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The Theology of John Calvin

CH 756

**J. Steven O'Malley, Instructor
Spring 2005**

Class Description and Objectives:

An examination of the life and thought of John Calvin, with primary attention given to the study of his Institutes of the Christian Religion. Our purpose is to gain a working knowledge of Calvin's theology in its historical context, that will enable the student to interact with central themes of Calvin's thought as they relate to the responsibilities of Christian ministry. Hopefully the student may also be assisted in advancing the dialogical and ecumenical objectives of attaining greater common understanding between the Reformed and Wesleyan/Arminian communities of faith.

General Goals:

- 1) Identify the main features in the historical context of Calvin's era and explore their influence upon his life and thought.
- 2) Identify the major events in the life of Calvin and their influence upon his thought.
- 3.) Evidence an understanding of major historiographical considerations in the life and thought of Calvin, including the relative merits of different schools of interpreting his thought.
- 4.) Evidence an awareness of Calvin's theological contribution to the Protestant Reformation, in light of other major expressions of Reformation thought.

- 5.) Demonstrate an understanding of Calvin's contribution to the interaction of religion and culture in sixteenth century European thought.
- 6.) Articulate the distinctive aspects of Calvin's theology in terms of its structure and his handling of specific doctrines.
- 7.) Explore the contemporary significance and relevance of Calvin's theology, in light of the student's chosen vocation of ministry, and in light of issues of pastoral ministry.

Prerequisites:

CH 501-502 or its equivalent.

Textbooks:

For purchase:

J.T. McNeill, ed., Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion; Library of Christian Classics Edition, vols 1 and 2=vols 20-21 (Westminster)

F. Wendel, John Calvin (Baker reprint)

Collateral:

Elsie A. McKee, ed, Calvin: Writings in Pastoral Piety (Paulist)

J.T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (Oxford) (can substitute for Wendel as biography to purchase and read)

D. Steinmetz, Calvin in Context (Oxford)

Reserve:

K. Rowe, Calvin Bibliography

J.C. Olin, ed., A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply

Class Procedures:

1. There will be lectures and discussion on the life and thought of Calvin, with reference to his 1559 edition of the Institutes. Students are required to attend all class sessions and complete all assigned readings (for personal and pastoral emergencies, contact the instructor in advance, where possible; letter grade reduction for non-authorized absences). A reading report is to be submitted on the last day of the class. [15 pts for completion of required readings and supplemental readings appropriate to individual research selected (minimum: 1500 pages total).]

2. Two individual briefs (or position papers) will be selected and prepared in relation to the other 17 pro/contra exercises (5-7 pages, double spaced, and documented where appropriate*). They will be presented in class according to the schedule below, with copies to class members. (20 pts each)

Evaluation of written work will reflect these aspects: (a) clearly and adequately addressing the pro or contra aspect of the question, (b) use of pertinent primary sources in Calvin, (c) discussion built upon interaction with existing historiographical literature, (d) conclusions that are supported by the data presented, and (e) correct style and grammar.

3. The integrative part of our learning will consist of two parts:

(a) develop one of your two class-briefs, or a different theme, into a 15-20 page research paper, reflecting the definition of a research problem, and a structure for addressing the problem, as well as aspects b-d listed for the briefs in #3 above. Follow Campbell/Ballou/Slade (CBS) research style, as found in the Bookstore. One-page proposal to be submitted by April 15. Paper is due by May 13.*. (30 pts)

*there will be a penalty for lack of conformity to this length or late submission.

(b) complete a final take-home exam consisting of one essay question intended to integrate your reading of Calvin's Institutes. Select one of the last three questions on the Questions list in this syllabus. See guidelines for the exam, at end of syllabus. (25 pts)

Grading:

Completion of all course requirements is necessary to receive a passing grade. Upon completion of those requirements, grades will be assigned based upon the total accumulation of points, as follows: in the following manner:

Reading report	15
Two briefs	40
Research paper	30
Final exam	25
Total :	110

Grading scale: 93-100% A (based on 110 points)

90-92	A-
88-89	B+
83-87	B
80-82	B-
78-79	C+
73-77	C
70-72	C-
68-69	D+
63-67	D
60-62	D-
-59	F

Class Schedule: (Readings from the Institutes: 1.1-5, etc.)

