

The Geneva of John Calvin

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It was only late in 1546, more than ten years after Calvin's first arrival in their city, that the pastors of the Genevan Church started to keep a register of their affairs and transactions. Those ten years had seen not only Calvin's coming in 1536, but also his expulsion in 1538 and his return in 1541, now to remain and lead the Reformation in Geneva for the remaining twenty-three years of his life. Unfortunately, the register was not as faithfully kept as one would have wished. It seems to have been written up somewhat spasmodically, with the result that there are numerous gaps and omissions, sometimes at points where we should very much like to have more information. Had the secretaries of the Company of Pastors been aware that what they were writing up was to become a historic document, they would doubtless have left us a fuller and more detailed record. As it is, however, it provides only a partial account of the doings and deliberations of the Company of Pastors in Calvin's time. Fortunately, there are other sources of information by which the record can be supplemented and filled out. But in itself the Register of the Company of Pastors is, none the less, a document the importance of which it would be difficult to exaggerate. The publication of its text makes available an indispensable work of reference for all serious students of Calvin and the city which adopted him.

It is a popular fantasy that the Frenchman John Calvin descended on Geneva as a religious tyrant whose aim was to dominate and subdue the unwilling populace of this city of no more than moderate importance and size. (It numbered some 20,000 souls in his day, which is comparable to the population of a large city parish of our day.) The fact is that nothing was further from his mind than to remain and make his home in this place, and nothing was further from his desires than to be involved in the tensions, conflicts, and harassments of public life which are the lot of the religious leader, and which were especially so in those troubled times of transition. The height of Calvin's ambition was to lead a life of scholarly retirement devoting himself to the literary tasks which he felt he had been called to fulfil. Prior to his fortuitous (as it seemed) arrival in Geneva, William Farel and Peter Viret, in fulfilment of the desire of both Council and people, had already made a start with the preaching of the Reformed faith and the establishing of evangelical worship there. It was not, therefore, to a hostile scene that he came.

Calvin describes (in the preface to his commentary on the Book of Psalms) how, after his experience of a sudden conversion, being retiring (*subrusticus*) by nature he had set his heart on an obscure and leisurely existence congenial to a man with scholarly objectives. He was actually on his way to Strasbourg, intent on finding the desired seclusion there, when the fateful encounter with Farel in Geneva took place—and even his going by way of Geneva, where he designed to spend no more than a single night, was fortuitous, in that, because of the recurrence of hostilities between Francis I and Charles V, the direct road from Paris to Strasbourg was blocked, making it necessary for him to travel by a circuitous route. So he arrived in Geneva, a bird of passage, *incognito* and unannounced. But someone recognized him and betrayed his presence to Farel—and that, virtually, was the end of his well laid plans for a peaceful and detached existence. Farel lost no time: "Learning that my heart was set on a sheltered life of private studies, and finding that he gained nothing by his entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my leisure if I should withhold my

help when the necessity was so great”, Calvin writes. His resistance was broken, however unwillingly; he abandoned his cherished purpose and his journey; but his naturally timid and reticent disposition caused him to stipulate that he would not place himself under obligation to assume any particular office in the church.

In this young man, then 27 years old, the fiery Farel discerned the master spirit that was needed if the building of the edifice of the Reformation was to be successfully carried through in Geneva. Recoiling, as we have seen, from any position of prominence, John Calvin commenced his career in the city with the humble title of *Lecteur en la sainte Ecriture en l'église de Genève*, which indicates that his personal wishes were respected to the extent that he was allowed to occupy the post of teacher, certainly less conspicuous than that of pastor. But it was not long—and for a man of his magisterial abilities it could not have been long—before he was compelled by circumstances of controversy in the city to display his exceptional qualities of mind and personality and also to add to his teaching commitments the responsibility of public preaching. This first period of two years would have been taxing enough for the most imperious of spirits: how much more for a man like Calvin who had no taste for public affairs and still longed for the solitude of the scholar's sanctuary. That he was impelled by no ambition or psychological urge to play the part of a dictator is shown by his own admission (in the same preface): “I was not animated by such greatness of mind as not to rejoice more than was seemly when certain commotions caused me to be expelled from Geneva.” It was a dispute with the civil authorities, involving the right of the pastors to speak freely from their pulpits and to act freely in the administration or otherwise of the sacrament, that led to the banishment of Calvin, Farel, and Viret from Geneva on 23 April 1538.

For Calvin at any rate, it was an occasion for rejoicing to the extent that it seemed that the moment had now come when he could with a good conscience withdraw from the public scene and devote himself in tranquillity to his literary pursuits. But it was not to be even now; for on his arrival in Strasbourg and the announcement of his intention not to accept appointment to any official post in the church there, his friend Martin Bucer threatened him with divine judgment, somewhat after the manner of Farel two years previously, holding before him the admonitory example of the prophet Jonah. Far more reluctantly did he respond subsequently to the call to return to Geneva. In going back he was governed, not by personal inclination, but by his sense of duty and his love for the Church of Christ in Geneva: “The welfare of this Church lay so near to my heart”, he says again, “that for its sake I would not have hesitated to lay down my life; nevertheless my timidity suggested to me many reasons for excusing myself from again voluntarily taking on my shoulders so heavy a burden. At length, however, a solemn and conscientious regard to my duty prevailed with me to return to the flock from which I had been torn: but with what grief, tears, and misgiving I did this the Lord is my best witness.”

Calvin's banishment from Geneva lasted two and a half years. As the *Guillermains* (a title formed from Farel's Christian name, Guillaume) established themselves and some degree of peace and order was restored to the Genevan scene, a situation appropriate to the reinstatement of Calvin came into being. An official delegation was despatched from the city to entreat the Reformer to return. This was in October 1540. Farel added his voice to the solicitations; but Calvin replied to him: “I would prefer a hundred other deaths to this cross on which I would have to die a thousand times each day”. “As often as I think how unhappy I was at Geneva,” he wrote again to his friend, “I tremble in my innermost being when mention is made of my return . . . I know well that wherever I go I must always expect to meet with suffering, and that, if I will live for Christ, life must be a conflict. But when I think to what

tortures my conscience was exposed, to what agonies I was subjected, and how I suffered the loss of all rest and quiet, I must pray you to forgive me if I dread that place as destructive of peace and safety.” And the following year: “If I had the choice I would do anything rather than what you wish, Farel. But as I am not left to my own choice, I bring my heart as a sacrifice and offering to the Lord”. Understandably, too, Bucer was anxious to keep Calvin with him in Strasbourg, and the civil authorities there were unwilling to release him until persuaded by insistent letters from Zurich and Basle as well as from Geneva, which urged the necessity of Calvin’s presence for the well-being of both church and state in Geneva. Neuchâtel, incidentally, had proved adamant in refusing to release Farel. And so Calvin (and Strasbourg) yielded at length to this unwelcome pressure. On 13 September 1541 he entered the city of Geneva again, never now to abandon it. His advent was greeted with scenes of joy and with every mark of civic honour. The populace spontaneously demonstrated their contrition for having allowed him to be driven from their midst.

