

CONTRATULATIONS TO THE VENERABLE PRESBYTER, LORD GABRIEL OF SACONAY,  
 PRECENTOR OF THE CHURCH AT LYON FOR THE BEAUTIFUL  
 AND ELEGANT PREFACE THAT HE WROTE FOR THE BOOK  
 OF THE KING OF ENGLAND

by  
 John Calvin (1561)

(This is a preliminary, rough translation of several parts of this treatise. In general, we have translated those sections in which Calvin specifically refers to Luther. We merely mention the main thread of argument running through the other sections. Eventually we will translate this entire treatise as well as the preface of Gabriel to which this treatise constantly refers.)

In our own age there used to be a certain Precentor of the Church at Orleans by the name of Correau (or Cortaeus), who when he ran down everything, was accustomed to begin with himself, and so he humorously made use of whatever sayings he could twist around to suit his own purposes. Thus in the case of a wicked and worthless man there was some appearance of modesty so that he did not spare himself any more than others.

But now we are faced with a very different sort of precentor of the Church at Lyon, Gabriel of Saconay, who has assumed great personal dignity like some bewitched theologian who mounts the high stage of the theater with great flourish in order to give a discourse on heavenly mysteries from there, as though he had been educated from childhood in the school of the apostles and prophets, and was well steeped in the doctrine of piety: but the truth is, he has actually been well steeped in whorehouses and brothels.

If you want to find his true home, you must go to a certain famous whorehouse in Lyon. I omit (his) dancing and lewd cavorting, which austere and chaste men call enticements to evil. I frankly say that he shows as much hospitality for prostitution and other vices as if he were actually making money from those things. He frequents houses filled with every disgrace and smells out the stench like a hunting dog after a most pleasant odor. However if he enters more wholesome and decent places, he corrupts them with the filth of his desires. Of course it is rather difficult to prove this unless he carries about the marks of venereal disease. But the more nicely the wound kills, the more valuable it is to hold on to. His best companion and most similar in morals was one Samouseto, who was also the most notorious of the boys in Lyon. There was such closeness of spirit between them that by mutual consent and apparently by common agreement they shared the same whore between them. But then a third rival in love cropped up, and somehow this Samouseto supposed that he had spent the night in bed, and thus to avenge the injury pounded on the door of the house at night to beat up his wretched companion. Fired by jealousy, he beat the stuffings out of him. At this point the unhappy athlete is brought home. When Samouseto recognized his error, they patch up their friendship with mutual tearful embraces.

No doubt these injuries which he brings back from the whorehouse did serve to prepare his mind for that grandiose speaking, which he would never have dared to thunder forth if it had been known that he was describing the obscenities of his own life. Now would not a decent man defend chastity: at least a man who is worthy of being priest of the good goddess (the whore of Rome)? Why you dirty mouth, out of which nothing but the most foul stench pours out, how can you still be so impudent as to have the nerve to talk about chastity? He sermonizes against promiscuous sex, and confidently accuses us of taking part in such; with about as much claim to truth as if he were recounting tales from cloudland. If Lyon punished such crimes as strictly as we do, your carcass would long ago have been hung on a pole as food for the ravens. Can you dare deny that if adultery were a capital offense as it ought to be, you would have deserved a hundred deaths either for ravaging or seducing virtuous women? Can you deny that a splendid home which is situated not far from an ancient mint was infamous for your disgraces, and that you had to restrain your passions because of threats and terrors? And you, profligate, will you come forth as a public protector of chastity? And yet a troop of actors would scarcely admit such a person as you are into their ranks? . . .

(skip some sentences on p. 427, which contain similar charges of immorality) . . .

Now here it is appropriate for us to notice those fornications which he expressed with shame ((i.e. the sort of thing Gabriel accuses Calvin of is precisely what Gabriel was doing himself)) He speaks of nocturnal orgies at Paris, where with candles put out they meet together with women and girls to do whatever they please. You actually ridicule the timidity of those whom you charge with false crimes, because you are accustomed by your open lewdness to inflame the jealousy of many husbands in midday by trying to solicit their wives.

