

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY REFORMED PERSPECTIVES ON THE MINORITY CHURCH*

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If one may combine hypothesis and anachronism, I reckon that John Calvin would be highly uncomfortable in the pluralist society of the West at the end of the second Christian millennium. Even if we do not find him enunciating in so many words Zwingli's bold axiom that 'a Christian city is none other than a Christian church,'¹ nevertheless the central thrust of the reform in Geneva is clear — that the whole city be united in the honour and service of God. All children should be baptized, and no open dissent or defiance of the Christian order to which the city was corporately committed should go unchallenged. This, at any rate, is the conventional account of a fundamental platform of the Genevan Reformation, shared in large measure by Zürich, Strasbourg and other cities, but not by Lutheran territories.

From such a perspective, the current fortunes of many churches, especially Protestant churches, in Europe and the 'New World' would have variously baffled or outraged the Genevan Reformer. Quite apart from their internal pluralism (which means that in most mainstream denominations, the first task of ecumenism is internal reconciliation — intra-church rather than inter-church), Christianity in numerous countries is but one option on offer in the marketplace. Even where church membership remains numerically strong, even claiming a majority of the population, and even where the church, or a church, enjoys established or national status (as, respectively, in England and Scotland, for example), its teaching is accorded little or no privileged recognition in the formation of the norms of public life. It is tolerated as a private option, and perhaps even respected, so long as its convictions do not entail a refusal to grant equal recognition to other options. For the most heinous sin in the late twentieth century is intolerance, otherwise known as bigotry. Where a communal consensus has so dramatically broken down, church discipline is an early casualty. One cannot but believe that Calvin would have found this scene unbearably messy — or, we might say, abysmally labyrinthine.

Calvin's Trials and Disappointments

This is not to forget that Calvin was never free from troublesome dissent in Geneva. If from c. 1546 he could command the virtually unanimous support of his colleagues in the Company of Pastors, there were battles royal to come for another decade. In late December 1563 Calvin called for a day of thanksgiving to mark the unmasking and overthrow of the final Libertine conspiracy to surrender the city to Savoy, while within the Company of Pastors itself a country pastor was brazenly unrepentant when rebuked in 1558 for having read out Berne's ban on the preaching of predestination, and even in 1564 another minister, 'newly returned from Tübingen where he had studied for several years,' was singing Bolsec's song against predestination.² That is to say, the pursuit of consecration of the whole community to serve God according to his Word entailed for Calvin almost unending conflict with critics and enemies. His farewell message to his fellow-pastors was scarcely up-beat.

I have lived here amid remarkable struggles... I have had battles to face, and you will experience them no less but even more mightily. For you are set in a perverse and wretched people and however many good folk there be in it, the people is perverse and wicked, and you will have trouble when God has taken me off.³

Calvin could surely not have endorsed John Knox's eulogy of Geneva, which commended not so much purity of doctrine — which could be found elsewhere also — as 'maneris and religioun so sinceirlye reformat, I have not yit sene in any other place.'⁴

As Heiko Oberman has recently shown, Calvin's assessment of the state of religion in Europe in mid-century was bleak.⁵ To the testimonies he cites we may add the following verdict from the Zephaniah commentary published in 1559, evoked by the meagre and short-lived fruits of Josiah's reforms.

This example ought at this day to be carefully observed: for though God now appears to the world in full light, yet very few there are who submit themselves to his word; and of this small number fewer still there are who sincerely and without any dissimulation embrace sound doctrine. We indeed see how great is their inconstancy and indifference...

We may also derive hence an admonition no less useful — not to regard ours as the golden age, because some portion of men and women profess the pure worship of God... The sacred name of Reformation is at this day profaned, when anyone who shows as it were by a mere nod that he is not wholly an enemy to the gospel is immediately lauded as a person of extraordinary piety. So although many show some regard for religion, let us yet know that among so large a number there are numerous hypocrites,... we may see here, as in a mirror, how difficult it is to restore the world to the obedience of God.⁶

Or again, from the Haggai commentary, on the Jews' neglect of rebuilding the temple while revelling in domestic comfort.

And how is the case today? We see that through a remarkable miracle of God the gospel has shone forth in our time, and we have emerged, as it were, from the nether regions. Yet who now rears up, of his own free-will, an altar to God? On the contrary, all regard what is advantageous only to themselves; and while they are occupied with their own concerns, the worship of God is cast aside; there is no care, no zeal, no concern for it; nay, what is worse, many profit from the gospel, as though it were a lucrative business.⁷

And yet, as far as I know, Calvin was never induced, by his depressing estimates of the progress of spiritual renewal, to entertain those aspirations which tempted other leading Reformers to abandon hopes of a communal Reformation and provide instead, or as well, for a minority church, a gathered or covenanted fellowship, *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.

Luther's Ideal Congregation

Best known are Luther's ruminations in the Preface to his *German Mass* of 1526.