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But Calvin’s return was in no sense that of the triumphant potentate. At no time did he attempt to usurp the authority of the civil magistrate, though it was only to be expected that a mind as powerful as his would leave its stamp not only on the church but also on the state; nor is it surprising, taking into account also his legal training and knowledge, that his counsel was repeatedly sought by the secular authorities—but always on such occasions his services were given in his capacity as a private person and without regard to his ecclesiastical status. Indeed, the whole structure of society as conceived in Calvin’s mind was based on the distinction between church and state as two separate powers whose spheres of authority were clearly defined, the former wielding the spiritual sword in the faithful proclamation of the Word of God, and the latter the secular sword in the maintaining of good and just government and the punishment of offenders against the statutory laws; and both being subject to the supreme authority of Almighty God. At the same time, while each power was regarded as having an autonomy of function, the relationship envisaged was one of harmony in which church and state co-operated fruitfully with each other to the glory of God. In practice, however, it was not always easy to agree on the precise line of demarcation that should be drawn between the two jurisdictions, with the result that conflicts—for example, the dispute (of which more will be said later) as to whether the right of excommunication belonged to those who wielded the spiritual sword or to those who wielded the secular sword.

Concrete regulations concerning the functions of the church in Geneva and its relationship to the state were embodied in the Ecclesiastical Ordinances which were officially adopted and promulgated by the General Council on 20 November 1541, and which are prefixed to the Register of the Company of Pastors. The preamble of this important document declared that there was need for “a certain rule and method of living by which each estate attends to the duty of its office”, and that accordingly it had been deemed “advisable that the spiritual government of the kind which our Lord demonstrated and instituted by His Word should be set out in good order so that it might be established and observed among us”. Of special significance is the concluding proviso which was added to the Ordinances to reassure the magistracy that there was no intention that the church should encroach on its domain:

All this is to be done in such a way that the ministers have no civil jurisdiction and wield only the spiritual sword of the Word of God, as St. Paul commands them, and that there is no derogation by this Consistory from the authority of the Seigneurie or the magistracy; but the civil power shall continue in its entirety. And in cases where there is need to administer some

punishment or to restrain the parties, the ministers together with the Consistory, having heard the parties and administered such reprimands and admonishments as are desirable, shall report the whole matter to the Council, which thereupon shall take steps to set things in order and pass judgment according to the requirements of the case.

The following July the form of oath to be required of all ministers on their admission to the pastoral office was approved by the Council. The minister had to swear that he would serve God faithfully, would observe the Ecclesiastical Ordinances, would maintain the honour and welfare of the city and its rulers, and would obey the laws and the magistracy of the republic, without prejudice to the liberty which belonged to him in the work of teaching as God had commanded and in fulfilling the various duties of his office.

The Ecclesiastical Ordinances defined four orders as having been instituted by Christ for the government of His Church: namely, pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons. The pastors, to whom alone the public ministry of Word and sacraments was entrusted, were to be elected to their office only after a searching test of their ability in theology and homiletics and an investigation to establish the blamelessness of their lives. Those so elected were to be presented to the Council, with whom it rested to ratify the ministers' choice; and, finally, the common consent of the members of the church was obtained by presenting the candidates to the people in public preaching. Their induction was to follow a ceremony of swearing in before the Council. These provisions immediately show how closely church and state were linked together in the Reformed perspective. This bond was further emphasized by the arrangement that any dispute over a doctrinal issue which the ministers were unable to resolve among themselves was to be referred to the civil authorities for judgment. Again, decisions of the ministers concerning the discipline of any of their number found guilty of delinquency were to be referred to the Council, to whom the right was reserved of ratifying or otherwise the punishment proposed.

The collaboration of church with state was made even more intimate by the regulations governing the appointment of the order of elders, who were the official ecclesiastical delegates of the civil power. Two were to be elected from the Little Council, four from the Council of Sixty, and six from the Council of Two Hundred, men of good character and reputation, who together with the Company of Pastors constituted the Consistory. The primary function of the elders was the supervision of the morals and discipline of the citizenry in their relationship to the church.

Of the remaining two orders, the teachers, as their name implies, were to be responsible for the education and Christian instruction of the people, especially the young, and one of the objectives in the establishment of a college was to ensure that future generations might not lack persons adequately trained and equipped both for the ministry of the church and for the government of the state. The fourth order, that of deacons, was charged with the care and the administration of charity to the poor, the sick, and the aged, for whom suitable institutions were provided. Begging accordingly was declared an offence.

But the marriage between church and state in Geneva, however ideal in theory, was not one of uninterrupted harmony in day to day experience. Personality of genius though he was, there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate the falsity of the fashionable assertion that it was Calvin who always called the tune and tyrannically governed the life of the Genevan republic. Indeed, the civil power did not show any noticeable disposition to relinquish its authority or submissively to place itself under the control either of the church as a whole or of

Calvin in particular. Calvin's years in Geneva were years of struggle rather than domination. To recognize this fact is not to minimize the extent to which a great mind was able over the years to impress its vision on the course of events and on the moulding of a community. Calvin's achievement—and it was in all essentials *his*—was truly phenomenal; it rested, however, not on dictatorial imposition, but on the logic of the scriptural principles which he sought to elucidate and apply. This alone explains the enduring nature of his achievement.

It should not be forgotten that when Calvin first came to Geneva, and was unwillingly held there by Farel, the city had already committed itself to the Reformation. Already, before his arrival, the state had not only overthrown the papal hegemony and outlawed the celebration of the mass, but had also pronounced strict penalties against libertinism and made church attendance obligatory on pain of a fine (measures of which Calvin is commonly said to have been the initiator by those who caricature him as a misanthropic kill-joy). All along, in jealously guarding what it considered its prerogatives, the state sought to have the last word and to exercise the power of veto. Matters even of faith, no less than of worship, had ordinarily to be submitted to the Council for approval and ratification. Thus in 1537 we find the Council sanctioning the confession of faith that Farel had prepared, issuing statutes concerning the administration of baptism and holy communion, and assuming to itself the right of pronouncing judgment in matrimonial cases after consultation with the ministers. In the same year the Council authorized the holding of a public conference with the Anabaptists, determined the length and conditions of its duration, and then decreed the banishment of all Anabaptists and forbade Farel to engage in such discussions in future without the Council's permission. It was criticism from the city's pulpits of unjustified interference in the ecclesiastical sphere which, in 1538, led to the attempt by the Council to impose a ban on preaching and thereafter to the expulsion of Calvin and his colleagues from Geneva.

