

THE GODLY LIFE OF JOHN CALVIN

“MY HEART I OFFER
TO YOU, O LORD --



PROMPTLY AND SINCERELY!”

(Prov. 23:26 cf. 1:7.)

Sixteenth Century Reformation Rally Address
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by

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The Protestant Reformation had not yet begun. Yet the Dark Ages of many centuries of ignorance were about to end. For the art of printing had recently been invented. So the available number of Bibles was now steadily increasing. And the deepening study of that book, was clearly exposing the corruption of the Deformed Church. Martin Luther was still an unconverted monk aged 26 when Jean Cauvin alias John Calvin first saw the light of day.

Calvin was born one of six children in the town of Noyon, within the province of Picardy, in the land of France. Soon after that, he was baptized in the local Roman Catholic cathedral. Both his first dwelling-place (today a small Protestant church!), as well as his first place of worship (still the Roman Catholic cathedral) deeply impressed me when I myself visited them in 1969.

Calvin's mother Jeanne Lefranc Cauvin was a dedicated Roman Catholic who superstitiously relished relics. But other near relatives in the immediate family were less complacent. Calvin's father, Gerard Cauvin -- though the secretary of a bishop -- was himself nevertheless something of a nonconformist who criticized ecclesiastical abuses. And Calvin's elder brother Charles -- the Catholic priest in Noyon -- was later excommunicated from the Roman Church in 1536 for following the Lutheran "heresy." Indeed, after their father had been excommunicated for non-theological reasons, Charles and John later buried him while he was still unreconciled with Rome.

Now when Calvin was a little boy of eight, Luther started the Reformation in Germany by nailing the 95 theses (against the Romish deformation of Christianity) on the doors of Wittenberg Cathedral. When Calvin was but ten, Zwingli started the Swiss Reformation. When Calvin was fourteen, his parents -- still intending him for the Roman Catholic priesthood -- sent him to the College des Capettes in his hometown Noyon.

Soon, however, he was transferred to Paris. There, at the College de la Marche, he studied Latin and French under the renowned teacher Mathurin Cordier, a student of the great Renaissance scholar Desiderius Erasmus himself. Still in Paris, Calvin transferred to the reactionary College Montaigu, a hotbed of Anti-Protestant Romish conservatism and of strict ascetic practice. Here, John got his M.A. degree. Fortunately for Calvin, he also now met the genial Biblical humanist Nicholas Cop. He it was who introduced Calvin to the ideas: of the great Greek scholar, Guillaume Budé; of the German Reformer, Martin Luther; and of the great French Bible scholar Pierre Robert d'Olivet.

However, Calvin's father was now about to be excommunicated by Rome. This brought the family into a great crisis. The next year, when John himself was but twenty years old, the 'Mother Church' declared that both he and his elder brother Charles were "contumacious."

Disillusioned with the Roman Church and desiring to obey his father's wishes, John switched from theology to law. Thus he proceeded to Orleans, to study under Pierre Taisan d'Etoile (the greatest legal mind in France).

There, Calvin studied for twelve hours at a stretch. Indeed, he would also wake up each day early in the morning, and strengthen his memory by repeating (while still in bed) whatever he had been studying the previous night.

Then, transferring to Bourges, John studied further under the great Italian jurist Andrea Alciati; and under the celebrated teacher of Greek culture, Melchior Wolmar. Thus, Calvin finally secured his doctorate in law (LL.D.) when 22 years old in 1531 -- the year of his father's death.

While studying law, Calvin had also acquired a taste for classical languages. So he now returned to Paris, in order to pursue Renaissance Studies at the Collège Royale. His teachers there were the great Greek scholar Pierre Danès, and the celebrated Hebrew teacher Francois Vatable. Renewing his old friendship with Nicholas Cop, Calvin lodged with an enthusiastic Protestant, Etienne de la Forge.

There, he met De la Forge's preacher Rev. Gerard Roussel; as well as the great Bible scholar Lefevre d'Etaples. Calvin was still a humanist, and he completed his famous work on Seneca's *De Clementia* in 1532.

Yet Calvin's humanistic knowledge of the classical languages also gave him access to the Bible in its original tongues. And his contact with De la Forge's Protestant circle was leading him more and more to choose -- between the Neo-Paganistic Renaissance on the one hand, and the Protestant Reformation on the other.

Calvin took a long time to become a Protestant. But the day of decision finally came in 1533, when he was 24 years old. Watching a public procession in Noyon in connection with the outbreak of pestilence there, brought Calvin to the point of decision. His studies had prepared the way for his conversion -- but his heart now made the final commitment.

At a much later date, looking back on his 1533 conversion, Calvin wrote: "God drew me from obscure and lowly beginnings, and conferred on me that most honourable Office of Herald and Minister of the Gospel. My father had intended me for theology from my early childhood. But when he reflected that the career of the law proved everywhere very lucrative for its practitioners, the prospect suddenly made him change his mind. And so it happened that I was called away from the study of philosophy, and set to learning law.

"Although, out of obedience to my father's wishes I tried hard -- yet God at last turned my course in another direction.... By an unexpected conversion, He turned to teachableness a mind too stubborn for its years. For I was so strongly devoted to the superstitions of the Papacy, that nothing less could draw me from such depths of mire. And so this mere taste of true godliness that I received, set me on fire!"

