

Martin Luther and John Calvin¹

HERMAN J. SELDERHUIS

Herman J. Selderhuis is professor of Church History at the Theological University Apeldoorn in the Netherlands and director of Refo500, the international platform on projects related to the 16th Century. He wrote his PhD on “Marriage and Divorce in the Thought of Martin Bucer” (1997) and is the author and editor of several books, including *John Calvin: A Pilgrim’s Life* (IVP Academic, 2009) and *Martin Luther: A Spiritual Biography* (forthcoming, 2017). Dr. Selderhuis is also president of the Reformation Research Consortium (RefoRC), president of the International Calvin Congress, and Curator of Research at the John A. Lasco Library in Emden, Germany.

LUTHER’S ONLY STUDENT

The connection between Calvin and Luther is more intense than the centuries-long and often fierce confessional discussions between Lutherans and Calvinists might suggest. Although from Lutheran side came the statement that Calvinists were even more dangerous than Muslims² and Lutherans often saw Calvinists as synonymous with spiritualists,³ the fact that no Protestant theologian has so fundamentally absorbed Luther’s thinking as did the Genevan reformer is evident in all of his works. Peter Meinhold stated the conviction of many researchers when he said that Calvin was probably the greatest and maybe even the only pupil Luther ever had. According to him, Calvin was the only theologian who understood Luther’s theology well and developed it further in such a way that he kept standing on Luther’s shoulders.⁴ The point that Calvinists are in fact Lutherans in the true sense was already made in the sixteenth century,⁵ but this standpoint was never accepted—at least not by the majority of Lutherans or by many in the Reformed tradition.

The relationship between these two reformers includes more than just the

theological relationship between Calvin and Luther; it also involves Calvin's relations with Luther's colleagues, such as Melancthon and Bugenhagen. Furthermore, Calvin had contact with other theologians who were connected to Luther but lived outside of Wittenberg, so that Calvin's relation with the Lutherans comes up for discussion. One can distinguish the personal from the theological aspects of these contacts, though to Calvin these aspects were in fact always connected to each other. This article restricts itself to the aforementioned relations during Calvin's lifetime. It is most plausible to approach the topic of Luther and Calvin from Calvin's perspective, as there is no reception of Calvin in Luther's work, but there is certainly a reception of Luther's theology in Calvin's work.

However much Calvin may have wanted to do so,⁶ he never met Luther personally. Geographically and politically, they lived in completely different worlds. More importantly, Calvin was a man of the second generation, born 26 years later than Luther. When Calvin comes on the theological stage in 1536, with the first edition of his *Institutio*, Luther only had ten years to live, had already written his most essential works, and had been through his most essential discussions with Erasmus, Zwingli, Rome and the *Täufer*. And as travelling from Geneva to Wittenberg takes quite some time and requires several stopovers even today, in those days it certainly would have cost two months to go back and forth. Added to this is the weak physical condition both reformers were constantly in, which also might have prevented a long journey to facilitate a meeting. The literature often refers also to language as another possible reason why they did not meet or communicate, as Luther was unable to speak, read or write French, and the same conditions applied to Calvin when it came to the German language. However, as both were fluent in Latin, they could have talked and discussed as much as they would have wanted. However, the only occasion for contact that could have occurred between Calvin and Luther was prevented by Philip Melancthon, because he did not dare to forward the letter Calvin had written to Luther in January 1545. "I have not shown your letter to Pericles [that is: Luther], for he is inclined to be suspicious, and does not want his replies on such questions as you raise to be passed around."⁷ One could surmise that there had hardly been a connection between the two, since Luther and Calvin mention each other's names only a few times in their correspondence. However, those few mentions have sufficient content to give us an idea of the appreciation

each had for the other, while clarifying the influence Luther had on Calvin's theology. If one were to look only for Luther's name in Calvin's work, the conclusion could be that his influence was minimal, but anyone familiar with the content of Luther's works, will encounter him on almost every page of Calvin's books, sermons, and commentaries, not infrequently even in word-for-word quotations.

LUTHER ON CALVIN

As far as we know, Luther expressed his opinion on Calvin seven times. On October 14, 1539 Luther sent his greetings to Calvin through Martin Bucer because it was with much pleasure that he had read two of Calvin's works—namely his *Institutio*, which had recently been published in a second and extended edition, and his letter to Cardinal Sadoletus.⁸ “Farewell. And will you pay my respects to John Sturm and John Cavin. I have read their little books with singular enjoyment.”⁹ Calvin was thus impressed when he received this personal greeting from Luther, and, hearing the message that Luther had read his books with pleasure, Calvin thought it worth mentioning in the foreword to his commentary on Romans that he had written something Luther had approved of.¹⁰ In this same period, Melancthon reported that someone had tried to get Luther to start an argument against Calvin because Calvin had uttered some criticism on Luther. The reaction, however, was quite the opposite, and Luther had expressed his hope that Calvin would also have good thoughts about him. He even said that it was just to admit that a man with such intelligence was right.¹¹ Calvin was rather impressed by Luther's words, and it seems that it aroused him from this moment on to speak amicably and mildly about the Wittenberg reformer. In 1545, Calvin was informed that Luther had read his address to Emperor Charles V (*Supplex exhortatio ad Caesarem*, 1543) with much pleasure.¹² And in 1545, Calvin was reminded once again how much appreciative notice Luther had taken of Calvin's letter to Sadoletus.¹³ All these reports increased Calvin's sympathy for Luther and encouraged him to defend him when others criticized him. When he heard about Luther's positive evaluation of Calvin's publication, he wrote to Farel: “We must be completely made of stone if this immense temperance would not break us.”¹⁴ These words indicate that there was tension between the Swiss and the German theologians, but they also indicate that Geneva