The third kind of service which a truly evangelical church order should have [in addition to the new Latin and German masses] would not be held in a public place for all sorts of people, but for those who mean to be real Christians and profess the gospel in deed as well as word. They would record their names on a list and meet by themselves in some house in order to pray, read, baptize, receive the sacrament and do other Christian works. In this manner, those who do not lead Christian lives could be known, reprov'd, reclaim'd, cast out or excommunicated...In short, if one had the people or the persons who wanted to be Christians in reality, the rules and regulations could easily be supplied.

But as yet I neither can nor desire to begin, or to make rules for, such a congregation or assembly.⁸

We may note the comments of Martin Brecht, who thinks that these reflections issued from Luther's recent discussions with Caspar von Schwenckfeld on 'the "coming church"':

Here one may see Luther's ideal of a congregation, along with his sober evaluation of how far distant such an ideal was...In Luther's opinion, up to now there had not been a group which worshiped spontaneously and in which church discipline and intensive charitable acts were practiced.⁹

'Christian Communities' in Strasbourg

The most remarkable effort to implement something of this kind was that of Martin Bucer in Strasbourg during 1547-9. To the depression brought on by the Protestants' defeat in the Schmalkaldic War and the imposition of the Augsburg Interim on Strasbourg was added disenchantment at the failure of reform measures to fashion an authentically Christian church in the city. These two reverses were not unconnected: apathy in reforming the church had drawn down God's wrath upon the community in military and religio-political disasters. Bucer now channelled his energies into the formation of 'Christliche Gemeinschaften,' small Christian communities, which are first mentioned in January 1547. These were groups of believers committed to firmer disciplinary exercises than the city magistrates would sanction in the majority church, with the aim of promoting closer unity, deeper sanctification and fuller fidelity to the pattern of the primitive Christian congregations. Their meetings were to supplement the Sunday worship of the whole parish, and indeed the cells were envisaged as catalysts for the wider church's renewal in dedication.¹⁰

Although these fellowships were to elect their own elders from among 'the most zealous and wisest in the Lord,' Bucer and his colleagues made a show of maintaining the overall supervision of the parish wardens (Kirchenpfleger), who represented the authority of the city council. Yet 'this "core-church" movement' only too easily invited the council's suspicious attention, and also stirred up tensions, and even charges of schism, among the pastors of the city. Bucer was certainly mistaken in claiming, in response to the objection that other evangelical churches lacked such house-groups, that they were not only to be found, but even more completely implemented, 'in all properly evangelical churches and in those that maintain Luther's order.'¹¹

In this ecclesiological experiment Bucer resiled from wearisome and increasingly frustrated efforts to Christianize the city as a unified community. It produced the most

concrete embodiment of one motif in Bucer's twofold ecclesial vision, so finely characterized in Gottfried Hammann's monograph entitled (in French) 'Between the Sect and the City: the Church Envisaged by the Reformer Martin Bucer.' He shows how deeply rooted in Bucer's thought about the church lay this duality between the *corpus mixtum* of the majority and the *communio sanctorum* of those who truly professed Christ. In his great pastoral manual of 1538, *On True Pastoral Care (Von der Waren Seelsorge*, of which an English translation may be confidently expected before long), Bucer committed himself to supplementing the inadequacies of public worship and instruction for all and sundry by means of house fellowships to foster living faith in Christians.¹² But as early as 1527, in his first Gospels commentary, he had sketched one design of what he attempted to create only two decades later.

In fact our congregations are still too impure and the number of those who have pledged themselves wholly to Christ too few. For reasons of public concord we may not debar from the church's meetings for worship those who are unproven. Hence in the public assemblies of the church...excommunication cannot be publicly exercised — unless...the majority of the population together with the magistrates are wholeheartedly converted to Christ. Where this is not granted, it is essential that those who have fully accepted Christ should reestablish among themselves Christ's most godly and wholesome practice of assiduous and unstinted mutual exhortation of all of their family or neighbours or other connexions who have named the name of Christ. Any who proceed to scorn their admonitions they should cite for this contempt before the church to which they belong by virtue of locality or acquaintance or parental or family connexion...and if they continue to despise the Word of the Lord, they should excommunicate them.¹³

Another focal point of Bucer's almost ministry-long struggle with the competing inclusivist and exclusivist tendencies of his ecclesiology was infant baptism. He soon became one of its doughtiest sixteenth-century defenders, but at the cost of qualifying its significance. He ascribes to it 'a containing role, the marking of an outer ring, within which another and more decisive line would be drawn, coming into sacramental focus in confirmation.'¹⁴ It was inconceivable that the sign of redemption should be given less indiscriminately (*promiscue*) under the new covenant than under the old. Far from baptizing only solidly instructed disciples, as the Anabaptists claimed, the apostles often baptized people they had spoken to for scarcely an hour. Baptism merely enrolled them in a school, an apprenticeship; they could be expelled again as soon as it became clear that teaching them was wasted labour. In fact, Bucer attested from his own experience the value of a residual 'cradle Christianity' fostered by the practice of general baptism.

