

Calvin and the Need for Reformation*

칼빈과 종교 개혁의 필요성

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Protestants and Roman Catholics in the sixteenth century believed that the issues that divided them were so important that they could not be ignored or compromised away. In 2009, the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Calvin, we should indeed reflect on the nature of the Reformation and ask about its continuing value to the life of the church.

As we approach these questions, one way we can focus them is by looking at Calvin's own summaries of his concerns as expressed in some of the dedicatory letters that he wrote to accompany the publication of various of his work.

Many within the churches descended from the Reformation no longer share Calvin's confidence in the truthfulness of the Bible. Similarly for many the Bible is no longer accepted as sufficient for the worship and government of the church. Worship and the leadership of the church had been supplemented with rites, activities, leaders, and offices that have no biblical warrant. In many churches the perspicuity of the Bible has been functionally rejected. Many seem to regard the Bible as a wax nose that cannot solve our theological differences. The interpretation of the Bible has fallen into all sorts of abuses today. Today as in

* 논문 접수일: 2009. 4. 9. 계재 확정일: 2009. 8. 11.

the sixteenth century the Bible is formally honored, but increasingly not read with understanding. Today often human depravity, the work of Christ, and irresistible grace are replaced by a Gospel of health, wealth and happiness. The worship of the church has become a feel-good experience, rather than a meeting with the holy God.

Is the Reformation over? I believe that we ought to recognize afresh that Calvin is still right about the functional authority of the Bible and about the Bible's program of reform for the church.

Key-Words: John Calvin, the Need for Reformation, the Authority of the Scripture, the Scripture's program for reform, the sufficiency of the Scripture, biblical way of worship, biblical view of the government of the church

Is the Reformation Over? Under that provocative title Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom wrote a book which discussed whether changes in Roman Catholicism and evangelicalism in the twentieth century and the new alliances forged between them on various theological and ethical issues might mean that the theological and ecclesiastical divisions resulting from the Reformation of the sixteenth century were not longer of fundamental importance.¹ Their somewhat tentative answer to the question, is the Reformation over, is: “Probably not. But a once-yawning chasm has certainly narrowed.”² Indeed, the divisions between Roman Catholics and evangelicals is very small when compared with the differences between those two camps and liberalism: “Such evangelicals and Catholics affirm together the Trinity, the sinfulness of

¹ Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2005).

² Noll and Nystrom, 114.

humanity, the saving love of God extended to sinners in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the redeeming power of the Holy Spirit to change men and women into servants of God, and the wholesome integrity of God's law. Whatever differences may still exist between such Catholics and evangelicals with respect to the foundations of Christianity are infinitesimal when compared to differences between traditional Christianity as described above and modernist Christianity of all sorts.”³

The most serious problem with the Noll-Nystrom book is its failure, despite its title, to engage with the Reformation. Both Roman Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century knew that they agreed on the “foundations of Christianity” described above. They also knew that they agreed with one another more than they agreed with militant Islam that was advancing dangerously on the eastern flank of Europe. They were aware of voices calling for Christian unity in the face of the cultural, political and religious threats posed by the expanding Ottoman empire. Yet Protestants and Roman Catholics in the sixteenth century believed that the issues that divided them were so important that they could not be ignored or compromised away. Noll and Nystrom in their book never really show any understanding of this division or seek to explicate its character. The Reformation as a program for the reform of the church is never really examined. Without knowing what the Reformation was, we cannot possibly know if it is or ought to be over.

In 2009, the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Calvin, we should indeed reflect on the nature of the Reformation and ask about its continuing value to the life of the church. We do not want to approach this question today simply as a historical question, looking at various cultural and social implications of the Reformation. Rather we need to ask this question in terms of the theological and ecclesiastical aims of the Reformation. What were

³ Noll and Nystrom, 230.

its basic concerns? Are those concerns still necessary and important today?

Calvin encourages us to reflect on these questions because he was arguably the clearest, best organized and most profound theologian of the sixteenth century. But he was more than a theologian. He was primarily a pastor whose work for the church had an impact far beyond the borders of Geneva because of his remarkable talents. He truly became a reformer of the church and his vision of reform according to the Word of God captured the hearts and minds of many churches, pastors and believers throughout Europe.

In addition to being a great reformer, Calvin was also a voluminous theologian. His works run to many volumes of theology, biblical commentary, letters and sermons. All these volumes can make it difficult to answer broad questions—such as what was the Reformation really all about for Calvin—in a focused way. As we approach these questions, one way we can focus them is by looking at Calvin's own summaries of his concerns as expressed in some of the dedicatory letters that he wrote to accompany the publication of various of his works. These dedicatory letters are sometimes addressed to friends, sometimes to enemies and most often to powerful political persons who were in a position to advance or hinder the course of the Reformation in their countries. In each of these letters Calvin expressed something of his basic concern as a reformer for the church and for the truth of God.