But where did you learn the monstrosity about which you grunt, o pig? with your witticisms - when you are tanked up--you enjoy accusing pure and innocent men of your own vices.

However when the Parisian authorities diligently sought out by the most dire and terrible tortures those who were the dangerous enemies of our religion and of ourselves, and spared no cruelty by which they might detect any suspicion of hidden crime, all of the most upright--though convicted of no crime--were compelled to make confession ((of being in the wrong)) unless they were willing to hear the ((required)) pious doctrine and holy prayers. Do not the likes of you prove that such public proceedings ((i.e. against Protestants in France)) were in fact organized crookedly by the real enemies ((of the people))?

Of course under the same sort of pretext the pious martyrs who flourished about the time of the beginning of the reign of Christ were reproached with infanticide by such as yourself. This type of accusation is the noble pattern you follow in order to proclaim your dogmas: but actually you are stupid to spread such calumnies because they show what a fool you are!

But by what sort of faith you assert with such assurance and with such loud mouth transubstantiation, I do not know, Unless perchance you think it is about as easy to turn bread into a body as it is to metamorphose a woman into a man.

(skip several sentences on p. 428 of similar criticism of Gabriel)

Well, more than enough has been said about the hideous and shameful habits of this brute. And so I pass on to the matter itself, only first let me say a few words about the author of the preface who lends his pen to Gabriel of Saconay. It was indeed appropriate to do so, lest the preface itself disagree--at least in this matter--from the book it commends. Since the lackeys of the pope in England buried themselves with their own arguments in their battles with Luther, they thought up a new way to win their point: they would show their superiority to the opposition by holding up the shield of authority ((of the civil government)).

This book was therefore patched together from monks and such wrangling lawyers, and the king was persuaded by bad counsel to let his name be inscribed on it. Indeed, the king later repented of his ill-advised enthusiasm, and the very absurdity of the work was enough to abolish its memory, so for thirty years it was buried in deep silence.

Now since this epicure of the table, Gabriel of Saconay, was unable to injure our cause by the splendid rhapsodies which he tossed about in his hand ((among his own crowd)) he finally found a way to get at us publicly. Therefore he was glad to republish the book of the King of England which was long out of date. Hence Gabriel eagerly seized the laudatory preface which ((the king's)) hired writer had resigned, and Gabriel thought of himself as half a king when he combined his own with the royal name. But how ridiculous was his silliness in not seeing that he would expose himself to the derision of children! No doubt this defender of the Catholic Faith will be believed, whose slowness and stupidity from intoxication in a game of cards has been abundantly recognized in his unchastity and brute impudence. Certainly there is nothing in this preface over which an artist could be proud. But if any spark of genius or learning should flash forth, it would raise questions of plagiarism. Therefore, like the crow who dressed himself up in someone else's feathers and did shameful things under this cover, which had been lying in oblivion or enclosed within the city walls, the Precentor is not doing a good job looking after his reputation.

Now briefly to run through the chapters, in the first place he holds forth against heresies.

(Skip several paragraphs on pp. 429-433, which say that Christians should be against heresy, as 2 Pt. 2:1 and 2 Thss. 2:4 tell us, but that Gabriel does not define properly what heresy is. Gabriel sets up as the test of truth the Councils of the Church and not the Scriptures. Calvin argues that according to Scripture, the real heretics would be the Roman Catholics who have brought in many things contrary to Scripture, such as various sorts of idolatry.)

Now to keep from wasting time in useless quarreling and disputing, we should bring up the definition of the church: which is what Gabriel so carefully leaves out. For what he bubbles forth about antiquity is nothing but stupid impudence.

(Skip paragraphs from pp. 433-435, in which Calvin admits that Rome used to be the mother of churches, but that--as Luther cleverly pointed out-- [and here Calvin begins to mention Luther for the first time in this treatise] the present Roman curia is not to be identified at all with the true church of earlier Rome).

