

IN TRANSLATIÖNE

John Calvin's Letters to the Ministers of Montbéliard (1543–1544): The Genevan Reformer's Advice and Views of the Liturgical Calendar

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Translation: Two Letters to the Ministers of Montbéliard

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1. As far as could be ascertained, this is the first full English translation of these two letters, as well as of some of the other material referenced in this introduction.

2. "Nous avons laissé, dans notre livre précédent, Calvin à Bâle, revenant d'Italie, et nous avons indiqué la seconde moitié de juillet 1536 comme la date de son arrivée à Genève." Emile Doumergue, *Jean Calvin, les hommes et les choses de son temps*, 7 vols. (Lausanne: Georges Bridel & Cie Editeurs, 1899–1927), 2.173.

3. The prefacing letter to Francis I, King of France, is dated August 1, 1535. The first edition appeared in Basel, presumably by March of 1536 (as noted by the publisher). The older theory put forward and held by Paul Henry and others, that there was a French edition between the August date of the preface to which it was presumed to belong and the Latin edition the following March, was discarded in light of the more critical assessments of Jules Bonnet and Albert Rilliet. Doumergue, in the first volume of his life of Calvin, lays out that case with respect to these editions. In sum, the book having missed the prime fall book fair in Frankfurt, the printers were in no rush to get the work out until the next fair in the spring. Doumergue, 1.593. Cf. Paul Henry, *The Life and Times of John Calvin*, trans. Henry Stebbing, 2 vols. (London: Whittaker and Co., 1849), 1.70–72.

4. After having to flee Paris, Calvin was essentially on the run. He left France in 1535 ending up in Basel where he spent much of 1536 writing the preface to the Bible in French and preparing the manuscript of the first edition of the *Institutes*. He then traveled to

INTRODUCTION

In 1543 and 1544 the Genevan Reformer John Calvin wrote two letters of advice to the Reformed ministers of Montbéliard. The Montbéliardians were facing the imposition of unbiblical worship practices, including some of the old holy days of the liturgical calendar which the Reformed church there had previously abolished. While of some historical interest because of the controversy at the time, these and related correspondence remain relevant today to confessional Presbyterianism because they help clarify Calvin's views and because his letters figured prominently in the Presbyterian response to the re-imposition of some of the same pretended holy days which had been rejected at the Scottish Reformation. After some background, these two letters from Calvin to the Reformed of Montbéliard are presented in translation from the Latin texts.¹

GENEVA'S REFORMATION

John Calvin arrived in Geneva sometime in the latter half of July 1536.² Having prepared and completed the first edition of the *Institutes* the previous year,³ he was amid those troublesome war-ravaged times, intent on pursuing a private life of scholastic study. He planned to stay a night before heading on to his destination, which was to have been Strasbourg.⁴ However, William Farel, upon hearing the author of the *Institutes* was in town, sought him out, intent on persuading Calvin to stay and contribute to the reform in Geneva.

Farel had embraced Reformation doctrine fairly early⁵ and his fiery temperament and ardent piety, and intense opposition to all idolatry,⁶ soon made him the leading French Reformer, though eventually eclipsed by others such as Calvin. In the years from 1521 to 1536, Farel was a roving preacher of the Reformed faith, seeking to spread the gospel among the Italy, returned for a brief stay in Paris before heading toward what he thought was his ultimate destination in Strasbourg. See Jeremy Walker, "An Outline of the Life of John Calvin" (<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2009/an-outline-of-the-life-of-john-calvin/> accessed March 10, 2017) and Doumergue, volume 2 (1902), book one, "En Italie," 3–94.

5. Farel "was converted by the first half of 1521 since he left his teaching career in Paris and started his preaching ministry in Meaux in June 1521. Farel's conversion is therefore very early in the history of the French Reformation if we consider that the first works of Luther in Latin were only slowly being published in France from 1518 and some possibly appeared in French as early as 1521 although evidence of this is lost." Stéphane Simonnin, "Guillaume Farel (1489–1565)," A study of the reformer's theology and piety [unpublished thesis]. https://www.academia.edu/9942340/Guillaume_Farel_1489_-_1565_ (accessed March 13, 2017), 9–10.

6. "The most distinctive marks of" [Farel's] "theology, and the most challenging ones for evangelical Christians today, are his passion for God's glory and his uncompromising attitude towards idolatry." Simonnin, 104.

French-speaking Swiss, in places such as “Basel, the county of Montbéliard, Bern, Aigle, Neuchâtel and Geneva and many villages around.”⁷ At the Synod of Bern which determined to adopt the Reformation faith in 1528, Farel received a commission to preach freely in lands over which Bern had influence. This authorization presumably covered Geneva to some degree,⁸ which had entered into a defensive alliance with Bern and Fribourg two years earlier. When Geneva’s nemesis the Duke of Savoy attempted by force of arms to return the city to his control in 1530, Bern came to the still-Roman Catholic city’s aid. This allowed the Reformation to progress in Geneva and Farel made his first visit to the city in 1532. Farel was beaten and forced to leave the city, returned in 1533 and then had to leave again, but returned and remained after Geneva’s government outlawed the mass in May of 1536, and embraced the Reformation.⁹

Apparently Farel had a commanding presence, having been a singular influence in getting the Waldensians to embrace Reformation doctrine, and whose “missional” methodology was to preach vehemently enough to cause the people immediately to tear down their images and the priests to flee in terror, and if they did not sue him in court for libel, he would sue them so he could preach at the court proceedings.¹⁰ Farel’s response to Calvin’s persistence in rejecting his ‘invitation’ to remain and work with him was to pronounce an imprecation if he were to depart, which so terrified Calvin that he remained in Geneva. With Pierre Viret the three would settle “the new Reformed faith and worship in Geneva.”¹¹ Here Calvin would do most of his work, produce commentaries on the Scriptures, theological treatises, preach as many as 4,000 sermons, and write nearly 4,300 letters. Yet Calvin’s career in Geneva was not without an early and involuntary hiatus, brought about by an imposition of liturgical days and a prohibition against fencing the Lord’s Table issued by the city governors.¹²

In 1536 shortly before Calvin’s arrival all the old pretended holy days (feast days) “which were no[t] Sundays” had been outlawed in Geneva.¹³ Farel had begun the effort to bring Geneva to observe a Sabbatarian week of six days of work with

one holy day of worship, the Lord’s Day—a pattern which the Genevan ministers would subsequently continue to seek.¹⁴ In this they were acting against the burden of the liturgical calendar as it existed at the time of the Reformation.

The Protestant Reformation dramatically restructured liturgical time in sixteenth-century Geneva. The Catholic tradition had organized the liturgical calendar and celebrated the passage of time according to a sequence of

Expanded edition (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 2008), 39–43; Manetsch, 13–14. Farel escaped from being shot (the gun exploded) and stabbed, but was kicked, beaten and for his life was forced to leave the city. Melchior Kirchner, *Life of William Farel, the Swiss Reformer* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1837), 106–109. Simonnin, 14.

10. Simonnin, 12.

11. Simonnin, 14.

12. “... by 1526, the primary political institutions of the future republic were in place, namely the Small Council (made up of four syndics and twenty senators); the Council of 60 (the Small Council, supplemented by thirty-five representatives from the Council of 200); the Council of 200 (consisting of elected representatives from every neighborhood in the city); and the General Assembly (comprising all the citizens and burghers in the city).” Manetsch, 13–14. Similar to T. H. L. Parker, we have used governors, magistrates, council, etc. “to indicate indiscriminately any or all of the complicated Genevan Councils.” T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An introduction to the preaching of John Calvin* (London; Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1947), 28.

13. Calvin, *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 1–7*, text in French, introduction in English, ed. Willem Balke and Wilhelmus H. Th. Moehn, *Supplementa Calviniana*, v. 8 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1994), ix. Elsewhere, Mohen writes similarly, “Even before Calvin arrived in Geneva, those church holidays that were not Sundays had been abolished. Farel and Viret wished to honour only the Sunday as the Lord’s Day. They refused to acknowledge any human institution.” *Ioannis Calvini Opera omnia*, Series 5, Sermons volume 8, *Plusieurs sermons de Jean Calvin*, ed. Wilhelmus H. Th. Moehn (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2011), xix.

14. Farel and Calvin wished “to establish the sabbatarian principle as the law of Geneva.” Thomas Lambert, “Preaching, Praying and Policing the Reform in Sixteenth-Century Geneva.” Ph.D. dissertation (University of Wisconsin, 1998), 190. This early Sabbatarianism was not as developed as that of English Puritanism and Scottish Presbyterianism, but it is clear Calvin not only shares a practical agreement with how the Sabbath was to be kept, but stands much closer theologically to the later views than is usually granted. On Calvin’s ‘practical’ Sabbatarianism see John H. Primus, “Calvin and the Puritan Sabbath: A Comparative Study,” in *Exploring The Heritage Of John Calvin: Essays In Honor Of John Bratt*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 40–75; *Holy Time: Moderate Puritanism and the Sabbath* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989); and “Sunday: The Lord’s day as a Sabbath—Protestant Perspectives on the Sabbath,” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenezi, Daniel J. Harrington, S. J., and William H. Sher (New York: Crossroads, 1991). For an argument that Calvin was closer theologically to later English Puritanism than generally conceded, see Stewart E. Lauer, “John Calvin, the Nascent Sabbatarian: A Reconsideration of Calvin’s View of Two Key Sabbath-Issues,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 3 (2007); and reprinted in volume 12 (2016).

7. Simonnin, 11.

8. Farel “showed credentials from Bern, which made an impression” in Geneva. Philip Schaff, and David S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, volume 7 (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 243.

9. “Bern’s political and military support proved to be a Trojan horse that brought with it unforeseen religious consequences. Beginning in the autumn of 1532, Protestant missionaries from Bern, including Guillaume Farel, Antoine Saunier, and Antoine Froment, regularly visited the city to preach the gospel and lend support to a small, clandestine community of evangelicals.” Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford University Press, 2016), 14. On Calvin and Geneva’s relationship with Bern, see Wulfert de Greef, *The writings of John Calvin: an introductory guide*.

church festivals and saint's days. The Catholic liturgical year was divided into two parts. From late November to June, Catholics observed the ritual enactment of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ through the major feast days of Christmas (preceded by four Sundays of Advent), Epiphany (January 6), Easter (preceded by Ash Wednesday and forty days of Lent), Ascension (forty days after Easter), Pentecost (fifty days after Easter), and Corpus Christi (eleven days after Pentecost). The second half of the year, from late June to late November, contained the majority of saint's days, including five of the seven major feasts to the Virgin Mary; days commemorating each of the twelve apostles and the fourteen auxiliary saints; as well as the Feast of All Saints (November 1) and All Soul's Day (November 2). In the region of Savoy and Geneva, festivals dedicated to minor saints such as Saint Claude were especially important. Throughout Catholic Europe, between forty and sixty days a year were set aside as "holy days," marked by abstaining from work, special processions and Masses, and communal celebrations. In addition to religious festivals, the traditional liturgical year also included several dozen fast days—during Lent and on the eve of festivals—for the purpose of self-mortification and to imitate Christ's own forty-day fast and temptation in the wilderness. Reformed churchmen attempted to dismantle this ritualistic universe, arguing that prescribed days of feasting and fasting promoted a theology of "works-righteousness," and encouraged superstition, drunkenness, and idleness.¹⁵

Hughes Oliphant Old puts this burden in practical terms when he wrote of Genevan antipathy toward the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic Church,

The working people of Geneva were not too happy about stopping their work every few days for religious holidays. Holidays for the artisans of the late Middle Ages were a hardship, particularly when it became obvious that many of their apprentices found the holiday a good excuse for spending the day in the tavern. The middle class had good reason for objecting to frequent holidays. A Christmas observance which included Christmas, the feast of Saint Stephen, the feast of the Circumci-

sion, the feast of the Holy Innocents, Epiphany, and the feast of the Purification made for six holidays in a bit more than a month. This could also be a problem for the day laborer during the middle of the winter, when there were extra expenses for fuel. The middle of winter was no time to lose six days' wages.¹⁶

As elsewhere, this complex of observances was constantly tolled by the church bells of Geneva. "In the late Middle Ages, the bells of the cathedral marked the boundaries of daily existence and heightened the drama of urban life. Bells were rung to announce the beginning (4 a.m.) and end (9 p.m.) of the day; bells called people to worship and prayer; bells sounded the alarm of plague and fire; bells celebrated the glad tidings of feast days and the arrival of distinguished visitors; bells mourned the dead..." "... throughout each day, bells were heard summoning the faithful to the Mass, marking the monastic office, announcing meetings of the cathedral chapter, and celebrating the anniversaries of notable churchmen and honored saints." Indeed, the inscription on St. Pierre Cathedral's largest bell reads: "I praise the true God, I summon the people, I assemble the clergy, I weep for the dead, I chase away the plague, I adorn feast days. My voice strikes terror in all demons."¹⁷ The Reformation in Geneva brought about radical change in the employment of these bells.

