



Calvin – Integrity and Reputation



To the end, May 27, 1564

Diligence & Self-sacrifice

- A naturally frail countenance
- Long hours
- Poor and restricted diet
- Plagued w/physical ailments
- Meager remuneration
- Lived in a house w/out ammenities



I have lived here amid continual bickerings. I have been from derision saluted ... before my door with forty or fifty shots of an arquebuses. ... I was expelled from this town ... and when ... I was called back hither, ... I had no less trouble ... than heretofore. They set the dogs at my heels, ... and these snapped at my gown and my legs. ... I have been amid combats ... yet know I well that I have prevented three thousand tumults that would have broken out in Geneva.

But take courage and fortify yourselves, for God will make use of this church and will maintain it, ...

Jérôme-Hermès Bolsec



- a French Carmelite theologian-turned-Protestant,
 - First publicly challenged John Calvin, on the doctrine of predestination.
 - Unable to persuade Calvin,
 - Bolsec eventually returned to Roman Catholicism.
- Published *Vie de Calvin*, 1577
 - Calvin was irredeemably tedious and malicious, bloodthirsty & frustrated
 - Calvin treated his own words as if they were the Word of God and allowed himself to be worshipped as God.
 - He was both homosexual & promiscuous with women.
- All claims and condemnations were unsubstantiated and uncorroborated.

“The Bolsec myth, like so many other myths concerning Calvin, lives on as a sacred tradition through uncritical repetition, despite its evident lack of historical foundation.”

(McGrath)



“It is probably fair to suggest that Calvin was not a particularly attractive person, lacking the wit, humour and warmth which made Luther so entertaining at dinner parties.

Calvin’s persona, as it emerges from this writings, is that of a somewhat cold and detached individual, increasingly inclined towards tetchiness and irritability as his health declined, and prone to launch into abusive personal attacks on those with whom he disagreed, rather than dealing primarily with their ideas.”



“The key to his complex personality lies in his understanding of his calling. ... He considered that, despite his personal worthlessness, God had called him, changed the course of his life, directed him to Geneva, and conferred upon him the office of pastor and preacher of the gospel.

Whatever authority Calvin possessed he understood to derive from God rather than his own innate talents and abilities. He was but an instrument in the hand of God.”

(McGrath, p. 17-18)

Favorite Attacks Upon Calvin

- “The Dictator of Geneva”
- Calvin’s Involvement in the Servetus affair
- The Doctrine of Predestination

#1: “the great dictator of Geneva”

“Myths concerning [Calvin in Geneva] abound, reflecting the intense distaste with which Calvin has been viewed by many in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. ... [w]here this myth is not total invention, it is a serious distortion of the historical facts.” (McGrath, p. 105)

Significant Character Assassination

- Balzac, a 19th c writer of French fiction and not an historian, wrote in his massive work, *La Comedie humaine*, that immediately upon Calvin's return to Geneva in 1541 “executions began, and Calvin organized his religious terror.”
- Stefan Zweig, 20th c. novelist, described Calvin as an authoritarian leader who ruled the unfortunate inhabitants of Geneva with a rod of iron.
- Aldous Huxley, 20th c novelist, asserted, without documentation, that “during the great Calvin's theocratic rule of Geneva a child was publicly decapitated for having ventured to strike its parents.”