To us it was especially useful that the whole of our people was from the cradle admitted to the church, whatever its condition. In this way some belief about Christ and some appreciation of Holy Writ were instilled. These had the effect of opening up a wide window for the recent recovery of the pure gospel, which could not have opened up if no respect for Sacred Scripture had been held by the people.¹⁵

Baptismal discipline remains a pressure-point today, at least in Britain, where not all would endorse Bucer's appreciation of indiscriminate paedobaptism. They view it more like an inoculation, all too effectively immunising its recipients against catching the real thing later in life.

Gathered Congregations

Bucer's nagging aspirations for some more authentic Christian community in the midst of the nominally Christian majority may well have rubbed off on Calvin during his Strasbourg exile. As Willem van't Spijker points out, it was in accordance with this ideal that Calvin successfully organized his French refugee congregation in the city.¹⁶ I hazard the opinion that biographers of Calvin have paid insufficient attention to the possibility that his ecclesiology was influenced at Strasbourg, where he pastored a congregation that was almost by definition gathered rather than territorial, by elements such as we have noted in Bucer's vision of a purer church.

The impact of such convictions is identifiable elsewhere also. The scheme that Francois Lambert drew up for the reformation of the church of Hesse at Landgrave Philip's invitation has been called 'the first Church Order which can be call "Reformed" (as distinct from Lutheran or Anabaptist).'¹⁷ It enunciated a drastic congregationalism, with a church of true believers only, governed by a weekly meeting of church members and practising a strict discipline. Although Luther advised against the scheme's adoption, the influence of his own earlier 'congregationalism' is undeniable, and perhaps too of the Preface to his *German Mass* published several months earlier in the same year 1526.¹⁸

Debate at Zürich

Even at Zürich, that supreme embodiment of the Reformed city-church, similar impulses were felt. In 1532 a brief exchange of letters took place between Leo Jud, Zwingli's intimate associate, and Zwingli's successor, Heinrich Bullinger.¹⁹ It largely turned on whether excommunication should be left in the hands of the magistrates. Jud claims that church and magistracy are utterly different realities, and argues that

The holy church of Christ is assembled from the godly and faithful, by which I mean those who profess their trust in Christ and do not deny it by manifest deed or word. The church is spiritual...because its members are led and governed by the Spirit of Christ, or at least ought to be, for in them Christ's Spirit fights against the flesh and its corruptions. But in the church we have papists, godless, brazen, incorrigible wretches, mockers and enemies and persecutors of Christ and the gospel...They freely declare their disbelief in our gospel and call its teaching heresy and the devil's doctrine.

Jud challenges Bullinger to contemplate the visage of the church of Zürich, 'in which scoundrels like this not only exist but actually reign,' and ask whether it deserves the name of Christ's church. He goes on:

I have no wish to turn the church into a monastery or a coterie of Pharisees, like the Anabaptists...But nor do I want it to harbour lethal lice and dregs and garbage like these folk, whom one would never reckon among decent citizens.²⁰

When at the end of his reply Bullinger relaxes his guard and says, in effect, 'the world's been the same from the beginning, you won't change it now,'²¹ Jud retorts with passion:

If we cannot change the world, why then do we preach? ...God translated us from the kingdom of darkness and the power of Satan into the kingdom of light of his beloved

Son. Christ chose us from the world, and his teaching is none other than the renewal of the world.²²

'The church of Christ is not founded on the votes of the majority':²³ this was Jud's opening gambit. Calvin knew it well enough, and his goal in Geneva had more in common with Jud than with Bullinger. And yet he would not acquiesce in sharp distinction between the congregation of Christ and the civic community. He would aim for Geneva — Geneva simpliciter — to be a perfect school of Christ, a city in which the writ of Christ ran through the agency of a vigorously independent church order — vigorous and independent enough to ensure the survival of churches elsewhere as persecuted minorities in hostile territory.

Protestant Minorities in France: Calvin's Counsel

So our attention shifts from Strasbourg, Zürich and Geneva to France, for whose scattered and suffering Protestants Calvin expended such efforts. On this front if anywhere one might hope to find pointed counsel from Calvin on the vocation of religious minorities. Among his preoccupations, engaging his thought and writing for some twenty-five years, was the problem — or rather, the complex of problems — which he called Nicodemism. We can do no more than touch on some aspects of his controversy with the sin (as he saw it) of religious dissimulation, that is, of continuing to conform outwardly to Catholic worship and devotion while inwardly dissenting from them.