Events now moved very rapidly. In November, Calvin's friend Cop gave a public sermon in the Church of the Mathurins. Cop preached in favour of God's sovereign grace. He explained the forgiveness of sins. And he described everlasting life as a free gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, he even inveighed against the "shrivelled-up sophists" of the unreformed party.

Francis the First, the Roman Catholic King of France, immediately put a price on Cop's head -- so that he hastily fled to Switzerland. Cop's friend Calvin fled Paris to Claix, where he enjoyed the magnificent library of his friend Louis du Tillet. There, Calvin soon became France's leading Protestant theologian.

In 1534, when Calvin was but 25, D'Etaples told him: "You have been chosen as an instrument of the Lord. Through you, God will erect His Kingdom in our land!"

However, in May, the Bishopric of Noyon terminated Calvin's ecclesiastical income. This precipitated his formal breach with the Roman Church. Now he became a "nomadic missionary," preaching sermons in cellars and administering the Lord's Supper in caves.

Against the false testimony of Romanists who wrongly accused him of Anabaptist views, Calvin defended the immortality of the soul in his *Psychopannychia*. The Reformed protests against the corruptions of the Roman Church increased. As too did the Romish persecution of the Protestants.

In October, public posters against the Romish mass appeared suddenly and surreptitiously. King Francis condemned the posters as scandalous. So Calvin and Du Tillet wisely fled France to the Zwinglian stronghold of Strassburg.

Calvin had already suffered much. His father and his brother had been excommunicated by the Anti-Reformed Church of Rome. He himself had been hunted down like a wild animal, until he had now finally fled his beloved France for ever.

His health was poor, throughout his life. A chronic insomniac, he averaged but two hours sleep per night. He ate little, and had severe indigestion. He often suffered from the most violent attacks of migraine. He contracted catarrh, asthma, haemorrhoids, calculus, intermittent fevers, and arthritis of an almost unbearably painful nature. His constitutionally-weak chest endured many severe colds in the raw Swiss climate -- until he finally succumbed to tuberculosis. Yet he laboured on incessantly, against all odds -- until, in 1564, at 55 years of age, he finally went to receive his heavenly reward..

Throughout 1535, the 26-year-old Calvin studied hard, both in Strassburg and in Basel. There, he met the Reformers Bucer and Capito and Zell. And there he also worked on the manuscript of his own masterly *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

In 1536, the work was published (and rapidly sold out). A practical book, it gives a detailed analysis: of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Biblical Sacraments. It also: condemns six of the seven 'sacraments' of Romanism; defends Christian freedom against the papal strictures; and even demarcates the duties of a godly state.

In addressing his Foreword to Francis the First, the Romish King of France, Calvin's *Institutes* condemns the Anabaptists with whom the Protestants were often (quite wrongly) confused in the Romish mind. For the Anabaptists were revolutionists and visionaries; while the Protestants were reformers and Bible-believers.

After a visit to Renée (Duchess of Ferrara) in Italy, Calvin wanted to return to Basel. He did so by way of Geneva, an important city which the Protestants in Berne had liberated some eight years earlier from the Romish Duke of Savoy. Sadly, however, not lawful Protestantism but antinomian libertinism had since then ruled that city. Moreover, the Romanists were planning to recapture it.

Hearing Calvin was lodging there for a short spell, the Protestant leader Guillaume Farel came from Berne to Geneva. And Farel threatened to have God curse Calvin -- if the latter would not stay on in Geneva and help reform that city!

Complained Calvin to Farel: "Be kind to me! Let me serve God in some other way!" For Calvin wanted to continue his studies in Basle or in Strassburg (as formerly), and not to get involved in the hurly-burly of Geneva. However, Farel thundered back at Calvin: "I

declare to you, in the name of God Almighty – your studies are an excuse! If you do not now give yourself to this work with us -- God will curse you! For then, you will be seeking yourself – and not Christ!”

Calvin trembled. And later on, he wrote: “I was transfixed not only by being addressed and warned in this way, but also by a terrible forswearing from Farel – as if God from heaven violently grabbed me with His hand.”

So the godly Calvin humbly yielded -- and moved to the ungodly Geneva. In August, he started lecturing, in St. Peter’s Church in Geneva, on the Epistles of Paul. That he did for five months -- without receiving any salary.

In October, he went to Lausanne to engage in public debate against a Roman Catholic theologian. His Jesuit opponent claimed that the communion bread was transubstantiated into Christ’s flesh.

But Calvin spontaneously refuted this claim -- by quoting Chrysostom and Augustine from memory. So powerful was his refutation, that a Franciscan priest then in that very place was promptly converted to Protestantism -- and the whole city was won for the Reformation.

At the end of 1536 -- when still only 27 years old – Calvin was appointed the City Preacher of the ungodly Geneva. His name was now on everybody’s lips. Soon, he drew up a *Church Order*. This was to govern: the celebration of the Lord’s Supper; the Christian’s Profession of Faith; Church Discipline; and Ecclesiastical Censure.

In the January of 1537, the people expressed agreement. Then Calvin published his *Biblical Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and Worship Services at Geneva*. This was followed by his *Confession of Faith* and his *Catechism*.

Reluctantly, the ungodly people at least outwardly voiced general assent. Yet inwardly, the people of licentious Geneva continued to resist the Reformation. They hated being disturbed. They explained that they were quite respectable -- because they had previously been baptized *etc.* Indeed, they now started to brand Calvin’s views as “novelties.” This resistance to Calvin increased -- especially when he called for the punishment of gamblers and adulterers.

