

John (Jean) Calvin (1509-1564)

Five hundred years ago, on July 10, 1509, Gerard Cauvin and Jeanne le France welcomed their newborn son into their family. They lived in the town of Noyon, some 60 miles northeast of Paris, France. Their son was baptized Jean, but was destined to become known as John Calvin, and one of the greatest figures in theological and political history. Martin Luther's great assistant, Philip Melancton (1497-1560), an able teacher and theologian and a leading figure of the Lutheran Reformation, even called Calvin *The Theologian*.

Calvin's Student Years

In Noyon, Calvin attended a school in which only boys received an education. His keen mind and his talents made him excel among his fellow students. At the age of fourteen, he went to the University of Paris where he began his preliminary training for the priesthood. He learned Latin and became a master in the language. His student days were marked by hard work, food rationing and days of fasting. The daily schedule began at four in the morning, with lectures from five a.m. to five in the afternoon, interrupted by meals, attendance at mass, and recreation. In 1528, after spending five years in training at the University of Paris, Calvin passed his examination which gave him permission to engage in theological studies. But there was a change of plans. Calvin's father instructed him to change from theology to law, for the legal profession was the surest way to wealth and honour. In obedience to his father's will, Calvin went to the University of Orleans where he studied law. But he did more than study law. In his commentary on the *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* he says that he was also guided in the study of Greek. After one year in Orleans, Calvin went to the University at Bourges, where he studied the languages, the literature and the cultures of the ancient world. He also began to read the New Testament in the original Greek, as well as the Greek classics. In 1531, after the death of his father, Calvin went to Royal College of Classical Languages where he continued to study Greek and followed lectures in Hebrew. He also studied the works of the Roman philosopher, Seneca (3-65 AD). In 1532, his commentary on *Lucius Anneas Seneca's Two Books on Clemency* was published in Paris. This work is a testimony to his academic achievements. It shows that at the age of twenty-two, Calvin was well-versed in classical and patristic literature in both Latin and Greek and had a remarkable mature understanding of ancient authors.

Calvin's Conversion

Why did Calvin leave the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in which he was raised? The RCC of his time was steeped in medieval practices and thought forms. Calvin's mother, who had a reputation for both beauty and piety, took him at an early age to visit shrines in the neighbourhood: on one such occasion he kissed a fragment of the head of St. Ann, the mother of the Virgin Mary. The RCC also had some corrupt practices. For example, in 1502, John of Lothringen was appointed bishop at the age of four. In 1517, Pope Leo X appointed an eight-year old boy as Cardinal.

Calvin had a conversion experience when he was approaching his twenty-fifth birthday. It was awareness that God was turning him away from errors in the Church of Rome. He was led to the truth taught in the Bible and its good news of God's grace. Consequently, he left behind the practices and medieval beliefs of popular Catholicism in which he was raised. Calvin was

rather silent about his conversion, for in all his writings he made only two references to it. But what Calvin called "a sudden conversion", put a lasting stamp on his life.

Unlike the German Reformer, Martin Luther, he was never declared a heretic, and so his followers were not forced to choose between Reformation and the RCC – at least not at first. But Calvin eventually did have to choose. He was soon thrust into his life's work by the remarkable providence of God, and the next three decades brought about tumultuous change in Geneva, Switzerland, with world-shaking consequences.

Calvin's Marriage to Idelette

One day the bachelor Calvin mentioned to his friends that he was thinking about marriage. He stipulated that the lady had to be virtuous, helpful, thrifty, plain, and ready to care for his health. These characteristics were present in Idelette de Bure, a widow with two sons. They were married in the beginning of August, 1540. Idelette became an exemplary pastor's wife. She was a woman of prayer, visited the poor, comforted the sorrowing, welcomed the many visitors who knocked on the Reformer's door. She supported Calvin when he was discouraged. On July 28, 1542 Idelette and Calvin had a son, whom they named Jacob. He only lived for about 14 days. Calvin wrote that the death of their son was a bitter experience, but God is "the Father; he knows what is good for His children." Although Idelette lived in the shadow of her husband, she had a happy marriage. On March 29, 1549, she went to be with the Lord. After her death, Calvin wrote that as long as she lived, she was for me a faithful helper in my work.