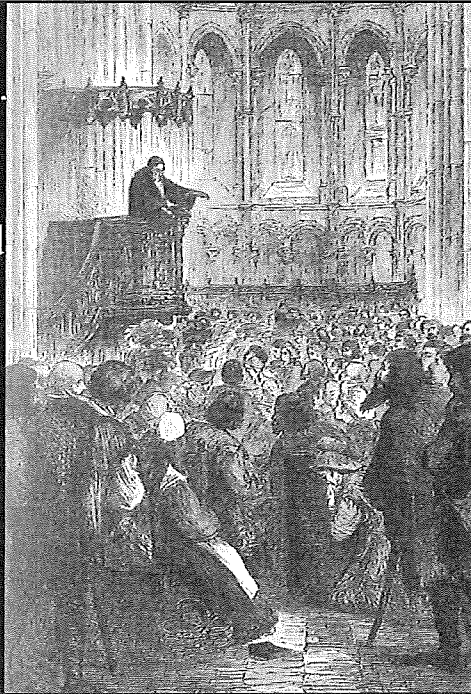


- There was no reign of terror. One public execution (Servetus)
- Civil/Criminal codes in Geneva owed nothing to Calvin's influence.
- A "theocratic" rule is a criticism levied against any govt. that desires to impose a moral authority.
- The city council maintained a competitive relationship with Calvin. "By restricting citizenship, with its full rights ... the council had effectively forestalled the ambitions of any foreigner to exercise political influence within the city. Calvin was thus denied access to the city's decision-making machinery." (McGrath, p. 109)

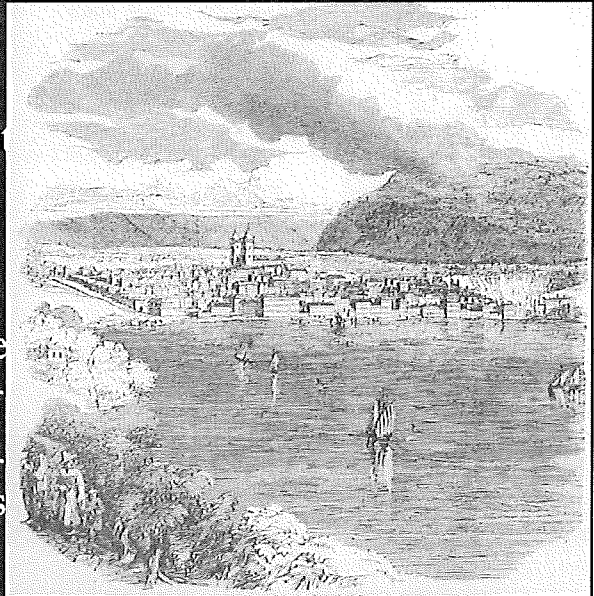
- 1553 – The Libertines, the political opponents of Calvin, controlled the city council. Calvin offered to resign but was refused.
- The tug-of-war between the city council and the consistory (the company of pastors) over right to exercise spiritual discipline intensifies.
- The city council is determined to maintain its control of the administration of justice. "Calvin might be allowed authority within the Consistory to discipline wayward members of his congregations by temporarily barring them from the communion services; as a mere habitant he was, however, rigorously excluded from the dispensation of civil and criminal justice." (McGrath, p. 115)

Yet, the facts are that Calvin never ruled Geneva.

The city was not a totalitarian society, but a republic with elections and dissent. Calvin held no civil office, he could neither arrest nor punish any citizen, nor could he appoint or dismiss any official. (To argue that his eloquence and logic constituted tyranny, is to invent a new standard.)



Under Calvin, Geneva developed into Europe's greatest concentration of printers and publishing firms. It became the epicentre of the movement for freedom world wide. Yet Calvin continues to be slandered by ignorant and prejudiced people.



#2: Calvin's Involvement in the Servetus affair

"The sixteenth century new little, if anything, of the modern distaste for capital punishment, and regarded it as a legitimate and expedient method of eliminating undesirables and discouraging their imitation. The city of Geneva was no exception: lacking a long-term prison (short-term prisoners were held captive, at their own expense, while they awaited trial), it had only two major penalties at its disposal – banishment and execution.

"To target [Calvin] this way – when the manner of his involvement was, to say the least, oblique – and overlook the much greater claims to infamy of other individuals and institutions raises difficult questions concerning the precommitments of his critics. Servetus was the only individual put to death for his religious opinions in Geneva during Calvin's lifetime, at a time when executions of this nature were a commonplace elsewhere." (McGrath, p. 115-6)

Miguel Servetus (1511-1553)

- A Spanish physician
- 1531 – *On the Errors of the Trinity* and others, denouncing the Trinity, that Jesus was not divine nor God.
- Resorting to another name to escape authorities and persecution, he continued to write.
- His studies in medicine and other publications in the medical field were quite competent, giving him respectability, although hostile to those who disagreed with his works. His works began to be censured.