Calvin still had some influence with the Town Clerk, however. But by July, when the latter tried to issue theocratic statements to the people of Geneva, some of the leading citizens openly resisted and denounced the “French preachers” they quite rightly suspected had put him up to it.

Worse still. In the 1538 February elections, a number of the enemies of Calvin and Farel were elected mayors in some of the leading Swiss cities. Now, these City Councils no longer remained merely Non-Reformed. Now, the Anti-Reformed parties had gained the political ascendancy.

In the city of Berne, even the Reformed Church was now pressured by pragmatic politicians toward re-instituting a few of the abolished Romish practices. The Anti-Calvinistic Bernese libertines gave those pragmatic politicians their full ‘democratic’ and anti-theocratic support. Filthy songs were sung under the windows of the Reformed preachers at night, to rob them of their sleep. And the Holy Supper of the Lord Jesus itself was openly mocked.

Matters came to a head at the Easter Sunday Services in 1538. The Geneva City Council demanded that the Lord's Supper be administered in a compromised manner. The Reformers refused. The City Council then forbade Calvin to preach.

On Easter Saturday, a threat was made to throw Calvin into the river. Next morning, after a sleepless night, Calvin defied the ban and climbed the pulpit. Said he: "It is not a question of leavened or unleavened bread which prevents us from celebrating with you the Lord's Supper. Think of the strife, the revolt against the Gospel, the blasphemy which prevails among you! Think of the manifold defiance against the Word of God and the Lord's Supper!"

During Calvin's afternoon sermon, his enemies started a fist-fight and drew their swords -- inside the church building. The next day, Easter Monday, the City Council criticized the Reformers for defying the prohibition against their preaching the previous day. Then -- they were given just three days to get out of Geneva.

Observed Calvin: "If we had been serving man, we had been badly rewarded! However, we serve the One Who never withholds from His servants that which He has promised them. Beyond measure, the Lord cares for us as His servants." Indeed, Farel added: "What good fortune! It comes from God -- therefore it is good!"

Calvin and Farel thus had to leave Geneva and Berne. They went first to Zurich, and then to Basle. Later, Farel was appointed Minister of Neuchatel.

But then, Calvin's old friend Louis du Tillet -- just like Rev. Gerard Roussel before him (whom Calvin had first met as De la Forge's preacher at a time when Calvin himself was still a Romanist) -- deserted the Reformation. Indeed, he went back to the Church of Rome.

Du Tillet had been offered and had accepted a bishopric. And now, "Bishop" Du Tillet was urging his former friend John Calvin similarly to desert Protestantism and to return to the 'Mother Church' of his birth. But Calvin resolutely replied that no man who has set his hand to the gospel plough and then turns away from it, is fit for the Kingdom of God.

However, the set time for encouragement would soon arrive. The Reformers Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito wrote to Calvin from Strassburg, inviting him to come and be a Minister there.

Records Calvin: "Martin Bucer forcibly called me to a new place, with a forswearing similar to that previously used by Farel. He swept me off my feet, by reminding me of the example of Jonah (1:1-3). So, once again, I accepted the Office of Minister."

In September 1538, the 29-year-old Calvin arrived back in Strassburg. Now, once again a Pastor (of some 500 French-speaking Protestant refugees), Calvin was also appointed Lecturer in New Testament at John Sturm's Gymnasial Academy.

His book sales now increased. The next year, when 30, Calvin published the second (and expanded) edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Now it had a more pastoral focus -- probably attributable to Bucer's influence. It was at Strassburg that Calvin did most of his research on his *Institutes*. It was the first logical and complete definition and vindication of Protestantism.

At Strassburg, Calvin also revised his liturgy. With Clement Marot, he wrote versifications of some five psalms (and of the Ten Commandments and of the Apostles' Creed and of Simeon's Song) for singing in worship services. He now wrote not only in Latin as the international language, but also more and more in his own native French. Indeed, he also developed the practice of free prayer, and gave more attention to matters of discipline and of baptism.

Now aged 31, Calvin met a godly Anabaptist couple -- Jean Stordeur and his wife Idelette de Bure Stordeur. After Calvin had converted both of them from Anabaptism to consistent Protestantism, Jean Stordeur died. Calvin subsequently married the deceased's widow.

Idelette proved to be a good wife to Calvin, and apparently bore him three children. Sadly, however, all three died in tenderest infancy. One was baptized by their father before dying, but two of them died unbaptized. Yet Calvin, knowing that God had sanctified all three of them from their godly mother's womb, never for a moment doubted their salvation.

For, as the Calvinistic *Decrees of Dordt* maintain, in their five points of Calvinism (1:17), "the children of believers are holy...by virtue of the covenant of grace in which they are comprehended together with the parents, [so that] godly parents have no reason to doubt the election and salvation of [those of] their children whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy." And, as the Calvinistic *Westminster Confession of Faith* also declares (10:3) -- "elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit."

Later, a malignant cleric suggested that Calvin's "childlessness" was God's curse upon him. But Calvin then replied that he had thousands of spiritual children in many lands!

