart is also strengthened and supported by his power.<sup>23</sup> And since it is harder for the heart to be given assurance than for the mind to be enlightened, the Spirit serves as a seal, in effect to seal up the certainty of faith in the heart.<sup>24</sup> As with Luther, faith for Calvin includes confidence or is identified with confidence in God's promises – a typical term meaning the promise of God's goodwill towards the elect. There is more than conviction or certainty involved here, however. The Word produces faith – without it, he says, no faith will remain<sup>25</sup> – but faith is the peculiar work of the Spirit and is 'the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.'<sup>26</sup> This concept of unity with Christ is of fundamental importance in Calvin's scheme. According to Butin, 'Bucer's early influence in reinforcing this emphasis on believers' communion with Christ had been significant.'<sup>27</sup> Certainly, over the various editions of the *Institutes* he varied and gradually strengthened his terminology of union because of the Eucharistic and other controversies in which he engaged. In the context of the bond with Christ arising from faith, he says in the final Latin edition of the *Institutes* (1559) that Christ 'makes us, engrafted in his body, participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself' and 'he becomes completely one with us.' It is evident from his *Commentaries* that his reading of Romans especially led him to this position. According to a recent study,<sup>28</sup> in the 1559 edition '(he) has no fewer than thirty-two references ... to believers participating in

<sup>23</sup> *Inst.* III. ii.33.

<sup>24</sup> *Inst.* III.ii.36.

<sup>25</sup> *Inst.* III.ii.6.

<sup>26</sup> *Inst.* III.i.1.

<sup>27</sup> P.W. BUTIN, *Revelation Redemption ...*, *op. cit.*, 115. See also K. McDONNELL, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) 81. McDonnell expresses doubts about the extent of Bucer's influence on Calvin in significant areas: 'That Bucer in reality decisively influenced Calvin in all these areas can be doubted; frequently the assertion of influence or relationship is made without presenting any evidence.'

<sup>28</sup> J.T. BILLINGS, *Calvin, Participation and Gift. The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Christ, with many more references in less direct language,' and the language of participation has been strengthened by him in the course of time to differentiate his position from Zwinglianism. To the significance of this emphasis for his doctrine of the Eucharist it will be necessary to return.

First, however, I must take up the question of the role of the Spirit in the Incarnation. As with the principal items of the Creed, his theology of the Incarnation reproduces the orthodox position and he explicitly repudiates the ancient heresies, particularly Nestorianism, saying, for example: 'For we affirm the divinity so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired, and yet these two natures constitute the one Christ.'<sup>29</sup> Despite this affirmation, various commentators have noted in Calvin a tendency to stress the disparity between divinity and humanity. For him 'the most apposite parallel'<sup>30</sup> for the relationship between the two is that between soul and body in man, and he is probably echoing Augustine who uses the example at least twice.<sup>31</sup> But it is also an approach found in Cyril of Alexandria, who says: 'These terms (body and soul) clearly denote things essentially diverse and utterly dissimilar.'<sup>32</sup> And so the use of the comparison may bring with it a legacy of Neo-Platonist dualism characteristic of Alexandrian theology, especially as there is a dualism evident in Calvin's actual anthropology; he accords the status of principal part of man to the soul and says it is separate from the body and even makes use of the term 'prison-house' to describe the body in the human composite.<sup>33</sup>

He does not however follow the Alexandrians in the attempt to use the 'communication of properties' to account for the unity of the person of Christ; instead he shares with the Antiochenes an attitude of great caution in this regard. As Wendel pointed out in his classic study, whenever Calvin concedes something on this point, 'he automatically attaches the reservation that in the person of Christ divinity and humanity keep their own characteristics without reacting on one another more than is required for the existence of this union *sui*

*generis*.'<sup>34</sup> In this he showed his awareness of the Monophysite danger – in the *Institutes* he referred to the condemnation of Eutyches at the Councils of Constantinople and Chalcedon – but it may be asked if this attitude, shared with the Antiochenes, led him to espouse the idea of a loose union between the divine and human natures in Christ - in fact a Nestorian tendency.