Miguel Servetus (1511-1553)

- 1540 – He becomes the personal physician to the Archbishop of Vienna.
- Calvin and Servetus begin to correspond, both using pseudonyms.
- 1553 – *The Restoration of Christianity* – continuing to reject the Trinity and rejecting the idea of predestination.
- The correspondence between the two became more heated until Calvin ended it. Calvin rejected both this views and his tone.
- 1553 – denounced as a heretic and arrested by Roman Catholic authorities and imprisoned in Vienna, but managed to escape. In absence, he was condemned and burned in effigy.



“With the coming of the Reformation to the cities of western Europe, the destabilizing tendencies of heresy became increasingly obvious. From the beginning, there was a tension between those reformers who saw reform as a symbiotic process involving reformers and magistrates acting together within the established order, and those radical reformers who regarded the true Reformation as sweeping away the existing corrupt social and political order. ...

Once it had been proven that there was a heretic in [Geneva’s] midst with sympathies which placed him alongside the radical wing of the Reformation, the Genevan authorities had little option but to act, ... (McGrath, p. 118)

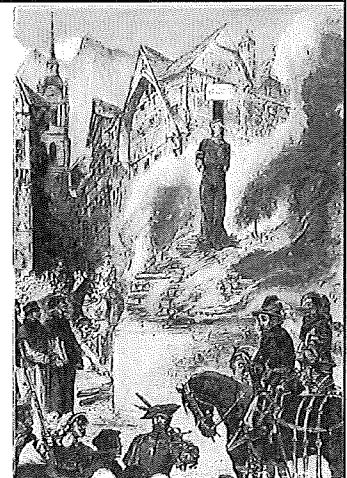
Miguel Servetus (1511-1553)

- August, 1553, Servetus walks into Geneva. He attends a sermon given by Calvin and was arrested after the service and imprisoned.
- French Inquisitors asked Servetus be extradited that they may execute him.
- Calvin's health kept him from being directly involved (the complainant, himself, was routinely incarcerated too pending the trial) but was represented by de la Fontaine. Calvin served as a witness but not as prosecution.
- Servetus was condemned on charges of spreading and preaching nontrinitarianism (a grave crime in the church's eyes), and anti-paedobaptism (more an issue with the state).
- After so many years of hostile communication and attack, Calvin was now done with him. "I hope that sentence of death will at least be passed on him; but I desired that the severity of the punishment be mitigated." (in a letter to Farel)



Miguel Servetus (1511-1553)

- The government of Geneva consulted other Swiss cantons as to course of action. They all supported his condemnation and suppression of his doctrine. M. Luther had condemned his writings strongly, as did Melancthon, as well as the Libertines (who were, as a party, opposed to everything Calvin supported), who called directly for his execution at the stake.
- Oct. 24, 1553 – The council, presided by a Libertine, sentenced Servetus to death by burning on both counts. Calvin's request for beheading was rejected.
- Oct. 27, 1553 – Servetus was burned alive above a pyre of his own books.



The Aftermath

- Philip Melanchthon: "To you the Church owes gratitude at the present moment, and will owe it to the latest posterity ... I affirm also that your magistrates did right in punishing, after a regular trial, this blasphemous man." Many others expressed similar sentiments.
- Sebastian Castellio, a French preacher and theologian, and one of the first proponents for religious toleration, was angered and accused Calvin, singularly, of blatant murder.
- Calvin still was in the opposition party of Geneva until 1555, when the new elections showed a dramatic support for Calvin. "If 1553 was the low point for Calvin politically in Geneva, 1555 was the high point.
- From that election until the time of his death in 1564, Calvin's life in Geneva became secure and peaceful." (Godfrey, p. 134)



