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**ABBREVIATIONS**

<i>CO</i>	<i>Opera quae supersunt omnia</i> (Calvin’s writings)
<i>Commentary</i>	Calvin’s Commentaries
Inst.	Calvin’s <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> (Battles’ edition)
Inst. (Bev.)	Calvin’s <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> (Beveridge’s edition)

## PREFACE

For many years, I have searched for a book that would cover the intellectual and spiritual emphases of Calvinism, the way it influences the church and everyday living, and its ethical and cultural implications. The book I had in mind would explain for today's reader the biblical, God-centered, heartfelt, winsome, and practical nature of Calvinism, and would clearly convey how Calvinism earnestly seeks to meet the purpose for which we were created, namely, to live to the glory of God. By doing so, it would serve as a corrective to the many caricatures of Calvinism that still exist in North America and beyond.

I searched in vain. Over the years, I have frequently used H. Henry Meeter's *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism* and Leonard Coppes's *Are Five Points Enough? The Ten Points of Calvinism*, as well as a number of smaller books on the five points of Calvinism. But none of these, good though they are, covered all the emphases I had in mind. After giving a number of addresses on Calvinism for Malcolm Watts' conference in Salisbury, England, for the Puritan Project in Brazil, and for a conference in Adelaide, Australia, I realized more acutely the real need for the kind of book I envisioned. I wish to thank these groups for the warm fellowship I received from them, and I am glad that I can finally respond to their requests to publish these addresses as part of this introductory volume on Calvinism.

Greg Bailey of Ligonier Ministries pushed me to do the book myself with a commitment that he would edit it and that Ligonier would publish it through its Reformation Trust Publishing imprint—provided that I could complete it early in 2008 to be available in time to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth in 2009. So, in the end, I felt compelled to undertake the task myself. Looking back, I thank Greg for the early deadline and for his capable handling of my manuscript.

My first outline included fifteen chapters, but by the time I finished, the book had doubled in size. I apologize for that and hope the length won't be a hindrance to anyone who wants to learn more about Calvinism. I do have some justification, however, for expanding this book. In the 1980s, my doctoral dissertation adviser, D. Clair Davis, often said that Calvinism is so comprehensive that it is hard to get one's mind and arms around it. He would then say, a bit

tongue-in-cheek, that this comprehensiveness is one major difference between Lutheranism and Calvinism. Lutheranism could neatly bring all of its confessional statements under one cover in 1580 and call it *The Book of Concord*.<sup>1</sup> But the Calvinistic faith is so rich that at least three families of confessional statements developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the English-Scottish family, the Dutch-German family, and the Swiss family—none of which contradicted the others but built on and complemented them.<sup>2</sup>

This diversity is reflective of John Calvin himself. His theological work was comprehensive and, as a result, it has significant ramifications for a host of areas of human life, society, and culture. He was intent on bringing every sphere of existence under the lordship of Christ, so that all of life might be lived to the glory of God. That is why Calvinism cannot be explained simply by one major doctrine or in five points, or, if we had them, even ten points! Calvinism is as complex as life itself.

The breadth of Calvinism, earnestly and zealously lived out, is most clearly manifest in Puritanism. Therefore, I have held the Puritans up as examples in a number of areas, including sanctification (chapters 14 and 15), evangelism (chapter 21), and marriage and family life (chapters 23 and 24). The Puritans have much to teach us today about how to live with one eye on eternity and the other on this world, dedicating our entire lives to God's glory.<sup>3</sup>

The target audience for this book is laypeople and ministers who are interested in learning the basics of Calvinism. I hope it also will serve as a stimulating summary and refresher course for those who are already avid Calvinists, much as Steven J. Lawson's *The Expository Genius of John Calvin* from Reformation Trust excites those of us who are already familiar with much of its content.<sup>4</sup> I have worked hard to keep this book simple, clear, and non-technical, in the hope that you might hand it to others to help them understand how you think as a Calvinist.

I called on some of my friends to cover certain areas of Calvinism. I owe a great debt to Ray Pennings for writing so helpfully on three of the most challenging areas of Calvinism: its comprehensive nature (chapter 22), vocational Calvinism (chapter 25), and political Calvinism (chapter 26). I asked James Grier to summarize philosophical Calvinism (chapter 11), Derek Thomas to present ecclesiastical Calvinism (chapter 16), Ray Lanning to explore liturgical Calvinism (chapter 17), Robert Oliver to work on expositional Calvinism (chapter 18); and Nelson Kloosterman to examine Calvinist ethics (chapter 27). Each of them ably and graciously fulfilled my requests; their chapters were a joy to edit. I also asked

my dear friend and mentor, Sinclair Ferguson, to provide the capstone on doxological Calvinism (chapter 28), which, astonishingly, he wrote in one afternoon, on the final due date. I am grateful for his moving conclusion to this book.