In all this it must be remembered that Calvin's starting point in his Christology is the office of Mediator – his theology is essentially soteriological and he insisted that the things that apply to the mediatorship are not spoken simply of the divine nature or of the human nature but of the two. Nonetheless, he held that the prerogatives of the Mediator did belong to the pre-existent Son, though 'not in the same manner or respect'<sup>35</sup> and this hints at what will emerge later about the relationship between the divine and human natures, especially in relation to the status of the risen Christ.

In his refutation of the Polish Anti-Trinitarians in 1558 he said that the name of Mediator must be accepted as applying to Christ from the beginning of creation. As Eternal Son of God it was by his grace that both men and angels, before the Fall, were joined to God.<sup>36</sup> The way in which the prerogatives of mediatorship then show themselves in history centre on Christ's lordship by which God governs the world. But when the elect see God as he is, Christ, having discharged the office of Mediator, will cease to be the ambassador of the Father. He concludes this section in the *Institutes* by saying that: 'Then God shall cease to be the head of Christ, for Christ's own deity will shine of itself, although as yet it is covered by a veil.'<sup>37</sup> His commentary on the related passage, I Cor 15:27, includes the assertion that when Christ hands over the kingdom to the Father, his 'humanity will no longer be in between to hold us back from a nearer vision of God.'<sup>38</sup> All this is very speculative material and would require analysis of related passages, but a reasonable conclusion from other evidence would be that Calvin was so conscious of the limitations of human nature that he fell back on the divinity of Christ as the dominant principle in his soteriological and Christological thinking. This stress on the role of the divinity beneath or even beyond

<sup>29</sup> *Inst.* II.xiv.1.

<sup>30</sup> *Inst.* II.xiv.1.

<sup>31</sup> AUGUSTINE, *Sermones* 186, MPL 38, 999; *Enchiridion* XI, 36, MPL 40, 250.

<sup>32</sup> CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Adversus Nestorium*, 2,6, in H. Bettenson, ed., *The Later Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) 253.

<sup>33</sup> *Inst.* I.xv.2.

<sup>34</sup> F. WENDEL, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, P. Mairet, trans. (London: Collins, 1963) 222.

<sup>35</sup> *Inst.* II.xiv.3.

<sup>36</sup> *Joannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, W. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss, eds. (Braunschweig: C.A. Schwetscke, 1863-1900) 9:338.

<sup>37</sup> *Inst.* II.xiv.3.

<sup>38</sup> *Comm. I Cor (15:27)*, 327.

the flesh is so much associated with Calvin as to have been described in the sixteenth century Christological controversies as *illud extra calvinisticum*. By devoting some more attention to this specific idea, the *extra calvinisticum*, I can return to our main topic, the role of the Holy Spirit.