Over very many years, Calvin did everything he could to improve relations with the Lutherans. While Calvin did suspect the 'Zwinglian' Martin Bucer and the 'Lutheran' Philipp Melanchthon of entertaining an impermissible compromise proposal regarding Romish transubstantiation, the Genevan Reformer nevertheless eagerly met with Melanchthon and deeply impressed him.

So highly did Melanchthon regard Calvin, that the more hardline Lutherans began to suspect Melanchthon of Crypto-Calvinism. Martin Luther himself had refused Calvin the hand of fellowship, thundering forth against him and falsely accusing him of denying the real [spiritual] presence of Christ in His Supper.

Calvin gave a magnificent response. He replied: "Even if Master Martin calls me Satan himself -- I shall not cease to regard Luther as a most choice servant of Almighty God!"

Calvin tried to win Romanists for the Reformation. Cardinal Sadoletto had tried to win Geneva back to Romanism -- by stirring up her citizens against Calvin. However, the Reformer wrote a masterly reply to Sadoletto in the September of 1539.

More importantly, after Calvin had returned to Geneva when Sadoletto travelled through that city, Calvin warmly received him into his home, and again tried to win him for Protestantism. Indeed, Calvin often distributed evangelical tracts on the streets of Geneva to whosoever would accept them.

At length, matters began to take a more blessed turn in Geneva's new City Council elections. Now realizing that the ultimate choice lay between Calvinism, Romanism, and Libertinism -- the voters democratically proceeded to elect a majority of representatives sympathetic to Calvin (at least for a while).

Accordingly, in October 1540, the City Council itself invited Calvin to return to Geneva to become the City's Minister once more. He, however, was most reluctant.

Said he: "I would rather die immediately, than once again be tortured on the rack!" However, the Holy Ghost made Calvin willing. Then, he wrote to Farel: "I bring my heart to the Lord as a sacrifice.... I have bound my spirit and yielded it captive, in obedience to God."

By September 1541, he exclaimed: "I capitulate.... I dedicate my heart as a sacrifice to the Lord...promptly and sincerely!" (See the sketch on our front cover.)

On September 13th 1541, the 32-year-old Calvin then returned to Geneva in triumph -- at a salary of 500 florins. Formerly he had been preaching through the book of Job, when expelled from Geneva three years earlier. Now, he continued his preaching from the same book of Job -- as if never even interrupted. Though now able to do so, he never once avenged himself against his former enemies.

By November, Calvin got his *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* accepted by the people, and by the political authorities. He resumed his fine theological lectures in Geneva's St. Peter's Church -- but also preached three times and gave catechism classes once on each Lord's day.

Yet the Genevan Church was still not completely free from interference by the City Council. The latter would not allow Calvin to change the frequency of administering the Lord's Supper. Too, it insisted on ratifying all ecclesiastical excommunications. And it alone nominated all Ministers of religion and confirmed them in their ecclesiastical office.

Calvin resented the civil authority's undue influence in the affairs of the church. Yet he was no one-man-one-vote democrat in the realm of politics. Neither was he an advocate of oligarchy (or government by a small hereditary nobility).

To the contrary, Calvin advocated a constitutional aristocracy (alias limited government by "the best" or *hoi aristoï*). For only "the best" congregation members should be eligible for election by competent voters -- to rule either the church, or the state.

Perhaps most of all: Calvin was opposed to one-man tyranny (singular) alias dictatorship -- whether by the Pope in the Church, or whether by a despot in a state. For Paul, in his famous passage on political government in Romans 13, speaks of submission not to a tyrant (in the singular) but to political 'powers' (in the plural).

Calvin's favourite Bible text was probably Proverbs 1:7 -- "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." So, he agitated for the closure of dens of drunkenness -- but also for the establishment of hostels to treat those thus addicted. He pleaded with the City Council that capital criminals and even poisoners not be tortured or have their punishments dragged out -- but that they rather be executed humanely and speedily. He urged that prostitution be banished from the city -- but he also promoted the rehabilitation of street women by employing them to do a different kind of 'work' in Geneva's factories.

It is true that Calvin disciplined church members for fraud, forgery, blasphemy, card-playing, dancing, and witchcraft. For Calvin considered that the Bible itself regards these actions as censurable. Indeed, Calvin even tried to influence the politicians to punish petty criminals. But in all this, the following needs to be remembered.

First, Geneva was a very immoral city -- even for those licentious days. Second, church discipline was applied without respect of persons. Third, such punishments were general in those times -- even in Non-Calvinist circles throughout Europe. Fourth, Calvin merely approved but did not prescribe those civil penalties. For fifth, he was still only a French 'resident alien' in Switzerland -- and not yet a citizen of Geneva.

In 1542, Calvin's first son was born and died. Yet even then, Calvin nevertheless wrote and published his *Formulas for Prayers and Hymns* and his *Commentary on Jude*.

The next year, the 34-year-old Reformer defended himself against the Dutch Romanist theologian, Albert Pigghe. The latter had lengthily attacked the doctrines set forth in Calvin's *Institutes* -- especially the doctrines of God's free grace and God's absolute predestination.

Calvin therefore responded. He did so immediately, with his *Defence of the Doctrine of the Bondage and the Liberation of the Human Will* -- and later, with his treatise on *God's Eternal Predestination*.

In 1545, Calvin wrote his work *Against the Fantastic Sect of the Libertines* -- alias the Antinomians, or the 'lawless ones.' The then Mayor of Geneva himself, Ami Perrin, was one of their chief leaders.

