

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

*by J. Mark Beach*

A.D. 2009 marks the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth (10 July 1509). The chorus of praise being heaped upon Calvin in recognition of his influence and abiding importance as a Reformed theologian and church reformer is well deserved. This year witnesses, not surprisingly, a swell in the already vast scholarship dealing with Calvin, as seen in the plethora of new articles, special conferences, lectures, and published books dealing with Calvin and his legacy. However, Richard A. Muller believes that Calvin needs to be demoted as a Reformed theologian—demoted in the sense that it is mistaken to think that Calvin alone defines the Reformed tradition or that Calvin viewed himself as first among peers, having no equal.

Given the great interest in Calvin's theology today, we forget that there have been periods in church history when Calvin, if not forgotten, was regarded as *passé*. One thinks particularly of the late-seventeenth century when the forces of rationalism had made strong inroads in the church. The work of the Reformers was viewed with disdain. In the eighteenth century matters grew worse, for when the Enlightenment had gained the field in the academy Calvin's work was regarded as quaint, despotic, and authoritarian.

Muller's point, of course, in venturing to demote Calvin, is to promote other noteworthy Reformed thinkers, for Calvin's promotion has meant their demotion. As a result we lose their contributions to theology in the Reformed tradition. This in turn contributes to a skewed understanding of that tradition. To promote Calvin is one thing; to demote everyone else is quite another. Thus, if Calvin were demoted we might find room to explore the wisdom of other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed writers who formed our heritage.

Be that as it may, this is Calvin's year. Calvin's prominent role in the history of theology is not likely to be diminished or differently assessed any time in the near future. Among the reasons, I think, that Calvin will continue to outpace his Reformed contemporaries and many of his successors as the subject of scholarly attention is as simple as the availability of his writings in the vernacular. Since Latin is no longer the tongue of the academy many valuable Latin works suffer neglect—the church is cut-off from large segments of its Reformed inheritance, especially its continental expression. Calvin's works, however, given that so many of them are available in English translation, immediately present themselves for study. In this way Calvin has become the principal link to our Reformed past.

In the English speaking world we discover that many of Calvin's writings were translated into English during the early period of the Reformation in England. Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, for example, translated by Thomas Norton, first appeared in English in 1561 (reprinted many times thereafter: 1562, 1574, 1578, 1582, 1587, 1599, 1611, 1634, and 1762). It should be noted that in this publication history there is a considerable gap, spanning more than 125 years from 1634 to 1762. It bears noticing that a new and fresh translation of Calvin's *Institutes* into English did not appear until the John Allen translation of 1813; this was followed by Henry Beveridge's translation in 1845, and Ford Lewis Battles's translation in 1960. Many of Calvin's commentaries were likewise translated during the early period of the English reformation. His commentaries, however, do not make an appearance in the form of a new English translation until the nineteenth century. It is hard to overestimate the importance of the work of the Calvin Translation Society in the nineteenth century, not only publishing Henry Beveridge's translation of Calvin's *Institutes*, but also translating all of Calvin's commentaries and expository lectures, as well as a rich selection of his theological treatises and letters—the former consisting of some 46 volumes (1844-1855); the latter comprising seven volumes (1844-1858). It is probably not saying too much to argue that Calvin's legacy would be greatly diminished in the English speaking world today if it were not for the labors of many scholars in the century prior.

All this is not to say that *only* Calvin was translated into English in the sixteenth century or that Calvin *alone* provided impetus or influenced the shape of the theology in the English Reformation. This is clearly not the case, since among Calvin's contemporaries the writings of Heinrich Bullinger, Martin Bucer, Theodore Beza, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Wolfgang Musculus, and others appeared in English translation as well. But it is to say that in subsequent centuries the writings of Calvin's contemporaries languished while his work received new scholarly attention.