### The *extra calvinisticum*

Stated simply, this doctrine is that the Eternal Son of God, even after the Incarnation, was united to the human nature to form one person, but was not restricted to the flesh. Because of the title, it may appear that this teaching is unique to Calvin and indeed outside of the tradition, but this is not the case. For example Athanasius has a clear statement of it: 'The Word was not confined within his body; nor was he there and nowhere else; he did not activate that body and leave the universe empty of his activity and guidance. ... (W)hile being recognised from his body, through his actions in the body, he was also manifest in his workings in the universe.'<sup>39</sup> Calvin's formulation of the principle was expanded through various editions of the *Institutes* within the context of his eucharistic theory and issues in remarks such as: 'in his flesh he is contained in heaven until he appears in judgement.'<sup>40</sup> That and a related passage in Book II, indicates that his thinking is that the very reality of the 'flesh,' the 'prison-house' demands an assertion of the freedom of the Eternal Word. The human nature is limited, the Eternal Word is not and the deity, as he says elsewhere,<sup>41</sup> must not be robbed of what belongs to it. Clearly then, the *extra-calvinisticum* underlies his notion of mediatorship going beyond the historical role of the Incarnate Word. Through Christ as Eternal Son the angels and all creation were joined to God, so this mediation should be thought of as an ordering role. There are then two kinds of mediation, ordering and reconciling, and the first did not cease nor was it diminished when the Eternal Son was manifested in the flesh (Calvin's favourite expression). The ordering of creation according to the Father's will is the more comprehensive category of activity of the Son and his re-ordering and restoring of rebellious men are, as Willis says, 'special forms and instances of the inclusive office of the Son.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> ATHANASIUS, *De incarnatione*, 17 in *The Early Christian Fathers*, H. Bettenson ed. (London: Collins, 1956) 288. Cf. E.D. WILLIS, *Calvin's Catholic Christology. The Function of the so-called extra-calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1966).

<sup>40</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.30.

<sup>41</sup> *Inst.* II.xiv.7.

<sup>42</sup> E.D. WILLIS, *Calvin's Catholic Christology...*, *op. cit.*, 71.

What then of the role of the Spirit throughout this mediation? For Calvin, as for the tradition generally, there is a close relationship between Word and Spirit in the ordering of creation. In the section on the Trinity he says: 'To the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity.'<sup>43</sup> The activity of the Spirit is further specified: 'For it is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and in earth.'<sup>44</sup> There is a correlation here between the Eternal Word and the Spirit and this is expanded in his discussion of how Word and Spirit relate in Scripture: 'by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit.'<sup>45</sup> Of Christ and the Spirit, in the historical phase of mediation, he gives it as an axiom that they are not to be separated.<sup>46</sup>

It has been remarked that the *extra calvinisticum* serves to underline the identity of the *Spiritus Creator* with the *Spiritus Regenerator*, but in my view this in turn tends to undermine the idea of predestination in the form given to it by Calvin's extreme logic, the double decree, whereby the *Spiritus Regenerator* is withheld from some, but not the activity of the *Spiritus Creator*.

### Predestination

Let me make a brief reference to Calvin's doctrine of predestination at this point. To the traditional doctrine, as found in St Augustine, for example, Calvin, notoriously, one might say, added the idea of the double decree. He felt unable to accept that anything happens otherwise than under the control of the divine will, and so eternal damnation must be the subject of a divine decree as it is in the case of eternal salvation, This decree must be implemented by the *Spiritus Creator*, presumably, as a Spirit that passes, while the *Spiritus Regenerator*, by definition, operates only in the elect, and so the unity of the two comes into question.

Calvin of course found evidence for the double decree in the Scriptures. Where Paul says, 'He hardens the heart of whomever he chooses' (Rom 9:18), Calvin makes the similarly laconic assertion. 'Whom God

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<sup>43</sup> *Inst.* I.xiii.18.

<sup>44</sup> *Inst.* I.xiii.14.

<sup>45</sup> *Inst.* I.ix.3.

<sup>46</sup> *Comm. I Cor (11:27)*: 'It is an axiom to me, and I will not allow myself to be shifted from it, that Christ cannot be separated from his Spirit.' 251.

passes by, he reprobates.’<sup>47</sup> It has been said that Calvin’s prolonged treatment of the theme, in the *Institutes* and in the *Treatise upon the Eternal Predestination of God*, is explained in part by the fact that he is appalled by it. ‘The decree is dreadful indeed, I confess,’ he says at one point.<sup>48</sup> Overall, his attitude is: ‘Thou seekest reason? I tremble at the depth. Reason thou; I will marvel. Dispute thou; I will believe. I see the depth, I do not reach the bottom.’<sup>49</sup> Calvin certainly showed great respect for what he called the hidden counsels of God.

