

## THE DAVIDSON COLLEGE COLLOQUIUM: A HISTORY

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The Davidson Colloquium on Calvin Studies began in 1982 out of informal conversations. I was at that time president of Calvin Studies Society, and I was convinced that it would be good to have one Calvin Studies Society with a meeting in Grand Rapids in one year and a meeting somewhere else in the alternate year. This proposal was not workable.

The decision was made (how and among whom I cannot remember) to have a colloquium at Davidson on March 19-20, 1982. Papers were read by Ben Farley, Edward Dowey, Charles Swezey, Milner S. Ball, and J. Alexander McKelway. Responses were given by Glenn Edgerton, David Steinmetz, and Douglas Kelly. Worship was led by William F. Keesecker. The colloquiums, once begun, continued largely by their own momentum. We have had a total attendance close to 500, and more than 250 persons have participated in the proceedings.

The papers of each colloquium have been made available in duplicated form, usually 300 to 450 copies for each colloquium. The demand for these collections has been very satisfying. The collections for Colloquium I and II are now out of stock, and orders are still received for collections for III and IV.

The colloquiums have not only brought people together to talk about Calvin and made available publications, but they have helped to call attention to the significance of Calvin studies. Many of us are persuaded that Calvin's *Institutes* remains a very persuasive statement of Christian faith, more persuasive than many that are being published today. The study of Calvin is more alive in American Presbyterianism than it has ever been before. This is not to say that more Reformed theology is being read today, as older generations studied Reformed theology in the versions of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. It is to say that we are now experiencing an unprecedented revival of interest in the theology and works of Calvin.

An important feature of the Davidson Colloquium has been the deliberate attempt to bring together pastors and professors. We have been committed to the primary importance of Calvin for the church and to Calvin's usefulness in the edification of the church today.

Members of this colloquium have also been concerned to make available Calvin's writings to people in the church. The suggestion for the publication of *The Young Calvin* by Ganoczy came from this colloquium, as well as efforts to get support for that publication. We have attempted to include in our proceedings some translations of writings that were not previously available, such as the letter to the Venerable Presbyter Lord Gabriel of Sacony, translated by Douglas Kelly. Ben Farley translated Calvin's essay on "The Lord's Supper" from "The Form of Prayers." Douglas Kelly has made available some of Calvin's sermons on Samuel dealing with Calvin's views on the state.

During the Fourth Colloquium, Keith Crim of Westminster Press met with William F. Keesecker, John Nichols of the First Presbyterian Church of Oklahoma City, Brian

Gerrish, Elsie McKee, Ben Farley, and John Leith. The result of the conversation was the raising of money under the leadership of John Nichols and the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Oklahoma City in honor of William F. Keesecker to publish four books in the field of Calvin studies. The intention was to publish a collection of essays given at the Davidson Conference; a new translation of Calvin's *Ecclesiastical Advice*, short articles which he wrote in response to particular situations; Calvin's sermons; and a translation of the minutes of the Genevan Consistory, when they are available in a critical edition.

Timothy George, with the assistance of Elsie McKee and Ben Farley, has edited a collection of essays for publication by Westminster Press this spring. Westminster now has the manuscript of Calvin's *Ecclesiastical Advice* that had been translated by Ben Farley, Mary Beaty, and Roy Lindahl. We are looking forward to two additional books in the future.

The establishment of a Fund for the Explication and Application of Reformed Theology at Union Theological Seminary is an indirect consequence of the colloquium. It is under the supervision of a committee, all of whom have participated in this conference (Charles Raynal, John Kuykendall, Kenneth Orr, Wallace Alston, Robert Bardin, John Rogers) except the chairman, Taylor Reveley of the Hunton & Williams law firm. The fund now has received \$130,000, and will be used to provide graduate scholarship for those who are personally committed to Reformed faith and who wish to study the basic documents of the faith. The fund will also provide room, board, and some travel expense for ministers and researchers to study basic Reformed texts in the Union Theological Seminary library.

Publication of Calvin's writings is always an unfinished task, as there is a continuing need for new editions. I personally would like to see a photographic reproduction of the English translation of "The Forme of common praiers vsed in the churches of Geneua . . . and the catechisme of Geneua, made by maister Iohn Caluyne. E. *Whitchurche*, 1550 (jn. 7). 8, preserved in near perfect condition in the Sheide Collection in the Firestone Library of Princeton University.

It is assumed by many of us that we shall have another colloquium in 1992. The First Presbyterian Church of Charlotte has invited us to have that colloquium on their grounds with housing in the Marriott Hotel, which is across the street. A Calvin studies colloquium meeting in a church has the qualities of authenticity and integrity. On the other hand, Davidson College Presbyterian Church and Davidson College have sustained the conference for five meetings and we do not want to break that association. It may be possible to combine the two in 1992.

There are good reasons why the next conference should focus on Calvin studies as they relate to the life of the congregation. I believe the colloquium would serve the church well by concentrating on Calvin's understanding of piety, catechetical instruction, and worship. Controversy on each of these themes exists in the church, and church practices increasingly deviate from Calvin's teaching.

I have asked William Klempa, Charles Raynal, Alexander McKelway, Ben Farley, Timothy George, Allen McSween, Charles Bardin, Alex Evans, and John DeBevoise to make plans for the next colloquium and to prepare proposals for minimal organization to keep the colloquiums going in the future.

The Calvin colloquiums could not have survived without the cooperation and help of many people. No speakers have received honoraria, and except for those who travel a

great distance, all have come at their own expense. Everyone pays the small registration fee. All the expenditures have been used for specific services to the colloquium.

The Fifth Colloquium was assisted by a grant from the Lilly Foundation. This has enabled us to have two participants from Europe, and it will enable us to publish a better reproduction of the essays. We are grateful to Robert Lynn and Craig Dykstra and to the Lilly Foundation.

The colloquiums could not have been sustained apart from the voluntary contribution of many people. At the risk of omitting some who should be included, I would like specifically to express thanks to Charles Raynal and to the Davidson College Presbyterian Church Session and congregation, which have rendered yeoman service in providing for registration, refreshments, and the other necessary aids and props of our conference. Carol Barber has always been cooperative in her work as administrator for the Davidson College Presbyterian Church. The sales of the colloquium papers have been processed through the church office. All the finances of the colloquiums have been kept by the Davidson College Presbyterian Church under the direction of Carol Barber. The records are open to full review.

We are grateful to Davidson College for making available its facilities. President John Kuykendall and members of the faculty encouraged the preparation for the Fifth Colloquium, and they have supported the colloquium enthusiastically.

Charles Raynal and Alexander McKelway have always been willing volunteers on the Davidson College scene. Timothy George, Brian Armstrong, and Ben Farley have been very active in the planning of these conferences.

We are also grateful for the cooperation of the Meeter Center at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. The directors of that center have always attended these colloquiums.

A special word of appreciation must be expressed to Union Theological Seminary. It has not only paid my salary, but it has also provided the secretarial help that made possible arrangements for the colloquium, the mailing of information, the typing and preparing of the lectures for duplication, and long distance telephone calls necessary for arranging for the colloquium.