I also thank Michael Haykin, a dear brother and great church historian, who eagerly and faithfully read the entire manuscript; offered numerous valuable suggestions; and contributed a preface, a chapter on Calvinistic spirituality (chapter 12), and the first draft of the study questions. I am also deeply grateful to Phyllis TenElshof, Martha Fisher, Kate DeVries, and Ray Lanning for their proofing and editorial assistance. Thanks, too, are due to Jay Collier and Fred Sweet for tracking details on a number of stubborn endnotes.

I thank our pastoral flock, the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, and our staffs at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and Reformation Heritage Books for their encouragement and patience when I am in a book-writing mode. Particular thanks go to my colleagues, Gerald Bilkes and David Murray, who never hesitate to go the extra mile at my request. I could not work with better colleagues or have better staff.

My dear, faithful wife Mary is a constant source of inspiration, and I thank her for allowing me to work late at night on this book. I am grateful for my loving children, Calvin, Esther, and Lydia, whose kindness to me is unsurpassed.

Most of all, I am grateful to the holy, gracious, beautiful triune God, who makes Himself increasingly lovable to me the older I grow. Though I fall short of my goal dozens of times every day, I can say that my consuming desire is to live to His glory, and I believe what we call Calvinism is the system of biblical truth that best enables us to do that by the gracious Spirit of God.

I am keenly aware that my friends and I have addressed only tiny segments of Calvinism. Many more areas could have been examined, but the basics are here.

As for the various sections of this book, I wish to express gratitude to God for the following people: for “Calvinism in History,” I am most grateful for Iain Murray and the Banner of Truth Trust’s books and conferences, as well as the teaching of Dr. Ferguson, Rick Gamble, and D. Clair Davis at Westminster Seminary in the 1980s.

For “Calvinism in the Mind,” I am indebted to the teaching of Rev. J. C. Weststrate, who was my first and primary theological seminary instructor in the 1970s. I was privileged to work with Rev. Weststrate on translating into English Rev. G. H. Kersten’s *Reformed Dogmatics*, which profoundly influenced me. More

recently, I am thankful for Richard Muller's friendship and writing, and for Dr. Grier's friendship and teaching. And, of course, I have been influenced by the opportunity to have taught systematic theology for more than twenty years, first with Dr. Ferguson and Mike Bell at the Center for Urban Theological Studies (CUTS) in inner-city Philadelphia, then at the Netherlands Reformed Theological School and at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary since 1994.

For "Calvinism in the Heart," I am deeply indebted to my departed father's numerous conversations with me about how the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of sinners, and to the preaching and teaching of Rev. W. C. Lamain, under whose ministry I was reared and who later gave me what he called "practical lessons for ministry" every six weeks during my seminary years. Then, too, I owe a huge debt to Rev. Arie Elshout and Rev. Cor Harinck, whose ministries God used to bring me to more experiential liberty in Christ Jesus. Perhaps I profited most of all from ransacking my father's bookcase as a teenager, reading his Puritan tomes night after night. Forty years later, the Puritans still speak powerfully to my soul. I have also been influenced by preparing a course on Reformed experiential preaching, which I have taught in several seminaries around the world.

For "Calvinism in the Church," I am grateful for the three congregations I have been privileged to serve over the past thirty years in Sioux Center, Iowa (1978–81), Franklin Lakes, N.J. (1981–86), and Grand Rapids, Mich. (since 1986). All three churches have treated me well, and many individuals have influenced me greatly by their humility and godliness. Despite ministerial pressures and failures, I cannot imagine a greater joy in life than serving as a pastor of God's sheep in a Reformed church that yearns to live by the whole counsel of God as deposited in the Scriptures.

For "Calvinism in Practice," my greatest influence has been the afflictions that my sovereign God has sent my way and that I hope and pray have been sanctified to me. I am afraid to consider who and where I would be without God's loving, paternal, chastening hand. This I know: if God had not broken me deeply many times in His sovereign wisdom, I would be more prideful than I am. What a glorious Father He is, not only in the first person of the Trinity, but also as the Son of God, who is called "everlasting Father" (Isa. 9:6), and as the Holy Spirit, whose fatherly patience with our backslidings is stupendous. Humanly speaking, I am most thankful for my wife's kindness and integrity, and my mother's prayers and godliness. Other friends over the years have greatly moved me as well; I think of

Bert Harskamp and Henry Langerak, former elders with whom I worked in love, who modeled Calvinistic humility so poignantly for me. I also must express my gratitude for Dutch writers, including Wilhelmus à Brakel (whose *Christian's Reasonable Service* I was privileged to edit for six years) and Herman Bavinck, as well as the teaching of Robert Knudsen at Westminster Seminary.