To return to the doctrine of the Spirit as it developed in Calvin’s thought. While there are four Books in the *Institutes*, there are just two fundamental parts, dealing with the doctrine of God the Creator and of God the Redeemer, so a specific treatment of the Holy Spirit is not evident. However, Books III and IV deal with Spirit’s role arising from the Incarnation and thus with the Spirit’s work in the application of Christ’s merits to the believer. Time does not allow discussion of Calvin’s theology of the atonement in Book II – essentially it is that Christ redeemed us by his obedience unto death – nor of the distinctions Calvin makes between Christ’s status in the two phases of Resurrection and Ascension. This is his conclusion, somewhat abbreviated: ‘He therefore sits on high, transfusing us with his power, that he may quicken us to spiritual life, sanctify us by his Spirit, adorn his church with divers gifts of grace ... and finally hold all power in heaven and on earth.’<sup>50</sup>

These are significant terms: transfusing his power, quickening, sanctifying by his Spirit, giving grace to his church. He is concerned with the appropriation of the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice and this cannot happen without true and genuine communication with him (*veram cum ipso et substantialem communicationem*).<sup>51</sup> This, as I indicated earlier, occurs in the first place by faith, of which, he says, the Spirit is the only source.<sup>52</sup> His account of the relationship between the action of the Holy Spirit and faith on the one hand and regeneration or new life on the other, issuing ultimately in justification of the sinner before God, is quite complex but his concern is to establish a theory of the Christian life which takes account of the believer’s spiritual progress

<sup>47</sup> *Inst.* III.xxiii.1.

<sup>48</sup> *Inst.* III.xxiii.7.

<sup>49</sup> *Inst.* III.xxiii.5.

<sup>50</sup> *Inst.* II.xvi.6.

<sup>51</sup> *Comm. Gal* (2:19) 43.

<sup>52</sup> *Inst.* II.i.4.

in the midst of inherent sinfulness.<sup>53</sup> Of the benefits conferred on the believer he says: ‘Let us sum these up. Christ was given us by God’s generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ’s blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly that sanctified by Christ’s Spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.’<sup>54</sup>

Justification and sanctification, both the work of the Spirit, are the pillars of Calvin’s doctrine of the Christian life. A new life follows from the imparting of the Spirit.<sup>55</sup> It is a life of freedom as the Spirit convinces the believer of the freedom of the children of God.<sup>56</sup> But ‘God does not give the Spirit to a man as an isolated individual but distributes to each according to the measure of grace, so that the members of the Church may share their gifts.’<sup>57</sup> He says elsewhere: ‘no one can come to God unless he is united to his brethren.’<sup>58</sup> A theology of Church is obviously implied here.

### The Spirit and the Church

In the earlier editions of the *Institutes* he tended towards the idea of the invisible Church as the *ecclesia proprie dicta* of the Augsburg Confession (1530) but his experience gradually led him to place an emphasis on the visible Church, and he appears to draw on the dictum of Cyprian that we cannot have God for our Father without having the Church for our mother: ‘(t)here is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.’<sup>59</sup> (Let me express here a certain disappointment that he does not say, as a parallel to the Incarnation, that it is through the power of the Spirit that this mother church conceives.) In this imagery, he envisages neither a hidden church or, on the other hand, a juridical institution. In the end he would come to focus on the

<sup>53</sup> For a good summary of the internal debate in Reformed theology concerning the relation between justification and sanctification, see C. D. VENEMA, ‘Union with Christ, the “Twofold Grace of God” and the “Order of Salvation” in Calvin’s Theology,’ in J.L.R. BEEKE, ed., *Calvin for Today* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009) 91-113.

<sup>54</sup> *Inst.* III.xi.1.

<sup>55</sup> *Comm. Acts* (20:21).

<sup>56</sup> *Comm. Rom* (8:16), 170.

<sup>57</sup> *Comm. II Cor* (13:14), 177.

<sup>58</sup> *Comm. I Peter* (3:7), 284.