This brings us to the second and larger reason Calvin has figured so prominently within the history of Reformed thinking—i.e., the reason Calvin has been the center of attention in twentieth-century and also twenty-first-century scholarship. Although many would mention the influence of Karl Barth at this point and his call to study Calvin's theology—and I certainly acknowledge the validity of that observation—I do not believe that gets at the root of the matter. More fundamental to explaining Calvin's domination of Reformed theology, I believe, is this: his theological work *impressed itself* upon the church. In other words, that Calvin *now* towers over many of his Reformed contemporaries is due, I think, to the fact that his work foisted itself upon the church and academy. More than anything else, Calvin's dominance is grounded in the *rhetorical* power—the persuasive and eloquent character—of his writing. It is not that Calvin provided a theologically superior formulation of a given doctrine to his Reformed contemporaries, but he usually did provide a rhetorically superior presentation of a given topic. In this regard, one could arguably maintain that there are a number of topics that Calvin's contemporaries or successors treated as well as or better than Cal-

vin, if the standard applied is that of theological accuracy, or astute philosophical perception, or exegetical nuance and subtlety, or polemical finesse. However, few, if any, are able to match Calvin in rhetorical affect. His writings, besides exhibiting sound theological judgment, brim with style. They are crafted with the aim to persuade readers, displaying such rhetorical muscle that, in this regard, neither his contemporaries nor his successors are his equal. Calvin is the master rhetorician in the form of *persuasio*.

Although this is not the setting to present a biography of John Calvin, a few aspects of his life and labor may be noted. Calvin was born at Noyon in Picardy, France, on July 10, 1509. From 1523 to 1528 he studied at the University of Paris, and from 1528 he studied law at Orléans and then at Bourges, where he came under Protestant influence. Wishing to pursue the life of a scholar, his first publication was a Latin work, a commentary, on Seneca's *De Clementia*. About 1533 he appears to have undergone a "sudden" conversion experience which marked an irreparable break with the Roman Catholic Church. Because of his Protestant convictions, he had to flee France. Calvin's first writing for the cause of the Reformation was produced in 1536, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which was a well-ordered, brief, and synoptic presentation of Reformed teaching. Calvin would expand and revise this institution or instruction manual in the Christian religion many times throughout the remainder of his life.

After breaking with Rome and fleeing France, Calvin was looking for a place of refuge. He decided to go to Strasbourg, a Protestant city. However, while on his journey Calvin passed through Geneva, Switzerland, where he met William Farel. Farel immediately recognized Calvin's talent and enlisted him to serve the Protestant cause in that city, uttering anathemas against Calvin's desire for a peaceful, ordered life of a scholar. Calvin was convicted by Farel's challenge and stayed in Geneva to serve alongside of his older colleague. After a brief period of reforming work in Geneva, however, Farel and Calvin were both expelled from the city. Their proposals proved too radical and not to the taste of the Genevans. Calvin went to Strasbourg, where, under the influence of Martin Bucer, he labored for the French refugee congregation from 1538 to 1541. It was during this period that the city authorities of Geneva solicited Calvin to write a response to Cardinal Sadoletto, the Bishop of Carpentras in southern France. Sadoletto was urging the Genevans back to the Roman Catholic fold. Calvin took up this task with his "Reply to Sadoletto," wherein he masterfully defended the cause of the Reformation. He not only dismantled the Bishop's winsome case for Roman teaching, but in doing so Calvin exhibited a pastoral passion for souls and a love for the gospel, revealing his personal zeal for Christ. This reply served to open the door for renewed labor among the Genevans, and in 1541 Calvin was invited back to Geneva where he ministered for the rest of his years. He died on the twenty-seventh day of May, 1564, about a month and a half before his 55th birthday.

Calvin was a prolific writer—often assisted by secretaries and stenographers. Through his writings he continues to exercise his greatest influ-

ence. He wrote either commentaries or expository lectures on most of the books of the Bible. Besides the numerous redactions and increasing bulk of his *Institutes*, Calvin also penned numerous polemical treatises, treating at length topics like providence, predestination, the Lord's Supper, freedom of the will, and various works against Roman Catholic doctrines or practices, Libertines, and certain Lutherans. Some of his writings were directed toward the pastoral work of ministry as seen, for example, in the numerous sermons which were taken down in dictation and later published, the important catechisms he authored, as well as works dealing with visitation to the sick, church polity, liturgical issues, and other aspects of a minister's work.

Today Calvin casts a big shadow. Many Reformed thinkers and writers are obscured or otherwise hidden by his silhouette. Without a doubt, Calvin will remain the champion of the Reformed churches, for it is impossible to understand the Reformed movement, its impetus, its fears, its weaknesses, its passion, without recognizing the abiding influence of John Calvin.

