

John Calvin's Pastoral Theology: An Explanatory Outline

By Marcus J. Serven

INTRODUCTION

Mention the name "John Calvin" in a crowd and often-times it will elicit remarks of contempt on the one extreme and deep admiration on the other. Simply stated, some people "abhor" him while others "adore" him! Such is the variety of responses to this complex and multi-faceted man who served God during the Protestant Reformation (c. 1517–1688). John Calvin (1509–1564) was clearly second in rank only to Martin Luther (1483–1546) during this crucial era. Traceable to Calvin and the church in Geneva are several unique and distinguishing aspects of Protestantism: the development and practice of expository preaching, the formation of a Reformed view of the Lord's Supper, the practice of home visitation by elders, the creation of an extensive organization of social welfare, the practice of local church discipline, and the establishment of representative church government. Reflecting back on the details of Calvin's pastoral theology can bring forth numerous "helps" for the pastor of the present day. Despite the fact

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1. Jean-Daniel Benoit, "Pastoral Care of the Prophet," in *John Calvin Contemporary Prophet*, ed. Jacob T. Hoogstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 51.

that Calvin is best known as an eminent theologian, it must be remembered that he was first and foremost a *pastor* to the congregation of believers at Geneva. The esteemed Calvin scholar Jean-Daniel Benoit has the following to say about Calvin's pastoral ministry,

The work of Calvin is immense and varied. Theologian, churchman, organizer of Protestantism in France, founder of the Academy of Geneva, public lecturer, Bible commentator, preacher at Saint Peter's—Calvin was all of these. But to forget or to neglect the fact that Calvin was essentially and above all a pastor would be to misunderstand precisely that aspect of his personality which discloses the essential unity of his work, and to overlook the deep source of those waters which fecundate the entire field of his activity. In fact, theologian though he was, Calvin was even more a pastor of souls. More exactly, theology was for him the servant of piety and never a science sufficient unto itself. His thought is always directed towards life; always he descends from principles to the practical application; always his pastoral concern occurs.¹

It was due to the depth and success of Calvin's ministry in Geneva that the doctrines and practices of that particular church have become the basis for all Protestant ministry in one fashion or another. Listed below, in an explanatory outline, are the essential elements of Calvin's pastoral theology. Although he never wrote a volume dedicated to the theme of pastoral theology, these elements are gathered from a variety of his writings—the *Institutes*, his sermons, his personal letters, the *Commentaries*, and his many theological tracts. Let us learn from the "Master of Geneva" and recognize the biblical wisdom of his ways. These time-proven truths, I sincerely believe, will protect the modern-day pastor from untested and novel practices that may lead his

church to ruin. Let us now briefly consider John Calvin's personal character and then the elements of Calvin's pastoral theology.

CALVIN'S PERSONAL CHARACTER

John Calvin's life has been the subject of many learned biographies.² He chose as his lifetime motto, *Cor meum tibi offero, Domine, prompte et sincere* (or translated into English, "My heart I offer to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely").³ From his youth he was a quiet scholarly man who did not seek the stage of public approval. This characteristic was in sharp contrast to his close associate in Geneva, the flamboyant William Farel (1489–1565) who was frequently in the midst of public turmoil. Calvin excelled in his studies—especially in the languages (i.e. Latin, Greek, and Hebrew), in law, in logical thinking, and in biblical and theological studies. Thus, he purposefully sought for himself a place of "private studies" where he could research and write. Calvin reveals this inner desire by observing,

In short, whilst my one great object was to live in seclusion without being known, God so led me about through different turnings and changes, that he never permitted me to rest in any place, until, in spite of my natural disposition, he brought me forth to public notice.... William Farel detained me at Geneva, not so much by counsel and exhortation, as by a dreadful imprecation, which I felt as to be as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me.... And after learning that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken; but sensible of my natural bashfulness and timidity, I would not bring myself under obligation to discharge any particular office.⁴

In the providence of God, however, Calvin was thrust into the midst of a great religious revolution in the city of Geneva. He brought to this enormous task his legal training and his passion for the Word of God. At the beginning of his ministry in Geneva he was content to be known only as a "Professor of Sacred Literature," yet his intellectual skills and love for the truth eventually

led to his appointment as pastor of the church in Geneva.⁵ Early in Calvin's life he developed a strong sense of orderliness and proper behavior. This characteristic influenced his sermons, theological writings, and personal relationships.

Despite his tendency to be reserved in public, Calvin was often forced to marshal his formidable intellectual capacities in public debate. He excelled in this area and often astonished his opponents with his ability to quote extensive passages from the Bible and theological treatises from memory. It was through Calvin's dramatic oratory, punctuated with extended quotes from the early Church Fathers, that the public disputation at Lausanne was won for the Reformation, and the city came over into the Protestant camp.⁶ In addition, Calvin was not one to ordinarily hold a grudge, so that it turned into bitterness. Nor did he "lord it over" those in his charge, although he has been accused of such dictatorial behavior.⁷ Historian Will

2. There are a great number of excellent books written on the life and ministry of John Calvin, however not all are currently in print. The volumes that I would recommend the most highly are those written by—Theodore Beza, Jean Cadier, Bernard Cottret, Merle D'Aubigne, Timothy George, W. Robert Godfrey, Bruce Gordon, David W. Hall, R. N. Carew Hunt, Allister McGrath, T. H. L. Parker, Robert L. Reymond, Philip Schaff (Volume 8 in his *History of the Christian Church*), Herman Selderhuis, Emanuel Stickelberger, Machiel A. Van den Berg, Thea Van Halsema (this particular biography is especially good for reading out loud to children and young adults), Williston Walker, and Francois Wendel.

3. Emile Doumergue, *Iconographie Calvinienne* (Lausanne: George Bridel, 1909), 66. An allusion to Calvin's motto is found in a letter he wrote in August of 1541 from Strasbourg to William Farel who invited him to return to Geneva as soon as possible. Calvin was extremely reluctant to return to that tumultuous city. He wrote, "But when I remember that I am not my own, I offer up my heart, presented as a sacrifice to the Lord." See: "Letter to Farel," from *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, edited by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 4.280–281. A new edition of this valuable resource was reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust in 2009.

4. John Calvin, "The Author's Preface," in *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), xli–xliii.

5. Theodore Beza, "Life of Calvin," in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, 1.xxix.

6. Emanuel Stickelberger, *Calvin: A Life*, trans. David Georg Gelzer (London, England: James Clarke & Company, 1959), 50–54.

7. Ibid, 99–138. See: Chapter VI, "Antagonists of Calvin: From Castellio to Servetus." Stickelberger gives a detailed analysis of Calvin's opponents and their particular objections to his theology and practices: Sebastian Castellio, the *Enfants de Geneve* or *Libertines*, Pierre Ameaux, Jacob Gruet, Jerome Bolsec, Ami Perrin, Michael Servetus, and Philibert Berthelier. On the whole this is a rather unsavory list of individuals, in my opinion, and John Calvin's personal character brightly outshines them all.

Durant, perhaps, summarizes the hostility of many of Calvin's critics over the centuries when he refers to him as, "that sour popelet in Geneva."⁸ Yet, we find that when the details of his life are closely examined it is easy to see that he was forgiving to those who spoke ill of him and compassionate to those who were fleeing tyranny. One poignant example of Calvin's willingness to forgive others who had wounded him, is how he and the other ministers had been unceremoniously removed from their pastoral offices in Geneva by a vote of the City Council on April 25, 1538. After departing the city, Calvin found refuge in Strasbourg with Martin Bucer (1491–1551). He had several opportunities to speak poorly of the pastors who succeeded him to his former parishioners in Geneva, but he uniformly urged them to respect and honor the new ministers.⁹ Upon Calvin's return to Geneva on September 13, 1541, rather than speaking with hostility and condemnation regarding his forced exile, he graciously addressed the City Council by calmly stating that, "the church must be established in accordance with the Scriptures."¹⁰ Therefore, his plan for the reformation for both the church and the city, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, was summarily adopted. Moreover, the people of Geneva awaited his first sermon in the pulpit of St. Pierre. They were uncertain of exactly what they might hear—would it be a fiery storm of insult, rebuke, and self-justification? Emanuel Stickelberger reports just the opposite. He writes,

When Calvin mounted the pulpit of St. Peter's, the people crowded the wide nave. Eagerly they waited for the first sermon and hoped it would cause a sensation. Anyone who came for this, however, was disappointed. But here was a surprise. The pastor who had come back opened the Scriptures and began by continuing exactly where he left off three years before. He wanted to show that he had been forced to interrupt his preaching office but that he never gave it up.¹¹

We find in Calvin's character, then, not a picture of vengeful denunciation, but of humble and determined

service to his Lord, and to the Church that God had chosen for him to serve.