<sup>59</sup> *Inst.* IV.i.4.

local Church, such as the Church of Geneva. But from the 1536 *Institutes* on he saw the Church in its outward aspect as necessary to aid faith, and in 1559 the title of Book IV is 'The external means or aids by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein.' The external means indicate here the ministry of Word and Sacraments and they are necessary, he says, because of 'our ignorance and sloth, to which I add fickleness of disposition.'<sup>60</sup>

In sermons and commentaries especially, he defends the need for the ministry.<sup>61</sup> 'Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a Church of God does exist.'<sup>62</sup> There is a subtle difference here from the formula of the Augsburg Confession. The Word is to be preached and heard. The Spirit must be at work. This does allow him to agree that there are some true Churches among the Romans, but a considerable part of Book IV is otherwise taken up with a polemical treatment of the Roman Church as a juridical entity, which then obliges him to put forward his own considerations on the organisation, jurisdiction and discipline that are necessary for the Church. After this he turns to the sacraments.

### The Sacraments

He has two definitions of sacraments of which the briefer is: 'a testimony of divine grace towards us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety towards him'<sup>63</sup> and he appeals to Augustine's definition of a sacrament for support. In fact though, he goes beyond Augustine in speaking of a sacrament in interpersonal terms. Of the role of the Spirit he says: 'But the sacraments properly fulfil their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in.'<sup>64</sup> Without the Spirit it would be as if the sun were shining on blind eyes.

### The Eucharist

In the light of that approach of Calvin, I must turn to his theology of the eucharist, bearing in mind that he sees it only as a sacrament. While the long and richly theological Chapter XVII of Book IV is devoted to the sacrament, Chapter XVIII consists of a polemical attack

on the Roman theology of the Mass as sacrifice. Ironically, within that chapter he expounds a theory of what he considers true sacrifice, namely thanksgiving – contrasting it with the unacceptable idea of sacrifice as expiation – and in this way, in a theology of grace and gratitude,<sup>65</sup> brings out a central aspect of what is today's liturgical theology. It is in fact a logical conclusion of his interpersonal conception of a sacrament.<sup>66</sup> Here let me interject that looking back on Calvin and Luther's era, it seems such a tragedy that there was so little understanding of the nature of the liturgy in the West, while the Eastern Church continued undisturbed to celebrate the sacred mysteries. But it needs to be said in Calvin's case that when he comes to what was perceived to be the nub of the matter, the true nature of the presence of Christ in the sacrament, he begins with a disclaimer. 'Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it... I do not doubt that he truly presents them (his body and blood), and that I receive them.'<sup>67</sup> What we must analyse then is simply a theology of Christ's presence and it has to be seen in relation to the contemporaneous theories of Rome, the Lutherans and Zwingli's successors, all of which Calvin challenged. That in itself is not a very satisfactory context in which to do theology and I feel Calvin deserves considerable credit for what he achieved.

What did he achieve? Most of the older Catholic textbooks speak in terms of his having predicated a spiritual presence, where spiritual is contrasted with real. I have already indicated that his theology of the Spirit in relation to the Word advances the idea of a substantial union between Christ and the believer, so it is relevant to look at what kind of union the sacrament, in the power of the Spirit, achieves. A contemporary Catholic theologian, David Power, considers that in appealing to the operation of the Spirit of Christ, Calvin was able to stress the personal and relational aspect of the sacramental presence. 'Not only is the Spirit the agent of the presence, but it is the bond that exists between Christ and the believer who receives in faith.' Power continues: 'For (Calvin), though the sign is essentially distinct from the thing signified it conveys that reality to those who perceive the sign. The bread and wine are not mere tokens, for in the words of Christ there comes about a

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<sup>60</sup> *Inst.* IV.i.1.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Comm. Eph* (4:12), 180-181.

<sup>62</sup> *Inst.* IV.i.9.