For Calvin there were at hand commendable ways of avoiding the perils of Nicodemism, i.e. emigration and exile, and martyrdom — solutions which would of course dissolve a minority altogether. They were infinitely preferable to compromise. Carlos Eire has helpfully outlined the ecclesiological dimensions of Calvin's appreciation of exile: they include the ineluctable need, the obligation, of all Christians to take part in regular corporate worship in all its aspects, and the alien and contagious character of residence in an idolatrous nation compared with the attractions of the Christian's true homeland in the visible church.²⁴ Old Testament examples and warnings could be readily pressed into service, and one wonders also if Calvin's own position in Geneva as himself a displaced person or resident alien predisposed him to favour flight in quest of freedom of worship. In the city of Geneva a massive influx of Protestant refugees counted very decisively on the credit side of the Reformation ledger. When Oberman recently characterized the Genevan pattern of Reformation as 'the Reformation of the Refugees,' he did so with a special eye on Calvin's European-wide perspectives.²⁵ In this context the strangers' churches in London, Emden and elsewhere naturally invite due consideration.²⁶

Bucer and Calvin on Nicodemism

The sharpness of Calvin's almost unreserved hostility to Nicodemism emerges in clear relief when compared with the position adopted, perhaps all too predictably, by Martin Bucer. His *Consilium Theologicum Privatim Conscriptum* (*Theological Advice Written Privately*) on the subject, written probably in 1540, was published for the first time in 1988.²⁷ It is in part almost certainly a direct response to Calvin's first anti-Nicodemite writing, *On Avoiding the Unlawful Rites of the Godless* (*De Fugiendis Impiorum Illicitis Sacris*).²⁸ The individual to whom Bucer is writing remains unknown, but the date, c.1540, sets the *Consilium* in the midst of the series of colloquies with reformist Catholics in which Bucer played such an

adventurous role. As Fraenkel shows, there are significant points of contact between the *Consilium* and the Worms/Regensburg Book.

Most of Bucer's treatise is taken up with an assessment of three categories of observances found in churches serving the papacy. First are those established 'by explicit God-given instruction,' ranging from baptism to ministerial orders, psalm-singing and discipline. Secondly, come ceremonies of human institution, introduced 'partly in imitation of the Lord and his apostles, partly also in imitation of the Mosaic cultus, partly in a certain excess of godly zeal'; these begin with confirmation and include private confession and veneration of relics. The third class comprises 'nothing more than superstitions and perversions of those ceremonies which the church received by the Lord's appointment or by commendation of the saints'; here belong 'the abominations of the mass' (spelt out at length), celibacy, the mendicant orders, the cult of images, veneration of the saints and papal pardons.²⁹

Bucer's analysis recognizes that even dominical institutions have been vulnerable to human adulteration to a greater or lesser extent, but this does not deter him from acknowledging churches of Christ under the papacy. He prefaces the *Consilium* with two principles that inform it throughout, the first one enunciated at some length.

We must regard as a member of Christ anyone who invokes the name of Christ and does not deny this by behaviour that requires us not to eat with him...[cf. 1 Cor. 5:11]. Of those who invoke Christ in true faith there are very many in all the churches which still endure the papal yoke. Their observance of numerous superstitious ceremonies — invocation of saints, veneration of the crucifix, and so on — is so much a matter of ignorance that they are nonetheless of living faith in Christ. This they demonstrate by the chief fruits of faith — fear of the Lord, love of their neighbour, and complete integrity of life. So they have Christ as their foundation, however much wood, hay and stubble they erect on this foundation. Consequently, wherever there are those who thus truly possess Christ and have communion in the Word, the sacraments and prayers — even though with these they have also the observance of much that is quite incongruous with true faith and hence must sometime be abolished by the fire of a severer testing accompanied by enlightenment — there one must acknowledge the church of Christ. For Christ's church is none other than the assembly and company of those who truly invoke Christ and have communion with one another in the Word, the sacraments and prayers, however much of error and iniquity also cleaves to them.³⁰

Bucer never departed from this basic proposition. The difference between papal churches and Protestant churches lay in degrees of purification. 'When today churches are reordered in conformity to the gospel of Christ, they do not become churches from not being churches, but churches already in being are purged and reformed.'³¹ Bucer's patristic expertise informed him of the antiquity — and original wholesomeness or innocence — of many observances subsequently abysmally perverted, but it is nevertheless remarkable to find him acknowledging the kernel of the Lord's Supper amid the *violatio* and *contaminatio* of the mass, which he admits are horrendous and utterly deplorable.

Yet at the same time, since it is sufficiently established that in these churches a solemn memorial of the Lord's death is celebrated and participation in Christ is presented

(*exhiberi*) in the symbols and here too 'the word comes to the element,' there is certainly no justification for asserting that in these churches the Lord's Supper and its beneficial use have been totally eliminated.³²

Calvin's attitude could not have been more contrasting. He believed that his whole case against Nicodemism could be made by reference to the mass.