Daily religious life changed in significant ways in the first years following Geneva's Reformation. The city churches—which the French reformers called temples—were reduced in number from seven to three, and the outlying parishes consolidated. A company of around fifteen Protestant pastors soon replaced the roughly five hundred priests, curés, cathedral canons, monks, and nuns who had once ministered in and around the city. Reformed ministers officiated at public worship services wearing the attire of scholars—black gowns, white starched collars, and black caps—rather than the colorful vestments of the traditional clergy. Their primary public responsibility was to preach expository sermons in the French vernacular rather than recite the Latin Mass. Geneva's churches no longer observed the Catholic sacraments of confirmation, penance, holy orders, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction. Though the Lord's Supper and baptism were still celebrated, the liturgical form and theological substance of these two sacraments were substantially changed. Public worship in reformed Geneva was simpler and less ornate than in the medieval church. Gone were the processions, the incense, the candles and acolytes, the monastic choirs, and the melodious organs. Instead, the reformers created a liturgy that gave priority to

15. Manetsch, 124–125.

16. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 4: The Age of the Reformation* (Eerdmans, 2002), 122. Dr. Old noted, "On Calvin and the observance of feast days, there are a number of unanswered questions which we hope at some time to address." Dr. Clary told this writer that Dr. Old left a manuscript work where he explored these questions, but we were unable to recover a copy before press time.

17. Manetsch, 11, 12.

public prayers, the proclamation of the Word of God, and a cappella singing of the Psalter. Even the rhythm of religious time was transformed, as Calvin and Geneva's magistrates stripped nearly all religious holidays from the calendar. With the monasteries closed, and the Divine Office no longer recited, the bells of the city churches now rang only to mark time, announce the daily sermons, and summon Geneva's magistrates to their meetings. In all these ways and more, the texture of daily religious life in Geneva was radically altered in the months following the summer of 1536.¹⁸

This 'change in times' was not without difficulties however. Generally speaking with regard to the liturgical calendar, the Reformed wished to dismantle this system of holy days, but faced opposition from their civil magistrates who often acted on pragmatic grounds.

At first it was clearly the intention to abolish these days entirely. Then it was deemed better (as the people continued to take them for holidays), to turn them to a good account by the holding of religious services, and finally their observance was enjoined, doubtless on the ground of edification. Probably the magistrates, who are continually referred to as having authority in the matter, did not, for reasons springing out of the circumstances of the times, and the genius and habits of the people, deem it expedient to abolish them. While they continued by authority, the Church, rightly aimed to make them promotive of piety.¹⁹

The political situation Calvin and Farel faced in reforming Geneva was a bit more complicated than this generalization. The city's governors believed they needed to maintain a close political alliance with the Bernese with whom they had a treaty, and Bern itself believed it was owed conformity to its views as having had a hand in bringing the Reformation to

Geneva.²⁰ Consequently, less than two years after the city had abolished all holy days, the Genevan council due to pressure from Bern,²¹ reinstated some of the old feast days over the ministers' objections, re-imposing on the city the observance of Christmas, Circumcision Day, Annunciation Day and Ascension.²² This imposition of days and other practices came wrapped in a clash of civil and religious authority over fencing the Lord's Table. Amidst an unsuccessful push to bring all Geneva's residents under a common Confession of Faith, a demand from Calvin and Farel in January 1538 to bar from the Lord's Table those that refused subscription was rejected by the magistrates.²³ Then in February the elections removed

make any innovations "as to the Observation of Holy-days, such as Christmas, and the rest," and while in 1601 there was some objection raised, a synod left "churches at liberty to have Publick Prayers and Sermons on the Romish Holy-days, if it like 'em." John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata, or, the Acts, Decisions, Decrees, and Canons of those famous National Councils of the Reformed Churches in France*, 2 vols. (London: T. Parkhurst, 1692), 1.499, 1.166, 1.215.

20. Calvin and Farel "were not only harassed by their avowed enemies; they were brought into painful collision with their brethren in the faith. Since the Genevese kept only Sunday, a difference arose between them and the Bernese, respecting the celebration of certain feast days..." "The Bernese wished to establish an uniformity of rites, in order to repel the charge of want of unity, which was brought against the Evangelical church, and as they considered the Genevese to be under obligations to them for the introduction of the reformation, they expected them to conform to their standard of discipline." Kirchofer, 169.

21. Calvin notes in his letter to the minister in Büren, that originally the Bernese only observed the Lord's Day, but apparently only a year or two after embracing the Reformation, due to persistent insistence from one individual, the four days were imposed in an order dated April 10, 1530. "Since idleness serves the multiplication of vices and since God has instituted only one day of rest, Sunday, we declare as days of celebration [feast days] all Sundays, the day of Christmas, of the circumcision of Christ (New Years' Day), of the proclamation to Mary, of the Ascension of Christ. On those days one shall rest from his work and attend the sermons, for this is the primary reason for which the days of celebration were instituted, not that they are more holy than other days. All other days of celebration [feast days] are abrogated, only the 'Zwölfbotentag' (Day of the sending of the Apostles; July 12) shall be announced by the pastors as a means of 'remembering the times,' not as a day of celebration." Theodor de Quervain, *Kirchliche und soziale Zustände in Bern unmittelbar nach der Einführung der Reformation (1528–1536)* (Bern: Grunau, 1906), 197. Our thanks to Sebastian Heck for the translation from the German.

22. "the magistrates began to demand that the ministers adopt a number of liturgical rites practiced in Bern, including the use of baptismal fonts; the use of unleavened bread in communion; and the celebration of religious festivals such as Christmas, New Year's, the Annunciation, and Ascension. Although Calvin was not adverse to the first two proposals in principle, he and most of the other ministers were strongly opposed to what they saw as blatant interference by the magistrates—to say nothing of Bern—in the affairs of the Genevan church." Manetsch, 24. See also the account of the unfolding of events leading up to Calvin's and Farel's banishment in Manetsch, 23–24, and Parker, 28–29.

23. "When in January 1538 the ministers wanted to begin excluding

18. Manetsch, 19, 20.

19. David D. Demarest, *History and Characteristics of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church*, 2nd ed. (New York, Board of Publication of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1856), 175. See also, Rev. Dr. R. D. Anderson, "Why are Ecclesiastical Feast Days in our Church Order?" <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/pdfs/feastdays.pdf>. Voetius blames the magistrates in the instance of Dort in 1619 (see translations in Anderson, p. 4, 5). In the oppressed churches there was also a pragmatic acceptance of the liturgical calendar. Late in the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, the Reformed churches of France, ruled by Roman Catholic magistrates which prohibited working on the pretended holy days, "left unto the prudence of Consistories to Congregate the People, on such Holy-Days, either to hear the word Preached, or to join in common publick Prayers, as they shall find to be most expedient" (2nd Synod of Vitry, 1617). In 1594, the Synod of Montauban had agreed not to

much of the support for reform that the ministers had received from the governing bodies up to that point, with those wishing closer alliance with the city of Bern now holding sway. When a demand by city leaders to follow Bern in using unleavened bread in the April celebration of communion was objected to by Calvin and Farel, they were forbidden to preach. This order Calvin and Farel ignored.

In 1538 the feasts days were re-established by the Council, under political pressure from Bern.... Calvin and Farel asked the Council to postpone the decision on this matter until Whitsun so that members of the synod, which met in Zürich,²⁴ could be able to voice their opinion first. In order to maintain liturgical unity Calvin and Farel were willing to comply by the ceremonies, as long as Bern would acknowledge that the Genevan rituals were not unbiblical and as long as the feasts days not be made equal to Sunday by an extreme prohibition

from the celebration of the Lord's Supper those who had not yet subscribed to the confession of faith, they were forbidden by the Council to do so. Tensions mounted when the Council, at the request of Bern, wanted to introduce some of Bern's ecclesiastical practices into Geneva.... Because the ministers would not willingly adapt to these changes, on April 23, 1538, the Council decided that they would have to leave the city." de Greef, 12–13.

24. Farel and Calvin did not make their concession in a synod called with the Bernese to compose the difference, or to Geneva's council when they insisted the ministers comply, but apparently expressed that compromise was acceptable in consultation with their brethren in a Zurich synod. However, Geneva's governors were not in a mood to compromise and have the ministers return. Kirchhofer, 169. Having made that concession it may be seen that the removal of the Sabbath nature of such days by allowing the people to return to the labors after the services remained a goal for Calvin in the 1540s, which ultimately resulted in the council's abolishing of the days in 1550, however much that step beyond the original compromise surprised him and was not any of his doing, as he avows in his letters.

25. In other words, everyone had to "live according to the ceremonies of the Messieurs of Bern."

26. *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles*, ix–x.

27. Walker, "An Outline of the Life of John Calvin."

28. Some of Calvin's writings have been tagged with this appellation. "The documents in this collection, designated as *Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice*, may be found in the *Corpus Reformatorum*, volume 38 [*Calvini Opera*, v. 10], part I." *Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice*, trans. Mary Beatty and Benjamin W. Farley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 13. These letters to the Reformed ministers of Montbéliard do not form a part of that collection, but appear in *Corpus Reformatorum* (hereafter CR), 39, which is volume 11 in the *Ioannis Calvini Opera* (hereafter CO). Cf. "Thesauri Epistolici Calviniani, Tomus II, Epistolæ ad Annos 1540–1544 Pertinentes, CR 39, CO 11, cols. 623–626, *Ioannis Calvini Opera quæ supersunt omnia*, 59 volumes, in *Corpus Reformatorum*, volumes 29–87, *Corpus Reformatorum*, ed. G. Baum, Ed Cunitz, Eduard Reuss, and Alfred Erichson, 87 volumes (Brunsvigæ: C.A. Schwetschke, 1834–1900).

29. "[I]n 1524 Farel spent the summer evangelizing the small duchy of Montbéliard in the Jura mountain between France and

of labour to work, so that everybody would be free to go about their daily business after the service. However, the government ruled that they desired "vivre selon les ceremonies des Messieurs de Berne"²⁵ and that the preachers would not be allowed to bring public life into their sermons.

In the conflict over the jurisdiction of the State over the church that now evolved, both Calvin and Farel ascended the pulpit on Easter (21 April 1538), in spite of the ban on their preaching, but they refused to serve the Supper. Then the Council decided to banish them. The four feast days ... were established and labour on these days was prohibited. In addition, the shops were to be closed.²⁶

Calvin took the 'opportunity' afforded by this ejection from the city to continue his interrupted journey to Strasbourg, where he sat under Bucer's instruction for three years. Meantime, Geneva descended into civil and ecclesiastical anarchy.

By 1540, the Genevan situation was awful: there seems to have been a widespread collapse of public morals and civil order. In desperation, the authorities turned to the man whom they had banished. Calvin faced the prospect of a return with great distress, writing to Farel that he would rather endure 'a hundred deaths than that cross'. Farel's response, it seems, was on a par with his first successful attempt to tie Calvin to Geneva, and the reluctant Reformer re-entered the city on 13 September, 1541, never again to relocate. When Calvin climbed back into the pulpit at the cathedral of St Pierre, he resumed his ministry at the precise point at which he had paused three years before, taking up the next verse of his systematic exposition of Scripture.²⁷

On Calvin's return to Geneva in 1541, because other matters were more important and given the tenuous nature of his position, as he notes in later letters to Bullinger and others, he did not insist on abolishing the holy days that had been imposed. However, as shall be seen, there was a clear campaign by the Genevan ministers to curtail the sabbath-like nature of the four holy days.

THE MONTBÉLIARDIANS' TROUBLES

As noted already Calvin wrote approximately 4,300 letters over the course of his ministry. Many of Calvin's correspondents were seeking his 'ecclesiastical advice'.²⁸ One of these occasions came when the ministers of Montbéliard, among whom Farel had help settle the Reformed faith,²⁹ sought Calvin's

advice because the civil authorities were imposing Lutheran doctrine and practices in their county. In God's providence as has been described, Calvin was in a position to give advice, having faced a similar imposition amidst complicated attending circumstances. Wulfert de Greef summarizes the controversy and the contents of this correspondence.

On October 14, 1543, Calvin wrote a letter to the ministers in Montbéliard, including Pierre Toussaint, because they were not sure what they should do now that the duke had introduced the Lutheran practice of the sacraments (CO 11:624–26). Calvin approves of the fact that those who wish to participate in the Lord's Supper do present themselves for an examination, but in order to prevent abuse, he lays down what such an examination should strive for: private instruction of the ignorant, admonition for those who in their daily lives fall short of the obligations as Christians, and the comforting of troubled consciences. Celebrating the Lord's Supper with the sick is good if it is necessary and appropriate.³⁰ The same is true for criminals facing execution—if they desire to have Communion and are prepared for it. The celebration, however, must take place in a fellowship of believers. It is not good for a celebration of Communion to follow a regular church service at the request of just one member of the congregation. It ought to be announced beforehand, so that all know about it and can prepare themselves for it. If some wish to have Communion more often, that should not be refused.

Calvin strongly opposes emergency baptism. With respect to funerals, it seems better to him not to bring the casket into the church, but to go directly to the cemetery and deliver the funeral address there. He advises against bell ringing, but does not rigidly oppose it because he does not consider it something worth fighting about. He does, however, wish to stand by his rejection of the feast days that tend not to edify and that have a superstitious character. Moreover, he advises the ministers not to be troublesome and opinionated in their behavior toward the prince. He will surely be indulgent if he notices that they have reason to turn to him.

On May 8, 1544, after deliberating with his colleagues, Calvin again wrote to the ministers in Montbéliard (CO 11:705–8) because he had received further information from them about how things had been going with the initiation of Lutheran practices. He feels that those who are carrying this out are wrong when they point to the church in Wittenberg. Luther would not agree with that any more than we do, he writes. As far as emergency

baptism is concerned, he points out that salvation is not based on baptism. Baptism is a sealing of the covenant, in which we are included and elected as God's people. The children of believers also belong to that covenant on the basis of God's promise. If baptism, by which the promise is sealed, cannot be administered, the promise is sufficient in and of itself. Baptism belongs to the domain of the church, not of midwives, and it ought to be joined with the service of the Word. Although Augustine did not speak clearly and plainly about the custom of lay baptism in the early church, he nonetheless did not approve of it. According to Calvin, it was decided at the (Fourth) Council of Carthage that women ought not to presume to baptize.