Calvin and the Church

Was it Calvin's intention to start a new church? The answer is "No." Calvin made it abundantly clear that the Reformers were not out to start a new church but wanted "to renew that ancient form of the church, which was "managed and almost destroyed by the Roman pontiff and his faction." Calvin wanted a Reformation, a renewal, a purified church but not a deep division. And he pointed out that renewal of the church can only come by returning to the Word of God. Christ is the Church's head; ours the obedience, and "ours the church whose supreme care is humbly and religiously to venerate the word of God, and submit to its authority." Calvin sought passionately for the restoration of the universal Church of Christ, the Church of the Apostles and the Church Fathers. He spoke of the church as the society of all saints, a society which spreads over the whole world and existing in all ages, yet bound together by the one doctrine and the one Spirit of Christ, cultivating and observing unity of faith and brotherly concord. He added, "With this church we deny that we have any disagreement.... as we revere her as our mother, so we desire to remain in her bosom."

Calvin's Character

Who was John Calvin? Of all the leaders of the Reformation, Calvin seems to have received more criticism and misrepresentation. He has been described as self-concentrated, austere, having an unyielding spirit. He has been defamed and admired. His influence has sometimes been jubilantly reported to have expired. He was rated by his enemies as a tyrant. He was called a prude, a burner of witches, the "Protestant Pope". The poet, Les Murray, called him "padlock of the Sabbath". He concluded his poem about Calvin with these biting words:

"I love your moral snobbery
but the spirits you relied on,
turned atheist long ago." (*First Things*, February 2009).

But was Calvin a humourless kill-joy, determined to squash fun in any form? Well, none of these, really. Calvin seldom spoke about his own life and experience. He did not want to draw attention to himself. But his character reveals courage, determination, and dedication to his calling. He did not choose the quiet life of scholar in residence; instead he sacrificed himself for the glory of God. His work schedule showed "iron discipline". He slept little, and ate little. Even late at night he read mail which came from many parts of the world, with questions about a host of different subjects. He had many friends. He was also deeply spiritual and stressed the necessity of a close walk with the Lord in daily life.

The humanity of Calvin shows especially in his dealings with backsliding believers. He used every means to restore those who were in a fallen state. He could not share in their failure, but he urged them to press on and leave the past to God, who would wipe clean the soiled page in their lives with His forgiveness. He told them that forgiven sinners can face the future with confidence, asking God for His strength. He wrote, "Our gracious God is always ready to receive us with mercy, and when we have fallen, He stretches out a hand to us so that the fall should not be fatal."

Calvin's Death

Considering that Calvin suffered severe physical pain from ulcers, arthritis, asthma and most seriously tuberculosis, it is astounding that he could work such long hours. He lectured two hundred times a year and delivered two hundred sermons. He wrote commentaries on nearly every book of the Bible. His best-known work the *Institutes*, he constantly re-edited. All in all, the collected writings of Calvin comprise a total of fifty-nine volumes.

But just as his many years of hard work were beginning to bear fruit, his body was giving way. In his last years he would be carried into the pulpit or lecture hall. In February, 1564, he gave his last lecture and sermon. He died on May 27, 1564. His death was not violent or sudden but peaceful. He was in full control of his faculties until the end. When he said just prior to his death, "I have not corrupted a single passage of Scripture or knowingly twisted it," he was speaking as far as he knew in his own heart, "the truth, the whole, and nothing but the truth." According to his wishes, he was buried without great pomp or ceremony and laid in an unmarked grave.

For centuries, the name and theology of John Calvin have aroused intense feelings and vigorous reactions. But Calvin cannot easily be dismissed as irrelevant. The very fact that Calvin is the subject of many articles, seminars, and conferences during the 500th year commemoration of his birth, speaks of his importance in theology and Church history. He did not limit the Gospel to the private sphere of the home. His influence is wider than that, for Calvin's thinking was not limited to the Church, but reached out into the realm of politics, economics and culture. The many Reformed Churches, Christian educational institutes and organizations around the world testify to his important role in the history of the Church. I hope, therefore, that the 500th year commemoration of Calvin's birth will lead to a better understanding of Calvin, his life and theology.