<sup>63</sup> *Inst.* IV.xiv.1.

<sup>64</sup> *Inst.* IV.xiv.9.

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. B.A. GERRISH, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharist in John Calvin's Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. J.T. BILLINGS, *Calvin, Participation and the Gift ...*, *op. cit.*, 131-133.

<sup>67</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.32.

genuine change of names and a metonymy that allows one to refer to them in truth as the body and blood of Christ.<sup>68</sup> That is an assessment of Calvin's theology based on a sympathetic reading of his many relevant assertions, as for example, 'our souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ in the same way that bread and wine keep and sustain physical life.'<sup>69</sup> On the basis of that and similar statements, there would appear to be no problem in accepting that Calvin differed from the view of the Catholic Church of his time only in that he repudiated the theory of transubstantiation as the only acceptable way of accounting for the presence of Christ in the eucharist

But in opposing both the Catholics and the Lutherans he stressed the idea that the body of Christ, if it is to be a real body must be circumscribed, be finite, be located somewhere – 'let nothing inappropriate to human nature be ascribed to his body.'<sup>70</sup> This led him to claim that the Holy Spirit 'truly unites things separated in space.'<sup>71</sup> Could union between Christ and the believer take place in his way? Calvin seems unsure how to express the mechanism, so to speak, of this process. At one place he says: '(w)e say Christ descends to us both by the outward symbol and by his Spirit, that he may truly quicken our souls by the substance of his flesh and of his blood.'<sup>72</sup> He had enlarged on this 'descent by the Spirit' earlier, saying that the Spirit 'is like a channel through which all that Christ himself is and has is conveyed to us.'<sup>73</sup> But, elsewhere in the same 1559 *Institutes*, he says: 'to (our opponents) Christ does not seem present unless he comes down to us. As though, if he should lift us up to himself, we should not just as much enjoy his presence.'<sup>74</sup> Already in the *Treatise on the Lord's Supper* of 1541 he had pointed out: 'the practice always observed in the ancient Church was that, before celebrating the Supper, the people were solemnly exhorted to lift their hearts on high, to show that we must not stop at the visible sign, to adore Jesus Christ rightly.'<sup>75</sup> He also referred to it in the *Ordonnances* of

<sup>68</sup> D.N. POWER, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (Dublin/NY: Gill and Macmillan/Crossroad, 1992) 253.

<sup>69</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.10.

<sup>70</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.20.

<sup>71</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.10.

<sup>72</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.24.

<sup>73</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.12.

<sup>74</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.31.

<sup>75</sup> *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, Calvin Theological Treatises, trans. J.K.S.Reid. Library of Christian Classics Vol. XXII, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954) 159.

1542, his set of regulations for worship in Geneva.

That, I think, is why the tag '*Sursum corda*' is still associated with Calvin and it prompts me to engage in some speculation. The Roman Canon predates the medieval theology of the eucharist and I wonder if its operational theology is closer to that of Calvin than one would expect. It lacks an epiclesis (unless you say 'Bless and approve our offering' is one) and it has an interesting prayer after the Institution Narrative that is open to different interpretations: 'We pray that your angel may take this sacrifice to your altar in heaven. Then as we receive from this altar the sacred body and blood of your Son, let us be filled with every grace and blessing.' What sacrifice is to be taken to heaven? Is it our agricultural sacrifice of bread and wine and therefore our offering of ourselves? And which altar is 'this altar' that we are receiving the body and blood from, the one here or 'your altar in heaven'? If it is the latter then our celebration has more of an eschatological thrust. But I digress...