As to the question of what the ministers should do, Calvin answers that they should explain to their prince what it is that prevents them from obeying the prince. If that is of no concern to the prince, then they must follow the instruction of Peter to obey God rather than men.

With regard to bell ringing and the keeping of feast days, Calvin calls upon the ministers to bear with such things rather than leave the positions God has given them. That does not mean, however, that they should not make their objections known.

What Calvin identifies as truly intolerable is that the prince forbids the ministers to meet together. What will become of the church if the ministers can no longer deliberate together? It would be preferable to die a hundred deaths than to consent to such an annihilation of the church, he feels...³¹

Switzerland...." Simonnin, 17. "In 1524 Ulrich sought Oecolampadius's advice concerning the reform of Montbéliard and in June, Oecolampadius's protégé, William Farel, arrived in Montbéliard." Jill Raitt, *The Colloquy of Montbéliard Religion and Politics in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14. "The county of Montbéliard belonged to Duke Ulrich of Württemberg who had encouraged Farel's evangelical preaching from the beginning, as had also his brother, Count George, the administrator of the county. In 1542, however, Ulrich replaced the latter as administrator by his son, the young Duke Christopher, who encouraged the spread of Lutheranism in the territory and opposed the activity of the Reformer [Pierre] Toussain, Farel's friend and successor." Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), 87.

30. "The Genevan consistory followed the custom of the churches in Zurich and Bern and did not think it right to celebrate Communion with the sick in their homes. For Calvin's stance on this, see also his letter of December 1, 1563, to Caspar Olevianus (CO 20:200–201)." de Greef, 203 (n18).

31. de Greef, 203–205.

Balke and Moehn, after rehearsing the earlier controversy in Geneva, place the Montbéliard correspondence within a summary of Calvin's views regarding the old feast days.

In 1543, Calvin corresponded with the preachers of Montbéliard on this matter. They had asked Calvin for advice concerning the Lutheran ceremonies, which the Duke of Wurttemberg wanted to introduce. Calvin admonished them: "Concerning the refusal of the feast days, it is my wish that you will be more firm: not in a way that you battle against everybody without distinction, but only against that (feast days) which do not contribute in any way to edification and which do clearly show unbelief at first sight. And you have a good basis to oppose this. Because in the papacy the conception and ascension of the virgin Mary are celebrated with great pomp. What else could a servant of Christ do, when he ascends the pulpit on these days, than to ridicule the folly of those persons who first thought of such days." "On the issues of the bell ringing and the feast days, we feel that you can better bear these little follies than to vacate the place where the Lord has put you. Only you should not agree to them, keep the privilege to admonish the superstitions originating from them, and do that zealously. There are mainly three main issues here: first, making a distinction between one day and the other; second, that there is a Christian service established on these feast days, and thirdly, that not only for the honour of God—which would be also Jewish itself—but also for the honour of people certain days will be set apart."³²

GENEVA AND MONTBÉLIARD AFTER 1544

The Montbéliard Reformed would struggle against the imposition of Lutheranism into the seventeenth century. In 1634 the county became Lutheran, though as late as 1873 it was said "the people of Montbéliard never forgot their Reformed origins and the long struggle" against that imposition.³³

32. *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles*, x.

33. Raitt, 176.

34. "These festivals were abolished again in 1550 without Calvin's knowledge. Calvin was not unhappy with the abolition of festivals, though this was an issue he did not consider of sufficiently critical importance to do battle over." John H. Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today," in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 214.

35. Manetsch, 125. Emphasis added.

36. By "keeping," Calvin means having a communion service and a sermon on the birth of Christ; he clearly does not mean "keeping" it in any modern holiday or holy day sense.

In Geneva, apparently from Calvin's return in 1541, amidst continued dissension in the city there was a continued campaign to reform from the imposition of the four Bernese feast days. Manetsch summarizes,

After Calvin's return from Strasbourg in 1541, he and his pastoral colleagues renewed their efforts to expunge feast days from Geneva's religious calendar. In 1545, they convinced Geneva's magistrates to *suppress* the feasts of the Circumcision of Christ, Annunciation, and Ascension. Five years later [i.e., in 1550], after a protracted campaign on the part of the city ministers, the Small Council passed an edict that *proscribed* all religious holidays in the city, including the feast of Christmas, requiring Geneva's citizens to treat them as ordinary workdays.³⁴ The Lord's Supper, customarily celebrated on Christmas Day, would henceforth be observed on the Sunday nearest to December 25. Calvin insisted that the Lord's Day, or Sunday, was the Christian's true "holiday," the day when ordinary work was set aside so that believers might worship God and be instructed in his Word.³⁵

This campaign and Calvin's role in it, whether or not it was a primary one, is not as apparent if one relies strictly on Calvin's explanations for the abolition of these days in his 1550 correspondence. In the letters Calvin disclaimed any responsibility for the final abolition of the three feast days plus Christmas day. He does explain that before the 1550 decision, he had proposed a middle way of marking Christ's birth with a service on December 25, and the other days marked with prayer services in the morning with everyone free to return to work afterwards (the compromise he and Farel originally offered the Bernese in 1538). He explains this in a January 1551 letter to John Haller.

Before I ever entered the city, there were no festivals but the Lord's day. Those celebrated by you were approved of by the same public decree by which Farel and I were expelled; and it was rather extorted by the tumultuous violence of the ungodly, than decreed according to the order of law. Since my recall, I have pursued the moderate course of keeping Christ's birth-day as you are wont to do.³⁶ But there were extraordinary occasions of public prayer on other days; the shops were shut in the morning, and every one returned to his several calling after dinner. There were, however, in the meanwhile, certain inflexible individuals who did not comply with the common custom from some perverse malice or other. Diversity would not be tolerated in a rightly constituted church: even for citizens not to

live on good terms with one another, would beget mistrust among strangers. I exhorted the Senate to remove this disagreement in future by a proper remedy. And indeed I lauded, at the same time, in express terms, the moderation which they had hitherto exercised. I afterwards heard of the abrogation, just as a perfect stranger would.³⁷

And in a letter to the minister in Büren, the Reformer gives perhaps the fullest explanation of this abolishment of the old feast days.

CALVIN TO A MINISTER OF BÜREN³⁸

Greetings. You have acted wisely in not trusting the empty chatter that says we have abolished observance of the Lord's Day. The sheer ridiculousness of such extravagant tales undermines all their credibility. But you, relying upon confidence in our discretion, have properly rejected the slander which was beginning to brand us. In doing so you have shown yourself to be a dutiful friend and brother. I would for sure be more than insane if I were to harass good men with such a pointless and hollow innovation. I would also be arming the wicked and exposing myself to everyone's ridicule.

So what do I have to say for myself? I do not think that there is here among us one man from the whole lot so arrogant as ever to dream up such a scheme.³⁹ Still, I have now learned by long experience to despise such gossip, or at least to endure it with a more calm mind. Otherwise the daily burden of these disgusting slanders would have just about killed me already.

Perhaps one point has provided substance for a fable. The feast day which had been dedicated to Christ's birth was transferred to the following Lord's Day. It is not my place to say whether or not this was a good decision. But so far as I am concerned it is permissible for you freely, by your own judgment, to disapprove of it. For because this was done neither by my leadership nor with my knowledge, I should not be charged with it. You will be surprised how suddenly our leaders,⁴⁰ without consulting the pastors, have changed the form of worship⁴¹ that was adopted in our church. But this also happened more by negligence than stubborn persistence.

Before I had entered the city during my first tenure, all the feast days had been abolished except for the Lord's Day.⁴² Both Farel and Viret had thought that this was a useful practice. I freely consented to the received cus-

tom. This new province of Bern⁴³ had at first followed the same practice. Someone⁴⁴ then stepped forward, and fought for feast days no less vociferously⁴⁵ than St. Victor⁴⁶ once fought on behalf of his interpretation of the Paschal day. From the time that I was driven out, four feast days with certain other rituals were established. Since my return, although I was immediately able to root out—with the approval of a great portion of the population—whatever had been done in my absence, I have calmly held my peace.⁴⁷ But I was not able to pass over in silence the utterly ridiculous celebration of the feast of Christ's circumcision,⁴⁸ while they ignored the feast for the day of his death.⁴⁹ This practice had been engineered with wickedness and ignorance by unlearned men. Now, because the common people were worshipping the day of Christ's birth under Mary's name,⁵⁰ I pointedly attacked that superstition year after year. Indeed, the French in their tongue la-

37. *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, volume 5, trans. David Constable (1858; reprint Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1983), 288.

38. [Ed. Translation © 2017 by David C. Noe. See letter #1427, *CR* 42 CO 14.[1]–4. Summary from the *CR*: “Calvin here explains both the true and false opinions that are being disseminated about the discontinuation of feast days in the Geneva Church. He also discusses who the different groups are on both sides of this question.” Footnotes are Mr. Noe's and any insertions by Mr. Coldwell are in square brackets.]

39. I.e., discontinuing Lord's Day observance.

40. *nostros*, ‘our men,’ and referring to the members of the Geneva Council. Cf. Manetsch, pp. 125–6.

41. *ordinem*.

42. *praeter Dominicum*.

43. It is not clear why Calvin writes *nova haec Bernatium provincia*. Perhaps this is in reference to Bern having become Protestant in 1528?

44. Although Calvin apparently used the name Conzenus here, according to the editors of *CR*, Beza when collating Calvin's correspondence concealed the name (*suppressit*) and supplied instead the initial ‘N,’ i.e. *Nomen*, to anonymize him. For this discussion, see Calvin's letter to Haller, #1428, and the editors' note thereto. They also cite Abraham Ruchat (*Histoire de la Réformation de la Suisse: 1536–1566*), volume 4.452, 459. Calvin dates the letter to Haller as January 2, 1551.

45. *tumultuose*.

46. I.e., Victor Romanus, c. 195 A.D., Bishop of Rome.

47. *placide quievi*.

48. This was traditionally celebrated on January 1.

49. The Latin phrase is *praeterito mortis die*, i.e. Good Friday. The editors of *CR* quote Abraham Ruchat: “On célèbre la mort du Seigneur toutes les fois qu'on fait la cène” (*ibid.*, volume 5.441, 1836); i.e. “We celebrate the Lord's death every time we participate in the Supper.” They also add this comment, which I have translated from the Latin: “Even in our own day [1875] the Swiss celebrate the feast of Paraesceve in solemn worship, though not the residents of Glarus.” Paraesceve is the preparation day before the Sabbath; cf. John 19.14: ἦν δὲ παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσχα....

50. *sub Mariae nomine*. This can also mean “out of respect for Mary.”

bel the feast day of our Lord as “of Mars”.⁵¹ And from then on that day is commonly believed to be sacred to him. Still, I showed such self-restraint that I sought to curb those who, from the other party, were shouting that these days had to be abolished altogether. For those who had subscribed to the Gospel in the earliest stages were so distraught about any innovation introduced afterward, that sometimes they didn’t even spare me, because to them I seemed too cautious. In fact, the situation once reached such a pitch that men drew swords! And when the intensity of the arguing ran so hot both sides, we found a middle ground acceptable: the holy days would be observed with shops closed in the morning, and they would return to their daily activities from the noon meal on. This practice was established nine years ago,⁵² but the wrangling has still not subsided yet. This is because the fact that some shops are closed while others are open keeps causing nasty strife. Because we could find no end nor cure for this problem, at the end of the following year I took the matter to the consistory.⁵³ I then asked the city Council to come up with a compromise in line with their own judgment so that the people could reach greater harmony. I said nothing specifically about the abolition of the feast days. Instead, I commended the city fathers that up to this point they had, from a keen desire to promote peace, accommodated themselves to the practice of Bern. When I learned that those days had been abolished by popular vote,⁵⁴ it was such an unexpected surprise that I was just about speechless! I have no other comment except to say that I scarcely would have dared to make that proposal if I had put it to a vote myself.

51. *in Martio*. The editors of *CR* add this note: *La fête de N.D. de Mars*.

52. The editors of *CR* comment (in my translation of their Latin): “This was done in December 1544 at Calvin’s own urging, although he had approached the city Council about this matter earlier on May 22. That he wrote ‘nine years ago’ seems to be a slip of memory. But the four feast days seem to have gradually fallen out of use.”

53. *curia*.

54. *plebiscitio*.

55. I.e., the Sunday worship.

56. [Ed. “ordo bene compositus.”]

57. “But meanwhile, in learning of Bucer’s death I have suffered a great sorrow. Contrary to my desire, we will soon feel just how great a loss the church of God has suffered. So long as Bucer lived, I had an adequate regard for the brilliance of the gifts in which he excelled. Now in the end, I see better as an orphan just how useful he would still be to us. I am then all the more anxious to plead with the Lord to preserve all of you longer in his service, and make use of your work.” Translation © David C. Noe. See Calvin’s Letter #1482 to Bullinger, April 24, 1551, *CO* 14, 105. See also the narrative in *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles*, ix–x.

You see that in the context of the whole history, nothing new has been introduced. But instead, the customary practice of the church, which had been rescinded by wicked example, has now been restored. And yet, this happened contrary to my expectation. But it was not this church alone which kept no feast days except for that of the seventh day.⁵⁵ For the same practice was instituted previously in Strasbourg. When I arrived in Geneva, I was obliged not to disturb a well-established system.⁵⁶ That even now this order has been revoked as it were on the very doorstep, does not seem to me to be a serious reason for offense. If, however, there were any blame, it belongs to those who wrongly hold me guilty for someone else’s action. Farewell.