John (Jean) Calvin (1509-1564) The Book of the Reformation

In this commemorative year of John Calvin's birth in 1509, streams of articles and commentaries on his life and work are being published. Some write ill of him; others praise him. But he never sought the praise of humans. This great theologian's only passionate desire was to glorify his God, even if it meant to put his life on the line for the sake of the Gospel. But why should we in this chaotic world still pay attention to his works? No other Reformer of his time left such a profound literary legacy as Calvin. In Calvin the qualities of a great writer were blended to a remarkable degree: his clarity of style, vigour of expression, imagination, and the conviction of sincerity. Throughout the years of Calvin's ministry, while constantly troubled by poor health, a seemingly inexhaustible stream of commentaries on the books of the Old and New Testaments went forth from his study to the printer. They constitute the great bulk of his literary output, which total more than fifty volumes. All of his published works reveal the single-minded purpose of his life. Some were written for the instruction and edification of Christ's flock. Others were intended for a statement and defence of the truth against those, who by their teaching, threatened the truth.

Calvin the Correspondent

Calvin was a phenomenal correspondent. His letters form, in themselves, an output large enough to establish his literary reputation. He wrote to the most powerful men of his age. He wrote with boldness, power and the force of a spokesman of God. He admonished kings and princes, pointing out their duties in the light of the Gospel. "It is a great matter to be a king," he writes to the young king of England, Edward VI, "but I am sure that you count it a far greater privilege to be a Christian." This is not in any way to underrate kingship, but to be a Christian is an even greater honour than being a king. Again Calvin writes to Sigismund Augustus II, King of Poland, "Remember that in your person God has lit a candle for the whole of Poland, and that you cannot conceal it for long without the most serious consequences." There was also another group of Calvin's correspondents – the Reformers, in France, Switzerland, the Netherlands and England. He also wrote to prisoners and martyrs. His letters encouraged them, strengthened them, furnished them with answers to the questions of their adversaries, opened the prospect of the heavenly kingdom, and assured them that no drop of blood would be shed in vain.

Calvin and the Psalter

One of Calvin's great contribution to Reformed Protestantism was *The Genevan Psalter*. It provided the model of Reformed Psalmody for generations to come. Calvin sees the use of psalms in meditation and self-examination as an important function in worship. In the psalms, we are drawn to examine ourselves and discover our true need. He has in mind particularly the many psalms of lamentation found in the Psalter.

In the preface to the *Genevan Psalter*, Calvin gives us the reason to use the Psalms. "The psalms incite us to praise God, to pray to him, to meditate on His works to the end that we fear, honour and glorify Him." What St. Augustine says is quite true, one cannot sing anything more worthy of God than that which we have received from Him. "For this reason," Calvin continues, "no matter where we search, we will not find better or more appropriate songs for our worship than the Psalms of David. For, after all, these songs come from the Holy Spirit.

When we sing them, God himself is putting the words in our mouths so that He Himself sings within us, exalting His glory." In defending his preference for psalmody, Calvin does not appeal to the authority of Scripture in this matter. He had no objection if in other churches, hymns or other than the psalms were sung.

The *Psalter* has been translated into many languages. When I attended an elementary Christian school of Reformed persuasion in the Netherlands, we were required each week to memorize a stanza of one of the psalms and every Monday morning we had to recite it. In later years, these memorized psalms were of great spiritual encouragement for me.

The Book of the Reformation

Although Calvin was a prolific author, he is not called without reason, "the man of one book." It is also one of the few books that have profoundly affected the course of history. The Book of books for the Reformation was the Bible. But in no other work is Scripture so systematically summarized as Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In fact, it is nothing but a commentary on all of Scripture. As long as there is interest in Reformed theology, the *Institutes* will be honoured and studied.

Calvin was a young man of 27 when he first published the *Institutes*. It was meant to be a little book, a handbook to help new Protestants who needed to be shown the truths of the Bible. In time it was transformed by skillful expansion into a compendium of scriptural doctrine for student use. There were the successive editions of the *Institutes*, the finest summary of Christian theology ever written, a magnificent monument of scholarship, devotion and industry. In the years that followed, the book grew. In four editions, Calvin enlarged it from six chapters to eighty, filling four large volumes. No modifications were made in its fundamental teaching by these additions, and the ground plan of the exposition as laid down in 1539 was retained unchanged throughout the subsequent additions. His consistency was remarkable. He never changed his mind on any doctrinal issue. In the 1539 edition, we find the famous opening sentence, which was to be retained in every edition since: "Almost the whole sum of our wisdom, which ought to be considered true and solid wisdom, consists of two parts - the knowledge of God and of ourselves."