I deny that there is any Lord's Supper if all believers present do not have a common invitation to its sacred feast, if the sacred symbols of the bread and the cup are not set before the church, and the promises as a seal of which it has been given are not explained, and the gift of life purchased for us by Jesus Christ is not preached. Can you show me one iota of these in the mass?³³

Bucer's approach is more patently ecclesiological. In his anti-Nicodemite writings Calvin rarely grasps the nettle whether the Roman Church is truly a church of Christ, and when he does, seems to deny it or concede it only within highly damaging limitations.³⁴ For Calvin what mattered in this context was not only fuller conformity to the scriptural order for the Supper but sound teaching and preaching. Similarly, while Bucer's *Consilium* is one-sided in concentrating on only one mark of the church and preoccupied with the liturgical and ceremonial, Calvin sets the issue in the broader framework of one's proper deportment while living in Catholic territory. And so in *De Gugiendis*, Calvin sets himself to answer two questions applying to every believer thus placed:

First, what kind of confession does the Lord require of his followers who live few and scattered among the ungodly, in a place from which the discipline of true religion has been exiled? And secondly, by what marks in the outward conduct of life would the Lord have them differ from the hordes of idolaters among whom they are mixed?³⁵

While Calvin does not require, or approve of, aggressive protestation of one's scruples, and appropriately stresses 'the duties of private life' as the locus of profession of faith, nevertheless confession holds an important role in his critique of Nicodemism because it cuts across the grain of unacceptable distinctions — between bodily demeanour and attitude of heart, between private behaviour and public, between passivity and active testimony.³⁶

Vocation and Neighbourly Love

Here we may return to the prologue of Bucer's *Consilium* and notice the second of his fundamental propositions.

Any Christian who resides in such a church [i.e. one that must be acknowledged, despite all its defects, to be a true church of Christ] by a legitimate vocation, must treat it as the church of Christ, and embrace as brothers and members in Christ all in it who are not openly ungodly. By 'legitimate vocation' I mean some position in life agreeable to the Word of God, such as citizen, head of a household, recognized member of a household, magistrate, and so on.³⁷

The influence of a more conservative Lutheran emphasis on the ordered stations of human life is very evident. To Bucer, Calvin's summons to exile sounded irresponsible and heartless:

'to desert such churches without being called away from them by a lawful vocation is less tolerable than abandoning brethren who are dangerously ill.'³⁸

It would be tempting to discern part of the difference between the two Reformers in Bucer's stronger accent on love of the neighbour. The *Consilium* includes several citations of 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 — Paul's becoming a Jew to the Jews etc., in order by any means to save some. The verses appear on the title page itself. Calvin was ready enough to please all but only for their own good; accommodation to the weak is enjoined on us only for their edification.³⁹ Setting a bad example by committing idolatry would make for no one's salvation. But Bucer evinced a more prominent concern lest separation and clamorous protest offend the weaker brethren and snuff out the dimly burning wick of their faith and devotion.

In the very short comment that Bucer provided in 1545, on Calvin's two main anti-Nicodemite works, the first point he makes is as follows:

I am eager that those brethren held fast in a Babylonian exile take the greatest care to avoid incurring a reputation for impiety with God's elect, whom they should be winning for the Lord, by inopportune and reckless castigation of common observances. Thereby those who seek to draw them to the Lord render themselves ineffectual.⁴⁰

As he put it in the 1540 *Consilium*:

How shall we bring people to a more perfect knowledge of Christ when we so harshly condemn everything they hold as the height of religion? And when in turn we inculcate so insensitively everything they judge to be utterly irreligious? To be sure, unless they recognize us as Christ's ministers serving him faithfully, we will do them no good for the kingdom of Christ.⁴¹

The debate is a fascinating one, with the arguments more nuanced on both sides than is often recognized. If Calvin found fault with a false dichotomy between conforming body and nonconforming soul, he can nonetheless say that fellowship with sacrilege consists not in physical proximity but in inward consent. No guilt is contracted by look, access or vicinity. After all, Paul took a thorough tour of Athens before he found the illustration he needed for his sermon.⁴² On the other hand, while Bucer insists on the inexorable duty of evangelical believers to associate fully with Catholic congregations, they must shun Catholics who profess Belial and not Christ.

You must adhere very strictly in this principle in contracting marriages, in fixing a place of residence, in settling in a city, choosing a neighbourhood and selecting a household, and in absolutely every concern of human life which lies within your own discretion.⁴³

What bearing has this sixteenth-century discussion on pluralism in the modern world? The pluralism that dwells within the gates of Jerusalem has already been alluded to. Perhaps in some circles on some occasions the intrusion of paganism has been so blatant that not only must Barmen's voice resound again but even separation be contemplated. But even in denominations apparently so hell-bent on not lagging behind a society and a culture in headlong flight from their Christian roots, we would probably be indulging in a kind of

ecclesiastical hypochondria if we dared liken present-day corruptions to those vastly more flagrant ones of the Old Church in the Reformation era. More to the point would be to reflect, along parallel lines to the Nicodemite debate, on the different options open to us in living faithful lives and maintaining faithful ministries as a shrinking Christian minority today.