was, in a way, a bridge between Zurich and Wittenberg. Luther was quite open to Calvin's approach and demonstrated a certain generosity towards his young colleague in Geneva, and this resulted in an attitude of friendliness from Calvin's side.¹⁵ Luther had taken notice of Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper; it is most likely that he read this in a Latin version of Calvin's "Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper," as such a translation was published in 1545, a year before Luther's death. On that occasion, Luther said that if Zwingli and Oecolampadius had spoken in the same way as Calvin, there would not have been such a long dispute on the Lord's Supper.¹⁶

Luther's Person

The significance Luther had for Calvin can best be reflected in an utterance Calvin made in 1556, during the controversy with the Lutherans regarding the Lord's Supper. He says that, in the period in which he began "to free himself from the darkness of the papacy," he was so influenced by Luther that he turned away from the writings of Oecolampadius and Zwingli.¹⁷ These words express Calvin's independence as well as his position of being closer to Luther than to Zwingli. Calvin did not want to compare Luther with Elijah, as if no other prophets could have emerged after Luther, but he did suggest that "the Gospel went out from Wittenberg."¹⁸ Luther was the person who caused the papacy to falter.¹⁹ In the letter to Luther withheld by Melancthon, Calvin addresses him as "very learned father in the one Lord." He writes that he would like to fly to Luther in order to spend a few hours with him and discuss some issues with him, but if that should not be possible on earth, Calvin hopes that it will be possible soon in God's heavenly kingdom, expecting that they could discuss and communicate there.²⁰

However, Calvin also sometimes expressed his difficulty with Luther's ideas. In Calvin's letter to Bullinger of November 25, 1544, he calls Luther "immoderately passionate and audacious in character."²¹ Luther should have controlled his tempestuous temperament better and tried harder to see his own shortcomings. Calvin writes to Melancthon that Luther lacks self-control and allows himself to be aroused to anger much too easily. He is thereby a danger to the Church, and apparently there is no one who dares to resist his behavior.²² Still, the appreciation for Luther remained, and—according to Calvin himself—if Luther should call Calvin a devil, even then Calvin would honor him by describing him as a very special servant of God.

Calvin's judgment of Luther did not change, not even during the intense and troublesome discussions on the Lord's Supper. Although it seemed possible that, after Zwingli's death, the position of Bullinger could create some openness in relations with Luther, the whole situation exploded again in the 1540s. Calvin tried to admonish Bullinger to appeasement, although he did so in a humble and friendly way. It is in the letter Calvin sent to Bullinger in November 1544 that Calvin's view on Luther is best described:

I hear that Luther has at length broken forth in fierce invective, not so much against you as against the whole of us. On the present occasion, I dare venture to ask you to keep silence, because it is neither just that innocent persons should thus be harassed, nor that they should be denied the opportunity of clearing themselves; neither, on the other hand, is it easy to determine whether it would be prudent for them to do so. But of this I do earnestly desire to put you in mind, in the first place, that you would consider how eminent a man Luther is, and the excellent endowments wherewith he is gifted, with what strength of mind and resolute constancy, with how great skill, with what efficiency and power of doctrinal statement, he had hitherto devoted his whole energy to overthrow the reign of Antichrist, and at the same time to diffuse far and near the doctrine of salvation. Often have I been wont to declare, that even although he were to call me a devil, I should still not the less hold him in such honour that I must acknowledge him to be an illustrious servant of God. But while he is endued with rare and excellent virtues, he labours at the same time under serious faults. Would that he had rather studied to curb this restless, uneasy temperament which is so apt to boil over in every direction. I wish, moreover, that he had always bestowed the fruits of that vehemence of natural temperament upon the enemies of the truth, and that he had not flash his lightning sometimes also upon the servants of the Lord. Would that he had been more observant and careful in the acknowledgement of his own vices. Flatterers have done him much mischief, since he is naturally too prone to be over-indulgent to himself. It is our part, however, so to reprove whatsoever evil qualities may beset him, as that we may make some allowance for him at the same time on the score of these remarkable endowments with which he has been gifted. This, therefore, I would beseech you to consider first of all, along with your colleagues, that you have to do with a most distinguished servant of Christ, to whom we are all of us largely indebted.²³