(Skip paragraphs on pp. 435 and 436, in which Calvin answers Gabriel's argument that Protestants have divided the church. Then Calvin attacks transubstantiation as a heresy. Calvin enlists the Church fathers to help him, and quotes authorities such as Irenaeus, Chrysostom, Basil, Berengar of Tours, Thomas, and Scotus. On page 437, Calvin shows how Gabriel misunderstands and abuses the (Vulgate text) of Jeremiah 11:19. Here, for the second time, Calvin mentions Luther: )

But also in that passage of Jeremiah 11:19, which he interpreted-- "Let us despatch the wood into its bread" (which is the nearest he ever gets to Scripture), he accommodates the verse to his own use through a common error. As if indeed the mystery of the Supper had come into the mind of the prophet, when he deplores his enemies having plotted together to taint his food with poison! Well, since Luther attacked the prodigy of transubstantiation, relying on the agreement of the universal church, he justly despised the whole papal pretension.

When Gabriel begins to bring up the dissensions which subsequently followed ((scil. Luther's criticism of the mass)), he insolently tells tall tales, just as he is accustomed to do with his females. Of course he does not remember the names of men and places, and he wanders extremely far from real history: and the refutation of his nonsense can be sought from published books. Urged by evil motives, he perverts testimonies from Melanchthon and Luther--to demonstrate nothing. Carlstadt disdained Luther, because after his victory over the pope, he no longer wanted to be taught by Luther. Melanchthon turns his back on him, and shows that he was moved by hatred of Luther to stir up this quarrel. He wishes to be received as an angel of Satan, just as he blames Melanchthon along with Luther for having upset the world because of no zeal for piety. The book exists which shows Gabriel is a forger.

Otherwise, because Luther, who had halted in mid course, did not sufficiently weigh out what had been more correctly imparted by others, instead attacked them intemperately--not only according to the customary vehemence of his genius, but also inflamed by certain fans--((exploiting this)) Gabriel hatefully heaps up all his hyperboles which turn the minds of the pious from an investigation of the truth. And not only that, but everything he confuses in order to obscure the light, repeatedly coloring things with the venom of his own misrepresentation. He says there was a dissension and hostile struggle by Luther against Oecolampadius and Zwingli. Calvin damned them all. Why, good-for-nothing?

If Calvin modestly and with an added respect which was proper, advised readers how much harm the heat of contention had done so that they--with minds settled down to moderation--might better consider the matter, surely these matters will not be in an uproar for you so that the pious will be alienated from the study of the truth? Now if the comment of Carlstadt offended Luther, I am not at all surprised, because it betrayed such manifest absurdities. And indeed, would that he had at first listened to Oecolampadius and similar people peacefully and with a calm mind. However, Luther went beyond the limit and angrily brought forth many things: but even so, surely everyone's minds were not therefore alienated from seeking out the truth so as to plunge into darkness with closed eyes.

On the other hand Gabriel censures Calvin because he begrudged Luther the title of Elijah. Yes, indeed, because Calvin surpressed the folly of those who were saying that the final ((manifestation of)) Elijah had appeared in his person. Calvin affirms that this is preposterous and unbearable, no matter about whom it is said. What a pretext it is therefore when this tasteless jester employs his raillery ((to imply that)) Calvin had ever desired a title which he abhorred. To the contrary, Calvin censures him by the very form of teaching which he held. No, he says Calvin published new and previously unheard of opinions (not that Gabriel understands these opinions, because of his own studipity which he demonstrates as he writes about this matter), rather Gabriel prefers to add together the opinions of others than to get praise by trying himself to deal with the new opinions.

This is too rotten a lie, to which nevertheless two other lies are added, (for your claims) rest on absolutely no authority--either of the scriptures or the fathers. Whom do you think you are speaking to, Gabriel? your canonical associates or whores? For if Calvin was ever precisely examined about this matter, he omitted nothing of diligence, but strengthened his cause with the testimonies of both the scriptures and the fathers.

