

## REVISED NOTE TO CONFERENCE ORGANISERS 27-11-2008

### TITLE

Calvinus catholicus and Hans Küng's 'catholic' friend, Karl Barth

### ABSTRACT

500 years ago John Calvin was born 1509-1563. As a Reformer he was invited to reform the Medieval Catholic Church in Geneva. In the light of Vatican II and conversations between Hans Küng and Karl Barth we can now see that most of all his reforms but not all have been welcomed. Rome still needs reforming but equally or even more so is this the case for the so-called Reformed Churches.

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Revd Dr Donald W Norwood is a United Reformed Minister who has been active in ecumenical affairs at local, national and international level. Most recently he was Research Consultant at the WCC Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, near Geneva.

## CALVIN CATHOLICUS &amp; HANS KÜNG'S 'CATHOLIC FRIEND KARL BARTH

Second International Receptive Ecumenism Conference

This is a plea for Catholic sympathy for John Calvin and his heirs. Calvin will be 500 on July 10<sup>th</sup> this year. Born and baptised a Catholic, unlike Luther he was never excommunicated. Unlike Wesley, his quarrel was with Rome, not the Church of England. Calvin's positive aim was the renewal or restoration of the Catholic Church in one specific location, Geneva. Many of his reforms have subsequently been 'received', not least by the Second Vatican Council 400 years after his death. He may be praised or blamed for the rise of Capitalism and the growth of Democracy. He can be credited with the Catholic-Reformed and ecumenical foundations of Taizé and Iona. He can be linked with Couturier and the enterprising Catholic-Reformed Groupe des Dombes. In popular thinking, his crime is the burning of Servetus for heresy but his Roman Catholic contemporaries were prepared to do the same. Though Vatican I branded all Protestants as heretics, Calvin himself claimed to defend the Catholic faith. His one big offence was his rejection of the Papacy but one reason was similar to Barth's – he could not hear the voice of the Good Shepherd speaking from the throne of Peter. Had you been around in the 16<sup>th</sup> century could you?<sup>1</sup> More so than Vatican II, he believed in collegiality. Let us give him a fair hearing. Roman Catholic scholars like Alexandre Ganoczy, student of Hans Küng, have been doing just that for the past fifty years, especially since Vatican II. So has the late George Tavard, 'ecumenist extraordinaire'<sup>2</sup>

## RECOGNISE HIS CALL TO GENEVA

The Catholic bishop had come at the head of an army and laid siege to the city and lost. Not surprisingly the citizens of Geneva rejected his episcopacy. In effect, they invited John Calvin to be their 'bishop'. They did so twice. They had also, even before Calvin's arrival, voted to support the Reformation. As almost always in the 16<sup>th</sup> c religious struggles were compounded by partisan politics. The bishop acted too much as the servant of the House of Savoy. Geneva wanted independence and the Reformers helped her gain it.

Today's Roman Catholics can make a case for the local election of bishops. Their cry is resisted in Rome. Somehow the people of Basle retained this right but in 1967 the Vatican sought to abolish this and centralise all appointments. The Swiss theologian, Hans Küng [*Disputed Truth* 24] defended this tradition and was strongly supported by his good Reformed friend and citizen of Basle, Karl Barth.

Popular election of Church leaders is a feature of Reformed Churches everywhere but it can claim to be as much Catholic as Reformed.<sup>3</sup> As Calvin noted in his *Institutes* IV/4/11

The freedom of the people to choose their own bishops was long preserved:

No one was to be thrust into office who was not acceptable to all. It was therefore forbidden at the Council of Antioch that anyone be introduced upon the people against their will.

He claims support from Luke in Acts and from later Tradition as found in Cyprian IV/3/15, Augustine, Theodoret and Leo [Inst IV/4/11-12].