The introduction to the *Institutes*, an admonitory letter to King Francis I of France, was written with burning passion and eloquence. King Francis I had wavered in his position towards the Reformation. At one time he had tolerated Protestants in his kingdom, and at another he had persecuted them. Deceitfully, Francis sanctioned the Reformation to befriend the German Protestants, while at the same time slandering the Protestants in France with being revolutionaries. A reason for slandering Protestants was provided on October 18, 1534, when handbills posted throughout Paris condemned the Roman Catholic doctrines of the mass and clergy. Francis persecuted the Protestants by imprisoning them and by burning them at the stake. Calvin, at that time completing his first edition of the *Institutes*, wrote the Preface addressed to King Francis I. It was an eloquent protest of a heart filled with pity for the persecuted Protestants in France.

Throughout the years, Calvin never stopped revising, reshaping, and developing his book. We can say, therefore that the *Institutes* is the work of his whole life. It means the maturing and expansion of his thought. It was not the case of new chapters being added on one after

another like extending a wall. It was rather the growth of a living entity. And as one reads the *Institutes*, one becomes struck by Calvin's vast knowledge of the Church Fathers. In the final (1559) edition of the *Institutes*, there are numerous citations from some forty of the Church Fathers, indicating a truly comprehensive familiarity with their works. Specially Augustine and Chrysostomos are repeatedly referred to and quoted.

Calvin's Theology

Calvin was not an "armchair theologian." He wrote the *Institutes* to bolster the faith of the new Protestants. He did not want to theorize but to give Biblical instruction. His sole aim was the pure exposition of the Word of God. The Bible only and the whole of Scripture must be the foundation of theology. We owe to the Bible the same reverence and obedience which we owe to God, because it proceeded from Him alone.

He notes that it is the school of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is to "*fully* persuade us" that "the Scriptures are the very Word of God", – to work in us "*full* persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority" of the Word of God. Therefore, Calvin says, we must search for God nowhere else but in His Holy Word and speak nothing but what has been learned from Scripture. And he pointedly states: "No man can have the least knowledge of true and sound doctrine without having been a disciple of Scripture." It is our Light and directing principle for all of life. Only when we keep the Word of God, are we walking on a safe path. We cannot have a proper view of God, the universe, man, or history without it.

The final edition of the *Institutes* is nearly five times the size of its original text. It is divided into four books, and these, in a general way, follow the topics of the Apostles' Creed – the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Catholic Church. Throughout his work Calvin emphasizes the honour of the Triune God and His Sovereignty and he boasts in God's grace in Christ.

Calvin's view of religion goes against the grain of the Western secular-mindset. He says that everyone is religious. "The seeds of religion," he insists, "are sown in every heart." What we call religion is just the reaction of the human soul to what it perceives God to be. But how then do we come to know the Triune God? The wonder of nature reveals God, only as Creator, not as Redeemer. The natural knowledge of God drawn from creation cannot lead to a saving relationship with God. Sinful man cannot be trusted to form his own religion. Calvin said that, from the beginning, God revealed Himself by His created works, and then by His Word spoken to patriarchs, prophets and apostles. In other words, it is in the Holy Scriptures that "God preserves His truth in perpetual remembrance." Man cannot "see" God revealed in creation until he has put on the "spectacles" of the Holy Scripture.

How does the Bible view man? Adam disobeyed God and was driven from paradise. As descendants of fallen Adam, we too are fallen human beings, totally depraved, unable to do any saving good and inclined to all wickedness. If this is so, how then can we be saved? Each one of us is a moral agent, responsible to God for our actions. No one can earn salvation. The entire work of salvation is the essential work of the Triune God. "God the Father planned it. God the Son earned it. And God the Holy Spirit applied it, regenerating heart and life." God

did it all and all to Him we owe. We ascribe to Him all the glory!

Calvin had a high view of the Church. The importance of the church's role in the Christian life is attested by the fact that the doctrine of the Church takes up one-third of the *Institutes*. The Church is not an invention by someone at some point in history. The Church is not only Christ's body. It is also our mother. There is no private Christianity. There is only communal Christianity. But don't judge a Church by the people who attend on a regular basis. Calvin insisted that the true Church cannot be recognized by the individual quality of its members. After acknowledging the presence of hypocrites in the church's midst, still we are commanded to hold the visible church in honour and stay in communion with it. Calvin recognized that the Lord is daily at work in smoothing out wrinkles and cleansing spots. Yes, we believe in the Holy Catholic Church, but the Church's holiness is not yet complete. The Church is holy, then, in the sense that it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect: it makes progress from day to day but has not yet reached its goal of holiness. In other words, there is *no* perfect church. But if you *do* find a perfect church, don't join it or you'll spoil it.