The most famous of these dedicatory letters is the very early one, August 1535, that accompanied the first edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin was twenty-six when he wrote this letter. He had seen fellow Protestants persecuted in France and had heard the lies and gross misrepresentations told about the religion he embraced. He appealed in his letter to King Francis I of France to reject the lies, to recognize that his Protestant subjects were peace-loving, and to provide them with protection. This letter is the first of Calvin's brief presentations of the character and purpose of the Reformation. There he laid down the key elements of his

reform program which remained remarkably constant throughout his career.

Clarity about the Scripture's Authority

The first key element which he highlights in this letter defending the Protestant cause is the role of the Scriptures in the movement. He makes clear that the Scriptures are his authority and the guide of the Reformation. Of course the opponents of the Reform rejected such claims. Calvin noted, “Indeed, our adversaries cry out that we falsely make the Word of God our pretext, and wickedly corrupt it.”⁴ In a sense we can say that his life was dedicated to rejecting and answering this calumny.

The Bible was the foundation of all the Reformation’s teaching. Calvin and the other Reformers recognized that in order for the Bible to be a useful, effective authority, it must have three basic characteristics. It must be true, sufficient and perspicuous. All three characteristics of the Bible were necessary and mutually interdependent. In the context of the sixteenth-century debates there was no controversy over the truthfulness of the Bible. Protestants and Roman Catholics were agreed on that point. Since that time, of course, the truthfulness of the Bible has been attacked and rejected by many, sometimes very subtly and sometimes very blatantly.

Much more central to the debates of the Reformation was the question of the sufficiency of the Bible. In the “Address to King Francis” Calvin responded briefly to arguments from custom and from the church fathers as additional authorities in the life of the church. Of custom Calvin wrote that it could be good or evil. As Calvin noted: “...evil custom is nothing but a

⁴ John Calvin, “Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France,” *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J.T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 12.

kind of public pestilence in which men do not perish the less though they fall with the multitude.”⁵

Calvin went on to argue that the church fathers were much more on the side of the Reformers than on the side of the Roman church. Calvin insisted that the fathers would be dismayed, not at the way the Protestants treat the Bible, but the way the Roman theologians treat it: “All the fathers with one heart have abhorred and with one voice have detested the fact that God’s Holy Word has been contaminated by the subtleties of sophists and involved in the squabbles of dialecticians. When they attempt nothing in life but to enshroud and obscure the simplicity of Scripture with endless contentions and worse than sophistic brawls, do they keep themselves within these borders?”⁶ Calvin believed that he stood with the fathers in his insistence that the Bible did not need to be supplemented but contained all that was needed as an authority for the church.

Finally Calvin defended the perspicuity of the Bible. Rome insisted that not only was the Bible insufficient as an authority, but it was also unclear as an authority. Rome claimed that all the differences among Protestants about the meaning of the Bible proved this point. Calvin summarized Rome’s complaints this way: “...they say that there is no need of many arguments, for one can judge by its fruits what it is, seeing that it has engendered such a heap of sects, so many seditious tumults, such great licentiousness.”⁷ Calvin answered this charge stating, “...they invidiously recount how many disturbances, tumults, and contentions the preaching of our doctrine has drawn along with it, and what fruits it now produces among many. The blame for these evils is unjustly laid upon it, when this

⁵ Calvin, “Prefatory Address,” 23.

⁶ Calvin, “Prefatory Address,” 22.

⁷ Calvin, “Prefatory Address,” 15.

ought to have been imputed to Satan's malice. Here is, as it were, a certain characteristic of the divine Word, that it never comes forth while Satan is at rest and sleeping... Furthermore, how great is the malice that would ascribe to the very word of God itself the odium either of seditions, which wicked and rebellious men stir up against it, or of sects, which impostors excite, both of them in opposition to its teaching!"⁸ The reason for the differences in understanding the Word was not for any inadequacy in the Word, but because of the work of Satan and evil men.

This basic theme of the Reformation—the authority of the Scripture—that Calvin introduced in the Address to King Francis is taken up in other letters of dedication. The theme of Scripture is taken up in an important way in the letter of dedication for his first commentary, his commentary on Romans, to his scholarly friend, Simon Grynaeus, of Basel in 1539. In that letter he moves beyond his assertion of the Bible's authority to reflection on how concretely to interpret it. He wrote: "I remember that three years ago we had a friendly discussion about the best way of interpreting scripture. The plan which you particularly favoured was also the one which at that time I preferred to any others. Both of us felt that lucid brevity constituted the particular virtue of an interpreter."⁹ Calvin wanted clear, brief interpretation of the meaning of the Holy Scriptures.

His most fundamental concern was that the interpretation of the Bible be for the church: "For my own part I could not prevent myself from trying to see what good my efforts in this regard might achieve for the Church of God."¹⁰ Of his decision to write a commentary on Romans he reiterated: "... I have been led to undertake it for no other reason than the common good

⁸ Calvin, "Prefatory Address," 27f.

⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1973), 1.

¹⁰ Calvin, *Comm. Romans*, 1.

of the Church.”¹¹ Brevity and clarity are what the church needed for its growth in understanding.

For Calvin the church’s good was advanced by looking at the great truths of the Bible. He believed that Paul’s letter to the Romans was foundational for that task: “... if we understand this Epistle, we have a passage opened to us to the understanding of the whole of scripture.”¹² He expanded this conviction in his summary of the theme of Romans: “...if we have gained a true understanding of this Epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture... Thus he [Paul] enters on the main subject of the whole Epistle, which is that we are justified by faith.”¹³

It was remarkably bold for a young pastor, not yet thirty, to write his first biblical commentary on this critical book of the Bible. But in his Romans commentary Calvin brilliantly embodied his ideals for interpretation. The commentary is brief, clear, and focused on the foundational truths of the Gospel for the good of the church.

Because the Bible is so vital and useful to the church Calvin stressed the need to interpret it most carefully: “Its [the Bible’s] majesty is somehow diminished, especially if we do not interpret it with great discretion and moderation.”¹⁴ The Bible’s interpretation can never be treated as a game in which scholars just try to score points off one another: “It is, therefore, presumptuous and almost blasphemous to turn the meaning of scripture around without due care, as though it were some game that we are playing.”¹⁵

The godly interpreter must always approach the Scriptures with a profound sense of humility, seeking always to learn from others: “God has never so

¹¹ Calvin, *Comm. Romans*, 3.

¹² Calvin, *Comm. Romans*, 2.

¹³ Calvin, *Comm. Romans*, 5.

¹⁴ Calvin, *Comm. Romans*, 3.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Comm. Romans*, 4.

blessed His servants that they each possessed full and perfect knowledge of every part of their subject. It is clear that His purpose in so limiting our knowledge was first that we should be kept humble, and also that we should continue to have dealings with our fellows... When, therefore, we depart from the views of our predecessors, we are not to be stimulated by any passion for innovation, impelled by any desire to slander others, aroused by any hatred, or prompted by any ambition. Necessity alone is to compel us, and we are to have no other object than that of doing good.”¹⁶ The interpretation of Scripture must take place in the community of the faithful church for the good of the church.

Calvin’s sincere concern for each individual interpreter to approach the text of the Bible humbly did not at all lead to the conclusion that the meaning of the Bible could not be known with certainty in the church. He wrote in his dedicatory letter to Henri de Bourbon (1563) in his *Genesis Commentary* that Rome insisted the meaning of the Bible was uncertain: “...they have no axiom more plausible than, that faith must be free and unfettered, so that it may be possible, by reducing everything to a matter of doubt, to render Scripture (so to speak) as a nose of wax. Therefore, they who being captivated by the allurements of this new school, now indulge in doubtful speculations, obtain at length such proficiency, that they are always learning, yet never come to the knowledge of the truth.”¹⁷

Calvin several times in his writings against the Roman Catholics accused them of turning the Bible into a “wax nose.” The reference is to wax attached to a human nose in a game or theatrical performance that can be given any shape its wearer desires. Calvin’s concern is to make clear that the meaning of the Bible is not subject to whatever meaning the interpreter

¹⁶ Calvin, *Comm. Romans*, 4.

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, translated by John King (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1979), lii-liii.

wants to give it, but that there is an objective, intelligible meaning of the Bible that the interpreter can and must discover.

Calvin was insistent, in his dedicatory letter to King Edward VI (1551) in his commentary on the Catholic epistles, that it was not enough to honor the Bible externally as Rome did: “If only Scripture were allowed its own authority, there is none of these things about which our adversaries would not be compelled to be silent. This is what they in fact admit, when they contend that owing to the ambiguous meaning of Scripture we ought to stand solely on the judgment of the Church… Though they may kiss the closed copies of the Scripture as a kind of worship, yet when they charge it with being obscure and ambiguous they allow it no more authority than if not a single word of it existed in writing.”¹⁸ The real way to honor the Scriptures is to read, understand and follow them.