Like other theological journals, academic institutions, and ecclesiastical associations or groups, we wish to salute Calvin and honor his contribution to Christ's church with this commemorative issue of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*. Calvin's work continues to help us with our own catechetical, homiletical, and theological labors. His theology still informs and shapes the ongoing task of theology for the church today. Thus in this commemorative issue, there are two articles devoted to a particular aspect of his thinking. The first, written by Cornelis P. Venema, considers Calvin's doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness in the justification of believers, specifically whether it is permissible to assert that Calvin taught the imputation of Christ's "active" obedience for justification. Venema musters evidence from Calvin's corpus to argue that, on balance, the scales tip toward *continuity* rather than *discontinuity* between Calvin and the consensus of later Calvinists on the imputation of Christ's active obedience. Although Calvin does not use the same language that later Calvinists would use, Calvin understood the righteousness of Christ to be a comprehensive righteousness. The entire obedience of Christ under the law is imputed to believers, and this justifying verdict encompasses both the declaration of the forgiveness of sins and the believer's positive righteousness and holiness before God.

The second article devoted to Calvin, of which I am the author, focuses upon Calvin's exegesis of two Pauline texts: Galatians 3:15-22 and Romans 9:6ff. I chose Calvin's analysis of these passages because they demonstrate how he treats doctrinal issues which emerge relative to covenant and election. Inasmuch as the covenant of grace is made with believers and their seed, and given that the covenant promises new birth, the washing away of sins, justification, and eternal security in Christ in the way of faith; in short, communion with Christ and all his benefits—the very things signified and sealed in the sacraments—and, further, given that God alone is able to work this divine grace in us, overcoming all obstacles, including our own hardened hearts, how can any among

the covenanted be lost or fail to come to salvation? That is, how can anyone in covenant with God be lost, since the promise is salvation and *God* is the agent of salvation, the driving force of irresistible grace, the one who both promises the gift of faith and the one who alone can bestow the gift of faith? The apostle Paul addresses these issues in the above mentioned biblical texts, where he demonstrates that divine election must also be brought to bear on matters pertaining to the covenant. Thus Calvin, in exegeting these Pauline texts, also faces the relationship between covenant and soteric (not just corporate) election, with the issues attendant with it. Unfolding his understanding of the apostle's words, Calvin maintains that there arises a distinction among the covenanted—a distinction that originates in God. This is seen in Gal. 3:15ff., for the promised *seed* as announced in the Abrahamic covenant is not finally the progeny of Abraham but Jesus Christ—from the line of Abraham—in, from, and by whom Abraham and all the elect are blessed and come to salvation in the way of faith. Thus, only those in Christ, in the Seed, are children of promise in the strict sense. Rom. 9:6ff., likewise, takes up the relationship between covenant and election, for concerning those who are in the covenant—the covenanted—the apostle states that “they are not all Israel who are of Israel.” Divine election is manifest in the separation between children of promise and children of the flesh *in the covenant*. Having examined how Calvin handles these issues, the article concludes by offering some theological observations meant to engender further discussion.

Within the Reformed academy and the wider ecclesiastical setting a subject of recent debate (and perhaps uncertainty) is *the Reformed* understanding of Christ and culture. Ryan McIlhenny engages this topic by examining varying approaches to the believer's calling in the world. The author argues that cultural activity is not optional but necessary as part of what it means to be a Christian in the world, for Christians themselves are creators of culture, not just participants in or critics of a given culture. The calling of believers extends to witness to the gospel in all of its redemptive claims, which means that it extends beyond the salvation of souls and also applies to the world in the whole scope of its ruination. Such witness is itself a cultural activity, for to be creators of culture is human activity. Christians therefore are also creators of culture—which means that that activity and its results also come under the scrutiny of the divine standard of God's revealed will. In this regard, then, Christians may not keep special revelation on an ecclesiastical shelf, to be consulted only for personal affairs; rather, they must press the claims of Christ *as the Christ* to an estranged and rebellious world. Bearing witness in this way is itself cultural activity—all cultural activity is either obedient or disobedient.