The Church as Remnant

In the end, the issue comes back to the doctrine of the church, which for Calvin of course is found not only in the New Testament but also in the Old. I am not aware of any study so far of what he has to say, as preacher and commentator, of the remnant motif in the Old Testament. T.H.L. Parker devotes a few pages to it, showing how Calvin uses the distinction between the irredeemable mass and the faithful remnant to make consistent sense of the mingling of denunciations and encouragements in the prophets.⁴⁴ Parker cites Calvin on Habakkuk 1:11 ('Then he [the Chaldean] shall change his spirit'):

The prophet now begins to give some comfort to the faithful, lest they succumb under such burdensome evils. He had hitherto directed his address to that irreclaimable people, but now he turns to the remnant. For there were always among them some of the faithful, though few, whom God never neglected, for who sake he often sent his prophets. Although the multitude derived no benefit, the faithful understood.... This was why the prophets were accustomed, after speaking generally, to come down to the faithful, and as it were to comfort them apart and privately. This distinction should be noted...; when the prophets warn of God's wrath, their speech is addressed indiscriminately to the whole body of the people, but when they add promises, it is as if they called the faithful to a private conversation, and spoke in their ear what the Lord had commanded them.⁴⁵

The preservation of the remnant, on which the continuation of the covenant depends from Abraham to Christ, provides a hermeneutical key, as it were, to the understanding of the apparently unqualified condemnations of Israel, which seemed to cancel out God's protestations of mercy. It is to 'the remnant of his heritage' (Micah 7:18) that his mercy applies.⁴⁶ And again, on Jeremiah 23:3:

...the covenant remains valid in the remnant... God then has ever been the preserver of his church; and thus his gratuitous adoption, by which he had chosen the seed of Abraham, never fails. But this adoption is effectual only as to the remnant.⁴⁷

In another context, the remnant can function as the firstfruits, as it were, of a more abundant harvest. The remnant left in Judaea under Gedaliah (Jeremiah 40:11) embodied the moderation of the divine vengeance; 'some remnants continued in Judaea until the restoration of the whole people.'⁴⁸

But Calvin does not very often explicitly reflect on the implications of the salvation of only a remnant of Israel or Judah for the fortunes of the church of his day. But Jeremiah's expectation that the return from exile will witness the salvation of only the remnant of Israel evokes this application from Calvin:

This doctrine may justly be applied to our time. For we are by no means to expect that God will so restore his church in all the world, that all shall be renewed by his

Spirit and unite in true religion; but he gathers his church on all sides, and yet in such a way that his gratuitous mercy is ever evident, for there shall be remnants only.⁴⁹

Church Under the Cross

The foundation of the remnant is, of course, God's election. I have learnt from David Wiley's essay on 'The Church as the Elect in the Theology of Calvin' in the volume edited by Timothy George.⁵⁰ The importance of the confidence given by election for the suffering church is skillfully illustrated from the *Institutes*. The 1559 edition inserts in 4:1:2 passages that in Wiley's view must have in mind a perspective beyond Geneva. Commenting on the credal phrase 'believe the church,' Calvin says:

But the purpose is for us to know that, even though the devil moves every stone to destroy Christ's grace, and though God's enemies also rage with the same savage fury, it cannot be extinguished... For God alone 'knows those who are his' ...But because a small and contemptible number are hidden in a huge multitude and a few grains of wheat are covered by a pile of chaff, we must leave to God alone the knowledge of his church, whose foundation is his secret election... Although the melancholy desolation which confronts us on every side may cry that no remnant of the church is left, let us know that Christ's death is fruitful, and that God miraculously keeps his church as in hiding places. So it was said to Elijah, 'I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee before Baal.'⁵¹

Wiley suggests that Calvin must here be thinking of the persecuted Protestant communities of France, for these sentences are not applicable to Geneva at this time. His essay ends with the following paragraph:

If one reads Calvin basically in terms of Geneva, which is a strong temptation, one may also have to read him almost exclusively in terms of a theology of glory and, in turn, ruminate, on occasion, on the unfortunate connections between Calvin and the theology of glory, which has strongly shaped the self-understanding of several Western countries that have been significantly influenced by the Reformed tradition. But if one can learn to read Calvin in terms of the 'first generation' concerns of the evangelical party in France and its poor, little, suffering churches that lived under the cross, then, perhaps something of Calvin's version of a theology of the cross — a theology lived out under it — yet speaks powerfully today to both insiders and outsiders alike.⁵²