Earlier, Perrin had been a zealous supporter of Calvin and Farel. But since then, his highly-respected father-in-law had been denied the Lord's Supper, after falling into immorality.

Again, also Perrin's brother-in-law had been apprehended -- for mockery, even while his own marriage was being blessed. Indeed, Perrin's own wife had been admonished by the Kirk Session -- for dancing at a wedding.

Summoned before the Kirk Session, she had even called Calvin a pig. So the Reformer then plainly told her: "You had better go and build a new city, where you can live for yourself -- if you do not want to bow with us here under the yoke of Christ.... Here in Geneva..., even if your family had just as many crowns as it has high heads -- the Lord stands still higher!"

Understandably, however, Mayor Perrin now hypocritically turned against Calvin. In this, he was joined by other leading libertines, like Pierre Vandel and his nephew (the popular attorney Philibert Berthelier). The latter, though the son of a martyr for the freedom of the city, was also the town drunkard.

So Vandel and Berthelier now supported Mayor Perrin against Calvin. Their essentially antinomian party of the libertines falsely yet very loudly professed its 'Christianity.' For, while going around wearing a white cross as their libertine emblem -- they also went around breaking the Ten Commandments of Almighty God.

Trying to make life impossible for the Reformer, they would even incite their dogs to attack him, and also get little children to mock him by yelling "Cain! Cain!" at him. Indeed, the libertines sometimes even stirred up commotions under Calvin's bedroom window at

night, robbing the Reformer of his vital rest. For they knew very well that Calvin the chronic insomniac was not able to sleep at the best for more than an average of two hours per night.

Worse yet. In 1547, in the City Council elections, the libertines vastly increased their power. Fighting broke out in the City Council. Calvin, the French foreigner, risked his own life as he went between the warring factions, crying out: "If you want to shed blood, start with mine!"

The uproar subsided. Yet Calvin soon exclaimed: "Evil has spread so far, that I can scarcely hope any more for the church to remain in an orderly condition to any extent.... Believe me, I would be a broken man -- if God did not stretch out His hand to me."

Still worse. Calvin's beloved wife died in 1549, when the Reformer himself was but 40 years old. He felt his heart had been ripped out.

He never remarried. Yet even that same year, he still published his *Commentary on Hebrews* and (with Bullinger) also his *Consensus Tigurinus*. In the latter work, he sought to establish a common doctrine of the Lord's Supper even between the Zwinglians and the Lutherans. The obstinacy of the latter, however, torpedoed his efforts here.

Worse yet. In 1551, an apostate Romish monk turned itinerant physician, Jerome Bolsec, viciously attacked Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Some of Bolsec's opponents wanted him put to death. But the gentle Calvin himself resisted this.

However, after Bolsec was expelled from Switzerland, he finally returned to the Roman Church. Embittered, in his old age, he wrote a *History of the Life, the Customs and the Teachings of John Calvin*. There, he falsely accused the Reformer of having claimed to be able to resurrect the dead; of being a glutton; and even of unnatural unchastity. Indeed, when Calvin would die, as he indeed deserved to do, he would -- claimed Bolsec -- be eaten up by vermin, even while desperately cursing and calling on the name of the devil.

Comment is almost superfluous. The shamelessness of these untruths is exceeded only by the greater shamefulness of those other Anti-Calvinists who have subsequently kept on circulating Bolsec's lies.

But worst of all Calvin's enemies, was the Ex-Priest Michael Servetus. Nearly twenty years earlier, just before Calvin had left France with a price on his head, that Anti-Trinitarian Spanish heretic had requested Calvin to meet with him.

Calvin had agreed, for he wanted to convert this man who had denounced the Holy Trinity as "a monster." But Servetus never turned up for the meeting.

However, about twelve years later, Servetus -- after being sentenced to death for blasphemy by the Roman Catholic Spanish Inquisition -- started corresponding with Calvin. The Reformer had replied courteously. Servetus, however, went on inundating Calvin with a further thirty letters of a most insulting nature.

Even so, Calvin did not disclose the fugitive Spaniard's whereabouts to the inquisitorial authorities. Finally, however, Servetus was apprehended in France by the Romanists themselves. Yet Servetus somehow managed to escape. Incredibly, the wretch then secretly went to Geneva.

There, he worked with the libertines, to try and get rid of Calvin. However, when he (even more incredibly) went to hear Calvin preach in church one Sunday -- Servetus was recognized and promptly arrested.

Not Calvin but the Geneva City Council indicted Servetus, on thirty-nine counts. His trial lasted nearly three months, during which time he was defended by the antinomian attorney Philibert Berthelier. Both the libertine Berthelier and his client Servetus -- as Calvin's intractable enemies -- were confident of winning the case and thus of subsequently getting rid of Calvin from Geneva for ever.

Indeed, the libertines had even printed and circulated Servetus's heresies (in Geneva). And the libertine Mayor Perrin sat in the chairman's seat on the City Council.

During Servetus's trial, he was cocky and defiant. When Calvin calmly gave evidence, Servetus treated the Reformer as if the latter were the accused. "Criminal!" thundered Servetus against Calvin. "Killer, wretch, liar, ridiculous dwarf...! Do you believe you can deafen the ears of the judges, by barking like a dog?"