Why read and study the works of Calvin? After five centuries we still want to listen to Calvin, because with him we want to listen to the Word of God, we want to be students of the Scriptures with him. By his works, let Calvin be judged afresh today, and it will be found how unsubstantial are the many prejudices that still cluster around his name.

John (Jean) Calvin (1509-1564) Faith and Life.

Sixteenth century Western Europe was marked by social, political, and religious upheavals. For John Calvin, it meant standing at the threshold of two worlds. He was a fundamental opponent of the medieval ascetic ideal which monks portrayed as the purpose of the Christian life. According to this view, the purpose of work was not to become rich, but to maintain oneself in the circumstances in which one was born, awaiting for the transition from this earthly life to the heavenly life. But Calvin did not limit the Christian life to the confines of the church. It went beyond withdrawing from the world and waiting for entry into heaven. Calvin's central thought was the absolute sovereignty of the Triune God over all of life and over the whole world. He pointed out that the whole of the Christian life is the service of God. He said that the church needs to call its members to live wherever they are according the principles of God's Word. This living in obedience to these principles will lead to opposition from the forces of evil. He believed that in this world we witness the warfare between the foolishness of the cross and the wisdom of the world. What we are facing, then, is a clash between the Kingdom of God and the realm of Satan.

Sin and Salvation

Calvin insisted that social and economic problems are the inescapable consequences of Adam's fall and rebellion against God. He did not regard wrong-doing as primarily the result of some form of social or psychological maladjustment or of a bad environment, but rather the expression of the sinfulness of human nature. And in Scripture he found the only adequate remedy for the human dilemma. For Calvin, the remedy for sin is not a new orientation, or more education, or a new environment, but a new birth. Nothing but the Biblical doctrine of redemption can bring relief. But redemption means more than saving "souls" from eternal

damnation. When God saves, He saves the whole man for time and eternity. Therefore, a Christian seeks to glorify God not only in church on Sunday, but in every area of life. Whether he is transacting business or engaging in political activities, working in the sciences, art, industry, or education, the glorification of God is his goal.

The Kingship of Christ

Why did Christ come into this fallen world? His suffering and death are for the realization of the kingdom of God. Calvin stressed the all-embracing doctrine of the Kingdom of God, which was the theme of Jesus' preaching. This Gospel of the kingdom focuses on the whole person: the hungry, the naked, the afflicted, the mourning, the despairing, the exploited. In fact, Christ's lordship extends to every inch of the globe and to every area of public and private life. This claim is affirmed by Christ Himself in the preface of the great commission when He said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18). These words of our Lord were the focus of all Calvin's thought. As Dr. Abraham Kuyper aptly restated Calvin's view in his inaugural address at the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880, "There is not one inch in the entire area of human life about which Christ, who is sovereign of all, does not cry out, 'This is Mine! This belongs to Me'."

The Kingship of Christ calls for a radical commitment. Even our minds must be made obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Discipleship is, therefore, the natural and rightful response to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We are responsible to God for what we do, and our calling is where we exercise that responsibility. Our Lord taught us to pray, "Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Lord's Day 48 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* states that this petition means: "Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you. Keep your church strong, and add to it. Destroy the devil's work; destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your Word. Do this until your kingdom is complete and perfect that in it you are all in all."

Calvin and the Bible

Calvin was not an autonomous individualist who interpreted Scripture according to his own insights. He was rooted in the soil of the early Church and well acquainted with the thought of the church fathers, especially Chrysostom and Augustine. Calvin said of Biblical authority; "I acknowledge that the Scripture is a most rich and inexhaustible fountain of all wisdom; but I deny that its fertility consists in the various meanings which any man, at his pleasure, may assign."

For Calvin the Bible is not only the book that tells us how to be saved, it is the Word of God addressing on every page God's plan and purpose for this world. Calvin judged society in the light of God's revelation. Its message is powerful and all embracing. It can change the direction in the lives of individuals but also the direction in the existence of nations, cultures, societies, and civilizations. It speaks with authority to rich and poor, politicians and educators, merchants and military, parents as well as children. In other words, the Word of God turns the searchlight of divine truth and righteousness upon every area of life.