In many places Calvin stressed the certainty of our hearing the very voice of God in the Scriptures. For example, he commented on Isaiah 45:19 which reads: “I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I the Lord speak the truth; I declare what is right.” Calvin wrote about this verse:

This enables us to see clearly how wicked are the speeches of those who say that no certainty can be obtained from the word, and who pretend that it is a nose of wax, in order to deter others from reading it; for this do wicked men blaspheme, because the mere doctrine of the word exposes and refutes their errors… the Prophet appears to allude to the predictions which were uttered out of the groves and tripods of the idols. They are uncertain and deceitful, but nothing of this kind can be found in God’s answers; for he speaks openly, and utters nothing that is deceitful and ambiguous. But experience tells us that Scripture is

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: The First Epistle of Peter*, translated by W. Johnson, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1963), 225.

somewhat dark and hard to be understood. This is indeed true, but ought to be ascribed to the dulness and slowness of our apprehension, and not to the Scripture; for blind and weak-sighted men have no right to accuse the sun, because they cannot look at him... he [God] not only asserts that he has spoken clearly and without ambiguity, but declares the certainty and steadfastness of his word; as if he had said, that he does not promise largely with an intention to deceive, or amuse hungry men by words, but actually performs what he has promised.¹⁹

Calvin's commitment to Scripture was no theological abstraction for him. The authority of Scripture was the basis of his rejection of so much of the teaching and practice of the Roman church and the basis of his positive program of reform for the church. He wrote, again in the dedicatory letter to King Edward:

"If only the pure and simple doctrine of Scripture were to shine forth as it ought, every one who does not refuse to open his eyes would acknowledge the Papacy to be a savage and an execrable monster, made up through Satan's arts of an innumerable mass of errors. We make it evident by the most solid proofs that the glory of God is so scattered by sacrilegious rending among fictitious idols, that hardly a hundredth portion of His right remains to Him. Further, if they do reserve for Him some portion of worship, we can show that no part of it is sincere, but that it is all full of the superstitious inventions of men, and that the law of God is also overwhelmed with similar devices... We show clearly from Scripture, that Christ's power under the Papacy is almost abolished, that His grace is in great measure made void, that unhappy souls are torn away from Him, and inflated with fatal confidence in their own power and works. We prove that prayer to God such as is prescribed by His Word (which is the only true refuge for salvation) is wholly

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, translated by William Pringle, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1979), vol. 3, 420-21.

subverted. We show plainly that the sacraments are adulterated partly by extraneous inventions, and partly also are transferred to a foreign purpose, in that the power of Spirit is impiously tied to them, and what is peculiar to Christ is ascribed to them.”²⁰

Submission to the Scripture's Program of Reform

From the Bible and under its authority Calvin derived his program of reform designed to repair the greatest faults and abuses in the life of the church. For Calvin the most basic problem he confronted was a church that had given glory to itself at the expense of the glory that was due to God alone as the Savior of his people and as the Lord of his church. In the name of the Reformation Calvin pressed this question: “...a very great question is at stake: how God’s glory may be kept safe on earth, how God’s truth may retain its place of honor, how Christ’s Kingdom may be kept in good repair among us.”²¹

Calvin particularly stressed that the glory of God in the salvation of his people had to be protected and clearly proclaimed. Listen to the eloquence with which Calvin pressed this point, an eloquence which was a central element in Calvin’s effectiveness as a teacher:

Before God, of course, we are miserable sinners; in men’s eyes most despised—if you will the offscouring and refuse of the world, or anything viler that can be named. Thus, before God nothing remains for us to boast of, save his mercy, whereby we have been received into

²⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on First Peter*, 225.

²¹ Calvin, “Address to King Francis,” 11.

hope of eternal salvation through no merit of our own; and before men nothing but our weakness, which even to admit by a nod is to them the greatest dishonor. But our doctrine must tower unvanquished above all the glory and above all the might of the world, for it is not of us, but of the living God and his Christ whom the Father has appointed King... For what is more consonant with faith than to recognize that we are naked of all virtue, in order to be clothed by God? That we are empty of all good, to be filled by him? That we are slaves of sin, to be freed by him? Blind, to be illumined by him? Lame, to be made straight by him? Weak, to be sustained by him? To take away from us all occasion for glorying, that he alone may stand forth gloriously and we glory in him?... Besides, what is better and closer to faith than to feel assured that God will be a propitious Father where Christ is recognized as brother and propitiator? Than confidently to look for all happy and prosperous thing from Him whose unspeakable love toward us went so far that ‘he...did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all?’ Than to repose in certain expectation of salvation and eternal life, when we meditate on Christ, given by the Father, in whom such treasures are hidden²²

We hear that same eloquence in his dedicatory letter to King Edward VI:

If the controversy be concerning the depravity of human nature, the miserable and lost state of mankind, the grace and power of Christ, or the free ground of our salvation, they will immediately bring forward the rotten axioms of the schools as mandatory and as things that ought to be received without dispute. The Holy Spirit teaches us in Scripture that our mind is smitten with so much blindness, that the affections of our heart are so depraved and perverted, that our whole nature is so vitiated, that we can do nothing but sin, until he forms a new will within us. He constrains us, who are condemned to eternal death, to renounce all confidence in our own works, and to flee to the mercy of God as our

²² Calvin, “Address to King Francis,” 12-13.

only asylum, and to trust in it for all our righteousness. By inviting us to God, He also testifies that God is reconciled to us only through the merits of the blood of Christ, and bids us to rely on Christ's intercession, and to come boldly to the heavenly judgment seat.²³