But there is no evidence to suggest that during Calvin's absence from the city-state the people found themselves able to relax under a more indulgent regime. They were not granted any greater freedom of person or of opinion; the simple reason being that it was the duly appointed Council, not a fictitious tyrant named Calvin, that had ruled the republic hitherto and that continued to rule it. Why should the Council be expected to alter the regulations which it itself had passed? Accordingly, during the years of Calvin's banishment we see the magistracy maintaining a stern surveillance over the lives of the inhabitants, insisting on attendance at church and at holy communion, rigorously opposing all forms of papistry, and imposing a strict censorship on the publications of the printing-houses. It is absurd, therefore, to speak as though the expulsion of Calvin was symptomatic of the state's lack of sympathy with the Reformation and of a longing for less exacting standards of religion and morality. Nor did the recall of Calvin indicate any fundamental change in the state of affairs. It has been suggested, for instance, that the Consistory was instituted as an instrument of domination and as such presented a threat to the authority of the Council. But the facts do not support such a view, and in any case, as Calvin himself wrote to the ministers of Zurich, the Consistory was formed "for the purpose of regulating the morals of the place, and had no civil jurisdiction, but only the right of reproof in accordance with the Word of God, the most severe sentence in its power being that of excommunication."

It was precisely over the right of excommunication that a protracted dispute developed, a dispute that illustrates with particular clarity the tenacity with which the civil power clung to what it had decided were its own prerogatives, even in the face of the most persistent pressure from the church. As a chronicle of this dispute the Register of the Company of Pastors is a contemporary document of special interest. Calvin, as we have seen, considered that the right

of excommunication belonged to the Company of Pastors, in accordance with his understanding of the Ecclesiastical Ordinances. The Council, however, interpreted the situation otherwise. Ordinarily, in ecclesiastical matters, it rested with the Council to pronounce and impose the penalty for any infraction of the regulations. But the ministry claimed that excommunication was an exception to this rule, and, on the face of it, the Ordinances would seem to indicate plainly enough that excommunication was a discipline within their jurisdiction. Recalcitrant persons who persistently refused to heed the admonitions addressed to them were to be “forbidden the communion of the supper” or “separated from the church” and denounced to the Council, the ban evidently being imposed by the Consistory and the denunciation that followed being intended both for the information of the Council and also so that the Council might take any further disciplinary action that might be deemed necessary under the civil law. The members of the Council doubtless argued that the terms of the concluding proviso of the Ecclesiastical Ordinances (already quoted above) justified their interpretation of things, and they may also have been swayed by the consideration that Zwingli and Bullinger in Zurich, and leaders in other Reformed centres in Switzerland, had shown themselves content to leave the machinery of excommunication in the hands of the magistracy, judging that the church was sufficiently safeguarded by the Christian policy to which their states had committed themselves.

In March 1543, some fifteen months after the promulgation of the Ecclesiastical Ordinances, it is recorded in the Council’s Register that the question as to whether or not the Consistory should have the power of banning those incapacitated from receiving communion was discussed in the Council of Sixty, and that “it was resolved that the Consistory should have neither jurisdiction nor power to ban from the supper, but only to admonish and then to report to the Council, so that the Seignery might pass judgment on the delinquents according to their deserts”. Anyone, therefore, from whom the pastors might withhold the sacrament was tempted to feel that an appeal to the Council might be to his advantage. In September 1548, for example, the Council attended to a complaint made by a man named Amar and ruled that the ministers possessed the right “only of admonition and not of excommunication”; and in December of the same year the Council countermanded the pastors by authorizing Guichard Roux to receive the sacrament. Again, in February 1553, we find the pastors objecting before the Council that the Consistory was being treated contemptuously by a number of people who were saying that excommunication was not a function of this body, and demanding that the Consistory should be treated with greater respect.

This whole dispute came to a head over the case of Philibert Berthelier, whom the Consistory had banned from communion in 1551. Two days before Christmas in 1552, the Council sought to bring about that those who had been excommunicated should be restored to the fellowship of the holy table, including Berthelier. But the rebelliousness of spirit which Berthelier displayed was, it seemed, so unmistakeable, that even the Council was convinced of his unworthiness and supported the ban that had been placed on him. Subsequently, however, the Council reversed their attitude and, without consulting with the Consistory, told Berthelier that he could consider himself free to receive communion. Not surprisingly, this action evoked the strongest protestations from the ministers, “who unanimously declared that they could not admit this man, or others like him, to the supper until the Consistory had evidence of his repentance, and had absolved him”. They also objected that the Ecclesiastical Ordinances made it clear that the right of excommunication belonged to the Consistory and not to the Council. Calvin, moreover, voiced a public protest from the pulpit. On 7 September 1553 the city ministers, apart from Calvin, presented themselves before the Council and protested that the Council was unlawfully demanding that they should break their oath of

obedience to the Council's own ordinances. The Council in turn retorted that it had no intention of violating the regulations it had imposed. The following day the ministers presented a written plea to the Council in which they maintained not only that the right of excommunication was plainly assigned to the pastors in the Ecclesiastical Ordinances, but also that the added requirement that persons thus banned should be reported to the Council did not indicate that the Council had a power of veto over the Consistory's decisions, but that the Council should take suitable steps to deal with any who might show themselves refractory and scornful of spiritual discipline. It was then, such persons being a scandal to society, that the state should exercise the power of the sword with which it had been entrusted. Otherwise the dignity and authority with which the Consistory was vested would be brought into contempt, and might better be abolished altogether.

On 21 December the Council ruled that, because of his continued intransigence, Philibert Berthelier should not be readmitted to communion. His brother, François, was also excommunicated because of the outrageous accusations he had made against the ministers in the presence of the Council. But the controversy dragged on for another full year before it was finally resolved. At a session of the Council of Sixty and the Council of Two Hundred, held on 24 January 1555, Calvin, who was accompanied by the other ministers of the city, addressed the assembly; and then the first syndic, Amblard Corne, announced that it had been resolved that "the Consistory should retain its status and exercise its accustomed authority, in accordance with the Word of God and the Ordinances previously passed". It might have been thought that so imprecise a statement would be less than satisfactory and open to interpretation either way; but evidently its context was one which conceded to the pastors the right which they had claimed all along in this dispute.