Thursday, February 10 -- Introduction to the class and to “Calvin and the Reformation”

– Introduction to Calvin’s Life and work, and the historiography of John Calvin (1509-1564)

2/17 – Calvin and the Reformed Tradition (McNeill on History and Character of Calvinism)

-- Studies in Book One begin – The Knowledge of God and the Place of Holy Scripture (1.1-5, 6-12)

2/24 – Learning Exercise 1 (pro/contra/reply from Barth, Brunner, Calvin) (note: this is a practice session; texts from Barth and Brunner to be distributed in class)

– Book One Contd. – Calvin on the Trinity, Creation, and Providence (1.13-14, 16-18)

--Scripture

Exercise 2

3/3: Calvin on Providence: Between “Chance” and “Stoicism”

Exercise 3

– Studies on Book II begin;

-- humanity created and fallen (1.15 and 2.1-5)

Exercise 4

3/10: Calvin on the Fall and “Total Depravity”

Exercise 5

– law and gospel (2.6-11)

Exercise 6

3/17 – Person and Work of Christ: The Grace and Wrath of God in Calvin’s
Doctrine of Reconciliation (2.12-17)

Exercise 7

Exercise 8

3/31 -- Studies on Book III begin: “Closing with Christ: The Believer’s
Privilege”

-- mystical union (3.1-2)

Exercise 9

– regeneration (3:3-8)

Exercise 10

4/7: --regeneration and justification: “Order and Freedom in the Christian
Life” (3.10-11)

– Exercise 12 (3.17-18)

4/14: "Predestination and the Means of Grace"

– Exercise 13 (3:20)

--eschatology &
election (3.9, 21-24)

Exercise 14

4/21: "Reconciliation, Election, and the Church: A Calvinist Dilemma?"

Exercise 15

-- Studies on Book IV begin

-- the Church (4.1-2.4)

4/28 Exercise 16

(4.5-6, 8-11 are optional, read Reply to Sadoletto, on Reserve)

-- the Word, ministry,
preaching, and discipline (4.3, 12)

5/5

-- baptism (4.15)

Exercise 17

--the Lord's Supper (4.17)

5/12 –The Eucharistic Controversy in the Protestant Reformation
(Calvin) (Luther, Zwingli)

Exercise 18

-- church and state (4.20)

Exercise 19

-- Review and Conclusions

5/19 --Final Exam Week

Write answers in response to two of the last three questions on the list (the integrative questions).

Questions:

1. In affirming the limited validity of natural revelation in the knowledge of God, Calvin undermines the distinction between general and special revelation. [note here how terms like “awareness of divinity”, “seed of religion” and “conscience” function in his thought] Pro/contra
2. Calvin is inconsistent in defending “sola Scriptura”, which claims that Scripture is “self-authenticating,” and also using non-Biblical language for God. Pro/contra
3. The doctrine of Providence is ably defended by Calvin against the options of chance and Stoicism. Pro/contra
4. It may be affirmed that Calvin’s doctrine of the creation of humanity successfully avoids a dualistic view of human nature, that would deny the physical creation to be the work of God. (Pro/contra)

5. Calvin's doctrine of the fall successfully avoids the Manichean excesses of total depravity. Pro/contra
6. Calvin's emphasis on the third use of the law does not conflict with his sola fideism. Pro/contra
7. Calvin's doctrine of reconciliation blurs the distinction between the Old and New Testaments. Pro/contra
8. The way Calvin frames his doctrine of reconciliation permits the grace of God to prevail over his concern for God's sovereign freedom. Pro/contra
9. Calvin's assertion that "faith rests not on ignorance but on knowledge"(544) and that "faith is a firm and certain knowledge" (551) is consistent with his emphasis upon salvation through personal union with Christ. Pro/contra
10. Calvin's understanding of the relation of faith and repentance is a faithful reflection of the biblical and patristic position of the early church. Pro/contra (Roman Catholic position)
11. Calvin's emphasis on order in the Christian life is consistent with his understanding of Christian liberty. Pro/contra
12. Calvin's emphasis on the need for good works by believers undercuts his sola fideism. Pro/contra
13. Calvin's doctrine of prayer, which presupposes God may respond to human intercession, is difficult to reconcile with his doctrine of providence and predestination. Pro/contra