If one key element of Calvin's program of reform derived from the Bible is the doctrine of salvation, the other key element is the doctrine of the church, especially its worship and its ministerial leadership. In both of these areas he believed that the Roman church had betrayed biblical religion. He expressed these views sharply in his dedicatory letter to the King of Poland (1549) with his commentary on Hebrews:

Whatever pretences are urged by those who give their energies to opposing us in favour of the Antichrist of Rome, the source of all the strife by which the Church has been so bitterly torn these thirty years will be found in the fact that those who want to be the chief among the followers of Christ cannot bear to submit to His teaching. So voracious is their ambition and their boldness, that the truth of God lies buried under innumerable lies, that all His institutions are debased by the foulest corruptions, that worship is everywhere profaned, the doctrine of faith utterly overturned, the observance of the sacraments corrupted, the government of the Church turned into a barbarous tyranny, evil trafficking in all things sacred introduced, the power of Christ misused to support the unrestrained tyranny of the ungodly, and terrible profanation of everything full of the most dreadful mockeries has taken the place of Christianity.²⁴

He wrote of both the corruptions in the Roman church and his hopes for change in another dedication to King Edward VI (1550), this time of his

²³ Calvin, *Commentary on First Peter*, 223-24.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, translated by W. Johnson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1963), x-xi.

commentary on Isaiah: “For since the purity of doctrine is there corrupted by monstrous errors, since shocking murder has come into the room of lawful government, since the sacraments are in part debased by gross corruptions, and in part exposed to disgraceful sale, what by melancholy ruin is left of the true and natural beauty of the spiritual building? Yet in our age, contrary to the expectation of all, the Lord hath again begun to *raise up that which was fallen*, (Amos ix. 11) that there might be left among us an outline of the true temple, in which God should be worshipped with purity, and according to the requirements of the Gospel.”²⁵

Calvin’s great concern for the clear teaching of the Gospel, the holiness of true believers and pure worship was expressed throughout his career. We see that in his early letter to King Francis I (1535): “And we have not, by God’s grace, profited so little by the gospel that our life may not be for these disparagers an example of chastity, generosity, mercy, continence, patience, modesty, and all other virtues. It is perfectly clear that we fear and worship God in truth since we seek, not only in our life but in our death, that his name be hallowed.”²⁶

We see it also in the middle of his career in his 1551 letter to King Edward VI: “We shall endeavour to restore God’s worship to its purity, and to purge it from the innumerable superstitions by which it has been corrupted… Where is that simplicity of obedience which the Lord everywhere demands and so distinctly requires?”²⁷ Here he highlighted the simplicity of true Gospel worship.

We see it just as clearly in the rather late (1560) dedication of the second edition of his commentary on the Acts of the Apostles to the Polish

²⁵ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, xxii-xxiii.

²⁶ Calvin, “Address to King Francis,” 30.

²⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on First Peter*, 223.

prince Nicolas Radzivil. He reiterates his commitment to the basics of reform, namely the preaching of the Gospel and the purity of worship: “My mind is rather inclined to an exhortation, the substance and aim of which will be this, that just as you embraced the pure teaching of the Gospel with alacrity at the beginning, just as you endeavoured, with vigour and greatness of spirit, to maintain the true worship of God up to now, you may go on with the same perseverance right to the bitter end of this course.”²⁸

In this 1560 letter Calvin continued more specifically: “When we talk about the Kingdom of Christ, we must take note of two things in particular, first, the teaching of the Gospel by which Christ gathers the Church to Himself, and by which He governs it when it has been gathered; secondly, the actual fellowship of the godly, who, having been united among themselves by the sincere faith of the Gospel, are truly regarded as the people of Christ.”²⁹

Calvin knew that his program to preach the Gospel and to reform the worship of God could succeed only if the leadership of the church was also reformed. Without faithful ministers the true church had no future. The Roman church had developed a hierarchical leadership that sought power and wealth as marks of its success. Calvin believed that the Bible taught an equality and collegiality of ministers, cooperating to preach the Scriptures faithfully without regard to worldly success or approval. He gave strong testimony to the importance of ministerial harmony and cooperation in his 1549 letter of dedication for his commentary on Titus to his two ministerial colleagues with whom he had worked to reform the church in Geneva, William Farel and Peter Viret. He wrote to them: “With both of you I discharged here the office of pastor, and so far from there being any

²⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles*, translated by J. Fraser and W. McDonald (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1973), vol. 1, 2.