Months later Calvin repeats almost verbatim the same account to Bullinger, only differing in appending a poignant acknowledgment that he had received news of Bucer’s death.⁵⁷

As indicated earlier, though Calvin disavowed any responsibility for the 1550 abolition of the feast days, his letters apart from some imprecision on the timeframe, square with what is clearer from council records. What the records show is that there was an effort to reform away from the imposed Bernese holy days observed as feast or ‘sabbath-like’ days toward the compromise offered in 1538 of going back to work after services, in which the Reformer did have a role. On Calvin’s return to Geneva, as he says, he on his own authority could have pressed the removal of these days with the backing of the majority of the people. He did not do so to avoid discord on a lesser matter with many other greater at stake, and no doubt to avoid a conflict with Bern. Yet, the first years of Calvin’s return were marked with confusion over how these days were to be observed with the council giving no clear guidance. This confusion was apparent as late as December of 1543.

After Calvin’s return [late in 1541], the Council proceeded with the utmost caution, still concerned first and foremost with achieving unity and preserving the Bernese alliance. Lack of direction on this point left the people unsure of whether or not they were supposed to observe the feasts. In response the Council passed a number of resolutions stating that nothing was to change. That is to say, there was a sermon or prayer service in the morning [of the feast days] and people were to rest for the remainder of the day. If Calvin made an active effort to abolish the remaining feasts [i.e., before 1544], he must have done so only in his sermons, but not in the Council chambers. His liturgy made no special mention of any particular days. There was by necessity a special liturgy for communion services, but the service book makes no recommendation on when communion

should be celebrated, and would work equally well for a weekly or monthly celebration, as Calvin wished, or for a quarterly celebration as was in fact practiced.⁵⁸ Despite signs of softening on the part of the Council in 1544 in response to Calvin's efforts, it wasn't until 1545 that the Council accepted Calvin's argument that the four feasts were "superstitious."⁵⁹

Lambert goes on to note Calvin's 1544 recommendation for reform (just two months prior to his 1544 letter to the Montbéliardians), which was not immediately received by the council.

Calvin made what seems to have been a first effort in March of 1544. Four days before the Annunciation, he asked the Council whether or not the feast should be observed. The Council held to its original position. In particular, the Council demanded a prayer service for that day (a Tuesday), and for the three following Tuesdays. This was apparently in addition to the normal prayer service on Wednesdays. Two months later, Calvin suggested that, in order to get rid of "superstitions," the pastors should preach in the morning on the four feasts and in the afternoon everyone should be free to work or not as he pleased. Presumably Calvin envisioned sermons that would educate people on the *proper* observance (or lack thereof) of these days. The Council referred the matter to the General Assembly, but no further action seems to have been taken. That December, Calvin succeeded in getting the Council to suppress the Christmas prayer service, Christmas falling on a Thursday, and to make do with just a sermon. The Council also agreed to do the same for the other feasts. Finally, when the feast of the Annunciation came around again in March 1545, the Council denounced it as a superstition and stipulated that there be no special observance. In fact, since the day fell on the normal day of the prayer service (Wednesday), the Council may even have been uneasy about holding the normal prayer service for fear that it would be perceived to be in observance of the feast, though this is only one possible reading of the document ... The important point is that by 1544 the Council had clearly come around to Calvin's position in calling the feasts "superstitious," despite the fact that the Bernese continued to celebrate them. The Council did not, however, *abolish* these "superstitions" until 1545.⁶⁰

These council records, as Lambert notes, "allow multiple interpretations." This may be why Manetsch (cited previously), who is clearly familiar with Lambert's work, calls the 1545 action a *suppression* of the three feasts, with the *abolition*

of all four at once coming by official action in 1550. A gradual suppression of some aspects of the three feasts seems to square with Calvin's narrative, with allowances for his putting greater stress on not having a personal hand in the abolition, than if they had been abolished in total six years before his letters on the subject, and his praise of the moderation of the council seems to point to a relaxed approach to the matter, though that would seem to be a polite way of looking at their indecision in the years before 1545. What is clear is that Calvin was very much involved in laying before the council the proposition which they eventually adopted, that these days were superstitious as observed before 1545. Things continued on for five years with ongoing disputes between citizens for and against reopening shops after services on the four feast days, apparently because the council did not want to take an 'immoderate' stand and force conformity on the issue. As Calvin noted in his letters, it was because of these ongoing contentions that he brought the matter of the feast days before the Council again in 1550, and on November 11, 1550 that body settled the matter definitively by abolishing the four feast days completely.⁶¹

CALVIN'S VIEW OF HOLY DAYS

While the pretended holy days were only one issue, and not even the most serious which Calvin addressed in these letters to the Montbéliard and other ministers, the use of the liturgical calendar is of the primary interest because the letters figure in later Presbyterian literature against imposition of such days,

58. Lambert notes: "Carbonnier-Burkard (1993), p. 349–50, underlines the significance of this omission by Calvin. Note that in Calvin's draft of the Ecclesiastical Ordinances there was no mention of when the Lord's Supper should be celebrated either, but the final version approved in Council, specified that it should be celebrated four times per year on Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and the first Sunday of September." Marianne Carbonnier-Burkard, "Jours de fêtes dans les églises reformées de France au XVIIe siècle," *Études théologiques et religieuses*, 68, #3 (1993): 347–58. This article gives an "overview on the suppression of feasts in the French Reformed Church, beginning with Farel in Geneva...." Lambert, 194, 191 (n79).

59. Lambert, 193.

60. Lambert, 194. "In 1544 the Council introduced a unique change in the celebration of the feast days: in the future, church services would be held and workplaces closed only on feast-day mornings; in the afternoons everyone would go back to work." de Greef, 39.

61. *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles*, x. "On 11 November 1550 Calvin appears before the Council and speaks about 'la diversité du peuple quant aux festes, à cause que aucuns ouvrent leurs boutiques, les autres non, qui est une division scandaleuse.' Calvin does not propose to abolish the feast days—instead, he addresses the issue of social abuse. The Council decides to abolish the feast days immediately." Calvin was concerned about differences over observing the feasts and that some opened their shops in the afternoon and some insisted on not doing so, which was "a scandalous division."

and because Calvin's view of the church calendar is routinely cited today to defend some use of it.⁶²

The editors of the French text of Calvin's sermons on Acts conclude their overview of Calvin and the liturgical calendar with their synopsis of the reformer's view of its use. They begin by noting that some scholars disagree that Calvin was fully detached from the abolition of the feast days in 1550:

Roget, Gautier and his editors, however, feel that Calvin is not as innocent in this abolition as he appears to be. According to them, it is impossible that the Deux Cents and the Conseil Général would have taken a decision unknown to Calvin.

We can only establish that Calvin was not strictly opposed to the liturgical year. He would not have abolished Christmas. He did not think much of Circumcision Day, and the Mary-feast was in his eyes complete superstition. At Easter and Whitsun, he always interrupted his sermons in the *lectio continua* and addressed the "feast matters." He also interrupted his weekday sequential material in order to address the history of the passion.

62. This is generally done in informal online defenses of observing Christmas liturgically, but as will be argued here, the conclusion of some scholars that Calvin supports a sober or restrained use of the liturgical calendar may still be saying too much, unless we let Calvin's practice fully inform that sober use, as noted below.

63. *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles*, ix–x. The curtailing of some practices in 1545 would seem to lend credence to this view.

64. Balke and Moehn do not give any references for their summary. *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles*, x.

65. Moehn, *Plusieurs sermons de Jean Calvin*, Introduction, xxi.

66. Sermon preached Thursday, December 25, 1550/1, *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, trans. Benjamin W. Farley (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2003), 303. This is the Julian date and in Geneva at the time December 25 was the first day of the new year. Commenting on this sermon Lambert notes, "Since most of the available sermons of Calvin are not dated, no other sermons known to be from Christmas day are available, though perhaps there will be more when the *Calviniana Supplementa* project is completed." Lambert, 198–199, and n99. Subsequent to Lambert's 1998 dissertation, sermons have been issued on Genesis 1–20 (2000; English 2009); Ezekiel 36–38 (2006); and Isaiah 52–66 (2012); and Droz has issued the *Plusieurs sermons de Jean Calvin* (2011; cf. CR 74 CO 46, 956–968) containing the December 25, 1552 sermon on Christ's birth from Luke 2, which does not repeat the chastisements of two years earlier (that year the 25th being the Lord's Day everyone was expected to be there; Moehn notes parallel sermons also on Luke 2 for 1559, *Plusieurs sermons*, xxxvi, CO 46, 271, 285). The Isaiah sermons were delivered from July 16, 1556 through August 26, 1559, but Calvin was ill for seven months in the middle of the series, so there are no sermons dating to December. The Ezekiel volume has just fifteen sermons given on week days in January and February 1554, but a table detailing the data on all 175 sermons has a note for sermon 149 on the nativity sermon preached that year, "On Sunday 24 December 1553" [note that contrary to the normal rule declared late in 1550, this is

Social care was an important issue to Calvin. The weekly rest day is a gift of God, but too many days off would lead to lawlessness, idleness, alcohol abuse and all kinds of immorality. A sober liturgical year, geared to bring to light the significance of the great holy facts, is a good thing. But that significance should most of all sound in the preaching of the entire holy Scriptures. And that is why: *lectio continua*.⁶³

Even with the qualifications and the clear stated preference for *lectio continua*, this endorsement of a 'sober use of the liturgical calendar' seems to stretch the evidence and is not qualified enough. The assessment that Calvin thought "a sober liturgical year" "a good thing" seems to be based upon a statement in regards to preaching on the subject of the birth of Christ.⁶⁴ In that "well-known sermon"⁶⁵ preached on Tuesday, December 25, 1551, Calvin said,

In truth, as you have often been admonished, it is good to set aside one day out of the year in which we are reminded of all the good that has occurred because of Christ's birth in the world, and in which we hear the story of his birth retold, which will be done Sunday.⁶⁶

This was after the feast days as such (as Sabbath-like days) had been abolished in 1550, and the observation of Christ's birth and the attending observance of communion moved to the next Lord's Day after December 25.⁶⁷

the Lord's Day before rather than the one after] Calvin preached "on the story of the Nativity of our Lord according to St. Luke," as the table of contents of ms.fr.30 shows." *Supplementa Calviniana: Sermons inédits ... Vol. 10:3, Sermons sur le livre des revelations du prophete Ezechie: chapitres 36–48* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 2006), xvii, n12; *Sermons sur Esaïe*, 2 vols (2012). There is a December 25, 1559 (Monday) sermon on Genesis 8:20–22 with no mention of the old holy day, and one on Acts 7:52–56 preached on Sunday December 21, 1550, which only notes that the communion would be celebrated the next Lord's Day in accord with the new rule of the council. The Acts series takes up again on January 4, 1551, indicating that a nativity sermon was preached on December 28 (the service referenced in the Micah sermon preached the previous Thursday). More volumes are still forthcoming in the *Calviniana Supplementa*. See *Sermons on the Acts of the Apostles*, Chapters 1–7, trans. Rob Roy McGregor (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 612; *Sermons on Genesis, chapters 1:1–11:4: forty-nine sermons delivered in Geneva between 4 September 1559 and 23 January 1560*, trans. Rob Roy McGregor (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

67. "This way all the holidays were abolished by the government in Geneva [on November 11, 1550]. The only day celebrated with a rest from labour was the Sunday; the holiday in honour of the birth of Christ was changed to be celebrated on the next Sunday. This meant that also the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which always took place on 25 December, was transferred to the next Sunday." *Plusieurs sermons de Jean Calvin*, Introduction, xix–xx.

First and foremost it has to be understood that Calvin preached nativity and other liturgical calendar-related sermons because it was Bern's practice and/or the council had ordered this, and these orders remained even though the four feast days had been abolished.⁶⁸ For instance, as to the interruption of his normal "weekday sequential material in order to address the history of the passion," the council ordered all the ministers to do this in March of 1544, and we know Calvin did this at least in the year 1549 before the abolition of the four holy days, and also afterwards in 1554 and 1555.⁶⁹ It is not contended that Calvin followed the magistrates' orders even though he thought it was wrong, but that without these orders and the controversy with Bern, it cannot simply be assumed he would have been preaching such sermons at those times in the first place. As to Calvin's not being in favor of abolishing Christmas day; again, this is assuming some favoring of the observance which the evidence does not support. As noted in the letters cited previously, Calvin did not agree with the decision in 1550 to abolish the feast days; yet we know he and the ministers had campaigned for changes that would reduce the superstitious observance of the days by removing the Sabbath-like nature of them, which was at root the concern in the compromise that he and Farel had offered in 1538.⁷⁰ Calvin was always for a moderate course and it is likely he wished December 25 simply to be observed with a sermon in the morning and with folks returning to work afterwards (when it did not fall on a Lord's Day), as he proposed for all four of the days in May 1544. But we know from the letters that he also did not oppose the complete abolition; he simply would have taken a more measured approach.

All we have in Calvin's view is that it is good to preach topically on a select few themes relative to Christ's work of redemption once idolatrized in the old liturgical calendar. Whether Calvin would have chosen different times to do this is unknown, but he clearly acquiesced as ordered.⁷¹ When to preach such sermons or whether to do so on or near the old holy days, is at the first consideration (i.e., in theory) a matter of indifference, the determination of which must be left to the attending circumstances (idolatrous abuse being one; of which more below).⁷² This is not a minor distinction; it is the difference between a positive endorsement of that calendar as something good and a circumstantial 'cue' taken from it.