Finally, for “Calvinism’s Goal” (doxological Calvinism), nothing has moved me so much as Samuel Rutherford’s *Letters*, a copy of which I have kept on my nightstand for decades and turned to often for inspiration to praise my sovereign God, to whom darkness and light are both alike (Ps. 139:12).

Finally, in addition to my brothers, John and James Beeke, my fellow ministers and members in the Heritage Reformed and Free Reformed denominations, and the alumni and students of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, I wish to thank the following friends and colleagues for stimulating intellectual and spiritual fellowship on matters related to Calvinism: Tom Ascol, Karl Boonzaayer, John Brentnall, Flip Buys, Walter Chantry, Scott Clark, Robin Compston, Curt Daniel, Ben Dowling, Heinz Dschankilic, Ligon Duncan, George Ella, Edwin Elliott, Arnold Frank, W. Robert Godfrey, Ian Hamilton, Peter Hammond, Christo Heiberg, Paul Helm, Martin Holdt, Michael Horton, Irfon Hughes, Erroll Hulse, Sherman Isbell, Mark Johnston, Theodoros Joannides, Hywel Jones, Ronald Kalifungwa, David Lachman, Anthony Lane, John Lawler, Robert Letham, Peter Lillback, Sam Logan, Wayne Mack, William Macleod, Jerry Marcellino, Leo Markwat, Albert Martin, Peter Masters, Mike Mathis, Bill May, Gary Meadors, R. Albert Mohler, John J. Murray, Adrian Neele, Tom Nettles, Stuart Olyott, Kerry Orchard, Joseph Pipa, John Piper, Lance Quinn, Maurice Roberts, Hal Ronning, Phil Ryken, Calvin Rynbrandt, Carl Schroeder, David Schuringa, Tom Schwanda, Changwon Seo, Denis Shelton, Don Sinnema, R. C. Sproul, John Temple, John Thackway, Geoff Thomas, Carl Trueman, Tim Trumper, Tom VandenHeuvel, Arie VanEyck, Bernie VanEyck, Anthony VanGrouw, Ray VanGrouw, Fred van Lieburg, John VanVliet, Douglas Vickers, Brian Vos, Cees Vreugdenhil, Sam Waldron, Malcolm Watts, Donald Whitney, Andrew Woolsey, and William Young.

I have taken the liberty to modernize spellings in quotations from antiquarian books. In chapters of historical interest, endnotes containing additional source material are supplied. In more practical chapters, I have been more sparing in the use of endnotes.

It is my hope that this book will help those who are already Calvinists to

know, appreciate, and live the historical truths of Calvinism. If we do not *know* our Reformation heritage, ignorance will lead to indifference, and indifference to relinquishment. I urge you to study Reformed thinking. Immerse yourself in the writings of solid, renowned Calvinists. Read sixteenth-century classics such as Calvin's *Institutes*. Try Henry Bullinger's *The Decades*, which teaches the doctrines of the Bible in fifty messages on a somewhat simpler level than the *Institutes*. Read seventeenth-century classics, too, such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and John Flavel's *The Fountain of Life*. Pick up eighteenth-century works such as Wilhelms à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service* and Jonathan Edwards' *Religious Affections*. From the nineteenth century, read Octavius Winslow's *Work of the Holy Spirit* and Charles Spurgeon's *The Treasury of David*. From the twentieth century, read D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' *The Sermon on the Mount* and John Murray's systematic theology (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2).<sup>5</sup> If we do not *appreciate* our Reformation heritage, our faith will lack authenticity. No one will be jealous of us, for we will be sorely lacking in true peace, joy, and humility. And if we don't *live* our Reformation heritage, we will not be salt in the earth. When salt has lost its saltiness, it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men (Matt. 5:13).

Finally, if God uses this book to clear away some of the serious misrepresentations people have about Calvinism and to stir in many souls the faith and conviction to believe that all of life must be lived to His glory, my efforts will be more than amply rewarded.

—Joel R. Beeke  
Grand Rapids, Mich.  
February 2008

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 2 below.

<sup>3</sup> For two helpful sources that show the breadth of Puritanism's Calvinist vision, see Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), and *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Puritanism and Law*, 5, no. 2 (Winter, 1978–79). The bulk of the latter source is devoted to the Puritan approach to various spheres of life.

<sup>4</sup> Steven J. Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Reformation Trust, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> All of these books, and several thousand more of solid Reformed persuasion, are available at discount prices from Reformation Heritage Books, 2965 Leonard N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49525; 616-977-0599; orders@heritagebooks.org; www.heritagebooks.org.