I think there is a problem in Calvin's Eucharistic theology that goes back to his Christology and is rooted in the prominence the *extra calvinisticum* gives to the divinity, with a corresponding emphasis on the limitations of the humanity. He says, 'as our Lord Jesus Christ took our humanity, so he exalted it to heaven, withdrawing it from its mortal condition, but not changing its nature.'<sup>76</sup> The consequence of this view is that for the risen Christ to appear to his disciples in the room where they were gathered a miracle was required. 'Yet I am far from admitting that what the Papists say is true, that Christ's body passed through the shut door.'<sup>77</sup> Requiring a miracle, Calvin does not seem to consider that Christ now belonged to a new order of existence from which he could return (as on other occasions) to a palpable form of existence. Against the Romans and the Lutherans, Calvin of course held that a ubiquitous human nature would be no human nature at all.<sup>78</sup> In his attack on the theory of transubstantiation, in *Inst.* IV.xvii.14 ff, he dismisses what he calls a more subtle evasion, that the body that is given in the sacrament is glorious and immortal and therefore can be contained in several places – or in no place or no form. For him, if this were the case, it would not be the same mortal body that Christ gave to his disciples the day before he suffered and the way would be open to the docetism of Marcion 'if Christ's body seemed mortal and lowly in this one place, but in another was considered immortal and

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Comm. St. John 11-21 and The First Epistle of John*, 202.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. S. EDMONDSON, *Calvin's Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 214.

glorified.<sup>79</sup>

Calvin was not impressed, if indeed he knew of it, by Aquinas's assertion that Christ's body is on the altar under sacramental species and in heaven under its own species (*in propria specie*).<sup>80</sup> Aquinas, like Calvin, was of course reasoning within a cosmological model that considered God's dwelling to be above the dome of the heavens and that the Ascension involved movement. But for Aquinas, Christ's ascension into heaven brought and needed no addition to his essential glory either in body or in soul.<sup>81</sup> That glory of both body and soul (the glory of the former being derived from that of the latter) is above the glory proper to all spiritual substances: 'although Christ's body is beneath spiritual substances, if we weigh the condition of its corporeal nature, nevertheless it surpasses all spiritual substances in dignity, when we call to mind its dignity of union whereby it is united personally with God.'<sup>82</sup> This contrasts with Calvin's assertion that 'Christ's body is limited by the general characteristics common to all human bodies, and is contained in heaven....'<sup>83</sup>

Both Calvin and Aquinas struggled with the concept of heaven being a place involving spatial distance and being also a figurative way of describing the kingdom of God – the tension involved is evident in Calvin's commentary on Acts 1:11, for example and continues into his efforts to predicate both Christ's bodily absence from earth and his substantial union with the believer in the eucharist. After a comprehensive discussion of this tension in Calvin's thought, Thomas J. Davis concludes that it is best to see the uneasy relationships between presence and absence as the dialectical conditions of Western metaphor and that Calvin was concerned with religious experience, for which finally the language is metaphor. 'Despite the appearance of absence, despite real absence here on earth, there was an experience that Calvin claimed, which he said had to do with the bodily presence of Christ. Others, such as Luther (and the long Catholic tradition), claimed it as well.'<sup>84</sup> Davis points to the importance of reading the commentaries alongside the *Institutes* in order to make Calvin's dialectic more

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<sup>79</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.18.

<sup>80</sup> *Summa Theologiae* III. q.76. a.5. ad 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* q.57. a1. ad 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* q.57. a5. English text in *The 'Summa Theologica' of St Thomas Aquinas*, Part III (QQ. XXVII-LIX) (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1926) 434.

<sup>83</sup> *Inst.* IV.xvii.12.

<sup>84</sup> T. J. DAVIS, *This is My Body. The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 128-38.

comprehensible<sup>85</sup> and this makes me wonder whether in the *Institutes* Calvin the scholastic (and critic of Scholasticism), was somewhat at odds with Calvin the humanist of the commentaries. Had he been able to deal more successfully tensions within himself, perhaps he could have expressed his experience in a poetic way that would have produced ultimately a more convincing theology of the eucharist.