Despite his natural shyness, Calvin could, in times of crisis, be courageous and forthright. Consider Calvin's bold entry into the Council of the Two Hundred as an example of his positive reputation and frank outspokenness. The entire city was in turmoil following a tumultuous trial. Two men were accused of treason, and one represented the opponents of Calvin (the Libertines) and the other was a French refugee and personal friend of Calvin. When the opponent of Calvin was acquitted (i.e. Ami Perrin) and the other remained in prison (i.e. Laurent Maigret), the factions separated into warlike parties and a contentious brawl with drawn swords seemed likely to erupt in the Council of the Two Hundred. *The Register of the Company of Pastors* notes,

On Monday 12 December 1547 it was decided by the brethren to present themselves before Messieurs for the purpose of objecting strongly to the insolence, debauchery, dissoluteness, and hostility which were leading the church and city to ruin.... On this day we left the Congregation sooner than was customary. This was not done without great blessing from God, for when we arrived at the public hall, where the Two Hundred were assembled, a variety of disputes had already arisen and the minds of nearly all were so inflamed that they were not far from insurrection. Indeed an atrocious shedding of blood would have followed had not the Lord intervened. When he heard the alarming clamor and uproar Calvin rushed ahead into the midst of the tumult which was now quite out of hand, and the others followed him. Nearly all were so agitated and enraged that it was impossible to hear anyone clearly. But after a little while calm was restored and the Two Hundred were brought to order. Presenting ourselves to them, we used the same exhortations as we had used before the Council previously, but on this occasion when insurrection threatened, everything was handled by Calvin much more forcefully.¹²

A few days later Calvin wrote these revealing and descriptive lines in a personal letter to his friend and fellow-minister, Pierre Viret (1511–1571),

The Two Hundred had been summoned.... I immediately ran up to the place. The appearance of matters was terrible. I cast myself into the thickest of the crowds, to the amazement of almost everyone. The whole people, however, made a rush towards me; they seized and

8. Will Durant, *Heroes of History* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 294.

9. Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, trans. George Shriver (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 73–77.

10. Stickelberger, *Calvin: A Life*, 82–83.

11. Stickelberger, 83–84.

12. *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, trans. and ed. Philip E. Hughes (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), 70. See the entry from December 12, 1547.

dragged me hither and thither, lest I should suffer injury. I called God and men to witness that I had come for the purpose of presenting my body to their swords. I exhorted them, if they designed to shed blood, to begin with me. The worthless, but especially the respectable portion of the crowd, at once greatly relaxed in their fervor. I was at length dragged through the midst to the Senate. There fresh fights arose, into the midst of which I threw myself. All are of opinion that a great and disgraceful carnage was prevented from taking place by my interposition. My colleagues meanwhile were mixed up with the crowd. I succeeded in getting them to all sit down quietly. They say that all were exceedingly affected by a long and vehement speech, suitable to the occasion, which I delivered. The exceptions were at least few, and even they, not less than the respectable part of the people, praised my conduct in the circumstances. God, indeed, protects myself and colleagues to the extent of the privilege implied in the declaration of even the most abandoned, that they abhor the least injury done to us not less than they detest parricide. Their wickedness has, however, reached such a pitch, that I hardly hope to be able any longer to retain any kind of position for the Church, especially under my ministry. My influence is gone, believe me, unless God stretch forth his hand.... Adieu, brother and most sincere friend.¹³

Calvin's bleak prognosis for the demise of his ministry, however, simply did not come true. The Lord "stretched forth his hand" and protected the fledgling church of Geneva. Calvin suffered through many other extraordinary difficulties, yet he persevered and prospered through them with the Lord's blessing. In time, the Libertines were discredited and the Reformers were rewarded with the support of the majority of citizens in Geneva (1555).¹⁴

It is also important to note that Calvin's ministry in Geneva was not that of a *dictator* or a *tyrant*, but that of *servant* of the living God who was pressed by dangers on every side. Sadly, Calvin has been falsely accused of oppressive and self-serving behavior.¹⁵ Yet, numerous irrefutable facts stand as a stark testimony to his untiring service to God and to the citizens of Geneva. He certainly demonstrated the characteristics of bold courage, resolute determination, and self-sacrifice. Williston Walker, church historian and biographer of Calvin, frankly addresses the subject of Calvin's weaknesses. He thoughtfully writes,

His chief faults were a supersensitive self-consciousness

which led him to feel slights and criticisms far too keenly, and a quickness of temper which often overcame him to the loss of self-control.... He was himself fully conscious of the weakness, and it was not less clearly recognized by his friends. His nerves, racked by constant struggle and by long illness, were easily ruffled. In his lightly aroused exasperation, he often expressed himself, even to his intimates, with acerbity. To his enemies, for example to Castellio and Servetus, he was hard and vindictive. Much of this asperity was the result of semi-invalidism; but much, also, was the fruit of the conviction—a source, indeed, in no small degree of his strength—that his work was fully that of God. So intense was this identification of his own interests with those of the Master he would serve, that he thanked his physician for aid in recovery from illness less on his personal account than as a service rendered to the Church; and he regarded attacks upon himself as a danger to the cause of the Gospel. It was easy for such a temperament to see in a criticism a serious offense and in an opponent an enemy of God.¹⁶

Here we have a portrait of Calvin that many of his critics may be surprised to read. He was fully aware of his own short-comings, yet he hoped that God would use him to advance the cause of the Reformation in Geneva despite those particular short-comings. Theodore Beza evaluates Calvin's character with the following words,

13. Letter to Pierre Viret, December 14, 1547, *Selected Works of John Calvin*, 5:148–149.

14. Stichelberger, *Calvin: A Life*, 139–152. See Chapter 7 "The Years of Triumph (1555–1564).

15. Stefan Zweig, *The Right to Heresy: Castellio Against Calvin* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1936) 60–61. The following passionate quote from Calvin's modern-day critic, Stefan Zweig, will suffice to show how some have completely mischaracterized his life and ministry: "But how, we ask, could a republican city, accustomed for decades to Swiss freedom, tolerate a dictatorship as rigid as had been Savonarola's in Florence; how could a southern people, fundamentally cheerful, endure such a throttling of the joy of life? Why was an ascetic like Calvin empowered to sweep away joy from thousands upon thousands? Calvin's secret was not a new one; his art was that which all dictators before and since have used. Terror. Calvin's was a holy terror. Do not let us mince matters: force that sticks at nothing, making mock of humaneness as the outcome of weakness, soon becomes overwhelming. A despotically imposed systematic reign of terror paralyses the will of the individual, making community life impossible. Like a consuming disease, it eats into the soul; and soon, this being the heart of mystery, universal cowardice gives the dictator helpers everywhere; for, since each man knows himself to be under suspicion, he suspects his neighbors; and, in a panic, the zealots outrun the commands and prohibitions of their tyrant."

16. Williston Walker, *John Calvin: The Organizer of Reformed Protestantism* (New Haven: Yale University, 1906; New York: Schocken Books, reprint edition, 1969), 442–443.

With regard to his manners, although nature had formed him for gravity, yet, in the common intercourse of life, there was no man who was more pleasant. In bearing with infirmities he was remarkably prudent; never either putting weak brethren to the blush, or terrifying them by unreasonable rebuke, yet never conniving at or flattering their faults. Of adulation, dissimulation, and dishonesty, especially where religion is concerned, he was as determined and severe an enemy as he was a lover of truth, simplicity, and candor. He was naturally of a keen temper, and this had been increased by the very laborious life which he had led. But the Spirit of the Lord had so taught him to command his anger, that no word was heard to proceed from him unbecoming a good man. Still less did he ever allow his passion to proceed to extremes. Nor was he easily moved, unless when religion was at stake, though he had to do with men of a petulant and obstinate temper.¹⁷

Lastly, consider these comments about the Reformer's ministerial diligence. Charles Bridges, the evangelical Anglican pastor and scholar, writes of Calvin,

What shall we say of his indefatigable industry, even beyond the power of nature, which being paralleled with our loitering, I fear will exceed all credit, and may be a true object of admiration, how his lean, worn, spent, and weary body could possibly hold out? He read every week in the year three divinity lectures, and every other week over and above; he preached every day, so that (as Erasmus saith of Chrysostom) 'I do not know, whether more to admire the indefatigableness of the man or his hearers.' Yea, some have reckoned up, that

his lectures were yearly one hundred and eighty-six, his sermons two hundred eighty-six, besides Thursday he sat in Presbytery... Calvin's own account in one of his letters to Farel, thus speaks—"When the messenger called for my book (*The Commentary on Romans*), I had twenty sheets to revise—to preach—to read to the congregation—to write forty-two letters—to attend to some controversies—to return answers to more than ten persons, who interrupted me in the midst of my labours, for advice."¹⁸