## CALVIN BAPTISED

Calvin baptised but with two innovations: he expected parents or particularly fathers to be present at the baptism of their children and for baptism to take place during a normal service in church. Many of us in most traditions take such innovations for

<sup>1</sup> For balance but equally damning accounts see the Roman Catholic and Anglican biographies of Popes by Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners* 2006 and J N D Kelly, *Oxford Dictionary of Popes* 1986

<sup>2</sup> A recent set of essays, Randall Zachmann ed, *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism* Grand Rapids, Baker Academic 2008 is dedicated to George Tavard, RC author of a number of books on Calvin

<sup>3</sup> Peter Norton, *Episcopal Elections 250-600*. Oxford, OUP 2007

## CALVIN CATHOLICUS &amp; HANS KÜNG'S 'CATHOLIC FRIEND KARL BARTH

Second International Receptive Ecumenism Conference

granted. We now know from local histories of Geneva such changes were strongly resisted. Changes in popular piety and practice require popular consent. Not all Genevan parents were happy with Calvin's reforms<sup>4</sup>. Some travelled to Catholic cities to have their children 'properly' baptised. Midwives continued to baptise the newborn in private homes out of respect of a popular fear, promoted by Augustine but rejected by Calvin, that unbaptised infants would not go to heaven. Calvin, unlike Barth, had no quarrel with infant Baptism but the requirement that a parent be present was so that baptism be seen as the first step in a life of discipleship and Church membership, not simply as a sacrament that might operate regardless of the faith and Christian nurture of the sponsors, including the congregation. Rome now respects his arguments.

The Roman rites authorised in 1969 after the Second Vatican Council clearly involve parents and godparents and expect them to bring up the child in the faith. The newly baptised is welcomed as a member of Christ's body, the Church. Calvin would be less happy about the invocation of the saints. But just as he accepted that Rome, despite many errors remained a Church because of baptism, so he should surely welcome Rome's ecumenical acceptance of all the baptised [Lumen Gentium 15] In England we now have a Common Certificate of Baptism that is endorsed by most Churches including the Roman Catholic Church.

## COMMUNION

Although Calvin like other Reformers rejected the Mass, his intention was to promote Communion and communicating in the Sacrament and create a Full Service of Word and Sacrament every Sunday. Even though he failed to convince the Swiss authorities and most Reformed congregations ever since, if parishioners communicate once a month or once a quarter this is still a 12 or 4 fold increase on Medieval practice. The Mass had become a spectacle, albeit a sacrifice, not a communal meal. It looked to some like idolatry. There is no need here to go into all the painful details of arguments even among the Reformers about the nature of Christ's presence<sup>5</sup>. Sufficient to say that if today John Calvin went to Mass in a Roman Catholic Church in Geneva he would notice and welcome tremendous reform. The Service is simpler and in the language of the people. It is clearly related to the Last Supper or the feeding of the multitude in its four key actions of Offering, giving thanks, breaking and sharing. Scripture is properly honoured and expounded. The Cup has been restored to the laity. Nothing is said about transubstantiation. At only two points might a Reformed Churchman hesitate. One is again the invocation of the saints and the other, the reference to sacrifice but the matters have now been so well rehearsed in dialogues as to no longer be a barrier to communion –I speak here from personal experience in Geneva whenever I have felt permitted to participate. The Liturgical Movement as part of the Ecumenical Movement has led to remarkable convergence in celebration<sup>6</sup>. In response to the WCC Faith and Order document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* 1982, drawn up by theologians from most churches including the Roman Catholic Church, even the Kirk of Scotland [Reformed] noted a consensus on the unique presence of Christ and the 'sacrificial character of the eucharist'<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Spierling *Infant Baptism in Geneva* Aldershot, Ashgate 2005

<sup>5</sup> Recent studies include J Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation and the Gift* Oxford University Press 2007; Christopher Elwood, *The Body Broken*, New York, Oxford University Press 1999; Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude* Edinburgh T&T Clark 1993; Graham Ward, *Cities of God* London, Routledge 2000. Earlier, Kilian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist*, Princeton 1967

<sup>6</sup> Max Thurian and Geoffrey Wainwright eds, *Baptism and Eucharist, Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration* WCC Faith and Order Paper 117, Geneva WCC 1983