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Another matter that was to prove a source of friction between church and state concerned the dismissal of ministers who had been found guilty of offences which were regarded as incapacitating them for the pastoral office. In such cases there was no dispute as to where the final authority lay: the Ecclesiastical Ordinances made it quite plain that the pronouncing of the sentence of deposition belonged to the Council. The problem arose when the Council showed itself unwilling to accede to the pastors' request for the removal of one of their number whom they judged unworthy to continue as a fellow-pastor. Philippe de Ecclesia was arraigned before the ministers of the Genevan church on 15 February 1549 and admitted, at least in part, the justness of the charge that he had been guilty of teaching certain errors and absurdities. A fraternal reprimand was administered to him and he was barred from speaking at the meetings of the Congregation until the next day of censures. This action was the culmination of frequent warnings that had been given him in the past. De Ecclesia expressed his acceptance of the decision of the brethren, and his plea that the discipline imposed on him might not be made public was granted. He was admonished also himself not to disclose what had taken place in the Congregation and to avoid the company of evil living and dissolute persons. De Ecclesia, however, failed to honour this agreement and shortly after was recalled for uttering further calumnies against his fellow-ministers and their doctrine, and for revealing what had taken place at the time of his previous arraignment. His answers to the accusations, which he denied, were inconsistent and hypocritical, and because of his intransigence and bad faith it was resolved that he should be deposed from the ministry and that the Council should be informed accordingly. When summoned before the Council de Ecclesia denied every accusation and countercharged the Company of Pastors with

fabricating a case against him. The response of the Council was a request to the ministers to pardon him and restore him to his place among them.

Understandably, the ministers felt this decision to be outrageous and seriously damaging to the dignity of their office, and they informed the Council that they were unable to reconsider their judgment concerning de Ecclesia's unsuitability to continue in the pastoral office. But the Council was no less obdurate and repeated its instruction that he was to be reinstated. On receiving a further remonstrance, the Council, while acknowledging that de Ecclesia's conduct had been reprehensible, undertook to administer a severe reprimand, warning him that if he appeared before it again there would be no further leniency. At the same time it persisted in its demand that the ministers should restore him. With this demand the Company now complied, though unwillingly and contrary to their convictions, declaring that responsibility for any harm resulting to the church rested on the shoulders of the Council.

De Ecclesia continued to be a thorn in the side of the Company of Pastors. On 13 April 1549, just a week after the Council's ruling, he was made to withdraw from the Congregation, being told that, until such time as there was evidence of a change of heart on his part, he would not be permitted to preach in the Congregation when it would ordinarily have been his turn to do so. This action was justified on the grounds that the pastors had explained to the Council that they would tolerate an evil which they were prevented from removing: they would accept de Ecclesia as a minister, conforming to the Council's ruling, but they were unable to welcome him as a brother. De Ecclesia next appears in the Register of the Company of Pastors in August 1551 when his brothers-in-law complained to the Congregation about his objectionable behaviour to his wife, their sister, and to their family in general. This *contretemps* seems to have been satisfactorily settled by the Congregation and a reconciliation effected between the parties concerned.

Nearly a year later, in March 1552, de Ecclesia was the cause of further trouble. As Jean de Saint-André had been expelled by the Bernese from Jussy (a parish which came under the jurisdiction of Geneva), the Council ordered the Company to proceed to the appointment of a minister in his place. Accordingly, it was resolved to move de Ecclesia from Vandoeuvres to Jussy. (Perhaps it was felt that he would be less trouble at a comparative distance from Geneva and in Bernese territory.) De Ecclesia, however, would not agree to the proposed change and voiced his objections to the scheme (as he had a right to do). These the Company found unsubstantial. On the matter being brought to the attention of the Council, the latter ruled that de Ecclesia should remain in the parish of Vandoeuvres and that the ministers should choose someone else for Jussy. This was another slap in the face for the Company of Pastors. But the Council brushed aside their protests, threatening that it would elect a man for Jussy if they refused to do so. And this it proceeded to do when the pastors made it plain that they could not conscientiously act otherwise than they had already done. So the Council nominated François Bourgoïn to Jussy. This called forth a further protest from the ministers that the regulations of the Ecclesiastical Ordinances were being violated. But the Council was not to be moved. Bourgoïn, for his part, declared that under the circumstances he could not acquiesce in the proposed arrangement. But the Council remained adamant, even when the pastors offered a compromise involving the allocation to Jussy of Jean Fabri (who had stated his willingness to go there). In the meantime, however, while these and other protests were flying to and fro, new accusations were brought against de Ecclesia to the effect that he had been engaging in acts of usury, which necessitated the Council to set up an investigation. It was also reported that de Ecclesia had been a companion of Jerome Bolsec (whose case had

been recently concluded and who had been banished from the city) and that he had proclaimed from the pulpit that the body of Christ is ubiquitous.

Consequently, in November of that same year (1552), de Ecclesia was arraigned before the Council. The ministers from the city and country parishes were also present. The accused man had no defence to offer to the charges of usury and disloyalty and accordingly was censured and condemned by the Council. Yet, even now, the pastors were requested to pardon him again and to let him continue in his position as a member of their Company. They had every justification for finding this an amazing request, even though the condition was added that de Ecclesia should acknowledge his fault and ask for forgiveness. Their rejoinder was that he had given ample proof of the sort of man he was and that it was vain to expect a change of heart in him now. On 16 December, their day of censures, the ministers in Congregation further cross-examined de Ecclesia and then reported to the Council that they had found no evidence of a repentant spirit in him, that therefore the condition imposed for his restoration had not been fulfilled, and that they were unable to accept him as one of their number. De Ecclesia made counter-protests before the Council. A week later the Council ordered the Company of Pastors to be reconciled to de Ecclesia. The ministers in turn objected that they could not conscientiously consent to this. The situation was not improved by the Council's simultaneous demand that persons who had been banned from communion should be reinstated forthwith. On 6 January 1553 the Consistory assembled, together with a number of special delegates from the Council, to give de Ecclesia yet another hearing. He "offered the same excuses as on previous occasions, speaking of reconciliation and protesting that he wished us no harm and that all should be forgiven, without in any way acknowledging his faults or showing signs of repentance". It was the unanimous judgment of the meeting that he had failed to satisfy the condition imposed by the Council, and the following week, on 27 January, the Council sentenced de Ecclesia to be deposed from his office as a minister of the Genevan Church.

This affair took place in the mid-course of Calvin's career in Geneva. It would be difficult to imagine an occasion better suited for the display of the tyrannical powers which some have supposed Calvin wielded. But it affords no evidence of the manifestation by him of any kind of authoritarianism. On the contrary, the de Ecclesia case indicates as clearly as anything could that, although conflicts between church and state were not unknown in Geneva, the state, so far from being cowed by some horrific kind of ecclesiastical domination, had no hesitation in withstanding the will of either the single person of Calvin or the united body of the pastors. It also testifies to the respect which the Reformers had for the authority of the state, even at those times when they found themselves unable to approve of its rulings. As Professor Basil Hall has written:

Those who wish to focus denigration of Calvin and what he stood for on his supposed cruelty and dictatorial powers fail to come to grips with two major facts. First, if Calvin was a cruel man, how did he attract so many, so varied, and so warmly attached friends and associates who speak of his sensitiveness and his charm? The evidence is plain for all to read in the course of his vast correspondence. Secondly, if Calvin had dictatorial control over Genevan affairs, how is it that the records of Geneva show him plainly to have been the servant of its Council which on many occasions rejected out of hand Calvin's wishes for the religious life of Geneva, and was always master in Genevan affairs? A reading of Calvin's farewell speech to the ministers of Geneva made shortly before he died should resolve doubt upon this point. To call Calvin the 'dictator of a theocracy' is, in view of the evidence, mere phrasemaking prejudice. Calvin in Geneva had less power either in theory or in practice than had Archbishop Whitgift in England,

and less again than had Archbishop Laud, for he had neither the authority of their office, nor the consistent and powerful political support which they received.¹

The Register of the Company of Pastors affords an abundance of evidence to corroborate this judgment. A revealing incident, not recorded in the Register, took place on 24 September 1548, when Calvin, none other, was summoned to appear before the Council in order to give an explanation of the contents of a letter from him to Viret in which he had made certain critical remarks concerning the city of Geneva and its government, and which had been intercepted and brought to the attention of the Council. Calvin offered his apologies and requested that what he had said might be taken in good part. On 18 October the Council announced that no further action would be taken, but admonished Calvin to be more mindful of his duty in future!