Despite all of his critics, Calvin's personal character is shown to be compassionate, determined, enduring, forthright, honest, loyal, resolute, steady, and unflappable. He persevered to the end, and God rewarded him with a lifetime full of achievements that not only exalted him, but also benefited numerous others. In short, he denied himself, picked-up his cross, and followed after Jesus.¹⁹ This is the mark of a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

ELEMENTS OF CALVIN'S PASTORAL THEOLOGY

1. Pastoral Care. Calvin's overall plan for the pastoral care of Geneva is contained in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*.²⁰ This document was initially drafted by Calvin in 1537, but it was not until his return to Geneva in 1541 that it was finally approved by the City Council.²¹ The actual enforcement of these biblical principles, however, formed the main area of difficulty in Calvin's pastoral ministry until 1555. Although the people may have approved these ordinances in theory, they had not reckoned with the application of them to all areas of life.²² Following the elections in 1555, when the opponents of Calvin were soundly defeated, the provisions of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* were finally embraced by the City Council and they were able to be regularly enforced by the Consistory. The main components of Calvin's plan of pastoral care can be broken down into eight specific areas of ministry: (1) Four orders (or offices) in the Church; (2) Concerning the Sacraments; (3) Concerning Marriage; (4) Introduction of Hymns; (5) Concerning Burial; (6) The Visitation of the Sick; (7) The Visitation of Prisoners; and lastly the (8) Preserving of Discipline in the Church. Here we see the organizational genius of John Calvin clearly demonstrated. He developed a plan—"a certain rule and method of living... which our Lord demonstrated and instituted by His Word"—and as the years went by he was able to fully implement that plan for the reformation of the city of Geneva.²³

17. Beza, *Life of Calvin*, xcvi–xcix.

18. Charles Bridges, *Christian Ministry: With an Inquiry into the Causes of its Inefficiency* (repr., Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1830), 43.

19. Mark 8:34.

20. "Ecclesiastical Ordinances" in Philip E. Hughes *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, 35–49. For another source that may be easier to find, see *John Calvin: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Scholar's Press, American Academy of Religion, 1975), 229–244.

21. *Ibid.*, 35. The City Council voted on November 20, 1541 to approve the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*. This decision, however, did not end the quarrelsome struggle between the ministers and the magistrates over who had the power of excommunication from the Lord's Supper—that dispute continued on until 1555.

22. Robert D. Linder, "Ecclesiastical Ordinances," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 112–113.

23. "Ecclesiastical Ordinances," in *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*; see the *Preface*, 35.

2. The Offices of the Church. Four ecclesiastical offices were recognized in Geneva: Pastors, Teachers (Doctors of the Word of God), Elders, and Deacons.²⁴ This ecclesiastical structure clearly implies a Presbyterian form of church government, rather than a Hierarchical or Congregational form of church government. Moreover, a firm distinction was made by Calvin in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* between church discipline (i.e. the power of the “keys”) and civil jurisdiction (i.e. the power of the “sword”). Calvin explains,

All this is to be done in such a way that the ministers have no civil jurisdiction and wield only the spiritual sword of the Word of God, as St. Paul commands them [Cf. Rom. 13:1ff.], and that there is no derogation by this Consistory from the authority of the Seignery or the magistracy; but that the civil power shall continue in its entirety. And in cases where there is need to administer some punishment or to restrain the parties, the ministers together with the Consistory having heard the parties and administered such reprimands and admonishments as are desirable, shall report the whole matter to the Council, which thereupon shall take steps to set things in order and pass judgment according to the requirements of the case.²⁵

In this ecclesiastical structure, the pastor and the elders of the congregation served as the church officers (*Gk. presbuteros*) as spoken of in the Bible.²⁶ Beyond that, all of the pastors in Geneva and its environs served as the local governing body (i.e. *the Presbytery*) over the entire group of churches. This group met every Friday and was known as the “Company of Pastors,” or “The Venerable Company.”²⁷ These pastors not only discussed Scripture and reached consensus on its proper interpretation, but also held one another accountable with quarterly times of “fraternal admonition.”²⁸ Rather than investing ecclesiastical authority in a single individual to serve as a presiding Bishop, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* gave that ecclesiastical authority to a plurality of godly officers. The practice of the Roman Catholic Church—to invest ecclesiastical power in one man—was thoroughly rejected by Calvin.

3. Church Discipline. One of the central areas of controversy between the Consistory and the City Council was the subject of church discipline and upon whose authority it was to be exercised—specifically this focused on excommunication. The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* gave that sole authority to the Consistory, which was then enforced by the civil government when the circumstances warranted. The practice of church discipline became

an area of great controversy in Geneva, with the City Council directly challenging the authority of the Consistory more than once.²⁹ Calvin goes on to explain in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* how the ministers, selected elders, and a representative of the magistrate will gather once a week, on Thursdays, as a Consistory.

The delegates (*commis*) shall assemble once a week together with the ministers, namely, on Thursdays, to see whether there is any disorder in the Church and to consult together concerning remedies when necessary. Since they have no authority or jurisdiction to coerce, we have decided to give them one of our officers for the purpose of summoning those to whom they wish to give some admonishment. If through contempt anyone should refuse to appear, it is their duty to inform the Council so that remedial steps may be taken.³⁰

These men had the spiritual responsibility to advance the teaching of biblical doctrine and Christian behavior.³¹ Violations of these biblical standards would be enforced by the Consistory; which was made up of representatives from both the church and civil government. If the violations were of a serious nature and recurrent then a person could be suspended from the Lord’s Table, either temporarily or permanently. What breaches might lead to suspension from the Lord’s Table? Here are seven general stipulations listed in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*,

(1) “If anyone speaks critically against the received doctrine,” (2) “If anyone is negligent to come to church in such a way that a serious contempt of Christians is apparent,” (3) “if any one shows himself to be scornful of the ecclesiastical order,” (4) “those who mock at the specific admonitions of their neighbor,” (5) “for those notorious and public vices which the Church cannot condone,” (6) “for those crimes which deserve not

24. “Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 35–49; see also the *Institutes* 4:11 and 4:3:1ff. and 4:4:1ff. for Calvin’s description of the qualifications and duties of “Pastors,” “Teachers,” “Elders,” and “Deacons.”

25. “Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” 49.

26. 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5.

27. Robert M. Kingdon, “Geneva Company of Pastors,” in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 151–152.

28. John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1954), 162.

29. Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536–1609* (London, England: Oxford University Press, 2013), 182–188.

30. “Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” in *The Register*, 48.

31. Robert M. Kingdon, “Geneva Consistory,” in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 152.

only verbal rebuke but correction with punishment,” (7) “If through contumacy or rebelliousness such a person attempts to intrude himself contrary to the prohibition.”³²

The length of the suspension, whether it was temporary or permanent, would depend upon the offending person’s repentance, or lack of it.³³ In addition, the pastor who was tasked to administer the Lord’s Supper was also responsible to “fence the Table” so that those who were “unworthy partakers” would not be able to receive the Lord’s Supper. The minister would use the following words to “fence the Table” in the Genevan liturgy,

The Warning - Minister: “We have heard, brethren, in what manner our LORD celebrated the Supper among his disciples; whence we see that strangers, who are not of the company of the faithful, may not approach it. Wherefore, in obedience to this rule, and in the name and by the authority of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, I excommunicate all idolators, blasphemers, despisers of God, heretics, and all who form sects apart, to break the unity of the Church; all perjurers, all who are rebellious against fathers and mothers, and other superiors, all who are seditious, contentious, quarrelsome, injurious, adulterers, fornicators, thieves, misers, ravishers, drunkards, gluttons, and all others who lead scandalous lives; warning them that they abstain from this Table, lest they pollute and contaminate the sacred food which our Lord JESUS CHRIST giveth only to his faithful servants.”³⁴

Here we see an example of the very serious manner in

32. “Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” in *The Register*, 48–49.

33. Robert M. Kingdon, gen. ed., *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, Volume 1: 1542–1544, ed. Thomas A. Lambert and Isabella M. Watt, trans. by M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000). The *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva* provides a fascinating record of the difficulties in bringing the people of Geneva under the discipline of the Word of God.

34. Charles W. Baird, *The Presbyterian Liturgies: Historical Sketches* (New York, NY: M. W. Dodd, 1855; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publications, 2006), 53–54.

35. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. Library of Christian Classics, no. 20–21 (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4:17:1.

36. 1 Corinthians 11:27–29.

37. Manetsch, *Calvin’s Company of Pastors*, 188–189.

38. *Institutes* 4:1:12.