After this, Gabriel ((in his preface)) slanderously wrests the words of Calvin at the very time when he claims that he is getting ready to speak sincerely and without pretense, as he is accustomed to (or so he says!) Here Gabriel, as if awakened from drowsiness, exclaims: Listen reader, Paul, discussing this tremendous mystery, says: "I received from the Lord what was delivered to you" (I Cor. 11:23). But Calvin (according to Gabriel) does not refer to what he got from Christ and his spouse, the church, but instead bases his authority on "what seems to me." Anyway, it is a bother to respond to such futile nonsense. But what about the statement of the apostles and elders (in Acts 15:28) "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us": surely they did not separate themselves from the Spirit? What moreover does Paul say elsewhere? "I say," he says to virgins and widows (I Cor. 7:8). Likewise, about virgins I have no teaching from the Lord, but I give this counsel, inasmuch as I have received mercy from the Lord in that He counted me faithful (ibid. vs. 25).

(Skip several sentences in this section on p. 439, in which Calvin brings forth several more quotations from Scripture such as Rom. 2:16, 2 Cor. 13:3, Luke 1:1, I Cor. 14:32, Matt. 3:16, etc. Calvin concludes this section with this persona slam against Gabriel:)

. . . And you will growl again that Calvin speaks without scripture, but is it not rather the case that you, wearied of the light, will go hide in the bosom of some harlot ? . . .

(Skip sentence on p. 439, where Calvin goes back to the argument over transubstantiation, and claims Tertullian, Chrysostom, Basil, Augustine, and others on the side of a figurative meaning of "This is my body.")

Skip sentences on p. 440, where Calvin argues against the perversions that Gabriel has made of Calvin's teachings on baptism as well as the Lord's Supper.)

(Skip sentences on p. 441, where Calvin continues setting the record straight on his eucharistic teaching against Gabriel's perversions of it.)

Now because Calvin spares Luther and Zwingli, the other charge branded by Gabriel is that he cherishes heretics, whom Christ orders to be considered as heathen and publicans.

(Skip some sentences on p. 441, where Calvin replies to the charge that he cherishes heretics, and mentions how Gabriel--with a boring play on words--keeps calling Geneva Gethenna.

Skip sentences on p. 442, where Calvin refutes the claim of Gabriel that he denies the divinity of Christ by denying transubstantiation, etc.)

Why, moreover, does it not occur to him to look for the interpretation out of Augustine? And as Gabriel's nonsense appears everywhere, ((it is especially here)) in place of the words of Christ: This cup is my blood, Gabriel substitutes from his own missal: "This is he indeed." Now we may believe the defender of the Catholic Faith for whom the missal is the gospel.

Again, that Gabriel opposes us with the words of Luther, does not particularly upset me as I labor to answer him; for it would be unfair to the thoughtless passion of Luther if I covered up a good cause ((scil. in order to protect him)). Indeed, the hyperbolic clause, where Luther says the kernel of Christianity is in the papacy, would be retracted by noble Luther if he lived today. Why indeed should he not be given another chance after thirty-three years ((when he originally said this))?

(Skip some sentences on p. 443, where Calvin returns to Gabriel's arguments against his teaching on the eucharist)

Finally, Gabriel descends into the broadest field of impudence, in which he practices unrestricted insolence, while he intermingles us with all the sects and sprinkles us with their infamy. I would say that he has drawn this slander from Staphylus and similar apostates: unless, in fact, he is ignorant of the names of those about whom he chatters. For Schvinkffeldius he substitutes Sventrefeldius. But where he vomited everything up, by which he thinks to disgrace our doctrine, where nevertheless will he be able to transfer the blame for errors--by right or title--onto those by whose industry and labor he has been overthrown?

Since Luther began to overthrow the papacy, suddenly there arose nearly countless heretics, who threw Germany into confusion with unnatural inventions. Afterwards, other sects also emerged. It will be (thus). For when the gospel has been promulgated a significant crowd of errors and sects bubbles up. This is Gabriel's piety, to tag us with the disgrace of having an excess of Christ and the apostles. Our cases are similar and absolutely common. Who therefore does not see that if Luther, Zwingli and others sustain the offense of errors which have emerged in this situation in close order, that the same judgment must be advanced for Christ and the apostles?