But Calvin was able to prove to the court that Servetus was the dog-like one. For Servetus had called the Most High God "a dog with three heads." And the centuries-old Justinian Code -- then followed throughout the 'Holy Roman Empire' -- still prescribed the death penalty for all such blasphemy. Things now began to look bad for Servetus in the courtroom. So the libertines created a diversion.

Servetus's attorney, Philibert Berthelier -- in a drunken brawl -- had chased one of the preachers through various public places and to his own doorstep. The Kirk Session accordingly barred Berthelier from the Lord's Supper. But the City Council now arbitrarily reversed that decision, and declared that Berthelier's right to communicate had been restored.

Calvin protested to the City Council; but the latter overruled the Reformer. So Calvin solemnly told them on the Saturday before Communion Sunday: "I swear rather to die, than to have the Lord's Supper defiled.... I would rather be dead a hundred times, than to commit such terrible mockery against Christ!"

Next day, fully expecting Berthelier to come forward demanding the Sacrament, Calvin mounted the pulpit in St. Peter's Church. Said he to his congregation: "Know that whatever may occur, I shall act according to the clearly-revealed command of my Master. Should there be anyone (during the Lord's Supper which we are about to celebrate) who approaches the Lord's table but who has been denied this privilege by the elders -- I shall take the stand required of me!"

Calvin had fully expected to be arrested and exiled from Geneva once more. So he preached from Acts chapter 20, on Paul's farewell message to the elders of Ephesus.

However, Berthelier was not in the church that Communion Sunday. This was the unexpected turning-point of the Swiss Reformation. God Himself had suddenly intervened!

Servetus's trial now speedily drew to a close. The other cities of Switzerland -- to the surprise of the libertines -- strongly denounced Servetus, and demanded that his blasphemies be stopped. Mayor Perrin first feigned illness, to stall for time and to try to stave off the court's decision.

Then Perrin capitulated. The court pronounced sentence against Servetus. Said the judges: For the crime of denying the Trinity, and because “you have obstinately tried to infect the world with your stinking heretical poison..., we now in writing give final sentence and condemn you, Michael Servetus, to be...burned with your book to ashes!”

Calvin protested the burning, and sought a more merciful sentence for the criminal Servetus. The Swiss court silenced Calvin’s protest. It reminded him that, as an alien from France, he wasn’t even a citizen.

Yet Calvin visited Servetus in his cell. Said the Reformer to the heretic: “Do you remember how, in danger of death, I wanted to meet you in Paris nineteen years ago, in order to win you to our Lord? And afterward, when you were a fugitive (from the Spanish Inquisition), was I not concerned to show you the right way, in letters...?”

“Ask forgiveness of the everlasting God Whom you have blasphemed...! Be reconciled to the Son of God..., to the Saviour!” But Servetus would not be reconciled. So Geneva’s City Council, under pressure from the other Swiss cities, executed Servetus.

Two years later, in the election of 1555, representatives were chosen to the Geneva City Council who favoured Calvin and his theocratic views. Now it was the libertines who were brought to trial. Berthelier, Vandel and the previous Mayor Perrin (and his wretched wife) all fled from Geneva. Calvin had won.

Of course, things were still not perfect in Geneva. Yet the Christian Church was now free from harassment by an unsympathetic State -- and the Genevan State itself now professed the Reformed Faith. From now on, whenever a Mayor who was also an Elder attended Kirk Session meetings -- he would first ceremoniously lay aside his political staff.

Previously, Calvin had already published: his *Refutation of the Council of Trent*; his *Treatise on Scandals*; his *Defence of the Doctrine of Predestination*; and his *Commentaries* on Romans, Jude, I & II Peter, I & II Corinthians, I & II Thessalonians, the other Pauline Epistles, James, Isaiah, Acts, and John. Now, in 1554, he also published his *Defence of the Faith in the Trinity*, and his *Commentary on Genesis*. Furthermore: in the 1555 City Council elections, the libertines finally lost control of Geneva for the rest of the century.

Now the 46-year-old Reformer felt free to send Protestant missionaries to Brazil. Indeed, Calvin was the only Reformer to promote foreign missions. He wrote his *Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels* and his three *Defences of the Doctrine of the Sacraments Against the Lutheran Westphal*.

Calvin preached 200 sermons annually, and also gave a further 200 lectures and Bible studies each year. Thousands of his letters have been lost; yet his collected works still fill 59 weighty volumes.

In 1559, now aged 50, Calvin published his *Draft for the French Confession of Faith* and the last edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Faith*. Indeed, only then was the French Reformer granted Genevan citizenship.

Finally a Swiss citizen, Calvin now set about bringing the laws of Geneva into greater conformity with the laws of the Bible. He became adviser to the City Council, and influenced it to pass laws prohibiting the wearing of immodest apparel in public, and regulating the

character of theatrical productions. Gambling was forbidden because, said Calvin, “God wants man to cultivate the earth...through all kinds of work” (Gen. 1:26ff & 2:15ff).

Rome, following Aristotle’s philosophy, had previously prohibited interest altogether in Geneva. But Calvin now got the City Council to authorize money-lending (except to the poor) at a moderate rate of interest (*cf.* Matt. 25:27). This ensured the success of the later Swiss banks and the blossoming of that country’s economy.