39. “Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” in *The Register*, 47–49. See also *Institutes* 4:12:1 and 4:12:5 on the subject of excommunication.

which the ministers regarded participation in the Lord’s Supper. It was a regular reminder to the people of the Church, that the Lord’s Supper was to be regarded as “a spiritual banquet”³⁵ for those who were able to truly “examine themselves” and rightly “discern the body.”³⁶ For this reason, “fencing the Table” should be seen as a key aspect of church discipline in Calvin’s Geneva.³⁷

4. The Marks of the Church. Another prominent element of Calvin’s pastoral theology is the concept of the “marks” of the true church (Lat. *notae ecclesiae*). Calvin identifies the two “marks” that are found in the Bible as follows,

The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the Sacraments are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both of these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults.³⁸

These are the evidences that Christians should look for when evaluating a church. During the Reformation there were many who came to saving faith and found themselves still awkwardly connected to churches whose “marks” were questionable. In order to make matters clear, Calvin taught that the first mark of the church is “the pure ministry of the Word” of God. The second mark of the church is the “pure mode of celebrating the sacraments” (i.e. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper). Some scholars believe that Calvin also taught a “third mark” of the church—the proper exercise of church discipline. However, this third mark is only a logical extension of the rightful observance of the Lord’s Supper. In other words, the Church has the authority to suspend a member of the church who errs in doctrine or life from the Lord’s Supper when they prove to be unrepentant. Their erroneous belief or scandalous behavior could result in a temporary suspension from the Lord’s Supper, or possibly in excommunication.³⁹

5. Preaching the Word. The public preaching of the Bible held a high priority for Calvin and the Genevan church. Preaching took place on Sunday mornings and late afternoons. Also, during the week people would gather for early morning sermons. The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* notes,

On Sundays, there shall be a sermon at daybreak in St. Pierre and St. Gervais, and at the customary hour in St. Pierre, La Madeleine, and St. Gervais. . . . On work-days, in addition to the two customary sermons, there shall

be preaching in St. Pierre three times a week, namely, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and the bells are to be rung for the sermons, one after the other, at an hour such that they can be finished before one is started elsewhere.⁴⁰

From this statement we learn that Calvin intended for the people of Geneva to become thoroughly saturated with the Word of God, that preaching should be frequent, and at regularly scheduled public worship services. Moreover, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* spelled out the main duties of pastors as follows,

With regard to pastors, whom Scripture also sometimes calls overseers, elders, and ministers, their office is to proclaim the Word of God for the purpose of instructing, admonishing, exhorting, and removing, both in public and private, to administer the sacraments, and to exercise fraternal discipline together with the elders or delegates (*commis*).⁴¹

We see from this statement, the prominent role that regular preaching played in advancing the reform of doctrine and life in Geneva. In practice, Calvin rarely interrupted the orderly exposition of Scripture from one passage to the next even for special holidays. He held to the principle of a “continuous reading” (Lat. *lectio continua*), which over time commonly became known as “verse by verse” preaching, or as expositional preaching.⁴² It was his pattern to preach one verse after another in short crisp sentences, speaking in French which was his native tongue. He normally read directly from his Hebrew or Greek Bible, and gave a running translation of the text into French. He did not use any notes in his preaching, but simply held up his Bible and read the verses as he worked through the passage.⁴³ Hughes O. Olds, an expert on Reformed preaching, notes, “John Calvin was a master of the art of biblical interpretation and a skilled craftsman in word usage. His sermons are simple, clear, and informative.”⁴⁴ Each sermon was roughly thirty to forty minutes in length and produced an effect upon the listeners that was remarkable and profound. Calvin's sermons always have a redemptive theme, so that he consistently highlights the saving work of Jesus Christ. His use of illustrations, stories, and quotations was sparing. He suggested applications to his listeners, and urged them to go forward in the Christian life by faith. Moreover, Calvin believed that the preacher had the high call of interpreting the Word of God to the people, and therefore, he also had the obligation to live out the truths that

he was preaching. Beginning in 1549 many of Calvin's sermons were transcribed for printing and published in books.⁴⁵ These sermons are gradually becoming available as they are found, translated from the French manuscripts, copiously edited, and bound into scholarly volumes. They are currently being published in the *Supplementa Calviniana*.⁴⁶

6. Worship of God. The central element in Calvin's mind regarding all worship was that it be focused on God alone—by individuals in private, by families gathered around their table, and by congregations in a public worship service. The essential difficulty in worship, Calvin notes, is that “man's nature ... is a perpetual factory of idols.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the elements of all types of worship should be determined only by the express teachings of the Bible (i.e. a “regulative principle of worship”). He also insists that all personal preferences and human traditions be left out of the practice of divine worship. Calvin argues this very point in his earnest and

40. Ibid, 40. See also *Institutes* 4:1:5.

41. Ibid, 36. See also *Institutes* 4:8:9.

42. John Calvin, *Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ*, trans. Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), from the Preface. Leroy Nixon writes, “It was Calvin's method to preach consecutively through a whole book of the Bible. For example, without any regard for the Christian year, Calvin preached two hundred consecutive sermons on the book of Deuteronomy. Once he preached a special sermon for Christmas Day... On Easter Day, 1559, and on Easter Day, 1560, he preached a special sermon ... otherwise as far as the records go, Calvin ignored the Christian year as completely as possible.” [For more background on Calvin and the liturgical calendar, see *In Translatione* in this same issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.—Ed.]

43. T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 59–64. See Chapter 7 “Preaching in Geneva.”

44. Hughes O. Olds, “History of Preaching,” in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 287.

45. Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, Expanded Edition, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 94. Wulfert de Greef writes, “On August 25, 1549, the deacons, who cared for the French-speaking poor in the congregation in Geneva, made a decision of great significance for the transmission of Calvin's sermons when they appointed Denis Raguénier as stenographer. His job was to take down Calvin's sermons in shorthand, transcribe them, and then give them to the deacons, who would eventually have them printed and use the proceeds for refugee relief. The oldest known sermon recorded by Raguénier is that of Sunday, August 25, when Calvin began his sermons on Acts. By his own count, Raguénier recorded 2,042 of Calvin's sermons. After Raguénier's death in 1560 or 1561, his work was carried on by others.”

46. *Supplementa Calviniana*, various editors, vols. 1–8 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1936–to the present day). Additional volumes are currently in preparation. Many popular editions of Calvin's sermons exist and have been printed in recent years: see various titles produced by The Banner of Truth Trust, Baker Books, P&R, Old Paths Publications, and Solid Ground Christian Books.

47. *Institutes*, 1:11:8.

forthright reply in 1539 to the Roman Catholic scholar, Cardinal Jacobo Sadoletto. Calvin writes,

I have no difficulty in conceding to you that there is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a preposterous and perverse worship of God. The primary rudiments by which we are wont to train to piety those whom we wish to gain as disciples to Christ are these; viz., not to frame any new worship of God for themselves at random, and after their own pleasure, but to know that the only legitimate worship is that which He himself approved from the beginning. For we maintain what the sacred oracle declared, that obedience is more excellent than any sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22). In short, we train them by every means to be contented with the one rule of worship which they have received from His mouth, and bid adieu to all fictitious worship.⁴⁸

In 1544 Calvin makes this same case once again in his timely and forceful tract, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*. He persuasively argues,

Having observed that the word of God is the test which discriminates between true worship and that which is false and vitiated, we thence readily infer that the whole form of divine worship in general use in the present day is nothing but mere corruption. For men pay no regard to what God has commanded, or to what he approves, in order that they may serve him in a becoming manner, but assume to themselves a license of devising modes of worship, and afterwards obtruding them upon him as a substitute for obedience.⁴⁹

Hence, in all of the churches in Geneva the worship

48. John Calvin, *A Reformation Debate: John Calvin & Jacopo Sadoletto*, ed. John C. Olin (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1966), 59.

49. John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1844; Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995), 23.

50. Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1961), 185–196. See Chapter 7, “John Calvin: The Form of Church Prayers.” In these pages Bard Thompson describes the changes in worship that Calvin makes during his ministry in Geneva (1536–1538 and 1541–1564). He also includes a translation of the actual text that Calvin wrote, *The Form of Church Prayers* (Strasbourg, 1545 and Geneva, 1542).

51. *Institutes* 4:17:43.

52. *Institutes* 4:17:43.

53. Howard E. Hageman, “Geneva Gown,” in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 152.

54. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Books, 1985), 108.