Calvin was firmly anchored in Scripture. It was his profound insight into the majestic sweep and depth of God's Word which gave him the right to speak with authority in the area of social

and economic problems. Calvin was an expository preacher. His purpose in preaching was to present the message of the text in a simple and straightforward manner and then to apply the text to the lives of his hearers. He was not a story-teller. In his sermons we find no engaging introductions, no illustrative stories nor anecdotes, no quotations from great authors. Although Calvin was one of the most literate men of his age and a master in the use of language, he did not depend on literary eloquence to persuade his hearers. The forcefulness of his sermons was found in the clarity of his analysis of the text. The simplicity and directness of his style were based on his confidence that what he was preaching is indeed the infallible Word of God. His preaching clearly demonstrated that the uniqueness of the Biblically-directed faith and the radical differences between Christian and non-Christian faiths are not denied but clearly and openly acknowledged.

The Christian Life

Faith, for Calvin, is more than simply an intellectual agreement with a set of doctrinal propositions; it is a fundamental turning of the heart toward God, through Christ. That means not simply that we take Christ as our example. Through faith we are united with Christ. This union with Christ is not reserved for our entry into heaven. It is a moment by moment experience. It is something that happens right now, and is the root of life for all Christians all of the time. *We* are not the ones who live; it is Christ living through us. As Calvin put it: "We belong to God; let us, therefore, live and die to him. We belong to God; therefore, let his wisdom and will govern all our actions. We belong to God; so let us direct every part of our life to him, the only legitimate goal."

Calvin did not separate doctrine from right living. God is glorified when His servants carry out their assignments humbly, faithfully, and in accord with His will. We can't earn our salvation; our good works are the fruit of our salvation. Calvin echoed the word of the apostle Paul, "godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). Calvin also reminded us that the Lord calls us to bear our cross. Jesus said, "Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:38). Christians then serve the Lord in the shadow of the cross.

Calvin called daily work a calling. This is unlike many Western evangelical Christians who believe that ministry and mission involvement is sacred work, but driving a taxi or work as a carpenter is secular. A sense of calling should precede a choice of job and career, and the main way to discover calling is along the line of what we are gifted to be. Os Guinness aptly sums up Calvin's view of work. "Calling is the truth that God calls us to Himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to His summons and service." Therefore, when we view work as a calling, it is not only necessary to ask what one does for work, but also whether it benefits others, and in this way serves his neighbours.

Calvin and the Social Order

Calvin did not champion any particular social or economic system. He neither advocated unbridled capitalism nor stifling socialism. He did not offer a blueprint for a theocracy or a utopia. The God who redeems His people wants to be obeyed out of gratitude. So that we would know how to live, God gave a practical set of instruction for knowing and doing His

will. Consequently, Calvin was convinced that the basis of all sound social life was the Ten Commandments, and that the last six were the norms for all human and social activity. We cannot overestimate the world-formative weight and the authority of the law in Calvin's thought and life on economic and social thought and practice. From this perspective he presented a Biblical frame of reference for every phase of social thought. He viewed property as a gift of God. The right to own property is clearly taught and safeguarded by the Bible, specifically in the Ten Commandments and in the teachings of Christ in Calvin's economic thought. To steal the property of another is sinful, and if it is done by the state under the guise of legal action it is no less so. We are accountable to God for what we own. For Calvin then, the pursuit of economic gain and the acquisition of wealth is always legitimate, but the rich man is responsible to God for his wealth. "Those to whom God has given much grain and wine, are to offer part of these goods to those who are in need of the same....God commands that those who have an abundance of possessions always keep their hands open for helping the poor...If the rich do not acquit themselves of their duty, they will have to give an account of their inhumane actions, but this will be done before the heavenly Judge." We must care for the poor and just in all our dealings.

Calvin stated that faith without works is dead, and claims of justice without deeds of justice violate the Holy Scripture. Therefore, when the Biblical view of the family is undermined, when racial and economic injustices prevail, when the environment is exploited, Christians should show that they care. They care because Christ cares about His world.

Conclusion

Calvin's prayers reflected his theology and his piety. He addressed God as "almighty", rejoiced in God's gift of salvation, sought to glorify Him in every sphere of life, and looked forward to receiving his eternal inheritance:

"Almighty God, thou buildest not a temple among us of wood and stones, for the fulness of thy Godhead dwells in thine only-begotten Son, who by his power fills the whole world, and dwells in the midst of us, and even in us. Grant that we may not profane his sanctuary by our vices and sins, but so strive to concentrate ourselves to thy service, that thy name through his name may be continually glorified. May we at length be received into that eternal inheritance, where will to us appear openly, and face to face, that glory which we now see in the truth contained in thy gospel. Amen."

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April. 2009