<sup>7</sup> Max Thurian ed. *Churches Respond to BEM* Vol 1,91 Geneva WCC 1986. Roman Catholic response to BEM is in Vol VI 1988. 'In the text on the eucharist we find much that we can agree with', p25

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## FROM REFORMED GENEVA TO REFORMING ROME

Scholars differ as to whether Calvin, so to speak, gave up on Rome. Zachman states that 'Calvin had concluded early on that reconciliation with Rome was neither possible or desirable' but gives no evidence for his conclusion.<sup>8</sup> Casteel on the other hand, in a well argued essay on Calvin and Trent notes how Calvin even in his Antidote to that Council complimented its achievements, such as they were, and right to the end of his life held out hope for a better Council in a *Memoire sur La Concile 1560*.<sup>9</sup> George Tavard detects a shift in tone in the final section of *The Institutes* even in 1536 and thinks that Calvin's attitude to Rome hardened after the Affair of the Placards and suppression of Protestants in France, for which reason Calvin himself had to escape to Basle. Even so he pleads that we do not follow 'Calvin's Catholic adversaries who were blinded to the fundamental catholicity of his thought'<sup>10</sup> Like Hans Scholl in 1974, I plead the case for 'Calvinus Catholicus' with four brief points:

- 1 Calvin was baptised a Roman Catholic and never excommunicated
- 2 There is more than one way of being Catholic- something Rome in our lifetime has found it hard to accept. Calvin argued this point with Cardinal Sadolet. Rome in 20<sup>th</sup> c with Teilhard de Chardin, Lambert Beauduin, Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, Charles Curran, Leonard Boff, all trying to be 'catholic'.
- 3 Calvin was convinced there can only be one Church and never denied Rome that title. His aim was to restore the 'true face of the [one] Church'<sup>11</sup>
- 4 Reformed Churches are provisional Churches.<sup>12</sup> They are neither a rival to nor a replacement of Rome

## CALVIN, REFORMING COUNCILS TRENT AND VATICAN II

Calvin was invited to the Council of Trent 1545-1563 but did not go. His presence could have been felt at Vatican II 1962-5 in the person of Reformed Observers: Robert McAfee Brown USA, George Caird Doctor-Vater to the present Bishop of Durham, Oscar Cullman, Max Thurian and Roger Schutz of Taizé Lukas Vischer from the World Council of Churches. Karl Barth was also invited but was too ill to attend. He later had something Calvin never experienced, a heart to heart meeting with the Pope and a pope who was on the same wave length, a theologian Paul VI.

In principle Calvin could welcome both Councils:

We indeed willingly concede, if any discussion arises over doctrine, that the best and surest remedy is for a synod of true bishops to be convened, where the doctrine at issue may be examined *Institutes* IV/ix/13

In practice he declined to go to Trent though he had taken part in various Colloquies because he knew that Trent could not be the free, reforming Council that Luther and other Reformers had been asking for since 1518. Trent he said soon after it began was not representative. It was a 'hired crew of the Pope's followers'; only two bishops from France, 'both dull and unlearned'.

<sup>8</sup> Randall Zachman *Conciliation and Confession, the Struggle for Unity in the Age of Reform* Indiana, Notre Dame Press 2004, 90

<sup>9</sup> Theodore Casteel, 'Calvin and Trent', *Harvard Theological Review* 63 1970, 91-117

<sup>10</sup> George H Tavard *The Starting Point of Calvin's Theology* Grand Rapids Eerdmans 2000, 119ff, 191

<sup>11</sup> Lukas Vischer *Pia Conspiratio, Calvin on the Unity of the Church* Geneva John Knox 2000

<sup>12</sup> The notion of 'provisionality' is hinted at in Calvin, in later Reformed like John Robinson of Mayflower fame, strong in Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2/620-3, 715, and in the Anglican-Reformed Dialogue *God's Reign and our Unity* 1984. It is surely implied in the Reformed slogan *ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda*, probably first enunciated by Jodocus von Lodenstein c1675. The idea has been applied ecumenically by Christian DuQuoc, RC author in *Provisional Churches, An Essay in Ecumenical Ecclesiology* ET London SCM 1986