55. Romans 4:11.

liturgy was established only upon the Bible’s teaching. The three parish churches in Geneva conducted services every Sunday morning and afternoon. In addition, mid-week preaching services were held for the common good of the people on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. These worship services were usually conducted early in the mornings before work.⁵⁰ Calvin and the other pastors were flexible in regard to certain circumstances of worship (e.g. time of the service, the use of leavened or unleavened bread, and the use of red or white wine in the Lord’s Supper, etc).⁵¹ Some regional worship practices were considered to be “indifferent things” (Gk. *adiaphora*), and therefore were not to be rejected. Other practices, which were specifically prohibited in the Bible, or were too closely related to Roman Catholic practices, were simply not tolerated (e.g. the adoration of images, prayers to saints, veneration of the host, etc).⁵² To summarize, churches within the Calvinistic tradition have sought to regulate their worship services according to the *elements* that are found in the Bible, the *forms* of worship that are acceptable to God, and the *circumstances* of the church which may require minor variations in liturgy, place, and time. Moreover, the pastors in Geneva protested the use of ornate vestments in the worship service and preferred a simple black gown (known as a “Genevan Gown”) for everyday clothing and for use in the pulpit.⁵³

7. The Sacraments. In regards to the Sacraments, Calvin rejected the Roman Catholic concept that grace is solely conferred by the ritual of the sacrament itself (Lat. *ex opere operato*, “by the work performed”).⁵⁴ He believed that only two Sacraments are taught in the Bible (i.e. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper), and not the seven that are taught by the Roman Catholic Church. Calvin also firmly repudiated the power of the priest to transform the elements of bread and wine into the actual body and blood of the Lord (Lat. *transubstantiation*). Calvin sought to remove the ambiguity surrounding the Sacraments by identifying them with terms found in the Bible. Thus, he identified them as “signs” and “seals.”⁵⁵ In other words, the Sacraments *signified* and *sealed* the greater reality of God’s covenantal promises to his people. He explains,

First we must consider what a sacrament is. It seems to me that a simple and proper definition would be to say that it is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men. Here is another

brief definition: one may call it a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him.⁵⁶

Calvin's teaching on the Lord's Supper differs from other Reformers, such as the Lutherans, because he taught the *spiritual view* of the Lord's Supper—where the real presence of Jesus is not to be found in the physical elements of bread and wine, but in the gathering of those who commune with him by faith.⁵⁷ As a result, Calvin distanced himself from Luther's view (Lat. *consubstantiation*) where Jesus Christ was present "in, with, and under" the elements, and from Zwingli's view of the Lord's Supper, where the Lord's Supper was simply a "memorial feast."⁵⁸ Calvin preferred the frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, even weekly, but was never able to realize this goal in Geneva. The Magistrates determined that the Lord's Supper would be observed only four times a year. Children were received to the Lord's Supper on the basis of being able to give a credible Profession of Faith. Preparation for this examination involved learning the questions and answers of the *Genevan Catechism*, or a simpler series of questions for children. A class was held for children every Sunday afternoon to help prepare them to make their Profession of Faith.⁵⁹ The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* lays out the following procedure,

At noon on Sundays all citizens and inhabitants shall take or send their children to catechism, of which we have spoken above. A particular form of instruction is to be composed for them and, besides the teaching which is to be given them, they are to be questioned about what has been said to see whether it has been well understood and remembered. When a child has been sufficiently instructed to pass on from the catechism, he shall solemnly recite the sum of what is contained in it, and he shall do this as a profession of his Christianity in the presence of the church. Before this has been done, no child is to be admitted as a communicant to the supper, and parents are to be cautioned not to bring them before the time, for it is very perilous both for the children and for their fathers to present them without good and sufficient instruction, which is the purpose of prescribing this order.⁶⁰

Calvin argued that baptism is performed out of obedience to Christ's commission in Matthew 28:18–20. Baptismal regeneration was thoroughly rejected by Calvin, for regeneration is solely the work of the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ The proper subjects of baptism are twofold: believing

adults who give credible evidence of saving faith (i.e. *credobaptism*), and the children of believers. These children are known as "covenant children," and they are baptized on the basis of the faith of one parent, or both (i.e. *paedobaptism*).⁶²

8. Church Music. Rather than using specialized choirs and soloists, the Genevan church emphasized congregational singing that was based upon *chants ecclesiastiques*.⁶³ Since Psalms were the actual words of God, Calvin reasoned that it was fitting for them to be sung in the worship of God. This section in the "Ecclesiastical Ordinances" simply reads, "It will be desirable to introduce hymns in order the better to incite the people to prayer and to the praise of God. To begin with, the little children shall be taught, and then in course of time the whole church will be able to follow."⁶⁴ Calvin regarded music as one of the best gifts to humanity that God had given for our enjoyment. Musical instruments were not used in worship services and in their place metrical tunes for the Psalms were composed. Whereas the

56. *Institutes* 4:14:1.

57. Matthew 18:20.

58. M. Eugene Osterhaven, "Sacraments," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 332–334.

59. *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*, ed. and trans. Elsie Anne McKee (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 101.

60. Calvin thoroughly rejected the concept of *Paedocommunion*. This fact is apparent by his insistence that children should be catechized in preparation to making their Profession of Faith. See also Calvin's argument where he demonstrates the difference between the subjects of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Specifically, Calvin notes, "Do we wish anything plainer than the apostle's teaching when he exhorts each man to prove and search himself, then to eat of this bread and drink of this cup [1 Cor. 11:28]? A self-examination ought, therefore, to come first, and it is vain to expect this of infants." *Institutes* 4:16:30.

61. John 3:1–8; Titus 3:4–7.

62. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen Publishers, 2008). Calvin strongly argued, "Reason would tell us that baptism is rightly administered to babies. The Lord did not give circumcision long ago without making them (infants) partakers of everything represented by circumcision. He would have been deceiving his people with a sham, if he had reassured them with false signs. The idea is very shocking. He distinctly states that the circumcision of the infant is the seal of covenant promise. If the covenant remains firm and unmoved, this is just as relevant to the children of Christians today as it was to the children of the Jews under the Old Testament.... The truth of baptism applies to infants, so why do we deny them the sign? The Lord himself formally admitted infants to his covenant, so what more do we need?" *Institutes* 4:16:5.

63. "Ecclesiastical Ordinances," *The Register*, 45. Philip E. Hughes notes, "By chants ecclesiastiques ('ecclesiastical songs'), which we have here rendered as 'hymns,' metrical versions of the Psalms are doubtless intended."

64. *Ibid*, 45.

Lutheran churches of Germany encouraged a rich tradition of choral music and organ composition, the Swiss Reformers sought to distance themselves from instruments which were associated with the Roman Catholic Church. Clement Marot, the French poet who fled Paris after his conversion, was recruited by Calvin to write metrical Psalms. After Marot's untimely death in 1544, this work was picked up by Theodore Beza, Louis Bourgeois, and Claude Goudimel. The first full Psalter (with 101 psalms by Beza and 49 by Marot) was published in Geneva (1562).⁶⁵

9. Teaching the Word. Teachers were distinguished from preachers by not having the privilege of serving the Lord's Supper, nor by being put in charge of church

discipline. It was their task to interpret the Scriptures for the benefit of the common man.⁶⁶ In addition, Calvin's *Commentaries* on the Bible were compiled from the notes from public lectures on Scripture he would give every other week. These weekday lectures on the Bible (Lat. *praelectiones*) were given by Calvin and several other teachers in Geneva to overflowing crowds of students at the Genevan Auditorium (Fr. *Auditoire*) which was immediately next to St. Pierre Cathedral. Many of these lectures were written down, quickly edited, and became the basis for future commentaries and theological books published by Calvin.⁶⁷ In addition, the publication of the *Geneva Bible* (1559), with copious study notes written under Calvin's personal supervision, made a significant and positive impact on all of Protestantism.⁶⁸ This is especially true in the English-speaking countries where the *Geneva Bible* was to be regularly found in the homes of the Scottish Covenanters, the English Puritans and Pilgrims, plus the French Huguenots and many others who fled to America following persecution.⁶⁹

10. Theological Writing. Throughout Calvin's ministry he wrote a great number of tracts and theological treatises.⁷⁰ Each manuscript had a pastoral concern in mind, where he sought to provide Scriptural exposition, correct error, instruct in the truth, and condemn heretics. Calvin's most significant achievement was the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. This short treatise of six chapters, which he called his "little book," was first published in Basle (1536) and went through five successive editions during Calvin's lifetime expanding into its final form of four massive books, consisting of eighty chapters, by 1559.⁷¹ Calvin devoted his life to editing and adding to the information contained in this book; he felt it was his most important work. The well-respected Presbyterian theologian, Benjamin B. Warfield, has thoughtfully stated,

Even from the point of view of mere literature, it holds a position so supreme in its class that every one who would fain know the world's best books, must make himself familiar with it. What Thucydides is among the Greeks, or Gibbon among eighteenth-century English historians, what Plato is among philosophers, or the *Iliad* among epics, or Shakespeare among dramatists, that Calvin's *Institutes* is among theological treatises.⁷²

In the *Preface*, Calvin dedicated his treatise to King Francis I (1494–1547) with the hope that the persecution of the Protestants would soon be eased. This was not to be and it is doubtful that Francis ever read even

65. Henry R. Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, Second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1972), 111. Van Til notes, "Calvin has been called the father of the Psalter. Before him the French Reformed churches knew no congregational singing. In 1537 Calvin had already proposed the introduction of congregational singing in Geneva, in order to stir up the cold hearts to prayer and to move them to praise. However, the first edition of the Psalter appears in Strasbourg in 1539, where Calvin was in exile. It contained his own metrical version of the Psalms of Strasbourg. Later Calvin eliminated his own poetry and took Marot's version of the Psalms, while the tunes were either composed or arranged by Bourgeois and published in 1562. This version of the Psalter enjoyed twenty-five editions the year of its publication and a total of 1,400 editions."