Finally, in this respect, it would seem that far too many people are ignorant of the significant fact that Calvin was not granted even the elementary privilege of bourgeois status in the republic of Geneva until the year 1559—that is, twenty-three years after his arrival in the city and only some five years before his death; and further, and consequently, that he had no vote until that year in the conduct of civic affairs. Such unconcern for even the humblest public status and recognition hardly comports with the image of a man who was, supposedly, ambitious for absolute power and domineering in his attitude to other mortals.

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But, someone is sure to ask, what about the burning of Servetus? Does not that incident show Calvin in the rôle of an intolerant tyrant? The short answer to this question is that it was the custom of that age to burn heretics, and Calvin, in so far as he approved of what was done, was conforming to that custom (except that, as we shall see, he desired for Servetus a death less painful than burning). To say this is not to condone what was done to Servetus; but it is important to remember that Calvin belonged to the sixteenth, not the twentieth, century and that the toleration which Protestantism takes so much for granted today, though it is a fruit of the Reformation, was not immediately comprehended by those pioneers of evangelical freedom. It should be remembered, too, that the middle years of the sixteenth century were years of the greatest peril for the Reformation movement which was then still in its formative stage, and that Calvin in Geneva (like his fellow-Reformers in other places) was intent on protecting his church from forces that threatened to destroy the edifice which was being constructed with such laboriousness. Accordingly, there was an exceptional sensitiveness to the peril of giving free rein to the disseminators of false teaching. In any case, it needs to be emphasized that Servetus was not burnt by Calvin, who had no authority to pronounce, or even to vote for, any such sentence. The death penalty was imposed by the civil authorities, and would have been imposed by them even if there had been no such person as Calvin in Geneva.

To describe this one instance of a man who was put to death in Calvin's Geneva, then, specifically as an example of *Protestant*, or, more narrowly, *Calvinistic*, intolerance is nonsense. Servetus had been taken prisoner in the city of Vienne where, by the practice of flagrant duplicity, he had for years enjoyed the hospitality and the patronage of the papal archbishop; but he had managed to escape from custody before being brought to trial. He was tried *in absentia*, however, and sentence was passed that, once apprehended, he was to be burnt alive by a slow fire until his body had been reduced to ashes, and his books with him. Meanwhile the city of Vienne contented itself with burning an effigy of him together with his

writings. This was the pattern of procedure that could have been expected in any city in which he was apprehended, whatever its religious affiliation. By papist and protestant alike Servetus was execrated as the most detestable of heretics, and it is one of the quirks of history that he was put to death in a protestant rather than a papal community. Such evidence as is available suggests that Servetus had made his way to Geneva in the expectation that the anti-Calvin party, which was then in power, would take his part and see that he came to no harm—indeed, his temerity was such that he may well have hoped to supplant Calvin as religious leader in that city. On Sunday 13 August 1553 he was bold enough to mingle with the worshippers in La Madeleine when Calvin himself was preaching, and, on being recognized, was immediately arrested by a civic official on a charge of heresy. And so the whole sorry tale of the trial unfolded. Servetus alternated between arrogance and plaintiveness, according as he felt things were going well or badly for him. He was championed by the rebellious Philibert Berthelier, around whom the controversy over excommunication was raging at that very time. But both the vanity and the violence of his opinions left him in the end a self-convicted man.

That the life of a man of so many-sided an intellect and so remarkable in his capacities should be extinguished in such a horrible manner was beyond all dispute tragic. The brilliance, it is true, was offset by a deep gulf of darkness in his character. And this duplicity was his undoing. He was like an animal which, impelled by presumption, is caught in a trap which it has knowingly entered. The theological interchange in the Servetus affair is carefully recorded in the Register of the Company of Pastors. There was an element of personal tragedy for Calvin, too; for this was not the first time that he and Servetus had had dealings with each other. Years earlier, as young men known by reputation to each other, a meeting had been negotiated between them when they were both in Paris. Because of his evangelical convictions Calvin had to move with the greatest circumspection, and the possibility was there that Servetus might be a decoy to bring about his capture. None the less, he kept the appointment and waited for a long time at the agreed *rendez-vous*, for he had hopes of gaining Servetus for the evangelical cause. But Servetus failed to put in an appearance. In later years Calvin wrote: "I was even ready to risk my life to win him to our Lord, if possible". Had this meeting taken place, the subsequent situation might have been very different. While Calvin expected and approved of the death sentence for so incorrigible a heretic, yet, as he said in a letter sent to Farel on 20 August 1553, it was his wish that some less cruel form of execution than burning might be permitted. This hope was to be disappointed. On 27 October 1553 sentence was publicly pronounced and Servetus was led off to the stake and burnt to death.

And so the deed was done. It was but a single drop in the ocean of savage tortures and persecutions and deaths that adherents of the Reformation were suffering in those days when it had become customary to hunt and destroy men like brutes. News was constantly reaching Geneva of fresh atrocities perpetrated against evangelical Christians; fugitives from persecution were constantly pouring into Geneva and finding shelter and succour there (which gave rise to the main complaint of the anti-Calvin faction, whose policy was Geneva for Genevans, and who bitterly opposed this influx of foreigners); and dedicated men were constantly being sent out from Geneva to imperil their lives by taking the message of the Gospel into hostile territory. These were times of violence and insecurity. Protestants were condemned as heretics by papists, and Servetus was condemned as a heretic by both protestants and papists.