PART ONE



**CALVINISM  
IN  
HISTORY**



# THE ORIGINS OF CALVINISM

*The spread of Calvinism was unusual. In contrast to Catholicism, which had been maintained by civil and military force, and Lutheranism, which survived in becoming a religion of politics, Calvinism had, for the most part, only its consistent logic and its fidelity to the Scriptures. Within a generation it spread across Europe.<sup>1</sup>*

—CHARLES MILLER

Calvinism is rooted in the sixteenth-century religious renewal in Europe that we refer to as the Protestant Reformation.<sup>2</sup> But this great movement was not an isolated phenomenon. It did not simply begin with Martin Luther's (1483–1546) act of posting his Ninety-five Theses on the church doors of Wittenberg on Oct. 31, 1517, even though those theses were soon translated into numerous languages and distributed to the masses. In one sense, the Reformation originated in Luther's so-called "tower experience," which probably predated his theses by a few years. Through this experience, Luther came to grasp the definitive doctrine of the Reformation: justification by gracious faith alone. But in another sense, the Reformation flowed out of earlier attempts for renewal, the most notable of which were led by Peter Waldo (ca. 1140–ca. 1217) and his followers in the Alpine regions,<sup>3</sup> John Wycliffe (ca. 1324–1384) and the Lollards in England,<sup>4</sup> and John Hus (ca. 1372–1415) and his followers in Bohemia.<sup>5</sup> Lesser-known divines, such as Thomas Bradwardine (ca. 1300–1349)<sup>6</sup> and Gregory of Rimini (ca. 1300–1358),<sup>7</sup> came even closer to what would become known as Protestant theology. All these men are properly called forerunners of the Reformation rather than Reformers because, although

they anticipated many of the emphases of the Reformation, they lacked a complete understanding of the critical doctrine of justification by gracious faith alone.<sup>8</sup>

These forerunners of the Reformation were morally, doctrinally, and practically united in their opposition to medieval Roman Catholic abuses. This opposition is critical to note, since the Reformation began primarily as a reaction to the abuses of Roman Catholicism. Luther did not set out to destroy the Roman Catholic Church and to establish a new church. His initial intent was to purge the Roman Catholic Church of abuses.

Reformed theology thus cannot be fully understood apart from its reaction to problems in the church, such as:

- *Papal abuses.* The medieval papacy was rife with abuses in theology and practice. Immoral conduct was lived out and condoned even by the popes, and grace became a cheap, commercialized religion throughout the church via a complex system of vows, fasts, pilgrimages, masses, relics, recitations, rosaries, and other works. The papal imperative was “do penance” (as translated in the Vulgate) rather than “be penitent,” or “repent,” as Jesus commanded.

- *Papal pretentiousness.* Biblical and historical study by the Protestant forerunners led them to question papal claims to apostolic authority as head of the church. For example, the Reformers concluded that the rock on which the church was built (Matt. 16:18) was the content of Peter’s faith rather than Peter himself, which meant that the bishop of Rome possessed no more than a position of honor. Though the Protestants initially were willing to accept a Reformed papacy that would honorably serve the church, the cruel opposition of the popes to reform eventually persuaded many of them to regard the pope of Rome as Antichrist (cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, 25.6).

- *Captivity of the Word.* Protestants taught that the Roman Catholic Church held Scripture captive, withholding it from the laypeople and thus keeping them in bondage to church councils, bishops, schoolmen, canonists, and allegorists for interpretation. The Protestants worked hard to deliver the Bible from this hierarchical captivity. As Malcolm Watts writes:

The Church of Rome degraded the Holy Scriptures by alloying the purity of the Canon with her apocryphal additions, by supplementing the inspired records with an enormous mass of spurious traditions, by admitting only that interpretation which is according to “the unanimous consent of the

Fathers” and “the Holy Mother Church,” and, particularly by diminishing the role of preaching as their “priests” busied themselves with miraculous stories about Mary, the saints and the images, and magnified the importance of the Mass, with its elaborate and multiplied ceremonies and rituals. It was thus that preaching deteriorated and, in fact, almost disappeared. The Reformers vigorously protested against this and contended with all their might for the recovery of God’s Holy Word.<sup>9</sup>

- *Elevation of monasticism.* Protestants opposed the Roman Catholic concept of the superiority of the so-called religious life. They did not believe that monasticism was the only way to spirituality or even the best way. By stressing the priesthood of all believers, they worked hard to eliminate the Roman Catholic distinction between the “inferior” life of the Christian involved in a secular calling and the “higher” religious world of monks and nuns.

- *Usurped mediation.* Protestants also rejected the Roman Catholic ideas of mediation by Mary and the intercession of saints, as well as the automatic transfusion of grace in the sacraments. They opposed all forms of mediation with God except through Christ. They reduced the sacraments to two, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, thereby stripping priests and the church of mediating power and the sacramental dispensation of salvation.

- *The role of good works.* Protestants rejected the ideas of Semi-Pelagianism, which says that both grace and works are necessary for salvation. This theological difference was at the heart of Protestant opposition to Roman Catholicism, though it was largely through moral and practical corruption that the issue came to the fore.