66. "Ecclesiastical Ordinances," in *The Register*, 40–41.

67. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries on the Bible*, various editors, 22 volumes (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1844; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reprint edition, 1998). The Baker edition alone contains over 11,000 pages of learned comments on the text of Scripture. This is a remarkable achievement for one who only "lived for 54 years, 10 months, 17 days" (see: Beza, *Life of Calvin*, xcvi).

68. 1559, *Geneva Bible*, (White Hall, WV: Tolle Lege Press, 2007).

69. John T. McNeill, *History and Character of Calvinism*, 237–350. The influence of the *Geneva Bible* upon Scotland, England, and America has been greatly underestimated. McNeill traces its profound impact.

70. See: Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, for a superb analysis of all of Calvin's numerous writing projects.

71. Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 195–202. Five specific editions of the *Institutes* during Calvin's life are known with each edition growing larger in size and scope:

— *Institutes* 1st edition in Latin (1536, published in Basle)

— *Institutes* 2nd edition in Latin (1539, published in Strasbourg) and in French (1541, published in Geneva)

— *Institutes* 3rd edition in Latin and French (1543 and 1545 respectively, published in Geneva)

— *Institutes* 4th edition in Latin and French (1550 and 1551 respectively, published in Geneva)

— *Institutes* 5th edition in Latin and French (1559 and 1560 respectively, published in Geneva)

72. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, vol. 5 in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Oxford:1932; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 374.

a single line from the *Institutes*. It is interesting to note that all of Calvin's theological works were written in the context of *pastoral ministry*. He constantly mentions the names of opponents and supporters in his works, so that reading the *Institutes* requires some understanding of the historical context in Reformation Europe.⁷³ Many other theological tracts and treatises were produced by Calvin. He deals with theological opponents who teach erroneous doctrine, and the tendency of religious enthusiasts towards schismatic behavior. Each one of his theological writings clarified the Bible's teaching on that particular topic, addressed various theological concerns, and defended the correct teaching from the Bible.⁷⁴

11. Pastoral Counseling. John Calvin experienced most of the typical pastoral counseling situations throughout his career as would the modern-day pastor.⁷⁵ He administered both adult believer and infant baptisms, he helped parents to prepare their children to make a profession of faith, he worked with young couples for marriage, he performed funerals and consoled people dealing with grief and discouragement. The noted Calvin biographer, T. H. L. Parker, writes,

Calvin was not only the architect of the Church in Geneva, bearing, as the leading pastor, the chief responsibility for the Church's life and organization, but he was also actively engaged in the pastoral work. Undoubtedly he looked upon his life work in Geneva primarily as 'proclaiming the Word of God' and 'instructing believers in wholesome doctrine.' His time was not spent in sitting in an office and planning, nor was it devoted entirely to committees. He was a pastor, busied with the common run of pastoral duties. For example, glancing through the Annals of Geneva, we find that on November 5th, 1553, he married two couples in the Cathedral; that on December 10th of the same year he 'blessed a marriage and administered baptism at St. Pierre.' The first quarter of 1554 kept him busy: on January 7th he had a marriage at St. Pierre, on the 28th two, two more on February 4th, three on the 18th, one on the 4th of March, and a baptism on the 18th, and three marriages on April 1st. All in all, for the ten years 1550–1559 for which we have a register, he took about two hundred and seventy weddings and fifty baptisms.⁷⁶

The Reformers in Geneva did not have a specialized counseling ministry with pastors trained to perform only this one aspect of ministry. Instead, all pastors saw it as part of their pastoral duty to counsel any whom the Lord might bring to them. Their text and handbook was the Bible alone (Lat. *Sola Scriptura*). Their counsel

for each person was given by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, from the teachings in the Bible, and their own experiences of personal growth, suffering, and grief. The special responsibility of the pastor, Calvin firmly believed, was to bring about "the cure of souls" by the grace of God.⁷⁷ He believed that the Bible was sufficient to address all areas of human concern—anger, anxiety, assurance, despair, fear, guilt, hatred, lack of hope, loneliness, marriage difficulties, rage, sin, sorrow, suffering, trial, worry, etc.⁷⁸

12. Doctrine of the Christian Life. Calvin taught that each Christian, when in the midst of trouble, should be encouraged to look away from himself and look only to God.⁷⁹ In the *Institutes* he notes, "We have taught that the sinner does not dwell upon his own compunction or tears, but fixes both eyes upon the Lord's mercy alone."⁸⁰ Thus, in Calvin's doctrine of the Christian life, faith in Jesus Christ and personal repentance are emphasized as key marks of how the Christian ought to live.

73. There are several fine reading guides for the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Here are two books I would highly recommend: (1) David B. Calhoun, *Knowing God and Ourselves: Reading Calvin's Institutes Devotionally* (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016); and (2) J. Mark Beach, *Piety's Wisdom: A Summary of Calvin's Institutes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010).

74. See *Tracts and Letters*, 7 volumes.

75. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation: A Study of Calvin as Social Worker, Churchman, Pastor and Theologian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988). See: Chapter 12 "The Pastor—the Cure of Souls," and Chapter 14 "Pastoral Exhortation and Assurance." These chapters are especially helpful in understanding that Calvin's counseling methodology was based exclusively upon the Bible.

76. T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1954), 81.

77. Calvin was undoubtedly indebted to his ministerial colleague in Strasbourg, Martin Bucer. In 1538 Bucer produced a small volume in German entitled, *Von der waren Seelsorge* ("Concerning the True Care of Souls") based on his exposition and application of Ezekiel 34:15–16. This volume was recently translated and republished by the Banner of Truth. See: Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, trans. Peter Beale (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

78. *Calvin's Commentary* on Acts 20:20. Calvin explains, "Christ did not ordain pastors on the principle that they only teach the Church in a general way on the public platform, but that they care for the individual sheep, bring back the wandering and scattered to the fold, bind up the broken and crippled, heal the sick, support the frail and weak."

79. *Institutes* 3:6–10. These chapters comprise the "Golden Book of the True Christian Life" which has often been printed separately. A modern edition of this classic is the following: John Calvin, *Golden Book of the True Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952). Ligonier Ministries published the newest edition that I know of: John Calvin, *A Little Book on the Christian Life* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2017).

80. *Institutes* 3:4:3.

Moreover, the “mystical union” one experiences with Christ is the foundation upon which one finds assurance and comfort in time of trial.⁸¹ Calvin felt that the individual Christian’s greatest strength was to be found in the “inner testimony of the Holy Spirit” which assured the Believer that the Lord truly loved each one with an “everlasting love.”⁸² Calvin especially contributed the idea that each believer is to live out the Christian life as a “holy venture” that pleases God.⁸³ He writes, “Holiness is not a merit by which we can attain communion with God, but a gift of Christ, which enables us to cling to him, and to follow him.”⁸⁴ In addition, Calvin rejected any artificial distinction between those who are “spiritual” versus those who are considered to be “common.” Calvin argues, like most other Reformers, that, “every believer is a priest” (Lat. *communio sanctorum*).⁸⁵ This belief was widely promoted in Geneva and became a model for Christians throughout the world.