The sentence in the Servetus case was decreed by the anti-Calvin party, then in power in Geneva. Calvin concurred with its justness. But first there had been consultation with the churches of Zurich, Schaffhausen, Basle, and Berne—Geneva’s fellow-Reformed churches in Switzerland—and all (including Berne, which, as the Register shows time and again, was not the friendliest and most co-operative of neighbours to Geneva, or Calvin) demanded that Servetus should be punished with the utmost rigour of the law. On 8 September Farel wrote from Neuchâtel to Calvin that, as the apostle Paul had said that he did not wish to escape death if he deserved it,² so he had often expressed his willingness to die if he had taught anything contrary to the doctrine of the Gospel, and, indeed, would consider himself worthy of the worst possible torture if he had turned anyone from the faith and teaching of Jesus Christ. “In fact,” Farel added, “I cannot demand for others anything else than what I demand for myself”. This, as Doumergue had observed, throws lights on the psychology of the men of the sixteenth century. The following year, on 14 October, Melanchthon, who was as gentle as Farel was fiery, wrote to Calvin: “Now and in the generations to come the Church owes and will owe you gratitude. I maintain that your magistrates have acted justly in executing this blasphemer following a lawful trial”.

Melanchthon, like Farel, was Calvin’s friend; but even Bolsec, whose antipathy to Calvin needs no comment, expressed his full approval of what had been done, and this despite the fact that he himself had been condemned and banished from Geneva some time previously. In a letter to Cardinal de Tournon he described Servetus as a “foul and monstrous heretic” who was “altogether wicked and unworthy to share the company of men”, and declared his wish that “all persons of this kind should be exterminated and the Church of our Lord thoroughly purged of such vermin”. In view of what he had experienced in Geneva and his attitude to Calvin, it might have been expected that Bolsec would be predisposed to take the side of Servitus. His judgment affords further and striking confirmation of the judgment of that age.

* * * *

Bolsec’s trial and banishment had taken place two years before the Servetus affair. The theological dispute with him is fully recorded in the pages of the Register of the Company of Pastors, and it throws some interesting light on the question of the tolerance of Calvin and his contemporaries. The matter under debate was the doctrine of predestination and its implications—a matter in which it would be felt today that there is room for difference of opinion and emphasis. But, once again, the state of affairs in the Church of Geneva must be given due weight. Virtually surrounded as the small city-state was by hostile forces, while Geneva itself was the scene of deep spiritual struggle, Calvin was intent on establishing a strong integrity of doctrine so that the Reformation might be secured for the generations to come. What he believed to be at stake was nothing less than the truth of the sovereignty of God, which was the key-stone of the whole Reformed system. Moreover, Bolsec’s attack amounted to an affirmation of a certain adequacy of man in the realization of salvation, which in effect was little different from the semipelagian teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. And it must be added that Bolsec, now pursuing the somewhat dubious career of a theologian-cum-physician of sorts, had previously been a monk, and, understandably, ex-monks were treated with a measure of healthy suspicion until the sincerity of their professed change of heart had been sufficiently tested.

On 8 March 1551 Jerome Bolsec was summoned before the Consistory because of the wild denunciations he had been uttering against the doctrine of predestination, and his opinions were rebutted by Calvin in a friendly and gentle manner. The attempt to curb his slanders was

unsuccessful, however, and he was cited again on 15 May and sternly reprimanded. He appeared for the third time before the pastors at their Congregation held on 16 October of the same year and made a frontal assault on their doctrine, declaring that their God was a tyrannical idol like the pagan deity Jupiter, that their teaching was heretical, and that it was false to affirm that Augustine had maintained the doctrine of election—indeed, he asserted that this doctrine had been invented by the Italian scholar Lorenzo Valla during the preceding century! Calvin, who was not present at the commencement of the meeting, had come in unperceived and taken a place among the listeners. No sooner had Bolsec finished speaking than he stood up and treated the company to a characteristically brilliant display of intellectual virtuosity. In an oration that lasted an hour he refuted Bolsec point by point, quoting numerous passages from Scripture and from Augustine with such fluency that it seemed as though he had just that moment come from studying them. Thus, as on so many other occasions, Calvin's phenomenal memory was used with crushing effect. A state official who was present took Bolsec into custody.

It would be difficult for anyone to deny the violent and scandalous nature of the slanders which Bolsec continued to utter even while he was in prison. As usual, Calvin staunchly expounded and defended the Reformed doctrine; but it seems that he would have been pleased to call off this particular dispute—perhaps because so much of Bolsec's assault was on him personally, and Calvin was never much interested in self-defence. In response to the counter-charges levelled against him by Bolsec, he complains, *inter alia*, that Bolsec had passed over in silence the fact that he (Calvin) had besought the Council even with tears that the matter might be dropped. This, surely, should be the last nail in the coffin of the calumny that there was no mild and forgiving side to Calvin's nature: it is simply not true that he hungrily demanded the destruction of any person who might be so rash as to disagree with him. The civil authorities disregarded his request, however, and required the trial to be carried through to its conclusion.

Transcripts of the theological interchange between Bolsec and the pastors were sent by order of the Council to the other chief centres of the Reformation in England, so that Geneva might have the benefit of their judgment before a final decision in this affair was announced. The replies received are of considerable interest. The letter from Basle dated 21 November 1551, deplors the trouble which Bolsec had caused in the Genevan Church and indignantly disavows a claim made by him that the Church of Basle held opinions similar to his own. The response is cautiously worded, however, especially in that the assertion of a double predestination is avoided: "Those whom God draws believe; those whom He does not draw do not believe. . . . This only we say: what takes place is plain enough; but why it takes place is due to a hidden cause which God alone knows. Nor is it for us to inquire into this cause. But this much is certain: that they (those who are not drawn) rejected the Word which was preached to them because it was contrary to their inclinations. . . . It is better that we should start from faith rather than from the foreknowledge of God or from predestination and election . . . for in this way our teaching is not bound up with doubtful questions by which it could be side-tracked. . . . You see, then, our simplicity with regard to this question, which is the most difficult and intricate in religion".

In thanking the pastors of Basle for their prompt reply—the transcript and covering letter had been sent to the different churches on 14 November—Calvin expressed a measure of disappointment over the indecisive manner in which they had written. By contrast, however, the letter from Zurich, which was dated 27 November, was openly critical, and, emanating from that quarter, must have come as a shock to Calvin. A letter from him to Farel dated 8

December expressed his sense of disappointment at the attitude of Bullinger and his colleagues, from whom he had anticipated the fullest support. It is true that the ministers of Zurich declared their great grief at the news of the problems with which the Church in Geneva was confronted and their admiration for the work which Calvin and his fellow-pastors were doing in that city. But it was their hope that a reconciliation between Bolsec and the Genevan pastors might be negotiated. And they did not scruple to introduce a reproofing note: "In your judgment Jerome has conducted his case in an intemperate manner; but, our brothers, we look for moderation in you also, for you seem in your letter . . . to be extremely severe". That letter had described Bolsec as pestilential, rash, irresponsible, and imposturous (surely with some justification) and had expressed the desire that the Church of Geneva might be rid of him, "but in such a way that he does not become injurious to our neighbours". It may be that this was taken to imply a penalty more drastic than was intended. The Zurich pastors even stated that they had no wish "to tighten the chains of a captive man, unknown to us, as we have not been appointed his judges". In explaining their own view of the doctrine in dispute, they took care to add that "the fact that the reprobate do not believe the Word of God, but wickedly live in opposition to God, ought to be attributed to them, not to God, who justly and condignly condemns those whom He condemns, since it is in man, not in God, that sin inheres".