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With hindsight we can be more generous. Prompted or provoked by Calvin and Company, Trent responded with a Catholic Reformation. Henceforth many bishops and priests were more spiritual and faithful. In place of a warrior prelate laying siege to its citizens, Geneva was blessed with Francis de Sales, Bishop from 1602. Even a local Calvinist said he had never met such a saint. And Trent clarified the contentious issue of Justification in such a way that a young Catholic student, Hans Küng was able to convince a Reformed Professor Karl Barth that this was no longer a Church dividing issue<sup>13</sup>. Sadly it took another forty years for Lutherans and Roman Catholics to officially agree on Justification but not on unification.

Much at Vatican II would have thrilled him –though it is hard to imagine Calvin ever dancing for joy or laughing with delight as Barth was apt to do. Vatican II was the most representative Council the world has ever known. It symbolically enthroned the Gospel as a reminder where its true authority must lie. It supported many of Calvin's reforms including those on Baptism and Communion. Barth was both surprised and challenged by the Council's readiness for reform: 'How would things look if Rome [without ceasing to be Rome] were one day simply to overtake us and leave us in the shadows? He even speculated with Küng as to what might happen if one day Küng, that great admirer of Pope John XXIII ever became Pope.<sup>14</sup>

The papacy<sup>15</sup>, at least in its present form, remains a major problem for a genuinely Catholic Church. Calvin, who always associated the papacy with tyranny and oppression, would have been well prepared for what the *History of Vatican II* recalls as 'The Black Week, *settimana nera*' [14-21 November 1964]. The Council was in the process of approving the ground breaking Decree on Ecumenism and had tried hard to be generous to Protestant spirituality: Calling upon the Holy Spirit they **find [inveniunt]** God in the Scriptures as speaking to them in Christ, the Word of God made flesh for us'. Oh no, said the Pope, that is too bold! Let us say, Protestants **seek [inquirunt]** God in the Scriptures. So the Council, which is still an optional extra in Rome's 'un-Reformed' ecclesiology, agreed. [*Unitatis Redintegratio* 21] Bea and Willebrand were surprised, Congar was angry. Protestant Observers bitterly disappointed and disillusioned<sup>16</sup>.

But thank God, the Gospel has the final Word! Anyone using Calvin's Commentary on Matthew 7,7 will be assured that those who seek, find. And the same text, 'speaking to us in Christ' urges us to 'knock and the door will be opened'. This is what the heirs of John Calvin must still do, go on knocking on Rome's door. 'Let us in if this is really where the Catholic Church subsists' [*Lumen Gentium* 8]. But, dear sisters and brothers in Christ, go on knocking on our doors also, for we too are inclined to shut out the Spirit that has blown so strongly among you. We too need a John XXIII who will open a few windows so that the Holy Spirit can blow in and let the whole household of faith be seen to be one and, as Barth would say, become 'the living congregation of the living Lord Jesus Christ' [WCC Amsterdam Address 1948].

<sup>13</sup> Hans Küng *Justification* 1957 ET 1964 London Burns and Oates 1981 with Letter from Karl Barth

<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth *Ad Limina Apostolorum, An Appraisal of Vatican II*. ET Richmond Virginia John Knox 1967 75

<sup>15</sup> James Puglisi, ed. *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press 1999

<sup>16</sup> Luis Tagle 'The Black Week of Vatican II' in Giuseppe Alberigo, ed, *History of Vatican II*, Vol IV, Mayknoll/Leuven, Orbis/Peeters 2003; Alberic Stacpoole, ed, *Vatican II by Those Who were There*, London, Geoffrey Chapman 1986; Hans Küng *Memoirs I* ET London Continuum 2003, 434ff

Donald W Norwood

Ecumenical Research Oxford

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