Of course it does not make any difference to those Cynical and Epicurean idlers if the name of Christ be exposed to any sort of blasphemy--just as long as they can revile us ((it is a price they are willing to pay)). But our prompt and ready reply is also that if the society we are in is with Christ, Gabriel should not try to lay claim to our own position. Indeed, I briefly respond to Gabriel: among fair persons and interpreters who are not sinister, all of the errors which he raises from the dregs--so far from weakening the conviction of our doctrine--rather confirms it all the more. . . .

(Skip paragraphs from pages 444-447, in which--among other things--Calvin defends himself from connection with heretics and sectarians such as Michael Servetus, the Anabaptists, and others).

Certainly when some rare anxiety tormented Gabriel, he also displayed his own luxuries in his style. But these did not agree among themselves because the resentment, vomiting bitterness all through the preface, declares the triumphs of us and of the books of our men. According to him, there is hardly any mention of the books of Luther, unless perhaps in some out of the way place in Saxony. Doubtless this is the reason why he lived in an empty territory. After all, the preface of Gabriel really depends on the books of Luther. Let him announce through runners that coaches are ready at hand for hire, which can carry this valuable treasure house into all parts of Europe.

But how insipid you are, who do not even surmise how great the supply of books and the variety of papal materials which Luther daily casts down from their seats! But your charge that Melancthon separated from Luther, I can handle with greatest pleasure: since the agreement of this man helps our cause in no common manner, who indeed has been widely acknowledged since the death of Luther, whose life is also documented in works which are not obscure. Now why would Calvin prohibit his books being published at Geneva, if he carefully had the worst writings of his enemies published? ((i.e. these are point by point replies to false

charges leveled by Gabriel in the preface--translator's note)) No, unless the furor absolutely blinded you, you should know that some of Luther's writings have been translated into the Gallic tongue; you have the name inscribed of the city and printer. Anyone who wishes to buy any one of Luther's books will find them for sale in the shops.

Furthermore, Calvin is certainly not afraid of your prediction in which you threaten a quick death to his works, because ((according to you)) they contain nothing solid, but are empty words, filled with deceit; these verborities and ornaments of rhetoric (are nothing but) curses against the sacraments and jeers against the church. He ((Calvin)) should be a disciple of Hortensius or Lorenzo Valla rather than of Christ, in which case you would find him to be a rhetorician rather than a theologian. . . .

(Skip sentences on lower page 448, in which Calvin criticizes Gabriel's lack of knowledge and quotes from the fathers.

Skip p. 449 on which Calvin returns to the personal church life of Gabriel in Lyon and to his reputation.

Skip p. 450 on which Calvin asks whether the papacy is the true heir of the fathers and the early church.

Skip p. 451, where he goes back to Gabriel, and also discusses something of the history of the ministry in the early church and scripture.

Skip p. 452, where he returns to heresy and the unity of the church, mentioning Augustine and the Donatists.

Skip the upper part of p. 453, where Calvin refers to various scriptures to indicate that Gabriel is the actual heretic.)

But since he seems to have interpreted (the matter) in a spurious sense, let me with a few words set right what accusations he vomits up in the conclusion of the Preface. In order to render the name of Luther odious and to dishonor our whole doctrine in his person, he recalls how obscure, weak, and contemptible the beginning was: but in the advance of time merely insignificant sparks burst forth into a great fire. What, I pray, had Luther done, for whom only a spark, and indeed of obscure light, flashed out? He therefore published freely what he knew, that is, a little more than nothing. However, Gabriel lifts up the buskin and savagely accuses Luther of contradicting himself in everything: that the pope, whom he revered at first, he afterward began to hold to be Antichrist; purgatory, which he professed himself to believe, he says is a mere figment; next, he upheld prayers to saints, the sacrifice of the mass, and artificial worship; he annulled the tyrannical vow of celibacy and confession.