13. Prayer. Calvin addresses the subject of prayer in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with an extensive analysis that defines prayer, reveals the importance of it in the Christian life, considers the Lord’s Prayer as a whole and each petition by itself, and discusses various difficult questions related to prayer (e.g. the sovereignty of God and prayer, unheard prayers, etc).⁸⁶ He defines prayer and advocates its steady practice with the following paragraph,

It is, therefore, by the benefit of that we reach those riches which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father. For there is a communion of men with God by which, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, they appeal to him in person concerning his promises in order to experience, where necessity so demands, that what they believed was not in vain, although he had promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayers. So true is it

that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord’s gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.⁸⁷

Calvin gives four basic rules of godly prayer: (1) “Now for framing prayer duly and properly, let this be the first rule: that we be disposed in mind and heart as benefits those who enter conversation with God,” (2) “Let this be the second rule: that in our petitions we ever sense our own insufficiency, and earnestly pondering how we need all that we seek, join with this prayer and earnest—nay, burning—desire to attain it,” (3) “To this let us join a third rule: that anyone who stands before God to pray, in his humility giving glory completely to God, abandon all thought of his own glory, cast off all notion of his own worth, in fine, put away all self-assurance—lest if we claim for ourselves anything, even the least bit, we should become vainly puffed up, and perish at his presence,” and (4) “The fourth rule is that, thus cast down and overcome by true humility, we should be nonetheless encouraged to pray by a sure hope that our prayer will be answered.”⁸⁸ Many of Calvin’s public prayers, which were uttered at the end of a sermon in St. Pierre, or the end of a lecture in the *Auditoire*, are preserved in his *Commentaries* on the Bible. Here is one such prayer from 1551,

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, inasmuch as we have been born into a century full of corruption and one which overflows with such a license to indulge in every form of wickedness that scarcely a spark of goodness and righteousness remains, grant that you would forgive us our sins and that you would give us the grace that we may continue to live uprightly in the midst of thorns, and so constantly keep us under the care of your Word that we may always be nurtured in true piety, so as to engage in all that is just and fair toward our neighbors. And inasmuch as it is not in our power to preserve ourselves with complete integrity, grant that your Son, our Lord Jesus, may so protect us by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may continue to advance toward the goal of our course, until we are finally gathered into that heavenly kingdom, which he has acquired for us by his blood. Amen.⁸⁹

It is easy to observe from this compelling example of public prayer, that Calvin was a man who was well-acquainted with prayer. He not only sought “true piety” in his own life, but also in the lives of those who were under his spiritual care.

14. Letter Writing. Calvin wrote an amazing variety

81. Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 91–93.

82. Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:35–39.

83. John R. Walchenbach, “Vocation,” in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 387–388.

84. Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life*, trans. Henry J. Van Andel (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952), 13.

85. 1 Peter 2:4–10.

86. *Institutes* 3:20:1–52.

87. *Institutes* 3:20:2.

88. *Institutes* 3:20:4, 6, 8, and 11.

89. John Calvin, *Sermons on the Book of Micah*, trans. & edit. Benjamin W. Farley (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 393–394. This prayer was given at the end of a sermon on Micah 4:4–7, preached on Tuesday, January 8, 1551.

of letters to people throughout his entire ministry.⁹⁰ He wrote to those who were seeking advice, giving them counsel from the Bible. He wrote to those who were troubled, offering them compassion and encouragement. Here is a small sample of Calvin's pastoral care from a consolatory letter Calvin wrote to a bereaved father (Monsieur de Richebourg) who had lost his son Louis, and his son's teacher Claude Ferey, a distinguished professor at the Academy, in the plague that swept through Strasbourg in 1541.

The son whom the Lord had lent you for a season, he has taken away. There is no ground, therefore, for those silly and wicked complaints of foolish men: O blind death! O horrid fate! O implacable daughters of destiny! O cruel fortune! The Lord who had lodged him here for a season, at this stage of his career has called him away. What the Lord has done, we must, at the same time, consider has not been done rashly, nor by chance, neither from having been impelled from without; but by that determinate counsel, whereby he not only foresees, decrees, and executes nothing but what is just and upright in itself, but also nothing but what is good and wholesome for us... But what advantage, you will say, is it to me to have had a son of so much promise, since he has been torn away from me in the first flower of his youth?... However brief, therefore, either in your opinion or in mine, the life of your son may have been, it ought to satisfy us that he has finished the course which the Lord had marked out for him... Nor, in the school of Christ, do we learn any such philosophy as requires us to put off that common humanity with which God has endowed us... set bonds, temper even your most reasonable sadness; that having shed those tears which were due to nature and to fatherly affection, you by no means give way to senseless wailing... May Christ the Lord keep you and your family, and direct you all with his own Spirit, until you may arrive where Louis and Claude have gone before.⁹¹

Here we have an open window into the heart of John Calvin. And surprisingly, for some skeptical readers, it reveals a heart that is warm and tender towards those who suffer through the trials of life rather than one which is cold and hard. It is the heart of a true shepherd and pastor to his people. In addition, Calvin wrote to those who were in positions of civil authority exhorting them to godliness; many of these letters were completely unsolicited, but they were well-received.⁹² The reason he wrote them was this—he felt compelled to write to those in prominence in the hope that he might

influence their personal attitudes toward the Lord and advance the kingdom of God on earth.

15. Ministries of Mercy - One of the central duties of the Pastors, Elders, and Deacons was to visit the sick.⁹³ The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* establishes the following plan: "Because many are negligent to console themselves in God with His Word when they find themselves in necessity through illness, and consequently many die without any admonition or teaching, which is then more than ever salutary for man, we have decided and ordered that no one is to remain three full days confined to bed without seeing that the minister is notified."⁹⁴ During the plague that struck Geneva in 1543 Calvin strongly encouraged a ministry to the sick and dying, and he prepared to go to the Plague Hospital himself if necessary. He was forbidden, however, by the City Council to participate in this ministerial service because of his great value to the city. *The Registers* of the City Council record, "Master Calvin, however, is barred because the Church needs him."⁹⁵ Nevertheless, he promoted this ministry of mercy and was instrumental in founding several new hospitals in Geneva and raising financial support for them. In addition, Geneva received waves of refugees fleeing from persecution during the time of Calvin and afterwards. The deacons of Geneva established a system of community assistance, which they called, the *Bourse Francaise* (i.e. "the French Purse") as an organization designed to assist refugees in relocating to Geneva.

The Bourse was specifically designed to help refugees, many of whom would never have required assistance at home in France. Through its extraordinary range of activities it looked after the diverse needs of the men, women and children who arrived in Geneva. It helped men retrain and obtain work, arranged apprenticeships for the boys, looked after widows and found work for them, mostly in sewing. The type of jobs could vary enormously... The Bourse also acted as a marriage service seeking new husbands for widows. Children had to be cared for and particular provision was made for widows and children. There was no separate orphanage, but the Bourse developed a system whereby children

90. John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin* (Edinburgh, Scotland: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980). See also: Henry F. Henderson, *Calvin in his Letters* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1996).

91. Calvin, *Selected Works*, 4.246–253.

92. John Calvin, *Calvin's Ecclesiastical Advice*, trans. Mary Beaty and Benjamin W. Farley (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1991).

93. "Ecclesiastical Ordinances," in *The Register*, 43–44, 46.

94. "Ecclesiastical Ordinances," 46.

95. Stickelberger, *Calvin: A Life*, 97–98.

were sent to foster homes. It also gave money for men and women to return to France to bring family members to Geneva.⁹⁶

Another duty shared by the ministers, elders, and deacons of Geneva was the regular visitation of those who were imprisoned.⁹⁷ Both the Scriptures and godly counsel were to be given. Special care was to be shown to condemned criminals who were facing execution. Calvin, himself, gave spiritual care to condemned criminals during the course of his ministry. He made particular efforts to proclaim the gospel of grace to Michael Servetus, a most difficult and hardened heretic, before his execution in 1553. Sadly, this was not received and Servetus died unrepentant and still holding to his erroneous beliefs.⁹⁸

16. Visitation of Families and Rural Churches. The New Testament records the ministerial practice of the Apostle Paul—he was busy “teaching . . . in public and from house to house” (cf. Acts 20:20). This same pattern was regularly performed at Geneva, and it has come down through the centuries as a distinct practice for the pastors and elders of Reformed churches to visit in the homes of their parishioners on a yearly basis.⁹⁹ Every home was to be visited; this practice forms a basic foundation for pastoral care and spiritual accountability.¹⁰⁰ The visitation of the rural churches by the leading pastors of Geneva was also strongly encouraged. One year, Calvin and several other pastors were chastened in the minutes of the *Company of Pastors* for failing to carry

out this duty in a timely manner.¹⁰¹ The needed visits were then carried out by Calvin and the others as required by the *Company of Pastors*.

17. Relation to Civil Government. Calvin’s pastoral theology was also very concerned with how the church related to the civil government.¹⁰² The two spheres of ecclesiastical and civil authority remained distinct and separate in Geneva—with overlaps in their jurisdictions only when the situation warranted it.¹⁰³ Church historian, Henry C. Sheldon, makes the following observation on the relationship between church and state in Geneva. He notes,

He viewed the two as properly co-ordinate powers, having each its own sphere, each rendering support to the other, but neither claiming supremacy over the domain of the other. As actually instituted at Geneva, however, the polity of Calvin did not fully guard the Church from the intrusion of the State.¹⁰⁴

Throughout the years of 1541–1555, there were numerous times that the civil government sought to overrule church decisions—especially involving the matters of excommunication. This proved to be a great difficulty for Calvin and the other ministers of Geneva, and in essence this became a struggle for power and authority. Calvin understood that the church had no authority in meting out physical punishment. When an offender was found to be a danger to the established order, however, he believed that the magistrate should rightly determine the proper punishment and carry out the judgment. Some have accused Calvin’s Geneva of becoming a “dictatorship.” Nothing could be further from the truth! Henry C. Sheldon argues,

Doubtless his part in the Genevan administration has sometimes been exaggerated. His position was not exactly that of an Olympian Jupiter or an absolute dictator. Sharp and decisive measures were known at Geneva, independent of the agency of Calvin.¹⁰⁵

The following examples show that Calvin was not the dictator of Geneva: (1) the forced removal of Calvin and his ministerial colleagues from Geneva by the City Council in 1538; (2) the ongoing struggle between the City Council and the Consistory (1541–1555) over who had the authority to excommunicate or to restore church members to the Lord’s Supper; and (3) the fact that the right of physical punishment and execution always remained with the civil authorities and was never given over to the Church. Simply stated, there was never

96. Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 200–202.