Calvin was open to believe that what many say about Luther is true—namely, that the reformer’s steadfastness is mixed with stubbornness.²⁴ And Calvin was also honest enough to complain openly that Luther’s pride had no limits.²⁵ Even though he owed much to him, he will not shut his eyes against Luther’s mistakes, such as his uncontrolled anger, his fierceness in discussions, and his unwillingness to give in. Calvin also pointed to the fact that not all of this was due to Luther, and he blamed the negative influence some of Luther’s friends had on him, mentioning particularly Nicolaus von Amsdorf as “a fool without brains.”²⁶ Over against the Swiss, who accused him in 1554 of writing too mildly about Luther, Calvin defended Luther’s forcefulness by observing that that was just a part of his character and that, in addition, the man was being incited by malevolent persons.²⁷ In his treatise against Albertus Pighius on the bondage and liberation of the human will, (*Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii, adversus calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis*, 1543), Calvin defended Luther’s position on the issue without qualification.²⁸ He points to the difficult situation in which Luther had to act and compared it to the circumstances under which the apostles had to work, adding that for Luther it was even harder. Every political authority had declared war on Luther and his fellow reformers.²⁹ Calvin defended Luther when Pighius accused him of being influenced by the devil and said that the devil made use of Luther’s manifold spiritual afflictions. According to Calvin, quite the opposite is true, and he characterized Luther’s afflictions as a sign of his being elected by God and of his holiness. Calvin also contradicted the complaint Pighius made against Luther, that the reformer did not really appreciate the value of good works. Without hesitation, Calvin agreed with Luther’s statement that the free will of man after the fall into sin was just an empty label, since humans can do nothing other than sin.³⁰ Calvin placed Luther’s views on sin and grace in line with those of the Apostle Paul and church father Augustine.³¹ At this point, Calvin also defended Luther’s fierce manner of discussing this issue. Indeed, Calvin admitted, Luther made use of harsh words and outspoken theses, but he simply spoke the truth.³² Luther had no choice, and it was his opponents who not only triggered his anger, but also made him wiser and give him more insights through their opposition.³³ In sum, Calvin defended Luther both in his views and in the way he presented them. He wanted no one to have any doubts about this, as he stated: “Concerning Luther

there is no reason for him [that is: Pighius] to be in any doubt when now also, as we have done previously, we openly bear witness that we consider him a distinguished apostle of Christ whose labor and ministry have done most in these times to bring back the purity of the gospel.”³⁴ Pighius had attacked both Luther and Calvin, which means he had a good overview of things, as both were in line when it comes to the heart of the gospel. Calvin’s self-defense was identical to a defense of Luther. He was convinced that God himself had called Luther to rediscover the road to salvation. For that reason, Luther held up the torch.³⁵ “Through his service our churches have been founded and put in order.” With these words—in his treatise on the unity of the Church—directed at Emperor Charles V, Calvin confessed that he was heartily convinced of the unity of Protestantism, although there was indeed an internal diversity.

For Calvin, Luther remained an excellent servant of Christ, to whom all were indebted; according to Calvin, it was everyone’s duty to rebuke Luther for what was wrong in him in such a way that there was plenty of room left to appreciate his brilliant gifts.³⁶ And concerning Luther’s rough language, Calvin was convinced that “if Luther would live today, he would certainly have revised some of his harsh expressions.”³⁷

Luther’s Theology

Of greater interest than their mutual judgments of each other are Calvin’s view of Luther’s ideas and especially the influence of Luther on Calvin. This influence is undisputed and is also treated in many essays, yet an extensive study of Luther’s impact on Calvin’s theology has so far not been published. Luther’s influence can be traced back to the very beginning of Calvin’s work. Already in the *Concio academica*, the inaugural address of Nicolas Cop as rector of the University of Paris, which was written by Calvin—as proven by recent scholarship—and held on November 1, 1533, it is evident that Calvin made use of a sermon published by Luther.³⁸ The speech presents the main topics of the Reformation, such as justification by faith alone and certainty of that justification on the basis of God’s promise. The speech also refers to the importance of the assurance of faith amidst spiritual afflictions; Calvin took over all of these standpoints from Luther. This means that Luther’s direct influence on Calvin can be traced back to Calvin’s early twenties.

Calvin himself claims that, in regard to Luther, he steadfastly retained his

freedom (*me semper fuisse leberum*).³⁹ He was therefore not hesitant to make critical marginal observations on Luther's hermeneutic, because the work of every exegete would be superfluous and nonsensical if taking issue with Luther was not permitted.⁴⁰ About a sermon Luther preached in 1522, Calvin opines in 1562 that Luther at that time was not yet thoroughly at home in the Bible.⁴¹ Calvin also found that Luther's exegesis of Isaiah neglected the historical context too much.⁴²

When it comes to the Lord's Supper, Calvin as a reformer was able to survey the various points of view; thus he noted that there were shortcomings on both sides. Calvin thought that the man from Wittenberg had gone too far in his formulations and his pronouncement on others. According to Calvin, Luther was too harsh, was too un-nuanced in his judgments, and had used formulations that were too difficult and unsuitable.⁴³ At the same time, Calvin said that these mistakes had also been made on the Swiss side. Calvin had great appreciation for the fact that Luther had warned sternly against a Catholic view of the presence of Christ.⁴⁴ After his initial hesitation regarding the Wittenberg Concordance (1536), Calvin began to think more positively about the document, especially as a result of becoming acquainted with the Lutherans during the Reichstag in Worms (1539). Precisely because the Concordance professes "that in the Lord's Supper not only Christ's body and blood were represented but that in the course of the worship service they were truly offered and presented before all as present," Calvin declared that not only had he wanted this Concordance, he had also tried to strengthen it.⁴⁵ Hence it comes as no surprise that Calvin, who in 1538 had signed the *Confessio Augustana invariata* in Strasbourg, signed the *Confessio Augustana variata* during the religious dialogues in Regensburg.