The Protestant response to Roman Catholic abuses gradually settled into five Reformation watchwords or battle cries, centered on the Latin word *solus*, meaning “alone.” These battle cries, expounded in chapter 10, served to contrast Protestant teaching with Roman Catholic tenets as follows:

<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Roman Catholic</i>
Scripture alone ( <i>sola Scriptura</i> )	Scripture and tradition
Faith alone ( <i>sola fide</i> )	Faith and works
Grace alone ( <i>sola gratia</i> )	Grace and merit
Christ alone ( <i>solus Christus</i> )	Christ, Mary, and intercession of saints
Glory to God alone ( <i>solus Deo gloria</i> )	God, saints, and church hierarchy

The first of these battle cries deals with the fundamental issue of authority, the middle three deal with the basics of salvation, and the final one addresses worship.

In early Protestantism, both Lutheran and Reformed believers embraced these five watchwords. Regrettably, Luther and Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), the early leader of the Swiss Reformation, parted ways in October 1529 during the infamous Marburg Colloquy, when they could not reach agreement on the nature of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper.<sup>10</sup> From that time on, Protestantism divided into two traditions, Lutheranism and Calvinism—the latter being the Reformed tradition as understood and expressed in the writings of John Calvin and his fellow Reformers.

#### THE SPREAD OF THE REFORMED (CALVINISTIC) FAITH

The Reformed tradition has its earliest roots in Switzerland with Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), who established and systematized it after Zwingli's death.<sup>11</sup> Calvin (1509–1564), its greatest representative and most influential exponent, established Geneva as a model Reformed city.<sup>12</sup> In many respects, Geneva was the most important Protestant center in the sixteenth century. This was not only because of the presence of Calvin, but also because the seminary Calvin established sought to train and educate Reformers for all of Western Europe. Amazingly—somewhat to the chagrin of some of the Genevan populace—the town became the Protestant print capital of Europe, with more than thirty houses publishing literature in various languages. Because of Zwingli's premature death on the battlefield, the fact that Bullinger's works<sup>13</sup> were not as easily accessible by the later Calvinist tradition, and Calvin's able work in systematizing Reformed Protestantism through his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, commentaries, sermons, and leadership, the terms *Reformed* and *Calvinism* became virtually synonymous. Calvin himself preferred *Reformed* because he was opposed to having the movement called by his name.

The Reformed movement then spread to Germany. The city of Heidelberg, where the Heidelberg Catechism originated, became an influential center of Reformed thinking. Nonetheless, much of Germany remained staunchly Lutheran. A minority of Lutherans in Germany were affected by Calvin's thinking, most notably Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), a close associate of Luther

who was unkindly referred to by his peers as a crypto-Calvinist.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, a number of Melanchthon's followers, estranged from the Lutherans after Luther's death, joined the Reformed Church in Germany.<sup>15</sup>

Calvinism also took hold in Hungary,<sup>16</sup> Poland, and the Low Countries, particularly the Netherlands, where it penetrated the southern regions about 1545 and the northern about 1560.<sup>17</sup> From the start, the Calvinist movement in the Netherlands was more influential than its number of adherents might suggest. But Dutch Calvinism did not flower profusely until the seventeenth century, cultivated by the famous international Synod of Dort in 1618–1619 and fortified by the Dutch Further Reformation (*De Nadere Reformatie*), a primarily seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century movement paralleling English Puritanism.<sup>18</sup> The Dutch Further Reformation dates from such early representatives as Jean Taffin (1528–1602) and Willem Teellinck (1579–1629), and extends to Alexander Comrie (1706–1774).<sup>19</sup>

The Reformed movement also made substantial inroads into France.<sup>20</sup> By the time Calvin died in 1564, 20 percent of the French population—some two million people—confessed the Reformed faith. In fact, this 20 percent included half of the aristocracy and middle class in France. For a while, it seemed that France might officially embrace the Reformed faith. But Roman Catholic persecution and civil war halted the spread of Reformed teaching. In some ways, the French Reformed movement has never recovered from this blow of persecution and attack in the sixteenth century. On the other hand, God brought good out of evil—the Reformed believers who fled France, known as the Huguenots, injected fresh spiritual vitality and zeal into the Reformed movement everywhere they settled.<sup>21</sup>

The Reformation spread rapidly to Scotland, largely under the leadership of John Knox (1513–1572), who served nineteen months as a galley slave before he went to England and then to Geneva. Knox brought the Reformation's principles from Geneva to Scotland and became its most notable spokesman there.<sup>22</sup> In 1560, the Scottish Parliament rejected papal authority, and the following year, the Scottish Reformed “Kirk,” or church, was reorganized. In ensuing generations, many Scots became stalwart Calvinists, as did many of the Irish and the Welsh.