"It is not entirely clear why scholars have singled out the execution of Servetus as somehow more notable or significant than the mass executions carried out within Germany after the abortive Peasants' War (1525) and after the ending of the siege of Munster (1534), or the ruthless policy of execution of Roman Catholic priests in Elizabethan England. Even as late as 1612, the English secular arm, at the behest of the bishops of London and Lichfield, publicly burned two individuals who held views like those of Servetus. In France, similar ruthless policies of execution were employed: thirty-nine individuals were ordered to be burned at Paris for heresy between May 1547 and March 1550."

"[I]f Calvin cannot be excused in this manner, he may and must be contextualized, in an era which, lacking many of the sensitivities of twentieth-century liberal thought, regarding the execution of heretics as routine." (McGrath, p. 117)

Yet, historians have
noted that:

*“No good man has
ever had a worse
press; no Christian
Theologian is so
often scorned; so
regularly
attacked.”*



The great Reformer, John
Calvin, declared:

**“No greater
injury can be
inflicted upon
men than to
ruin their
reputation.”**



#3: The Doctrine of Predestination – an admittedly “awful” doctrine

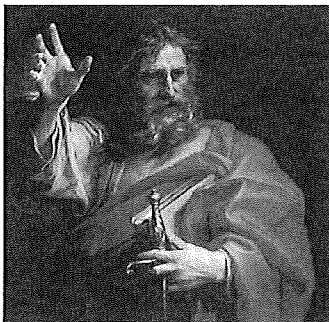


By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.

The will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it. Therefore, when it is asked why the Lord did so, we must answer, 'Because he pleased.' But if you proceed farther to ask why he pleased, you ask for something greater and more sublime than the will of God, and nothing such can be found.

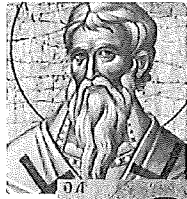


Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. (Gen. 17:4-7, ESV)



For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, (Rom. 9:6-7)

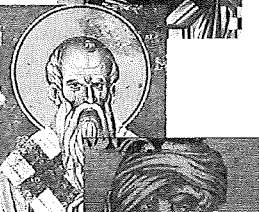
In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, (Eph. 1:5-6, 11, ESV)



Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 200): ... 8 But He Himself in Himself, after a fashion which we can neither describe nor conceive, **predestinating all things**, formed them as He pleased, bestowing harmony on all things, and assigning them their own place, and the beginning of their creation. *ANF: Vol. I, Against Heresies, Book 2:2:4.*



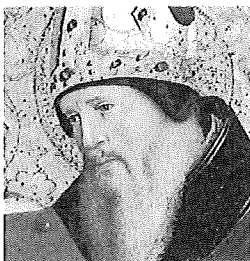
Clement of Alexandria (150 – c. 215): Therefore in substance and idea, in origin, in pre-eminence, we say that the ancient and Catholic Church is alone, collecting as it does into the unity of the one faith—which results from the peculiar Testaments, or rather the one Testament in different times **by the will of the one God**, through one Lord—**those already ordained, whom God predestinated, knowing before the foundation of the world that they would be righteous.** *ANF: Vol. II, The Stromata, Book VII, Chapter XVII.*



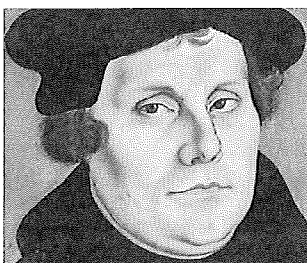
Clement Romanus – “Let us therefore consider, brethren, out of what matter we are made; who and what we were when we came into the world, as out of the grave and darkness itself; **who, having made and formed us, brought us into his world having first prepared his good things for us, before we were born.**” “Therefore He (that is, God), being desirous that **all his beloved ones should partake of repentance, confirmed it by his almighty will.**”