An ecclesiological *theologia gloriae* and *theologia crucis*! Whether Calvin would have like his Genevan ministry to sail into the future under the epitaph *theologia gloriae* — or *ecclesia gloriae* (his farewell words to his fellow-pastors hardly encourage us to contemplate this), we should note carefully Wiley's argument that at last Calvin recovers the motif of the minority church which features in the 1536 *Institutes*. But we may surely question if a solely, or predominantly, geographical distinction between the two is really plausible. Over against this interpretation we may set Oberman's insistence that Calvin is 'bound to be misunderstood when typecast as the reformer of Geneva. His parish was as wide as Europe and his vision was directed to France at its center.'⁵³ The conclusion of Oberman's reading of the Calvinian reform as 'The Reformation of the Refugees' is this:

...where Calvinism became the dominant culture, it showed the ugly face of suppression for which it is widely known. However, when forced to go underground and to live 'East of Eden,' it could regain the original vision of John Calvin, the vision of the remnant, destined to serve as pathfinder and refuge.⁵⁴

NOTES

¹From his late (published 1531) exposition of Jeremiah (dedicated to Strasbourg), *Huldreich Zwingli's Sämtliche Werke* XIV (1959), 424; see R.C. Walton, *Zwingli's Theocracy* (Toronto, 1967), 169, 218.

²E. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin. Les hommes et les choses de son temps*, vol. VII (Neuilley-sur Seine, 1927), 84-8; E.W. Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York, 1967), 133-4.

³CO [=Calvini Opera] IX, 892-3; ET in J. Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, vol. IV (Philadelphia, 1858), 372-7. See J. Haroutunian's discussion of Calvin as 'Interpreter for the Suffering Church,' in *Calvin: Commentaries (Library of Christian Classics)* XXIII; London, 1958), 37-9.

⁴Letter to Anne Locke, 9 Dec. 1556, ed. D. Laing, *The Works of John Knox* (Edinburgh, 1855), vol. IV, 240.

⁵'Europa afflicta: The Reformation of the Refugees,' *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 83 (1992), 91-111 at 102.

⁶On Zephaniah 1:1-3, CO XLIV, 4; ET by John Owen, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets...*, vol. IV (Edinburgh, 1848), 186-7.

⁷On Haggai 1:2-4, CO XLIV, 85-6; ET by Owen, *op.cit.*, vol. IV, 325.

⁸*Deutsche Messe und Ordnung Gottesdiensts*, WA [=Weimarer Ausgabe] 19, 72-113 at 75; ET by Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Cleveland, 1962), 125-6 (altered).

⁹*Martin Luther. Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532* (Minneapolis, 1990), 255. For earlier and later intimations of the same ideal in Luther, see Bellardi, *op.cit.* (n. 10 below), 109; cf. H. Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career 1521-1530* (London, 1983), 478-9.

¹⁰W. Bellardi, *Die Geschichte der 'Christlichen Gemeinschaft' in Strassburg (1546-50). Der Versuch einer 'zweiten Reformation'* (Leipzig, 1934); G. Hammann, *Entre la secte et la cité. Le projet d' église du réformateur Martin Bucer (1491-1551)* (Geneva, 1984), 76-82, 363-86; *id.*, 'Ecclesiological motifs behind the creation of the "Christlichen Gemeinschaften,"' in D.F. Wright (ed.), *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community* (Cambridge, 1994), 129-43.

¹¹J. Kittelson, 'Martin Bucer and the ministry of the church,' in Wright, *op.cit.*, 83-94 at 89-94. Cf. also T.A. Brady, Jr., *Ruling Class, Regime and Reformation at Strasbourg 1520-1555 (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought* XXII; Leiden, 1978), 274 on the subversiveness of this 'clerically-led conventicle movement.'

¹²Hammann, *op.cit.*, 358-9.

¹³Cited by Bellardi, *op.cit.*, 26 from the 1553 edition of the Gospels commentary (cf. Hammann, *op.cit.*, 361-2); *Enarrationum in Evangelia...* (Strasbourg, 1527), liber II, ff. 214^v-5^f (most copies lack liber II).

¹⁴D.F. Wright, 'Infant baptism and the Christian community,' in Wright (ed.), *op.cit.*, 95-106, 102.

¹⁵*Enarratio in Evangelion Johannis (1528, 1530, 1536)*, ed. I. Backus (*Martin Bucer's Opera Latina*, vol. II; Leiden, 1988), 77.