97. “Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” in *The Register*, 46.

98. *The Register*, 291. It reads, “On Friday 27 October, having received the decisions of the churches of Berne, Basel, Zurich, and Schaffhausen concerning the affair of Servetus, Messieurs condemned him to be taken to Champey and to be burnt alive there. This was done without any sign of repentance for his errors being given by Servetus at the time of his death.”

99. “Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” in *The Register*, 41–42.

100. Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 348. Bridges notes, “Calvin often lays down the Scriptural obligation to this work, and reports the fruitful harvests reaped at Geneva, when the ministers and elders went from house to house, and dealt closely and individually with the consciences of the people.”

101. *The Register*, 82–84. See the entry for January 11, 1548.

102. David W. Hall, “Calvin on Human Government and the State,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 411–440.

103. “Ecclesiastical Ordinances,” in *The Register*, 49.

104. Henry C. Sheldon, “The Part of Calvin in the Government of the Genevan Church and Society” in *History of the Christian Church*, 5 vols. (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1895; Peabody, MA: Hendricksen Publishers, 1988), 3.153.

105. Sheldon, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 3, 152.

any "Inquisition" in Geneva. There is no question that Calvin actively participated in the civil sphere, but he never became a member of any of the governing councils of the city of Geneva, nor did he even become a citizen of Geneva until 1559. His citizenship was not due to his own efforts at petitioning for this privilege, but as a reward from the grateful citizens of the city when they realized that citizenship had never been given to him.¹⁰⁶ Essentially, Calvin's role in the political sphere was that of an "advocate" for the Christian faith, and by extension, its application to every area of life.

18. Evangelism & Missionary Activities. The public preaching and teaching of the Word of God featured prominently in efforts at evangelism in Geneva. Beyond this, Calvin and many other Reformers often engaged in "public debates" for the purpose of winning whole cities or regions to the Reformation.¹⁰⁷ A prominent feature of Reformed evangelistic activity is the belief that God alone changes fallen human hearts (Gk. *monergism*). God alone brings people to faith in the gospel.¹⁰⁸ The Genevan church trained and sent out many pastors, evangelists, and missionaries with this "God-centered" theology in mind. They made every effort to evangelize the nearby Swiss cantons who remained Roman Catholic, and the various nations of Europe—France, Holland, Germany, England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Poland, Northern Italy, and Bohemia.¹⁰⁹ One missionary effort in 1556 focused on sending missionaries to establish a Protestant colony on an island off the coast of Brazil, but this effort eventually failed.¹¹⁰

19. Discipleship. Calvin was particularly concerned with the discipleship of new Believers and children. With them in mind he wrote the *Genevan Catechism* in 1538.¹¹¹ It was not, however, until his return to Geneva in 1541 that the *Catechism* was revised and put into regular use. The question and answer format was designed to be taught and memorized over the space of fifty-five Sundays.¹¹² Every Sunday at noon the children would gather at St. Pierre for instruction in the catechism. Besides the *Genevan Catechism* the regular preaching and teaching of the Word of God was the foremost means of discipleship in Geneva. And beyond that, for more able students, the public lectures at the Genevan Auditorium (Fr. *Auditoire*) were available for all to attend.

20. Education. In 1559 the Genevan Academy was formally established for the purpose of training pastors and missionaries.¹¹³ This school was a stunning achievement for a town of approximately 20,000 people with little resources beyond the local town treasury. The usual practice of the day was that a University was established with the help of a rich patron who would

fund the starting of the school (e.g. a King, Queen, or Prince). The Genevan citizenry contributed out of their own personal resources to establish this school. They hired the best professors that could be found throughout Europe to make up the faculty. Due to the efforts of this school, missionary pastors and evangelists were sent all over Europe. Later the Academy expanded its course offerings and, in time, it became known as the University of Geneva.¹¹⁴

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

I have intended in this explanatory outline of John Calvin's pastoral theology to put forth sufficient evidence to show how deeply his ministry was rooted in the Bible. In essence, it is a *biblical theology* that has been extended into all of the practical affairs of Christ's Church (i.e. a *pastoral theology*). I truly hope that the case has been made, and that each reader will consider my earnest proposal: rather than finding answers to perplexing pastoral questions from the realms of sociology and psychology, I would urge you, instead, to take "a backwards glance" to a ministerial example that has proven itself over the past four hundred and fifty years—to Calvin's pastoral theology. All Protestants would do well to rediscover their Reformation heritage and to "seek the old paths."¹¹⁵ I do not believe that this approach promotes an unthinking allegiance to John Calvin, or encourages pastors to slavishly imitate every one of the practices of the Genevan Church. Surely, everything that worked well in Geneva wouldn't necessarily work in your own ministerial context. There are, however, essential ministry principles from Calvin that can be put into practice in your own church. And so, you can wisely glean from Calvin's many successes and carefully avoid his mistakes.

106. Stichelberger, *Calvin: A Life*, 145.

107. Stichelberger, 50–53. For a fascinating account of one such debate in Lausanne, Switzerland, read pages 50–53.

108. John 1:12–13, 6:44.

109. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, 382–385.

110. *The Register*, 317. See the entry for August 25, 1556.

111. Hesselink, I. John, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 1997). Also, this catechism can be found in Dillenberger, *John Calvin: Selections from His Writings*, 245–266.

112. Charles Partee, "Genevan Catechism," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 150.

113. "Ecclesiastical Ordinances," in *The Register*, 41. Also see the entry for 1559, pages 343, 345–346.

114. Robert M. Kingdon, "Genevan Academy," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 150.

115. Jeremiah 6:16

What was the overall impact of Calvin's ministry—and did it bear good fruit? Calvin scholar and long-time pastor, Ronald S. Wallace, suggests a much wider achievement for Calvin's ministry than just with the city of Geneva: its people, its church, its culture, and its local environs. Wallace asserts that there is an influence that continues to this very day through the legacy of Calvin's theology and his city. He perceptively writes,

Calvin's influence in the sixteenth century however was due not only to his writing, counsel and teaching but also to what Geneva itself became under his influence. The perplexed pastor of today finds much of what is written by experts, and given as advice even at heart-warming church conferences, does not really fit into his own actual situation in the parish ministry. Calvin, however, instead of writing a "Utopia," actually produced it in Geneva. He translated his ideas into ecclesiastical and even political institutions. He influenced the kind of individual people could meet as they went about the city. Geneva itself therefore became a fact of great importance. It attracted people. They sent their children so that they could come under the influence of the place. They came to believe it was possible for them to have something like it where they themselves lived and worked.¹¹⁶

In this way we see the "good fruit" of Calvin's ministry as a faithful pastor and shepherd to the church of Jesus Christ. He demonstrates this good fruit in three ways: (1) by a city that was fundamentally transformed by the gospel, (2) by a church which established lasting patterns for ministry that are still being imitated today, and (3) by a culture that was so completely penetrated by the gospel that the arts, civil government, education, finances, laws, morals, scholarship, social welfare, and vocations were deeply influenced by the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁷ Robert M. Kingdon, a scholar who devoted a lifetime to studying the details of the church in Geneva during the time of the Reformation, thoughtfully noted, "Geneva's church became and to a



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certain degree remains a mother and model to the entire Reformed movement."¹¹⁸ Indeed, John Calvin was a faithful pastor whose ministry was uniquely blessed by God. His closest associate and personal successor, Theodore Beza, gives us a fitting tribute to Calvin's life with these stirring words,

Having been a spectator of his conduct for sixteen years, I have given a faithful account both of his life and of his death, and I now declare, that in him all men may see a most beautiful example of the Christian character, an example which it is as easy to slander as it is difficult to imitate.¹¹⁹

In response to Beza's tribute of Calvin, I can only enthusiastically proclaim, *Soli Deo Gloria!* To God alone be the glory! ■

116. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation*, 43.

117. Abraham Kuyper, who was certainly aligned with Calvin's theology, enthusiastically stated, "Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" See: Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper, A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 488.

118. Robert M. Kingdon, "Genevan Reformation," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, 153.

119. Beza, *Life of Calvin*, 100.