Calvin’s political reforms now grew apace. Short-changing merchants were punished (*cf.* Isa. 1:22). Begging was prohibited (*cf.* Ps 37:25 & Acts 3:6). Jobs were created, to help the unemployed (*cf.* Matt. 20:3ff). Sewers were installed, to combat disease (*cf.* Lev. 13:45ff & 14:39ff). Dentists were tested and licensed to pull teeth (Ex. 21:22-27 *cf.* Prov. 25:19ff).

For safety's sake, chimneys were to be installed in homes with fireplaces (*cf.* Neh. 3:11 & 12:38 with Hos. 13:3). And railings were to be fitted to balconies, to protect small children from falling off (*cf.* Deut. 22:8).

Calvin also insisted that the Geneva Academy should have not only a Faculty of Languages and a Faculty of Theology, but also a Faculty of Law and a Faculty of Medicine. For not just preaching, but even jurisprudence and surgery (and eating and drinking and everything else too) were and are to be undertaken solely to the glory of God (*cf.* I Cor. 10:31).

Not surprisingly, the Geneva City Council finally honoured Calvin publically. It did so, for “the many valuable services which he has daily rendered to our Republic since the Christian Reformation.”

Calvin’s letters (and his students) went out all over Europe -- to France, to Germany, to Poland, to Hungary, to England, to Holland, and to Scotland. He wrote to kings; and his students preached to queens. He did his best to unite all true Protestant Christians -- in spite of Luther’s miserable antipathy toward him, and in spite of the even greater enmity of Luther’s successors (except the humble Melancthon).

However, all of the pressures of life -- and now tuberculosis too -- were taking their toll on Calvin. He exhausted himself by writing new *Commentaries* -- on Daniel, on the Pentateuch, and on Joshua. Indeed, he died shortly after commenting up to the twentieth chapter of Ezekiel -- while writing a Commentary on that book of the Bible too.

For at age 54, Calvin was worn out. On February 2nd 1564, he gave his last lecture. On February 6th, he preached his last sermon. On April 2nd, he attended church for the last time -- carried in on a litter, to receive the Lord’s Supper for the last time, from his successor Beza. Then, Calvin himself sang in church the last time -- and from his very own hymn composition of the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:25-29ff).

On April 25th, Calvin dictated his last will and testament: “In the Name of God, I, Jean Cauvin, Minister of the Word of God in the Church of Geneva, feel so exhausted through various diseases, that I cannot but think that God wants to take me out of this world speedily.... I thank God for not only showing mercy to me as His poor creature and for dragging me out of the pit of idolatry into which I had descended -- for putting me into the light of the Gospel and for making me a sharer in the doctrine of salvation of which I was so

unworthy.... For He has tolerated me even in the midst of all my sins and weaknesses which really deserved rejection by Him a thousand times....

“But I also thank Him for moreover giving me the grace to be able to serve Him through my work. I declare that, according to the measure of grace given to me, I have endeavoured to preach His Word purely and to expound Holy Scripture faithfully. In all struggles against the enemies of the truth..., I have defended His cause uprightly. Alas, the desire and the zeal which I had -- if one can call it that -- have been so cold and lax, that I feel indebted in all things and all places.... If it were not for His great and infinite kindness, all the affection that I have had, would be only smoke. To see the good things that He has done for me, only makes me more guilty -- so that my only recourse is to that One Who, being the Father of mercy, may be, and shows Himself to be, the Father of one who is such a wretched sinner.”

Having written this in his testament, Calvin then bequeathed his few worldly possessions to his relatives. Yet he also left some money to the Academy’s fund for poor refugees.

On April 27th, the stricken Calvin received the members of the City Council at his bedside. He thanked them for their friendship, and declared he had always tried to seek the best for Geneva. He thanked them for putting up with him, in spite of his shortcomings – as God had also tolerated them.

He warned them to keep on standing up for the honour of God in public life. Said he: “Each of us has his weaknesses; let each examine himself carefully, and fight against them... You older ones, be not jealous of the gifts which the younger generation has received, but be glad and praise the Lord Who has given them! And you younger ones, be humble and seek not to achieve greater things than you can do!” Feebly offering his hand to each of the City Councillors one at a time, they all left Calvin’s bedroom visibly moved.

Next day, April 28th, Calvin bade farewell to the preachers. Said he: “You have had to tolerate many shortcomings in me. Even everything I have ever done, is of no value.... I tell you once more -- nothing of all I have done was of any value. For I am a miserable creature. Yet I can say that I have wanted to do good, and that my vices have always grieved me, and that the root of the fear of God was in my heart. And you can say that my intentions were good; and I urge you to forgive me, whenever I have been wrong.

Calvin’s 80-year-old friend Farel came and bade him farewell. For Calvin had recently written to him on May 2nd: “Since it is God’s will that you should outlive me, remember our friendship! It was useful to God’s Church, and its fruits await us in heaven. I do not want you to tire yourself out on my account. I draw my breath with difficulty, and expect each moment to breathe my last. It is enough that I live and die for Christ, Who is to all His followers a Gain -- both in life, and in death.”

Calvin lingered on, frequently mumbling words from Psalm 38 and Isaiah 39. His successor Beza, at his bedside, heard him say: “You are crushing me, Lord; but it is enough for me that it is Your hand!”

Wrote Beza: “He frequently told me that he was grieved he was keeping me from my work.... He regarded my time as so valuable, and he wanted me rather to use it in the Church.”