14. Calvin's doctrine of predestination reflects his soteriological rather than his theological concerns. Pro/contra (argues that it reflects both concerns)

15. Calvin fails to resolve the problem of the universality of Christ's reconciling work (2 Cor. 5:19) with the particularity of election. Pro/contra

16. Calvin's belief in the necessity of the church for salvation is undermined by his sola fideism.

Pro/contra

17. Calvin offers a compelling defense of infant baptism. Pro/contra

18. Defend: Calvin's assertion that believers "eat Christ's flesh".

Pro(Calvin)/contra (Zwingli)/reply(Luther)

19. By opposing tyranny, Calvin's philosophy of government contains within it the seeds of democracy. Pro/contra

Integrative Questions (for Final):

20. "Calvin's insistence on the necessity of churchmanship is inconsistent with his doctrine of election." Argue one side or the other of this question, paying attention to the structure of his thought in the Institutes and to his treatment of specific doctrines which have a bearing on the question.

21. What are the main features of Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and how does that doctrine emerge from the Institutes as an integrating vehicle for his systematic theology? (Explain with reference to specific doctrines and with reference to the structure of his thought.)

22. Identify a critical ministry situation from Calvin's ministerial career, in which you explain the situation, with reference to its historical context, and explain how specific doctrines of his theology are being applied in his handling of that situation. Consider also whether Calvin seemed to be consistent with his own theological tenets in his handling of that situation of ministry.

â€ŽThis course examines the theology of John Calvin. Students will survey the main features of Calvinâ€™s theology and exegesis. Additionally, students will assess the historical factors that shaped Calvinâ€™s theology as well as his contribution to the Reformed tradition. Students will survey the main features of Calvinâ€™s theology and exegesis. Additionally, students will assess the historical factors that shaped Calvinâ€™s theology as well as his contribution to the Reformed tradition. The Theology of John Calvin Knox Theological Seminary. Religion & Spirituality. 5.0 â€¢ 4 Ratings. Listen on Apple Podcasts. This course examines the theology of John Calvin. Students will survey the main features of Calvinâ€™s theology and exegesis. John Calvin (1509â€“1564) is easily the most important Protestant theologian of all time and remains one of the truly great men who have lived. A world-class theologian, a renowned teacher, an ecclesiastical statesman, and a valiant Reformer, Calvin is seen by many as the greatest influence on the church since the first century. Apart from the biblical authors themselves, Calvin stands as the most influential minister of the Word the world has ever seen. Philip Melancthon revered him as the most able interpreter of Scripture in the church, and therefore labeled him simply â€œthe theologian.â€ And John Calvin - John Calvin - Theology: Calvin has often been seen as little more than a systematizer of the more creative insights of Luther. He followed Luther on many points: on original sin, Scripture, the absolute dependence of human beings on divine grace, and justification by faith alone. But Calvinâ€™s differences with Luther are of major significance, even though some were largely matters of emphasis. Theology of John Calvin. Calvin has often been seen as little more than a systematizer of the more creative insights of Luther. He followed Luther on many points: on original sin, Scripture, the absolute dependence of human beings on divine grace, and justification by faith alone. Only RUB 220.84/month. The Reformed Theology of John Calvin. STUDY. Flashcards. Calvin understands the work of Christ in terms of satisfaction -What makes Christ + all his benefits available to the believer is the inner + secret operation of the Holy Spirit, whose main work is faith in Christ -Faith has a cognitive element -The role of faith is to join the believer w/ Christ in such a way that the justice of Christ is imputed.