In England, Henry VIII (1491–1547) rebelled against papal rule so that he could legally divorce, remarry, and hopefully produce a male heir. He tolerated a mild reformation but established himself as the Church of England's supreme head, even as he remained essentially Roman Catholic in his theology.<sup>23</sup> During

the short reign of his young son Edward VI (1547–1553), who, together with his council, had a great heart for true reformation, some gains were made, especially by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) through his book *Homilies*, his *Book of Common Prayer*, and his Forty-Two Articles of Religion. All of this seemed to be reversed during the bloody reign of Mary Tudor (1553–1558), who reinstated the Latin Mass and enforced papal allegiance at the cost of nearly three hundred Protestant lives. But the blood of those martyrs, including Cranmer, was to be the seed of the Protestant cause in England.

When Mary's half-sister Elizabeth (1533–1603) succeeded her, many Protestants harbored fervent hopes that the reforms begun under Edward VI would grow exponentially. Elizabeth, however, was content with the climate of British Protestantism and strove to subdue dissident voices. Those who fought too much for reform in matters of worship, godliness, politics, and culture were persecuted and deprived of their livings. Elizabeth's cautious, moderate type of reform disappointed many and eventually gave rise to a more thorough and robust Calvinism that was derogatorily called Puritanism.

Puritanism lasted from the 1560s to the early 1700s. The Puritans believed the Church of England had not gone far enough in its reformation, because its worship and government did not agree fully with the pattern found in Scripture. They called for the pure preaching of God's Word; for purity of worship as God commands in Scripture; and for purity of church government, replacing the rule of bishops with Presbyterianism. Above all, they called for greater purity or holiness of life among Christians. As J. I. Packer has said, "Puritanism was an evangelical holiness movement seeking to implement its vision of spiritual renewal, national and personal, in the church, the state, and the home; in education, evangelism, and economics; in individual discipleship and devotion, and in pastoral care and competence."<sup>24</sup> Doctrinally, Puritanism was a kind of vigorous Calvinism; experientially, it was warm and contagious; evangelistically, it was aggressive, yet tender; ecclesiastically, it was theocentric and worshipful; and politically, it sought to make the relations between king, Parliament, and subjects scriptural, balanced, and bound by conscience.<sup>25</sup>

Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists were all part of the Calvinist movement. Some Puritans seceded from the Church of England during the reign of King James I (1603–1625). They became known as separatists or dissenters and usually formed Congregationalist churches. Puritan conformists remained within the Anglican fold.



Eventually, Calvinism crossed the Atlantic to the British colonies in North America, where the New England Puritans took the lead in expounding Reformed theology and in founding ecclesiastical, educational, and political institutions.<sup>26</sup> The Puritans who settled in the Massachusetts Bay Colony continued to sanction the Church of England to some degree, whereas the Pilgrims who sailed to America in the *Mayflower* and settled in Plymouth (1620) were separatists.<sup>27</sup> Despite these differences, all Puritans were zealous Calvinists. As John Gerstner observes, “New England, from the founding of Plymouth in 1620 to the end of the 18th century, was predominantly Calvinistic.”<sup>28</sup>

Four more streams of immigrants brought Calvinism to America. Dutch Reformed believers, from the 1620s, were responsible for the settlement of New Netherlands, later called New York. The French Huguenots arrived by the thousands in New York, Virginia, and the Carolinas in the late seventeenth century. From 1690 to 1777, more than two hundred thousand Germans, many of whom were Reformed, settled mostly in the Middle Colonies. The final stream was the Scots and the Scotch-Irish, all Presbyterians. Some settled in New England, but many more poured into New York, Pennsylvania, and the Carolinas. “As a consequence of this extensive immigration and internal growth it is estimated that of the total population of three million in this country in 1776, two-thirds of them were at least nominally Calvinistic,” John Bratt concludes. “At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the largest denominations were, in order: Congregationalists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, German Reformed, and Dutch Reformed. Roman Catholicism was tenth and Methodism was twelfth in size.”<sup>29</sup>

With the exception of the migrations to America, all of this spreading of the Reformed faith happened by the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>30</sup> The most extensive and enduring strongholds of the Reformed movement became the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, Great Britain, and North America.

It is noteworthy that all of these Reformed bodies shared the conviction that Christianity in many parts of Europe prior to the Reformation was little more than a veneer. As these Reformed believers surveyed Europe, they saw what they could regard only as large swaths of paganism. The planting of solidly biblical churches was desperately needed. This explains in large measure the Reformers’ missionary focus on Europe.

In time, the Reformed movement developed into two very similar systems of theology: the Continental Reformed, represented primarily in the Netherlands

by its Three Forms of Unity—the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort; and British-American Presbyterianism, expressed in the Westminster standards—the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, and the Shorter Catechism.<sup>31</sup> These two systems were not opposed to or entirely separate from each other, however. For example, British Puritans profoundly influenced the Dutch Further Reformation in the seventeenth century. Likewise, the Italian-Swiss Francis Turretin (1623–1687) profoundly affected American Presbyterianism.<sup>32</sup> Turretin’s systematic theology was taught at Princeton Seminary until the 1870s, when it was replaced by that of Charles Hodge.