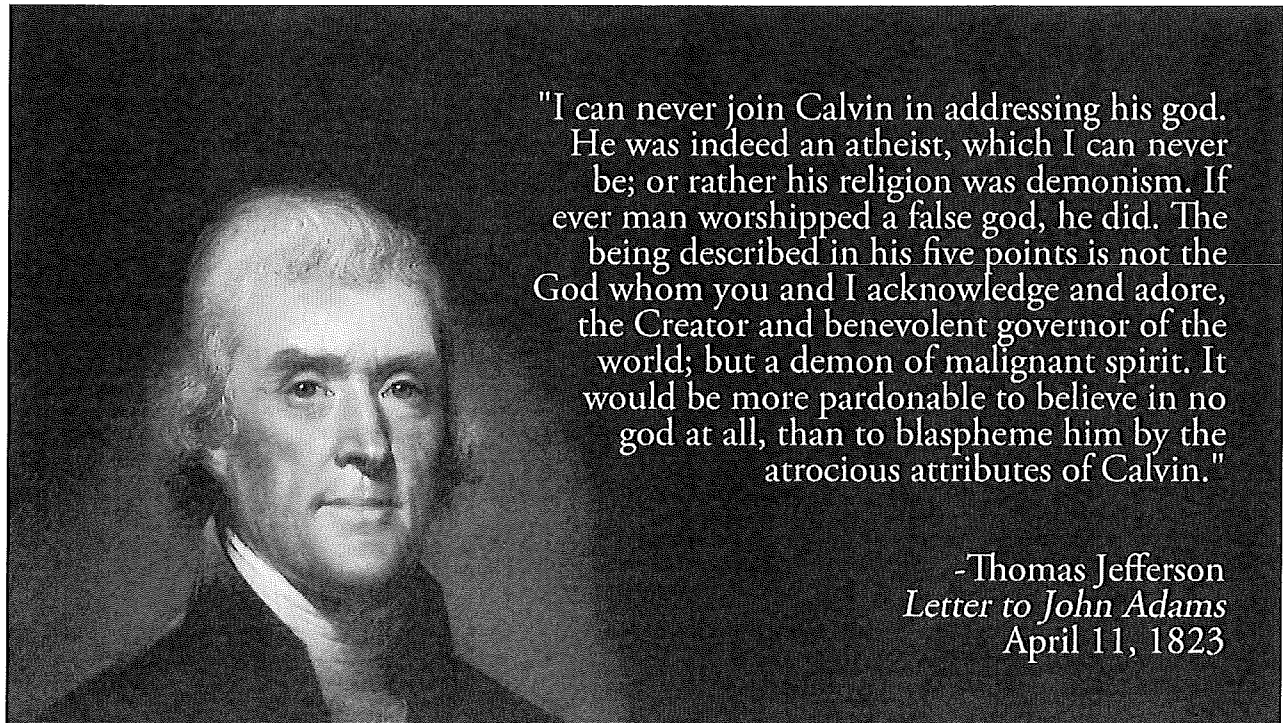
Tertullian 200 AD, “he distinguishes the issues of things, not substances; for who does not place the judgment of God in a twofold sentence of salvation and punishment? Wherefore *all flesh is grass, which is appointed to the fire, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God; which is ordained to salvation.*” “there can be no election without reprobation.”



Augustine (354-430) “Predestination should be taught... because it is one of the primary Gospel doctrines, and foundations of faith. It cannot be ignored without great injury to the Church and to believers, since it is the fount of our gratitude to God, the root of humility, the foundation and most firm anchor of confidence in all temptations, the fulcrum of the sweetest consolation, and the most powerful spur to piety and holiness.” *Institutio Theologiae Elenticae, Question 6*