Gregory Schuringa presents an article that explores the theology and theological program of Simon Oomius (1630-1706). Through his analysis of Oomius, a theologian of the *Nadere Reformatie*, Schuringa exposes the errors of earlier scholarship pertaining to the *Nadere Reformatie* and what that movement involved theologically, as well as errors regarding Reformed scholasticism and the relationship between Reformed ortho-

doxy and the pietism of the *Nadere Reformatie*. In the seventeenth century a theologian did not face the choice of being either a pietist on the one hand or a scholastic on the other, for scholasticism and pietism coalesced in the seventeenth-century *Nadere Reformatie*. Recent scholarship has shown the untenability of pitting Cocceius's *historia salutis* methodology (or so-called biblical theology approach) against the scholastic methodology of Voetius's dogmatics, for in fact both Cocceius and Voetius were federal theologians, both employed the methodology of scholasticism, and both produced fairly traditional scholastic dogmatical works. Similarly, Schuringa examines the salient features of Oomius's theology and demonstrates how doctrine and life, the theoretical and the practical, are woven together in his thinking, which also shapes his understanding of the theological discipline. Thus it is mistaken to posit a dichotomy between orthodoxy and spirituality (or piety), as if they existed as alternatives to one another. This certainty was not the case with theologians of the *Nadere Reformatie*, like Oomius.

In this issue readers will also find a translation of Robert Rollock's catechism on the divine covenants. This work has been translated by Aaron Denlinger, and we are all in his debt for making this early example of covenant theology available to scholars and pastors alike. Denlinger prefaces this translation with a comprehensive introduction to this work, so I will forego any comments in that regard. I simply alert readers that we should not underestimate Rollock's role in the development of what has come to be called Reformed federal theology. Denlinger maintains that Rollock's constructive and widespread use of the covenant of works as a theological foil to the covenant of grace represents his principal contribution to the intellectual development of Reformed covenant theology. More to the point, Denlinger argues that the polarity between the covenant of works and covenant of grace functioned to support singularly Protestant distinctives, such as the "*solas*" of the Reformation, and the differences between the law (God's standard of righteousness before him, without which there can be no fellowship with God) and the gospel (God's promise of salvation which does not subvert the law but upholds and fulfills God's righteous standard through the gift of Christ and his obedience *for us*). This work shows how Reformed theology continued to develop and explore the contours of biblical revelation; and given that this work is a "catechism" we see how Reformed theology was expressed through the use of various genres of theological literature.

Michael Brown offers an analysis of Samuel Petto's understanding of the covenant. He focuses upon Petto's view of the Mosaic covenant as being in some sense a republication of the covenant of works. Petto (c. 1624-1711), a seventeenth-century Puritan writer, well represents one of the various strains of thinking among the Puritans on this question. In this article Brown demonstrates how Petto's work serves as a window into the era of high orthodoxy (c. 1640-1725) and gives us a glimpse into British covenant theology, which was to shape later generations of Reformed thinking. Brown's purpose is not to argue for a particular dogmatic or biblical-theological construction, but to present an accurate portrait of the texture of debate on this topic from one proponent of a

staked-out view. More specifically the goal is to show how Petto sought to protect the doctrine of *sola fide* by means of his construal of the Mosaic covenant as a republished covenant of works. For Petto, Christ comes to fulfill the condition of the covenant of grace, that condition being expressed in the legality of the Mosaic covenant. Questions of the believer's assurance are not unrelated to Petto's field of concern. Of course, many other Reformed theologians had a different take on this question than the view articulated by Petto or by those who follow that trajectory of thinking. Brown, however, has given us a good portrait of a representative of one strand of this debate.

In continuity with a theme explored in the 2008 issue of the journal on Church Planting, Daniel R. Hyde presents an essay on what a distinctly Reformed approach to church planting should look like versus, say, that of the Pentecostal tradition, or the Emerging church, and the like. Hyde offers a set of foundational principles for this sort of work—focusing on theology, liturgy, and community—and then turns to aptitude principles, exploring the type of traits church planters need to possess and cultivate within themselves in the exercise of this task. Indeed, these aptitudes are so necessary for a pastor that without them to attempt the work of being a church planter becomes unfeasible and the faithful performance of this labor impossible. Hyde's article aims to help churches assess those whom they would call to this task and it assists pastors in the assessment of their own suitability for this work.

As always, we have sought to review books that would be of interest to pastors and scholars alike. Many of the reviews in this issue, in keeping with the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth, are devoted to books about the great Genevan. Although it has become trite, I urge all to *Tolle lege!*