#### CALVINISM AND THE LUTHERANS

Both systems of Reformed theology parted ways with Lutheranism. By the end of the sixteenth century, Calvinism differed from Lutheranism in the following areas:

- *Approach to the Lord’s Supper.* Lutherans maintained the doctrine of consubstantiation, which holds that Christ is physically present in, with, and under the elements in the Lord’s Supper. They resisted any attempt to explain Jesus’ statement “this is my body” as a metaphor, saying that such efforts opened the door to allegorizing away the gospel itself. Furthermore, they said, if all that is offered in Communion is a spiritual Christ, the sacrament presents a truncated gospel that offers no comfort to believers whose bodies eventually will die. Lutherans would be satisfied only with a concrete, historical Christ.

The Reformed leaders said that the incarnate, historical Christ is now risen and ascended, and therefore is not present in the Supper in the way He was prior to His ascension. Furthermore, the concept of Christ’s spiritual presence does not mean something less than complete; rather, it refers to His ongoing work through His Spirit. The Reformed believed they were affirming all that the Lutherans wanted to protect, but in a clearer, more biblical manner.

- *The primary function of the law.* Luther generally regarded the law as something negative and closely allied with sin, death, or the Devil. He believed that the dominant function of the law is to abase the sinner by convicting him of sin and driving him to Christ for deliverance.

Calvin regarded the law more as a guide for the believer, a tool to encourage him to cling to God and to obey Him more fervently. The believer must try to

follow God's law not as an act of compulsory duty, but as a response of grateful obedience. With the help of the Spirit, the law provides a way for a believer to express his gratitude.

- *Approach to salvation.* Both Lutherans and Calvinists answered the question "What must I do to be saved?" by saying that Spirit-worked repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His substitutionary work of atonement are necessary. But Lutherans had a tendency to remain focused on the doctrine of justification, whereas Calvinists, without minimizing justification, pressed more than Lutherans toward sanctification, which asks, "Having been justified by God's grace, how shall I live to the glory of God?" Calvinism thus became more comprehensive than Lutheranism in explaining how salvation works itself out in the life of a believer.

- *Understanding of predestination.* In the late sixteenth century, most Lutherans moved away from Luther and the Calvinists, who asserted the predestination of both the elect and the reprobate rather than the predestination of the elect only. Reformed theologians believed this shift in thinking was at odds with the content of Romans 9 and similar passages, as well as with the comprehensive sovereignty of God.

The Calvinists were convinced that election is sovereign and gracious, and that reprobation is sovereign and just. No one who enters heaven deserves to be there; no one who enters hell deserves anything different. As Calvin said, "The praise of salvation is claimed for God, whereas the blame of perdition is thrown upon those who of their own accord bring it upon themselves."<sup>33</sup>

- *Understanding of worship.* Luther's reform was more moderate than Calvin's, retaining more medieval liturgy. Following their leaders, the Lutherans and Calvinists differed in their views of how Scripture regulates worship. The Lutherans taught that we may include in worship what is not forbidden in Scripture; the Calvinists maintained that we may not include in worship what the New Testament does not command.

## CALVINISM TODAY

Calvinism has stood the test of time. Most Protestant denominations that originated in the Reformation were founded on Calvinistic confessions of faith, such as the Thirty-nine Articles (Anglicanism), the Canons of Dort (Reformed), the

Westminster Standards (Presbyterianism), the Savoy Declaration (Congregationalism), and the Baptist Confession of 1689 (Baptist). All of these confessions essentially agree, with the major point of disagreement being the doctrine of infant baptism.


Reformation theology prevailed, for the most part, in Protestant evangelicalism for many decades, but was diluted in the nineteenth century because of several influences, such as the Enlightenment in Europe and Finneyism in America. By the mid-twentieth century, Calvinistic theology had declined dramatically in the Western world, having been assaulted by nineteenth-century liberal theology and revived Arminianism.

About two centuries ago, William Ellery Channing, the father of American Unitarianism, wrote: "Calvinism, we are persuaded, is giving place to better views. It has passed its meridian, and is sinking to rise no more. It has to contend with foes more powerful than theologians; with foes from whom it cannot shield itself in mystery and metaphysical subtleties—we mean the progress of the human mind, and the progress of the spirit of the gospel. Society is going forward in intelligence and charity, and of course is leaving the theology of the sixteenth century behind it."<sup>34</sup>

Channing was a false prophet. Today, even though the world in general is becoming more anti-God and wicked than ever, Calvinism is being revived, although, sadly, it is still a minority position. A fresh hunger for Calvinism's biblical doctrine and spirituality is causing the roots of Reformed theology to spread throughout the entire world. In recent decades, a significant number of Calvinistic churches and denominations have been birthed around the world. Today, Reformed churches exist in the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Italy, the United Kingdom, North America, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, China, the Philippines, Russia, Egypt, Pakistan, India, Israel, and various additional African and Asian countries. Also, since the 1960s, there has been a resurgence of interest in Calvinistic literature. Calvinistic conferences are being offered in numerous countries; in many of these nations, the number of Calvinists is steadily growing in our new millennium.