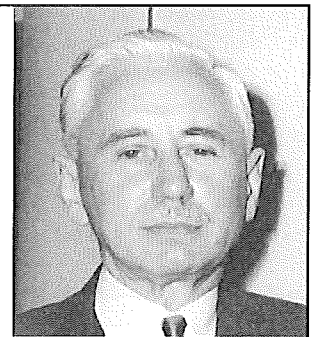


“That is what Reason can neither grasp nor endure, and what has offended all these men of outstanding talent who have been so received for so many centuries. Here they demand that God should act according to human justice, and do what seems right to them or else cease to be God.” (M. Luther)



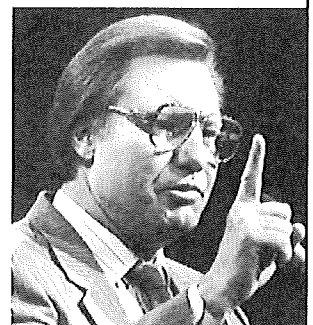
Will Durant, 1885-1981

"... we shall always find it hard to love the man who darkened the human soul with the most absurd and blasphemous conception of God in all the long and honored history of nonsense."



Jimmy Swaggart, 1935 -

"Calvin has, I believe, caused untold millions of souls to be damned ... "



Uses of Predestination

- Improper
 - Curiosity
 - We can (& must) state the doctrine as what we know to be true
 - We cannot explain it or go beyond what Scripture reveals to us about it (Dt. 29:29)
 - Defiance

"People want to know why God chose some and passed by others. Don't ask me. Don't ask John Calvin. Don't ask any man, but ask God. God chose some to holiness and sonship because it pleased him to do so. Why it pleased him to do so it has not pleased him to reveal."

(J.B. Green)

Uses of Predestination

- Proper
 - There is a sweet fruit here
 - It gives all glory to God
 - It humbles all men.

"Predestination undercuts all confidence in work righteousness and lays bare the source of human salvation. It is the negation of all merit and places salvation solely in the mercy of God. It means that salvation is rescue and not achievement. ... Predestination was Calvin's most emphatic way of saying that justification is the work of God's grace. Just as justification by faith through grace was Luther's most emphatic way of saying the same thing."

(J. Leith)

Uses of Predestination

- Proper
 - Election encourages confidence
 - Roman Catholicism – “do what is within you.” Purgatory will finish the work.
 - Anabaptists – good works must be sufficient
 - Calvin – assurance is found in the promises of God and not in ourselves
 - Election creates worship/reverence
 - “I see the depth but do not reach the bottom. Paul rested where he found wonder.” (Augustine)

“In being quite abased in ourselves let us seek that we may be so renewed in the image of God that it may shine perfectly in us until we are made partakers of the glorious immortality that he has so dearly bought for us. Also, that it may please him to grant this grace not only to us but to all peoples and all nations.”

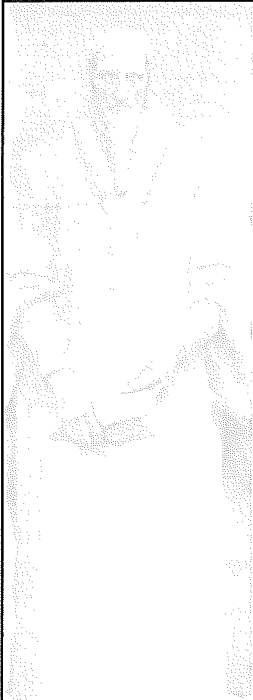
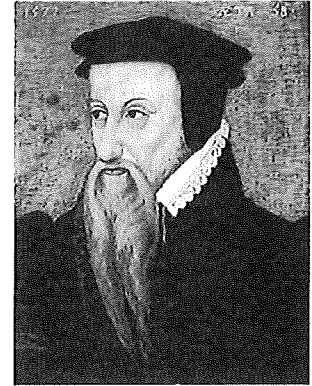
(J. Calvin)

Uses of Predestination

- Proper
 - God’s revealed will
 - Election/Reprobation
 - Love for the lost
 - May not sound logical but it is biblical.
 - Gives us impetus to pray for and seek the lost.

Theodore Beza, 1519-1605

"Having been a spectator of his conduct for sixteen years ... I can 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."



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