²⁹ Calvin, *Comm. Acts*, vol. 3, 3.

appearance of rivalry, I always seemed to be of one mind with you... This also I count among the benefits of our union, that unclean dogs whose bites cannot succeed in tearing and rending the Church only stir it up to no effect by their barking. We cannot hold their influence in too great scorn, since we have good reason to glory before God and have the clearest evidence to show to men that our alliance and friendship have been entirely consecrated to Christ's name, have hitherto been profitable to His Church, and have no other aim than that all men should be at one with us in Him.”³⁰

In the commentary itself on Titus, Calvin noted that in the history of the church the work of the ministry is never easy: “It is clear from this epistle that immediately after Paul’s departure Satan made great efforts not only to overthrow the government of the church, but also to corrupt its doctrine.”³¹ The opposition of the evil one seeks always to destroy both the truth and the institution of the true church.

Calvin wrote extensively in various places about the work of the ministry, always making clear that ministers must first really learn the Word before they can teach and preach it: “He [the Psalmist] would secure the greater weight and deference to his doctrine by announcing that he had no intention to vend fancies of his own, but to advance what he had learned in the school of God. This is the true method of instruction to be followed in the Church. The man who holds the office of teacher must apply himself to the reception of truth before he attempt to communicate it, and in this manner become the means of conveying to the hands of others that which God has committed to his own. Wisdom is not the growth of human genius. It must be sought from above, and it is impossible that any should speak with the propriety and knowledge necessary for the edification of the Church, who

³⁰ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: The Epistle to Titus*, translated by T. Smail (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), 347-48.

³¹ Calvin, *Comm. Titus*, 349.

has not, in the first place, been taught at the feet of the Lord.”³²

In his summary of the teaching of I Corinthians, Calvin stressed that the preaching of godly ministers must be spiritual, not worldly. He shared Paul’s criticism of “those preposterous teachers or chattering speechmakers” in Corinth: “I am therefore quite sure that they did not openly detract from the substance of the Gospel in any respect; but since they were burning with a misguided and passionate desire for prominence, I think that they had devised a new method of teaching, that was not consistent with the simplicity of Christ; and they hoped that it would make them the objects of people’s admiration…The first step in serving Christ is to forget about ourselves, and think about the glory of the Lord alone, and about the salvation of men. Further, no person will ever be fit for teaching, if he has not first absorbed the power of the Gospel, so that he speaks, not so much with his lips, but from his very heart.”³³

Ministers without the Spirit of the living God cannot produce genuinely spiritual results for the glory of God. Of such ministers he wrote:: “Their preaching is dead, when it should be alive and producing results; and in order to be in the public eye themselves they disguise the Gospel, dressing it in different clothes, so that it may look like a worldly philosophy.”³⁴

Calvin held up the Apostle Paul as the example of the faithful preacher that all ministers should emulate. He wrote: “In fact, because his heart was really under the influence of the Spirit, there was not a scrap of ostentation about him, he was incapable of flattery, and was not concerned about pleasing men. He had one end in view, viz. that he and all others being

³² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, translated by James Anderson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1979), vol. 2, 237.

³³ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, translated by John Fraser (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1960), 8.

³⁴ Calvin, *Comm. I Cor.*, 9.

restored to order, Christ might reign. Since the Corinthians had a liking for teaching that was clever rather than beneficial, they had no relish for the Gospel. Since they were eager for new things, Christ was already out of date to them. At any rate, if they had not yet actually fallen into those errors, they were already naturally inclined towards seductive things of that sort. So it was easy for the false apostles to get a hearing among them, and to adulterate the teaching of Christ... Therefore, in order to suit the Corinthians' taste, they added seasoning to their teaching, with the result that the true flavour of the Gospel was ruined.³⁵ Truly faithful ministers may not suit the taste of worldly listeners, but they are called to preach the real Gospel with the glamour of this world.

The program of the Reformation—namely a genuinely biblical understanding of the Gospel, the church, worship and the ministry—remained remarkably constant for Calvin throughout his life. But his evaluation of the actual success of the reform in different places rose and fell. In 1560 he wrote quite optimistically about the advance of the Reformation in Poland: “God has thought the kingdom of Poland worthy of an extraordinary privilege and honour, in that the majority of the nobility have finished with ungodly superstitions, which are corruptions and debasements of the worship of God, and unanimously desire the right kind of godliness, and a properly constituted Church order.”³⁶

Late in his life as he surveyed the progress of the reform particularly in France he could be rather pessimistic about the spread of the Gospel. In 1563 he dedicated his Genesis commentary to Henri de Bourbon, then the ten-year old son of Jeanne d’Albret, Queen of Navarre. This boy was the future King of France, Henri IV. The dedication breathes a rather pessimistic

³⁵ Calvin, *Comm. I Cor.*, 9.

³⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on Acts*, 4.

spirit-almost prophetic in light of the future apostasy of Henri-reflecting the struggles of the Reformation and Calvin's declining health:

We are often disturbed and almost disheartened at the paucity of those who follow the pure doctrine of God; and especially when we see how far and wide superstitions extend their dominion. And, as formerly, the Spirit of God, by the mouth of Isaiah the prophet, commanded the Jews to look to the Rock whence they were hewn—that is to say, to their father Abraham, who was but one solitary man, —so he recalls us to the same consideration, and admonishes us of the absurdity of measuring the Church by its numbers, as if its dignity consisted in its multitude. If sometimes, in various places, Religion is less flourishing than could be wished, if the body of the pious is scattered, and the state of a well-regulated Church has gone to decay, not only do our minds sink, but entirely melt within us. On the contrary, while we see in this history of Moses, the building of the Church out of ruins, and the gathering of it out of broken fragments, and out of desolation itself, such an instance of the grace of God ought to raise us to firm confidence. But since the propensity, not to say the wanton disposition, of the human mind to frame false systems of worship is so great, nothing can be more useful to us than to seek our rule for the pure and sincere worshipping of God, from those holy Patriarchs, whose piety Moses points out to us chiefly by this mark, that they depended on the Word of God alone. For however great may be the difference between them and us in external ceremonies, yet that which ought to flourish in unchangeable vigour is common to us both, namely, that Religion should take its form from the sole will and pleasure of God.³⁷

However discouraged Calvin became at moments in his life, he never lost the settled conviction that true church would survive, even if in weakness: “Surely the church of Christ has lived and will live so long as Christ reigns

³⁷ Calvin, *Commentaries on Genesis*, li.

at the right hand of his Father... first, they [Romanists] contend that the form of the church is always apparent and observable. Secondly, they set this form in the see of the Roman Church and its hierarchy. We, on the contrary, affirm that the church can exist without any visible appearance, and that its appearance is not contained within that outward magnificence which they foolishly admire. Rather, it has quite another mark: namely, the pure preaching of God's Word and the lawful administration of the sacraments.”³⁸

Calvin knew that for all the problems that the church faced, it would never fail because if its great leader, Jesus the Christ: “Anyone who takes it on himself to forward the doctrine of salvation and the safety of the Church must be armed with unconquerable perseverance; but since this is a matter beyond our strength, God will supply us with heavenly weapons. Meantime it is our duty to have written on our hearts the promises which occur throughout Scripture that as the Lord has laid the foundations of the Church with His own hand, so He will not allow it to remain derelict without being concerned for repairing and restoring its ruins. In so saying He promises that He will never fail us in this work... But this one thing is abundantly sufficient to encourage us, in that we have a Leader so invincible that the more battles He fights, the more triumphs and victories He gains.”³⁹

Conclusion

We have surveyed at length Calvin’s vision for the reform of the Church. I have quoted Calvin at length to demonstrate his clarity and his passion for the Reformation and to show that these concerns were pervasive throughout

³⁸ Calvin, “Address to King Francis,” 24-25.

³⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews*, xiii-xiv.

his career. Also I hope that these quotations make clear that many Protestant churches have traveled far from Calvin's Reformation vision.

Many within the churches descended from the Reformation no longer share Calvin's confidence in the truthfulness of the Bible. Rather the Bible is treated either as a fallible record of human religious experiences or as a revelation of God mixed with human errors. Human minds are the real authority determining what in the Bible is true and valuable.

Similarly for many the Bible is no longer accepted as sufficient for the worship and government of the church. Worship and the leadership of the church must be supplemented with rites, activities, leaders, and offices that have no biblical warrant.

In many churches the perspicuity of the Bible has been functionally rejected. Many have learned to accept differences in the church as insoluble. The Bible cannot resolve differences between Calvinists and Arminians, between baptists and paedo-baptists, between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, between Sabbatarians and anti-Sabbatarians, between Pentecostals and cessationists, and among various eschatological positions. Many seem to regard the Bible as a wax nose that cannot solve our theological differences.

The interpretation of the Bible has fallen into all sorts of abuses today. Some use the Bible to create pseudo-sciences of geology or psychology. Others treat it as a book of secrets to be decoded through a wooden literalism. Still others use it as a source of poetic inspiration, lifting images and sentences out of their context. Today as in the sixteenth century the Bible is formally honored, but increasingly not read with understanding.

Today often human depravity, the work of Christ, and irresistible grace are replaced by a Gospel of health, wealth and happiness. Christians are not called to self-denial and following Christ in the path of suffering, but rather are assured that the abundant life of this world will be theirs.

The worship of the church has become a feel-good experience, rather than

a meeting with the holy God. Exciting music has become the new sacrament mediating the presence of God and his grace. Sermons have become pop psychology, moralistic exercises in self-help.

The new life and worship of the church necessitates new kinds of ministers. Ministers have tended to become actors or entertainers or counselors or organizers or cheerleaders, instead of preachers and pastors.

The new kinds of ministers logically require a new kind of education. Ministers should be educated in psychology, anthropology, sociology, dramatic arts and business administration. Such education is worlds away from the education for the ministry called for in the Reformation. Then to prepare for the ministry a man needed a thorough education in literature, history, philosophy and languages, especially Hebrew and Greek. Such an education had the great purpose of preparing ministers to read, to understand and to teach the Bible as the life and food of the church.