Calvinism has a bright future, for it offers much to people who seek to believe and practice the whole counsel of God. Calvinism aims to do so with both clear-

headed faith and warm-hearted spirituality, which, when conjoined, produce vibrant living in the home, the church, and the marketplace to the glory of God. It confesses with Paul, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever” (Rom. 11:36). That, after all, is what Scripture, Calvinism, and life itself are all about.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. What are the historical roots of Calvinism?
2. What are the main geographical areas where Calvinism spread in the first two centuries after the Reformation?
3. How does Calvinism differ from Lutheranism?

## NOTES

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<sup>4</sup> For books on Wycliffe and the Lollards, see Ellen W. Caughey, *John Wycliffe: Herald of the Reformation* (Ulrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, 2001); G. R. Evans, *John Wyclif: Myth & Reality* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2005); Anthony John Patrick Kenny, *Wyclif in His Times* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Ian Christopher Levy, *A Companion to John Wyclif: Late Medieval Theologian* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); G. H. W. Parker, *The Morning Star: Wycliffe and the Dawn of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

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- <sup>12</sup> For Calvin’s life and ministry, see especially François Wendel, *Calvin* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (London: SCM Press, 1954), and *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988); Timothy George, ed., *John Calvin and the Church. A Prism of Reform* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990); and Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

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- <sup>13</sup> Only in recent years has Bullinger's work been recognized as nearly equal in influence to that of Calvin in their own day. See especially Pamela Biel, *Doorkeepers at the House of Righteousness: Heinrich Bullinger and the Zurich Clergy, 1535–1575* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991); Thomas Harding, ed., *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, 4 vols. in 2, intro. George Ella and Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004); Bruce Gordon and Emidio Campi, ed., *Architect of Reformation: An Introduction to Heinrich Bullinger, 1504–1575* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); and George Ella, *Henry Bullinger* (Eggleston, England: Go Publications, 2007).
- <sup>14</sup> See Michael Rogness, *Philip Melancthon: Reformer Without Honor* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), and Karin Maag, ed., *Melancthon in Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1999).
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- <sup>16</sup> See Laszló Ravasz et al., *Hungarian Protestantism* (Budapest: Sylvester Nyomda, 1927); Imre Révész, *History of the Hungarian Reformed Church*, ed. G. N. Knight (Washington: Hungarian Reformed Federation, 1956); Gyula Combos, *The Lean Years: A Study of Hungarian Calvinism in Crisis* (New York: Kossuth Foundation, 1960); Alexander Sándor Ungváry, *The Hungarian Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); and Graeme Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier 1600–1660: International Calvinism and the Reformed Church in Hungary and Transylvania* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).
- <sup>17</sup> For a summary of the Reformed church in the Netherlands, see Maurice G. Hansen, *The Reformed Church in the Netherlands* (New York: Board of Publication of the RCA, 1884); Jerry D. van der Veen, "Adoption of Calvinism in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands" (B.S.T. thesis, Biblical Seminary in New York, 1951); Walter Lagerway, "The History of Calvinism in the Netherlands," in *The Rise and Development of Calvinism*, ed. John Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); W. Robert Godfrey, "Calvin and Calvinism in the Netherlands," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 95–120; J. P. Elliott, "Protestantization in the Northern Netherlands: A Case Study—The Classis of Dordrecht, 1572–1640," 2 vols. (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1990); and A. C. Duke, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries* (London: Hambledon, 2003).
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- <sup>21</sup> See Philip Conner, *Huguenot Heartland: Montauban and Southern French Calvinism during the Wars of Religion* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002).
- <sup>22</sup> For the writings of Knox, see David Laing, ed., *The Works of John Knox*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: J. Thin, 1895). For Knox’s life and ministry, see Thomas M’Crie, *The Life of John Knox* (Philadelphia: Wm. S. Young, 1842); W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974); Richard L. Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1980); Richard G. Kyle, *The Ministry of John Knox: Pastor, Preacher, and Prophet* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 2002); Roger Mason, *John Knox and the British Reformations* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 1998); and Douglas Wilson, *For Kirk & Covenant: The Stalwart Courage of John Knox* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2000).
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- <sup>32</sup> For his systematic theology in English, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992–1997).
- <sup>33</sup> Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (hereafter, *Inst.*), ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.24.7–11.
- <sup>34</sup> Quoted in Bratt, *The Rise and Development of Calvinism*, 134–135.