Frankly, I wonder why you did not consider it an offense on his part for not having spoken before he came forth from his mother's womb! I freely bestow on you more than you can exact. Luther called indulgences pious frauds from the beginning. What he called indulgences at first was altogether too gentle, because he had not yet understood that they came from the deepest pit. And perhaps he would have remained longer in a ((moderate)) "grey" area, unless he had been aroused by the folly of those who then tried to defend all the grossest errors. Luther cleverly says somewhere: "willy, nilly, they are forcing me to become wiser than my adversaries in a short time." Of course, since they



repeatedly amassed new absurdities, why did he not open his eyes to consider the mysteries of the pope, about which they never dared to argue?

But if you say you have cleverly concealed anything so that little by little and obliquely, it might ingratiate itself by crawling, how will this pretence agree with your vehemence which so violently excites you? Nevertheless, he tries to prove this about the words of Luther himself: that he who confessed that he had been about to be led into a position of great benefit ((was glad to give it up on the slightest pretext--added by translator)) if anyone had convinced him that there was nothing in the Lord's Supper except bread and wine, (simply) because of how much it seemed he had annoyed the papacy. This good interpreter ((Gabriel)) so twists Luther's words as to end up meaning that he would have denied the presence of Christ in the meal only to annoy the papacy.

Now after all this, will you dare to discourse on the generous spirits of the nobles, and to call yourself a noble? Even if you had been born of the most distinguished and noble family, with all the disgraces that are smeared on you, you would cause your family to be blacked out! What folly it is to pride oneself about family, since at the same time you so deservedly stink with filthy lies among swineherds.

Luther says that he for his part had been a great danger to the pope, even when he was silent, because he (still) was not persuaded by a good conscience. This deceiver (Gabriel) persuaded by double talk that what appeared to all to be white was black. In the rest of the text he inveighs this way with the same impudence against Luther so as to prove conclusively his own vanity.

I only want to say this: in the battles of conscience with which God engaged the man, he was a bright example of the serious fear of God. Luther's life was as far from the disgraces you heap on him, as your wicked habits are removed from all honest men.

Well, Gabriel did not think that he had lied quite enough unless he extended his insolence even up to the death of Luther. This good historian observes that he was killed by a sudden death, and he assigns the cause of death to a hangover and drunkenness. Indeed, as if this untruth might not be sufficiently disproved in public records! Unless you were absolutely hopeless, you would have said with Balaam (Num. 23:10): "Let my soul die the death of the just," rather than have dared to grunt with your pen in this way. ((From this point to the end of this treatise, either words have been dropped out of the copied text, or else the style is extremely elliptical. This makes it necessary to add some words on the basis of conjecture. The conjectures will be noted--translator's note)). Nevertheless, Gabriel trusts that by the charm of his raillery (Luther) is going to be destroyed, whereas ((he supposes)) that (those who have) celebrated the papacy--even when nearest death--will be left behind (Luther): surviving him ((in order to)) revile him.

If you now should ask the pope, will he confess himself ((to be)) in the doctrine of Luther, with which barbs he is continually being pierced: to such a degree that he cannot ((enjoy)) normal living.

Instead, his kingdom is wasting gradually away, ((and is)) rotten like a living corpse. But even if you are more stupid than all lethargic people, however, what you fear most--I declare I am going to insist--that your kitchen may freeze. I wish to put an end to you with this exorcism, since you are from that family of demons who cannot be cast out except by fasting!

The end

(This translation is merely a first-draft effort. It will be necessary to study the original Preface of Gabriel--since Calvin is answering it point by point--in order to shed light on some difficult places in this treatise.

There are some typographical errors in the text of this treatise as printed in the CR. At places the Latinity seems somewhat below Calvin's normal polished style. Whether that would indicate another hand in the original preparation of this treatise, or whether it would be explained by the satirical, tongue-in-cheek nature of this production, I am not at all competent to judge--though I would assume the latter explanation is most likely the correct one.

This translation will require careful revision before it could be considered a finished product.

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