But even granting it is appropriate to term Calvin's practice 'a sober use of the liturgical year' and 'good' as such, one should allow Calvin himself to exhibit what sort of preaching that would entail. As long as there was danger of abuse and superstition, he would guard against that and be sure to exhort the people plainly. For instance, soon after the pretended holy days had been abolished, Calvin was surprised by a larger audience than usual on a weekday that fell on December 25, 1550/51. He remarked in the sermon already cited,

Now, I see here today more people that I am accustomed to having at the sermon. Why is that? It is Christmas day. And who told you this? You poor beasts. That is a fitting euphemism for all of you who have come here today to honor Noel. Did you think you would be honoring God? Consider what sort of obedience to God your coming displays. In your mind, you are celebrating a holiday for God, or turning today into one but so much for that. In truth, as you have often been admonished, it is good to set aside one day out of the year in which we are reminded of all the good that has occurred because of Christ's birth in the world, and in which we hear the story of his birth retold, which will be done Sunday. But if you think that Jesus Christ was born today, you are as crazed as wild beasts. For when

68. "In 1548 [*sic* 1544?] the city council specifically indicated that the pastors were to preach on the passion narrative during Holy Week, although nothing is said about these days being holidays, that is, about closing one's workshop or not going out into one's fields." Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 4*, 123. Cf. "Reg. du Conseil, 21 March 1544 (CO 21, 332): "Ordonné que les predicans tout au long de la sepmaine devant pasques ayent à presher la passion." No similar ordinance for nativity sermons was traced, so it is not clear if there was a similar earlier order for such or if this was simply a prevailing custom that Calvin adopted along with the service on his return in 1541 and accepted the ceremonies 'in the manner of Bern.' See the previous citation from his letter to Haller.

69. *Plusieurs sermons de Jean Calvin*, Introduction, xxi.

70. Again, this was the compromise. Calvin was perfectly satisfied with the Genevan practice of 1536, where all of the old holy days had been abolished.

71. It is not as though Calvin was officiating at a typical modern worship service with all the centuries of built-up traditions and accretions and expectations that have crept into even most American Presbyterian churches since they re-embraced a liturgical calendar in the early twentieth century.

72. "Whence arises another distinction of offenses, viz. from the matter of a practice, or from the manner of [the] performing of it, or the circumstances in the doing of it. For as it is not an act materially good that will edify, except it is done in the right manner, so will an act materially good not keep off offense, if it is not done tenderly, wisely, etc. And often we find circumstances have much influence on offense, as times, persons, places, manner, etc. For it is not offensive [for] one to pray or preach, but at some times, as before an idol, or on a [pretended] Holy-day, it may be offensive." James Durham, *Concerning Scandal* (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1990), 5; (2014), 47. The Puritans commonly pressed the need to abandon abused practices. Regarding the notorious 'Christmas' abuses of his day, Increase Mather wrote, "The Scandal of them calls for their Abolition. The School Doctors affirm rightly, *Etiam Spiritualia nonnecessaria sunt fugienda, si ex iis Scandalum oritur*. Things of an indifferent nature, when they become an occasion of Sin, should not at all be used." *A testimony against several prophane and superstitious customs now practised by some in New-England* (London: [n.p.] 1687), end of chapter three. Calvin articulates a similar principal in his tract against Cassander, cited below.

you elevate one day alone for the purpose of worshipping God, you have just turned it into an idol. True, you insist that you have done so for the honor of God, but it is more for the honor of the devil.

Let us consider what our Lord has to say on the matter. Was it not Saul's intention to worship God when he spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, along with the best spoils and cattle? He says as much: 'I want to worship God.' Saul's tongue was full of devotion and good intention. But what was the response he received? 'You soothsayer! You heretic! You apostate! You claim to be honoring God, but God rejects you and disavows all that you have done.' Consequently, the same is true of our actions. For no day is superior to another. It matters not whether we recall our Lord's nativity on a Wednesday, Thursday, or some other day. But when we insist on establishing a service of worship based on our whim, we blaspheme God, and create an idol, though we have done it all in the name of God.⁷³ And when you worship God in the idleness of a holiday spirit, that is a heavy sin to bear, and one which attracts others about it, until we reach the height of iniquity. Therefore, let us pay attention to what Micah is saying here, that God must not only strip away things that are bad in themselves, but must also eliminate anything that might foster superstition. Once we have understood that, we will no longer find it strange that Noel is not being observed today, but that on Sunday we will celebrate the Lord's Supper and recite the story of the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. But all those who barely know Jesus Christ, or that we must be subject to him, and that God removes all those impediments that prevent us from coming to him, these folk, I say, will at best grit their teeth. They came here in anticipation of celebrating a wrong intention, but will leave with it wholly unfulfilled.⁷⁴

Calvin was not finished admonishing his congregation. On January 6, 1551, which was the old feast day of Epiphany, the Reformer was almost if not as directly pointed. It is a less cited and lengthy passage, but for its adducing the biblical principle of worship and other matters of relevance, we cite it in full with the attending notes.

73. "In the creation of a festival, an idol, the product of human fantasy, was forged in the name of God." Leith, 214.

74. Farley, *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, 302–304.

75. "See the *Institutes* 3.7.7 and 4.13.4. In the latter, Calvin maintains that intentions are important, but God just as often finds them more displeasing than acceptable." Farley, *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, 302–304.

76. "Simplicity can mean 'artlessness,' 'plainness,' and 'singleness' as well." Farley, *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, *ibid.*

Now, he [Micah] mentions the "statutes, ordinances, and the ceremonies" because idolatry always promotes itself as virtuous activity. For idolaters imagine that they are worshipping God in everything they do, even when their services are foolish, which the blind and the Devil make others believe God approves. We still witness the same occurring today. For those who worship God in accordance with their fantasy, as in the papacy, dishonor and blaspheme God rather than worship God. Yet the papists are so arrogant as to think that God is obligated to accept what they do. And they justify it on the ruse: "Ah, will not God accept whatever is done on the basis of a good intention?"⁷⁵ That is how mankind hope to obligate God by their stupid fantasies, while avoiding any adherence whatsoever to his will. Now because this pride also gripped the Jews, Micah responds with equal loftiness: "Yes, of course! You tell me that these statutes, decrees, and ordinances provide wonderful advice and counsel and dictate what you should do. Very well! I will grant you your lofty words, but, nevertheless, God considers all of it an abomination, and, in believing that you are worshipping God by means of your silly fantasies, you are actually confessing that you have been worshipping the Devil." If we would worship God as we should, then this passage [Micah 6:12–16] forces us to expend the effort to ground ourselves in the pure simplicity⁷⁶ that God has set forth in his Word.

That constitutes a doctrine we cannot ignore. For no matter what pretext we might use, or how noble we find our own cause to be, all that is rejected and condemned by a single word, namely, "obedience." For with good cause, God prefers it above all else, desiring that we worship him in simplicity and obedience. But when we surpass those limits, we corrupt our cause. And although we might impress others, one may still say: "Yes, what a devout man! What a devout woman! but I tell you, they are both bigots!" For irrespective of what they may mumble, or of how many masses they attend; irrespective of how many relics they worship, or votive candles they may light, or how many times they have been saluted as "good people," it amounts to nothing but a grievous offense against God. Hence, even if we are admired by others, we will not escape God's condemnation unless we follow what he has commanded in his Word.

Now by this example, we are instructed to adhere to the pure simplicity of God's Word, even though we are prone to disregard it. True, we might not turn against it at first, but soon after God has been gracious enough to teach us, we are easily corrupted. In fact, the majority

are immediately carried away, some in order to follow their accustomed idolatry and superstitions—for whatever bizarre and stupid reason I know not, while others cease to care about God and his Word at all, or they care about as much as animals do, while others, driven by their contempt and disgust for God's Word, vent their rage on both its teaching and those who preach it. When we observe such an ingratitude on the part of mankind, there arises the danger that we may fall into an abyss far more destructive and horrible than the one from which our Lord retracted us, thanks to his infinite goodness. For although one might daily explain what has been done in order to worship God, the majority will continue to pursue their habitual course and old superstitions. For example, how many people still regard Epiphany with high reverence?⁷⁷ They even celebrate the festival as they have been accustomed to do. I know not where they came up with this festival of "the king."

Now even though people openly know that all this is pure mockery of God, and that the only reason why the papists observe this festival is in order to get drunk, stuff themselves, and behave in the most intemperate and dissolute way, nevertheless, if you were to ask three hundred, or even a thousand Genevan inhabitants,⁷⁸ if it were good to celebrate this festival, they would reply: "Why not? What harm can result from honoring God in this way?" That is the response that many would make, even though they are supposed to be instructed in the Word of God and know that such falsehood is nonsense. This is not how we should act. For if we hope to worship God in the manner that is acceptable to him, we must divest ourselves of all silly superstitions and frivolous inventions, renounce all idolatry in order to worship God in spirit and in truth (as God commands us), and cling to the simplicity that we observe in his Word.⁷⁹

It is understandable that Calvin felt the need to chastise so strongly and largely against the old pretended holy days.⁸⁰ Geneva was still not a very godly city. The Reformer comments in one sermon, "Go down any street in Geneva, and you will discover as much righteousness and loyalty there as you would among dogs."⁸¹ And the old calendar was still an issue. Seventeen years later, in 1568, "the ministers and elders felt the need to justify their restrictive policy: 'in regard to the observance of the day of Christmas, things that are indifferent should not be formalized, and we do not condemn [other Reformed cities] that observe such a day, provided that they do so without superstition.' In the case of Geneva, however, it was necessary 'to remove this festival because it was apparent that the people treated it in a superstitious manner.'⁸² Again,

this is not surprising, as the Protestant religion in Geneva remained ever at threat with many harboring sympathies for Catholic customs, particularly in rural Geneva where such were very difficult to root out. Indeed, thousands apostatized at the end of the century due to an aggressive campaign by Savoy to reestablish Roman Catholicism in rural Geneva.⁸³

Seven years later, Calvin reiterated his firm opinion on such pretended holy days in a letter dated December 25, 1557.

With respect to ceremonies and above all the observance of holy days [I offer the following]: Although there are some who eagerly long to remain in conformity with such practices, I do not know how they can do so without disregard for the edification of the church, nor [do I know] how they can render an account to God

77. "In the French text, Calvin refers to this festival as *ce jour des Rois*—"the day of the King." However, the *Supplementa* editors explain that since the Reformers had abolished the ecclesiastical calendar along with its festivals and special days, Sundays excepted, Epiphany (or January 6, the very day of this sermon) was no longer observed." Farley, *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, *ibid.*

78. At the Reformation Geneva had a population of about ten thousand, and there were two thousand in the surrounding rural areas under the city's control. Cf. Manetsch, 126, and Brill's *Companions to the Christian Tradition*, v. 72, *Companion to the Swiss Reformation*, ed. Amy Nelson Burnett and Emidio Campi (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 366. 79. *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, 362–364.

80. Lambert observes, "Calvin rudely chastised his audience during a sermon on Thursday, 25 December. ..." "Calvin goes on to berate and insult his audience for several more lines." Lambert, 198–199, and n99. To focus on Calvin's language as rudeness surely misses the point. Calvin uses terms such as "poor beasts" euphemistically and direct remarks like this are not uncommon in his sermons, often for rhetorical effect to underscore the point he is making (our thanks to Ryan J. Ross for this observation based on extensive reading in Calvin; see his "Calvin and the Early French Reformation: Theology of Persecution," *Westminster Theological Journal* 79, No. 1 [2017]). Consider the following sampling of his sermons: "Therefore, it appears to these poor beasts that they are well protected before God, and that God will never condemn them for saying: 'I wanted to live as I was reared'"; *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, 390; "were sleeping there as poor beasts"; "we are dragged like poor beasts"; "Poor beasts, recognize what you are"; "We see that they [the apostles] were poor beasts, so that, considering how little they learned in such a good school, we must be ashamed of their slowness"; *Sermons on the Deity of Christ* (Old Paths Publications, 1997), 56, 91, 227, 247); "Poor beasts! why do you look for me here below?" (*Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973], 356); "You poor beasts, you look for bread and water when you are hungry and thirsty, but do your souls not count for anything"; *La famine spirituell* (*sermon inedit sur Esaie 55*), ed. Max Engammare, trans. Francis Higman (Geneva: Droz, 2000), 36; "For although God lifts up our heads and holds us up, as it were, by force to make us consider the eternal kingdom, we continue to be poor beasts with our snouts stuck down in a decaying pasture!"; *Sermons on 2 Samuel Chapters 1–11* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 339.