In a letter of January 12, 1538, to Bucer, Calvin mentions Luther for the first time. He writes that he is convinced of his piety but is not sure what to think of him further.⁴⁶ Calvin thinks that Luther clings so tightly to his doctrine of the Lord's Supper that he thereby hinders a reformational unity. It becomes obvious here that Calvin had more trouble with Luther's character than with his ideas. That Calvin saw his own teaching of the Lord's Supper substantially in agreement with that of Luther is clear. Luther tried to incite Calvin to criticize Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, as he had verbalized in his letter to Sadoletto. However, when Luther read the relevant passages, he praised Calvin for it instead.⁴⁷

Mild—but essential—was Calvin’s critique of Luther’s exegetical approach. In a letter to Pierre Viret, Calvin gave a description of the way Luther explained Scripture and compared it with the exegesis of Zwingli, which he also criticized: “Zwingli, although he is not wanting in a fit and ready exposition, yet, because he takes too much liberty, often wanders far from the meaning of the Prophet. Luther is not so particular as to propriety of expression or the historical accuracy; he is satisfied when he can draw from it some fruitful doctrine.”⁴⁸ According to Calvin, Luther made too much use of a speculative way of explaining biblical texts.⁴⁹ Too often, he just guessed as to the meaning of a word,⁵⁰ and this resulted in reflections on a passage that sometimes lacked any foundation.⁵¹ Calvin does not make the step from the text to the doctrine too quickly, and he pays more attention to the Hebrew and Greek meaning of the words, and to the historical context.

Luther in Calvin’s Institutio

Although Calvin was fundamentally influenced by Luther’s writings years before the first edition of the *Institutio* was published, Luther’s name does not appear in any of the editions of this most important of Calvin’s works. If one would focus only on his name, the conclusion could even be that Calvin had no knowledge of Luther at all.⁵² The situation, however, is completely different, and one who is familiar with Luther’s works will easily discern how Luther shows up constantly in Calvin. Already in the first edition of 1536, Luther is present even in unnoted quotations, phrases, and terms, and this presence is only expanded in later editions. Calvin’s *Institutes* demonstrate the continuity between Luther and Calvin, as the Genevan did not repeat, but rather developed Luther’s thoughts.⁵³ Calvin did not simply pass on Luther’s heritage, but shaped it into a form that could be applied in various contexts and also made it applicable to church, culture, society, politics, and education. Calvin’s *Institutes* demonstrate on every page that they are written by a student of Luther.⁵⁴

More concretely, it is Luther’s *Small Catechism* that was fundamental to Calvin’s first edition of the *Institutio*.⁵⁵ This catechism served him for the structure of his work, which he also initially intended as a catechetical tool. Next to this *Small Catechism*, there are also other publications of Luther that Calvin used as source material, such as: *De Libertate Christiana* (1520). *De Captivitate Babylonica*, (1520), *Ein Sermon von den Sakrament des Leibs*

und Blutes Christi wider die Schwärmgeister, which was translated into Latin in 1527; the *Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heyligen wahren Leichnames Christi* (1519), translated in 1524; and also the Latin edition of Luther's *Postilla*, published in 1521. From the *Small Catechism*, for example, Calvin copied the order in which he treated the various items of the Christian Faith. Luther's Catechism dealt with these in the following order: the law as the Ten Commandments, faith as laid down in the Apostle's Creed, prayer as explanation of the Lord's Prayer, and finally the sacraments.⁵⁶ Calvin's order in 1536 was completely identical: *De lege, De fide, De oratione, De sacramentis*. He did add two chapters—namely, one on the five 'false' sacraments; and one on Christian liberty, the authority of the Church, and political power. It is understandable that August Lang wrote that in the 1536 *Institutio*, Calvin shows up as a Lutheran from southwestern Germany.⁵⁷ In the introduction to the *Institutio*, in which Calvin connects *Cognitio Dei et hominis*, the direct link to Luther also becomes evident. On the doctrine of predestination, Calvin was just as much a student of Luther, although he came to know Luther's opinion on this matter mainly through Martin Bucer.⁵⁸ Calvin does not define predestination as explicitly as Luther did in his *De Servo Arbitrio*, but in essence there is no difference. Other topics in which Luther's influence can be seen include Calvin's use of the terms *foedus* and *testamentum*, which are clearly derived from Luther's *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium* (1520). The way Calvin wrote about the correlation between *promissio* and *fides* in this respect reflects Luther in every way.⁵⁹

Melanchthon

Calvin's relation to Luther's colleague Philipp Melanchthon is an essential part of his relation to Luther. The rather intense contacts between Melanchthon and Calvin are personal as well as theological. After he had met Melanchthon a few times, Calvin wrote that he was sorry that they lived such a great distance from one another. Therefore, Calvin added that he and Melanchthon could find comfort in the anticipation that someday—in heaven—they would be able to enjoy their mutual love and friendship, where they would live together forever.⁶⁰