Farel and the ministers of Neuchatel (though they were not, apparently, among those to whom the transcript of the Bolsec debate was officially sent) wrote supporting the Genevan pastors up to the hilt. In a vituperative denunciation of Bolsec they likened him to Judas Iscariot. They commended their colleagues in Geneva for having dealt with this matter wisely, and expressed the belief that all good men would approve what they had done. If the reaction from Neuchstel was as expected, so also, no doubt, was the reaction from Berne (which is not included in the Register). The latter was as distant and unfavourable as the former was warm and approving. It was an opportunity not to be missed by those in Berne who regarded the public of Geneva with such jealous rivalry. They admonished their neighbours to be careful not to treat those who are in error with too great severity. They reminded them that the doctrine of predestination had been an embarrassment to excellent men and that it was not milk for children but meat for the mature. Moreover, they did not consider Bolsec to be so black as he had been painted, and so they wished him to be treated with leniency as a brother and fellow-Christian and by the arts of persuasion to be brought to a better frame of mind. All this sounds admirable—until one remembers that subsequently the Bernese ran this same man Bolsec out of their territory when he sought asylum there. And there is even more irony, if possible, in the fact that, in 1558, Valentin Gentilis was induced by Calvin with the use of persuasion to retract his antitrinitarian views, but was later arrested by the Bernese and burnt to death in their city.

Bolsec, in fact, was not even an inhabitant of Geneva. The situation is well summed up by Calvin himself in a letter he wrote to Bullinger following the somewhat unsympathetic response from Zurich. He found it incomprehensible that Bullinger and his colleagues should have wished to afford protection to a man who had seditiously stirred up trouble in a peaceful church, who had tried to split their ranks with disastrous discord, and who, without the slightest provocation, had publicly charged them with all sorts of infamies. The expulsion from Geneva of this agitator and charlatan, who in any case did not belong there, seems a reasonable enough action under the circumstances. Jerome Bolsec was to become the most vicious and unscrupulous inventor of slanders against Calvin's good name.

But the Church in Geneva was far from being preoccupied with its own troubles and problems. No church was less open to the charge of introversion than this church. This is something to which the Register of the Company of Pastors bears clear testimony. In Geneva, as we have already remarked, the most sustained opposition to Calvin came, not from persons who were out of sympathy with the Reformation, but from the “Geneva for the Genevans” party who resented the policy of welcoming into the city large numbers of refugees from the persecutions that were raging against adherents of the Reformed faith in France and elsewhere. Geneva, indeed, became the most famous haven for evangelical fugitives of the day. No doubt this steady influx from abroad posed problems of administration and accommodation in the small republic—and there were inevitably some undesirable individuals who slipped in under false colours. But these considerations did not stifle the magnanimity which held out the hand of hospitality to those who were destitute and in distress.

Calvin’s Geneva, however, was something more than a haven of refuge for the afflicted: it was also a school, in which, with the aid of regular lectures and daily sermons, the people were instructed and built up to be strong in the Christian faith. Even more significantly, it was a school of missions: it was open not only to receive fugitives but also to send out witnesses who would spread the teaching of the Reformation far and wide. Geneva, indeed, received only to give. It was a dynamic centre of missionary concern and activity, an axis from which the light of the Good News radiated forth through the testimony of those who, after thorough preparation in this “school”, were sent forth in the service of Jesus Christ.

The record in the Register of this missionary activity is impressive, even though it is incomplete and undramatic in its presentation. Here is irrefutable proof of the falsity of the too common conclusion that Calvinism is incompatible with evangelism and spells death to all missionary enterprise. The Register gives the names of 88 men who were sent out from Geneva as bearers of the Gospel between the years 1555, when it was first considered safe for their names to be recorded, and 1562, when the wars of religion commenced in France and it became expedient once again to cease minuting the names of such men, most of whom went into French territory. Since the Reformation was a new dawn of the Gospel after centuries of comparative darkness in Europe, it was not (with one exception) to the heathen overseas but to the mission field of Europe, and in the main of France, that these men were despatched.

In certain respects, Geneva was strategically placed as a launching-ground for these enterprises, being situated at the tip of the south-western section of Switzerland which juts into the heart of France, and is also near to the northern territory of Italy. But it would be hard to exaggerate the extremely hazardous nature of the assignment undertaken by those who sallied forth from Geneva as missionaries. The unbridled hostility to the Reformation meant that the utmost secrecy had to be observed in sending out these evangelical emissaries. Ordinary prudence dictated that their identity should customarily be concealed by the assumption of pseudonyms (hence the occurrence at times in the Register of more than one name for the same person: for example, “Jean Gerard, otherwise called du Gay”, “Guy Moranges, alias la Garde”, “Jean Boulier, called de la Roche”). Their lines of infiltration were along perilous paths through the mountains, where they were dependent on friendly cottagers for food and hiding in case of necessity. Nor did the danger end when they arrived at their various destinations, for there too the utmost caution had to be observed lest they should be discovered and apprehended, with all the dire consequences that would be involved. Where a congregation was mustered, services were conducted in a private home behind locked doors or in the shadows of a wooded hillside. There were times when, as much

for the sake of the work as for his own safety, it became advisable for a missionary-pastor to leave a place because his activities were becoming suspect and his identity was no longer well concealed (he was becoming, as the Register puts it, "*trop découvert*"). It is against this sort of background that the letter of 12 October 1553 from the Company of Pastors in Geneva addressed, without the mention of names, "to the believers of certain islands in France", and pseudonymously signed "Charles d'Espeville" (a cover-name sometimes used by Calvin), must be understood.

As previously remarked, the Register names 88 such men who were sent out from Geneva between 1555 and 1562; but there were many more who are not mentioned in these annals. In 1561, for example, which appears to have been the peak year for this missionary activity, the despatch of only twelve men is recorded; whereas evidence from other sources indicates that in that year alone no less than 142 men ventured forth on their respective missions.³ This concern on the part of Geneva for the spiritual benefit of others in foreign territories was the opposite of self-centred: indeed, Geneva was willing, in times of urgent demand, to deprive itself of pastors whom it needed for itself rather than withhold men who could go out to establish an evangelical ministry elsewhere.