81. Farley, *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, 349.

82. Manetsch, 126.

83. Manetsch, 140.

for having advanced evil and impeded its solution.... Nevertheless, since we have to endure a number of imperfections when we cannot correct them, I am of the opinion that no brother ought to allow the above to be the cause of his leaving his church, unless the majority support the opposite.⁸⁴

We see, then, that Calvin thought that in order to avoid evil and advance edification, one should not conform to the pretended holy days, and from the Micah sermons cited, that we must remove anything that would “foster superstition” and “divest ourselves of all silly superstitions and frivolous inventions, renounce all idolatry in order to worship God in spirit and in truth.” Calvin would draw the points of his sermons out much more extensively into a principle against “monuments of idolatry” in one of his tracts, which would be picked up and elaborated upon by later writers and adduced in Reformed Confessions.⁸⁵ In 1561 Calvin wrote a response to George Cassander’s work arguing for a reunification of the Protestant churches with Rome.⁸⁶ In perhaps the standout portion of this tract Calvin writes,

Recognizing that God’s law commands the form of his worship, and by this he expresses detestation of all false gods, of course it is a repugnant thing to say that in

84. Calvin’s *Ecclesiastical Advice*, 90.

85. The phrase or idea of “monuments of idolatry” can be found in The Debrecen Synod (1567), The Synod at Szikszo (1568), The Nassau Confession (1578) and Bremen Consensus (1595). Calvin does not use the term in his tract, and this may just as well be called the principle of the brazen serpent. Though he notes the duty in his Commentary on Genesis (35:4), Calvin was opposed to the excesses of mobs sacking churches, of which activities Farel was not guiltless. Mindful of such activities, in 1559 Knox notes such destruction of idolatry in St. Andrews was done with the magistrates’ authority, who agreed “to remove all monuments of idolatry.” The Westminster Assembly would appropriately state the duty from the principle: “The duties required in the second commandment are ... the disapproving, detesting, opposing all false worship; and, according to each one’s place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry” (WLC 108). Foxe compared Edward VI to Josiah in the destruction of “all monuments of idolatry.” See also usage in Edward IV’s injunctions for such destruction (1547), and in Hooper’s injunctions (1551). Knox and Hooper likely picked up the language from the earlier use. See Chris Coldwell and Andrew J. Webb, “American Presbyterianism and the Religious Observance of Christmas,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 11 (2015), 178–179; Andrew Lang, *John Knox and the Reformation* (1905), 113; John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1570), book 9, 1521–1522; *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, volume 2, 1536–1557, ed. W. H. Frere et al. (London: Longmans Green & Company, 1910) 126; *Later Writings of Bishop Hooper together with his letters and other pieces*, ed. Charles Nevinson for The Parker Society (Cambridge: University Press, 1852), 135.

86. G. Cassandro, *De officio pii ac publicae tranquillitatis vere amantis viri in hoc religionis dissidio*, edited by F. Bauduin (Basel: 1561; repr. Lazari Zetzneri, 1612).

pleasing men something must be added to his Commandments. The vile buffoonery of the Papacy soils all religion. This also is not a thing suitable to good conscience. If some customs are useful and of good faith, I confess that the error that detains the spirits of some must not stop those who are well instructed to use only that which is good—provided that it would not become a common error confirmed by use. But because superstition is bindingly connected with many ceremonies which in themselves are good, anyone who would want to keep them shows in effect that he is of those who fall short. In this way, a false opinion, commonly received, will soil by abuse customs that otherwise are good. It becomes not only necessary to flee from it in your personal observation, but also that the fault be liberally noted out of fear that simple people would be hardened by it more and more. For it is not proper for a zealous Christian to say, “To each his own,” without also admonishing the others to be on their own guard.

Similarly, what is alleged of an Italian writer, that abuse does not take away good use, will not be true if one holds to it without exception: because it is clearly commanded to us to prudently watch that we would not offend the infirm brothers by our example, and that we should never undertake what would be illicit. For Saint Paul prohibits offending the brothers in eating flesh that was sacrificed to idols [1 Cor. 10:28], and speaking to this particular issue he shows a general rule that we are to keep ourselves from troubling the consciences of the weak by a bad or damaging example. One might speak better and more wholesomely if he were to say that what God himself ordains may not be abolished for wrong use or abuse that is committed against it. But even here, it is necessary to abstain from these things if, by later human ordinance, they have become corrupt with error, and if their use is harmful or scandalizes the brothers.

Here I marvel how this “Reformer,” after granting that superstitions sometimes have such strong popularity that it is necessary to remove from the realm of man those things once ordained by public authority (as we read of Hezekiah doing with the bronze serpent), finally does not consider even a little that his shrewdness is a horror to the ways of good action: as if in defending supportable rituals, he would oblige that all superstitions should be considered as safe and whole because they are weighty. For what is there in the papacy now that would not resemble the bronze serpent, even if it did not begin that way? [Numbers 21:9.] Moses had it made and forged by the commandment of God: he

had it kept for a sign of recognition. Among the virtues of Hezekiah told to us is that he had it broken and reduced to ash [2 Kings 18:4]. The superstitions for the most part, against which true servants of God battle today, are spreading from here to who knows where as covered pits in the ground. They are filled with detestable errors that can never be erased unless their use is taken away. Why, therefore, do we not confess simply what is true, that this remedy is necessary for taking away filth from the church?⁸⁷

Given Calvin's views, it is remarkable that he even preached nativity and passion week sermons cued to the pretended holy days! A later writer would excuse Calvin while applying this principle against any use of the old liturgical calendar.

LATER USE OF THE MONTBÉLIARD LETTERS

George Gillespie was one of those writers who picked up and elaborated upon this 'brazen serpent' principle which Calvin articulated, in crafting his argument for the necessity of putting away monuments of idolatry.⁸⁸ Much like Cassander, the Anglo-Catholics who had been arguing for the rites imposed by King James in the Articles of Perth (1618), including the re-imposition of some of the old pretended holy days which the Scottish Kirk had tossed out completely at the Reformation, argued "that it is needless to abolish utterly things and rites which the papists have abused to idolatry and superstition, and that it is enough to purge them from the abuse, and to restore them again to their right use." Gillespie answered, citing Calvin's response to Cassander,

Calvin, answering that which Cassander alleges out of an Italian writer, *abusu non tolli bonum usum* [abuse does not take away the good use], he admits it only to be true in things which are instituted by God Himself, not so in things ordained by men, for the very use of such things or rites as have no necessary use in God's worship, and which men have devised only at their own pleasure, is taken away by idolatrous abuse.... [*The safer part*] here, is to put them wholly away, and there is, by a great deal, more danger in retaining than in removing them.⁸⁹

Gillespie shows in his argument against the English popish ceremonies, that the old pretended holy days and other popish ceremonies "are thrice idolatrous: "because they are monuments of by-past idolatry;" 2. "because they are badges of present idolatry;" 3. "because they are idols themselves." Ceremonies such as the old holy days "are unlawful, because they are monuments of by-past idolatry, which not being necessary to be retained, should be utterly abolished."⁹⁰

By communicating with idolaters in their rites and ceremonies, we ourselves become guilty of idolatry; even as Ahaz, was an idolater, *eo ipso* [for that very reason], that he took the pattern of an altar from idolaters (2 Kings 16:10). Forasmuch, then, as kneeling before the consecrated bread, the sign of the cross, surplice, festival days, bishoping, bowing down to the altar, administration of the sacraments in private places, etc., are the wares of Rome, the baggage of Babylon, the trinkets of the whore, the badges of Popery, the ensigns of Christ's enemies, and the very trophies of AntiChrist: we cannot conform, communicate and symbolize with the idolatrous papists in the use of the same, without making ourselves idolaters by participation.⁹¹

Just prior to citing Calvin's answer to Cassander, Gillespie reinforced his argument for the necessity of removing monuments of idolatry with a twofold reason, drawing from Calvin again.

Fifthly, our proposition is backed with a twofold reason, for things which have been notoriously abused to idolatry should be abolished: (1) *Quia monent* [because they remind]. (2) *Quia movent* [because they move]. First, then, they are monitory [*admonitory; give a warning*], and preserve the memory of idols; *monumentum* [a monument] in good things is both *monimentum* [a memorial] and *munimentum* [fortification]; but *monumentum* in evil things (such as idolatry) is only *monimentum*, which *monet mentem* [instructs the mind], to remember upon such things as ought not to be once named among saints, but should

87. "Response a Un Certain Moyenneur Ruse" [French], *Recueil des Opuscules* (Geneva: Stoer, 1611) 2191–2192. Cf. *Responsio Ad Versipellem Quendam Mediatorem* [Latin], CR 37 (CO 9), 542. For a full translation of this tract into English from the French see, R. V. Bottomly, "Calvin's Response to a Certain Tricky Middler," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012), 254–275. For this quotation see page 264.

88. The ceremonies, including the pretended holy days, "are idolatrous, because having been notoriously abused to idolatry heretofore, they are the detestable and accursed monuments, which give no small honor to the memory of that by-past idolatry which should lie buried in hell." The principle which Gillespie draws from Calvin among others is "All things and rites which have been notoriously abused to idolatry, if they are not such as either God or nature has made to be of a necessary use, should be utterly abolished and purged away from divine worship, in such sort that they may not be accounted nor used by us as sacred things or rites pertaining to the same." George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies* (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 2013), 149.

89. Gillespie, 156–157.

90. Gillespie, 149ff.

91. Gillespie, 172ff.

lie buried in the eternal darkness of silent oblivion. Those relics therefore of idolatry, *by which succeeding generations, as though by a memorial, may be reminded* (as Wolphius rightly says),⁹² are to be quite defaced and destroyed, because they serve to honor the memory of cursed idols.

God would not have so much as the name of an idol to be remembered among his people, but commanded to destroy their names as well as themselves (Exod. 23:13; Deut. 12:3; Joshua 23:7); whereby we are admonished, as Calvin says, how detestable idolatry is before God, *whose memory a repentant man wants to be erased so no trace of it may be seen afterward.*⁹³ Yea, he requires, *that the memory be erased [abolished; put away] of all those things which were at anytime consecrated to idols.*⁹⁴ If Mordecai would not give his countenance (Ester 3:2), nor do any reverence to a living monument of that nation whose name God had ordained to be blotted out from under heaven (Deut. 25:19), much less should we give connivance, and far less countenance, but least of all reverence, to the dead and dumb monuments of those idols which God has devoted to utter destruction, with all their naughty [*bad, wicked*] appurtenances, so that he will not have their names to be once mentioned or remembered again.

But, secondly, *movent [they move]* too; such idolotrous remainders move us to turn back to idolatry. For *by experience we have verified, that, even after superstitions have been cast out, if any monuments of them be left to remain, not only has the memory of those persisted, but in the end it has obtained that they might be revived,* says Wolphius;⁹⁵ who hereupon thinks it behoveful [*necessary*] to destroy *funditus [utterly]* such vestiges of superstition, for this cause, if there were no more: *so that both for those aspiring to resume idolatry, hope may*

*be diminished, and for those attempting new things the opportunity and material may be forestalled.*⁹⁶

God would have Israel to overthrow all idolatrous monuments, lest thereby they should be snared (Deut. 7:25; 12:30). And if the law command to cover a pit, lest an ox or an ass should fall therein (Exod. 21:33), shall we suffer a pit to be open wherein the precious souls of men and women, which all the world cannot ransom, are likely to fall? Did God command to make a battlement for the roof of a house, and that for the safety of men's bodies (Deut. 22:8), and shall we not only not put up a battlement, or object some bar for the safety of men's souls, but also leave the way slippery and full of snares? Read we not that the Lord, who knew what was in man, and saw how propense he was to idolatry, did not only remove out of His people's way all such things as might any way allure or induce them to idolatry (even to the cutting off the names of the idols out of the land (Zech. 13:2), but also hedge up their way with thorns that they might not find their paths, nor overtake their idol-gods, when they should seek after them (Hosea 2:6, 7)? And shall we by the very contrary course not only not hedge up the way of idolatry with thorns, which may stop and stay such as have an inclination aiming forward, but also lay before them the inciting and enticing occasions which add to their own propension, such delectation as spurs forward with a swift facility?⁹⁷

As if it were not clear enough that Calvin should be cited very cautiously for any kind of proof for the positive use of the old pretended holy days, these same Anglo-Catholics tried to make use of the Reformer's letters including those to the Montbéliard ministers to prove the holy days imposed by authority upon Scotland ought to be accepted. Gillespie's response, explaining and excusing Calvin, enrolled these letters into the corpus of polemical writings against the imposition of the idolatrous liturgical calendar of Roman Catholicism.

There is another place of Calvin abused by Bishop Spottiswood and Bishop Lindsay, taken out of one of his Epistles to Hallerus, which I find in the volume before quoted. That which they grip to in this epistle is, that Calvin, speaking of the abrogation of festival days in Geneva, says, *but I wish this to be attested, that if the decision had been conferred upon me, what has now been established would not have been affirmed as a judgment.*

ANSWER. That which made Calvin say so was not any liking which he had to festival days, for he calls the abolishing of them *a well put-together arrangement*; but as

92. "Com. in 2 Reg. 23:6. *quibus quasi monumentis posteritas admoneatur [Melachim; id est, 1599 ed., ibid., p. 398r]."*

93. "Com. in Isa. 27:9. *cujus memoriam vult penitus deleri, ne posthac ullum ejus vestigium appareat. [Cf. CR 63 (CO 26), 456; Commentaries, vol. VIII, 2.261.]"*

94. "Calv., Com. in Exod. 23:24. *eorum omnium memoriam deleri [sic aboleri], quæ semel dicata sunt idolis. [CR 52 (CO 23), 546; Commentaries, vol. II, 2.387. The compositor of the 1637 text may have transposed the deleri from the citation from Isaiah just prior.]"*

95. "Ubi Supra [2 Kings 23:6]. *usu compertum habemus, superstitiones etiam postquam explosæ essent, si qua relicta fuissent earum monumenta, cum memoriam sui ipsarum apud homines, tum id tandem ut revocarentur obtinuisse. [Melachim; id est, 1599 ed., ibid., p. 398r.]"*

96. "*ut et aspirantibus ad revocandam idololatriam spes frangatur, et res novas molientibus ansa pariter ac materia præripiatur."*

97. Gillespie, 154–155.

[he] himself shows in the following epistle, which bears this title, *Cal. Ministro Burensi, S. D.*, the reason why he durst scarcely have so determined, if his judgment had been required, was because he saw neither end nor remedy for the prevailing tumult of contention raised about festival days, and likely to impede the course of reformation; therefore *fovendæ pacis studio* [out of eagerness to foster peace], he professes that he durst not make mention of the abrogation of those holy days. Because he would have tolerated holy days, because he durst not at that time, and as the case then stood, have spoken of the abolishing them, can it be hereupon concluded that he allowed of them? No, sure[ly].