From May 19th onward, Calvin's words were hardly intelligible. He died, sighing, in the evening of May 27th. Wrote Beza that very night:

“The same moment the sun was setting, the great light of the Church of God was taken heavenward. It has pleased God to show us in the life of a single man of our time, how to live and how to die.” The 1564 Kirk Session minutes simply record: “Gone to God, May 27 of this present year, between eight and nine o'clock in the evening. Thanks be to God!”

Next day, in Geneva's Plainpalais cemetery, a large crowd of mourners buried Calvin's corpse. He was laid to rest, as he himself had requested, in an unmarked grave, “to wait for the day of the blessed resurrection.”

Wrote Beza: “There was great lamentation in the city. For its government mourned for the prophet of the Lord. The poor flock lamented the loss of its faithful shepherd. The Academy deplored [the loss of] its true doctor.... All, in common, wept over the departure of their father....”

In Berne, the sorrowing Reformer Berthold Haller was in grief and agony. Like Elisha for Elijah of old, he exclaimed: “My father, my father -- the chariot of Israel, and its horsemen!”

Now I myself have visited Calvin's French birthplace in Noyon, and his Swiss workplace in Geneva. I have also visited his cemetery. But I could not find his grave. Today, nobody knows quite where in that cemetery the Reformer lies buried.

Indeed, he is not there -- but in heaven. For it is from heaven that the Spirit-inspired John was long ago assured: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!” (Rev. 14:13.) “‘Yes!’ -- the Spirit keeps on saying. ‘They are resting from their labours! But their works keep on following them!’”

Like the righteous Abel of old, Calvin too -- “though dead -- still keeps on speaking.” (Heb. 11:4.) Therefore -- in the words of Hebrews 12:1 & 2 -- “seeing we also are surrounded with such a great cloud of witnesses -- let us too lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us! Let us too patiently keep on running in the race set before us! Let us too keep on looking to Jesus -- the Author and Finisher of our faith!

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ABOUT REV. PROF.-EMERITUS ADV. DR. FRANCIS NIGEL LEE

Dr. Francis Nigel Lee was born in 1934 in the Westmorland County of Cumbria (in Great Britain). He is the great-grandson of a fiery preacher whose family disintegrated when he backslid. Dr. Lee's father was an Atheist, yet he married a Roman Catholic who raised her son Nigel Lee in that faith. Yet, when Nigel was seven, his father led him into Atheism.

During World War II, the Royal Navy appointed Nigel Lee's father Chief Radar Officer (South Atlantic). So the family then moved to South Africa. There, Nigel became a Calvinist; had the great privilege of leading both of his parents to Christ; and then became a Minister of God's Word and Sacraments in the Dutch Reformed Church of Natal and an Advocate (Barrister) of the Supreme Court.

Emigrating to the U.S.A., Dr. Lee attended the very first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America; transferred his ministerial credentials to that denomination; and pastored Congregations in Mississippi and Florida. He was also: Professor of Philosophy at Shelton College in N.J.; Visiting Lecturer in Apologetics at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Ms.; Staley Distinguished Visiting Lecturer at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis; Research Scholar-in-Residence at the Christian Studies Center in Memphis; Academic Dean of Graham Bible College in Bristol, Tn.; and incidental Lecturer at several other Colleges, Seminaries, and Universities. He was at that time the only person in the World serving on the Executives of both the British Lord's Day Observance Society and the Lord's Day Alliance of the U.S.

Preacher, Theologian, Lawyer, Educationist, Historian, Philosopher and Author, Lee has produced more than 330 publications (including many books) -- and also a multitude of long unpublished manuscripts. Apart from an honorary LL.D., he has 21 earned degrees -- including eleven earned doctorates for dissertations* in Education, Law, Literature, Philosophy and Theology.

After the murder of his father, Lee led his father's murderer in jail (and later also the latter's parents) to Christ. Though loving to study, Lee prefers preaching and leading the lost to God.

Lee rises early; reads God's Word in ten languages; then walks a couple of miles before breakfast. He has been round the World seven times; has visited 110 countries (several repeatedly); and also every Continent (except Antarctica). He is in demand as a Promoter of Doctoral Students in Australia, England, Germany, South Africa and the United States. He has also lectured and/or preached in all of those countries, as well as in Brazil, Scotland, Korea, Japan, Namibia, New Zealand, and Zambia.

A diehard predestinarian, Lee now lives in the Commonwealth of Australia -- where he was for twenty years the Professor of Systematic Theology and Caldwell-Morrow Lecturer in Church History at the Queensland Presbyterian Theological College. He and his wife Nellie retired in 2000. They have two children (Johanna and Anna Marie), both of whom are teachers.

- * Th.D.: *The Covenantal Sabbath*
- Ph.D.: *Communist Eschatology*
- D.Min.: *Daily Family Worship*
- D.Ed.: *Catechizing Before Communion not prior to Puberty*
- S.T.D.: *Rebaptism Impossible!*
- D.R.E.: *Baby Belief Before Baptism!*
- D.Jur.: *Women Ministers and Australian Litigation*
- D.Litt.: *Holinshed on the Ancient British Isles*
- D.C.L.: *The Roots and Fruits of the Common Law*
- D.Hum.: *Tiny Human Life -- Abortion and IVF*
- D.Phil.: *Miracles -- What and When and Why?*