Melanchthon's withholding of Calvin's letter to Luther is indicative of the relation between Calvin and Melanchthon, for the latter tried to prevent conflicts between the two reformers. When Calvin let him know that the

Lutherans—in their adherence to certain liturgical customs—were almost Jewish, Melanchthon responded by saying that Luther had a high respect for the liturgical sobriety in Geneva. When Luther stated vehemently that the leaders in Zürich were leading their parishioners to hell and that they had no fellowship with God’s Church,⁶¹ Calvin urged Melanchthon to calm Luther down and thus bring about a spirit of reconciliation.⁶²

Calvin himself always had great admiration for Melanchthon, despite the fact that there were points on which they differed. Calvin would have liked to have Melanchthon to be more resolute.⁶³ It troubled him that Melanchthon was too timid to involve himself in the controversy regarding the Lord’s Supper, which emerged after Luther’s death, and to clearly show his colors there. It would be better to extricate Melanchthon from his all-too-Lutheran surroundings.⁶⁴ Should Melanchthon live nearer, Calvin would be able to consult him more often, for “in a conversation of three hours I would get further than in a hundred letters.”⁶⁵ According to Calvin, Melanchthon was among the best exegetes of Scripture.⁶⁶

Likewise, there was appreciation for Calvin from Melanchthon’s side, as was apparent in his efforts to keep Calvin in Worms when he wanted to leave because he no longer expected anything from the religious dialogues.⁶⁷ According to Beza, from that time onward, Melanchthon would speak of “the theologian” when he meant Calvin.⁶⁸

Calvin also differed with Melanchthon on the so-called *adiaphora*. After Melanchthon had accepted the Leipzig Interim (December 21, 1548), in which the ceremonies were regarded as *adiaphora*, Calvin indicated his difference with him and his greater agreement with Magdeburg—where Falcus Illyricus vigorously resisted this Interim—than with Wittenberg.⁶⁹

There was also disagreement on the subject of free will and predestination. Calvin dedicated his writing about this material—directed against Pighius—to Melanchthon, who appreciated the gesture very much. Melanchthon accordingly was quite positive about this work, but he rejected Calvin’s “determinism.”⁷⁰ Calvin, from his side, cited the cause of his difference with Melanchthon as the man from Wittenberg accommodating himself too much to human understanding and therefore speaking about these things more as a philosopher than as a theologian. However, according to Calvin, it was a mistake to place them in opposition to each other on account of this difference. Their friendship was sincere, and this also had to do with the fact that

they were both humanists. Along with their great mutual appreciation, this provided room for airing their differences publicly,⁷¹ but Calvin nevertheless saw himself as standing right next to Melancthon,⁷² as he makes clear in a salutation in one of his letters to his colleague in Wittenberg: “Greetings, therefore, O man of most eminent accomplishments, and ever to be remembered by me and honored in the Lord! May the Lord long preserve you in safety to the glory of his name and the edification of the Church.”⁷³

Lutherans

Calvin had some correspondence with various Lutheran theologians, such as Jacob Andreae, Veit Dietrich, Johann Marbach, and Johann Brenz. Characteristic of Calvin’s attitude toward the Lutherans is that he saw himself in line with Luther, while he accused the Lutherans of having distanced themselves from Luther.

The Lutherans refused unity because they kept discussing the how of Christ’s presence, while Luther himself, according to Calvin, had in fact regarded this question as secondary. For that reason, he called those who argued under Luther’s name “fanatics.”⁷⁴ In the summer of 1554, Calvin dedicated his commentary on Genesis to the three sons of the elector of Saxony, Johann Friedrich, who had died in March of that year. However, the dedication was rejected because Calvin had allegedly deviated from Luther’s doctrine on the Lord’s Supper and repeatedly insulted Luther’s exegesis of Genesis.⁷⁵ In 1555, Calvin sighed, “Oh, if only Luther was still alive. He was vehement, to be sure, but he never went as far as his followers, who should not be called disciples but merely mimics, indeed monkeys.”⁷⁶ It was Calvin’s opinion that Luther, had he lived, would not have chosen the side of the Lutherans.

Calvin’s most intensive discussion was with Joachim Westphal (1510/11-1574), preacher in Hamburg. When the Swiss rejected the symbolism of the Lord’s Supper in their *Consensus Tigurinus*, Calvin hoped in vain that the Lutherans would be more prepared for unity. In 1552, Westphal reacted strongly to the publication of the *Consensus Tigurinus*—in 1551, despite Calvin’s urging, more than a year and a half after its completion in 1549—with his *Farrago confuseanarum et inter se dissidentium opinionum de Coena Domini ex Sacramentarium libris congesta per M. Joachimum Westphalum pastorem Hamburgensem*. In this work, he introduces for the first time the concept of

“Calvinism” in order to stamp Calvin’s view of the Lord’s Supper negatively as a human invention. When Westphal published *Recta fides*—a similar work—a year later, Calvin wrote in 1555—at Bullinger’s insistence—his *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de sacramentis*.⁷⁷ He reminded Westphal that it was Luther who had first helped Calvin to a better understanding of the Lord’s Supper,⁷⁸ and he also reported to Westphal what Luther had thought about him: “It would not be hard for me to proof through reliable witnesses what judgment Luther had made about me, after he had seen into my writings. But I think Philipp Melanchthon is for me enough as representing the many others.”⁷⁹