But it is observable how both these prelates pervert Calvin's words. Bishop Spottiswood alleges his words anent [about] the abolishing of these festival days, thus: *I have been neither a persuader nor an instigator, and I wish this attested, that if the decision had been conferred upon*, etc. Whereas the words in that epistle lie thus: *Although I have been neither a persuader nor an instigator, for it so to have happened does not, however, vex me. But if you had the condition of our church equally disclosed to you, you would not hesitate to approve of my judgment. But I wish this attested, that if the decision had been conferred upon me*, etc. The Bishop would have made his hearers believe that Calvin was not content with the abolishing of the festival days, whereas his words testify the very contrary.

Bishop Lindsay is as gross in perverting the end of that epistle. *And yet there is no reason why men should be so provoked, if we use our liberty as the edification of the church requires*, from which words he concludes that in Calvin's judgment, the observation and abrogation of those days is in the power and liberty of the church. But the reader will perceive that Calvin there speaks only of the church's liberty to abrogate holy days, and nothing of her power to observe them, for he is showing, that howbeit he durst not have given advice to abolish them, if the decision had been referred to him, yet they had no reason for them who were offended at the abolishing of them in Geneva, because that church had done no more than she had power and liberty to do for edification....

§5. The Bishop meets with another answer in his antagonist which crosses his testimonies, namely, that howsoever foreign divines, in their epistles and councils, spoke sometimes sparingly against holy days, when their advice was sought of churches newly risen out of Popery and greatly distressed, yet they never advised a church to resume them where they were removed.

The Bishop objects against this answer, that Calvin (epist. 51), *advises the Monbelgardens not to contend against the prince for not resuming* (he should have said, for not receiving, if he had translated Calvin's words faithfully) *of all festival days, but only such as served not to edification, and were seen to be superstitious*.

ANSWER. 1. Albeit he spoke sparingly against holy days when he gave advice to that distressed and lately reformed church, lest the work of reformation should have been letted [hindered], yet he did not allow holy days among them. For in another epistle written to them he says, *About the ringing of bells and feast days, we feel thus, that you must bear these trifles rather than that the position in which you were stationed by the Lord be brought down, but do not regard it as good; but also it should be thereupon permitted to you to rebuke those superstitions following hence*. And this he sets down for one of these superstitions, *quod dies a die discernitur* [that a day is distinguished from (another) day], where also he condemns both the observing of days to the honor of man as superstitious, and the observing of them for the honor of God as Judaical.⁹⁸

From Calvin's practice and correspondence, George Gillespie concluded, "If holy days, in Calvin's judgment, be fooleries; if he gave advice not to approve them; if he thought them occasions of superstition; if he held it superstition to distinguish one day from another, or to esteem one above another; if he calls them Judaical, though kept to the honor of God, judge then what allowance they had from him."⁹⁹

CONCLUSION

Calvin's view from 1536 to as late as 1561 remained consistent. The feast days of the liturgical calendar were superstitious observances, and he actively campaigned throughout his ministry to remove them or curtail the superstitious nature of them as long as they were retained. Calvin's advice to the Montbéliardians regarding the imposition of holy days occurred as he himself was involved in an effort to reform Genevan practice. To those that continue to try to adduce Calvin in defense of a cyclical liturgy built around such days, it must be queried as Gillespie did: if Calvin believed that treating such days like the Lord's Day made them *superstitious*; if pretended holy days are an *idol* from man's imagination forged in God's name; if we *must* "eliminate anything that might foster superstition;" if these days *confirm* error by their retention and use; if conformity to them is *unedifying* and an *advancing of evil*; if we

98. Gillespie, 64–68.

99. Gillespie, 68.

should *remove* through the principle taught in Hezekiah's destruction of the brazen serpent all superstitious filth from the church which stand in the way as a snare or covered pit to ever tempt back to idolatry and superstition; if it is *not a good thing* to have to put up with such "trifles," as Calvin advised the Montbéliardians; and if once successfully removed as was done for centuries by Presbyterian churches, these observances should never be returned to use and should be 'erased by disuse'—judge what approval, let alone endorsement, the observance of the old superstitious days of the liturgical calendar actually had from the Genevan Reformer.

CHRIS COLDWELL

TWO LETTERS TO THE MINISTERS OF MONTBÉLIARD¹

CALVIN TO THE MINISTERS OF MONTBÉLIARD (OCTOBER 7, 1543)

Summary:² *In this letter, Calvin gives his position on certain rites that had been changed according to the design of Lutherans, rites which their leader Christophorus³ was imposing on their churches, especially concerning sacraments and feast days.*

To the faithful servants of Christ, the pastors of the church of Montbéliard, both in the city and in the countryside, brothers very dear to me and esteemed in Christ: grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, my very dear and reverend brothers. Even though you had only sent these two brothers to Neuenburg to seek the counsel of

1. Translated and edited by David C. Noe. Prior commentary and opinion as well as editorial insertions are by the introduction's author. The original text of this letter (#506) may be found in *CR* 39, *CO* 11, cols. 623–626.

2. [Ed. This is the summary from the *CR*.]

3. This is Christophorus, Duke of Württemberg, 1515–1568. This summary uses the word *dux* though Calvin employs the synonym *princeps* several times in the letter itself. [Ed. The *CR* notes, "*Ex quo Dux Christophorus comitatui Monbelgardensi praeectus fuit, ecclesiae eius ditionis, antea sub auspiciis Tossani et Georgii ducis Zwinglianismo magis addictae, Lutheranismi placata et ritus recipere debuerunt, procurante Io. Angelandro (Englemanno) quem Schnepsius cum Cod. eccl Wirtembergico eo miserat. (Vide quos laudavimus ad N. 457 et 459.)*"] See the introduction and background to the translation and Raitt, 19ff.]

4. I.e. of Neuenburg.

5. Daniel Toussaint, 1541–1602. [Ed. This letter does not survive. The *CR* notes, "Neque Tossani, neque Calvini literae supersunt."]

6. *optimus nervus*—this word means a muscle or sinew, and is used here metaphorically with the superlative adjective.

7. *familiariter*.

8. Presumably this would be either the *officium* to take the Supper properly, or that of moral and repentant living more generally.

9. Calvin here refers to taking the Eucharist to those who cannot attend worship service because of illness, *apud aegrotos*.

10. *Princeps*.

the ministers there, still, at the urging of those men,⁴ they set off to me here. They did this in order to deliver to you my opinion about the matters on which they were seeking advice from the men at Neuenburg. But I do not arrogate to myself something so significant, that I should presume when not asked to intrude on your deliberations, and force upon you my own opinion. But because our brother Toussaint⁵ had mentioned specifically in his letter that you want to hear what my judgment is, as well as that of others, I was not at all worried that it would seem arrogant or reckless on my part if I were to explain to you in a straightforward and brief manner what I myself would do if I were in your position. It is true that I privately informed my brother Toussaint two months ago some of what I thought about this. But now, because these brothers have reviewed for me the main points of the subjects you are debating—or at least about those matters in which there is some disagreement among you as to whether you ought to accept these practices—I will answer briefly what I think is best in particular instances.

It does not seem like a bad idea for those who want to partake of the Lord's Supper to show themselves to the minister and submit to an examination. Rather, I should say that I think you ought on your own initiative to require this of everyone. For this will be the best driver⁶ of pious and holy discipline in the church. But because the descent from that point to some kind of corruption is steep, it will be useful at the same time to set certain boundaries, in order to remove from the path all dangers. By these limits a proper use may be defined. First, there should be a kind of private catechesis for the informal⁷ instruction of the ignorant. Then, it is helpful to warn and admonish those who pay little attention to their duty.⁸ Finally, an effort must be made to raise up and strengthen trembling consciences.

On the subject of the administration of the Supper I hold as follows. The practice of celebrating communion with the sick ought to be freely allowed,⁹ whenever the circumstances and situation will permit. And I do not think there is any great reason to refuse to administer the Supper to criminals who are about to undergo punishment, provided that they ask for it, and it appears that they have been adequately prepared to receive it. And yet, it must be done according to this rule, namely that it is a true communion, i.e. that the bread is broken in some sort of assembly of believers. But it is altogether ridiculous for the Supper to be administered in an ordinary assembly, yet in a manner that falls outside good order, simply at the request of an individual. And it is not proper for this sacred feast, which is common to all, to be set out in everyone's presence without a solemn warning, so that the church may prepare herself for participation. But when the circumstances are arranged according to the dictate of the Prince,¹⁰ is this anything other than subjecting

the church's public administration to the whim of just one person? And if they object that this is necessary, there is no reason for you to refuse a more frequent administration, so that no one who is at all able to join the assembly may go on using necessity as an excuse.

The practice of allowing midwives to perform the rite of baptism is a wicked and sacrilegious profaning of that sacrament. Therefore, I hold that you must not only reject this practice, but if the Prince should exceed moderation in pressuring you, you must resist even to the shedding of your blood¹¹ rather than become complicit in this intolerable superstition. Christ asked the Pharisees about the origin of John's baptism: was it from heaven or from men?¹² For if they had admitted that it was the second option, then the obvious conclusion was that baptism was something worthless and insignificant. And when it comes to baptism performed by midwives, what will be its origin? Clearly it does not derive from the One who entrusted this duty specifically to the apostles. Consequently, the only option is that it comes from some incompatible authority. Augustine does not focus his debate on whether it is sinful for a woman to perform a baptism from necessity, but rather for a man without ecclesiastical office. In the end, he hesitantly replies that he would excuse it more than actually approve of it. He does not at all hold that it is permissible, but only acknowledges that the faulty practice existed. But if we follow the rule of Christ, no room for doubt remains.

On the subject of the burial of the dead, I would like to see the following restraint employed: the funeral procession should not proceed toward the church but go directly to the cemetery. I also would like an exhortation to be given there, so that those who are participating in the funeral ceremony on-site may understand what is being said.¹³ The former practice should not be absolutely forbidden.

As to the ringing of bells, I wouldn't want you to object too strenuously if the Prince will not relent and discontinue this ritual. This is not because I approve of the practice but because I think that it is not worth arguing about. I would wish that you were more steadfast in not submitting to feast days. But I think that you should do so in such a way that you are not arguing about every conceivable point, but only about those matters which do not serve to edify, and very obviously reek of superstition. And you already have a reasonable grounds for refusal. For in the papacy they worshiped the conception and ascension¹⁴ of the Virgin with great frequency. What will the servant of Christ have to say if he should climb into the pulpit on those days, except that he holds in contempt the foolishness of those people who have dreamed up these holy days?

I have now explained to you my position briefly and in simple words. It seems either redundant or at least not very necessary to produce arguments for you, since you can judge

according to your own wisdom and without any advisor what kinds of considerations compel me. I already see the kind of difficulty that rests upon you when it comes to prevailing upon the Prince, as well as how great that difficulty is. But if, by humble petition, you show that you have no other options, unless you are willing to disparage Christ in order to earn the Prince's favor, I don't doubt that he will in the end yield to such a reasonable request. For this reason I urge you, as far as possible, not to show yourselves intractable and hard to please. For when he notices how cooperative you are, it will be easier for him also to meet you halfway, especially when he sees that you are not stubborn in your opposition. The fact that the danger of lesser offenses frightens you—if you should adopt any new form of procedure which is not typically employed in our churches—yes, you have good reason for your concern. But because we have not arrived at perfection but only hope to continue advancing, this fear must not prevent you from permitting those rituals which in other respects must not be wholly condemned.

Farewell, my brothers whom I greatly esteem and respect. My fellow pastors are careful to send their greetings, men who do not at all disagree with my judgment. May the Lord Jesus rule you always by his Spirit. Written at Geneva, October 7, 1543.

Yours, John Calvin.

CALVIN TO THE MINISTERS OF MONTBÉLIARD (MAY 6, 1544).¹⁵

Summary:¹⁶ Calvin again encourages them not to allow their consciences to be compelled in the matter of vain or superstitious ceremonies, and especially that they do not tolerate baptism by midwives. In this passage, nevertheless, he defends Luther himself against the immoderation of Luther's followers.

Your correspondence,¹⁷ as was fitting, has brought me keen and bitter sorrow, because we have learned from your letters that you are constantly bombarded by new troubles. These troubles arise from the irritability of those men who seem

11. Cf. Hebrews 12:4.

12. Cf. Luke 20:4.

13. Calvin's argument seems to be against the use of Latin at the gravesite, but rather he wants an *exhortatio* in the vernacular.

14. [Ed. CR notes, "Ed. *Laus. et seqq. Assumptionem.*"]

15. [Ed. See the original text of this letter (#547) in CR 39, CO 11, cols. 704–708.]

16. [Ed. This is the summary from the CR.]

17. [Ed. CR notes: "*Quae iam non exstant, scilicet Helvetios de Lutheranzantium zelo certeores facientes indies ingravescente: nam ad ea quae Tossanus m. Ianuario scripserat (N. 527) responsum Noster non ad Maium usque retardare potuit.*" Letter 527 is a brief correspondence from Toussaint to Calvin dated January 15, 1544. CR 39, CO 11, col. [667–668].]

to have been born for the sole purpose of causing turmoil in the church.¹⁸ But as for you, make it your fixed purpose, with steadfast intention, nevertheless, to serve the Lord. Do this even though those men have quite a different agenda, and are spurred on by a different purpose, one from Satan, in order that he, through these men, might harass us.