But he seems to have been caught in a logical trap that required him to give the rather odd role of being a spatial link to the Holy Spirit, thus making the Spirit a mediator between Christ and the recipient. Wendel and McNeill, both apparently following Niesel,<sup>86</sup> consider that Calvin used a sermon of Chrysostom on the Holy Spirit as a source for the role of the Spirit in his theology of the eucharist. While this is likely – Erasmus had included it in an edition of Chrysostom's works in 1530 – it needs to be noted that Chrysostom does not use the term 'channel' but *copula*.<sup>87</sup>

One consequence of Calvin's Eucharistic doctrine is that the union with Christ remains on an individual basis, limited compared with what would arise if he had a less restricted idea of the glorified Christ, the Christ who, according to Eph 4:10, 'ascended far above the heavens so that he might fill all things.' For Catholic theology, the Eucharistic elements are taken up into this new order of existence and are transformed into Christ's body and blood ('may take this sacrifice to your altar in heaven...'). Through participation in the eucharist, believers actualise the body of Christ, so that it can be said that the eucharist makes the Church. For Calvin, the believer participates in Christ, as Billings has so thoroughly demonstrated, but the union is presented as an individual one, even though, as indicated earlier, he is convinced of the corporateness of Christianity, saying that no one can come to Christ without being 'united to his brethren.' But that is not quite to assert that the eucharist makes the Church.

## CONCLUSION

So, what might Calvin's contribution to theology be now, five hundred years on? A century ago, the focus was on his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Scholars such as Warfield held that his contribution was to replace the doctrine of the Church as sole source of assured knowledge of God, and sole institute of salvation, by the Holy Spirit. But this was to create a polarity which did

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 128.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. F. WENDEL, *Calvin. The Origin ...*, *op. cit.*, 351.

<sup>87</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Sermo in Pentecoste de Spiritu Sancto*. Text in *Opera D. Joannis Chrysostomi*, Vol. III, (Basileae, 1539) 578-9.

not exist in Calvin's thought. There was certainly in his theology an emphasis on interiority - for example, the internal witness of the Spirit seals the Word of God on the heart - and on hiddenness, on obscurity and suffering as indicative of the Church's real life. The church as institution did in some way participate in what he called 'the administration of the Spirit,' but always under the restraint of this fundamental interiority. This could appear ultimately destructive of the church as understood up to the Reformation, the replacement of its living soul by a visitation that passes, but such a view was not allowed full sway in Calvin's thinking - his object was to assert both the importance of the ministry and the necessary role of the Spirit in the lives of the faithful in face of the abuses he saw in the institutional church in which he grew up.

The church today? If all the answers are already given, in a closed hermeneutical circle, a contemporary writer says, 'what room or need is there for the creating, animating, bonding, uniting life and breath of God in human life, history, the world and the Church?'<sup>88</sup> There is much comment on the potentially repressive features of the institution, but little suggestion of resources to redress abuse. The problem is really a perennial one, as the fact of the Reformation itself witnesses, and was in the background of discussions at the Second Vatican Council. One of the concerns of the Council was to find a new balance between the institutional and charismatic elements in the church. In some documents it could do no more than juxtapose them and the period after the Council has been marked by the struggle to keep these elements in tension. It could be said that the Council's theology was christocentric to the extent of being poorly developed pneumatologically, and that much of the tension in the church since then has pointed to this lack, while the charismatic movement represented a popular attempt to introduce a pneumatic dimension to church life that was not sufficiently well founded or guided.

It is still useful to re-visit the issues that were raised at the time of the Reformation and to learn from the attempts made to resolve them. Whatever personal limitations and handicaps affected him, Calvin was one of the most powerful intellectual forces of his age and a determined agent of reform. He was a theologian inspired by a great love and knowledge of the Bible and made a particular contribution by his theology of the Holy Spirit. A sympathetic analysis of his thought could be helpful in dealing with issues in the church of today.

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<sup>88</sup> M. DOWNEY, Book Reviews, *Spirituality* (March-April, 2010) 125.