After a *Defensio* on the part of Westphal, Calvin wrote a *Secunda Defensio*,⁸⁰ in which he once again complained that the so-called Lutherans do not follow in Luther’s steps: “Ah, Luther! How few imitators of your excellence have you left behind you and how many apes of your belligerence.”⁸¹ For the pastor in Hamburg, this work was an occasion to direct a number of writings against Calvin. Other Lutheran theologians entered this discussion as well, directing their attack especially against the Swiss. Calvin reacted in 1557 with *Ultima admonitio ad Ioachim Westphalum*,⁸² indeed the last separate piece in the polemics with Westphal, whose later writings Calvin responded to only in the final edition of the *Institutes*.⁸³

Westphal was also responsible for Calvin coming into contact with the Lutherans in Frankfurt am Main, for it was there in 1555 that Westphal incited the Lutheran clergy against the Dutch-speaking, Reformed refugee congregation that had existed there for a few years and been allowed to use their own church building. In the introduction to his commentary on Acts, Calvin praised the Council of Frankfurt for helping the refugees.⁸⁴ He told the Lutheran clergy that he wondered how Westphal’s book could appear in Frankfurt and cause so much discord, while Reformed and Lutherans were in so much agreement.⁸⁵ When the situation worsened through quarrels within the refugee congregation, Calvin himself traveled to Frankfurt in September 1556. The trip was in fact for naught, for the discord persisted and the Lutheran ministers refused to talk with Calvin. In 1561, the authorities decided to close the church to the refugee congregation because they did not agree with the liturgy and doctrine of the Lutherans.

The question then arose if these Reformed people should let their children be baptized by a Lutheran minister and whether they should celebrate

communion with the Lutherans. Calvin's answer is that the administration of the sacraments did not depend on who administered them and that, though the Lutheran ceremonies were not unimportant, neither are they essential. As long as one is not forced to profess the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper, one should feel free to participate, according to the judgment of the clergy in Geneva.⁸⁶ Here Calvin gave essentially the same advice that he had given to the refugee congregation in Wesel, which in 1553 was forced by the city council to conform to the Lutheran confession. Accommodation and preservation of church unity—in this case unity with the Lutherans—was better than the departure of the Reformed congregation. In 1563, however, when the remaining Reformed people were forced to sign the Lutheran confession, Calvin proposed that in that case a number of corrections regarding baptism and the Lord's Supper must be effected first.⁸⁷

The notion that Calvin's interaction with Lutherans was limited to such discussions is one-sided. The contacts were, to be sure, strongly dominated by the controversies over the Lord's Supper, but Calvin also had many friendly contacts with Lutherans.⁸⁸ There was contact, for example, with Justus Jonas (1493-1555), who offered to translate Calvin's second treatise against Westphal,⁸⁹ an offer that Calvin accepted.⁹⁰

Luther's Influence on Calvinist Countries

The result of the argument that Calvin took up the core of Luther's theology and developed it further is that, in areas in which Calvinism became the dominant confessional position, Luther is present as well. One example is the Netherlands, a nation characterized by the overall presence of Calvinism.

CONCLUSION

In 1540, Calvin wrote that he had no greater wish or greater concern than to proclaim the gospel of Christ together with all German churches and to preserve in any way possible the utmost harmony.⁹¹ He maintained this attitude during Luther's lifetime as well as after Luther's death. And it is this stance that also indicates that Calvin's polemic with Luther's successors was not broken off by him, as it was Calvin who wanted to safeguard Luther's theology. He was convinced of the need to build on the foundation Luther had laid down, not to imitate Luther or simply to repeat what he had said,

but to further develop Luther's theology without changing it. The influence of Luther on Calvin means that the *Nachwirkung* of Luther can be found in a much wider tradition than just the Lutheran tradition. It is also due to international Calvinism that Luther can be found worldwide, as his spirituality, his liturgical insights, his views on preaching and teaching, and much more of his work has shaped endless numbers of Calvinists all over the world and through the ages, up until today.