I have been able to surmise from the actual circumstance just how much success Satan has had up to this point. I mean this: the gospel in our day has flowed out from the Wittenberg church. From that source, a multitude of men

now arise. These are rather like those who once set out from Jerusalem.¹⁹ Wherever they went, they were causing trouble for the true servants of Christ, and snatching at opportunities to stir up trouble. It is jealous rivalry²⁰ which causes this. All the while they strive through evil pretense to find a way for others to think they are like great men, as they try to win for themselves some grandeur. But they only succeed in looking like what they really are: pure and undiluted apes. I make this point so that no one may lose their affection for the church in Wittenberg. For just as those restless spirits once ran all over the place bothering Peter, James, and the other apostles, harassing even men they did not know and any who were resisting them, trying to prevent the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles, so also I would not hesitate to claim that Luther²¹ dislikes these senseless Thrasons²² just as much as we do. These men abuse the protection of the church of Wittenberg in order to dislodge from their position whatever good order they find. Indeed, what reason could that man²³ have for provoking conflict when the situation among you all was orderly and at peace? He wants to quarrel about some truly pointless and worthless ceremonies. Even though this kind of behavior obviously is wicked and quite foreign to a Christian spirit, nevertheless it was at least to some extent tolerable. But now he has gone too far in trying to drive you toward patently vicious rites. In this you must boldly resist him. Let him offer, as much as he wants, the names of great men as cover. But understand that he is doing something wicked. For Luther is blessed with discretion and sobriety, with a keen intellect and shrewd judgment. And I know that Schnepff²⁴ is endowed with the sort of self-restraint that I do not doubt could lead you to freely extending him your hand, once you have understood the situation thoroughly and accurately. First, however, I will discuss my perspective on the particular topics again. For I have already once explained to you my thinking.

The practice of women baptizing infants arose from the worst sort of error. They thought that if baptism had not been applied, it had some affect on those infants' salvation. And this is how the sacrament is defined in the schools,²⁵ namely that it is necessary for salvation. But we know that the salvation of infants depends upon the covenant of the Lord. By this covenant they are received and adopted into the company of his people. We confess that this covenant is truly sealed by baptism, but in such a way that the covenant possesses sufficient strength even if the sign is not present. Consequently, those persons who close off God's kingdom from infants who have not been touched with baptism cause serious harm to God's promise. For God himself has proclaimed that they are his even before they were born. Certainly, those who turn baptism into a magical charm are gripped by superstition. "But Christ," they

18. [Ed. CR notes: "N. 506, not. 3. *Dux Christophorus scriptorum Lutheri lectione maxime delectabatur et sic Zwinglianos detestari didicerat. Cf. eius epistolae ap. Neudecker Beitr. II 90 seqq.*" Cf. Johann Christian Gotthold Neudecker, *Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte der Reformation mit historisch-kritischen Anmerkungen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Friedrich Fleischer, 1841), 2.90ff. See the note on Christoph of Württemberg in the previous letter and in the introduction, footnote 28.]

19. Cf. Acts 15:1.

20. Calvin uses the Greek word *κακοζήλια*. This word is not especially rare but does not occur in the New Testament. Cognates from the verb *ζηλώω* are found in the Septuagint, and also I Corinthians 13.4 and Galatians 4.17.

21. This letter, written in May 1544, comes two years before Luther's death in February, 1546.

22. Calvin references Thraso, the archetypal braggart, whom the Roman comedian Terence immortalized in his comedy *Eunuchus*.

23. The Latin here is *iste vester*, an expression often reserved for contempt. The footnote in the CR indicates that Calvin means by this either Engelmann or Blaesius. The first is John Engelmann, a Lutheran opponent who had engaged Toussaint on the Calvinist view of the Supper. He was much in favor with Christoph. The second individual is Pantaleon Bläsi, mentioned in a letter from Daniel Toussaint to Calvin from Montbéliard, January 20, 1545. This is letter number 4142 [Ed. CR 48, CO 20, cols. 775–777]. The editors quote Charles Duvernoy's French comment (*Éphémérides du comté de Montbéliard*, Bsnçon 1823), which translates: "These debates raged from the end of 1544 between the German chaplains of Duke Christoph, Jean Engelmann and Pantaleon Bläsi, and the ministers of Montbéliard over the article of faith concerning the Lord's supper and rites of worship. Toussaint did not hold that the Eucharist was a mere symbol." Jill Raitt explains the career of Engelmann and connects him capably to Calvin and Toussaint (Raitt, 21ff). [Ed. CR notes: "Aut Englemannum innuit, aut Blaesium. Cf. etiam N. 527, not 2."]

24. This is almost certainly Erhard Schnepff (1495–1558), as the other candidate, his son Dietrich Schnepff (1525–1586), was too young to have been engaged in controversy at this date. [Ed. CR notes: "*Plures Calvini ad Schnepffium literae de hoc negotio scriptae interierunt. Vide infra ad 10 Oct. 1544.*" See letters 575 and 576, CO 11, cols. 751–755. De Greef writes, "On October 10, 1544, Calvin called on Erhard Schnepf (CO 11:751–54), a minister in Württemberg, to assist the brethren in Montbéliard by restraining Engelmann, one of the ministers in Montbéliard, who had made an appeal to Schnepf. Engelmann had created a problem by bringing to the fore the question of whether unbelievers receive the body of Christ in the celebration of the Lord's Supper." De Greef, 204–205.]

25. *in scholis*. As often is the case, Calvin means the professors of theology at the Sorbonne and the less reliable scholastics of the high medieval period.

claim, “demands regeneration by the Spirit and water.”²⁶ This interpretation arose from a related kind of ignorance. Some of the older interpreters understand by the word “water” mortification. Others hold that it is a metaphor. I simply take water and the Spirit by the same meaning, namely that we must be regenerated from the Spirit, who uses the water as the means²⁷ of cleansing us, just as elsewhere it says we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and fire. But, will they tie salvation so closely to water, however, that we should grant the latter passage²⁸ also refers to baptism? Especially since it is generally agreed that not only was baptism at that time not yet a typical practice, but that many—even the saints or the children of saints—wandered away from it. And the very worst interpreters have been those of the papists who denied that martyrs need to be baptized, since they substituted a baptism of blood for one of water.

Now then, this is the sound teaching: the children of believers by the gracious acceptance of God have been received into the covenant of salvation. God has given us proof of this by the promise “I am the God of your offspring.”²⁹ We must, therefore rest securely on this promise. Baptism is without doubt a seal³⁰ of this promise, but in such a way that the promise is adequate in and of itself, if there is not time nor opportunity for the application of the seal. But at the same time, we must also note that baptism has been entrusted to the church, and its administration has been tied to the ministry of the Word. So the one who transfers this administration to women, separates things which God has joined together. I ask you, to whom was the command “Go, baptize” given if not to those to whom also the authority and obligation to teach had been entrusted? For it is very childish and absurd the way they try, so I hear, to separate these activities.³¹ Therefore, I hold that the administration of baptism by midwives is a wicked mockery of true and genuine baptism.

Now if someone should look for precedent in the example of the ancient church, I confess that yes, Augustine is undecided about the propriety of baptism when administered by laymen.³² For the practice had already become entrenched that a godly man could administer it, and this was really no different than the way a good sailor in a storm was sometimes thrown off his proper course. Still, Augustine does not dare to deny that it is a sin, no matter how he seeks to lessen the offense. But when it comes to women, it was decided without exception at the Council of Carthage that they must in no way presume to baptize.³³ One may read this decree, by then corrupted, in the *Rhapsodies of Gratian*, together with a spurious exception:³⁴ but study the manuscript carefully. There you can see the verbatim insertion just as I claim.

Although the inviolable and holy truth of God is more than sufficient for me, even if I had to face death for its sake, still

I am not able to give others the advice which I myself would choose. Therefore, brothers, be careful that the sacred mysteries of God do not become defiled in your hands, mysteries which he has entrusted to your care by a fixed law. It follows then that you must give an account if you do not defend with your own blood the undefiled use of these mysteries, rather than allow them to be contaminated in any way. This kind of vigilance will involve danger, but it would be good for that famous statement of Cyprian to be engraved clearly and deeply on your minds: “The servants of the Lord who obey his commands faithfully cannot be conquered, even if they can die.”³⁵ We must also bring to mind another memorable statement of that same sainted man, one which Augustine quotes: “When it comes to something so holy, there is no room for discussion.”³⁶ This statement carries more weight because Cyprian himself said it at a precarious time, when the hand of the hangman was already heavy upon his neck. No matter how much pressure you are feeling, it has not yet come to that. So then, you must all the more carefully be on guard that you do not, merely for the sake of your security, prostitute the truth of God by betraying your ministry through Satan’s foolish mockery.

I suppose you will ask what you ought to do. The following seems to me the best strategy: you should plead with the Prince not to push your consciences beyond beyond what they can bear, and in fact provide him with the considerations that constrain you. But in the end, if he does not soften at all, you

26. John 3:5.

27. *officio*.

28. Matthew 3:11.

29. Cf. Genesis 26:24 et al.

30. *sigillum*.

31. I.e., teaching and baptizing.

32. *a viris privatis*. CR cites Augustine’s *Contra Epistolam Parmeniani*, 2.13.

33. The CR cites Canon 100.4 of the Council of Carthage.

34. [Ed. The practice of midwives baptizing in the case of necessity comes from a decretal of Urban II, which is cited by Gratian, *de consecratione*, dist. IV, c. 20. Cf. *Corpus Juris Canonici, Pars I, Decretum Gratiani*, edited by Justus Henning Böhm, Aemilius Ludwigh Richter, and Emil Friedberg (1839; Lipsia: 1879), 1367.]

35. Calvin is here paraphrasing, apparently from memory, the letter of Cyprian to Cornelius, number 57. The direct quote is: *Milites Christi vigilare iam sobrios, & armatos ad praelium stare; vinci non posse, mori posse....* I.e., “The soldiers of Christ now remain steadfast, sober-minded and armed for battle; they cannot be conquered, they can die.” See *Sancti Caecilii Cypriani Opera* (Paris: Jean Du Puis, Paris, 1666), 91; Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 3.830.

36. Calvin also adduces this saying in the *Epistolae Duae* (1537), and the editors of the Droz edition give the following note. “See MPL {Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*} 33.1412 (*sermo* 309) and CCSL {*Corpus Christianorum Scriptorum Latinorum*} 3/3, 90–110: ‘In re tam iusta nulla est consultatio.’ This sentence occurs in the Acts of Cyprian’s martyrdom and in Augustine’s sermon, however, without some vivid details provided by Calvin....” *Ioannis Calvinii Scripta*

must have recourse to Peter's famous remark: "We must obey God rather than men."³⁷

Our position on the ringing of bells and feast days is that you should rather endure these trivialities than abandon the post where the Lord has stationed you. Only do not lend your approval, so long as you are free to censure the superstitions that will follow from these practices, and be very insistent on that point. There are, moreover, three main points that are particularly important. First, that one day is distinguished from the next. Second, that the worship of God takes place on those holy days. And third, that these days are observed not only for the honor of God, which itself would be a practice of the Jews, but also for the honor of men.

It is completely intolerable that the Prince prevents you from assembling. You must not just for this reason give up meeting until he has revoked such a wicked injunction. For what will become of the church—I don't mean in the long term but even right now—if there is no fellowship among the ministers, no sharing in each other's plans, no

joint meetings for consultation? We would rather die one hundred times than agree to this kind of scattering of the church.³⁸

You only have need of courage and resolve. If the Lord equips you with those, everything will be fine, whatever the result may be. And so that you don't think I am failing to apply moderation, I shall refrain from a longer admonition. If I had not persuaded you to be ready to undergo all hardships rather than deviate from the path even one inch, I would be trying more forcefully to strengthen your resolve. But that I may not labor in vain, I will only pray that the Lord, by the Spirit of power and confidence, cause you to stand, and thereby make you impervious to all the devices of Satan. All of my associates with one accord join with me in this prayer, and I have written these remarks with their agreement.

Goodbye, dearest brothers, and carry on just as you have begun. Otherwise, you may open up a crack to the enemy, and he will leap in, as into a city he has already captured.

Geneva, May 6, 1544.

DAVID C. NOE ■

didactica et polemica, volume 4, ed. Erik Alexander de Boer and Frans Pieter Van Stam (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2009), 8 note 43. Here Calvin uses the synonym *deliberatio* for Augustine's *consultatio*. This substitution, as well as the use of the same quote on two occasions separated by approximately seven years, strongly suggests he is quoting from memory.

37. Cf. Acts 5:29.

38. CR notes that this particular legal provision was in the following year limited by a specific ecclesiastical ordinance, on November 29, 1545. [Ed. CR: "*Hic articulus, sic ut et caeteri, anno sequenti constitutione, ecclesiastica peculiari praefinitus est, quae edita est*

Uraci 29. Nov. 1545 s. h. titulo: Artikel darauf der Kirchen zu Mömpelgard Reformation neben und sambt Unser in Druck ausgegangenen Kirchenordnung gestellt und fürgenommen werden soll. *Covenantus ministrorum permissi, sub praesidio superintendentis habendi et praesentibus duobus consiliariis principis.* (Heyd, H. Ulrich III. 152, Goguel, *Réf. de Montbelliard* p. 44." Cf. Ludwig Friedrich Heyd and Karl Pfaff, *Ulrich, Herzog zu Württemberg: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte* (Tübingen: Ludwig Friedrich Fues, 1844), 152; and Georges-Frédéric Goguel, *Précis historique de la Réformation et des églises protestantes dans l'ancien Comté de Montbelliard et ses dépendances: suivi de La vie de Guillaume Farel* (Paris: Marc-Aurel frères, 1841), 44.]