Nor was it unusual for Reformed missionaries to be arrested, persecuted, and put to death. Thus, for example, the Register for 17 June 1555 records the receipt of a letter from three men, Jean Vernou, Antoine Laborier, and Jean Trigalet, who had been arrested and imprisoned at Chambéry while *en route* to Piedmont in Italy as missionaries. They never regained their freedom, but suffered martyrdom in the same place. Experiences of this kind, however, deplorable though they were, did not have the effect of inhibiting the sending out of more men along the same and similar perilous routes. On 16 August 1557, to take another incident mentioned in the Register, Nicolas des Gallars, himself a Frenchman of noble birth and one of Calvin's right-hand men, set out from Geneva in order to serve the cause in Paris, where peril lurked for professors of the Reformed faith around every street corner. On the way his companion was seized and put to death, but des Gallars managed to escape and reach his destination. Not long after his arrival enemy forces suddenly descended on his congregation and threw some two hundred of them, including many of high birth, into custody, as he tells in a letter of 7 September 1557. Again, in 1559 there is the somewhat terse entry: "Mâitre Lancelot d'Albeau was appointed to Valence, where, after faithfully preaching the Gospel, he was seized by his enemies and sealed the doctrine of the truth with his blood and his death".

Another laconic but exceptionally interesting minute concerns the sending of two ministers, Pierre Richet and Guillaume Charretier, to Brazil in August 1556. The Huguenot leader, Admiral Coligny, had been induced to believe that a colony of Protestant emigrants might be formed in South America, where they would be free from persecution, and able to establish their own culture and to evangelize the heathen natives. Accordingly a group of Reformed colonists was sent out to the islands which the French had taken off the coast of Brazil, and Richet and Charretier were appointed by the Genevan Church as chaplains to the Reformed group and missionaries to the South American Indians. The governor of the colony, Villegagnon, betrayed Coligny's trust in him, however. He turned against the Calvinists in his expedition, throwing four of them to a watery grave in the sea because of the faith they confessed, and causing the rest to seek safety by returning to their homeland, which, ironically, they had left in order to enjoy freedom to express and practise their faith without being hated and hunted like animals. But, abortive though this excursion proved to be, it

testifies strikingly to the far-reaching vision which Calvin and the Church in Geneva had of their missionary task.

Calvin's Geneva was also outward looking in its attitude to evangelical churches in other places. Proof of this is found, for instance, in the *Consensus Tigurinus* (or Zurich Agreement), the text of which is given in the Register. Calvin was particularly anxious to achieve a theological harmony of the Reformed churches, and not least in respect of eucharistic doctrine, both because of the central evangelical importance of right belief at this point and also because it had proved a focus of some contention, especially with the German churches. It was on 1 August 1549 that Calvin sent a letter and twenty-four articles or heads of agreement concerning the sacraments in general and the holy communion in particular to the pastors and teachers of the Church of Zurich for their approval. These articles were the outcome of a previous visit to Zurich by Calvin and Farel for the purpose of consultation over these matters. The response from Zurich was enthusiastic and the *Consensus* was adopted also by the church of Neuchâtel.

A few months earlier, in fact, a sort of prototype or prior draft of the *Consensus Tigurinus* had been sent by the Genevan Company of Pastors to the pastors of the Church of Berne. The text of the twenty articles comprising this document, together with the covering letter, is also recorded in the Register. Moves of this kind are indicative of Calvin's deep concern for doctrinal unity, particularly since the terms of the *Consensus Tigurinus* do not represent his personal sacramental views in the fulness of their emphasis: in the interests of harmony he was willing to moderate his own position, though not, of course, to compromise his convictions.

The extent of Calvin's influence throughout Europe is sufficiently well known: from far and wide his advice and help were eagerly sought by a great variety of persons. By way of illustration of his wider ecumenical outlook I wish only to mention here the correspondence that passed between him and Archbishop Cranmer in 1552 concerning the latter's grand project for the convening of an international congress of Reformed churchmen. "As nothing tends more injuriously to the separation of the churches than heresies and disputes respecting the doctrine of religion," wrote Cranmer on 20 March 1552,

"so nothing tends more effectually to unite the churches of God, and more powerfully to defend the fold of Christ, than the pure teaching of the Gospel and harmony of doctrine. Therefore I have often wished, and still continue to do so, that learned and godly men, who are eminent for erudition and judgment, might meet together in some place of safety, where, by taking counsel together and comparing their respective opinions, they might handle all the heads of ecclesiastical doctrine and hand down to posterity, under the weight of their authority, some work not only upon the subjects themselves but upon the forms of expressing them."

To this Calvin replied that it was his wish too "that grave and learned men from the principal churches might meet together at a place appointed and, after diligent consideration of each article of the faith, hand down to posterity a definite form of doctrine according to their united opinion". He observed that it was "to be reckoned among the greatest evils of our time that the churches are so estranged from each other that scarcely the common intercourse of society has place among them, much less that holy communion of the members of Christ which all persons profess with their lips, though few sincerely honour it with their practice". He added the famous comment that, if he could be of any service, he would not shrink from crossing ten seas, should that be necessary, for the purpose of attending such a gathering.⁴

Cranmer's project was never achieved. With the death of Edward VI and the accession to the throne of "Bloody" Mary he and many of his fellow-Reformers in England suffered martyrdom, while numerous others found refuge in Reformed circles on the Continent, including the church of Geneva. The glorious reign of Elizabeth I, however, saw the restoration of the Reformed worship of the Book of Common Prayer. Not long after she had become queen a request was sent—in April 1560—to Geneva by the Bishop of London (Edmund Grindal) for the sending of a good man to serve as minister of the French Protestant congregation in London, which was now being established again. The man chosen for this assignment was Calvin's close friend and lieutenant, Nicolas des Gallars. The fact of his despatch is cursorily mentioned in the Register of 1560; but the sparing of so valuable a pastor is a measure of the importance which Calvin attached not only to the French congregation in London but also to the Church of England, in whose affairs des Gallars might be expected to play a not insignificant part, as had been the case with predecessors in the post. It was, in short, a measure of Calvin's ecumenical perspective.

Enough has been said, I trust, to give some idea of the wealth of interesting material that is to be found in the Register of the Company of Pastors, much of it now published for the first time. The perusal of the Register enables us, as it were, to listen in to some of the most significant deliberations of the Company of Pastors, to obtain an insight into the doctrinal and ecclesiastical problems with which Calvin and his colleagues had to contend, and to gain an intimate glimpse of the Reformed microcosm that was Geneva in the middle years of the sixteenth century. By no means least, we are shown that Calvin's Geneva was not an introspective hothouse of pietism, not merely a haven and place of refuge for those in distress (as so many seem to regard the Church of our twentieth century), but especially a dynamic centre of evangelism and Christian instruction—"the most perfect school of Christ which has been seen on earth since the days of the apostles", as John Knox described it—where good men were built up in the faith in order that, at whatever peril to themselves, they might launch out from that haven into the storms beyond and minister the life-giving message to others.

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Endnotes:

- 1) "The Calvin Legend," in *The Churchman*, London, Vol. 73, No. 3, September 1959, pp. 124f.
- 2) The allusion is to Acts 25:16.
- 3) For a careful study of this whole situation see Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555-1563*, Geneva, 1956.
- 4) Thomas Cranmer, *Works* (Parker Society edition), Vol. II, Cambridge, 1846, pp. 431ff.