-
- ¹ This article was previously published in *Martin Luther: A Christian between Reforms and Modernity (1517-2017)* (ed. Alberto Melloni; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 401-416, with permission from the publisher.
- ² See H. Zschoch, "Das Bild des Calvinisten, Zur polemischen Publizistik im konfessionellen Zeitalter," in *Reformierter Protestantismus vor den Herausforderungen der Neuzeit* (eds. Thomas K. Kuhn and Hans-Georg Ulrichs; Wuppertal: Foedus, 2008), 19-46.
- ³ In 1618, a disputation is held in Wittenberg under the title "De communione nostri cum Christo, opposita tum Calvinianorum tum Fanaticorum quorundam erroribus."
- ⁴ "Calvin ist der grösste und wohl auch einzige 'Schüler,' den Luther wirklich gehabt hat, d.h. der ihn zutiefst verstanden, und von ihm ausgehend, das Werk der Reformation mit einer eigenen Durchdringung der Botschaft des Evangeliums fortgesetzt und zu einer eigenen kirchlichen Gestalt gebracht hat." (Peter Meinhold, "Calvin und Luther" in *Lutherische Monatshefte* 3 (1964): 67-96.
- ⁵ Herman J. Selderhuis, "Luther totus noster est. The reception of Luther's thought at the Heidelberg theological faculty 1583-1622," in *Reformation und Mönchtum* (eds. Athina Lexutt, Volker Mantey und Volkmar Ortman; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 173-188.
- ⁶ CO 12:7.
- ⁷ CO 12:61.
- ⁸ Herminjard 6:73.
- ⁹ WA.B 8:569; CO 10.2:432.
- ¹⁰ Herminjard 6:130, letter from Calvin to Farel, November 20, 1539.
- ¹¹ "Spero quidem ipsum olim de nobis melino sensurum. Sed aequum est a bono ingenio nos aliquid ferre," Herminjard 6:130, letter from Calvin to Farel, November 20, 1539.
- ¹² CO 12:127.
- ¹³ "Profectio reverendo patri Luthero tua epistola qua Sadoleto respondes ita modis omnibus perplacet ac praedicatur ut nihil supra;" CO 12:40, letter from Crodelius to Calvin, March 6, 1545.
- ¹⁴ Herminjard 6:131.
- ¹⁵ Mention must be made of two remarks in Luther's *Tabletalks (Tischreden)*, WA.TR 5:461, 6050 and WA.TR 5:51, 5303, in which Luther expresses a certain distrust towards Calvin. There is also a remark from theologian Christoph Pezel (1559-1604), in which he refers to a remark of Melancthon on the relation between Luther and Calvin, but the tradition on this is quite uncertain. See Erwin Mühlhaupt, "Luther und Calvin," in *Luther im 20. Jahrhundert. Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 175-89.
- ¹⁶ Mühlhaupt, "Luther und Calvin," 176; see also Brian A. Gerrish, "John Calvin on Luther," in *Interpreters of Luther. Essays in honor of Wilhelm Pauck* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968); Brian A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New. Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 27-48.
- ¹⁷ CO 9:51.
- ¹⁸ Herminjard 9.223, letter from Calvin to ministers Montbéliard, May 8 1544.
- ¹⁹ CO 14:31, letter from Calvin to Edward VI, February 5, 1551.
- ²⁰ CO 12:7ff.
- ²¹ Herminjard 9:313.
- ²² CO 12:99.
- ²³ Translation taken from *Tracts and Letters of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 4:432ff =

- Herminjard 9:374; CO 11:774.
- ²⁴ “esse ejus constantiae nonnihil pertinaciae admixtum;” Herminjard, 342.
- ²⁵ “quis tamen non eam excuset prae insolenti, quam narrant, Martini ferocitate?” Herminjard, 343.
- ²⁶ CO 11:774.
- ²⁷ CO 15:305, letter from Calvin to the clergy of Zürich.
- ²⁸ L. F. Schulze, *Calvin's Reply to Pighius* (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege, 1971); G. Melles, *Albertus Pighius en zijn strijd met Calvin over het liberum arbitrium* (Kampen: Kok, 1973). The treatise is in CO 6:225-404. For a recent translation, see John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will. A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius* (ed. A. N. S. Lane; trans. G. I. Davies; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).
- ²⁹ CO 6:239.
- ³⁰ CO 6:248f. Thesis 13 in Luther's disputation at Heidelberg reads: “Liberum arbitrium post peccatum res est de solo titulo, et dum facit quod in se est peccat mortaliter;” WA 1:354. On the judgment of the University of Paris on this thesis, see: F. T. Bos, *Luther in het oordeel van de Sorbonne* (Amsterdam: VU Amsterdam, 1974), 96ff and 223ff.
- ³¹ CO 6:264.
- ³² CO 6:249.
- ³³ CO 6:241.
- ³⁴ CO 6:250. Translation by Lane, *Bondage and Liberation*, 28.
- ³⁵ “We maintain, then, that at the commencement, when God raised up Luther and others, who held forth a torch to light us into the way of salvation, and who, by their ministry, founded and reared our churches, those heads of doctrine in which the truth of our religion, those in which the pure and legitimate sonship of God, and those in which the salvation of men are comprehended, were in a great measure obsolete;” CO 6:459; cf. CO 6:473.
- ³⁶ Herminjard 9:313.
- ³⁷ CO 9:442; cf. CO 15:501 and CO 11:705.
- ³⁸ *Concio academica nomine rectoris universitatis Parisiensis scripta*; CO 10b.30-36.
- ³⁹ CO 13:165, letter from Calvin to Bullinger, January 21, 1549.
- ⁴⁰ CO 15:454, letter from Calvin to Burckhard, July 10, 1554.
- ⁴¹ CO 19:368, letter from Calvin to Desprez, March 29, 1562.
- ⁴² Herminjard 6, letter from Calvin to Viret, May 19, 1540.
- ⁴³ CO 5:458.
- ⁴⁴ CO 5:458.
- ⁴⁵ Herminjard 4:338.
- ⁴⁶ Herminjard 4:338.
- ⁴⁷ CO 10.2:432, letter from Melancthon to Bucer, October 14, 1539.
- ⁴⁸ CO 11:36.
- ⁴⁹ CO 23:113.
- ⁵⁰ CO 23:170.
- ⁵¹ CO 23:193.
- ⁵² “The casual reader of the *Institutes*, who is not skilled in identifying unacknowledged debts or anonymous opponents, could certainly be pardoned for concluding that Calvin had never heard of Luther;” Gerrish, “John Calvin on Luther,” 67. For Luther's influence on Calvin's *Institutio*, see W. van't Spijker, “The influence of Luther on Calvin according to the *Institutes*,” in *John Calvin's Institutes. His Opus Magnum. Proceedings of the Second South African Congress for Calvin Research* (ed. B. J. van der Walt; Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1986), 83-105.
- ⁵³ Van't Spijker, “The influence of Luther on Calvin,” 86.
- ⁵⁴ Cf. A. Lang: “Ja, man darf sagen, er hat die Kernlehre Luthers von der Glaubensgerechtigkeit und der Wiedergeburt aus dem Glauben treuer bewahrt und theologischer schärfer zum Ausdruck gebracht als irgendein Dogmatiker der Reformation;” *Zwingli und Calvin* (Bielefeld/Leipzig: Velhagen & Klasing, 1913). See also A. Lang, *Johannes Calvin, Ein Lebensbild zu seinem 400. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Rudolf Haupt, 1909), 70f.
- ⁵⁵ Alexandre Ganoczy, *Le jeune Calvin. Genèse et évolution de sa vocation réformatrice* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Franz Verlag, 1966), 139-150; J. Köstlin, “Calvins Institutio nach Form und Inhalt in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung,” *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* (1868): 7-62, 410-486; A. Lang, “Die Quellen der Institutio von 1536,” *Evangelische Theologie* 3 (1936): 100-12; Wilhelm Niesel, *Calvins Lehre vom Abendmahl* (München: Kaiser, 1935), 21-28; Francois Wendel, *Calvin. Ursprung und Entwicklung seiner Theologie* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1968), 109-113.