So we return to the question with which we began: Is the Reformation over? The answer of Noll and Nystrom that its importance is greatly diminished makes sense in light of what the Protestant churches have so largely become. There is in fact not much difference between revivalist evangelicals and Roman Catholics. Indeed where Protestants reject the Reformation understandings of the Scriptures, salvation, the church, worship and ministry, the Reformation is over.

In this Calvin anniversary year, however, we should ask a slightly different question from the one posed by Noll and Nystrom. We should ask this: Ought the Reformation to be over? To answer that question we should note that there is as much difference as ever between Calvin and Roman Catholicism—a difference almost as great as that between Calvin and the revivalist tradition of the last two centuries. I believe that we ought to recognize afresh that Calvin is still right about the functional authority of the Bible and about the Bible's program of reform for the church. This is still

the great work of God to which we are called.

We should hear Calvin speaking to us in his words to King Edward of England: “Indeed, if there has ever been a time when the truth of God needed to be freely and boldly maintained, it has never been more necessary than in the present day, as all can see.”⁴⁰

Let us be called by Calvin back to the Scriptures: “In case the faithful are carried about by every wind of imposture, in case they should be exposed to the crafty scoffing of the ungodly, let them be taught by the sure experience of faith, and know that nothing is more firm or certain than the teaching of Scripture, and on that support let them confidently rest.”⁴¹

As we survey the state of the Church today, we could easily be discouraged if we accept Calvin’s vision of the biblical teaching on salvation and the church. Calvin’s counsel to us would that we should work as reformers according to the Word, but despite the difficulties, he would exhort us not to lose heart. Ultimately the work must be the Lord’s: “...when we repair the ruins of the Church, we give our labours to the Lord, in obedience to his laws and injunctions, and yet the restoration of the Church is his own work.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on First Peter*, 219.

⁴¹ Calvin, *Commentary on First Peter*, 225.

⁴² Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, xxiii.

국문초록**칼빈과 종교 개혁의 필요성**

W. Robert Godfrey

16세기 개신교인들과 천주교인들은 그들을 서로 나누어 놓은 문제가 아주 중요해서 자신들이 이 차이를 무시하거나 적당히 절충하여 해소해 버릴 수 있을 정도가 아니라고 믿었었다. 칼빈 탄생 500주년을 기념하는 2009년에 우리는 종교 개혁의 성격을 잘 생각해 보고, 종교 개혁이 여전히 교회의 삶에 계속적인 가치를 지닐 수 있는지를 다시 생각해 보아야 할 것이다.

이 문제를 생각하기 위해서 이 소논문에서는 칼빈이 자신의 다양한 저작들의 불인 현사들에 표현해낸 종교 개혁에 대한 칼빈 자신의 요약들을 중심으로 종교 개혁의 필요에 대한 칼빈의 견해를 생각해 보았다.

동시에 우리는 종교개혁의 후예들도 자처하는 많은 교회들이 성경의 신실성에 대한 칼빈의 확신을 더 이상 공유하지 않고 있는 현실을 목도하였다. 이와 비슷하게 많은 사람들은 성경이 예배와 교회 정치를 위해 충족한 것이라고 믿지 않고 있다. 오늘날 예배와 교회의 지도력은 성경적 보증을 얻을 수 없는 의식들(rites)과 지도자들과 직분들로 대치되고 있다. 오늘날 많은 교회들에서 성경의 명료성은 제거 되어 버렸다. 많은 이들은 성경을 우리들의 신학적 다름들을 해결할 수 없는 “초로 만든 코”(wax nose) 같은 것으로 여기는 듯하다. 오늘날 성경 해석은 온갖 방식으로 오용되고 있다. 오늘날도 16세기에서와 같이 성경이 형식적으로는 존중되고 있지만 점차 아무 생각 없이 읽혀지고 있다. 오늘날은 인간의 부패성, 그리스도의 사

역, 그리고 불가항력적 은혜가 건강의 복음, 부의 복음, 그리고 행복의 복음으로 대체 되었다. 교회의 예배도 거룩한 하나님을 만나 뵈옵는 것이기 보다는 예배하니 마음이 편하고 종교적 심리가 만족되는 우리를 기쁘게 하는 종교로 전락하고 말았다.

이런 이해를 가지고 “종교 개혁은 과연 끝났는가?”라는 질문에 대답을 해야 하는 것이다. 내가 판단하기로는 성경의 실질적 권위와 교회 개혁에 대한 성경의 프로그램을 말하는 칼빈의 견해가 21세기 상황에서도 여전히 옳다고 하지 않을 수 없다.

주제어: 요한 칼빈, 종교 개혁의 필요성, 성경의 권위, 성경이 말하는 개혁의 프로그램, 성경의 충족성, 성경적 예배 방식, 성경적 교회 정치관