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- ¹⁶'Bucer's influence on Calvin: church and community,' in Wright (ed.), *op.cit.*, 32-44 at 40.
- ¹⁷E.G. Léonard, *A History of Protestantism*, vol. I: *The Reformation* (London, 1965), 113-14.
- ¹⁸Cf. Bellardi, *op.cit.*, 109-11.
- ¹⁹I owe my knowledge of this correspondence to Oberman, 'Europa afflicta...' (n. 5 above), 97-8.
- ²⁰Heinrich Bullinger *Werke*, Zweite Abteilung: *Briefwechsel*, Bd. 2, ed. U. Gäbler et al. (Zurich, 1982), 58-9, 63 (no. 70).
- ²¹*Ibid.* 75 (no. 74).
- ²²*Ibid.* 78 (no. 75).
- ²³*Ibid.* 57 (no. 70).
- ²⁴C.M.N. Eire, *War Against the Idols. The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1986), 260-64.
- ²⁵'Europa afflicta...', 91, 110 ('the program of the reformed counter-culture of the refugees').
- ²⁶Cf. A. Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford, 1986), and *Emden and the Dutch Revolt. Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism* (Oxford, 1992).
- ²⁷Ed. P. Fraenkel, *Martin Bucer Opera Latina*, vol. IV (Leiden, 1988). Carlo Ginzburg, in *Il Nicodemismo: Simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell' Europa del '500* (Turin, 1970), regarded a partial unsigned copy of this *Consilium* as the work of Capito; see P. Matheson, 'Martyrdom or Mission? A Protestant Debate,' *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 80 (1989), 154-72 at 159-62.
- ²⁸CO V, 239-78; ET by H. Beveridge in *Tracts and Treatises*, vol. III (Edinburgh, 1851), 359-411.
- ²⁹Ed. Fraenkel, 13 (3:49), 69 (29:306), 93 (42:375).
- ³⁰*Ibid.* 5 (1:1-6).
- ³¹*Ibid.* 10 (2:37).
- ³²*Ibid.* 157 (66:698).
- ³³*De Fugiendis...*, CO V, 260; ET Beveridge, vol. III, 388. Cf. F. Higman, 'Bucer et les nicodémistes,' in C. Krieger and M. Lienhard (eds), *Martin Bucer and Sixteenth Century Europe. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg (28-31 août 1991)* (*Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, LII; Leiden, 1993), vol. II, 645-58 at 648, 650.
- ³⁴'Sur le principe central — que l'Eglise papistique est un vraie Eglise — il faut dire que Bucer est clair, net et cohérent, tandis que Calvin est évasif'; Higman, *art.cit.*, 649.
- ³⁵CO V, 245; ET Beveridge, vol. III, 367.
- ³⁶Eire, *op.cit.*, 266-7.

³⁷Ed. Fraenkel, 5-6 (1:708).

³⁸*Ibid.* 8 (2:19). See Higman *art.cit.*, 650, and Matheson, *art.cit.*, 156-7, 159, 169-70, on the importance of the theme of vocation.

³⁹*De Fugiendis...*, CO V, 273; ET Beveridge, vol. III, 405-6.

⁴⁰*Martini Buceri Consilium*, CO VI, 625. Bucer is throughout this (625-6) preoccupied with 'winning, gaining' Catholics. For (slightly differing) accounts of the genesis of this *Consilium*, see Eire, *op.cit.*, 245-7, and Higman, *art.cit.*, 652-3. Eire, 247 n.51, wrongly asserts that Bucer was supporting Calvin. As Higman shows, his position had not changed in its essentials from 1540. See further for a comparison of Bucer's, Calvin's and others' views on the mass in this context, J.V. Pollet, *Martin Bucer, Etudes sur les relations de Bucer avec Les Pays-Bas, L'Electorat de Cologne et L'Allemagne du Nord* (*Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought* XXXIII; Leiden, 1985), vol. I, 293-320.

⁴¹Ed. Fraenkel, 166 (69:761). Passages like this one strengthen Higman's suggestion, *art.cit.*, 647 n. 5, that the *Consilium* may have been written for a Catholic priest now committed to reform.

⁴²*De Fugiendis...*, CO V, 264-5; ET Beveridge, vol. III, 393-4. Cf. Eire, *op.cit.*, 256-7.

⁴³Ed. Fraenkel, 132-3 (56:549).

⁴⁴*Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh, 1986), 184-7.

⁴⁵CO XLIII, 505; ET by Owen, *Minor Prophets*, vol. IV, 34-5.

⁴⁶CO XLIII, 429-30; ET by Owen, *Minor Prophets*, vol. III, 402.

⁴⁷CO XXXVIII, 404; ET by John Owen, *Jeremiah*, (Edinburgh, 1854), vol. III, 132.

⁴⁸CO XXXIX, 202; ET by Owen, *Jeremiah*, vol. IV, 453.

⁴⁹CO XXXVIII, 652; ET by Owen, *Jeremiah*, vol. IV, 69.

⁵⁰*John Calvin and the Church. A Prism of Reform* (Louisville, KY, 1990), 96-117.

⁵¹*Institutes* 4:1:2; ET by J.T. McNeill and F.L. Battles, vol. II, 1013-14. Cf. Wiley, *art.cit.*, 108-9, and 113: 'The church as the elect is a biblical emphasis that tends to come forward in the worst of times.'

⁵²*Ibid.* 114.

⁵³'*Europa afflicta...*' (*art.cit.*), 109.

⁵⁴*Ibid.* 110.