- ⁵⁶ The text of the *Smaller Catechismus* can be found in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, rev. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 852-910.
- ⁵⁷ "Zumal in der ersten Ausgabe der Institutie erscheint er daher fast wie ein oberdeutscher Lutheraner;" Lang, *Zwingli und Calvin*, 106.
- ⁵⁸ Van't Spijker, *Prädestination bei Bucer und Calvin*, in *Calvinus Theologus* (ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1976), 85-111.
- ⁵⁹ Niesel, *Calvins Lehre*, 23.
- ⁶⁰ Letter from Calvin to Melanchthon, February 16, 1539.
- ⁶¹ WA.B 10:387.
- ⁶² Herminjard 9:201, letter from Calvin to Melanchthon, April 1544.
- ⁶³ CO 12:99, letter from Calvin to Melanchthon, June 28, 1545.
- ⁶⁴ CO 15:388, letter from Calvin to Vermigli, January 18, 1555.
- ⁶⁵ CO 15:321, letter from Calvin to Farel, November 27, 1554.
- ⁶⁶ Herminjard 6:414, letter from Calvin to Farel, December 1540.
- ⁶⁷ Herminjard 7:8, letter from Calvin to Farel, January 31, 1541.
- ⁶⁸ CO 21:62.
- ⁶⁹ CO 13:593-96, letter from Calvin to Melanchthon, June 1550.
- ⁷⁰ Herminjard 8:451, letter from Melanchthon to Calvin, July 12, 1543.
- ⁷¹ CO 12:381, letter from Calvin to the Council of Geneva, October 6, 1552.
- ⁷² CO 6:250.
- ⁷³ CO 11:516.
- ⁷⁴ CO 15:141, letter from Calvin to Farel, May 25, 1554.
- ⁷⁵ CO 15:260.
- ⁷⁶ CO 15:502, letter from Calvin to Seidemann, March 14, 1555.
- ⁷⁷ CO 9:15-36.
- ⁷⁸ CO 9:51.
- ⁷⁹ "Quin etiam Lutherus ipse, quum scripta mea inspexisset, quale de me iudicium fecerit, mihi per testes idoneos probare non difficile erit. Sed mihi unus pro multis erit Philippus Melanchthon;" CO 9:52. Calvin also defends himself against Westphal by reminding him that Luther sent greetings to Calvin, which makes clear enough that Luther did not see Calvin as an enemy (see CO 9:92).
- ⁸⁰ CO 9:41-120.
- ⁸¹ CO 9:105.
- ⁸² CO 9:137-252.
- ⁸³ 4.17.20-34.
- ⁸⁴ CO 15:710ff.
- ⁸⁵ CO 16:53ff.
- ⁸⁶ CO 15:78ff.
- ⁸⁷ CO 19:619ff., letter from Calvin to the Walloon congregation in Wesel, **January 11, 1563.**
- ⁸⁸ Willem Nijenhuis, *Calvinus Oecumenicus. Calvijn en de eenheid der kerk in het licht van zijn briefwisseling* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1959), 160f.
- ⁸⁹ CO 16:137, letter from Jonas to Calvin, May 8, 1556.
- ⁹⁰ CO 16:283, letter from Calvin to Jonas, September 17, 1556.
- ⁹¹ Herminjard 6:132, letter from Calvin to Farel, February 27, 1540.